



THE AVOCET

The Newsletter of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society

December 2000

A Christmas Count Story

Of birds and bandidos in the barrancas of Mexico

by Howard Higley

The great thing about the Christmas Bird Count (CBC) tradition is that willing volunteers are almost always welcome to help, wherever the count circle is. So last season, after participating in nine separate greater Bay Area CBC's over the last dozen years, I started thinking about a new way to inject a little more excitement into my usual ritual.

Via the wonders of the Internet, I found out about several cross-border counts in Sonora, Mexico run by Arizona birders. The Yecora and Alamos CBC's had been going on for several years and the potential species lists sounded great. More e-mail inquiry put me in touch with Arizona resident and veteran Mexico birder Dick Palmer, who was driving down for both counts and agreed to take an extra rider. So at 5:00 AM on Dec 19, 1999, I found myself crossing into a sleeping Nogales with Dick and another friend headed for Yecora, 10 hours down near the edge of Copper Canyon.

Because of the holidays, the pre-dawn line at the border control point was a two-hour wait in the cold, but finally the sun rose, we warmed up, got our visas stamped and took off. As the day progressed Dick told us a lot about his birding experiences in this region and in other parts of Mexico. He mentioned he was going to have to take a morning between the Yecora and Alamos counts to drive to the district police headquarters and claim some of the items that had been stolen from him last summer by the "bandidos." Seems he had been held up at riflepoint by two guys on burros who took all his photographic gear and spotting scope, but the

police had raided the bandit camp later and recovered some items. He would have to drive 40 miles to identify the goods and "fill out a report." Thoughts of "bandidos" began to generate a little anxiety but were quickly forgotten after Hermosillo, where a walk in a drying *rio* to some small pools yielded a Green Kingfisher and Caracara, the first real signs that we were headed south.

Toward the end of the day we began to climb out of the thorn, mesquite, and grasslands into the northernmost edge of tropical dry forest with a few stops and comments on where the Mottled Owl was in that canyon, where the Buff-collared Nightjar was in that arroyo and where the 25 Military Macaws were in that fig tree last year. No luck. The road continued up into high pine forest, where the remnants of the previous week's snowstorm were still evident in shadowed corners below high cliffs. At the crest of the road, at about 5,000 feet, we stopped at "the Barranca" which was to be about the middle of the next day's count circle and in whose protected reaches many of the previous years target birds had been found.

A quick walk up to a small spring just as the light was fading yielded the first true Mexican birds and life lister, a pair of Rufous-capped Warblers. Climbing back down to the car, I looked high up above the cliffs back into the light and there were two soaring hawks. Short-tailed? "Yeah, that's a good bird for the count circle," Dick said. Last year they had seen Aztec Thrush here as well. Yecora is a dusty ranching and lumbering town in a high valley and when we got to the "motel" we began to meet some of the other birders.

The compiler for both counts was Jack Whetstone, a BLM manager from Sierra Vista and part-time guide for Border-

What's Happening in Coyote Valley?

*The story behind the SCVAS Board's action on the Cisco development, explained by Executive Director
Craig Breon—Page 10*

lands Tours. Forrest Davis from Highlonesome Tours has also been instrumental in setting up these counts but wasn't able to make it that year. Rick Taylor of Borderlands Tours and some of his family, friends and clients along with other members of Huachuca and Tucson Audubon arrived as well, about 25 in all, and we had dinner and count circle strategy session in the local restaurant. Although it looked like somebody's garage, the proprietor was a good friend of the group leaders', the place was warm and the *comida* was *muybuena*. I also met my roommate for the next couple of nights. The room was cold, but luckily we experienced little typical Mexican night music—dog barking, rooster crowing, donkey braying etc.—until my roommate and I were awakened by horrible noises, both accusing each other of snoring the

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Complete CBC

info, maps-----Pages 8-9

Warbler watching-----Page 11



Wow, what a great morning! We saw a Golden Eagle being harassed by a Red-tail Hawk. I was at Charleston Slough with volunteers Jim Liskovec, Anne Mortimer and Janet Bertraine, who are working with the Christa McAuliffe students studying McClellan Ranch Park. As part of the students' curricula, we spent the morning identifying and counting birds. The field trip to the Slough helped students develop I.D. skills with larger, less mobile birds than those found at the Ranch, and got them thinking about ways to count birds. Anne and Janet are beginning birders but are wonderful with the kids who ask them all sorts of questions. They do a great job guiding and encouraging students to find their own answers. This tactic obviates the need for new volunteers to be experts, and, in the process of directing students, increases their own knowledge. I'm happy to say the children are already asking when they can do this again! You can participate too, just give me a call.

I'm sure you've been reading the new column, "Scope on Membership" by Debbie Thompson about the early history of our Chapter and our goals for increasing membership. Debbie is the SCVAS Membership Committee Chair, recruiting and welcoming members. New members are sent a packet of information about SCVAS and information on places to bird in Santa Clara County. The committee also hosts several New Member Walks at McClellan Ranch Park. These activities are key to maintaining an interested and informed membership that supports our conservation and education programs through direct contributions and volunteering. We need a new volunteer to work about 4 hours each month compiling our New Member Welcome Packets. Much of the work can be done at home and spread out over the month. You will be photocopying hand-outs and putting these items together to mail to new members. Please call to find out more about this volunteer opportunity.

Have you ever participated in a Bird Count? SCVAS conducts several Christmas Bird Counts (see page 8). If you are interested in going out with a Count team please call me and I will connect you with the right people. You don't have to be an expert; often the experts need beginners to fill in the count information. Either way you will learn a lot and improve your identification skills. If you can't help count birds you could help us compile the field information. All Count teams hand in their numbers and we enter these into the computer. We use Microsoft Excel for Mac. Last year's data form the basis for this year's data, making the job much easier. Please call if you could input Count data for us. The pace you work at is entirely up to you and if you have access to a Mac, the work could be done at home.

The San Jose Christmas Bird Count is on Sunday, December 17 and will be followed by a dinner at the Emma Prusch Farm Park in San Jose from 6 PM. We need a few people to help set up the dinner from 4:00. SCVAS will pay for the food but we need organizational help that Sunday to have it ready for our weary but excited counters to rejuvenate their bodies whilst they discuss the days' findings. If you could help us that Sunday please call me. Ulrike Keyssner, Volunteer & Education Programs Coordinator, (408) 252-3747, e-mail <ulrike@scvas.org>



View From The Office

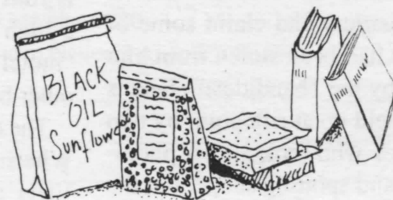
by Susan Bell
Office Manager

I recently had my one-year anniversary working for the Santa Clara Valley Audubon. I cannot believe it was only a year ago that I was swept up into the many activities of this chapter! SCVAS has accomplished many successes within its mission to maintain, preserve, and protect native animal and plant habitats. We have increased our membership and have brought in more volunteers. Our conservation efforts have been ongoing in bringing important issues before the public. We have been effective in educating not only students but also the general public to the choices facing everyone in land use in Santa Clara County.

There is much more work to be done to secure an ecologically sane future for our residents, and our chapter will continue to be a leading force for preservation of natural habitat.

I would like to extend an invitation to each member, to come to our Holiday Open House (see the announcement on the next page). We invite you to visit our headquarters, talk to our staff, visit our library, and browse our Nature Shop. Bring a friend and expose them to a chance to work with us to make a difference in our local environment.

The Nature Shop has many nature-related items for the bird lover on your holiday list. All proceeds from our Nature Shop go to fund our education and conservation projects.



December 2000 Calendar

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

****Saturday Dec. 2, 8:00 AM
Oka Ponds/Los Gatos Creek Park.** Half day. Leader: Shirley Gordon (408) 996-9863. From Hwy. 17 in Los Gatos take Lark Ave. exit west. Turn right on Oka Rd, left on Mozart Ave. and an immediate right on Oka Lane. Meet at gate. **RC**

****Sunday Dec. 3, 8:30 AM
Ogier Ponds.** Half day. Leader: Bob Reiling (408) 253-7527. From Hwy 101 in Morgan Hill take Cochrane Rd. west to Monterey Hwy, turn right, go north 2.6 miles, turn right towards the Model Airplane Park. Follow the road for 1/2 mile and park in the gravel lot at the bend in road. **RC**

**Wednesday Dec. 6, 7:30 PM
Bay Area Bird Photographers** presents Ron Saldino and his slides of birds of India. Lucy Evans Baylands Interpretive Center, E. Embarcadero Rd., Palo Alto.

****Saturday Dec. 9, 8:30 AM
Palo Alto Baylands Park.** Half day. Leader: Frank Vanslager (408) 257-3647 From Hwy 101 take Embarcadero Rd. east to the end, turn left, drive past the Duck Pond and park in the lot near the Lucy Evans Baylands Nature Interpretive Center. Good variety of herons, egrets, ducks, shorebirds, gulls.

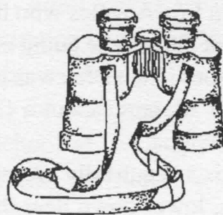
****Sunday Dec. 10, 9:00 AM
Charleston Slough.** Half day. Leader: Allen Royer (408) 288-7768. Meet at Terminal Way at end of San Antonio Rd. north off Hwy 101 in Mountain View. As usual, all are invited but birding will be geared toward the beginning birder. Bring a spotting scope if you have one.

**Tuesday Dec. 12, 9:30 AM
Eve Case Bird Discussion Group** will meet at the home of Gloria LeBlanc, 240 Montclair Rd., Los Gatos (408) 866-0101. Topic: Savannah Sparrow. ***PLEASE NOTE LOCATION CHANGE***

****Wednesday Dec. 13, 9:00 AM
Cambell Perc. Ponds/Los Gatos Creek.** Half day. Leader: John Arnold (650) 948-4250. From I-280 (go south) or 85 (go north) on Winchester Blvd, then east on Hacienda, left on Dell, and right into park. Possible Hooded Mergansers. Entrance fee; easy 2-mile walk. **LO, RC**

****Saturday Jan. 6, 8:00 AM
Panoche Valley.** Full day. Leader: Clay Kempf (408) 761-8260. Meet at Paicines Store on Hwy. 25 approx. 11 miles south of Hollister. Expected species include Phainopepla, Mountain Bluebird, Prairie Falcon, Ferruginous Hawk, Golden Eagle and Bald Eagle; possibilities include Mountain Plover, Vesper Sparrow, Roadrunner and Chukar. Bring lunch and a full tank of gas; **carpooling is strongly recommended due to limited parking on the narrow roads.**

****Sunday Jan. 7, 8:00 AM
Post CBC Rarities Chase.** Full day. Leader: John Mariani (408) 997-2066. Kick off the new year with some coastal vagrant chasing. Bring a full tank of gas, lunch, and field guides as we attempt to track down some of the unusual birds seen on Christmas Bird Counts from Monterey to Santa Cruz. Meet at the ranger's kiosk on Jetty Rd., just north of Moss Landing harbor on Hwy 1. **RC**



****Wednesday Jan. 10, 8:30 AM
Alum Rock Park.** Half day. Leader: Bob Reiling (408) 253-7527. Alum Rock Rd. is closed at the park entrance indefinitely; park at the Penitencia entrance. From Alum Rock Rd. turn left on White, right on McKee, left on Toyon and right on Penitencia Rd. to the end at parking lot. **LO, RC**

PLAN AHEAD:

Merced NWA---Saturday, Jan. 20, 2001
Mines Road-----Saturday, May 5, 2001

Join us for Our Annual Holiday Open House

Books



Field Guides



Bird Feeders



Bird Seed



Clothing



Stationery



Jewelry & More!

Saturday,
December 9, 2000
10 AM — 2 PM
McClellan Ranch Park
Cupertino

Refreshments provided

Christmas Bird Counting in Mexico

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We started out before dawn and, after a stop at the PEMEX for gas and coffee, drove back over the high road to our sector on the other side of the count circle. Dawn broke at a bridge over a small stream, with light slowly falling on and warming the road and trees. In rapid succession, then more slowly as we walked the area, new hummingbirds, orioles, solitaires, tanagers, and flycatchers appeared. Walking the creek bed among cliffs and sycamores we saw the remains of that summer's becard nests (but no becards) and real trogons. Then Dick demonstrated his patented Ferruginous Pygmy Owl call and not only attracted a small passerine mob but the owl as well.

Around noon we drove back to the main road and ran into the obligatory army checkpoint. After convincing the teenage soldier with the large AK-47 that we were not *narcotraficante* but looking for *pajaros lindos* we drove on to a small village and began a very slow 4-wheel-drive descent along a road that looked more like a dry creek bed at a 45° angle than a road. About half-way down, Dick said, "If you see any guys on burros, let me know." Why? "Well, this is where I was held up." Now I could understand how a guy with a rifle on a burro could stick-up a guy in a 4-WD.

I started to sweat, but we reached the bottom of the canyon OK and got out at an abandoned mine, with a few old adobe houses occupied by a few remaining people, covered in bougainvillea, dirt yards with towering poinsettias and a little corn growing on the hillside. Then we saw a pair of the signature birds of Western Mexico, the Black-Throated Magpie-Jay, flying across the stream into a huge sycamore, their long, plume-like tails streaming behind them. We saw more later in several different locations in Alamos, but this moment, with this spectacular life bird, was a highlight of the trip. On the way back up the road, my heart skipped a beat, when around the bend came a guy on a burro! As we slowly drove past, he appeared to have only a machete, and seemed more curious than malicious. Whew!

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At the countdown dinner in the garage, the tally was two short of last year's new record for Yecora (and Mexico high for 1998) with 182 species seen. The next day, while Dick was going to find out about his stolen gear, I asked one of the parties returning to the States to drop me at the barranca for the morning. Another cold start at dawn on the road below the barranca, but the group there yesterday had seen Blue Mockingbird and only took a few minutes to get it to respond to a tape. Two hours climbing below the road playing Mountain Trogon and Nightengale-Thrush tapes was not as successful. Wrong season.



Sketch of a Military Macaw -BBW

I climbed back up to the spring and got a pair of Spotted Wrens, then started to use the owl call. Suddenly dozens of Townsend's Warblers, kinglets, Orange-crowned Warblers, and flycatchers in a mixed flock began to mob me, and there, by the spring, was my first Red-faced Warbler. Exquisite, and new for the count period.

Not to be left out, a Pygmy Owl appeared in a pine overlooking the canyon. Back down on the road, I got a chance to call up the Blue Mockingbird for a few birders from Los Angeles who had been in a different part of the count circle the day before too. Then Dick was back and it was on to Alamos, about a five-hour drive via Navajoa.

Alamos is a beautifully preserved colonial town, lower down near the coast, close to the Sinaloa border. Capital of the

region and a silver mining center in the 1700s, it has been recently rediscovered by wealthy gringos from California and Arizona, and many of the original silver baron haciendas have been restored as beautiful residences and guest houses mixed together with townspeople, shops and cobbled streets. The rendezvous for the count was at David and Jennifer MacKay's *Solipaso*, a beautiful walled guest house, and we met some of the new counters who, along with the Yecora group, now numbered about 35. A few well-deserved *cervezas* and an excellent meal sent us back to our hotel, where my roommate and I had another snoring contest. He was now applying liberal doses of 25-year old tequila as a sleep aid and easily won.

The next morning we drove to our part of the count circle, the mostly dry Rio Cuchujaqui out side of town. The current state of the river belied the fact that the predecessor of the new bridge we were standing on, 40 feet up in the air, had been wiped out two years before by a killer flash flood. The few small pools were placid that morning, and as they caught the light we heard the croaking of some Tiger Herons, and then a pair of *Amazona sp.* parrots flew over. My roommate stayed at the car, (where he later heard the count's only Mot-Mot and saw a Five-striped Sparrow) while the rest of us walked up the streambed, finding Red-billed Pigeons and Grey and Black Hawks along the way.

We got back to the car, and after hearing what we had missed, left to drive some of the dirt roads in the surrounding thorn forest. This consisted of several hours of dusty circling, but punctuated with a few lifers including Plain-capped Starthroat, Berylline Hummingbird and Thick-billed Kingbird on the "morning-glory tree," the single blooming plant among the dry scrub. Just as we were turning back to town, hot and tired, two Magpie-Jays screeched across the road into the mesquite. I looked over and they had flown up into tree with two Purplish-Backed Jays. This is a surprisingly large

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Give a Gift of Audubon This Holiday Season

bird, with a vivid yellow eye and legs, and was a great find for me.

When we got back to town, we ran into Jack Whetstone, who mentioned the flocks of Blue-rumped Parrotlets his group had seen earlier. I decided to walk the town to see if they were returning to roost, but no luck, just interesting peeks into beautiful courtyards, with trees and foliage behind high walls and the normal bustle of people on late afternoon errands. The count dinner at the MacKay's reunited the various parties and as we called out the sightings, it became obvious it had been a very good day, with large numbers of unexpected species and a particular bonanza of birds for those who had walked up the mountain outside of town, a new area for the count. When Jack tallied the results as 172, a new Alamos record, we went to bed happy, ready for an early AM return to Tucson and afternoon flight back to the Bay Area.

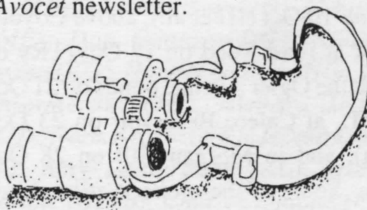
I ended up with 18 life list species, some new friends and great memories of a beautiful region of Mexico. Turns out I can't make it this year, and although shared transportation from the States, like I had, is not available, I've been told that birders are welcome to make their own arrangements to participate in these counts. (Flying to Hermosillo and renting a car was the solution several other birders took). I'd like to do the counts again sometime, too, and get those Aztec Thrushes, Macaws and Parrotlets.

Dick Palmer runs custom birding tours in SE Arizona and Mexico and can be reached at <PalmerRD@aol.com>. The Maricopa Audubon website also lists the other Sonora counts and all other Arizona Christmas counts in that state. Jack Whetstone (myiarchus@hotmail.com) is the compiler for the Yecora CBC and David MacKay (solipaso@cybernet.com.mx) compiles the Alamos count. Borderlands Tours (borderland-tours.com) and Highlonesome EcoTours (hilonesome.com) also visit these areas regularly in this and other seasons.

Why not buy someone on your holiday list a membership to National Audubon Society this holiday season? This is the perfect gift for friends who are eager to learn more about birds, conservation, and nature or who just enjoy getting outdoors and doing fun things with a bunch of dedicated nature lovers!

Here are the details: For each gift membership to the National Audubon Society (NAS) that you buy from Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society (SCVAS) you will receive a coupon for 20% off any single item in our Nature Shop (you can redeem the coupon at a General Meeting too!). NAS is now running a special offer that gives SCVAS \$30 for each new member we recruit from today until the end of December. So when you purchase a gift membership you will also be giving a much-needed gift to our education and conservation programs!

What we'll do: We will mail each of your gift recipients a custom holiday greeting signed with your name and message. Enclosed with the greeting will be a new member welcome packet (in which they will also receive a 20% off coupon!). As always, each new member will receive National Audubon's bimonthly award winning magazine, as well as our own *Avocet* newsletter.



Palo Alto Birding Class

Matthew Dodder, one of the area's top birders and compiler of the Palo Alto Christmas Bird Count, will be teaching a Beginning Birdwatching class through Palo Alto Adult School starting January 8. Registration begins on November 27 and continues through December. Details may be obtained by calling P.A. Adult School at (650) 329-3752 or by visiting the instructor's website at www.birdguy.net.

Follow these easy steps:

(1) Fill out the membership form on the back of this *Avocet* with the name and address of the person you want to send the gift membership to, marking the \$20 joint NAS and SCVAS membership box.

(2) On a separate piece of paper, write your name, address and phone number (in case we have a question about your order) so we can mail you the discount coupon. You can also include a special message that we will copy onto the holiday greeting card that we mail to the gift recipient.

(3) Send the membership form, your information sheet and \$20 payment to: Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society, Gift Membership Offer, 22221 McClellan Road, Cupertino, CA 95014.

Or

You can call us at (408) 252-3747 with the information and charge it (Mastercard or Visa only).



Put an Avocet in someone's Christmas stocking this year
—give a gift of Audubon!

Field Notes

by Bill Bousman

Pelicans through Waterfowl

The number of **Brown Pelicans** starts to taper off in October so a count of 54 birds on Salt Pond A9 in Alviso on 9 Oct (MMR) is of interest. Scarce in recent years, a single **Cattle Egret** was seen at State and Spreckles in Alviso on 24 Oct (RWR, FV). A scattering of **Greater White-fronted Geese** reports was more than is usual for October. At least one bird in the flock found at Searsville Lake last month remained through 2 Oct (*vide* RGJ). Two birds were found in the ponds along Highway 152 east of Casa de Fruta on 2 Oct as well (DLSu). A small flock was seen over the Sunnyvale Baylands Park on 22 Oct (LM *vide* LCh). Seven birds were at the Ogier Avenue ponds on 29 Oct (MW) and two immatures were at Lake Cunningham the same day (MMR). The winter flock of **Wood Ducks** at Almaden Reservoir has increased in October, with 67 birds counted on 28 Oct (AV). Single male **Eurasian Wigeon** were found on Salt Pond A9 in Alviso on 9 Oct (MMR) and at Calero Reservoir on 29 Oct (JMa). Two male **Blue-winged Teal** in the Palo Alto Flood Control Basin (FCB) on 3 Oct (FV) were the first noted there this season. Small numbers were found during the month (v.ob.), but eight males and four females on 22 Oct (SEM) was an unusually high count. A male was also in the Palo Alto Duck Pond on 21 Oct (LCh et al.) and two males were in the Palo Alto estuary on 27 Oct (AME). Early **Redheads** included one on Salt Pond A10 in Alviso on 9 Oct (MMR) and another in the Palo Alto FCB on 13 Oct (DB). **Hooded Mergansers** continued on the Oka percolation ponds during October (v.ob.) with numbers increasing to five by 27 Oct (DG). A single male on

Adobe Creek in the Palo Alto FCB on 8 Oct (NK) was unusual.

Raptors through Skimmers

Ospreys have been more common this fall and a single bird, a female, has roosted daily at Vasona Reservoir during October (JD). This bird appears to forage elsewhere mid-day and afternoons and may be responsible for other local observations. Additional birds seen in October included individuals at Almaden Reser-

October marked the return of two wintering Lesser Black-backed Gulls—one for its fourth winter, the other for its sixth

voir 1-10 Oct (v.ob.), at the Alviso EEC on 1 Oct (AV), at Stevens Creek Reservoir on 10 Oct (JH et al.), above Coyote Creek at Ford Road on 17 Oct (TRy et al.), at the Ogier Avenue ponds on 21 Oct (MJM), at Calero Reservoir on 23 Oct (JMa), and in Morgan Hill on 28 Oct (CL). Some of these observations may represent the Vasona bird as we don't know how far this female forages during the day. An adult **Bald Eagle** in Cupertino on 18 Oct (KP) and an immature over Lake Cunningham on 31 Oct (RWR, FV) were both away from local reservoirs where they winter. The first **Ferruginous Hawk** of the season was an immature at Monterey Highway and Riverside on 29 Oct (MW). **Merlin** have been found in good numbers in October, including a bird that has returned to a housing area near Stanford for its ninth winter

(KS). A **Prairie Falcon** along Coyote Creek below Highway 237 on 3 Oct (MJM) was the first of wintering birds noted on the valley floor. The juvenile **Pacific Golden-Plover** found last month southeast of Highway 237 and First Street was seen again on 2 Oct (FV). The numbers of **Lesser Yellowlegs** tapered off in October with ten at State and Spreckles in Alviso 7-8 Oct (m.ob.), dropping to five by 14 Oct (LCh), two by 21 Oct (JMa et al.), and then a single bird through the end of the month (RWR, FV). Two to three birds were also found near Highway 237 and First Street on 7-8 Oct (m.ob.). **Pectoral Sandpipers** continued at the San Jose-Santa Clara Water Pollution Control Plant (WPCP) drying ponds with 17 counted on 3 Oct (MJM, MMR) and at least one bird still there on 27 Oct (RWR, FV). Birds also continued to be found in fields southeast of Highway 237 and First Street, with ten seen there on 7 Oct (MMR, MJM). Single birds were also found at Salt Pond A16 in Alviso on 1 Oct (AV)

and at State and Spreckles in Alviso on 14 Oct (LCh). The adult **Stilt Sandpiper** found this fall in the New Chicago Marsh at State and Spreckles in Alviso was seen there 7-8 Oct (m.ob.), but not again during October. However, it is likely that the bird seen at the San Jose-Santa Clara WPCP drying ponds on 31 Oct (RWR, FV) is the same individual. Similarly, the adult **Ruff** that has been seen in the New Chicago Marsh this fall was seen again on 7-8 Oct (MDo, MJM et al.) and on 28 Oct (MJM, SEM). Few **Wilson's Phalarope** linger into October so two in New Chicago Marsh on 7-8 Oct (m.ob.) and one there on 21 Oct (JMa et al.) are of interest. An adult **Lesser Black-backed Gull** was seen in the New Chicago Marsh on 8 Oct (JMa, JL). This is probably the same bird that has been found in this general area in five previous winters. If

Field Notes *continued*

so, this is its earliest return. Another Lesser Black-backed Gull was found at Lake Cunningham on 29 Oct (MMR), apparently returning for its fourth winter. It is now in its fifth winter plumage. The Alviso bird is wide ranging and hard to find. In contrast, the Lake Cunningham bird is relatively sedentary and seems fond of its small island on the north shore of the lake. As in recent winters, a flock of **Black Skimmers** has taken up residence on Charleston Slough with at least 12 birds there by the end of October (m.ob.). At least two immature birds have been seen with this flock.

Swifts through Orioles

Two **Vaux's Swifts** at Coyote Reservoir on 4 Oct (TRy) were the last of the season. Four to six **Lewis's Woodpeckers** were found near the end of the Cañada de Pala Trail in Joseph Grant County Park on 8 Oct (JY, AL). These are fall or possibly wintering birds. A probable **Red-naped Sapsucker** was banded and photographed near Felter and Sierra roads on 28 Sep (RCo). Despite the good photographs, there is not complete unanimity whether the bird includes possible hybrid characters. A **Willow Flycatcher** seen at the Palo Alto Baylands on 1 Oct (MJM) was late. Reports of two **Golden-crowned Kinglets** along Coyote Creek below Highway 237 on 9 Oct (MMR) and one in Los Altos on 27 Oct (PLN) are nothing like the invasion we had in the fall of 1998. A **Townsend's Solitaire** was seen at a Saratoga bird bath on 16 Oct and was there again on 23 Oct (HG *fide* LCh). A controversial *Vermivora* warbler, found along San Tomas Aquino Creek below Highway 101 on 3 Oct (MJM, MMR), was seen at least through 6 Oct. Based on photographs obtained (MMR), it appears that this was a fall **Nashville Warbler** and not a Virginia's Warbler although the back color was unusually gray (KG). A **Palm Warbler** was found near Coyote Creek below Hwy 237 on 29 Oct (LCh,



Peregrine Falcon by Emelie Curtis

VS-Y); it was the western race. Also along Coyote Creek below Highway 237, there was a late **MacGillivray's Warbler** on 3 and 7 Oct (MJM, MMR). A basic **Chipping Sparrow** was seen at the end of Marsh Road on 7 Oct (MMR, MJM) and is likely a fall migrant. The first **White-throated Sparrow** of the season arrived at a Los Gatos feeder on 30 Oct (GLeB). A **Lapland Longspur** was found at the Sierra Road summit on 7 Oct (MMR, MJM) for the ninth county record. This is the earliest fall arrival for this species. A late **Hooded Oriole** was seen along Coyote Creek on 3 Oct (MJM, MMR).

Observers: Dan Bump (DB), Les Chibana (LCh), Rita Colwell (RCo), Matthew Dodder (MDo), Jean Dubois (JD), Al Eisner (AME), Don Ganton (DG), Kimball Garrett (KG), Harriet Gerson (HG), Jan Hintermeister (JH), Richard Jeffers (RGJ), Nora Kruzic (NK), Jolene Lange (JL), Amy Lauterbach (AL), Gloria LeBlanc (GLeB), Charles Ludlum (CL), Mike Mammoser (MJM), John Mariani (JMa), Steve Miller (SEM), Lisa Myers (LM), Paul Noble (PLN), Kenneth Petersen (KP), Mike Rogers (MMR), Bob Reiling (RWR), Tom Ryan (TRy), Kendric Smith (KS), David Suddjian (DLSu), Frank Vanslager (FV), Ann Verdi (AV), Michael Wienholt (MW), and Jim Yurchenco (JY).

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

Dueling Peregrines Highlight Slough Outing

A dozen SCVAS'ers joined a quartet of Santa Cruz Bird Clubbers on a gray morning to work Jetty Road, Moonglow Dairy, and the Elkhorn Slough vicinity, then headed for Harkins Slough to chase the Tropical Kingbird reported there. Best morning bird was a Red-necked Grebe just beyond the jetties, as well as 9 species of gulls along the road. Both Jetty Road and Moonglow offered superb views of Merlins. Moonglow had both yellowlegs species and, after careful scrutiny, both dowitchers (mainly by call-in-flight and tail). The group's species count kept mounting steadily, to over 100 by lunchtime.

After a few more species at the now-sunny Reserve headquarters, we decided to forgo Elkhorn Road in favor of Harkins Slough. There, at the very last, the Tropical Kingbird may have put in a distant appearance, unless the glimpsed yellow-bellied kingbird was a Western Kingbird, but not one that bore celebrating. But who cared?—we had just witnessed the day's astounding Audubon Moment. Two Peregrine Falcons turned the space over Harkins Slough Road into an aerial arena, dashing and swooping after each other, yelling as few of us had ever heard. At one point they locked talons and plummeted together a hundred feet in a tumbling free fall to (for one of them, actually onto) the very surface of the roadside pond! As the spectacle went on and on around us and right above us, we "stood amaz'd."

For the day, a group tally of 111 species. But it is those Peregrines that all of us will cherish about "that time at Harkins Slough."
—Todd Newberry

Four Local CBC's to Choose From

by Leda Beth Gray

For many birders, the Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is part of the holiday tradition. Tromping around in the cold (occasionally in the not-so-cold) all day counting birds is something that I look forward to every year. Last year I was so inspired, I did three different counts!

The CBC is carried out not just in the United States, but all over the Americas and on islands in the Pacific and Caribbean. Folks counting in the interior parts of Canada and the Northern U.S. often suffer adverse weather conditions, resulting in low overall totals of bird species. Some count circles get less than 30 species, and a few even less than 10. In the San Francisco and Monterey Bay regions, the count circles that include shorelines score high on the list of species totals, although we, too, can suffer freezing temperatures.

SCVAS sponsors four CBCs: San Jose, Palo Alto, Mt. Hamilton and Calero-Morgan Hill. In last year's 100th National Audubon Society CBC, San Jose's count total of 164 was ranked 24th in the nation, while Palo Alto's 159 species ranked 29th in a list of high counts that was largely dominated by California and Texas. The Point Reyes, Moss Landing and Santa Cruz Counts ranked fifth, sixth and seventh, with totals of 200, 197 and 196 species, respectively. Top count in the nation was Mad Island Marsh, Texas with 228 species!

Here is the relevant information on each of our local CBC's, supplied by their respective compilers:

SAN JOSE

The annual San Jose Christmas Bird Count takes place on Sunday, Dec. 17. Join us for a full day of birding adventure (rain or shine) as we canvas our count circle from the hills to the bay, including riparian corridors and urban parks.

All levels of birding experience are needed, and newcomers and beginners are especially welcome to help us spot, count and list all our many resident and wintering birds. Just dress warmly and

bring your binoculars and a lunch. A mandatory fee of \$5.00 per participant covers compilation and publication costs..

To participate in the Count, please contact one of the sector leaders below:

ALVISO: Dick Carlson (650) 324-2701 <rccarl@pacbell.net>

FREMONT HILLS: Karen Hesse (408) 371-3513 <khessepbi@aol.com>

CALAVERAS: Kep Stone (408) 263-3395 <kep_stone@gasonics.com>

ALUM ROCK: Dave Cook (408) 871-9552 <justdave50@earthlink.net>

EVERGREEN: Gloria LeBlanc (408) 866-0101 <gjl@lgsia.com> and Mary Murphy (650) 396-0929 <mmurphy@incyte.com>

SAN JOSE URBAN: Ann Verdi (408) 266-5108 <ann.verdi@amd.com>

SANTA CLARA: Debbie Thompson (408) 227-4604 <dthompson@idt.com>

AGNEW: Grant Hoyt (650) 969-7892 <granth@stanford.edu>

BERRYESSA HILLS: Harriet Gerson (408) 252-6244

If you have any questions about where you would like to count or about the CBC in general, please contact me at home (408) 266-5108, work (408) 749-2199 or by e-mail at <ann.verdi@amd.com>

NEW DINNER LOCATION: This year's countdown dinner will be at the Meeting Hall of Emma Prusch Farm Park, 647 S. King Rd, San Jose. The location is just north of the intersection of King and Story Roads (near the intersection of Hwys 280 and 101). Dinner will be served between 5:30-6:00 PM. To help out with the dinner, please contact Ulrike Keyssner at the SCVAS office, (408) 252-3747. We will start setting up after 4:00 PM. We especially need dessert donations.

PALO ALTO

The Palo Alto CBC is on Monday December 18. We welcome birders of all levels. Beginning birders will be teamed up with more experienced birders where an extra pair of eyes to help spot birds or someone to record data is a big help.

The Palo Alto Count circle contains diverse habitat that leads to great success in counting bird species. Bay shoreline

in Palo Alto and Mountain View are part of the count, as well as parks and opens spaces in the Santa Cruz Mountains up to Skyline Blvd. Urban areas include parts of Atherton and Menlo Park south to Mountain View, Los Altos and Cupertino. Folks who live within the count circle can do a back yard count, or count while walking around their neighborhoods.

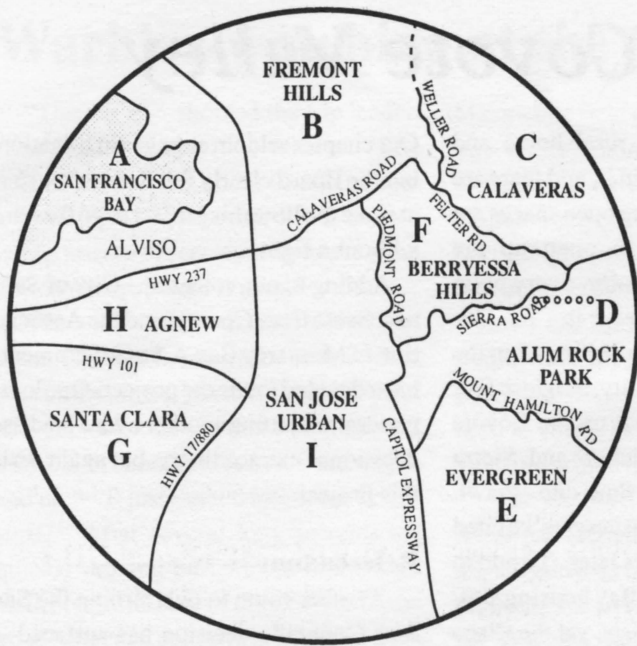
Matthew Dodder has taken over as compiler for Palo Alto's CBC. He can be reached at <mdodder@earthlink.net>.

CALERO-MORGAN HILL

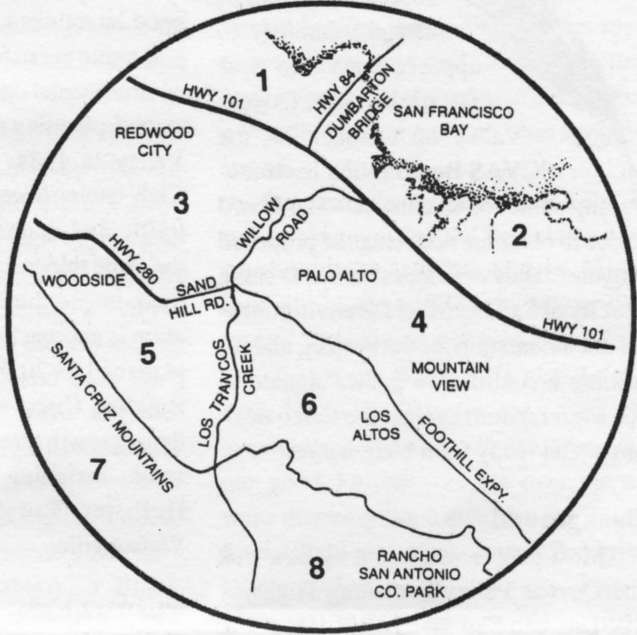
Veteran birders agree that there is no better way to celebrate the holiday season than to take part in a Christmas Bird Count. This annual event gives us a chance to exercise our bird-finding skills, enjoy the camaraderie of other birders, and simultaneously gauge the health of our wintering bird populations.

The newest addition to Santa Clara County's CBC roster is the Calero-Morgan Hill CBC, which will take place, rain or shine, on Saturday, Dec. 30th. We will be trying to count every single bird within a 15-mile-in-diameter circle centered near Calero Reservoir. That's a big piece of real estate and a lot of birds, so we need all the eyes and ears we can muster. Last winter our combined efforts tallied 30,195 birds of 139 species! Birders of all experience levels are welcome to take part.

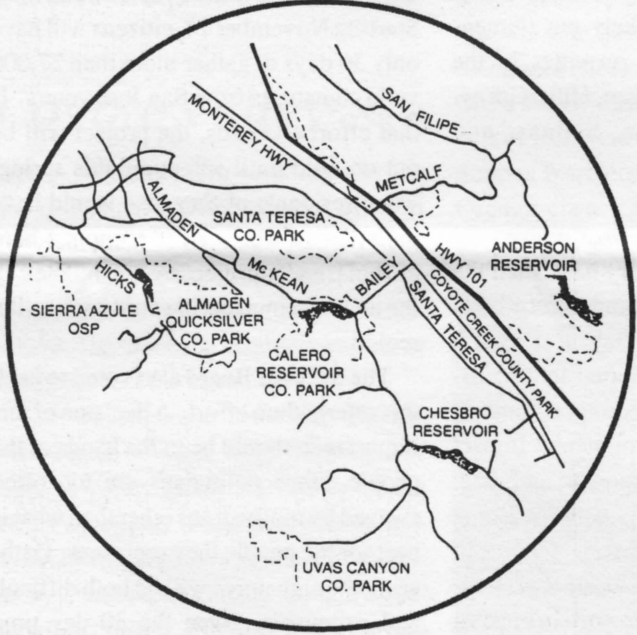
Participants will be divided into parties, each of which will have a specific territory to cover. Areas within the circle include Almaden Quicksilver and Santa Teresa County Parks; Almaden, Chesbro, and Guadalupe Reservoirs; the northern half of Anderson Reservoir; Almaden Lake Park; the northern Coyote Valley, including the Ogier Ponds and Parkway Lakes; Coyote Ridge in the Hamilton Range; and the summit of Loma Prieta. So pick an area that sounds interesting and join us on count day—we could use help everywhere! At the end of the day we will meet to share our finds and have a meal of delicious pizza, beverages, and desserts. Contact John Mariani at <redknot@worldnet.att.net>, or by phone at (408) 997-2066.



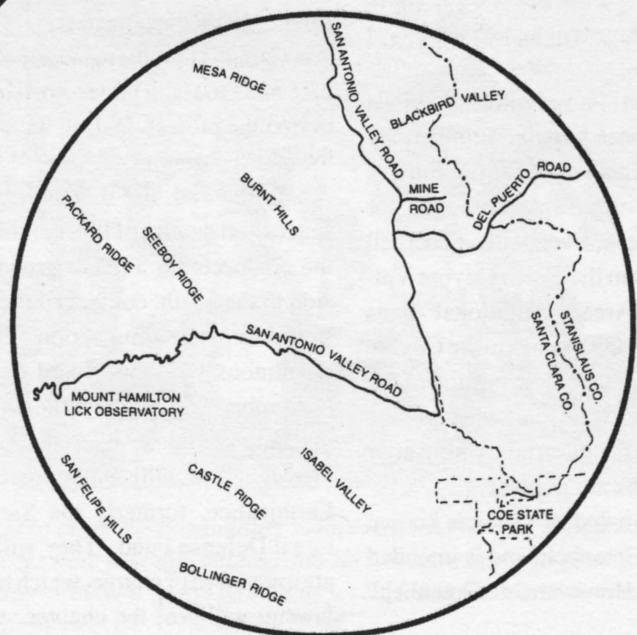
← SAN JOSE



PALO ALTO



← CALERO-MORGAN HILL



MOUNT HAMILTON→

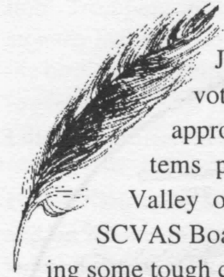
The Mt. Hamilton Count is not for the faint of heart. Rugged terrain, higher elevations, and the chance of a snow shower make this a count for outdoor types who don't mind hiking cross-country and doing a little bush-whacking. Birds can be scarce, but sometimes spectacular. The date of this CBC is Wednesday, Dec. 20.

Compiler Don Schmoltdt has moved to Sacramento and is temporarily without a permanent phone number. Call Grant Hoyt at (650) 969-7892 if you're interested in participating.

Taking a Stand on Coyote Valley

SCVAS Board

by Craig Breon
Executive Director



When the San Jose City Council voted unanimously to approve the Cisco Systems project for Coyote Valley on October 24, the SCVAS Board found itself facing some tough choices. The Board chose to continue opposing the proposed Coyote Valley development by (1) suing the city of San Jose over the environmental documentation for the project; and (2) joining a coalition to gather signatures for a referendum against the Cisco decision. Get ready for a busy winter.

Background

Most people will know by now that the Coyote Valley lies along Highway 101 between San Jose and Morgan Hill. Currently, there are 5000 acres of prime farmland in the Valley. Surrounding Coyote Valley are the Santa Teresa and Diablo Ranges and Tulare Hill—all beautiful open spaces with critical habitat for several endangered species, including the Bay Checkerspot Butterfly, Red-Legged Frog and several rare plant species. These hillsides also represent some of the best potential open spaces for public acquisition in the region—great wildlife habitats located near major population centers.

Cisco's project calls for 6.6 million square feet of office space, enough for 20,000 employees. Eventually, plans call for 50,000 jobs in the North Coyote Valley Industrial Area. Additional plans include up to 25,000 homes in the Coyote Urban Reserve, the middle portion of the Valley. When those homes might be built is unknown, but certainly long after many of the jobs are in place.

The southern end of valley is known as the Coyote Greenbelt, and is intended not to urbanize. However, the "Greenbelt"

already has extensive rural home and business development in it, and fears are that unless the remaining open spaces are purchased, pressure to open up the Greenbelt will eventually overwhelm good intentions to preserve it.

Despite persistent opposition from the environmental community, San Jose first started planning to open up the Coyote Valley in 1984. Audubon and Sierra Club letters from that time cite sprawl, traffic, and air quality issues; we've cited the same things 15 years later. To add to those issues, the South Bay housing situation is approaching crisis, yet the Cisco plans call for 20,000 jobs and no housing. Building Cisco will likely put tremendous growth pressure on cities to the south, including Morgan Hill, Gilroy, Hollister, Los Banos, Salinas, and Watsonville.

The Lawsuits

The San Jose Mercury has called the Cisco approval the most important growth decision in the South Bay in a least a generation. SCVAS started its opposition to the project this spring, commenting on the Cisco Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and beginning to mobilize. We have worked closely with the Loma Prieta chapter of the Sierra Club. In addition, many cities and local governments to the south have joined in opposition to the project, fearing what it means for their communities.

In the end, the threats to our open spaces and quality of life, combined with the prospects for a major growth explosion to the south, convinced the SCVAS Board to take strong action. By a near unanimous vote, the Board decided on November 7 to join with the Sierra Club in suing San Jose over the Cisco approval. We will be represented by Earthjustice, formerly the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund. They will provide attorneys free of charge, which means the lawsuit will cost the chapter very little.

Our chapter seldom engages in litigation, but the Board clearly felt that too much is at stake to allow this project to go forward without a fight.

Adding to our voices, the City of Salinas, Santa Cruz County, and the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments have decided to sue the project. One local government suing another over a land use decision is extraordinary, but again, so is this project.

Referendum

Another route to overturning the San Jose Council's decision has surfaced—taking the issue to the people of San Jose. Starting November 14, citizens will have only 30 days to gather more than 27,000 valid signatures from San Jose voters. If that effort succeeds, the project will be put on hold until sometime this spring, when residents of San Jose would have their say on whether the economic benefits of Cisco's project are outweighed by the negative impacts it would have on the region.

The SCVAS Board also voted to back this referendum effort. A decision of this importance should be in the hands of the people, since politicians are too often swayed by motivations other than what is best for the people they represent. Gathering the signatures will be both difficult and expensive, given the 30 day time limit. Even if the signatures are collected, we then face an uphill campaign to convince the voters. Cisco, Coyote Valley landowners, and other developers will no doubt raise large amounts of money to defeat the referendum. Again, while we face tough odds, the Board felt we had little other choice.

Where to Put Cisco

We should make it clear that our chapter's efforts do not oppose Cisco as a company nor the work they do. Were any other company to propose the same plans for Coyote Valley, our chapter

Warbler-watching at the Carmel River

"There it is!" shouted the trip leader. "The Prairie Warbler!" "Where?" "The tallest Cottonwood, about 10:30, in about a foot." "An immature bird." "It's moving up toward the center at the top." "Got it!" "Whoops, there it goes."

The warbler flew across the river and about 100 feet downstream with a dozen plus birders in hot pursuit. "Anybody see it?" A pause. "It's in that tree at about 2 o'clock, in about five feet, it's moving in and up." "It just moved into some heavy stuff." After several long seconds the quickly moving bird was re-found high on the opposite side of the tree near some good reference points in good light. Several more birders were able to find it.

Coyote Valley cont'd

would probably have responded in the same manner. While several SCVAS Board members believe that our region is simply growing too fast—and therefore would just as soon see Cisco go elsewhere—no doubt a sizable number of members feel the same way.

So, where should Cisco go? The answer seems obvious. With the people of Silicon Valley (a.k.a. the Valley of the Heart's Delight) voting overwhelmingly to tax themselves for a new BART extension, Cisco should locate along that future BART line. Building in the Coyote Valley would put Cisco 20 miles away from BART, with no hope of freeing the majority of Cisco employees from their cars.

What You Can Do

By the time this *Avocet* arrives at your door, there will be only two weeks left in the signature drive for the referendum. That's still plenty of time for you to get involved. If you want to help gather signatures—or help in some other way—please call People for Livable and Affordable Neighborhoods (PLAN) at (408) 293-5314.

Meanwhile field guides were opened and one birder commented on the whitish undertail coverts (the National Geographic field guide shows them to be a fairly bright yellow in all plumages; on immature birds they are in fact a very pale yellow) and another makes note of the frequent tail-dipping. Eventually the bird flew back across the river. There was no need to chase, as the trip leader had previously verified that all had seen the bird.

The October 21 field trip to Carmel River had started with high hopes; after all, a Yellow-green Vireo had been seen regularly for over a week and a Tennessee Warbler was found the day before. Unfortunately, the trip had been fairly routine with just the "usual suspects" being seen (flocks of Pygmy Nuthatches, Cedar Waxwings and Bushtits, large numbers of Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Yellow-rumped Warblers, Townsend's Warblers, Orange-crowned Warblers, a Black-throated Gray Warbler, Hermit Thrushes,

Downy & Nuttall's Woodpeckers, Band-tailed Pigeons, Hutton's Vireo's, a Northern Flicker, Song Sparrow, Bewick's Wren, Red-tailed Hawk, Red-shouldered Hawk and a White-tailed Kite to name a few). High water levels upstream prevented birding the Lagoon but an adult Green Heron provided some distraction until a phone call alerted us to the fact that a Prairie Warbler had just been seen upstream.

Because of our unexpected early return upstream to find the Prairie Warbler, it was decided that we would, for a change, bird the riverbed above the Highway 1 bridge. This decision proved to be a good one, for shortly thereafter a nice, bright, adult Nashville Warbler was found and eventually well seen by all. Oddly enough our good fortune was not over; as we were thanking the trip leader for his efforts, a light gray-backed adult Peregrine Falcon (subspecies *F. p. tundrius*) spent some time soaring near us.

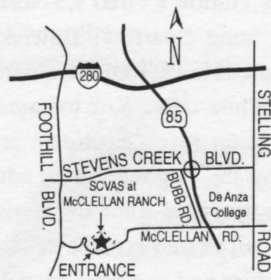
—Bob Reiling



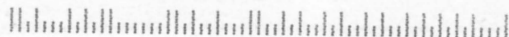
Thank you to all of the outstanding volunteers who helped with Wildlife Education Day. Please note that this photograph should have had everyone's names, but due to computer problems at my office this week, I was unable to access them. My sincere apologies, BB-W, assistant to ed.

SANTA CLARA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY
 22221 McClellan Road,
 Cupertino, CA, 95014
 Phone: 408-252-3747 / Fax: 408-252-2850
 E-mail: scvas@scvas.org

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STAFF

Executive Director
 Craig Breon 408/252-3748
Office Manager
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Volunteer Coordinator
 Ulrike Keyssner 408/252-3747
Environmental Advocate
 Jennifer Perritz 408/252-3748

Office Fax 408/252-2850
E-mail scvas@scvas.org
Website www.scvas.org

CHAIRPERSONS

Avocet
 Editor: Grant Hoyt 650/969-7892
 Graphics, Layout:
 Bonnie Bedford-White 408/261-8210
Education
 Bobbie Handen 408/356-4263
Environmental Action
 Leda Beth Gray 831/336-1127
Field Trips: Weekend
 Bob Reiling 408/253-7527
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Christmas Bird Count
 Ann Verdi 408/266-5108
 Kathy Parker 408/358-2832
Bay Area Audubon Council
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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

KEEPING CONNECTED: E-mail us at <e-network@scvas.org> so we can send informative brief notes of special concern.

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, address is above. 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 10

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