



THE AVOCET

The Newsletter of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society

February 2000

The Great Backyard Bird Count

by Leda Beth Gray

Join birdwatchers from all over North America for the 3rd annual Great Backyard Bird Count, located on the BirdSource web site designed and managed by National Audubon Society and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. If you've ever taken part in Project FeederWatch, located at the same site, then you will already be familiar with the type of counting that will be done for this continent-wide census.

Unlike Project FeederWatch, in which participants select their own count days out of two-week periods specified by the Program, participants in the Great Backyard Bird Count will all be counting during February 18 to 21, to produce a "snapshot" of bird species distributions across the continent for this period. Counts can be done in participants' backyards, neighborhoods, in local parks or

other natural areas for any or all of the four days.

On the web site you will find detailed instructions, but here is a quick overview of how the count works: You can count the birds at your feeders and in your yard, or take a walk of less than a mile in your neighborhood, local park or natural area. Count for as little as 15 minutes, but it is recommended to count for at least half an hour. Keep track of the largest number of each species that you see at one time. This is the number that you will report as your tally for each species. For example, if 5 House Finches arrive in your backyard and leave, and then 15 House Finches arrive later, you would report 15 House Finches, not 20.

There is no reason that you actually have to be at home to participate in the Great Backyard Bird Count. If you are at work on any of the count days, you could

do a route around your workplace at lunchtime, or in a local park. This might be a good opportunity to bird some areas you don't normally try, or maybe it will just fit in with your normal lunchtime routine.

Data is entered on line at <<http://birdsource.org/gbbc>><http://birdsource.org/gbbc> if you have the latest version of the web browser that you use. If you think you might not be quite that up-to-date, then visit <<http://www.birdsource.org>><http://www.birdsource.org>. I've visited both and they seem to be pretty comparable. If you aren't on-line, then hit up your friends or relatives to let you use a computer, or arrange to use on-line computers at the local library.

I entertained myself for quite a while, browsing the Great Backyard Bird Count web site. I looked at the distribution of various species from the last two Great Backyard Bird Counts plotted on maps of North America and California. A friend of mine, who did the Count last year, told

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**General Membership Meeting
Wednesday Feb. 16
"A Naturalist's Brazil"
with Doug Trent
Palo Alto Art Center
Embarcadero & Newell Rds.
7:30 Hospitality 8:00 Program**

Tonight's program featuring naturalist/ecologist/conservationist Doug Trent should be very special. Doug has combined his passion for studying and photographing the natural wonders of Brazil's amazing wildlife habitat with a fervent belief in the need for preserving that habitat. A co-founder of Rainforest Action Network and a pioneer in the ecotourism field, he is one of the leading conservationists of the Western Hemisphere as well as an experienced tour guide leader, photographer, and teacher. Please join us for tonight's slide show and lecture by a most distinguished guest.

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VIEW FROM THE OFFICE

by Susan Bell



I am very happy to be the new Office Manager of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society. My name is Susan Bell and I was briefly introduced by Leda Beth Gray in the January issue of the *Avocet*. I have ventured to SCVAS from another nonprofit organization where I worked as Office Manager for a little over eight years. I was born and raised in

Santa Clara County. I have a passion for this valley and feel very fortunate to learn and be involved with the SCVAS.

I have also been very fortunate to have been able to work with Leda Beth, and am hopeful that some of her knowledge has rubbed off on me so I can continue to be helpful to members who visit the Nature Shop and Office.

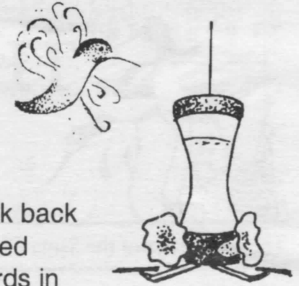
One question I have been asked by many concerned bird feeders who frequent the Nature Shop is: "What bird seed should be given to which species of bird?" I believe the following list will be helpful to those making selections while visiting the Nature Shop. (We do stock all of the seed which is listed):

- Black-oil sunflower seed: preferred by chickadees, titmice, nuthatches, and House Finches. It is available in the shell or hulled. Some people prefer the hulled because there is less mess around the feeder.
- White millet: Attracts the ground-feeding sparrows, Mourning Doves, and towhees.
- Mixed seed: Best offered on platform-type feeders. It attracts many ground-feeding birds since it contains mostly millet, but also has sunflower seed.
- Niger: Also known as Thistle seed, this attracts goldfinches and siskins.
- Suet: Woodpeckers, chickadees, titmice, and nuthatches love the suets; this is certainly the case here at the Nature Shop.
- Shelled raw peanuts: Attracts the chickadees and woodpeckers here at the Nature Shop. This is probably the least messy of the seed choices.

The SCVAS Nature Shop also stocks feeders for all of the above seed. We carry a variety of suets and suet feeders as well as many books on how to attract birds to the feeders and building a natural habitat for your favorite native bird in your own backyard.

If you're in the vicinity of the Nature Shop please stop by---I think you'll enjoy looking around and maybe see an interesting bird or two in the Park.


Volunteer Ventures
by Ulrike Keyssner



I spent the holiday break back home in Australia where I enjoyed rediscovering the varieties of birds in my backyard in a bayside suburb of Brisbane. This was my first trip home since I started at Audubon so I had a keen interest in birding this time. The first thing I noticed about the native birds around my Aussie home is that they seem much larger and more colorful than those in my California backyard. They don't trill sweetly at each other either---they squawk, hiss, and laugh instead. They are much louder than California birds, too, as the cacophony of bird sounds was enough to wake the dead, without fail, every morning at 5 AM! It was impossible to sleep no matter how late I went to bed, so the only thing to do was to don boots, grab binoc's and a field guide, and head out to see who was making all the fuss.

As in Silicon Valley, development is a big issue. Because of housing developments and the resulting increases in roads, from August to December between dawn and dusk, the speed limit signs are slower than during the day. This is designed to help motorists avoid koalas (not a bear) during the mating season. Due to habitat fragmentation, koalas must cross roads to find mates. I had to stop for a young koala one afternoon and shoo it off the road, stopping several cars in the process. It is encouraging to see people adapting to the needs of wildlife. I discovered that the approaches used by Australian environmental organizations, and their volunteers, to halt dwindling species and habitat are often similar to those we utilize at SCVAS. They are conducting bird counts, building nestboxes, promoting owls as a natural control of rodents instead of laying poison, propagating native plant species, and revegetating degraded areas.

Like SCVAS, these Aussie organizations would not exist without their financially contributing members and their volunteers. Volunteers are the heart of our organization and many of our projects would not function without them. The SCVAS Board and Education Committee has recommitted themselves to education by hiring me to coordinate our education programs. We need all our members who are interested in education to talk to me so that we can devise a way you can help SCVAS educate and inspire our local communities. We are looking for creative people who can draw and design posters, people with good bird I.D. skills to label bird slides and bird nests, and volunteers who are comfortable presenting the successful programs we already have and the new

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February 2000 Calendar

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

Wednesday Feb. 2, 7:30 PM

Bay Area Bird Photographers will feature John Cang with a slide show from his December trip to Bosque del Apache NWR in New Mexico. Lucy Evans Baylands Interpretive Center, E. Embarcadero Rd., Palo Alto.

**Saturday Feb. 5, 8:30 AM

San Francisco's Southern Parks.

Half day. Leader: Alan Hopkins (415) 664-0983. Meet at Candlestick Point State Recreation Area, a good place for shorebirds, bay ducks, loons and raptors. We'll then visit McLaren Park, for land birds and dabbling ducks. Other lesser known but birdy spots may be visited, time permitting. From Hwy. 101 exit by Brisbane Lagoon at the Candlestick/3Com Park off-ramp. Continue east along Harney Way and turn right onto Jamestown/Hunters Point Expwy. From Expwy watch for entrance to Candlestick State Recreation Area on right and enter (no fee). Meet at end of paved road that runs through the park.

**Sunday Feb. 6, 8:30 AM

Arastradero OSP. Half day. Leader: Jim Liskovec (650)969-5542. From I-280 take Page Mill Rd. west, turn right on Arastradero Rd. and meet in parking lot about 1/2 mile on the right. Moderate walking, **RC**.

Tuesday Feb. 8, 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: Violet-green Swallow.

**Wednesday Feb. 9, 9:00 AM

Coyote Reservoir. Half day. Leaders: Emelie Curtis (408) 779-2637 & Jane Glass. Take E. Leavesley Rd. exit off Hwy 101, go east 1.5 miles, turn left on New Ave. then right on Roop Rd. to lake. Meet at Lakeview Picnic Area. Waterbirds and raptors. **LO, RC**.

**Saturday Feb. 12, 8:00 AM

Charleston Slough. Half day. Leader: Nick Yatsko (408) 247-5499. Meet at Terminal Way at end of San Antonio Rd. north off Hwy. 101 in Mt. View. All are invited but birding and discussions will be geared toward beginning birders. Bring a scope if you have one.

**Sunday Feb. 13, 8:00 AM

Fremont Lagoons. Half day. Leader: Bob Reiling (408) 253-7527. From I-880 take the Gateway Blvd exit west, turn left on Fremont Ave. Park in the lot at the of the street. Come prepared to help ID gulls, which should include Thayer's and Glaucous.

**Saturday Feb. 19, 8:30 AM

Monterey Peninsula & Jack's Peak.

Full day. Leader: Kathy Parker (408) 358-2832. Meet at Municipal Wharf in Monterey. Take Pacific Grove Del Monte Ave. exit from Hwy 1, after 1.7 miles on Del Monte turn right at Figueroa St. into parking lot and meet at the base of the wharf. Bring quarters for parking meters at Coast Guard Pier, lunch and full tank of gas. Entrance fee required for Jack's Peak.

**Sunday Feb. 20, 8:00 AM

Crittenden Marsh & vicinity.

Half day. Leader: TBA (Questions? Call Bob Reiling (408) 253-7527). From Hwy 101 in Mt. View take Shoreline Blvd. north toward bay and meet in first parking lot on right after entrance kiosk to Shoreline Park. **RC**.

**Wednesday Feb. 23, 8:30 AM

Arastradero Preserve.

Half day. Leader: John Arnold (650) 948-4250. Oak woodland with creekside vegetation and a small lake; can be very productive for wintering sparrows, raptors, woodpeckers and a variety of passerines. Moderate walking 2 to 3 miles; muddy trails. From I-280 take Page Mill Rd. west, turn right on Arastradero Rd. (approx. 1/2 mile) and meet in parking lot, 1/2 mile on right. **LO, RC**.

**Saturday Feb. 26, 8:00 AM

Princeton Harbor. Half day. Leader: Mark Miller (650) 967-3429. Meet at corner of West Point and Stanford Ave. in Princeton, 4 miles north of Half Moon Bay on Hwy. 1. Bring your spotting scopes. Expected species include loons, grebes, sea ducks, rocky shorebirds, miscellaneous small landbirds. **RC**.

**Sunday Feb. 27, 8:30 AM

Grant Ranch Park.

Half day. Leader: Dave Cook (408) 871-9552. From I-680 take Alum Rock Ave. northeast, turn right on Mt. Hamilton Rd. and then approximately 9 miles to park. Meet at Hall's Valley Lake parking lot on left, just past main park entrance. Fresh water ducks, oak woodland birds and possible Golden Eagle. Moderate 2-mile walk, **LO, RC**.

**Saturday Mar. 4, 9:00 AM

Pescadero Marsh & vicinity.

Half day. Leader: Sue James (650) 348-0315. Meet at first parking lot south of bridge over Pescadero Creek on Hwy 1. Shorebirds, gulls, grebes, and ducks. Bring your spotting scope. **LO, RC**.

** Sunday Mar. 5, 8:30 AM

Coyote Hills Regional Park.

Half day. Leader: Frank Vanslager (408) 257-3647. Take Hwy. 84/Dumbarton Bridge east towards Newark. Exit right on Thornton, then left over freeway as Thornton becomes Paseo Padre. Turn left at Patterson Ranch/Commerce Rd. into park. Meet at far end of Quarry Parking lot 1/4 mile past park entrance. Fee required. **LO**.

BEGINNERS' BIRD CLASS

On **Saturday, Mar. 18**, Sandy Cortright will offer a 3-hour class on birding basics at McClellan Ranch Park in Cupertino. Topics covered will include bird groups, bird identification, selection of binoculars and field guides, where and when to find birds, and birding etiquette. Cost: \$20. For more information, call the SCVAS office at (408) 252-3747.



Scope on Membership Committee

by Debbie Thompson

SCVAS has a Membership Committee that is focused on increasing membership, representing Audubon at community and chapter events, and just plain keeping our members happy. In this installment of *Scope*, I would like to tell you a little bit about our committee.

One of our tasks is to maintain the chapter booth materials so it will be a real attraction at community events. It is very rewarding to meet and educate the public about the world of birds while promoting our ongoing programs at SCVAS. We strive to display the booth at as many festivals and events throughout the year as possible. We find that the public is very interested in hearing about our Audubon chapter.

Another task is to send a complimentary copy of the *Avocet* along with a letter to non-members who have shown an interest in SCVAS activities such as general meetings and field trips. We like everyone to know how little it costs to join our chapter and receive so many benefits.

The Membership Committee also helps host the monthly general meetings, as well as other events such as the annual dinner. At these events, we help set up tables, put out refreshments, welcome members and sell Nature Shop articles. It's a great time to get to know other members, too.

We have recently initiated a New Member Program twice a year, where

new members gather at McClellan Ranch to go on a short bird walk, find out details about SCVAS and socialize over a continental breakfast. The committee is also interested in starting a yearly Members Only Program---watch for details in a future *Avocet*!

If you're interested in finding out more about the Membership Committee, please check us out at our next meeting on Wednesday evening, February 9 at 7:30 PM at our office in McClellan Ranch Park. We appreciate any amount of help you can squeeze out of your busy schedule! You can also call our office or me, the Membership Committee Chairperson, at the numbers posted on the back of this newsletter for more information.

Great Backyard Bird Count *continued*

me that she found it interesting to watch the results come in as people across the country woke up and made their observations. The data showed up on the web site's map as a big wave sweeping across North America from east to west.

Other helpful information is available on the web site, including bird identification tips, bird calls that you can listen to, information on how to select a feeder and what type of seeds to offer, and "cool facts" about various bird species. About one of my frequent visitors, the Chestnut-backed Chickadee, I found the following "cool facts":

"A common bird of the conifer rain forests of the Northwest coast, the Chestnut-backed Chickadee is expanding its range both eastward and southward. The eastward expansion is probably due to the increase of Douglas Fir in the Sierra Nevada of California, after extensive logging during the 20th century. The Chestnut-backed Chickadee has also expanded into California south of San Francisco due to the maturing of shade trees and ornamental trees in suburban areas."

There are other bird surveys at this site for "citizen scientists" who have access to the web:

- In Project FeederWatch participants count birds at the bird feeders in their yards, selecting two consecutive count days out of each of ten 2-week periods throughout the fall and winter. The actual time spent counting is up to the individual participants. Those who are not on-line can still participate in this program by mail by signing up through Cornell Lab of Ornithology (1-800-843-2473).

- The Irruptive Bird Survey allows participants to enter observations of particular so-called irruptive species such as Pine Siskin, Purple Finch, Cedar Waxwing, American Goldfinch, Red-breasted Nuthatch, American Robin, and others. There are no count schedules for this survey; observations can be entered for any trips that you might want to make or for species that occur in your own yard. New forms are used for each location and date.

- Birders can enter warbler observations on BirdSource's Warbler Watch web page, noting whether nesting behavior was observed. Similar to the Irruptive Bird Survey, there are no count schedules, and observations can be made and entered at any time.

- School classrooms can participate in Classroom FeederWatch, also on the BirdSource web site. Curricula for grades 5 to 8 are available for \$199.

Interesting maps are put together with the results of these different counts. On the BirdSource site I found maps that cycled through several months showing how the distribution of a particular species, such as the Evening Grosbeak, varied by month throughout North America.

Join the tens of thousands of other birders who will participate in this year's Great Backyard Bird Count on February 18-21, and have a great time! Then think about doing some of the other counts on the BirdSource web site. Why not donate your observations to science?

Of Local Interest

An occasional column on local birds and birders
by Garth Harwood

If you tug at any one thing in nature, you find it is connected to everything else (to paraphrase John Muir). That's one of the things I like best about birding: the way we focus obsessively, or "tug," on birds, and end up interested in all manner of things in the long run "because it's important to birds". Birds serve as an especially elegant touch-point for a more general concern about the environment.

That said, this month's column is about trees . . . because, as a starting point, they are so important to birds. Recent reports have raised alarms about two significant disturbances to tree communities in our part of the world. To start with the more alarming of the two: in late September 1999, an article in the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported an unusually intense outbreak of two beetle species which have the potential to kill large numbers of oak trees throughout the region. These are the Western Oak Bark Beetle, *P. pubipennis*, and the Oak Ambrosia Beetle, *M. scutellare*. While these beetles are always present to some degree in local forests, they now appear to be killing off unprecedented numbers of otherwise healthy trees, especially Coast Live Oak and Tanoak. As of last September, the insect outbreak had killed tens of thousands of oaks in Mendocino, Sonoma, Marin, and Santa Cruz counties, and its arrival in the remaining Bay Area counties was expected imminently.

I've been watching for signs of trouble in San Mateo County, where I live, and in Santa Clara County, where I work. I'm happy to say that I haven't seen any signs of beetle-killed oaks yet. If and when the "epidemic" does arrive in our neighborhoods, however, trees may turn brown quickly as leaves die within a few weeks of infestation. If it's a genuine beetle attack, a telltale brown powder, or "bor-ing dust," should be apparent on the bark and lower surfaces as the beetles dig into the tree's tissues.

It would be hard to overstate the importance of oaks to local birds and eco-systems, from the aptly re-named Oak

Titmouse, to Western Scrub Jays (which in turn may "plant" up to 5,000 acorns per bird per year), to the savory chanterelle mushrooms which thrive in their leaf-mold. And until recently, their acorns made them arguably the single most important plant to the human inhabitants of this region.

Still, I wonder about "disasters" of this sort. Although this outbreak seems unusually severe, such insect booms are typically short-term events occurring when some other factor has already weakened the trees, such as a delayed response to the drought years of 1987-1983, as has been suggested in this case. And once the opportunistic bugs have done their work, they die back to ordinary levels and the living community mends itself. Often there are real ecological advantages to such "housecleaning" events, such as when a dense stand of trees is opened to sunlight for the first time in many years, and new seedlings of many species can take hold, perhaps providing food and shelter for an even wider variety of life-forms than before. After all, when compared to the sustained disaster of development pressure, from which there is little, if any, healing afterwards, or even to industrial-scale logging, this is small stuff.

The bottom line? I wish I knew. It will be interesting to see if this ecological event will be dramatic enough to cause perceptible changes in local forests and, ultimately, in bird communities over the next few years.

The second alarm that went up recently was raised over the internet by Kimball Garrett, Ornithology Collections Manager of the Natural History Museum in Los Angeles, who reports that a natural insect pest of eucalyptus trees has made its way to our state. These bugs, known as Red Gum Psyllids (*Glycaspis brimblecombe*), are doing what such creatures do when confronted with unlimited food resources and scant predation: they're running wild through southern California eucalyptus stands, killing many trees. As in the case of the oak

beetles, their spread to local environs seems likely to occur soon. Look for "lerps", or sticky, conical dabs of honeydew which are secreted onto leaves to protect developing larvae. There is likely to be a sticky rain of lerpy material under affected trees, making them easy to spot.

Although no less fascinating, this is an easier phenomenon to accept. The Blue Gum eucalyptus species which is prevalent in our part of California is at best a mixed bag for birds and wildlife. A spreading, invasive Australian species, it inhibits natural plant communities by out-competing most native plants for water, and it contains chemicals in its leaves which prevent most other plants from establishing themselves nearby. Eucalyptus provides an off-season nectar supply which is attractive to many bird species, (and great for bird counts!), although it is occasionally hazardous to them as well. The wide, shallow flowers coat birds' faces with a dark residue which can fatally clog nostrils and beaks.

Many Australian birds feed happily on these psyllids and their lerps. Sounds to me like a resource-in-waiting for native birds to discover, after which a new balance will surely be struck.



Field Notes

by Bill Bousman

Loons through Egrets

Four **Red-throated Loons** have been regular throughout December at Shoreline Lake (m.ob.). Four birds were also found at Calero Reservoir on 3 Dec (TRY) and a single bird was on Salt Pond A10 in Alviso on 19 Dec (MMR, SCR). A **Common Loon** at Shoreline Lake remained through at least 14 Dec (WGB), and a bird was seen at Calero Reservoir through 3 Dec (TRY). Lingered **Brown Pelicans** included one over the Santa Clara Valley Water District ponds on 11 Dec (DG) and an immature on Salt Pond A3W on 18 Dec (MMR). The Ogier Avenue ponds are **American Bittern** central as four to eight birds were seen there on 4 Dec (RWR, FV et al.). Singles were at the Mountain View Forebay on 8 Dec (AME) and 11 Dec (SCR, DWi). One was found along Alviso Slough on 12 Dec (MMR, IL). A **Cattle Egret** near Bloomfield Road in the South County on 12 Dec (NL) was the first bird found locally since last May.

Waterfowl

An immature **Greater White-fronted Goose** was seen with the Canada Goose flock at Calaveras Reservoir on 15 Dec (MMR). Four **Snow Geese** were found with the Canadas at Lake Cunningham on 19 Dec (MJM) and have been seen irregularly through the end of the month (v.ob.). Three adults were along Hwy 152 east of Casa de Fruta on 30 Dec (MMR) and a single adult was with the Calaveras flock of Canadas on 31 Dec (WGB). Grouped in with the four Snows at Lake Cunningham on 19 Dec were 10 immature **Ross's Geese** (MJM) and these birds were also seen there through the end of the month. An immature **Tundra Swan** was seen at the Parkway Lakes on 17 Dec (TRY), but did not linger. The best count of **Wood Ducks** was of 50 birds on 27 Dec (AV) at their favored Almaden Reservoir. A male **Eurasian Wigeon** has been found in December (v.ob.) in either the Mountain View Forebay or the Palo Alto Flood

Control Basin (FCB) and a female was seen there as well on 11 Dec (MJM). Two males and a female were found on Salt Pond A12 in Alviso on 19 Dec, within the San Jose CBC circle, while another male in Salt Pond A9 was outside (both SCR). Additionally, a male was found in the larger pond at the Sunnyvale Water Pollution Control Plant (WPCP) on 20 Dec (MJM). A male on Salt Pond A14 on 28 Dec (MDo) was probably one of the birds seen nearby on 19 Dec. Six **Blue-winged Teal** were seen in the Palo Alto FCB on 19 Dec (MDo) and a pair was in Bayfront Park in Menlo Park on 20 Dec (JAC, EF).

*Moderate rarities for
December included Tundra
Swan, Tufted Duck, Ruff,
Lesser Black-backed Gull,
Cassin's Kingbird, and
Mountain Bluebird*

A **'Eurasian' Green-winged Teal** was found at the Palo Alto Baylands on 17 Dec (BA *fide* PMB) and has remained through the end of the month (v.ob.). **Redheads** have been scarce in December with a male seen at Charleston Slough on 11 Dec (m.ob.) and two on Salt Pond A10 in Alviso on 28 Dec (MDo). Two female **Tufted Ducks** were found on Salt Pond A9 in Alviso on 19 Dec (SCR) and a male and two females were found nearby on Salt Pond A10 on 28 Dec (MDo). Shoreline Lake's **Barrow Goldeneyes** have been sporadic in December. Two adult males were seen there on 11 Dec (MJM, SCR, DWi) as well as an immature male (MJM). Two adult males were seen again on 25 Dec (AME), not none were found there on the Palo Alto CBC (MMR). **Hooded Mergansers** have been found in many of their usual locations this month. Six birds on Felt Lake on 20 Dec (AME, MM) were a high count for

December. A pair found in the Isabel Valley on 22 Dec (MJM, MMR) repeated last year's unusual record from the interior of the Diablo Range. A count of 211 **Red-breasted Mergansers** on the Alviso salt ponds on 19 Dec (SCR, MMR, IL) appears to be a record high count for Santa Clara County. Peak counts of 61 **Common Mergansers** at Grant Lake on 8 Dec (RWR et al.) and 80 there on 11 Dec (MW) are the largest numbers we've had in the last few winters.

Raptors through Skimmers

It was a good December for **Bald Eagles** with a immature over the Ogier Avenue ponds on 13 Dec (DB), an adult and an immature in the Isabel Valley on 22 Dec (MJM, MMR, GHt, ADeM), and an adult at Calero Reservoir 27-30 Dec (AV, HMCD). An adult **'Harlan's' Red-tailed Hawk** was seen on the Guadalupe River at Trimble on 22 Dec (SCR), apparently for its fourth winter. A **Ferruginous Hawk** was along the Monterey Highway south of Metcalf Road on 2 Dec (RWR, FV), an adult was at Moffett Field on 20 Dec (MJM), and two adults were found in the Isabel Valley on 22 Dec (MJM, MMR, GHt, ADeM). A color-banded **Snowy Plover** was found on Salt Pond A6 on 18 Dec (MMR) and, the next day, three birds were seen nearby on Salt Pond A5 and two were on Salt Pond A8 (both MMR, AK). Nine birds were found on the salt ponds south of Bayfront Park on 20 Dec (JAC, EF). The banded plover turned out to have been banded this past August at the Moss Landing Salt Ponds (*fide* MMR). Birders should make every effort to accurately report the sequence of color bands that they see on banded birds. Two **Lesser Yellowlegs** were found on the San Jose-Santa Clara WPCP drying ponds on 19 Dec (NL, MM), and a single bird was on Salt Pond A8 the same day (MMR, AK). The next day, eight birds were in the salt ponds south of Bayfront Park and one was in the Ravenswood Point salt ponds (JAC, EF). Just north of the county line, a **Ruddy Turnstone** was found at the mouth of San

Field Notes *continued*

Francisquito Creek on 20 Dec and five **Red Knots** were found in the same spot (MMR, JMe). The Christmas counts brought access to the salt ponds and a spurt of **Sanderlings**. Fifteen birds were seen in Alviso salt ponds on 18 Dec (MMR), and at least eight were found there the next day (MMR, AK). On 20 Dec, four birds were on Salt Pond B2 in Sunnyvale (MJM), one was at the San Francisquito Creek delta (MMR, JMe), and one was on Dumbarton Point (L&BP *fide* JAC). A **Ruff** was found on the San Jose-Santa Clara WPCP drying ponds on 19 Dec (NL, MM) and may be the same bird found there in November. The fourth-winter **Lesser Black-backed Gull** was seen throughout the month at Lake Cunningham (m.ob.), but the adult in Alviso was found only on 19 Dec in the San Jose-Santa Clara WPCP drying ponds (NL, MM). An adult **Glaucous Gull** was found on the Salt Pond A10/A11 levee in Alviso on 19 Dec (SCR). Two second-winter birds were at Almaden Lake Park on 26 Dec (JMa, DG) and a single bird was there the next day (JMa). The **Black Skimmer** flock at Charleston Slough has held constant at 11 during December (m.ob.).

Roadrunners through Goldfinches

A **Greater Roadrunner** in south San Jose near Oakridge Mall on 31 Dec (*fide* LBG) is unusual for a valley location. One to two **Short-eared Owls** have been found more or less regularly at Byxbee Park and the old Palo Alto dump during December (v.ob.). Good numbers of **Lewis's Woodpeckers** were found in the San Antonio and Isabel valleys on the Mt. Hamilton CBC on 22 Dec (v.ob.) with a preliminary total of 53 birds. Two **Cassin's Kingbirds** were found along San Felipe Road on 30 Dec (MMR). This is an area where they have nested in the last two or three years. Two **Tree Swallows** were seen at Lake Cunningham on 19 Dec (MJM) and a single bird was there on 23 Dec (SCR). A **Canyon Wren** was found along Penitencia Creek in Alum Rock Park on 29 Dec (MMR, SCR). A female **Mountain Bluebird** was found at the end of Geng Road in Palo Alto on 14 Dec (ADeM *fide* MMR) and was seen off and on through the end of the month. A **Phainopepla** was found on the west side

of the Isabel Valley on 22 Dec (GHt, ADeM) for our only record this winter. Always rare in the winter, a male **Black-throated Gray Warbler** was found in Bowers Park in Santa Clara on 12 Dec (SEM). Our rarest western warbler in winter, a female or immature **MacGillivray's Warbler** was seen at the Ogier Avenue ponds on 2 Dec (RWR). Two to three **Grasshopper Sparrows** were found at the north end of the Silver Creek hills 7-13 Dec (SCR). This species is extremely rare in the winter---or is it that we've overlooked this secretive grassland bird? At least one of the **Swamp Sparrows** found in November at the south end of the Stevens Creek Tidal Marsh is here for the winter, although not often seen with but one record on 14 Dec (WGB). Single **White-throated Sparrows** were seen at Stanford on 3 Dec (TGr), along Los Trancos Road on 20 Dec (AME, MM), and near Foothill College on 21 Dec (SCR). Birds apparently wintering at local feeders include individuals at two different feeders in Los Gatos (GLEB), at least two birds at an Almaden Valley feeder (BH), a bird in east San Jose (PB), and one in Campbell (PC). **Lawrence's Goldfinches** become even more irregular locally in the winter so a single bird on the west side of the Isabel Valley on 22 Dec (GHt, ADeM) is of interest.

Observers: Bill Ayers (BA), Peg Bernucci (PB), Dusty Bleher (DB), Bill Bousman (WGB), Phyllis Browning (PMB), Jack Cole (JAC), Pat Curtis (PC), Al DeMartini (ADeM), Matthew Dodder (MDo), Al Eisner (AME), Ed Frost (EF), Don Ganton (DG), Leda Beth Gray (LBG), Tom Grey (TGr), Barbara Harkleroad (BH), Grant Hoyt (GHt), Alma Kali (AK), Isabelle Lacey (IL), Gloria LeBlanc (GLEB), Nick Lethaby (NL), Mike Mammoser (MJM), John Mariani (JMa), Hugh McDevitt (HMCD), John Meyer (JMe), Steve Miller (SEM), Mary Murphy (MM), Lisa & Bob Pavvey (L&BP), Bob Reiling (RWR), Mike Rogers (MMR), Steve Rottenborn (SCR), Tom Ryan (TRy), Frank Vanslager (FV), Ann Verdi (AV), Michael Wienholt (MW), and David Wilcove (DWi).

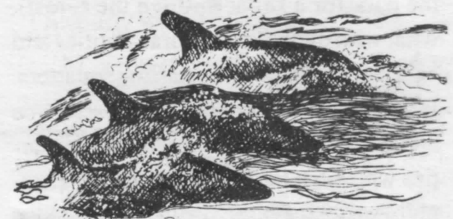
Dolphins Galore on Young Audubon Trip

"Dolphin and whale-watching" should have been the name for the Young Audubon trip on Saturday, Jan. 8. The trip was organized by Eileen Bowden and ably led by Allen Royer and Jim Liskovec. On a beautiful, warm and sunny day, as Chris's fishing boat left the pier at Monterey, 44 adults and 14 young people were treated to the sight of a Harlequin Duck, Common Loon and numerous Surf Scoters, as well as sea otter and harbor seals. Sea lions on the breakwater gave us a raucous greeting as we passed. Pelagic and Brandt's Cormorants could be seen as we headed out of the bay and into the Pacific.

Allen made the decision to move first toward a group of dolphins visible in the distance. To the delight of all we were surrounded by a large pod of Rizzo's Dolphins, fins waving above the surface. Next came a contingent of smaller Pacific White-sided Dolphins, speeding visibly just below the surface as they maneuvered in all directions and enjoyed bow-running with the boat. We saw quite a few Gray Whales, flukes waving at us, which elicited cries of admiration from the watchers, young and old.

As the boat was turning around to head back, the captain spied another group of dolphins leaping from the water and set off in their direction. Within minutes, the water around us erupted with a very large pod of playful Common Dolphins leaping into the air and, again, bow-running with us. It was a spectacular sight for all and an exciting finale to our trip.

---Elaine Gould



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

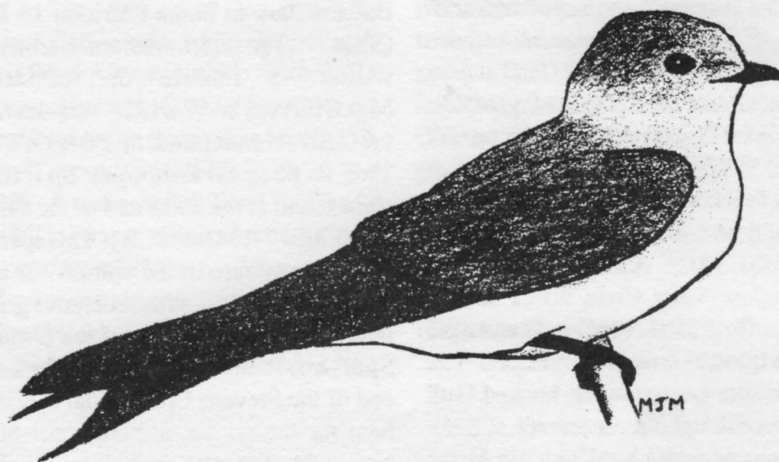
The Saga of Purple Martin 426

By Mike Mammoser

It was a Purple Martin. Of course, these words had no significance to the bird itself. They were merely convenient descriptors used by a completely different animal, one seemingly obsessed with categorizing it and others of its kind. The martin was what it was, its essence coming from deep within.

Born in the summer on Vancouver Island in British Columbia, near the town of Sooke, its life had not been too difficult to this point. Its parents had doted on it, providing protection and food as it grew healthy and strong. This idyllic life had been interrupted only by a single moment of terror, when it was snatched from its nest by something that the martin thought to be a large predator; a human. In its struggles it had become entangled in some kind of strange material; a shiny piece of metal had somehow wrapped around its left leg, while a yellow band of plastic with the legend 426 encircled its right. Nonetheless, it finally managed to escape back to the nest. For a while it pecked and pulled at the annoying bands around its legs, but eventually it took no more heed of them than if they were natural parts of its body.

Unlike their eastern cousins, these martins seemed to prefer keeping to themselves, choosing the single family life and avoiding the commune system prevalent in the east (no high rise condominiums for them!). However, finding that perfect home wasn't exactly a walk in the park (or a flight through the forest), what with dwindling natural cavities and excessively aggressive starling squatters. In recent years, though, a new resource appeared on the scene presenting the martins with what looked like an endless supply of nesting cavities: small square wooden boxes on skinny poles, many near or over water, with entry holes and dimensions seemingly made-to-order for them. It was in one of these strange hovels that 426 made its way into the world.



Purple Martin drawn by Mike Mammoser

Soon, the martin fledged from its nest, joining its parents in the big open space outside the box. Here, it dipped and dived and strafed the world with the reckless abandon of exuberant youth. Watching its parents intently and imitating their every move, it gained proficiency daily in its ability to snatch delectable insects right out of the air. This playful imitation would hone skills essential to future survival.

Much too soon, the summer of learning ended. At some point, the close camaraderie of the martin family was broken and 426 found itself alone in the world. And now it was on the move. It couldn't know where it was going, or even why it was going. Something deep inside just told it to go. Being gregarious by nature, the martin looked for others to join with, but found only its smaller cousins, the swallows. The plentitude of swallows was a boon for the young martin, as they would congregate at locations where insect prey was abundant. Soon, the martin learned to look for the swallows as it traveled towards the south, taking advantage of the bounty presented through their presence.

Eventually, it came upon the south end of San Francisco Bay and was attracted to a large flock of swallows along the edge of this body of water. There it feasted over the sloughs and perched on the wires that were stretched over them. Below, a human, similar to the one that had taken it from its nest so long ago, stared fixedly at it, seemingly intent on the colorful bands around its legs. The martin paid it little notice. Feeling secure at its high perch, it preened contentedly or playfully bullied the smaller swallows from their perches. Life was good.

The martin knew nothing of what lay ahead of it. Hopefully, it would recognize its destination when it got there, or simply stop when it felt that it had traveled far enough. Hopefully, it was traveling in the right direction. Hopefully, it could avoid the many predators that lurked at every turn. Hopefully, it would find others of its kind and continue to learn from them the business of being a martin. The path before it was fraught with obstacles and dangers, but it was along this path that it would find its future. Mindless of the difficulties, the martin took wing and flew off to meet its destiny.

Doug Trent to Speak At February Meeting

In 1980 Douglas Trent visited Brazil, and was so moved by the natural beauty and richness of its vast tropical habitats that he decided to move there. Soon after his arrival, he saw the other side of the coin: huge areas of deforestation and habitat destruction. In response to what he witnessed, he set up Focus Tours, a nature tour company with goals of using tourism for environmental education and raising funds for conservation work in the tropics. At a time when tropical forest issues were not on everyone's mind, Doug forged contacts with conservation groups, directors of botanical gardens and conservation authors. His conservation work was quickly endorsed by the National Audubon Society's International Program, Friends of the Earth (London), the noted authors Dr. Norman Myers and Catherine Caufield, and the Director of Kew Garden in London, Dr. Ghilleen T. Prance. His efforts have supplied binoculars to guards in the Pantanal wetlands, generated thousands of dollars for Brazilian conservation organizations, helped support the Caratinga Biological Station, provided data on wildlife populations to the Brazilian national parks department, provided free organizational consultation to Brazilian NGO's, and many other significant projects.

In 1985 Doug helped found the Rainforest Action Network. With "ecotourism" becoming a buzzword, Doug is recognized as one of the pioneers in this field. He has taught a Tropical Bird Ecology course outside of Iquitos, Peru as part of a week-long fundraising International Rainforest Workshop. He is the author of the Tropical Forest chapter of *The Mother Earth Handbook* (Continuum, 1991, ed. J. Scherff) and also authored the American Forests chapter of *The Piracy in America* (Clarity Press, 1999, ed. J. Scherff). He has delivered presentations to conservation organiza-

tions and universities, as well as to schools in Brazil and the USA. In addition, he is a regular speaker at international ecotourism congresses. He delivered his paper "Making Ecotourism an Ally in Biodiversity Conservation" at Yale University. This was later published in the Yale Bulletin.

While living in Brazil, directing his tour company and guiding specialized nature tours, Doug has been able to capture on film much of South America's exciting wildlife. His slide show presentations are a mix of eloquent and informative speaking on conservation and stunning wildlife photos.

Doug holds an Honors Degree in Environmental Sciences and Interpersonal Communication from the University of Kansas. He is a respected conservationist, tropical ecologist, tour guide, author, photographer, environmental consultant, speaker and teacher.

In 1999 San Jose's Black Diamond Paving, a woman-owned company with concern for the environment, worked with Focus Tours to create the Jaguar Ecological Reserve in Brazil's Pantanal wetlands through a generous donation. Their "Pave an Acre, Save an Acre" program has generated another donation, and will be presented to Focus Tours at our February Audubon meeting. This donation will be used to increase the size of this reserve, while directly benefiting the local community.

Doug Trent can be reached at Focus Tours, Inc., 103 Moya Road, Santa Fe, NM 87505, Phone: 505-466-4688 or E-mail at: FocusTours@aol.com.

Ventures *continued*

ones being developed. Some of these jobs require skills but many do not, and we always provide training and guidance to volunteers who wish to help but may be uncertain as to their usefulness. You can set your own schedule and, depending on the

And, Here is the Rest of the Story... View from the Office con't.

By Leda Beth Gray

Several types of organizations have permits to possess dead native birds. Some are non-profit environmental groups, such as SCVAS and Environmental Volunteers who use mounted birds or bird skins for educational purposes. Other organizations possessing such permits may include museums with natural history exhibits, public land management agency visitor centers and educational institutions. University biology departments, and in some cases grade school or high school teachers may have permits to use bird skins for education of school children.

I had an interesting experience some months ago when Cindy Wilber of Stanford's Jasper Ridge Biological Preserve called me about a banded Great Horned Owl that was found dead near a power pole at the preserve. I called in the band number and, suspecting a possible electrocution, I asked SCVAS member and Palo Alto Wildlife Rescue volunteer Karen Hoyt about the owl. She volunteered to have a look at him and asked me what the band number was. The owl turned out to be a three year old female that Karen herself had banded. Karen concluded that she was not electrocuted, but did have a bruised wing. There was no certain evidence of what could have killed her. Within a few weeks I did receive information about the bird from the band report I had made, but I already knew all of it.

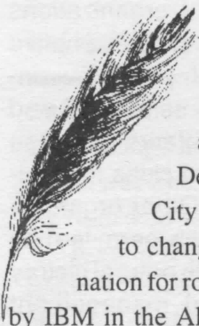
We apologize to Leda Beth Gray for inadvertently cutting the last two paragraphs of her article in last month's Avocet--eds

job, work at our Ranch office or from home. The year 2000 has just started---don't wait too long to do something significant for yourself and your local community.

Remember how quickly last year went . . .

IBM Lands Preserved

by Craig Breon
Environmental Advocate



In an effort we should have never been involved with, at least we won. On December 7, the San Jose City Council voted 10-1 not to change the land use designation for roughly 50 acres owned by IBM in the Almaden Valley of San Jose. The proposal was to redesignate this land, promised as open space in 1980 as part of a development deal allowing IBM to build a research park in the hills above the city, for housing.

The San Jose Council, to its credit, saw the issue for what it was—trust in government. Because the original deal had not been legally binding (at least arguably not), the council could have rezoned the land. However, with a little help from SCVAS and other environmental organizations, the local residents of Almaden Valley spent considerable time digging up proof of the past promises and bringing those papers to light before the council, their neighbors, and the press, and lobbying for what was right.

To IBM's credit, somewhere along the way they realized their mistake and were willing to withdraw their proposal. Unfortunately, by that time they were contractually bound by the developers, so they could not back out.

Still Important Work To Do

Now, IBM and the city should negotiate a deal whereby the vast majority of their 550-acre parcel is placed into a conservation easement, to make their old promise binding and to ensure that we don't have to go through this again in five or ten years. Councilwoman Pat Dando, who represents the Almaden Valley, has recommended this. We need to nudge IBM to do the right thing and engender

the good will of its neighbors, the city, and the environmental community.

Please take the time to write a letter to IBM's real estate directors, both locally and in Poughkeepsie, New York, where the company is based. Urge them to negotiate in good faith with the city for a conservation easement, and to work towards the protection and restoration of the natural resources on the land. Their property includes portions of two creeks which could be enhanced with riparian vegetation. In addition, much of the land is on serpentine soils, which can play host to rare species of plants and butterflies. Urge them to restore the serpentine on their lands, and provide a refuge for these endangered species. The addresses are:

Merle Gorman
Government Relations Manager
IBM
5600 Cottle Road
San Jose, CA 95193

Victor Weinstein
Real Estate Division
IBM
New Orchard Road #115
Armonk, NY 10504

Missing Newsletters

We are very aware that some of you (ok, *many* of you) did not receive your January newsletter. We are looking into what happened so that it doesn't happen again. We honestly try our best to get the publication to the printer in time so that all of you can be informed. You may find it hard to believe that sometimes we have to wait for some articles to get finished (*hint! hint!*) before we go to press! Note that we publish the field trips for the first few days into the next month so you can participate. -eds

NAS Convention Set For Mid-April

Come join hundreds of Audubon chapter members, educators, birders and conservation leaders at the next National Audubon Society Convention. Bring your family to the Asilomar Conference Center on the Monterey Peninsula, to be held Friday, April 14 - Tuesday, April 18.

Experience hands-on learning with experts, exciting field trips to a variety of habitats, a private tour and reception at the world-renowned Monterey Bay Aquarium, and much more.

The theme of the convention is "Audubon: The Gateway to Nature." Audubon Societies across the land do indeed provide a gateway to nature's wonders for millions of Americans, and National Audubon's vision for the year 2020 calls for Audubon Centers in communities across the country, plus a network of centers in each state. Convention workshops and programs will offer chapter leaders many opportunities to experience the kinds of programs that make such centers successful.



Sketch of a California Condor
-BBW

The Monterey Peninsula offers world-class birding, especially during spring migration. You'll have a chance to see California Condors, now back in the wild after nearly becoming extinct 20 years ago. Skilled leaders will guide participants to some of Monterey County's top birding spots.

The beautiful Asilomar Conference Center will headquarter the convention and its diverse programs and workshops. SCVAS members are encouraged to sign up for this biennial event, taking place just down the coast from Santa Clara Valley. Registration information is available from California Audubon at (916) 481-5332.

Visit Henry Coe Park For Annual Backcountry Weekend April 15 - 16

For one spectacular weekend this spring, Henry W. Coe State Park will open the gate at Bell Station on Highway 152 east of Gilroy. The annual Coe Backcountry Weekend, held in the little-traveled east side of the 80,000 acre park, is scheduled for April 15 and 16. Sponsored by the Pine Ridge Association, this event allows visitors vehicle access to a remote and beautiful area. Birders, hikers, mountain bikers and equestrians have a unique opportunity to see and enjoy an area isolated from the park's Morgan Hill entrance by long distances and rugged terrain.

This area of the park hosts a spring extravaganza of colorful wildflowers in the oak woodland. Fishing for bass and sunfish is excellent in secluded ponds and reservoirs. The trails provide panoramic views of the Diablo Range. Visitors may come into the park for the day, camp overnight at Orestimba Corral or Pacheco Creek Crossing, or backpack to one of the seldom-visited areas of the park. They may explore on their own, join a guided ride or hike, or participate in interpretive activities. Brochures, maps, information, activities, and volunteer assistance will be available.

Participants will travel 8.5 miles on an unpaved road from Bell Station to Pacheco Creek Crossing or an additional 3.8 miles to the Orestimba Corral. The road is in good condition and passable by two-wheel drive vehicles, although there are some narrow and steep sections requiring high clearance. Four-wheel drive is strongly recommended for towing horse trailers. Because of space limitations, steep hills, and creek crossings with sharp embankments, camp trailers and motor homes are prohibited.

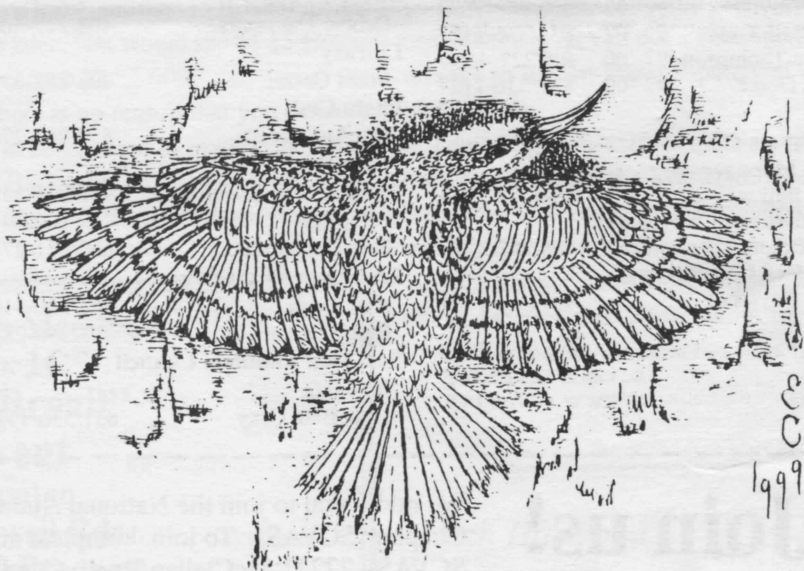
Entry for the weekend is by reservation only. Flyers announcing the event and providing an application form are

available at the Coe Park web site (<http://www.coepark.parks.ca.gov>); the REI stores in Berkeley, San Carlos, and Cupertino; Silacci's Feed Barn in Gilroy; Gunther's Feed Store in Morgan Hill; FISCO Farm & Home Store in Modesto; and at the Coe Park Visitor Center. Written requests for applications (self-addressed stamped business envelopes included) should be addressed to Application Forms, Coe Sector Office, 5750 Obata Way, Suite A., Gilroy, CA 95020.

Applications and entry fees (\$10.00 per vehicle for day use, \$20.00 per vehicle for overnight) must be postmarked

by **THURSDAY, MARCH 23**. One vehicle per application, please. We strongly encourage carpooling. A random drawing will be held to meet the 330 vehicles per day space limitation. All unsuccessful application forms will be returned with their checks to the applicants. No dogs are allowed. Campstoves will be permitted, but no open fires, barbecues, or hibachis. A group campfire will be held on Saturday night.

Join us for an unforgettable experience. The backcountry of Henry W. Coe State Park on a spring weekend is not to be missed!



Remember the anecdote about Brown Creepers behaving strangely, reported here a few issues back? Emelie Curtis was present that day, and with her characteristic eye for detail and delicate stroke of the pen, recorded her observation with this fine illustration. Jeff Davis of Santa Cruz reports that Charles Leck, in a short paper in *Western Birds* (Vol. 20: 91-92, 1989), observed a creeper at Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park in Santa Cruz County in a similar sunning posture. He attributed the behavior to temperature regulation or ectoparasite removal.

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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.

2000 Volume 47, Number 2

Join us!

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

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or

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