



THE AVOCET

The Newsletter of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society

April 2000

Bluebird Volunteers Outdo Themselves

by Garth Harwood

All over California in springtime, species after species of songbird breaks into breeding song. And no one is more keenly attuned to the onset of the breeding season than our local "bluebirders," those devoted volunteers who set up and monitor nestboxes for native birds in local back yards, parks and open spaces.

As all that birdsong adds color to the air throughout Santa Clara County, some 30 Audubon volunteers have already begun making weekly treks to their nestboxes to see who's moved in, to maintain the boxes, and to be ready to intervene in case of emergency. In the process, these monitors often witness some of the most endearing aspects of avian behavior at close range (an experience which can be very habit-forming!). Last year, as in each season since the inception of the local program, our volunteers set another record for the number of young birds fledged from our specially-designed nestboxes.

There's every reason to believe that we'll have yet another banner year out on the bluebird trails in 2000. Initiated by SCVAS in 1996, the Santa Clara County volunteer network now monitors 21 active trails and more than 338 nestboxes. The 731 birds of 10 species successfully raised in our boxes in the 1999 breeding season slightly exceeded the previous high mark of 697 birds set in the 1998 season, despite setbacks ranging from the partial loss of our largest trail, to gluttonous raccoons and even a murderous Norway rat.

Larger conservation significance

Those of us involved with the nestbox program take special pride in one aspect of our 1999 results: we have steadily gained ground toward our goal of providing crucial support to those birds who need it most, based on long-term population declines. Although we remain especially fond of the Western Bluebird, we're glad to note that 58% of last year's birds

were of species whose populations are declining in California at a greater rate than that of the bluebird (compared to 48% in 1998 and 27% in 1997).

At the outset of the bluebird program, little direct effort was made to encourage other, less well-known cavity nesters such as the Violet-green Swallow, although these birds weren't actively discouraged, either. Then we learned that this swallow, for example, has declined at nearly twice the rate of the bluebird across the state over the past 30 years. We promptly set out to modify our nestbox designs and placements to accommodate other birds in need, even though this represented a significant departure from established nestbox networks around the state and the U.S. We've succeeded here, and we continue to spread the word through our participation in wider networks of nestbox monitors.

We are fortunate to have the example before us of the remarkable recovery in recent years of the Eastern Bluebird, generally credited to the widespread placement of nestboxes when that species' nesting habitat began to disappear. In many cases, it remains unclear what

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General Membership Meeting
Wednesday April 19
"Trinidad & Tobago through the
Eyes and Paintbrush of Edward Rooks"
Palo Alto Art Center
Embarcadero & Newell Rds.
7:30 Hospitality 8:00 Program

Many SCVAS members have seen the beautiful bird and habitat paintings of our talented fellow member, Edward Rooks. Tonight you will see slides of his bird paintings in full glory on the screen. A superb artist and naturalist, Edward is a native of Trinidad endowed with a special grace and zest for life from growing up in such splendid beauty. Edward will show slides from his annual tours of Trinidad and Tobago throughout the 1990's and will include slides of his bird paintings from these islands. He has led 4 tours for Cheesemans' Ecology Safaris and will lead two this spring for small groups of 12 people. Come enjoy his paintings, highlights from a decade of trips and an update on the birding in these intriguing islands.

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Volunteer Ventures

by Ulrike Keyssner

In past issues, I have mentioned the large number of bird slides in our collection, and that we need help getting them labeled and cataloged—we still do—but I want to mention the next step in this process. We need to create several themed presentations our staff and volunteers can present to the public. For example, our Environmental Advocate, Craig Breon, could use several presentations based on issues such as: impacts of development in the Bay Area; the importance of protecting and restoring riparian habitat; and the plight of local Burrowing Owls. We need a volunteer who can find the appropriate slides and design a presentation around them. Aside from the initial discussion meetings, it would be up to you to set your own schedule. Please call me to talk about this fun job.

I want to welcome several new volunteers and say goodbye to our Tuesday office and Nature Shop powerhouse **Betty Jo Watkins**. Betty Jo's commitment and energy will be sorely missed, but we wish her luck and hope to see her again soon. With Betty Jo's departure we now need a Tuesday volunteer who could work for 4 hours between 10 and 5. **Mary Fasching** has taken over the Shop on Wednesdays and she is already proving to be a wonderful asset. She formerly owned a nature-related store in Palo Alto.

Our education programs have had an infusion of activity with the addition of **Margie Miller** who has been seeking donations to help us house and display our large bird nest collection. Margie's efforts will allow us to take the nests out of the basement and into schools to teach children about nesting behavior of many local species. Our other new volunteer is **Mayuri Naito**, who is creating educational poster boards which can be taken to schools, fairs and festivals. She has completed an amazing poster on Burrowing Owls complete with life-size owl drawings and a burrow decorated with dung and feathers! She is a talented photographer as well. Look for her photo of a hummingbird in the most recent *Birder's World*, page 86. Congratulations Mayuri!

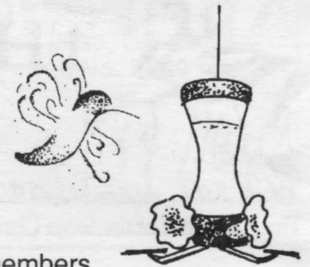
Our Librarian, **Marti Oetzel**, who has been doing a stellar job, now has an assistant: **Harriet Benson**, who will help with special projects such as the Spring Book Auction. Like many of our volunteers, Harriet is a frequent traveler and, despite her desire to help, was initially concerned about her ability to commit to a regular schedule. However, we found a job she was interested in and a level of commitment we could both feel good about. **Thank you to all our volunteers!**

PS Have you noticed how many of our volunteers are women? We do have several male volunteers but there must be more out there to even our numbers! Come on guys—we have plenty of rewarding work for you, too!

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View From The Office

by Susan Bell
Office Manager

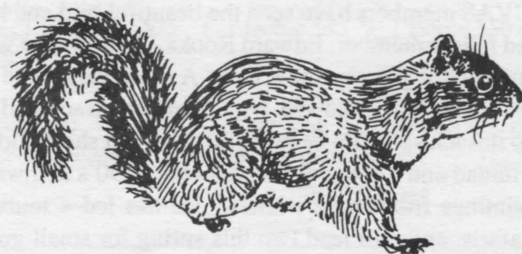


It's been nice to see our members braving the winter storms to visit the SCVAS Nature Shop. Such dedication to our wildlife, venturing out in the rain to buy seed or feeders, is auspicious for the birds. On behalf of SCVAS I would like to thank our patrons. A portion of each sale goes to support our local chapter, and we do everything in our power to protect birds and their habitats, as well as providing a wide range of services to enhance your education and enjoyment of birding.

It is so entertaining and rewarding to watch the activities at the feeders. The feeders attract the wild birds but very often they attract squirrels as well. Many a frustrated customer has come in looking for a way to outwit squirrels. It's a good idea to get to know the nature of the squirrel and understand its behavior. Then it may be possible to find a way to keep them from helping themselves to the seed in your birdfeeder. The Nature Shop has in stock two books on the facts, myths, mysteries, and interactions of the squirrel, entitled Squirrels: A Wildlife Handbook and Outwitting Squirrels (second edition). These books appear to be a great resource as well as providing a humorous look at squirrel activity. Squirrel baffles, used on the feeders here at the Nature Shop, work to keep the squirrels from getting into the seed we put out, and also to keep the seed dry when it rains. We have stocked several kinds of baffles in the Shop and can order the one that suits your needs. We're always looking for new ideas, too.

Visiting McClellan Park and the Nature Shop can be a very rewarding and educational experience. One very exciting thing happened just a few weeks ago: a coyote was spotted in the field right outside the Shop! It was sunning itself on, I believe, the only sunny day we had in February. The staff and visitors were able to get a good long look at it through binoculars.

Our Nature Shop hours are; 10 AM – 5 PM, Monday through Friday, Saturdays 10 – 2. Please call ahead to guarantee these times (408) 252-3747.



Squirrels are usually amusing until they start to raid our bird feeders! Maybe Outwitting Squirrels will help! BB-W

April 2000 Calendar

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

****Saturday Apr. 1, 7:45 AM**

Alum Rock Park. Half day. Leader: Al Eisner (650) 364-3686 or (650) 926-2108. From Hwy 101 or I-680 take Alum Rock Ave. northeast toward hills and into park. Turn left at entrance kiosk at bottom of hill, before bridge; meet in first parking lot near "Rustic Lands" area. Moderately strenuous 3 to 4 mile walk. Highlights: resident breeding birds (possible Rufous-crowned Sparrow, Canyon Wren), early migrants, lingering winter birds. Be prepared for some muddy areas. Possible entrance fee; **LO, RC**

****Sunday Apr. 2, 8:30 AM**

Natural Bridges State Park. Half day. Leader: Bonnie Bedzin (831) 425-1335. Trip offered by Santa Cruz Bird Club; designed for beginning birders but all skill levels welcome. Bring scopes. Meet at Delaware Ave. entrance to Natural Bridges State Park. From Hwy 17 in Santa Cruz take Hwy 101 north, left on Almar Ave. or Swift St. then right on Delaware Ave. to Natural Bridges Drive. **HRC** (Please note change to Daylight Savings Time---spring forward or be late!)

****Wednesday April 5, 8:00 AM**

Rancho San Antonio. Half day. Leader: Jim Liskovec (650) 969-5542. An extra weekday trip to this most popular preserve. Emphasis will be on bird song. Expect some strenuous walking on hilly trails. From Hwy 280 take the Foothill Expwy-Grant Rd. exit turning south onto Foothill Blvd. Turn right on Cristo Rey Dr. and continue on to large parking area. Meet by restrooms. **LO, RC**

Wednesday April 5, 7:30 PM

Bay Area Bird Photographers presents Bob Stewart with his slide show on "The Sky Islands of Southeast Arizona." Baylands Interpretive Center, E. Embarcadero Rd., Palo Alto.

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

Pichetti Ranch OSP. Half day. Leader: Roxie Handler (408) 730-1745. From I-280 in Cupertino take Foothill Blvd. south (it becomes Stevens Canyon Rd). Turn right on Montebello Rd. and go about 1/2 mile, turn left, past the winery entrance to the preserve parking lot. Because of limited parking space at the preserve you are encouraged to carpool, possibly from the Stevens Creek Dam parking lot. Moderately easy walking past the orchard, pond and through oak woodlands. **RC**

****Sunday Apr. 9, 9:00 AM**

Charleston Slough. Half day. Leader: Allen Royer (408) 288-7768 Meet at Terminal Way at the end of San Antonio Rd. north off Hwy. 101 in Mountain View. All are invited but birding will be geared toward the beginning birder.

Tuesday Apr. 11, 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: Hooded Oriole.

****Wednesday Apr. 12, 8:30 AM**

Calero Reservoir, McKean Rd. Half day. Leader: Alan Thomas (408) 265-9286. Meet at Ranger Station about 1 mile south of boat dock. We will not bird the lake, but concentrate on breeding woodland species instead. **LO, RC**

****Saturday Apr. 15, 9:00 AM**

San Pedro Valley County Park. Half day. Leader: Judy Spitler (650) 355-9362. From Hwy. 92 in Half Moon Bay take Hwy. 1 north to Linda Mar Blvd. in Pacifica. Turn right, drive to the end of the street, jog to the right then left into the parking area near the museum. Entrance fee for cars. **RC**

****Wednesday Apr. 26, 8:30 AM**

Stevens Creek Co. Park. Half day. Leader: Roxie Handler (408) 730-1745. From Hwy 280 take Foothill Rd. south about 2 miles, turn left into Chestnut parking area. This is a wonderful place and time to see nesting birds. **RC**

****Sunday Apr 16, 8:30 AM**

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

****Saturday Apr. 22, 8:00 AM**

Ed Levin County Park (North). Half day. Leader: Bob Reiling (408) 253-7527. Take Hwy. 237 east, crossing I-880 and I-680 (becomes Calaveras Rd.), turn left on Downing Rd. to the park entrance. Meet at parking lot on the far, northeast side of Sandy Wool Lake. We will look for migrants and local breeding birds in Milpitas' prime birding hot spot. Be aware that the trail is steep in some places. Entrance fee; **LO, RC**

****Sunday Apr. 23, 8:30 AM**

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

****Saturday Apr. 29, 6:30 AM**

Fabled north Santa Cruz County hot spots. Full day. Leader: Todd Newberry (call Bob Reiling 408-253-7527). We will bird Natural Bridges, Baldwin Creek, Rancho del Oso, and elsewhere as late reports suggest. This trip is intended for serious birders and will depart at 6:30 AM sharp from Beckmann's Bakery, 2341 Mission St. (Hwy. 1) on the north side of Santa Cruz. Bring a full tank of gas and lunch (and be prepared to remind the leader of the need to eat).

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Membership Committee— Now Chapter Historians

by Debbie Thompson

SCVAS sponsors and participates in many events and activities throughout the year. The Membership Committee would like to keep a chapter history of these activities in the form of a photo album for all to enjoy. We are depending on you to send us snapshots that show any of our members participating in an SCVAS event such as a field trip, picnic, meeting or fair. We are seeking good quality pictures of past events, as well as current and future. The pictures will be placed in a photo album and we will also periodically select a few to mount in a display. Both the album and the display will be available at General Meetings and other events for all to enjoy.

Please send us your 4x6 (or smaller) photos with descriptions on the back to the Membership Committee at 22221 McClellan Road, Cupertino, CA 95014. The description should include the members' names as well as the date and location of the event pictured, if known. Mail your photos any time throughout the year or bring them to the General Meeting. All photos received will become property of SCVAS.

So dig-out those boxes of photos and send us a few! We have a lot of chapter history to catch up on, and many future events that will need recording.

The photos could also be used in the newsletter as well! -BB-W, Assistant to Ed.



Thank you to the anonymous photographer who recorded this energetic group of volunteers after they assembled 56 hanging Bluebird boxes for SCVAS! It is this type of photo that we would like to receive.

Special Earth Day Public Meeting

“THREAT OF INVASIVE CORDGRASS IN BAYLANDS”

Come and hear Speakers Debra Ayres, UC Davis Bodega Marine Laboratory and Alex Dukes, Senior, Palo Alto High School on Thursday, April 20, 2000, 7PM at the Palo Alto Baylands Interpretive Center, E. Embarcadero Rd..

Spartina alterniflora, smooth cordgrass, is native to the eastern US. It was introduced into the south San Francisco Bay 25 years ago for the purpose of stabilizing soils in some intertidal areas. It has done that much too well. This aggressive alien, and its hybrid, the native California cordgrass, spreads to cover intertidal mud with tall, rigid, densely packed stems and thick tufts of roots. Tidal flow is slowed and sediments precipitate, elevating the marsh and creating an overgrown meadow resulting in a loss of habitat for clams, worms, crustaceans, and birds. The hybrid has taken over former salt ponds to the complete exclusion of native species, which could become extinct. At this point experts believe that the threat is controllable.

This event is organized by The Santa Clara Valley Chapter of California Native Plant Society (CNPS). The threat to birds that use intertidal areas in San Francisco could be grave. Breaching salt ponds to tidal flow could introduce the invasives to those areas, unless they are controlled. The invasion is controllable at this point, hence the public meeting.

We are fortunate to have two experts speaking at this meeting. Dr. Ayres will talk to us about her research and some strategies for control, and Alex Dukes will talk about studying the cordgrass at Baylands.

For more information call Don Mayall at (650)856-7579.

Annual Birdathon Set for April 29 - 30

by Bobbie Handen

Fly with us as we begin our first Birdathon of the century!!! This is your opportunity to be a part of the most exciting SCVAS fund raiser ever.

Yes, this is that time when you see your fellow Bird enthusiasts, clipboards and pencils in hand, running far and wide to find as many feathered species as they can. If you have never experienced a Birdathon firsthand, this is the year to be a part of this event.

Create a name (silly or otherwise) for your team, comprised of one or more friends, and contact your fellow workers, neighbors, friends and of course those ever faithful family members to be your sponsors. Sponsors may pledge a certain amount per bird species you find or a fixed amount to the team of their choice. Pick an area (or areas) to bird on a particular day. Some teams go to local parks while others bird their back yard. It is always amazing to see just how many birds live or visit the areas where you walk, work or live.

This year 2/3 of the proceeds from the 2000 Birdathon will help to support our continuously expanding education programs. There has been much interest from local schools requesting classroom visits and follow-up field trips. Our Wetlands and Woodlands program reaches school children throughout the valley. Great efforts are made to provide enthusiastic and memorable educational experiences for those children living in areas that do not afford them sufficient environmen-

tal educational experiences in order to make good choices. As part of this effort SCVAS has joined hands with the Children's Discovery Museum to provide materials as well as experiences for inner city children.

We all are aware of the need to educate young people from all over Santa Clara County about the importance of bird habitat and teach them to appreciate the splendor of our feathered friends and the need to save the habitats which we share. This continues to be a multigenerational effort.

The other 1/3 of the proceeds from the Birdathon will be used for the Bay Project. As the Bay continues to be threatened from numerous sources so must we birders help keep and expand the important home for our local and migratory birds. The goal of the ambitious program is to restore the Bay as a home for local and migratory birds as well as for other wildlife including the endangered species that live there.

Most teams will be holding their big day in the last week of April, but the date is flexible. The most important thing for SCVAS members and their friends to do is make a pledge or go out and join the fun and form their own Birdathon team and raise money for these worthy environmental causes. We wish to encourage individuals as well as teams to go out and enjoy the day in a way that will help us save this planet.

Call Birdathon Coordinator, Bobbie Handen at (408) 356-4263 if you have any questions about how to form a new Birdathon Team.

CALENDAR

continued

**Sunday Apr 30, 8:30 AM

Stevens Creek County Park. Half day. Leader: TBD (Call Bob Reiling (408) 253-7527). From I-280 in Cupertino take Foothill Expwy exit south 2.1 miles (becomes Stevens Canyon Rd.), turn left into the first park entrance and meet in the first parking lot. One of the best riparian birding spots in the South Bay for migrants and local breeding birds. *LO*

**Saturday May 6, 8:30 AM Mines Road & Del Puerto Canyon

Road. Full day. Leader: Don Schmoltdt (510) 547-5108. We'll start this trip in Del Puerto Canyon, working our way west to San Antonio Valley and end up in Livermore. From I-580 go east over Altamont Pass, to I-5, south on I-5 to the Patterson exit and go west on Del Puerto Canyon Rd. Meet at the first pullout (look for Don's "BAJA OWL" license plate). Highlights include possible Costa's Hummingbird, Phainopepla, Lewis's Woodpecker and Lawrence's Goldfinch.

**Sunday May 7, 8:00 AM

Alum Rock Park. Half day. Leader: Bob Reiling (408)253-7527. From Hwy 101 or I-680 take Alum Rock Ave north-east toward the hills and into the park. Drive under the bridge and meet at the far end of the parking lot. Moderately strenuous 3-4 mile walk. Lunch optional. Possible entrance fee. Resident breeding birds (possible Rufous-Crowned Sparrow, and Canyon Wren if we are lucky).



Our Birdathon Teams

Almaden Eagles: Ann Verdi and John Mariani

Busy Backyard Birders: Debbie and Steve Thompson

Hacienda Harried Hawks: Elaine Gould & Hacienda Friends

Humdingers: Sandy Cortright & Friends

Portola Valley Birder: Craig Breon

Rock Wrens: Leda Beth Gray, David Drake & Ulrike Keyssner

Spider Hunter: Vivek Tiwari & Friends

Uncommon Loons: Our official chapter team headed by Nick Yatsko and Rod Norden

Vagrants: Grant Hoyt & Friends

Wrong Terns: Bobbie Henden, Allen Royer & Friends

You can add your team to this list!!!

Field Notes

by Bill Bousman

Loons through Vultures

Two immature **Red-throated Loons** were seen at Shoreline Lake on 4 Feb (MMR, WGB), and single immatures were recorded there on 5 Feb (MJM) and 15 Feb (MMR). A bird seen on Salt Pond A9 in Alviso on 4 Feb (JDa) may have been the same bird found on these ponds earlier in the winter. Calero Reservoir also continued to host this loon with an immature there on 19 Feb (JMa, AV) and an adult on 21 Feb (JMa). Lingering or "oversummering" **American White Pelicans** were found again on Calero Reservoir, with 18 counted on 12 Feb (AV). About 13-15 birds were on the Mountain View salt ponds from at least 12 Feb (NY) through the end of the month (WGB). An **American Bittern** along Coyote Creek below Hwy 237 on 3 Feb (AJ) was in an unusual location and was the only one reported this month. Central California is a border region for **Turkey Vultures** with birds to the north being largely migratory and those to the south generally resident. At the beginning of the last century, this vulture was considered to be a summer resident in the Bay area, and that status is largely changed as the local birds now appear to be here year around and we seldom see obvious migrants. Thus 300 or so Turkey Vultures over Hwy 152 east of Bell Station on 26 Feb (DLSu) appeared to part of a major movement northward of returning birds.

Waterfowl

This has been another good winter for rare geese, which appear to becoming more common, perhaps, because of an increasing number of Canada Goose "decoys" along the valley floor. A **Greater White-fronted Goose** was found near Marsh and Felter roads on 2 Feb (KPa

with wild Canadas. An apparent wild white-front was seen at the Morabito "goose farm" in Morgan Hill on 3-12 Feb (SCR, v.ob.). An adult bird was also seen at the San Jose-Santa Clara Water Pollution Control Plant (WPCP) drying ponds on 9 Feb (AJ) and 20 Feb (NL). An immature **Ross's Goose** was also seen on these drying ponds on 1 Feb (SCR) and 3 Feb (AJ). Single Ross's were seen near Marsh and Felter roads on 2 Feb (KPa) and 13 Feb (NL), the latter an immature. Eight or nine free-flying birds were seen at the Morabito goose farm on 3-12 Feb (SCR, v.ob.), and are believed to be wild

A Sandhill Crane wintering near Gilroy pleased large numbers of birders

birds decoyed by the captive birds here. The wintering flock of **Wood Ducks** at Almaden Reservoir declined in February with 53 counted on 6 Feb (AV) and 34 on 20 Feb (LCh et al.). A male **Eurasian Wigeon** was on Salt Pond A9 in Alviso on 4 Feb (JDa) and a pair of birds were on a pond near Grand and Los Esteros on 22 Feb (SCR). A pair of **Blue-winged Teal** were in the Palo Alto Flood Control Basin on 17 Feb (WGB) and four males were seen there on 20 Feb (LCh et al.). A **Redhead** was found on Calero Reservoir on 16 Feb (TRy). Thirty to forty birds were seen on Charleston Slough on 20 Feb (LCh et al.) and at least 12 were still there on 28 Feb (LCh). The immature male **Tufted Duck** seen on Salt Pond A9 in Alviso in January was found again on 4 Feb (JDa). A male **Barrow's Golden-eye** was found on Calero Reservoir on 4 Feb (JMa) and two were there on 15 Feb

(TRy). Another male was on Shoreline Lake on 5 Feb (MJM). The highest count of **Hooded Mergansers** this month was six seen near Marsh and Felter roads on 13 Feb (NL). Thirty **Common Mergansers** seen on Uvas Reservoir on 3 Feb (SCR) are a considerable drop from the high total in January.

Raptors through Skimmers

The adult **Bald Eagle** visiting Calero Reservoir was seen again on 12 Feb (MJM). Three adults were found at Anderson Reservoir on 25 Feb (TRy) during a boat survey of the reservoir. The adult "**Harlanís**" **Red-tailed Hawk** wintering along the Guadalupe River near Trimble was seen again on 21 Feb (MJM). **Ferruginous Hawks** were seen northwest of Gilroy, from Day Road to San Martin Avenue, 3-12 Feb (JDa, v.ob.) and may represent a single bird. An adult was along Frazier Lake Road south of Bloomfield on 26 Feb (DLSu). At least one **Black Rail** was seen at the Palo Alto Baylands on 17 Feb (KPa, JAC). A **Sandhill Crane** was found northwest of Gilroy near Fitzgerald and Santa Teresa, adjacent to a housing development, from 31 Jan (MK *vide* MMR) to at least 19 Feb (KOMcG, m.ob.). Although the tenth record for the county, this is the first that has wintered at any location. There are rumors that the bird had been seen at this location since December. Most past county records have been of out-of-range fall migrants in flight. A **Lesser Yellowlegs** found in flooded fields along Frazier Lake Road on 22 Feb (DLSu) is particularly rare in winter. The adult **Lesser Black-backed Gull** wintering in Alviso was seen at the San Jose-Santa Clara WPCP drying ponds on 1 Feb (SCR) and nearby at the Coyote Creek Field Station (CCFS) waterbird pond on 3 Feb (AJ). The fourth-winter bird at Lake Cunningham was seen there on 9

Field Notes *continued*

Feb (SCR) and 23 Feb (MMR). An immature **Glaucous Gull**, found at Almaden Lake Park on 18 Feb (SCR, SBT), showed characteristics of both 2nd- and 3rd-winter birds. It was seen again 19 and 20 Feb (AV). A 1st-winter bird was found on the CCFS waterbird pond on 18 Feb and a different 1st-winter bird was seen there on 22 Feb (both AJ). Another 1st winter bird was seen nearby in the Fremont Lagoons in Alameda County on 19 Feb (NL). The numbers of Black Skimmers in the Charleston Slough flock peaked at ten on 28 Feb (LCh).

Roadrunners through Grosbeaks

A **Greater Roadrunner** that became trapped in a car dealership at Coleman and Blossom Hill in February was taken to a rehabilitator (fide KHT). There is little precedent for this species in urban areas. A **Barn Swallow** at the San Jose-Santa Clara WPCP drying ponds on 9 Feb (AJ) was earlier than expected for a spring bird. A 1st-winter bird seen nearby on 18 Feb (AJ) was more unusual in that it was halfway through its wing primary molt. Usually these birds complete their pre-basic molt on the wintering grounds in Central or South America. A **Canyon Wren** seen in Alum Rock Park on 6 Feb (NL) was in one of the few places where this rare Diablo Range wren can be found locally. A male **Phainopepla** was found above Anderson Reservoir on 4 Feb (DB). The **Green-tailed Towhee** found last month along Coyote Creek below Tasman was seen again 6-19 Feb (v.ob.). A wintering **Clay-colored Sparrow** was found at the Morabito goose farm in Morgan Hill on 3 Feb (SCR) and, amazingly, two birds were found there on 4 Feb (MJM). A single bird was in this area through at

least 12 Feb (MMR, v.ob.). Most of our records for this vagrant are from September and October and it can be argued that these are the first wintering birds we've had in the county. A **Vesper Sparrow** was found in the Evergreen area on 9 Feb (SCR), in vegetation that was purposely not disked last summer. Although there are previous winter records, this rare sparrow is also most often encountered in the fall. In some ways more surprising, five **Grasshopper Sparrows** were found in the same area and one was singing. Conventional wisdom states that these sparrows are very rare wintering species, but this winter has turned that wisdom upside down. Wintering **White-throated Sparrows** at feeders were reported in San Jose on 1 Feb (PB), a different bird in San Jose on 12 Feb (ER), and a bird in Saratoga that has been present since early December (MN). Searchers for the Green-tailed Towhee also found a white-throat along Coyote Creek below Tasman on 6 Feb (NL) and 9 Feb (MMR). A 1st-winter male **Black-headed Grosbeak** was found at a Saratoga feeder on 25 Jan (SB). It was joined by a female and both have been seen through the end of the month (SB, JAC, PC). We have fewer than ten winter records for this common summer resident.

Observers: Sally Baumwell (SB), Peg Bernucci (PB), Dusty Bleher (DB), Bill Bousman (WGB), Les Chibana (LCh), Jack Cole (JAC), Pat Curtis (PC), Jim Danzenbaker (JDa), Karen Hoyt (KHt), Alvaro Jaramillo (AJ), Michele Kveck (MK), Nick Lethaby (NL), Mike Mammoser (MJM), John Mariani (JMa), K.O. McGall (KOMcG), Mayuri Naito (MN), Kathy Parker (KPa), Mike Rogers (MMR), Ed Rooks (ER), Steve Rottenborn (SCR), Tom Ryan (TRy), David Suddjian (DLSu), Scott Terrill (SBT), Ann Verdi (AV), and Nick Yatsko (NY).

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

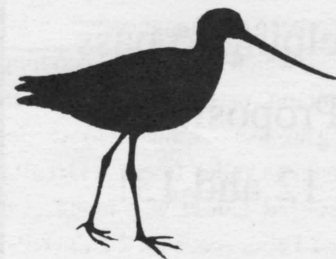
Field Trip Report

Princeton Harbor Feb. 26

A few folks ignored the weather forecasters and came to Princeton on the SCVAS outing Feb. 26. This time, the forecasters were correct: 40 MPH winds all morning. Perhaps with unjustified optimism, we headed toward Pillar Point.

Many WESTERN and CLARK'S GREBES were sleeping fitfully in the harbor, and clouds of CALIFORNIA, GLAUCOUS-WINGED, and WESTERN GULLS scudded in off the ocean, doing well just to stay in the air. We found a group of CINNAMON TEAL in the marsh, but the willows were quiet except for something in a reed patch that sounded like a loud Black Rail with a stutter (maybe 8 'ki's' before the 'derrrr'). On the beach, we found two HEERMANN'S GULLS. At the jetty, only a few WHIMBREL, MARBLED GODWITS, and SANDERLING were around — no Oldsquaw or Rock Sandpiper. The tide was out, so we went past the jetty to the point, and found respite from the wind. There were two very close BLACK OYSTERCATCHERS at the point, and a few PELAGIC CORMORANTS were bobbing in the waves. We made a side trip to Ocean Colony in Half Moon Bay in hopes of finding some land birds. Our best land bird was ALLEN'S HUMMINGBIRD, of which there were at least 5 in the Eucalyptus and bottlebrush between the northern fence line and Turnberry Court. One nice thing about the cloudy skies: the diffuse light brings out the color in their gorgets so beautifully. In all, 58 species, and high hopes for next year.

---Mark Miller



The Avocet 7

Sequoia Audubon Hosts Water Quality Forum

Audubon members are invited and encouraged to attend a special event: "Salmon and the Water Quality Connection: A San Gregorio Creek Forum" Wednesday, April 5, 2000, 7 PM, La Honda Elementary School. The San Gregorio Environmental Resource Center (SGERC), a San Mateo County non-profit dedicated to preserving rare species and habitat, will co-host the forum with Sequoia Audubon.

San Gregorio Creek is home to a host of wildlife, including, but not limited to, federally-listed steelhead trout, various rare amphibians and reptiles, and many bird species. It is one of San Mateo County's largest creeks. In recent years, more attention has been placed on the creek because of water rights conflicts, the possible reintroduction of federally-listed Coho salmon, and the need to reduce the amount of silt and sediment in the creek. Local residents remember a time when there were more fish in the creek, and are eager to help restore the steelhead fisheries.

The forum will provide information on the watershed, its existing fisheries, and the impacts of land-use decisions on water quality. Residents and concerned citizens can learn new ways to prevent or minimize pollutants and sediments in storm water runoff from impacting the stream and its aquatic inhabitants. The watershed supports a variety of land uses, including agriculture, residences, and recreation. Birders attending this forum will be able to share ideas with others con-

cerned with preserving the riparian systems for the myriad migratory and resident species dependent on San Gregorio Creek for food, shelter, and breeding habitat every year.

It's also a chance to sign up for our newest stream monitoring program in San Gregorio Creek! Short talks will be given by area agency scientists and free information handouts will be provided.

When: Wednesday, April 5th. Doors open at 6:30 for refreshments. Forum will start at 7 PM and end at 8:45. There will be time afterwards for informal discussion with the speakers.

Where: La Honda Elementary School, Sears Ranch Road. From 1 or 280, take Hwy 84 to La Honda, and turn north onto Sears Ranch road (next to Pioneer Market, across the street from Applejack's Tavern). Elementary school is on the right, about 1/8 mile.

Who: Scientists from the CA Dept of Fish and Game, Coastal Watershed Council, and the Regional Water Quality Control Board will be giving information on water quality, salmon and steelhead, and efforts to improve creek habitat. San Mateo County Supervisor Rich Gordon will give information on the County's efforts in the watershed. Event is free and open to the public. For more info, contact Chris Larson at (650)726-2499 or sgerc@sanmateo.org The San Gregorio Creek Forum is funded by the San Mateo County Stormwater Pollution Prevention Program.

---Nicole Salgado, Office Manager
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Discover the Art of Taxidermy!

by Ulrike Keyssner

This may sound ghoulish to some, but I would love to learn how to preserve birds who have passed on to another life! I'm talking about dead birds who have hit a window or suffered some other form of demise and now have the opportunity to become teaching tools for SCVAS. We have a freezer full of donated birds which we need to have stuffed. They will be added to our small collection. These birds are used in our education programs and, like the bird collections found in museums, allow children to discover the biological features that make birds birds. Similarly, following in the footsteps of the great artist, John James Audubon, these birds are also used as studies for our drawing classes, except we didn't have to waste them first! Thankfully, times have changed.

Several SCVAS volunteers have experience in taxidermy and are the source of our collection. After some coaxing, they have agreed to teach this unusual skill to those of us interested. The plan is to hold a workshop at our McClellan Ranch office in Cupertino where participants will be given a bird to work on.

This event will be RSVP only, as we want to limit the number of students per teacher. The date being considered is in late April but you'll have to call us for the specific date and what tools to bring. If you are already experienced in taxidermy and would like to pass on your knowledge, please call me so that we can add you to our instructor list. Phone (408) 252-3747 or e-mail ulrike@scvas.org to reserve a space and find out the date. Contact us early as this class may fill quickly!



*At last, something
constructive could
come from our grim
little discoveries.*

A huge
"Thank You"
helping to pass
Propositions
12 and 13!

Bluebirders *continued*

specific factors are causing declines in other cavity-nesting species, although the clearing of forests, and overdevelopment in general, are often the leading suspects. It may be that some of our other declining species can also be saved by the simple means of placing good nestboxes out for them. It's certainly worth the try!

Opportunities to get involved

Our network always has room for another dedicated volunteer who's willing to monitor a dozen or so boxes (usually provided free of charge by our expert volunteer craftsmen). If that sounds like you, please get in touch. Other means of assisting the birds are a lot simpler for the average birder. Backyard nestboxes, particularly along the western edge of the valley, have provided excellent habitat for one of our highest-priority species, the Chestnut-backed Chickadee, which has declined by about one-half across the state in recent decades. Backyard boxes all over the county are also great for Oak Titmice and Bewick's Wrens, two other high-priority birds. The other cavity-nesters are less likely to use backyards, generally preferring more open spaces, but there are always welcome exceptions, such as the four Western Screech-Owls fledged from the backyard of Mike and Marla Parker of Los Gatos (a first for the program).

If you do place a backyard box or two, please choose a bird-friendly box (many commercial boxes are quite dangerous to birds; the SCVAS Nature Shop has safe-and-sane ones). Also, be sure to choose one that permits you to open it up for an occasional peek inside. This won't harm the birds if you limit yourself to one or two quick visits a week, and we'd very much like to hear about any birds you successfully raise.

Finally, you can also support the ongoing advocacy work of Audubon, and join the California Bluebird Recovery Program to receive their quarterly news-

letter and support their work (\$5 or more to CBRP, 2021 Ptarmigan Dr., Walnut Creek, CA 94595; checks should be made out to "MDAS-Bluebirds").

Special thanks to our amazing volunteers

As in so many Audubon activities, it's the volunteers who make everything work so well. Gus Constant and Charles Wade deserve special mention: between them, they've built the great majority of nestboxes placed by our network in recent years! The nestbox monitors who gave so freely of their time and energy in the 1999 season include: Gerry Ellis (Almaden-Quicksilver County Park); Dave Hildebrand (Almaden IBM campus), David "Tex" Houston and John Draeger (Arastradero Preserve #2), Sally Schuman and son Gabe Kiritz (Arastradero Preserve #3), Garth Harwood (Foothill College, McClellan Ranch Park, Monte Bello Open Space Preserve, and Arastradero Preserve #1),

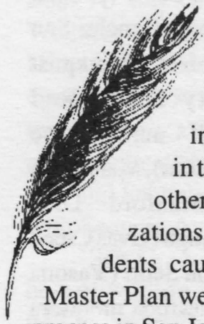
Barbara Milligan (Foothills Park), Jennifer Lyon (Fremont-Older Open Space Preserve), Dave Cook (Grant Ranch), Dave Poeschel (Guadalupe Oak Grove Park), Andy and Forest Scott (Hidden Villa Ranch), Ulf Stauber (Rancho San Antonio), Doug and Ardeth Greenquist (Santa Teresa County Park), Red Pendleton (Stanford Golf Course), Dave Weber (Stanford Arboretum), Mary Beth and Michael Arago (Stanford "Dish Hill"), Norman Watenpaugh (Uvas Creek Park), and Debby and Jon Scott (Vasona Lake Park). Backyard nestbox monitors who submitted reports included MJ Chestnut, Pat Curtis, Richard Greene, Carolyn Hammond, Carol Hankmeyer, Dina Hawkins, Leslie Larson, Gloria Leblanc, Jan Leonard, George & Marti Oetzel, Mike & Marla Parker, Elizabeth & Byron Ryono, Bill Scoggins, Mark and Kristin Shields, and Dirk Thiele. A hearty thanks to all, especially Mr. Watenpaugh, who built, installed, and monitored the year's biggest new trail of 45 boxes!

A COMPARISON OF YEARLY RESULTS OF THE SANTA CLARA COUNTY BLUEBIRD PROGRAM

Species	1999	1998	1997
Western Bluebird	190	274	90
Violet-green Swallow	195	175	52
Tree Swallow	55	46	31
Oak Titmouse	161	122	5
Ash-throated Flycatcher	50	17	25
Chestnut-backed Chickadee	46	13	5
Bewick's Wren	23	27	no data
Others (Owls, House Wrens, White-breasted Nuthatches)	11	23	21
TOTAL FLEDGES	731	697	229
TOTAL TRAILS	21	20	17
TOTAL NESTBOXES	338	295	230
TOTAL SPECIES	10	10	8

Alviso—Unfulfilled Commitments, Missed Opportunities . . . Yet Hope Remains

by Craig Breon
Environmental Advocate



Regular *Avocet* readers may remember the articles I wrote blasting the Alviso Master Plan in the fall of 1998. SCVAS, other environmental organizations, and many Alviso residents caused quite a stir as the

Master Plan went through the approval process in San Jose. Eventually, we won a significant victory for both the land and the people of Alviso in front of the San Jose Planning Commission, only to see many of our gains erased by the City Council. Still, the Master Plan that passed was an improvement over the draft plan we fought against.

For those of you needing a refresher, the lands of Alviso are some of the best natural resources left in the City of San Jose. Where the Guadalupe River and Coyote Creek flow into the Bay through the wetlands of the National Wildlife Refuge, Alviso also has the last, best open spaces left in North San Jose. Additionally, the people and the community of Alviso are unique, not swept up in the cookie-cutter industrial and residential development of much of modern San Jose. Alviso residents—primarily middle and lower income Hispanics—have a long history of independence and a strong sense of place. While we might stereotype such a population as not caring about their environment the way hillside communities often do, such a stereotype would be incorrect. The people of Alviso have repeatedly demanded that the land around them be treated with the same respect they ask for themselves. As a result, our work in Alviso focuses not just on wildlife and habitat, but on justice for the community.

Well, now the Alviso Master Plan is being implemented, with two developments—one industrial, the other residential—already approved, and Cisco Systems coming down the road for approval

of a massive office complex in April. It seems an appropriate time for an update.

The Good News

Let's start with the good news, as it will take less time to mention than the bad news. One of the first developments to go through, referred to as Legacy Partners, will build nearly one million square feet of development on an old landfill and illegally filled wetlands near the Guadalupe River.

The good news here is that the plan calls for one-third of the land to be set aside for open space. One-third open space is the standard we advocated for in the Master Plan, which the Planning Commission made a requirement and the City Council changed to a "goal." In addition, Legacy will be managing approximately 20 acres of their open space for Burrowing Owls, as either breeding or foraging habitat. If their owl plans go well, we may have better owl habitat on the site after the development than we have now. Also, the plan concentrates development away from more sensitive wetlands sites and Snowy Plover habitat. Finally, Legacy has agreed to contribute \$1 million to a new gymnasium for the Alviso community and will be setting up a foundation for youth programs in Alviso and San Jose. Given that the site was destined for development, Legacy did a decent job of considering the land and the community in their plans.

Good news number two: it appears that the gymnasium we and Alviso residents asked for will become a reality. With the leadership of several community members and Councilwoman Margie Matthews, nearly \$4.5 million has been raised for the project, and the city already has workable plans for its construction.

The Bad News (Talk is Cheap)

Unfortunately, much of how the Master Plan appears to be shaping up is as we feared, or as e-mails back in the fall of 2000 overdramatically put it, "the end of birdwatching in Alviso." There were

several commitments made by the City to the community and the environmentalists when the Master Plan was passed, and little or nothing has been done about those commitments since. Let me provide a partial list:

#1—As approved, the Alviso Master Plan committed to the formulation of a mowing and disking ordinance for the area, primarily to protect Burrowing Owls. By requiring that the lands of Alviso not be disked, habitat would be preserved for owls and a host of other species.

In May of 1999, I appeared before the City Council to ask what had happened to this and other commitments. Jim Derryberry, the Planning Director for San Jose, admitted that nothing had been done at that time, and Councilwoman Matthews directed him to begin the work as promised. It didn't happen. When I last called the Planning Department about this in January 2000, Laurel Pervetti, one of the chief planners for Alviso, passed the buck by saying that the City Attorney's office was drafting the ordinance. She could not, however, tell me either the name of the attorney working on it or when it might be completed, or whether it had even been started. The Planning Department has managed to produce piles of information relating to development approvals on projects in Alviso, but they evidently can't be bothered to create a document that might total 1 to 2 pages to preserve this rare species. It's all a question of priorities, and by and large San Jose likes to talk about environmental protection a great deal more than they actually do it.

#2—The Master Plan called for a review of the lands and the businesses north of State Street in Alviso. These lands are either directly adjacent to or even jut out into the New Chicago Marsh at the Wildlife Refuge. Much of the land north of State Street is illegally filled wetlands, and we suspect that some of the businesses in the area don't even have legal building or business permits. The busi-

continued next page

“Are You Ready”—For More Cisco?

by Craig Breon

A politician recently joked with me that if Cisco Systems continues their present rate of growth, we will all be Cisco employees in forty-five years. A scary thought, given the poor performance to date for this the largest employer in San Jose. Cisco is not only proposing to build 6.5 million square feet of office space on 350+ acres in the Coyote Valley (enough for 20,000 new employees), but they are also proposing 2.3 million square feet on 150 acres in Alviso (enough for another 6000 employees).

A few statistics about the Cisco project in Alviso: 1) there would be a significant, unmitigated loss of Burrowing Owl habitat; 2) significant local and regional traffic impacts also go unmitigated, leading to headaches for all of us that taxpayer

dollars will eventually have to fix; 3) significant air quality impacts go unmitigated, and this in a community where the children already have elevated levels of respiratory ailments; 4) while providing 32 acres of open space on their site, this falls short of the goal of the Alviso Master Plan to preserve one-third of larger sites as open space, and some of the land they are preserving could not have been built on anyway. To their credit, Cisco is contributing to some community projects that will benefit Alviso.

There is an alternative identified in their EIR that would allow for full build-out of the site, fulfilling Cisco and the City's goals, while preserving more open space, thus meeting the goals of the environmentalists and Alviso residents. It's called the “structured parking alterna-

tive” and calls for multi-level parking rather than a sea of single level parking surrounding the buildings. Unfortunately, it's a lot more expensive for Cisco to build. Still, the people and the land of Alviso are worth it, and Cisco should do the right thing for the region, even if it costs more.

In general, Cisco needs to consider the needs of the South Bay more than they do currently. They have had and will continue to have impacts on our lands and our quality of life. They are growing rich and powerful by creating those impacts, and some people are growing increasingly frustrated with their style. I have heard from San Jose city planners, Department of Fish and Game personnel, and even some of Cisco's own consultants, all stating that Cisco takes an overly arrogant and bullying attitude towards development in the South Bay. Perhaps it was Cisco's own executive who said it best. When news of Cisco's plans for Coyote Valley first surfaced in the *San Jose Mercury*, that executive was quoted as saying that if San Jose didn't give Cisco what they wanted, and fast, they could move to North Carolina in a moment.

With such a strong position in our local economy, Cisco may think they can throw their weight around with impunity. We should let them know that if that continues to be their attitude, then we will be happy to provide them with a map of North Carolina.

If you want to register your opinion of Cisco's development plans in Alviso or elsewhere, use the information in this article and write to:

Mayor Ron Gonzales and Council Members
San Jose City Hall
801 North First Street
San Jose, California 95110

or a letter to the editor of the *Mercury News* at:

750 Ridder Park Drive
San Jose, California, 95190

Alviso

continued

nesses on these lands create the worst impacts on wetlands and the community.

At the May '99 meeting mentioned above, Derryberry said that this review was ongoing. At that same time, students working with me contacted the Planning Department and asked for the parcel numbers of the lands north of State Street. The department could not give them the answers. This would be one of the first steps in a review of those properties. Evidently, Derryberry was either less than fully informed as to his staff's progress on this issue, or he was being less than truthful to the council.

In January 2000, Laurel Pervetti told me that the report on the lands north of State Street could be out by the end of January. As of the writing of this article in early March, I have seen nothing.

#3—When the Master Plan was approved, there was a call for review of a planned road from the Cisco Systems site to Grand Boulevard. This road, with heavy traffic, would empty into a residential neighborhood, causing severe disruption. As a result, even Councilwoman

Matthews called for a look at an alternative road route.

In the May '99 council meeting, Jim Derryberry said that the alternate route would be reviewed as part of the Environmental Impact Report for the Cisco Systems project. Unfortunately, when that EIR came out, there wasn't even a mention of the alternate route. Again, either Derryberry was uninformed about what his staff was and wasn't doing, or he was less than truthful with the Council and the public.

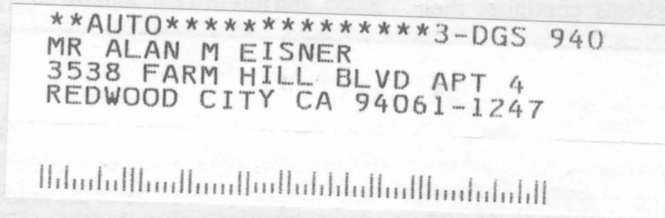
The Message

In short, there was every assurance by city staff and San Jose politicians that they recognized the importance of the land and the community of Alviso. They also committed to developing Alviso in a way that would focus on those sensitive and unique natural and cultural resources. Unfortunately, there is a large gap between words and deeds. We are trying to hold the city to its commitments, and we will continue to do so.

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

RARE BIRD ALERT: (415) 681-7422

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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 4

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