



THE

AVOCET

The Newsletter of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society

December 1999

Christmas Bird Counts Need YOU!!

As the holidays draw near and the millennium comes to a close, birdwatchers are preoccupied with their own rituals of December—Christmas Bird Counts (CBC's). Here in Santa Clara County, we now have four such events for birders of all skill levels to participate in, as Audubon members throughout the country prepare to do the same.

Last month in *The Avocet* we featured the new Calero/Morgan Hill CBC being organized by John Mariani and Ann Verdi. The re-establishment of this CBC, which had a brief prior run in the early 80's, will provide south Santa Clara County with valuable data on the presence, absence, and population shifts of bird species in a 15-mile diameter circle centered in the Coyote Valley. Gathering information on the wildlife of this region is important, as future development plans will certainly impact birds, wildlife, and habitat throughout the south County.

Then there's our old, reliable San Jose CBC. SCVAS is proud to sponsor this CBC, recruiting dozens of local birders to comb the area for birds and gather at Kelley Park's Leininger Center for a countdown dinner at sundown. And the Palo Alto CBC, which covers northern Santa Clara County and a large chunk of southern San Mateo Co., is also popular, though it occurs on a Monday (a good

excuse to ditch work!). The Mt. Hamilton CBC, covering eastern, high-elevation portions of Santa Clara Co., is not for the faint-hearted due to the remote habitat and possibility of bad weather, but it's still a lot of fun.

What do these CBC's have in common? They all need more counters! Even if you're a rookie birder whose identification skills are minimal, your ability to spot and tally birds can be a big help, and you'll have fun teaming up with a more skilled birder for an energetic day of birding. Remember, every hawk, egret, duck, owl, bluebird, sparrow (even starling and pigeon!) that you count gets tallied, entered into a long-standing database, and recorded permanently. It's not pure science, but the CBC data is regarded as a helpful tool for those who analyze local bird populations. Plus it's exciting when people come up with rarities or unexpected birds amid the commonly found species.

So if you're a veteran counter, contact your Section Leader(s) from last year and sign up again. If you're new, please phone one of the contact people listed at the right. You can count for half a day, all day, even record birds from your back yard feeder.

All of us at SCVAS hope you have a happy, birdy Holiday Season!

San Jose Sunday, Dec. 19

Compiler: Ann Verdi (408) 266-5108
(408) 749-2199
ann.verdi@amd.com

Palo Alto Monday, Dec. 20

{No compiler at press time; Call SCVAS for more info}

Mt. Hamilton Wednesday, Dec. 22

Compiler: Don Schmoltdt (510) 547-5108

Calero/Morgan Hill Sunday, Jan. 2

Compiler: John Mariani (408) 997-2066
redknot@pacbell.net

See Page 4 for the San Jose CBC Map and Section Leader listings. On Page 9, you'll find maps displaying the other 3 count circles in the county.

<i>San Jose CBC</i>	-----Page 4
<i>Scope on</i>	
<i>Membership</i>	-----Page 5
<i>Field Notes</i>	-----Page 6
<i>Open House</i>	-----Page 8
<i>Letter from the</i>	
<i>Editor</i>	-----Page 10
<i>Dog owner's view</i>	
<i>of leash laws</i>	-----Page 11

Remember, there's no General Meeting in December, but mark your calendars now for the new millenium's first meeting on January 19 in Palo Alto. Biologist, researcher, and birder extraordinaire Alvaro Jaramillo will present a slide show on "Discovering Blackbirds" and will also be available before the meeting to sign copies of his two books, Birds of Chile and New World Blackbirds. Details in the January *Avocet*. (If you'd like to purchase one of these books before the meeting, call the office in December to reserve a copy.)

VIEW FROM THE OFFICE

by Leda Beth Gray



Well, now is the time to start thinking seriously about getting birdhouses up for next spring. I have seen bluebird pairs inspecting houses as early as December in this area. Here at McClellan Ranch, we had individual titmice looking at the birdhouse outside our office window both in October and November this year. One



morning I surprised a titmouse by opening the blinds while it was on the birdhouse. It may have been looking for a roosting site, perhaps not even thinking of nesting yet, but both are good uses for a birdhouse.

Some of you might remember a few years ago when I wrote in *The Avocet* about Nuttall's Woodpeckers pecking out the entrance holes to my chickadee/titmice houses and using them for roosting holes during the fall and winter. Each year in February or so, when I saw chickadees investigating the boxes I would install a square piece of wood with the proper sized hole for chickadees over the enlarged opening. This keeps out non-native invasive bird species, such as House Sparrows or European Starlings. Then the next year the woodpeckers would peck it out again, and we would repeat the whole thing over. I always enjoyed seeing the woodpecker fly in at dusk and sit on the front of the box looking around. It would disappear into the box in a flash, and then often would peer out of the hole for a while before going to sleep. Too cute!

It is also important to make sure old nesting material is cleared out of the houses, ready for next spring's occupants. A paintbrush or shaving brush works well to clean it out. This is to make sure mites or other insects that might attack little nestlings don't get a foothold.

If anyone is interested in helping with our Bluebird Program, either making boxes, putting them up or monitoring them during nesting season, please get in touch with us at the SCVAS office. This program is also referred to as our "cavity nester" program, because the houses, as Garth Harwood has reported in the past, attract many other species of birds as well.

Note to schoolteachers: Each year SCVAS supports 3rd to 6th grade classes around Santa Clara County to receive National Audubon's *Audubon Adventures* curriculum. Teachers in this program receive sets of 6 issues of the *Audubon Adventures* newsletter for their students, along with a teacher's guide with suggested companion activities. *Audubon Adventures* contains learning objectives and methods



aligned to the latest national education standards, and each issue of the newsletter highlights a different theme having to do with birds, wildlife and their habitats and needs. We have a few openings left for classes to receive this program free, so please contact the SCVAS office if you are a teacher who is interested in using *Audubon Adventures* in your classroom. It normally costs \$35 for the classroom kit.

Note to homeschoolers: We have purchased some of the individual kits in our library so that homeschoolers can check them out from us and use them, then turn them back for others to use. Please call the office if you are interested.

Holiday Open House: Don't miss our annual holiday open house on Saturday, December 11 (see the ad on Page 8). I'll look forward to seeing you there.

* * * * *

Volunteer Ventures

by Ulrike Keyssner

I am thrilled to report we now have a trio of "tech heroes" with the addition of **Frank Klug**, whose help and ideas have been invaluable in updating and organizing our computer system. Frank and **Jerry Kaminski** have produced inventories and diagrams that would make NASA envious, and their energy and enthusiasm has been marvelous. Board Member **Charles Preuss** volunteered to be our new Tech Committee chair, rounding out our trio of tech heroes.

We also had two other members volunteer their time for SCVAS. **Anne Mortimer** is coming in on Thursdays to help us with our membership records and to keep us organized in the general office---a never-ending task we constantly need help with. If you are interested please call us as we need many more people with office skills or who are willing to be trained. In response to our Library Technician vacancy, **Marti Oetzel** will now be the SCVAS librarian, taking over from Joyce Chang. This is an important position we are delighted to have filled so quickly, especially as Marti is an experienced librarian.

I want to thank those members who responded to my plea for help with our Fall Fundraiser. It is interest-

continued on Page 4

December 1999 Calendar

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

****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



****Sunday Dec. 12, 9:00 AM**

Charleston Slough. Half day. Leader: Allen Royer (408) 288-7768. Meet at Terminal Way at end of San Antonio Rd, north off Hwy 101 in Mt. View. As usual, all are welcome but birding will be geared toward beginning birders. Bring a spotting scope if you have one.

****Saturday Jan. 8, 9:00 AM**

Charleston Slough. Half day. Leader: Carrie Wittmer (for info call Bob Reiling at [408] 253-7527.) Leader is on the faculty of the Audubon Expedition Institute in Belfast, Maine. Topics covered will include identification by body shape, bill shape, wing shape, tail shape and markings, flight patterns and migration. From Hwy 101 in Mt. View take San Antonio Rd exit north to Terminal Way parking area.

****Sunday Jan. 9, 8:30 AM**

Post-CBC Rarities Chase. Full day. Leader: John Mariani (408) 997-2066. Kick off the new millenium with some coastal vagrant chasing. Bring a full tank of gas, lunch, and field guides as we attempt to track down some of the unusual birds seen on CBC's from Monterey to Santa Cruz. Meet at ranger's kiosk on Jetty Rd., just north of Moss Landing harbor on Hwy. 1.

BIRD CLASS IN PALO ALTO

Matthew Dodder's Beginning Birdwatching class begins the first week in January. The eight-week introductory class is offered through the Palo Alto Adult School. Monday evening lectures will be accompanied by at least five weekend field trips to local birding spots. For more information, visit Matthew's website: www.shank.com/birdguy. Call Palo Alto Adult School at 650-329-3752 for exact dates and fees. No birding experience is necessary and repeat students are welcome.



Saturday Jan. 8, 8:45 AM

Young Audubon Whale-watching Trip on Monterey Bay.

Join us for an exciting two-hour excursion at the peak of California Gray Whale migration. We'll also be on the lookout for dolphins, porpoises, sea otters, and numerous sea bird species. Dress for cold and rain; trip goes in light rain or sunshine. Boat leaves from Chris's on main Monterey wharf. Cost: \$12 for children; \$15 for adults.

BY RESERVATION ONLY.

To reserve space call Ulrike at the Audubon office, (408) 252-3747.

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 the 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.

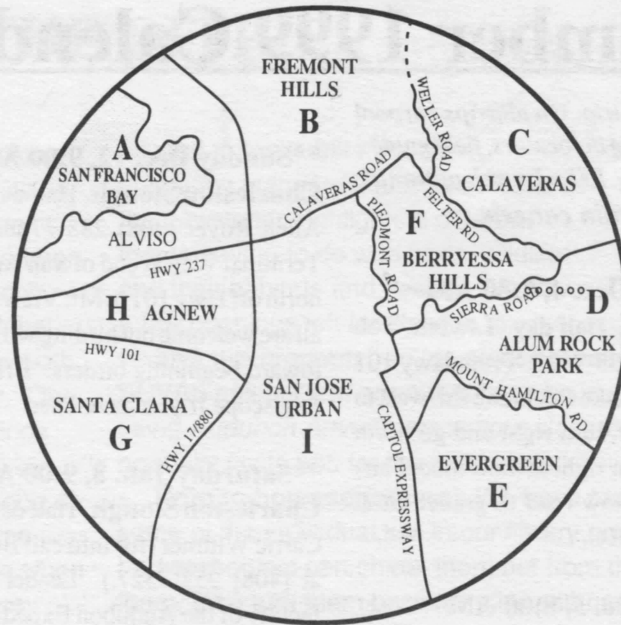
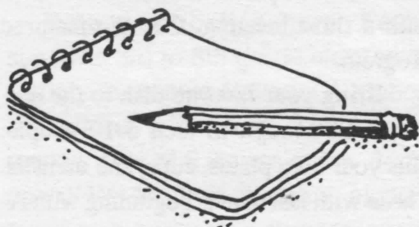
Volunteer *continued*

ing to note that most chose to take the work home. This leads me to suspect that many people want to volunteer but feel time is the one asset they don't have to spare, especially if it takes them away from home. In this valley, lack of time is chronic so we feel very lucky to have our small but dedicated volunteer base which is vital to the success of local organizations like ours. **Each hour of time you volunteer is valuable** to us and we appreciate your gift of this limited resource.

Along this line, a regular volunteer, who wishes to remain anonymous, arranged for her employer to send us a **"Matching Gift" of her volunteer hours**. Many members who donate money to SCVAS arrange with the companies they work for to match these donations. The difference this time was that the original donation was in *hours volunteered* and the company she works for converted this into dollars. This was a wonderful second gift to the valuable work she had already done for us. **THANK YOU!**

I hope all our volunteers and members have a wonderful holiday season. I look forward to working and birding with many of you in the New Year.

What do you think about the new title for my column? Any suggestions?



More about the San Jose Christmas Bird Count!

The map above depicts the area of the San Jose Christmas Bird Count held Sunday, December 19. Dress warmly and bring binoculars and a lunch. A mandatory fee of \$5.00 per participant covers the compilation and publication costs. After the day of birding

and counting, join us at the Leininger Center in Kelley Park for dinner and the countdown beginning at 5:30 pm. For anyone who can help out on the dinner, please contact Kathy Parker, 408-358-2832. We especially need dessert donations!

SECTION	LEADER/ E-MAIL	PHONE
A Alviso	Richard Carlson rccarl@sjm.infi.net	650-494-3160
B Fremont Hills	Craig Breon craig@scvas.org	408-252-3748
C Calaveras	Kepler Stone stone@gasonics.com	408-263-3395
D Alum Rock	Dave Cook justdave50@earthlink.net	408-949-8247 (w)
E Evergreen	Mary Simpson marysimpson@earthlink.net	408-370-2177
F Berryessa Hills	Harriet Gerson	408-252-6224
G Santa Clara	Mark Miller mark.c.miller@lmco.com	650-967-3429
H Agnew	Grant Hoyt grant.hoyt@forsythe.stanford.edu	650-969-7892
I San Jose Urban	Ann Verdi ann.verdi@amd.com	408-749-2199 (w) 408-266-5108 (h)

Scope on Membership: Meet the President

by Debbie Thompson

For our first **Scope** feature, I thought I would share with *Avocet* readers a close-up on our Chapter President, David McIntyre. David has served in this post for three years, and is dedicated to seeing our Chapter grow into a world-class organization. Not only does he run the monthly Board meetings, but he also supervises staff, attends numerous chapter events, and serves on several committees.

"After working at SCVAS, I've realized how dedicated David is to Audubon," said Interim Chapter Manager Leda Beth Gray recently. "He has a busy law career, yet is always willing to help me sort out a problem or discuss an issue. I've been so impressed at how he seems to intuitively know how to handle various chapter management issues. We are really lucky to have him."

David got hooked on birding while living in the suburbs of New York City during his junior high school years. His dedication to Audubon started early---he served on the Board of the Hudson Valley Audubon Society while still in junior high.

After high school, David attended Cornell University, where he majored in biology and minored in geology. During the summers he worked on a bobolink research study which was later published.

While working as a paralegal after graduation, he became Sanctuaries Chair at the Saw Mill River Audubon Society in New York. He considered graduate work in biology but was concerned about the job market when a professor advised him he would have a greater impact as a lawyer. He then attended and graduated from Fordham Law School and eventually "migrated" to California.

Every year David makes a trip back to his New York roots to help with the Bronx-Westchester Christmas Bird Count. He hasn't missed a count since the seventh grade!

"One fascinating thing about participating in a CBC for so long is that I have actually witnessed significant changes in the wintering ranges of several species," noted David. "For example, while Carolina Wrens and Red-bellied Woodpeckers were scarce when I first began the Bronx-Westchester Count in the 70's, the numbers of these two species recorded during that CBC today are quite significant.

"Similarly, ever since I spotted the first wintering Turkey Vulture in the 80-year history of that count ten years ago, they have been appearing regularly ever since. Although I have been participating in the Alviso section of the San Jose CBC for only five years, by continuing to take part in our local CBC year after year I look forward to witnessing first-hand any future changes in the wintering ranges of South Bay birds as well."

David enjoys birding in California and squeezes it into his schedule whenever he can. His favorite birding spots include Yosemite National Park, the San Mateo County coast (especially Pigeon Point), Panoche Valley, and outer Point Reyes.

Last year, David was awarded the Audubon Action Award for distinguished service. We are both fortunate and proud to have him as our Chapter President.

News from Audubon Canyon Ranch

As our holiday stress quickens, the approaching solstice brings some welcome calm to our three preserves. Docents at our Bouverie and Bolinas Lagoon Preserves have completed their fall school programs (having taught over 3,000 school children). Our resident critters are hunkering down to some serious hibernating and adjusting to less food and sunshine. And hardy bands of volunteers are slowly gearing up for the winter bird counts. If you'd love to help, call 415-663-8203!

Bolinas Lagoon Preserve

Over the past few years Len Blumin and his feisty crew of weed-busters have been attacking the cape ivy in our canyon. When the backbreaking work became daunting, we decided to call in the 4-legged ivy-busters--a herd of hungry goats! They arrived this fall to munch up several acres of this rampant non-native. So far, so good, and we will share our findings with others.



Bouverie Preserve

Our popular guided nature walks through this preserve in Sonoma's Valley of the Moon are held on the following Saturdays: December 11, January 29, March 11 and 25, April 8 and 22, and May 6 and 23. Call 707-938-4554 for a lottery form.

For more information about Audubon Canyon Ranch and its preserves, call 415-332-2924 or fax 415-331-2922.

—Betsy Stafford

Field Notes

by Bill Bousman

Loons through Waterfowl

An immature **Common Loon** on Stevens Creek Reservoir on 16 Oct (AV) was a very early fall arrival. Another bird on Boronda Lake in Foothills Park on 27 Oct (RWR et al.) was also early. A few **Greater White-fronted Geese** occasionally show up in late September, but 34 over Alviso on 1 Oct (SCR) were surprising for both their numbers and the earliness of the season. Also early, a family group of five **Ross's Geese** was seen along Pacheco Creek on 30 Oct (DR, RC) and six were found the next day in Morgan Hill among captive geese (MJM). An eclipse male **Eurasian Wigeon** led off the winter season at the Sunnyvale Water Pollution Control Plant (WPCP) pond on 9 Oct (MJM et al.). Another male was also seen in Adobe Creek in the Palo Alto Flood Control Basin (FCB) on 10-17 Oct (GLEB et al., MDo). Two male **Blue-winged Teal** were found in Adobe Creek on 3 Oct (JMa et al.). A male was nearby at Charleston Slough on 25 Oct (MMR) and 3-4 birds were in the FCB on 28 Oct (MDo, MMR). Birds were seen regularly on the high tide on the Stevens Creek Tidal Marsh 12-29 Oct (WGB, LCh et al.) with a high count of six males and four females on 12 Oct (WGB). A single male was found in the Lockheed Martin ponds in Sunnyvale on 17 Oct (MMi). Two to three **Redhead** were found on the San Jose-Santa Clara WPCP drying ponds on 23 Oct (NL, MJM) and six birds were counted in the Palo Alto FCB on 28 Oct (MMR). Three male **Hooded Mergansers** and a female on the Los Gatos Creek percolation ponds on 26 Oct (DG) were the first of the season. A male and two females were nearby on 30 Oct (JAC et al.).

Raptors through Skimmers

Reservoir surveys tallied single **Osprey** at Chesbro Reservoir on 4 Oct, at Anderson Reservoir on 5 Oct, and at Coyote Reservoir, the Ogier Avenue ponds, Coyote Creek a mile below Ogier Avenue, and Lexington Reservoir on 6 Oct (all TR). It is likely that these were all different birds. Single birds were also at the Parkway Lakes on 10 Oct (SCR) and 30 Oct (MMR), and Stevens Creek Reservoir on 15 Oct (SCR). Local sightings of **Ferruginous Hawks** included an adult at Lockheed Martin in Sunnyvale on 26

A Lesser Black-backed Gull has returned, apparently for its fifth winter. Particularly rare fall migrants included a Sandhill Crane and a Magnolia Warbler

Oct (MMi) and another bird at the Alviso Environmental Education Center (EEC) on 29 Oct (KF). Among good numbers of **Merlin** this month, a bird returned to a Palo Alto neighborhood on 23 Oct (KS) for its eighth winter. A **Sandhill Crane** flying over Moffett Field on 28 Oct (WCa) was a rare autumnal treat. Lingering **Lesser Yellowlegs** included one to six birds at the ponds at State and Spreckles in Alviso through 21 Oct (v.ob.) and one to three birds in the ponds near Hwy 237 and Lafayette on 4-6 Oct (v.ob.). The latest bird was a single at Crittenden Marsh on 23 Oct (LCh). The adult **Stilt Sandpiper** in the ponds at State and Spreckles in Alviso remained through 5 Oct (JMa, SCR). Also on 5 Oct, two adults and a juvenile were found on the ponds southeast of Hwy 237 and Lafayette

(SCR) and at least one adult remained through 15 Oct (SCR, v.ob.). A juvenile **Ruff** on Salt Pond A18 in Alviso was a good find on 2 Oct (NL). **Common Snipe** are sometimes found in large concentrations in south valley areas so a count of 89 on Coyote Reservoir on 31 Oct (MJM) was notable. The first-winter **Franklin's Gull** lingered to 4 Oct (JMa, RC) at the Palo Alto Duck Pond. An adult **Lesser Black-backed Gull** was found on Salt Pond A16 in Alviso on 16 Oct (SCR) and is likely the bird that has wintered in this general area over the last four winters. A **Common Tern** found on Anderson Reservoir on 5 Oct (TR) was late and unusual for its inland location. An apparent wintering flock of **Black Skimmers** re-established itself on Charleston Slough on 9 Oct when three birds were seen (TR, MJM et al.). These numbers grew to at least 11 by 24 Oct (LCh et al.) including an immature banded as a nestling in the Bay this summer (*vide* MMR).

Owls through Goldfinches

Two **Short-eared Owls** were seen foraging in the Palo Alto FCB on 25 Oct (MMR) and were found there through the end of the month (v.ob.). Late **Vaux's Swifts** included three at Hwy 237 and North First on 4 Oct (SCR), two at Stanford on 5 Oct (GHt), and one along Coyote Creek below the Ogier Avenue ponds on 6 Oct (TR). A **Willow Flycatcher** at the Ogier Avenue ponds on 16 Oct (MJM) was exceptionally late. The latest fall banding date I have is 9 Oct (out of 378 records), but last fall a late migrant was seen on 14 Oct. A **Golden-crowned Kinglet** found on Stevens Creek below L'Avenida on 7 Oct (MMR) was the only report this month. Following last winter's invasion conventional wisdom holds that this bird will be scarce this winter. Always a scarce migrant, an immature female **Nashville Warbler** was found along

Field Notes *continued*

Stevens Creek below L' Avenida on 7 Oct (MMR). An immature **Magnolia Warbler** was banded at the Coyote Creek Field Station (CCFS) on 6 Oct (*vide* AJ) for the fourth county record. **Palm Warblers** are probably our most common "vagrant." The first this season was near Hwy 237 and North First Street on 4 Oct (SCR). A bird at the Summit Point Golf Course in Milpitas on 12 Oct (SCR) was at an unusually high elevation as most of our records are from the valley floor. A single bird was banded at CCFS on 17 Oct (*vide* MJM). An immature **Blackpoll Warbler** was found at the old Harbormaster's house at the Palo Alto Baylands on 2 Oct (DSt). This cooperative bird was well seen through 4 Oct (m.ob.). A female **American Redstart** was found at the Alviso EEC on 5 Oct (SCR). Migrant **Chipping Sparrows** on the valley floor included a juvenile near Hwy 237 and North First Street on 4 Oct (SCR) and an immature along Coyote Creek below Hwy 237 on 6 Oct (RWR, FV). A **Vesper Sparrow** was found at the Sierra Road summit on 31 Oct (NL, AME). The first **White-throated Sparrow** of the season was at Hwy 237 and North First on 4 Oct (SCR). Additional birds were seen at the Pichetti Ranch OSP on 9 Oct (MJM, DSt) and along Skyline Boulevard on 23-26 Oct (LCh). A smattering of **Lawrence's Goldfinches** included two at Stevens Creek Reservoir on 15 Oct (SCR) and a male at the Searsville Lake dam on 21 Oct (TAC, BBu).

Observers: Bill Bousman (WGB), Bob Buell (BBu), William Cabot (WCa), Rita Carratello (RC), Ted Chandik (TAC), Les Chibana (LCh), Richard Clark (RC), Jack Cole (JAC), Matthew Dodder (MDo), Don Ganton (DG), Al Eisner (AME), Karl Fowler (KF), Grant Hoyt (GHt), Gloria LeBlanc (GLEB), Alvaro Jaramillo (AJ), Nick Lethaby (NL), Mike Mammoser (MJM), John Mariani (JMa), Mark Miller (MMi), Bob Reiling (RWR), Don Roberson (DR), Mike Rogers (MMR),

Field Trip Reports: Creepers, Skimmers Display Unusual Behavior

San Francisco Oct. 31

During the recent SCVAS trip to Golden Gate Park two Brown Creepers were observed in a behavior that none of the participants had previously experienced. The birds were on the lower trunk of a large coniferous tree on the northern edge of a small meadow just west of the pedestrian bridge by North Lake. One of the birds would snuggle down into the bark of the tree, with its head pointing up, spread its wings and tail, and then let its head fall back and to the side. The bird would stay in this position for an extended period of time. It repeated this behavior at least twice while we were present. The second bird chose a spot a few feet lower on the tree to do the same thing.

Alan Hopkins, the trip leader, took several photographs of this behavior as the birds allowed him to get quite close before flying away in apparent response to the sound of the camera's motor winder. At the time, it was postulated that the birds might be "anting" but no ants were seen on or around the birds. The south-facing trunk of the tree was in full sunshine and it looked as though the birds were sunbathing, though the lower bird was somewhat less exposed to the sun.

Perhaps this behavior is a technique they use for ridding themselves of parasites? Has anyone previously observed this behavior in Brown Creepers or have an explanation for it?

—Bob Reiling

Steve Rottenborn (SCR), Kendric Smith (KS), Dick Stovel (DSt), Tom Ryan (TR), Frank Vanslager (FV), and Ann Verdi (AV).

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

Charleston Slough Oct. 10

Thanks to Dick Stovel for leading the trip to Charleston Slough on October 10. Dick did a fantastic job of explaining how the topography of Adobe Creek, Coast Casey Forebay and the Slough was configured in the 1950's, and how and why the area has evolved into its current state.

On Adobe Creek past the major cross-road heading toward the Bay, we saw a male Eurasian Wigeon sitting on the far bank. Initially we thought it might be a hybrid, crossed with American Wigeon, but it turned out to be pure Eurasian.

The three Black Skimmers we saw on their regular roosting island looked normal when we first viewed them, but they proceeded to place their bills in the sand and then leaned forward with their wings further extended to the side. In this strange position they looked like dead birds! We surmised that in the 90 degree weather they were in some sort of cooling down mode.

We saw lots of other birds, but no surprises. Thanks to Dick for leading an extremely informative trip.

—Gloria LeBlanc

Princeton Harbor Oct. 30

Princeton was waveless, windless, and fogless, but by no means birdless for the SCVAS field trip on October 30. We started at the pines and willows around the American Legion Trading Post and Mezza Luna restaurant. Hutton's Vireo and Townsend's Warbler gave nice views, but many others were voices only. An adult Sharp-shinned Hawk sat up on a barbed-wire fence near the airport, and we gazed at its yellow eyes in our telescopes. Black Phoebe and Say's Phoebe were chasing bugs and each other in the grassy infields of the airport, and many Western Meadowlarks and Killdeer searched the runways for food.

continued next page

Princeton Harbor *continued*

At the west end of the harbor, we stood in the willows for a time and heard Purple Finch and Winter Wren, but saw nothing for several minutes until a Black-and-White Warbler snuck into the far reaches of our binocular views and shimmied along the willow branches for 30 seconds or so, then disappeared. Alas, most of the group did not see it. A Hermit Thrush came and sat briefly, long enough for most to see. We popped out to the road again and walked outside the willows, where a Fox Sparrow came to our pishing, and a small flock of Chestnut-backed Chickadees called from deep within.

We returned to the marsh and its Great Egret, then walked to the beach. Many Sanderlings, a few Black Turnstones, and a Black-bellied Plover were searching through the latest deposition of kelp. Common Loons, Western Grebes, and many Surf Scoters were in the harbor. We ran into Merry Haveman, who told us she had seen some Oldsquaws, so I started scanning the deeper parts of the harbor and soon ran into a pale-headed immature Oldsquaw. As we walked toward the breakwater we saw another, darker Oldsquaw.

The rocks just inside the base of the breakwater held a large roosting flock of

Elegant Terns, many Sanderlings, at least four Black Oystercatchers, several Black Turnstones, a Surfbird, a Long-billed Dowitcher, and numerous Willets and Marbled Godwits. Among the group of Double-crested Cormorants roosting on an old raft was a single young Brandt's Cormorant. Offshore birds were few, but we enjoyed watching a Sea Otter floating in the kelp. It was 1:00 already, so the group broke up. After we parted company I made a brief survey of the El Granada Trailer Park (hoping for a Tropical Kingbird), and ran into a Palm Warbler in the pines near the southwest corner.

—Mark Miller



Join us for the **Annual SCVAS Holiday Open House**



Saturday, December 11
10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

10% off for SCVAS Members on books and all other gift items in the Nature Shop!

Children's Books * Puppets * Finger Puppets

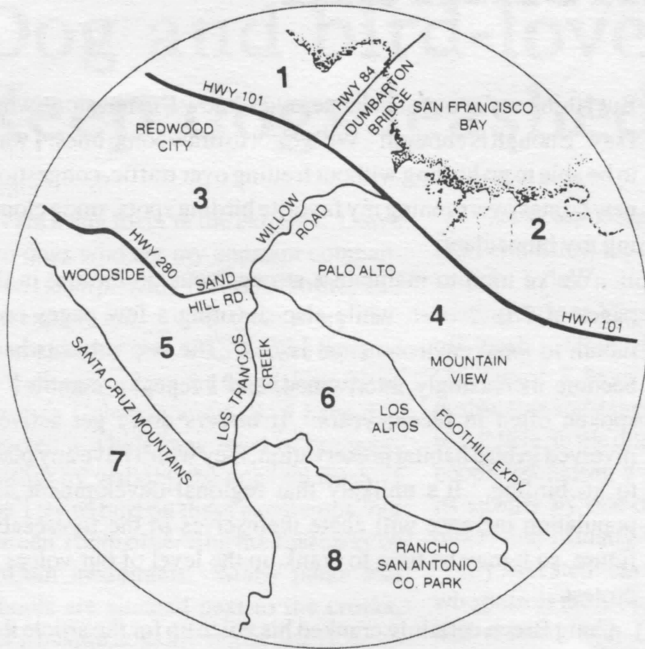
*** U.S. and International Site Guides and Field Guides ***

Bird Feeders * Bird Houses * Squirrel Feeders * Bird Baths

*** Bird, Bat, Fish, Tree and Insect Earrings and Pins ***

Join us for a bird walk at 10 a.m.

Kids can participate in a scavenger hunt while their parents shop and visit.



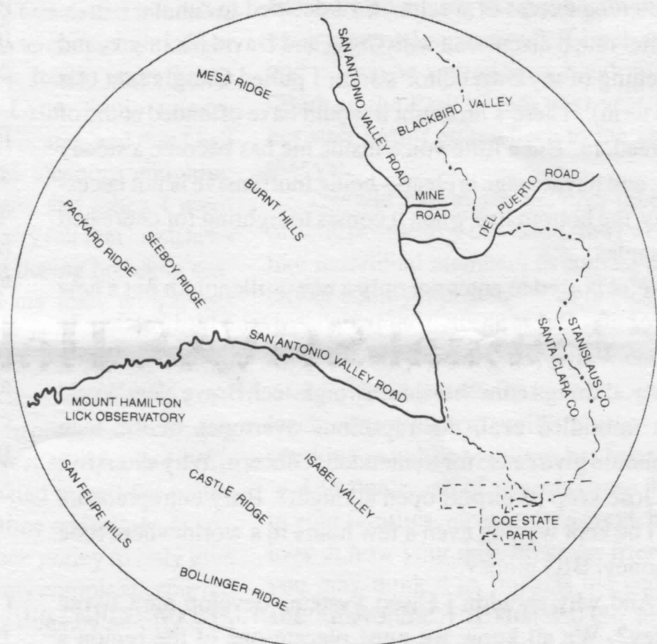
**Palo Alto
Monday, Dec. 20**

This map shows the CBC area divided into the different sections with approximate boundaries labeled between the sections. We have no compiler at press time, so please call SCVAS for more information.



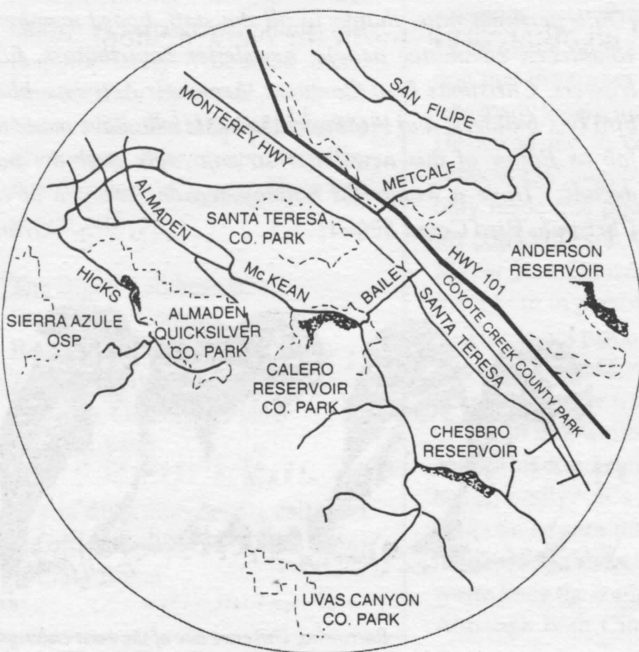
**Mt. Hamilton
Wednesday, Dec. 22**

This map shows the Mt. Hamilton Circle. If you look at the DeLorme Northern California Map book, you can see the area is dotted with unpaved roads. Call compiler Don Schmoltdt at 510-547-5108 for more information about this remote count!



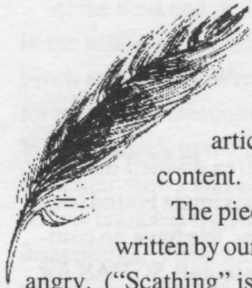
**Calero/Morgan Hill
Sunday, Jan. 2**

Our newest count circle (well, new since 1984!) needs volunteers as well. Call John Mariani at 408-997-2066 for more information or E-mail him at redknot@pacbell.net



Happy(?) New Millennium

by Grant Hoyt
Editor



A funny thing happened to the December *Avocet* on the way to the printer: For the first time in my ten years as Editor, we pulled an article at the last minute due to controversial content.

The piece, which may run in a future issue, was written by our Advocate Craig Breon, and its tone was angry. ("Scathing" is another adjective that comes to mind.) Initially I felt that, despite its hostile demeanor, Craig's article captured the sentiments and mood of many of us who feel our region is suffering from overdevelopment, sprawl, and a frightening excess of wealth. So I decided to run it.

After much discussion with Craig and David McIntyre, and searching of my own editor's soul, I pulled Craig's rant (his own term). There's no doubt it would have offended some of our readers. But a little voice inside me has become a steady roar, and its message is clear—being inoffensive is not necessarily the bottom line when it comes to fighting for cherished principles.

We're poised to enter not only a new millennium but a new way of life. Being an environmentalist, even a birdwatcher, in Silicon Valley isn't a walk in the park any more. While "www.allthings.com" heralds this high-tech Brave New World with unbridled zeal, the rapacious overtones of the tech revolution give cause for tremendous concern. Why shouldn't San Jose keep its airport open all night? Busy entrepreneurs can't be kept waiting even a few hours in a world where time is money, BIG money.

And why shouldn't Cisco Systems develop the Coyote Valley? We all know we must placate one of the region's biggest employers, or they might leave the area, and then where would we be? Because new jobs, new commerce is wonderful, it supersedes everything else, right? And new workers need new homes, with new roads, . . . etc, *ad infinitum*.

Make that *ad nauseam*. At some point, we've just gotta say NO to the juggernaut of Silicon Valley. This region is my home; has been for the last 38 years, and it's more to me than computer chips, cell phones and gridlocked freeways. It's White Pelicans in the Bay, Phainopepla in San Antonio Valley, Pileated Woodpeckers on Table Mountain, the Hermit Thrush at my birdbath. Or a pair of shy Blue-winged Teal on Adobe Creek, a Merlin streaking overhead, a kettle of Turkey Vultures rising over Coyote Creek, Bushtits building a nest at Arastradero.

We live in perhaps the most desirable place on Earth, but we're on the verge of ruining it. To simply oppose all Silicon Valley development would be unreasonable and unrealistic.

But I think we're out of balance, and I know I'm not alone when I say "Enough is enough!" We've got to draw some lines. I want to be able to go birding without fretting over traffic, congestion, new homes overrunning my favorite birding spots, smog clouding my binoculars.

We've tried to maintain a strong focus on birding in the pages of *The Avocet*, while also devoting a few pages each month to local environmental issues. The two subjects have become increasingly intertwined, and I repeat a mantra I've spoken often in recent years: If birders don't get actively involved in bird habitat preservation, they won't have any place to go birding. It's unlikely that regional development and population increase will abate themselves in the foreseeable future, so it may be time to crank up the level of our voices in protest.

Craig Breon certainly cranked his voice up for the article that I pulled, and I congratulate him for doing so. He CARES, damnit, and so do I, and so do a lot of our readers, about the quality of life in Santa Clara Valley. Next time, I'll be less inclined to douse the flames leaping off the pages of Craig's text.

So, on the eve of a new year/decade/century/millennium [aside to nitpickers: yes, I'm aware that the REAL eve is a year away], I encourage you all to stay tuned to these pages for coverage of the local birding scene—we'll never give that up. But be prepared to be challenged and confronted with some heartfelt, hard-core opinions on local environmental politics—it's the least we can do for the birds of Silicon Valley.

[On a personal note, thanks to all the staff, board members, volunteers, committee people, newsletter contributors, field trippers, Christmas Bird Counters, Armchair Activists, blue-bird box-builders, and birding enthusiasts who have made my job as Editor of this newsletter so enjoyable over the past decade. Have a wonderful holiday season; see you at the Christmas Bird Count dinner!]

---Grant]



Burrowing Owls are one of the most endangered species in Santa Clara Valley. This family of Burrowing Owls was drawn by Emelie Curtis.

Letter

Dog and bird-lover agrees: Keep dogs leashed in parks

Editor:

I am a dog lover in the extreme. I have two dogs who are my constant companions; I even plan my vacations so they can accompany me. I walk them every day, rain or shine, ON LEASH. The three of us walk daily along the Guadalupe River between Coleman and 880. I have discovered a whole new level of companionship by walking the dogs on leash. I don't try to bird on these excursions, but one can't help observing the vast array of riparian inhabitants. Many parks and schools are situated next to the creeks, and I'm sure dogs are impacting riparian habitat throughout Santa Clara Valley.

ACTION ALERT

Please take ten minutes and write to the County Board of Supervisors to express your disapproval over their actions on a recent decision to allow a 17,000 square foot, 45 foot high mansion to be built in the hills above San Martin, an unincorporated area between Morgan Hill and Gilroy. A variance permitting this inappropriately over-sized home was recently approved. Both the beauty of the foothills and the virtue of modesty were compromised by that decision. A paragraph or two would suffice.

The Board's address is:
Santa Clara County
Board of Supervisors
71 West Hedding Street
San Jose, California 95110
fax: 298-8460

(If you'd like more details, call me at the office: (408) 252-3748
---Craig Breon

As a founding member of SAVE BOTH and then the Burrowing Owl Consortium I first noticed the disruption to nesting owls at Mission College by dogs off-leash. Over the years along the Guadalupe I have witnessed so many destructive and dangerous situations, both to wildlife, to the dogs themselves, and to people (including a baby knocked from its stroller by one dog fleeing from another) that I finally was called to action.

My first step was to contact the ranger who patrols the area. It didn't hurt that he had studied with Lynn Trulio (also a Burrowing Owl advocate), and that I had participated in creek cleanups with him. He was sympathetic, and when I mentioned that I especially felt that leash laws should be enforced during breeding season, he confirmed my fears with direct knowledge of duck nests destroyed by dogs. He also told me that of all his contacts—drug dealers, drunks, (he even stopped an assault in progress once), dog owners were the most abusive and difficult. He has even had to call for police backup on at least one occasion.

He said it had been policy to only give warnings, but with my complaint, spurred by an attack on my dogs by an off-leash dog that the owner was oblivious to, he was ready to take more aggressive action. He asked me to call his supervisor to "encourage" support of this action. I not only made that phone call, but wrote to my councilperson, Cindy Chavez, and to Mayor Ron Gonzalez. I then talked to them both in person about this issue.

This is not just a "wildlife" issue, it is one of public safety. For example, my 84 year-old mother was knocked over by an off-leash dog while the owner, unable to control his dog, kept saying, "Don't worry, he is friendly." It's a health issue as well. You can be sure that all those dogs running loose go to the bathroom... and their waste lines the trails in great abundance. Although both Cindy and Ron seemed

very interested and sympathetic, the follow-up has been less than perfect. The mayor's office referred the issue to the head of the parks department who wrote me a condescending letter letting me know I couldn't possibly understand all the issues, but that they would put up additional signs and provide cleanup bags, neither of which they have done. Cindy Chavez had a great idea about creating a brochure educating the public about the environmental concerns of off-leash dogs, and of maybe setting up a booth in the "Bark in the Park" event next year, but her staff hasn't gotten back to me about that yet.

I would like to see SCVAS take an official position on this issue, and I would like individual members to contact their city or county representatives requesting ordinances already on the books be enforced. Maybe someday it will be as socially unacceptable to have a dog off-leash, especially in wildlife areas, as smoking in public buildings has become.

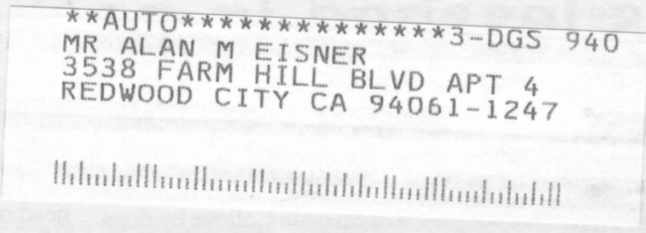
And finally, all of you who have dogs in your families, please take a good, hard look at how your dog, however friendly you may think it is, impacts the people and environment around it. So many people seem to think other dogs should be kept under control, but their own dog is somehow exempt. I keep having this fantasy that some day, if people really clean up after their dogs, and really do keep them on leash that my two four-legged friends and I could hike together on trails in parks now off limits to us. And yes, to John Mariani, the outdoors would be more pleasant for me, a responsible dog owner, if dogs were kept on leash, and if birders would realize just enjoying it isn't enough—sometimes you have to take political action.

Suzanne Morrone
San Jose

Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society
22221 McClellan Road
Cupertino, CA 95014

Phone: 408-252-3747
Fax: 408-252-2850
E-mail: scvas@scvas.org

Non-Profit Organization
U.S. Postage Paid
San Jose, CA
Permit No. 5869



OFFICERS

President
David McIntyre 408/252-3747
Past President
Nick Yatsko 408/247-5499
1st VP
Freddy Howell 408/358-9453
2nd VP
Vacant
Treasurer
Douglas McLendon 408/288-9254
Secretary
Ann Verdi 408/266-5108

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Dave Cook '98-'01 408/871-9552
Charles Preuss '98-'01 408/481-8704
Bobbie Handen '96-'99 408/356-4263
Grant Hoyt '96-'99 650/969-7892
Leda Beth Gray '96-'99 831/336-1127
Debbie Thompson '97-'00 408/227-4604
David Drake '97-'00 831/336-1127

STAFF

Chapter Manager
Leda Beth Gray (Interim) 408/252-3747
Environmental Advocate
Craig Breon 408/252-3748
Volunteer Coordinator
Ulrike Keyssner 408/252-3747
Office Fax 408/252-2850

E-mail scvas@scvas.org
Website www.scvas.org

CHAIRPERSONS

Avocet
Editor: Grant Hoyt 650/969-7892
Graphics, Layout:
Bonnie Bedford-White 408/261-8210
Education
Bobbie Handen 408/356-4263
Environmental Action
(Vacant)
Field Trips: Weekend
Bob Reiling 408/253-7527
Field Trips: Weekday
Shirley Gordon 408/996-9863
Rosalie Lefkowitz 650/494-6358
Finance
Don Price 650/327-1254
Membership
Debbie Thompson 408/227-4604
Library
Marti Oetzel 408/252-3747
Photo Club
Pete LaTourrette 650/961-2741
Programs
Doug & Gail Cheeseman 408/741-5330
Web page
Pete LaTourrette 650/961-2741
Christmas Bird Count
Ann Verdi 408/266-5108
Kathy Parker 408/358-2832
Bay Area Audubon Council
Delegate
Leda Beth Gray 831/336-1127

GENERAL MEETINGS are held on the third Wednesday of each month except July, August and December and are open to the public.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS meetings are open to all members. Call the office at (408) 252-3747 for times and directions.

RARE BIRD ALERT: (415) 681-7422

SCVAS welcomes gifts, including those made in honor of or in memory of friends or relatives. Such gifts will be used at SCVAS' discretion for its programs and activities unless specified otherwise by the donor. Tax-deductible donations may be made in the form of a check made out to SCVAS and sent to our Cupertino address. In addition, we gratefully accept bequests, which should specifically identify Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society as recipient. Gifts and bequests will be recognized by the Chapter in *The Avocet* unless the donor prefers otherwise.

The Avocet is published monthly (except for July and August) by the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society, 22221 McClellan Rd., Cupertino, CA 95104. Deadline is the 25th of two months prior. Send submissions to *The Avocet*, c/o SCVAS at the above address.

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

1999 Volume 46, Number 10

Join us!

We invite you to join the National Audubon Society and its Santa Clara County Chapter (SCVAS). To join, complete and mail this form with payment to: SCVAS, 22221 McClellan Road, Cupertino, CA 95014

SCVAS Membership: (Check one) Subscriber \$12 Supporter \$25 Donor \$35 Patron \$50 or more
Members receive *The Avocet* newsletter. Make check payable to SCVAS.

or

National Audubon Society Membership: (Check one) New Members \$20 Membership renewal \$35
Members receive *Audubon* magazine and *The Avocet* newsletter. Make check payable to National Audubon Society. Do not share my name and address

Donation: SCVAS greatly appreciates your tax-deductible donation. Your gift helps fund Audubon's birding, education and conservation programs.
NAME _____ GIFT FROM _____
ADDRESS _____
CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____
PHONE _____ **9MCH CC14**