



THE AVOCET

The Newsletter of the Santa Clara Audubon Society

March 2001

Executive Director's "State of the Chapter"

by Craig Breon
Executive Director

I am just finishing my fourth month as SCVAS' first Executive Director. In a manner similar to when I was hired more than seven years ago as the chapter's first Environmental Advocate, the job is slowly taking shape—in a rather organic fashion. With no predecessors, and thus few expectations, I have been able to transition into the work at my own pace. I thought I would take the time to share my thoughts about where this organization is going and some of the additional projects I have taken on.

Without bragging, I can confidently say that our Audubon chapter is one of the most dynamic and effective in the nation. For example, National Audubon recently offered incentives to get chapters to generate local members. SCVAS ended up recruiting more new members than any other chapter in the country, as NAS

President John Flicker recently noted. When we set our minds to a task, we have the Board, staff, and volunteers to achieve impressive results. In addition, despite the development concerns we all share, we remain blessed with beautiful natural resources to enjoy and protect, and a diverse population that largely shares our values.

I want to thank all the SCVAS members who have expressed remarkable confidence in my ability to handle the new responsibilities of running this organization. I'm frankly hoping that you know me better than I know myself, because I was (and still am) worried about my abilities relative to the tasks at hand.

I also want to express gratitude and relief at how generously our members have responded to our end-of-the-year fundraising letter (see page 4 for details). You made me look good in my first big

project. We are trying to make the transition from one full and two part-time staff members to four full time employees (we're not quite there yet). That alone has added more than \$50,000 to our yearly budget, and it's up to me to fill in the monetary gaps.

What do we get for the extra expenditures? Just what the Board wanted when they decided to hire a Director—more conservation, more education, and more restoration.

Conservation

We are in the midst of a search for a new Environmental Advocate. You can see from her article on page 10 that, on an interim basis, Jennifer Peritz is doing very well. Since a portion of my time is still dedicated to conservation advocacy, we are able to cover more issues and supervise more volunteers and interns in their special projects.

One long-term conservation project is slowly taking shape. I'm tentatively calling it "Promises Made, Promises Broken." Essentially, when development

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**General Membership Meeting
Wednesday, March 21
"Dragonflies—For a Change of Pace"
with Kathy Biggs
Palo Alto Art Center
Newell & Embarcadero Rds.
7:30 Hospitality 8:00 Program**

Kathy Biggs has been a nature lover all her life. As a child, she traipsed through the fields and hills around her homes in San Leandro and Alamo, collected insects and enjoyed camping outings. She became a birder, but when she and her husband built their garden pond, dragonflies became her passion. When she discovered that there were no guides available for dragonflies, she began collecting her own data which, as an educator, she decided to first 'publish' on the Internet to share with others. The website eventually evolved into her new book, "Common Dragonflies of California, A Beginner's Pocket Guide." She and her husband currently live in Sebastopol and enjoy excursions to see dragonflies. (See page 8 for Kathy's story on dragonfly study.)

Fundraiser bonanza----Page 4

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Nestbox program,

Owl census-----Page 9

SCVAS in the field—

enforcing the law?---Page 10

Volunteer Ventures

by Ulrike Keyssner



Our Executive Director, Craig Breon, has requested 2 volunteers for specific projects, and I'm happy to report both jobs can be worked on at home if you prefer. The first project is to peruse an e-mail mailbox full of grant offers. These grants fund wetland, creek, and other education projects that SCVAS may want to apply for. We need the grants sorted by subject and date so that Craig can easily ascertain which projects he should target. He estimates 5 hours to complete this job, preferably within 2 weeks of beginning.

The second project is updating an existing database on Creek Projects in Santa Clara County. Craig has all the information such as the Project Name, Creek Name, Project Contact, and Outstanding Issues all needing computer entry. For anyone interested in preserving our local creeks and finding out what is being done by local organizations, this is an interesting job. It should take around 4 hours to complete.

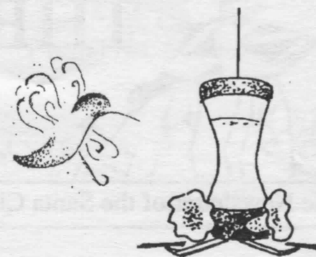
With spring weather just around the corner we experience a large increase in requests from schools, families, and Scout groups for kids' field trips. The trips are all over Santa Clara County, but mainly at McClellan Ranch Park, Charleston Slough, Alviso, or Lake Almaden. Groups range in size but we try to limit the number of attendees to 8-10 per leader. These small groups make for a wonderful learning experience for kids and are easily managed by the leader, assisted by at least 2 parent helpers. We lend the kids binoculars and field guides which they enjoy using for the one to two-hour trip. It's disappointing to turn down any requests for trips but we can't do them all—we need more field trip leaders.

Please contact us if you want to help lead a trip. We will train you if your skills and confidence level are not sufficient and, to begin with, we'll pair you with an experienced leader. When you're ready to 'fledge' we'll let you fly solo. These trips are scheduled throughout the week and weekend—let us know when you are available and we'll only tell you about those particular trips. You decide if you can lead them that week or month. Even if you only do a handful a year it will be appreciated and is a big help to us. We hate to miss any opportunity to instill in children a love and appreciation for birds as vitally important to our mission of educating Santa Clara County residents about habitat preservation in their own back yards.

Ulrike Keyssner, Volunteer & Education Programs Coordinator, (408) 252-3747
e-mail: <ulrike@scvas.org>

View From The Office

by Susan Bell
Office Manager



A Santa Clara Valley Audubon volunteer (pictured below) helps one of the Nature Shop customers find the right field guide for the birds in her neighborhood. If you haven't seen our new line of shirts, polos, and caps featuring the SCVAS Avocet logo, be sure to check them out next time you're in for a visit.

We're continuing to make our books a speciality of the Nature Shop. With the help of SCVAS Board member Leda Beth Gray, we're expanding the diversity of our field guide selection and keeping the shelves well-stocked.

When you decide to drop by the Nature Shop you'll see we carry a wide variety of ornithological books. To educate and aid birders of all skill levels, we carry basic and beginner bird books, bird-specific books, national and international site guides, and even books on bird behavior. To encourage a greater awareness of our environment we feature nature and plant guides (including native plants) and gardening references.

If you've heard of a good birding book or field guide, give us a call or stop by to see if we carry it. If we don't have it in stock, we'll be happy to order it for you. Nature Shop hours are Monday through Friday, 10 AM to 5 PM, and Saturday 10 AM to 2 PM.



A Santa Clara Valley Audubon volunteer (pictured in denim logo shirt) helps one of the Nature Shop customers find the right field guide for the birds in her neighborhood.

March 2001 Calendar

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

****Saturday Mar. 3, 9:00 AM**

Bair Island. Half day. Leader: Robin Smith (650) 325-3306. Bird the newest part of the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge. From Hwy 101 in Redwood City take Whipple Avenue exit east across frontage road to parking area (WATCH OUT for frontage road traffic!) Meet at refuge sign inside gate. Be prepared for mud! **RC**

****Sunday Mar. 4, 8:30 AM**

Coyote Hills Regional Park. Half day. Leader: Frank Vanslager (408) 257-3647. Take Hwy 84/Dumbarton Bridge east towards Newark. Exit right on Thornton, then left over freeway as Thornton becomes Paseo Padre. Turn left at Patterson Ranch/Commerce Rd. into park. Meet at far end of Quarry Parking lot 1/2 mile past park entrance. Entrance fee required. **LO, RC**

Wednesday, Mar. 7, 7:30 PM

Bay Area Bird Photographers presents Mike Danzenbaker and Lee Hung with a slide show on Midway Atoll. Lucy Evans Baylands Interpretive Center, E. Embarcadero Rd., Palo Alto.

****Saturday Mar. 10, 8:00 AM**

Oka Ponds/Los Gatos Creek Park. Half day. Leader: TBA (408) 253-7527. From Hwy 17 in Los Gatos take Lark Ave exit west. Turn right on Oka Rd, left on Mozart Ave, then immediately right on Oka Lane. Meet at gate. **RC**

****Sunday Mar. 11, 9:00 AM**

Stanford Campus. Half day. Leader: Dick Stovel (650) 856-6105. From Hwy 101 in Palo Alto take University Ave. exit west through downtown and into Stanford campus (University Ave. becomes Palm Dr.). Meet at end of Palm Dr. at entrance to Main Quad. Local breeding birds and early returning migrants should be active. Trip recommended for beginning birders. **RC**

Tuesday Mar. 13, 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: American Goldfinch.

****Saturday Mar. 17, 8:30 AM**

Ed Levin Co. Park (South). Half day. Leader: John Arnold (650) 948-4250. Take Hwy 237 east, crossing I-880 and I-680 (becomes Calaveras Rd.) to park entrance about 2 miles past I-680. Meet at parking lot on right side of Calaveras Rd. Migrants, local breeding birds in Milpitas' prime birding hot spot. Entrance fee. **LO, RC**

****Sunday Mar. 18, 8:00 AM**

Ogier Ponds. Half day. Leader: Grant Hoyt (650) 969-7892. From Hwy 101 in Morgan Hill take Cochrane Rd. west to Monterey Hwy, turn right, go north 2.6 miles, turn right toward Model Airplane Park where power towers cross Hwy. Follow road for 1/2 mile, park in gravel lot at bend in road. Waterfowl, raptors, migrants, breeding bird activity. **RC**

****Saturday Mar. 24, 8:30 AM**

Almaden Lake Park/Alamitos Creek. Half day. Leader: John Mariani (408) 997-2066. Meet in west parking lot of Almaden Lake Park. From Highway 85 take Almaden Expwy south. Park is on east (left) side of Almaden Expwy. Continue just past Coleman Rd. and the park, return northbound on Almaden Expwy to park entrance on right. 3 miles of easy walking. Waterfowl, raptors, variety of riparian birds. **LO, RC**

****Sunday Mar. 25, 8:00 AM**

Almaden Quicksilver Co. Park. Half day. Leader: Ann Verdi (408) 266-5108. In San Jose, take Almaden Rd. through the town of New Almaden; turn right at park entrance. Join this hard-working SCVAS officer in finding early migrating birds of the oak woodland and chaparral. Moderately strenuous uphill hiking. **RC**

****Wednesday Mar. 28, 8:30 AM**

Ed Levin County Park (South). Half day. Leader: John Arnold (650) 948-4250. Take Hwy 237 east, crossing I-880 and I-680 (becomes Calaveras Rd.) to park entrance about 2 miles after crossing I-680. Meet at parking lot on right side of Calaveras Rd. Migrants and local breeding birds in Milpitas' prime birding hot spot. Entrance fee. **LO, RC**

****Saturday Mar. 31, 8:30 AM**

Gilroy Hot Springs Rd. Half day. Leader: Bob Reiling (408) 253-7527. Limited to 23 participants by reservation only; carpooling mandatory. Meet at intersection of Gilroy Hot Springs Rd. and Canada Rd. From Hwy 101 take the Hwy 152 West exit and go east, turn left on New Ave. and then right on Roop Rd. Once in the foothills bear left at fork in road, continue several miles to Canada Rd. **RC**

Sunday, Apr. 1, 8:30 AM

Alum Rock Park. Half day. Leader: Al Eisner (650) 926-2018 days; 364-3686 evenings). Note change to Daylight Savings Time, no fooling: spring forward or be late. From Hwy 101 or I-680 take McKee Rd. northeast toward hills then left on Toyon Ave., right on Penitencia Creek Rd. and continue into park. Meet in "Rustic Lands" parking area, on right just before reaching "T" intersection. Moderately strenuous 3 to 4 mile walk. Resident breeding birds (possible Rufous-Crowned Sparrow, Canyon Wren), early migrants, lingering winter birds. Be prepared for mud! Possible entrance fee. **LO, RC**

****Wednesday, Apr. 4, 8:00 AM**

Rancho San Antonio. Leader: Jim Liskovec (650) 969-5542. An extra week-day trip to this most popular preserve. Emphasis will be on bird song. Some strenuous walking on hilly trails. From Hwy 280 take Foothill Expressway-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**

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Fundraiser Brings in Nearly \$70,000!

Culminating a year of growth, transition, and accomplishment, SCVAS' 2000 fundraising letter brought out remarkable generosity from our supporters. More than 410 individuals, from our membership list of 3700, responded with gifts ranging from \$10 to \$10,000. The total surprised us all—just over \$69,500. This was approximately twice the amount we had ever raised before.

Our annual fundraising letter began in 1994. At the beginning of that year, SCVAS hired Craig Breon to work half-time as the chapter's advocate on conservation issues throughout the County. In his first few months, Craig led a campaign to pass San Jose's landmark Riparian Corridor Policy—one of the first comprehensive river protection policies passed by a major American city. With that and other accomplishments for the year, our Board felt confident that our members would respond with enthusiasm. We drafted a simple fundraising letter, explaining to our members what we had done with their money in the previous year, and what we hoped to do the following year. What resulted was an impressive start—about \$12,000. Ironically, that amount barely covered what we paid Craig for his first year's work.

Early on, our chapter was counseled by experienced fundraisers and other nonprofits to seek professional help with our annual appeal. The Board mulled this over, and decided instead to rely on our own talents rather than spend precious resources on outside help.

The Board made a few other key decisions regarding how we would approach our members for support. Perhaps because so many of our Board members were themselves deluged by appeals in the mail, moderation became a watchword. One letter per year; no more. Standard advice for nonprofits is to send 6-8 appeals per year., but The Board has to date entirely rejected that philosophy as too distracting from our mission.

We also decided to keep our yearly message simple. No red underlining of

key phrases; no "Act now, or baby harp seals will die!" emotionalism. Instead, we have followed the same formula year after year. We say what we did with your money last year and what we intend to do with your contribution next year. We remind you that we only ask once a year. Then we send it out and pray it works again.

So far, our members have come through splendidly. In 1996, we garnered more than \$16,000 from 320 responses; in 1997, over \$25,000 from 410 responses. In 1998, we raised over \$30,000 from 470 responses, and in 1999 just under \$35,000 from 450 responses. This

Trip Report

Foster City January 28

A sizeable group of enthusiastic birders attended the Foster City trip. Under wonderfully sunny skies we covered the main lagoon, then made a second stop at another lagoon section and finally proceeded to Sea Cloud Park and Belmont Slough.

Some of the highlights were Common Goldeneye, Bufflehead, Hooded Mergansers, and American Wigeon. There were grebes aplenty, the first returning Forster's Terns, Whimbrel and Long-billed Curlew in the same view; a selection of other shorebirds; kites and raptors; egrets, herons and a kingfisher. A Downy Woodpecker, who stayed at close range, allowed everyone to see the diagnostic markings on the outer tail feathers—a first for some in the group.

Missing were a few usual target birds: Eurasian Wigeon, Red Knot and Barrow's Goldeneye. Few of these have been reported in Foster City this season. Some of the group stopped at the large pond at the wastewater treatment plant in Redwood Shores on the way home and were treated to a vast array of ducks, geese, shorebirds and one dazzling Eurasian Wigeon.

—Robin Smith

year, we've jumped to nearly \$70,000 from 410 responses. We hope this reflects your faith in our good work.

Will the growth of our programs require us to send more than one appeal letter per year? Can our annual appeal keep topping itself year after year? Or can we diversify our fundraising efforts to keep pace with our growth? Frankly, we don't know the answers to these questions yet.

We do know that last year's appeal was a rousing success. To each and every one of you who donated, we extend our sincere thanks. We owe you another year of productive and satisfying work.

PS—For those of you who didn't respond to our most recent appeal, it's not too late! Checks can be made out to SCVAS and sent to 22221 McClellan Road, Cupertino, CA 95014.

Calendar *cont'd*

****Saturday Apr. 7, 9:00 AM
Stevens Creek County Park.** Half day. Leader: Roxie Handler (408) 730-1745. From I-280 in Cupertino take Foothill Expwy exit south 2.1 miles, (becomes Stevens Canyon Rd.); turn left into first (Chestnut) park entrance and meet in first parking lot. One of the best riparian birding spots in the South Bay for migrants and local breeding birds. Possible \$4 entrance fee. **LO**

****Wednesday Apr. 11, 8:30 AM
Almaden Quicksilver Co. Park.** Half day. Leader: Shirley Gordon (408) 996-9863. In San Jose take Almaden Expwy south to Almaden Rd. through town of New Almaden, turn right at park entrance. Spring woodland species should be active. Moderate walking of 3 miles. **LO, RC**

****Wednesday Apr. 25, 8:30 AM
Stevens Creek County Park.** Leader: Roxie Handler (408) 730-1745. (See directions under Apr. 7 listing)

Water District Creates Community Grants Fund

(with a helpful nudge from SCVAS)

In another chapter of the ongoing story of improved relations between the Santa Clara Valley Water District and the environmental community, the Water District decided at their February 6 Board meeting to create a community grants fund. The one-year pilot project, with about \$250,000 in funding, has local creek and wetland enthusiasts excited, since many of the smaller creek groups around the County typically have difficulty scraping up funds for their projects.

The idea for the grant fund came from Water District staff. Initial funding will come from cost savings recently identified in ongoing District projects. Other agencies successfully utilize community grants—notably the Metropolitan Water District in Southern California, and locally the City of San Jose and the County of Santa Clara. The potential benefits of the concept are twofold: to improve relations with and strengthen local community groups, and to accomplish certain tasks at a cost well below what a public agency might pay for the same work.

While the details of the program (criteria for acceptable grants, size of grants) will be worked out in the next month or two, grants should be available this spring or summer. Grants must complement the Water District's core mission, but that mission is broad enough to encompass a lot of great work.

SCVAS played an important role in helping establish this new fund. As many regular *Avocet* readers know, our relations with the Water District have been steadily improving over the last few years. The District Board, although still somewhat split on specific conservation issues, has general agreement that their mission should extend beyond water supply and flood management to include water quality, watershed protection, ecosystem health, and even restoration. This is a position we have consistently advocated for at least five years—the Water District is the best agency for dealing

with the myriad ways people interact with water in the county.

As the Water District's philosophy has shifted, we have responded with increasing support for their efforts. In the fall of 2000, our chapter took the bold step of endorsing the Water District's special tax on the November ballot. It turned out that the District needed all the support it could get; the tax passed with

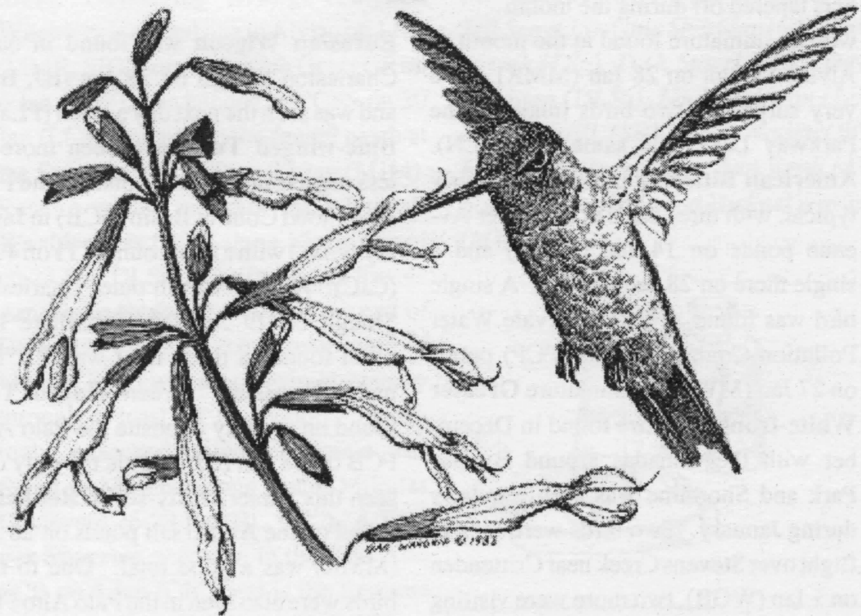
just a few hundred votes more than the two-thirds required. More recently, we have been working with the District to secure funding for local conservation-oriented projects from the clean water funds distributed by the State.

When we heard about the possibility of establishing the community grants fund, we realized that many local creek
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Hummingbird Day In Santa Cruz

SCVAS members are invited to attend Hummingbird Day at the University of California Santa Cruz Arboretum on Saturday, March 10th. Main events are from 10 AM– 4 PM. A general birdwatching "early bird tour" is offered from 8-10 AM. There will be tours of plants that attract hummingbirds, children's activities, plant sales and book sales. Visitors are guaranteed to see many Allen's and Anna's Hummingbirds. For more information call (831) 427-2998.

The Arboretum has the largest collection of Australian plants outside of Australia, plus California native plants and a New Zealand garden, and emphasizes habitat protection of plants to ensure the health of bird populations. A pamphlet guide/checklist to birdwatching at the UCSC Arboretum, developed by Todd Newberry, is available. The Arboretum is open 9-5 daily and the gift shop's regular hours are Tuesday through Saturday 10-4 and Sundays 1-4.



Anna's Hummingbird drawn by Gail Wardrip

Field Notes

by Bill Bousman

Loons through Waterfowl

Our first **Red-throated Loon** of the winter was a boldly-marked immature found on Shoreline Lake on 18 Jan (RWR, FV) and found through at least 22 Jan (m.ob.). The immature **Pacific Loon** found on the Campbell percolation ponds last month remained at least until 7 Jan (m.ob.). An immature **Common Loon** found at Calero Reservoir on 1 Jan (MMR, AV) was seen irregularly through January (v.ob.). Substantial numbers of **American White Pelicans** have lingered into January, as they did last year. The high count was of 29 on Salt Pond A4 on 4 Jan (SW). Unprecedented, however, have been the number of **Brown Pelicans** that have remained in January. The high count for the month was of 20 on Salt Pond A2W and the vicinity on 2 Jan (WGB). The highest previous count in January was three. Numbers tapered off during the month with an immature found at the mouth of Alviso Slough on 28 Jan (MMR) and a very surprising two birds inland at the Parkway Lakes the same day (PLN). **American Bittern** numbers were fairly typical, with three birds at the Ogier Avenue ponds on 14 Jan (MMR) and a single there on 28 Jan (AME). A single bird was found at the Sunnyvale Water Pollution Control Plant (WPCP) ponds on 27 Jan (MW). An immature **Greater White-fronted Goose** found in December with the Canadas around Byxbee Park and Shoreline was seen regularly during January. Two birds were seen in flight over Stevens Creek near Crittenden on 5 Jan (WGB), two more were visiting the Morabito "goose farm" in Morgan Hill on 28 Jan (MJM), four were in the New Chicago Marsh on 27 Jan (TRY), and a good-sized flock of 13 was over the Alviso salt ponds on 28 Jan (MMR). The

immature **Snow Goose** found at Lake Cunningham in December remained there at least through 13 Jan (v.ob.). An immature found with the domestic geese at the Sunnyvale WPCP ponds on 18 Jan (RWR, FV) and, seen through the end of the month, is presumably a different bird. Also at Lake Cunningham, an adult **Ross's Goose**, present since December, was seen through 20 Jan (v.ob.). The high count of **Wood Ducks** at Almaden Reservoir reached 66 on 21 Jan (AV). A male

Rare wintering passerines included a Black-backed Wagtail, two American Redstarts, and a Great-tailed Grackle

Eurasian Wigeon was found in outer Charleston Slough on 28 Jan (BJ, BM) and was seen the next day as well (PLaT). **Blue-winged Teal** have been more or less regular in the outer ponds of the Palo Alto Flood Control Basin (FCB) in January (v.ob.) with a high count of 11 on 4 Jan (CJC). A male was in outer Charleston Slough on 29 Jan (PLaT), where less often found in these tidal waters. The male '**Eurasian**' **Green-winged Teal** found on the Bay opposite the Palo Alto FCB on 28 Jan (BJ, BM) is the only one seen this winter. Fifty-seven **Redheads** found on the Alviso salt ponds on 28 Jan (MMR) was a good total. One to two birds were also seen in the Palo Alto FCB 28-31 Jan (DSt, JAC). A male **Barrow's Goldeneye** has been found at Shoreline Lake, at least through 21 Jan (v.ob.). A female was seen at Calero Reservoir on 21 Jan (JMa). Typically, **Red-breasted**

Mergansers are found only in the salt ponds or on the Bay, so a male at Lake Cunningham on 13 Jan (MJM) and 20 Jan (MW) was unusual. Only seven birds were found on the Alviso salt ponds on 28 Jan (MMR), which is low for that area. Some good tallies of **Common Merganser** from local reservoirs included 80 at Chesbro on 1 Jan (LSp) and 38 from Lake Elsmar on 23 Jan (DLSu).

Raptors through Gulls

Two adult **Bald Eagles** were found in San Antonio Valley on 5 Jan (GM). The adult '**Harlan's**' **Red-tailed Hawk** was seen again on 28 Jan (GS) on the Guadalupe River near Trimble. **Prairie Falcons** along the valley floor included one at the Ogier Avenue ponds on 14 Jan (MMR) and another along Santa Teresa Boulevard on 28 Jan (MJM). A high tide on 9 Jan brought out at least two **Black Rails** at the Palo Alto Baylands (MJM, DB). A single **Sanderling** was seen on Salt Pond A18 in Alviso on 1 Jan (MMR, SBT). Storm-wrecked **Red Phalaropes** are a seasonal occurrence along the coast, but they are seldom found inland. A moderate storm came through on Thursday, 11 Jan, and on Saturday, 13 Jan, a single Red Phalarope was found on the Campbell percolation ponds (LSu), where it was enjoyed by many observers at least through 22 Jan. Two different birds were found on Almaden Lake on 13 Jan as well (WV, DG) and another bird was seen at Calero Reservoir on 14 Jan (MMR). At Almaden Lake, three birds were found on 14 Jan (WV, DG, JMa) and at least two were there through 16 Jan (v.ob.). In past years, storm-wrecked Red Phalaropes have turned up on the salt ponds or near the Bay, so this inland pattern is curious indeed. Our "easy" **Lesser Black-backed Gull** has been seen regularly at Lake Cunningham through 20 Jan (v.ob.), but

continued next page

Field Notes *continued*

the Alviso bird has not been seen since October. **Glaucous Gulls** are found more often in January, although bleached-out birds can make identification tricky. Two inland birds include a 1st-winter Glaucous at the Ogier Avenue ponds on 7 Jan (MDo, JC) and a 1st- or 2nd-winter bird at Almaden Lake 14 and 21 Jan (JMa). A 1st-winter bird has been described from the Palo Alto Duck Pond on 21 Jan on (DSt) and 30 Jan (MJM), although the latter observation suggests some hybrid characteristics. A 1st- or 2nd-winter bird was on Salt Pond A18 on 25 Jan (RWR, FV). On 28 Jan, two 1st-winter birds were seen on the dikes on the Alviso salt ponds (MMR).

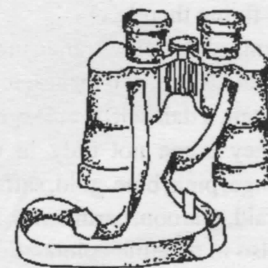
Owls through Orioles

Missing in December, the Byxbee Park **Short-eared Owls** turned up again in January. One was found over the Palo Alto FCB on 7 Jan (CO), and one or two were seen regularly towards the end of the month (v.ob.). An observation of an **Anna's Hummingbird** incubating eggs on New Year's Day in the Almaden area of San Jose ushered in the next millennium (PO'C). Two nestlings were recorded on 6 Jan—this is the earliest nesting record we have. A likely adult male **Red-naped Sapsucker** was found along San Antonio Valley Road on 5 Jan (GM), although face pattern details are lacking. A **Pileated Woodpecker** was heard along Morrill Road in the Santa Cruz Mountains on 23 Jan (DLSu), not far from where the same observer obtained our first breeding record in 1996. Fifteen **Tree Swallows** at the Sunnyvale WPCP on 27 Jan (MJM) probably represent an early migration. Five **Violet-green Swallows** were also with this flock and are also early. Making a triad, a **Barn Swallow** was also with this group of pioneers and was about a month early. A decade ago we never saw Barn Swallows in the winter and the first arrivals always turned up in late February, but things are changin'. Although this is supposedly

an irruptive winter for **Red-breasted Nuthatches**, the single bird found along Morrill Road on 23 Jan (DLSu) is within the range of resident birds. January **House Wrens** are always unusual, so a bird at Joseph Grant CP on 6 Jan (MW) and one found along Morrill and Wright Station roads on 30 Jan (RWR, FV) are of interest. An **American Dipper** along Penitencia Creek on 9 Jan (RWR, FV) is from an area where birds sometimes winter. **Golden-crowned Kinglets** were found in low numbers away breeding areas, with one at Joseph Grant CP on 6 Jan (MW) and two banded at Coyote Creek Field Station (CCFS) on 20 Jan (LCh). Two birds at Mt. Madonna CP on 1 Jan (JMa) and the approximately 85 heard near Lake Elsmar on 23 Jan (DLSu) are possibly resident. A **Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher** along Llagas Creek below Bloomfield Road on 3 Jan (DLSu) was undoubtedly wintering. We have only a handful of January records for this summer visitant. The **Black-backed Wagtail** found last month was seen again on private property in Alviso on 1 Jan (MMR, SBT). Wintering **Orange-crowned Warblers** included one in Alviso on 1 Jan (MMR, SBT), one at Joseph Grant CP on 6 Jan (MW), one banded at CCFS on 20 Jan (LCh), and one in the fennel patch at the Sunnyvale WPCP on 27 Jan (MJM). Rare in winter, an adult male **Hermit Warbler** was found along Morrill Road on 23 Jan (DLSu). The immature female **American Redstart** found at the end of December along Coyote Creek south of Metcalf Road was seen again in January through at least 20 Jan (v.ob.). Amazingly, a second immature female was found in Milpitas along South Milpitas Boulevard 26-29 Jan (RL, CJC). A **Vesper Sparrow** was seen in the Palo Alto FCB on 4 Jan (CJC) and is the first one found this winter. **White-throated Sparrows** include a bird found along Almaden Reservoir on 1 Jan (AV) and seen through at least 13 Jan (v.ob.), a bird at Hidden Villa on 3 Jan (GH), one at the Alviso Environmental Education Center on 24

Jan (JS *fide* TRy) and 27 Jan (TRy), and a bird continuing to come to a feeder in Los Gatos in January (JD). A 1st-winter **Black-headed Grosbeak** at McClellan Ranch on 21 Jan (KP et al.) was a pleasant surprise. A male **Great-tailed Grackle** was along Llagas Creek above Bloomfield Road on 2 Jan (DLSu). The status of this recent invader is continually changing. An immature **Bullock's Oriole** seen at the end of Geng Road in Palo Alto on 9 Jan (AME) is probably one of the birds found there in December.

Observers: Deborah Bartens (DB), Bill Bousman (WGB), Les Chibana (LCh), Jack Cole (JAC), Jesse Conklin (JC), Chuck Coston (CJC), Matthew Dodder (MDo), Jean Dubois (JD), Al Eisner (AME), Don Ganton (DG), Garth Harwood (GH), Bob Juhl (BJ), Peter LaTourrette (PLaT), Randy Little (RL), Mike Mammoser (MJM), John Mariani (JMa), Greg Meissner (GM), Brooke Miller (BM), Paul Noble (PLN), Patrice O'Connell (PO'C), Carlin Otto (CO), Kay Partelow (KP), Mike Rogers (MMR), Bob Reiling (RWR), Tom Ryan (TRy), Jeff Seay (JS), Gina Sheridan (GS), Larry Spivak (LSp), Dick Stovel (DSt), David Suddjian (DLSu), Linda Sullivan (LSu), Scott Terrill (SBT), Will Vadez (WV), Frank Vanslager (FV), Ann Verdi (AV), Scott Werner (SW), and Michael Wienholt (MW).



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

Get Hooked on Dragonfly Watching

by Kathy Biggs

Like birds, dragonflies come in vibrant colors, they fly, and they have interesting life histories and behaviors. If you're a birder, you've already developed the skills for watching them! Conveniently, they are especially abundant during the summer months, when fewer birds are around.

All you really need in order to be a dragonfly watcher are your eyes. Optional items, however, would include shoes that can get wet, an insect net, an 8-10X magnifying hand lens, glassine envelopes and plenty of sunscreen. Close-focus binoculars or a camera with a zoom lens can also be helpful: often regular binoculars won't focus in close enough while a camera will. You can click for a picture, or just use the camera for viewing.

To date, more than sixty species of dragonflies have been identified in California—over 100 if you include the damselflies. But dragonfly studies here in the USA are in their infancy, as ornithology was a century ago. One of the joys of dragonfly watching is that, even as a beginner, you can make contributions to their study. Santa Clara County is one of the better censused areas in the state. To date, 48 species have been found. In many counties, however, distribution studies are woefully inadequate. Nearby San Benito County has only had 8 species recorded as flying there!

In California, dragonflies range in size from the Giant Darner, at 6 inches, to the Pacific Forktail, a damselfly, at less than 1 inch. They come not only in red, fuchsia, orange, pink, blue, gold, saffron, black, emerald, maroon, earth tones, and more, but also in metallic colors. Some have colored, spotted or banded wings.

Unfortunately, you couldn't find a handy guidebook for the dragonflies until last year. The Audubon Society's *Insects and Spiders* field guide and Powell & Hogue's *California Insects* can be helpful, but these older insect guides cover

only a few western species of dragonflies. I spent the past several years writing a dragonfly guide for California. *Common Dragonflies of California, A Beginner's Pocket Guide* is now available and sold in the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Nature Shop. My book covers all of the common dragonflies and damselflies in California, including all endemic species. If you have Internet access you may find the book's companion

In Odonatology, the study of dragonflies, you can have fun, be outdoors, and contribute to a growing body of new knowledge!

web site useful: California Dragonflies <<http://www.sonic.net/dragonfly>>. This past fall, *Dragonflies Through Binoculars*, by Sid Dunkle, also became available. It covers all North American dragonflies (but not damselflies).

Like hummingbirds, dragonflies can maneuver quickly, making rapid zigzag maneuvers. Believe me, watching them can be a challenge! Occasionally, though, you'll find one basking in the sun or claiming and defending a territory on a pond or stream where it can be observed at leisure. Santa Clara County offers many great places to begin the study of dragonflies. Just find a spot near water on a calm, sunny day; any natural or artificial body of water will do, but one with

Kathy Biggs is an educator who worked in her home town of Sebastopol, CA in the Gravenstein School District for 18 years. Learn more about her and her family at their "Biggsnest" website: <http://www.sonic.net/~biggsnest/>

emergent vegetation will usually provide more species. Enjoy the thrill of seeing new species right in your area!

The following are a few of the most common California species found in our area. Reminder: 25 mm equals one inch.

Dragonflies

Flame Skimmer—red-orange including inside halves of wings, length 52-61 mm

Cardinal Meadowhawk—bright red, rests with wings forward, 32-38 mm

Blue Dasher—baby blue, white face, perches in vegetation, 32-40 mm; female plaid earth-tones

Western Pondhawk—baby blue, green face, perches on floating pond vegetation, 39-42 mm; female green

Spot-winged Skimmer—either 8 or 12 large dark spots on wings, 49-57 mm

Common Whitetail—bright white tail, bold black bands on wings, 42-48 mm

Black Saddlebags—black with black saddlebag mark on inner wings, 51-56

Green Darner—green eyes and thorax, blue (males) or brown (females) abdomen, 65-79 mm

Blue-eyed Darner—blue eyes, abdomen mosaic blues & brown/blacks, 62-72 mm

Damselflies

Damselflies are the small, slender-bodied and dainty 'blue-tailed flies' with widely separated eyes. At rest, they hold their wings closed sail-like alongside or over their backs, while dragonflies' wings are held out flat to the sides.

American Rubyspot—base of wings ruby red, bronzy-brown body, 38-48 mm

Bluet or Dancer Damselfly—patterned blue and black, blue abdomen tip, 25-50 mm

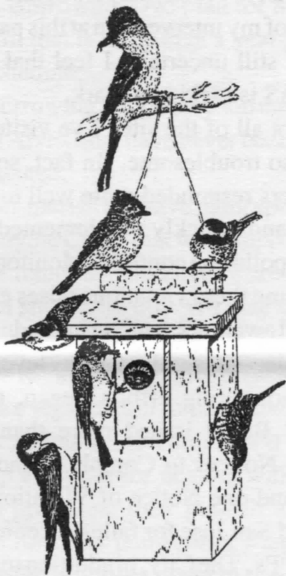
Forktail Damselfly—abdomen mostly black with a blue tip, 22-30 mm

Bluebirds, Owls Need Volunteer Help

Nestbox program begins 4th season

by Carol Hankermeyer
Program Coordinator

The year 2001 marks the fourth year that SCVAS will sponsor the California Bluebird Recovery Program in Santa Clara County, modified to include a number of other cavity-nesting birds noted to be in severe decline.



Drawing by Emelie Curtis

Our nestbox program has been highly successful due to the dedicated work of volunteer trail monitors and box builders. The breeding season is getting under way, and we welcome new volunteers to join in our efforts to restore dwindling populations of many cavity-nesting bird species, including Western Bluebird, Violet-green Swallow, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Oak Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Tree Swallow, Bewick's Wren, and American Kestrel.

Whether you are a veteran monitor wishing to add boxes, or you are interested in starting a new trail, we can accommodate your needs—120 hanging boxes are now available in the SCVAS office. Hanging boxes are recommended in order to deter predation, a serious prob-

lem experienced last year by several trail monitors. To obtain new boxes, please call Dave Cook or Carol Hankermeyer first, so that we can notify SCVAS. New volunteers should also request the bluebird monitoring manual published by CBRP.

An important aspect of volunteer field monitoring is to report final data on nestbox fledge numbers to either Carol Hankermeyer (north county) or Dave Cook (south county). **Request report forms from Carol Hankermeyer.** To become involved in the recovery program by establishing your own nestbox trail, building nestboxes, or putting up boxes in a suitable back yard habitat, please contact:

Carol Hankermeyer: (650) 948-9018,
<trinityL@pacbell.net>

North County Coordinator
or

Dave Cook: (408) 871-9552,
<justdave50@earthlink.net>
South County Coordinator

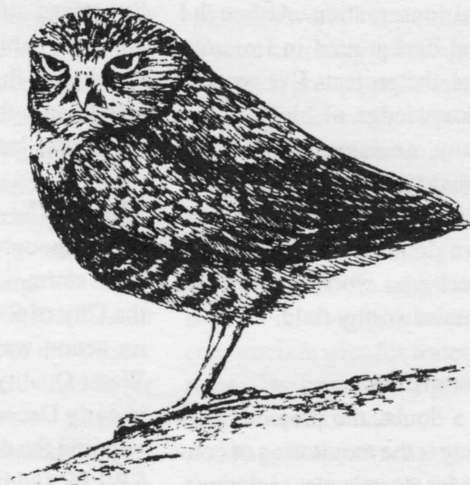
It's Burrowing Owl census time again

In the months of April and May, SCVAS will lead a volunteer effort to survey the remaining Burrowing Owls of Santa Clara County. We last did this about five years ago, and it's time to update our data. It may be a sad story we reveal, but it's important work nonetheless.

The task is fairly easy. Each volunteer gets a small grid of land to survey and, following protocols provided, covers that grid several times at dawn or dusk to note any owl activity. Information is then sent to the project coordinator and compiled.

Having lost a lot of local owl battles, our chapter has now turned to working on listing the species as endangered in California. The information provided by our local survey will feed in to that effort.

If you have a few hours to help local Burrowing Owls, please call the office at (408) 252-3747 and sign up. Thanks!

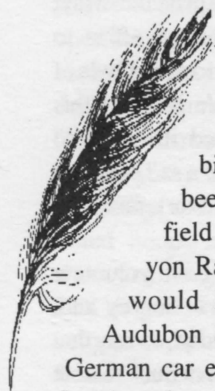


Burrowing Owl by John Mariani

The Long Arm of Audubon

New staffer gets tough with runoff violators

by Jennifer Peritz
Conservation Assistant



When I first began working for SCVAS, I knew very little about birds or the birding world. If it hadn't been for elementary school field trips to the Audubon Canyon Ranch near Point Reyes, I would have thought that the Audubon Society was a group of German car enthusiasts. Craig Breon first introduced me to the conservation work of SCVAS through his Environmental Activism course at Santa Clara University, and I quickly grew interested in the chapter's various campaigns and activities. Although I first thought Audubon might be too "conservative" an organization for my fresh-out-of-college, radical, tree-hugger tendencies, I soon learned that SCVAS plays a powerful role in the environmental politics of the South Bay.

What started as a summer internship evolved into six months of direct, hands-on learning in the multifaceted field of environmental conservation. Although I have a general background in Environmental Studies, the projects I've worked on required knowledge of biology, hydrology, botany, geology, politics, and law . . . and that was all in the first two months! Just the small dose of conservation work I've done gives me great respect for others who work in this challenging and praiseworthy field.

Job site adventures

Without a doubt, the project I find most interesting is the monitoring of construction sites for storm water violations. In addition to minimizing impacts from storm water runoff and spreading SCVAS' sphere of influence, this project has been quite a learning experience. Various other

adventures have included: riding shotgun for the Regional Water Quality Control Boards Field Inspector; listening to the angry shouts of construction workers; and zooming around in my car with one hand on the steering wheel and the other holding a camera. While these may not sound like glamorous projects or even useful ways to spend one's time, I've found the results of my work both instructive and rewarding.

As Craig explained in the February edition of *The Avocet*, construction sites are required to implement erosion and sediment control measures throughout the rainy season to protect our creeks and streams from pollutants. By adhering to a Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan, also known as a SWPPP, developers prevent dirt and other contaminants from entering waterways and stifling riparian ecosystems. Unfortunately, as my monitoring efforts have shown, construction sites often do not adequately comply with the terms of their SWPPPs, and our creeks and the wildlife depending on them pay the price.

The enforcement of these permits often gets tangled in a complicated political web. One such example is a development along Gold Street in Alviso. Runoff from the project site, a former landfill and Superfund site, drains into the adjacent wetland habitat, San Thomas Aquino Creek, and the Guadalupe River. Needless to say, this is quite a sensitive and precarious locale.

"Busted"—or not?

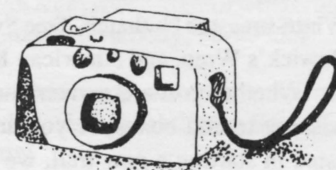
Although SCVAS reported the flagrant storm water violations of this site to the City of San Jose in early November, no action was taken until the Regional Water Quality Control Board intervened in early December. The Regional Board required the developers to fine-tune their SWPPP and implement the control measures therein. Since that time, rain began to fall, so I revisited the site only to find the control measures breaking. As a result, a river of mud poured off the site

directly into a storm drain stenciled "No Dumping." This scene evoked a bitter-sweet feeling—the success of catching a violation on film mixed with the frustration of my immediate inability to prevent the discharge.

With proof that this site was impacting City infrastructure, San Jose's Environmental Enforcement Inspectors responded to my concerns about the site. Upon their inspection in late January, the City issued an Administrative Citation, which is perhaps little more than a slap on the wrist to the developer. While the end result of my intervention at this particular site is still uncertain, I feel that overall SCVAS is making a mark.

Not all of the sites I've visited have been so troublesome. In fact, some developers responded quite well to our efforts and quickly implemented storm water pollution controls. Monitoring and reporting these violations raises environmental awareness among individuals both on project sites and at the city level. Since our monitoring efforts began, the Regional Board issued more than a half dozen Notices to Comply to individual sites and one Notice of Violation to the City of San Jose for failure to enforce the SWPPPs. The City, in addition to issuing the Administrative Citation, sponsored an erosion and sediment control workshop for its employees.

Working both with and against developers and the enforcement agencies has offered me a unique view of city and regional politics. Most importantly, this work demonstrates the need for environmental watchdogs. As this project progresses, I see SCVAS taking on an even stronger, more respected role in the protection of our creeks and streams.



"Various other adventures have included... zooming around in my car with one hand on the steering wheel and the other holding a camera."

State of the Chapter

continued from page 1

projects are planned, their backers make all sorts of promises in their environmental documents. This is supposed to assure the public that a project will inflict little harm on our local natural resources.

Not surprisingly, a lot of those promises go unkept. In the short time we spent looking at various developments, we have found:

- Creeks in the Evergreen area of San Jose that were supposed to be re stored, but weren't;
- A Burrowing Owl plan for Morgan Hill that is more than a year behind schedule;
- Burrowing Owl protection measures in Alviso that have never been implemented;
- Non-native, invasive plant species in Coyote Creek that were supposed to be removed, but never were.

What should we do? We may start by asking the cities responsible for these projects to "shape up." Unfortunately, it may take legal action to bring the issues to their attention. Eventually I'd like to develop a system for dealing with these broken promises, then publish a small manual for other non-profits wanting to enforce the promises made in their communities. I expect this project will develop strongly over the next year, and if it goes as I hope, we may have a lasting influence over a much larger area than our county.

Education

SCVAS should have a full-time environmental educator on staff. At present, Ulrike Keyssner, Bobbie Handen and the Education Committee are doing an excellent job, but they know how much more we could accomplish with a staff member dedicated to educational programs. I'm currently seeking funding needed to revitalize our Wetlands and Woodlands Discovery field trips, so we can take 900 elementary school children on wetlands field trips this spring. In addition, we want to develop the curricu-

lum for middle and high school field trips. Finally, we have a long list of lab and field equipment needed to add a more sophisticated science component to our outdoor activities. (If your company can help sponsor our education programs with funding or volunteers, please let us know.)

We are still exploring a partnership with the city of Gilroy to bring more environmental education to South County. Ace SCVAS volunteer Norman Watenpaugh first brought to our attention the fact that Gilroy has a portable classroom sitting in an ideal location along Uvas Creek, with nothing happening inside. With a little landscaping (natives, please), some funding for educational materials, and a bit of Audubon flare, we could bring a unique opportunity to an underserved region.

Restoration

The most important restoration priorities for Santa Clara County are certainly along our urban creeks. We are currently working on a grant proposal to map out and begin to remove several harmful, non-native plant species that invade local riparian areas. We hope to work with the Water District and several local creek groups to reach the economies of scale needed to make a real difference in creek health. We campaigned successfully with the Water District last fall to make sure they have the proper funding to continue their mission of flood management while adding a culture of stewardship and restoration to their work. Now we need to capitalize on that partnership.

And, of course, we are still dedicated to the ongoing restoration of the Ulistac Natural Area along the Guadalupe River in Santa Clara. Our first phase—six acres of oak woodlands and a butterfly garden—is nearly complete. Next we hope to plant willow and cottonwood cuttings—vital homes and rest stops for migrating songbirds.

The Round-Up

That's the real short list. The full list of good ideas we are either working on or have planned should not distract the chapter from the ongoing need for funds to maintain our current, quality-rich programs. I look forward to developing the resources and staff to help these programs flourish, and to grow in directions that our members and the Board call for.



Water District Community Grant

continued from page 5

advocacy groups around the county would be interested. Since SCVAS already helps coordinate the activities of these local groups, we were well situated to urge them to action. Jennifer Peritz sent out a call for letters, and a dozen local groups responded. With that enthusiastic support behind him, Craig Breon went to the District Board meeting to represent the chapter.

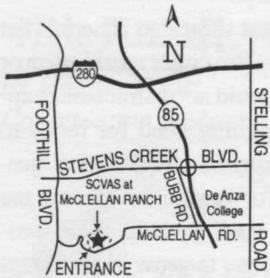
In front of the Board, Craig discussed not only our ongoing local creek and wetlands work, but ambitious new plans. We are currently working with other local creek groups to develop a project of mapping and eventual removal of invasive plant species from several important riparian areas in the County. This project could also include an excellent education opportunity for local high school or college students. In addition, we hope to expand our vigilant oversight of local construction sites for water quality violations. The community grant could allow us to do one or both.

We will monitor the grants fund as it develops. It should provide strategic funding for numerous local projects to improve stream health and wildlife habitat. Thanks to the Water District for doing the right thing!

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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

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.

2001 Volume 48, Number 3

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