



THE AVOCET

The Newsletter of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society

May 2001

Crucial Habitat Saved in Alviso

SCVAS Instrumental in Preserving 55 Acres

by Craig Breon
Executive Director

Alviso is always worth defending. For perhaps five years now, SCVAS has worked to preserve both the lands of Alviso—where San Jose meets the Bay—and to help the residents of this quiet community maintain their independent ways and unique character.

This time, the issue involved the US Dataports development on 170 acres near Coyote Creek—a 2.1 million square foot server farm (i.e. large computers to serve the Internet) and telecommunications offices, with their own small natural gas power plant and 84 back-up diesel generators (BIG polluters). A project worth \$1.2 billion, backed by the Mayor from the start, and considered key to San Jose's claim to the title "Capitol of Silicon Val-

ley." And then there's us—a small nonprofit trying to save land and quality of life.

Considering the odds, we did well . . . quite well. As a result of our work, nearly 25 acres near Coyote Creek will be permanently preserved (at \$1 million per acre, we saved land worth the equivalent of 125 years of our current annual budget). Those acres will be landscaped as Burrowing Owl habitat, representing one of the few times local land has been specifically reserved for our rare owls. However, as they say in late night infomercials—"That's not all!"

Landscape Plan Improved

We also won an important change on another 33 acres. Part of the buffer lands for the city's sewage treatment plant, these acres are to become the access drive for the Dataports project, including a road and extensive landscaping. As origi-

nally proposed, the landscaping was designed as pure golf course: turf grass, artificial ponds, and ornamental trees. We objected, noting that the Alviso Master Plan called for habitat-oriented landscaping mimicking historic Alviso: open grasslands and wetlands.

We won here as well. There will be some trees close to the buildings for screening, but most of the land will provide diverse wildlife habitat. So, to summarize thus far, we took a 170-acre project with no true open space and 30 acres of "golf course" habitat and changed it into approximately 55 acres of real, viable wildlife habitat.

But wait, there's more! US Dataports also agreed to a \$1 million fund over ten years to restore habitat and water quality in Coyote Creek. We asked Chuck Reed, the promising new Councilman representing the Alviso area, to direct the funds to the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory, a fellow nonprofit based in the Alviso area. In the final project conditions, SFBBO is named as a possible recipient

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General Membership Meeting Wednesday, May 16 "Bats—Conservation and Ecology" with Morgan Venable

Campbell Community Center, Rm. 80
1 West Campbell Ave. (corner of Winchester)
7:30 Hospitality 8:00 Program

Santa Cruz resident Morgan Venable is a bat rehabilitator and California Bat Conservation Fund member. She does an incredible job of integrating information about bats with their role in conservation and ecology, such as their importance in revegetating clear-cut rain forests. Her presentation includes radar images of bats in Texas moving toward insects streaming in from Mexico at high altitude, and a demonstration of a device that can pick up a bat's echo location squeaks and broadcast them to us in a range we can hear. She will bring to the presentation two or three live bats that can't be released due to injuries. Don't miss the chance to learn more about these amazing night fliers!

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Volunteer Ventures

by Ulrike Keyssner



Time to Go

If you read my column last month, you heard me go on and on about how much I love my job at Audubon. This was a bitter-sweet article for me to write because I am, in fact, leaving SCVAS in early June. I am returning home to Australia to live. I've been in California for 11 years but the time is right

for me to go back to my roots.

I made some wonderful friends and had many great experiences, and the last two years at Audubon have been a highlight, especially the people I've met and the myriad opportunities to work in the community. I hope to recreate some of what I've experienced at SCVAS back home in Brisbane, but it will be a hard act to follow. Few local environmental organizations, either here or back in Oz, cover the range of interests and issues SCVAS gets involved in.

I want to say how much I've enjoyed working with the SCVAS Board and especially the Education Committee: Allen, Bobbie, Elaine, Freddy, Greg, and Jim, thanks for making it a team effort. I found our brainstorming invigorating and worthwhile. You are all doing fantastic work and I encourage our membership to consider participating. Committee Chair Bobbie Handen is a driving force and her energy and devotion to teaching kids is contagious.

My first experience with Audubon was working on a 3-month Reptile and Amphibian Survey of Stevens Creek in 1995. My survey partner was Jayne DiCandio, who managed the SCVAS office at the time. Later, when Garth Harwood managed the office, I volunteered to put together a Bay Area Bird slide show and script for volunteers to take to classrooms. Naturally, when a job came up I gleefully jumped on it.

Board member Leda Beth Gray started working in the office the same week I did. As a beginning birder I benefited from her birding experience, which allowed me to quickly help others. More importantly, I benefited from her activism. Her knowledge of issues was/is impressive, and her ethics and passion, tempered by good judgment, made working with her invaluable. She is a true environmental hero, working tirelessly, making sacrifices for no other reward than personal satisfaction.

I have worked closely with so many fantastic volunteers, too numerous to mention but I'll list a few exceptional standouts: Anne Mortimer, Anne Creevy, Bonnie Bedford-White, Elaine Gould, Gus Constant, Janet Bertaina, Jerry Kamiski, Jerry Towner, Marie Gordon, Marti Oetzel, and Mary Fasching. I wish I could mention everyone but space does not allow. (Now I know how the winners feel at the Oscars!)

I must make a special mention of Jim Liskovec. Not only has he been an invaluable volunteer for our kids field trips, he also works on the Education Committee and numerous other SCVAS projects. Jim has been a wonderful colleague, incredibly supportive and also thought provoking. Thanks Jim, I hope to see you and Sue in Brisbane soon.

It's tough to leave the staff at SCVAS. We have a great group. Working with Craig Breon is always interesting and he will continue to do impressive things as SCVAS' first Executive Director. He has big plans and

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Nature Shop News

by Susan Bell

Make the Nature Shop part of your migration!

If the outdoors are calling you, stop by the shop before you start out on your adventure. Our Nature shop can prepare you for your travels. We have recently increased our inventory and have in stock nature related items for all age groups.

If you have been waiting for the larger sizes in the SCVAS denim shirt we now have a variety of sizes, show your support of your local chapter and purchase this 100% cotton denim shirt that is perfect for the cool mornings and breezy evenings. Easy to pack in a backpack or shove into a suitcase (picture available on our web site: www.scvas.org).

We have just received the new checklist of Arizona birds, and we also carry bird checklists for national and international areas.

Our book selection keeps increasing and if you are planning a trip chances are we carry the right field guide for that area; if not, we will certainly try to order it for you. If it's not in the Nature shop, try our extensive library which has many field guides and bird specific books. Books can be checked out for up to 3 weeks.

We have been developing our children's corner with educational, easy to read, beautifully illustrated books. Items also include T-shirts with wildlife themes, puppets and coloring books.

Feeders of all kinds fill our shelves—perfect for attracting and enjoying the wildlife which grace our back yards. The good weather will be bringing us out of doors, so be prepared, be kind, be careful and enjoy.

The Nature Shop is located at McClellan Ranch Park in Cupertino. Shop hours are 10 AM to 5 PM Monday—Friday; Saturdays 10 AM to 2 PM

Thank you, Floy Zittin

SCVAS wishes to thank local artist Floy Zittin for donating proceeds from her recent art show to the Chapter. Some of Floy's outstanding bird art is on display at McClellan Ranch—take some time to appreciate her work next time you stop in.

May 2001 Calendar

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

Wednesday May 2, 7:30 PM

Bay Area Bird Photographers will feature Uwe Steinmueller and his presentation on bird photography with digital SLR cameras. Lucy Evans Baylands Interpretive Center, E. Embarcadero Rd. Palo Alto.

**Saturday May 5, 8:30 AM

Mines Rd. and vicinity

Full day. Leader: Don Schmoltdt (916) 739-8821. Trip starts in Del Puerto Canyon, working west to San Antonio Valley and Livermore. From I-580 go east over Altamont Pass to I-5, south on I-5 to the Patterson exit, then go west on Del Puerto Canyon Rd. Meet at first pullout (look for Don's "BAJA OWL" license plate).

Highlights: possible Costa's Hummingbird, Phainopepla, Lewis's Woodpecker and Lawrence's Goldfinch.

**Sunday May 6, 8:30 AM

Carmel River

Half day plus. Leader: Bill Hill [Questions? (408) 253-7527]. We'll bird a new area south of Carmel River, some of the north bank, the Lagoon (at mouth of river) and beach. Time permitting we will "chase" rarities found during the previous weekend's Birdathon. Take Hwy 1 south to Rio Rd. in Carmel; turn left then immediately right into Crossroads Shopping Center. Meet in Cinema parking lot at back of mall near river. Bring a lunch and your enthusiasm.

Tuesday May 8, 9:30 AM

Eve Case Bird Discussion Group

will meet at the home of Pat and Jean Dubois, 17150 Buena Vista Ave., Los Gatos (408) 395-4264. Topic: Phainopepla.



**Wednesday May 9, 8:30 AM

Gilroy Hot Springs

Half day. Leader: Bob Reiling (408) 253-7527. Meet at intersection of Gilroy Hot Springs Rd. and Canada Rd. From Hwy 101 in Gilroy go left on Leavesley Rd., left on New Ave then right on Roop Rd. Once in foothills bear left at first fork in road and continue several miles to Canada Rd. Highlights: migrants, breeding birds. **LO**

**Saturday May 12, 8:00 AM

Charleston Slough

Half day. Leader: Phyllis Browning (650) 494-6360. Meet at Terminal Way at end of San Antonio Rd. north off Hwy 101 in Mt. View. Birding geared toward beginning birders.

**Sunday May 13, 7:30 AM

South coastal San Mateo Co.

Half day plus. Leader: Al Eisner (650) 364-3686, days; voice mail (650) 926-2018. Trip will begin with a stationary "sea watch" at Pigeon Point; OK to arrive up to 8:15 AM. Meet at large pullout on Pigeon Point Rd. immediately north of lighthouse approx. 28 mi. north of Santa Cruz, 22 mi. south of Half Moon Bay on Hwy 1. Highlights: variety of breeding (and singing) songbirds, resident marsh birds, migrating seabirds and shorebirds. Bring scopes. **LO**

**Saturday May 19, 8:00 AM

Hidden Villa, Birding by ear

Half day. Leader: Garth Harwood (650) 879-0724. Even though this is a "Birding By Ear" field trip be sure to bring binoculars and scopes. From I-280 in Los Altos take El Monte Rd. past Foothill College, turn left at Moody Rd. and after approx. 1.7 miles, left into Hidden Villa. Meet at first parking lot beside entrance. \$5 parking fee. **LO** (Birding field trip will end by noon; Garth will lead a separate butterflies-through-binoculars trip (birding on the side) from 2-4 PM. For this trip the folding "Local Butterflies" guide available at McClellan Ranch Park store is recommended. 20-25 species possible.

**Sunday May 20, 7:00 AM

Grant Ranch Twin Gates

Half day. Leader: Grant Hoyt (650) 969-7892. From Hwy 680 take Alum Rock Rd. east, turn right on Mt. Hamilton Rd. Continue past Grant Ranch CP entrance (approx. 9 miles) to Twin Gates parking area (another 2 miles or so). Emphasis on birding by ear. Ash-throated Flycatcher, House Wren, Lark Sparrow, Chipping Sparrow; possible Lazuli Bunting, Horned Lark, Grasshopper Sparrow. Moderately strenuous 3 mile hike. **LO**

**Wednesday May 23, 8:00 AM

Monte Bello OSP

Leaders: Rita Colwell (650) 949-1869 and Rosalie Lefkowitz (650) 494-6358. Meet at large Monte Bello OSP parking area on left side of Page Mill Rd. about 7 miles southwest of I-280. Last year we found an Indigo Bunting. Who knows what may be around this year? Possible cold, wet, foggy weather. Moderate, but hilly walking. **LO**

**Saturday May 26, 8:30 AM

Monte Bello OSP

Half day. Leader: TBD (Questions? Call (408) 253-7527). See directions under May 23 listing. Possible Lazuli Bunting, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Chipping and Black-chinned Sparrows. May be cold, wet and foggy. **LO**

"Meet the Breeding Birds" offered on May 27 and June 3, are full-day field seminars designed for beginning and intermediate birders and will introduce local breeding birds. Sign up for one session only. Meet at 7:30 AM at Park-and-Ride at Hwy 280 and Page Mill Rd. in Palo Alto. Group will carpool to a variety of local habitats ranging from Skyline to the Bay; exact itinerary to be chosen by leader depending on weather conditions and recent bird observations. Possible sites: Russian Ridge, Monte Bello, Stevens Creek, Arastradero and Charleston Slough. We will cover field identification and basic biology of birds,

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Open House and Bird Walk For New Members

By Debbie Thompson

The Membership Committee is once again hosting an open house for new members. This program will help all new members who have joined in the past year or so find out what SCVAS is all about. It will also be a good time to meet other new members while taking a leisurely birdwatching stroll or while enjoying bagels, coffee and other refreshments.

Our next open house is on **Saturday, May 19 at 9:30 AM** at our chapter headquarters in McClellan Ranch Park. First, we'll take a short bird walk around the park led by an experienced birder. The park is bordered by a stream and contains an old orchard, open grassy areas, a bluebird house trail and a community garden, so there is a good opportunity for numerous bird species.

After the walk, we will serve coffee, tea, juice and bagels in our meeting room. Members of the Board of Directors and different committees will be on hand to welcome you, to informally discuss different programs we offer, and also to hear your ideas. The SCVAS library (which is improving daily, I might add) and the Nature Shop will also be open for you to browse. Our Nature Shop is stocked with field guides and other nature-related books, including children's books. We

also stock bird feeders, bird seed, animal puppets, SCVAS logo clothing and gifts.

So grab your binoculars (or borrow ours!) and spend a few hours getting acquainted with SCVAS. We're excited about meeting our new members in person, so we hope you will be able to attend. Please call us if you have any questions.

In Memoriam—Gail Chancellor

Gail chancellor, a nurse and Audubon society member for some years, passed away December 24, 2000 after a long battle with cancer. Gail and her companion, Ron LeCount, particularly enjoyed the birding field trips with the Audubon group. Birding gave Gail the chance to pursue her love of wildlife, hiking, and the outdoors. She expressed her deep feelings for the importance of the Audubon Society's efforts by bequeathing a goodly sum of money to SCVAS. We are most grateful to Gail for her generous gift.

Gail said just a few weeks before she died that, if she could, she would return as a hummingbird. We will remember her fondly when we next admire a graceful and lovely hummingbird at our feeders.

Calendar *cont'd*

including taxonomy of common families, breeding biology, ecology, and conservation. Handouts and checklist will be supplied. A \$5.00 donation to be used for SCVAS education fund is suggested. Each trip is limited to 12 participants: you must sign up in advance. Bring lunch and several layers of clothing (wide range of temperatures possible). Trip ends about 3 PM.

****Sunday May 27, 7:30 AM**

"Meet the Breeding Birds"

Session 1

Leader: Steve Rutledge (650) 328-5097. See above description; call Steve to reserve space.

****Saturday June 2, 8:15 AM**

Skyline Ridge OSP

Half day. Leader: Bob Reiling (408) 253-7527. Meet at northwest corner of Skyline Blvd (Hwy 35) and Page Mill Rd. (Note: Do not park in Russian Ridge Parking Lot!) Moderately strenuous walking with some elevation change. Possible Chipping Sparrow, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Western Tanager. Bring extra layers of clothing; temperatures variable.

****Sunday June 3, 7:30 AM**

"Meet the Breeding Birds"

Session 2

Leader: Steve Rutledge (650) 328-5097. See above description; call Steve to reserve space.

****Wednesday June 20, 8:30 AM**

Russian Ridge OSP

Half day. Leader: Shirley Gordon (408) 996-9863. Note—this is the 3rd Wednesday. Meet at Preserve parking lot. At junction of Page Mill (becomes Alpine when it crosses Skyline) and Skyline Blvd. (Hwy 35), go southwest on Alpine Rd. for approx. 1 block to parking lot. Highlights: Grasshopper Sparrow, Lazuli Bunting. **LO**



SCVAS headquarters at McClellan Ranch Park in Cupertino

Ulrike Says Goodbye *continued from page 2*

you should hitch your wagon to his if you want to be on the pulse of important happenings in the Valley. Our office manager, Susan Bell is totally committed to running the Office and Nature Shop and is a great asset. However, watch out for her quick humor, she keeps you on your toes! Lastly, our newest employee, Jennifer Peritz, has been a fantastic addition working as Conservation Assistant. She is proving exceptionally adaptable, working in all areas of the office, a vital talent in a small non-profit.

I started as the Volunteer Coordinator working 20 hours a week. A while later, an extra ten hours were added so I could function as the Education Programs Coordinator. This was a big move for the organization. I loved the diversity of the jobs though there is a lot of interaction because education relies heavily on volunteer help. I am happy to say the person who takes over my job will be a full-time employee with the title of Program Coordinator.

I mentioned above the adaptability of Jennifer Peritz; she will prove this even more by filling my shoes as our new Program Coordinator. Not only is she incredibly capable and organized, she is also creative (a hard combination to find) and a really nice person to boot! I'm thrilled that she is taking over my position and I encourage all our volunteers and members to heartily welcome her as Program Coordinator. She will work closely with our volunteers (many of whom already know her), find new recruits, and coordinate existing education programs. I wish her all the best. You'll have a blast Jennifer! We will have a volunteer social event before I go and I will introduce Jennifer to all who can attend.

I know I have missed mentioning some very important people. Luckily, I have one more edition of *the Avocet* to write for so I will redeem myself then. Now, back to business. Volun-

teers—we need you! The need for education programs such as ours in Santa Clara Valley is increasing. Schools are desperate to participate but we need more people power to do it. If you don't want to work directly with the public you can work behind the scenes as a program support person. Please don't let concerns over your lack of education experience stop you from helping us, we will thoroughly train you. You can make a real difference!

We also need people to help out for a few hours each week in the office between Mondays to Fridays, 10 AM to 5 PM, for a variety of office tasks. I'll admit, some of these jobs are not very exciting but I have found that many volunteers prefer to do these types of jobs (photocopying, data entry, addressing envelopes, dusting, filling the bird feeders, etc.) as a relief from too much stress in other areas of their lives. If you want to help but don't want anything too stressful, we have jobs for you.

Craig Breon could really use the help of a volunteer, or several, who could assist him with several projects. Much of this help is organizational, filing and data entry, but you would need to keep on your toes, as some of the information may be sensitive. You would need to be able to work independently at the office.

Lastly, we are still in need of Saturday volunteers to open the Nature Shop. Our core Saturday volunteers, Colleen Cunningham, Marie Gordon, and Christine Wolfe have been absolutely fantastic and steadfast in their devotion to keeping us open. Obviously, when you do the math, there are only three of them; most months have four Saturdays and some have five, so they can't possibly keep us open every Saturday. We open from 10 AM to 2 PM, please volunteer if you can.

Call or e-mail Ulrike Keyssner, (408) 252-3747, Ulrike@scvas.org.

Summer Bird Classes

Beginning Birds

Birds of Central California

Instructor: John Mariani

Discover the adventure of birding and learn to identify birds by sight and sound in this special spring birding class offered to SCVAS members only. Local bird expert John Mariani, an experienced and enthusiastic instructor, will teach this class, sponsored by the SCVAS Education Committee. Cost is \$40 per participant, covering 4 classes and field trips, plus a \$3 fee for materials. Proceeds will benefit Audubon education programs.

Instructional classes will be held on Mondays starting May 14 (skipping Memorial Day) through June 11 from 7 - 9 PM at SCVAS offices at McClellan Ranch Park in Cupertino. Saturday field trips will range from local parks to Big Sur and explore a variety of habitats. Focus will be on breeding bird behavior.

Participants should bring binoculars, notebook, lunch and comfortable hiking shoes for the weekend outings. The course also include a nocturnal "owl prowling." Reserve space soon; there is a 20-person limit. Call the SCVAS office at (408) 252-3747 to sign up.

Birds of the Sierra Nevada

Instructor: John Mariani

Instructional class date to be announced. Yosemite National Park trip takes place Friday Aug. 24 through Sunday Aug. 26.

This course will focus on Sierran bird species, their identification and ecology. The single class meeting at McClellan Ranch will be followed by the weekend field trip to Yosemite. Target birds include Blue Grouse, Great Gray Owl, Black-backed Woodpecker, Pine Grosbeak, among others.

Participants are responsible for their own lodgings and transportation. Base camp will be at White Wolf Lodge. Accommodations in the park must be reserved early. To reserve space for this course, call John Mariani at (408) 997-2066 as soon as possible. This class is limited to 15 participants. Fee is \$75; \$3 materials fee payable to the instructor at first class.

Field Notes

by Bill Bousman

Loons through Snipe

A **Red-throated Loon** lingered at Calero Reservoir during March (v.ob). Two birds were seen there on 16 Mar (JMa) and 22 Mar (SW) and a remarkable three birds on 19 Mar (JAC). A beached bird was at the Los Gatos Creek percolation ponds on 10 Mar (RWR et al.). A **Common Loon** was found on Calero Reservoir on 1 Mar (JMa, MJM) and remained at least to 9 Mar (v.ob.). The immature **Snow Goose** wintering with the domestic flock at the Sunnyvale Water Pollution Control Plant (WPCP) ponds was seen again on 4 and 18 Mar (MJM) and 24 Mar (VT). The wintering Lake Cunningham bird was seen again on 24 Mar (CM et al.). The **Ross's Goose** that has wintered with the domestic geese at Lake Cunningham was also seen on 24 Mar (CM et al.). The Almaden Reservoir **Wood Duck** flock broke up in March. Twenty one were seen there on 11 Mar (MMR, AK), but by the end of the month only six were found there (AV). Few **Eurasian Wigeon** have been found since December so a male at the Sunnyvale Baylands Park on 9 Mar (AG) was of interest. A male **Surf Scoter** was inland on Calero Reservoir on 22 Mar (SW), where less common. Four female-plumaged **Hooded Mergansers** were regular during March in a channel near the Mountain View Forebay (v.ob.). One was observed to have a yellow eye on 10 Mar (VT), indicating an immature male. Two pairs along Los Gatos Creek were last seen on 8 Mar (LS, DRh). The pair in the outer Palo Alto FCB was last seen on 27 Mar (RC). A female-plumaged bird was seen at Calero Reservoir on 11 Mar (MMR, AK). Twelve **Common Mergansers** at Calero Reservoir on 1 Mar (MJM) and 11 on Almaden Lake on 11 Mar (MMR, AK) are, perhaps, the last of

our wintering birds. Elsewhere, they were seen in small numbers and may nest nearby. An **Osprey** carrying sticks near Lexington Reservoir in late March (SBT) is probably constructing a nest locally. If so, this would be the first certain nest record of this species in Santa Clara County. The female that wintered at Vasona Reservoir was last seen on 20 Mar (JD). An adult **Bald Eagle** was found at Calero Reservoir on 1 Mar (JMa, MJM) and was seen there at least through 11 Mar (v.ob.). Adult **Ferruginous Hawks** found along Coyote Creek at

Mar (RK) is believed to be a wintering bird as migrants normally are found in late April and early May. The female **American Redstart** found earlier in the winter in Milpitas was seen again on 1 Mar (JDa). **Grasshopper Sparrows** at Ed Levin on 16 Mar (RWR, FV) and 28 Mar (MMR) are believed to be early arrivals, although typically summer birds do not arrive until mid April. A **White-throated Sparrow** was found in northern San Jose, not far from Coyote Creek on 13 Mar (CKS). A female **Black-headed Grosbeak** at a feeder in Los Gatos on 30 Mar (LS) may have wintered nearby or was an early arrival. A **Nutmeg Mannikin** was seen carrying nest material along Alamos Creek above Mazzone Drive on 10 Mar (JMe). Nesting of this exotic species in this area is yet to be well documented.

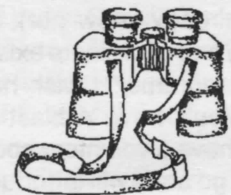
A female American Redstart was the last of winter's rarities and heralded the advent of spring

Riverside Drive on 1 Mar (TRy, DRo) and lower on the creek near the Highway 101 and 85 intersection on 5 Mar (TRy, RD) were the last of the season. A count of 50 **Common Snipe** in fields along Bloomfield Road on 1 Mar (MJM) is the high count for the winter and in an area where we've found large numbers in the past.

Hummingbirds through Grosbeaks

The first migrant **Rufous Hummingbird** was a male seen near Felter and Sierra roads on 7 Mar (RCo). Individual males were found at Ed Levin CP on 13 Mar (R&JL) and 28 Mar (MMR), as well as one at Almaden-Quicksilver CP on 25 Mar (AV). Two **American Dippers** were seen along Stevens Creek above Mt. Eden Road on 11 Mar (ChW), an area where they've occurred historically. A **Hermit Warbler** found in Alum Rock Park on 8

Observers: Richard Carlson (RC), Jack Cole (JAC), Rita Colwell (RCO), Robin Dakin (RD), Jim Danzenbaker (JDa), Jean Dubois (JD), Andy Gibb (AG), Alma Kali (AK), Roland Kenner (RK), Randy & Janet Little (R&JL), Mike Mammoser (MJM), John Mariani (JMa), John Meyer (JMe), Cheryl Millett (CM), Bob Reiling (RWR), Dori Rhodes (DRh), Don Rocha (DRo), Mike Rogers (MMR), Tom Ryan (TRy), Chris Salander (CKS), Linda Sullivan (LS), Scott Terrill (SBT), Vivek Tiwari (VT), Frank Vanslager (FV), Ann Verdi (AV), Scott Werner (SW), and Chris Wolfe (ChW).



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

Trip Reports

Oka Ponds

March 10

The Oka Ponds (Los Gatos Creek Park) field trip on March 10, 2001 was significantly enhanced by the presence of small numbers of several species which ultimately resulted in a count of at least 56 species. While a dozen plus birders gathered at the Oka Lane entrance to the park, listening to a singing Northern Mockingbird, a perched Green Heron (the first of many) and a female Hooded Merganser were spotted, putting everyone in the proper frame of mind. Nearby, a small flock of Lesser Scaup, with Ruddy Ducks and a single male Canvasback, provided an excellent opportunity to discuss scaup markings. Mallards, many of questionable origin, were in abundance. A gorgeous adult male Hooded Merganser then dropped in near us while we observed and discussed the breeding plumage of a Double-crested Cormorant that was drying its wings. Diving Bufflehead were expected but a pair of American Wigeon and four Ring-necked Ducks (one male) seen later were not.

Meanwhile, several Canada Geese acted unconcerned as we strolled nearby. Six to eight Common Snipe were then found in an unexpected area where we got excellent views as they fed along the edge of the water (three to four more, much harder to find, resting snipe were in their "usual" places in the creek). White-crowned Sparrows, American and Lesser Goldfinches and Song Sparrows were in and alongside the creek. A Sharp-shinned Hawk ultimately provided excellent, close in views, to confirm an earlier "guesstimate". A male Belted Kingfisher posed long enough for all to see and an adult male Gadwall (one of only three seen) was upstream of the bridge over the creek; a female Common Goldeneye was later seen further upstream.

There were lots of House Finches and Yellow-rumped Warblers, a few Dark-

eyed Juncos, House Sparrows, Chestnut-backed Chickadees, some Ruby-crowned Kinglets, a Golden-crowned Sparrow and an Oak Titmouse. A Nuttall's Woodpecker and a Northern Flicker preferred the larger sycamores while a Downy Woodpecker seemed to favor the willows in the creek. Red-winged Blackbirds were around and among the reeds lining the shores while Brewer's Blackbirds worked the bare banks near a settling pond on the eastern edge of the park (not far from a pair of Hooded Mergansers).

One of the more interesting sights of the day was of two "male" Ospreys closely associating over the largest (northern most) pond. Both birds had clean necks and upper chests. Other raptors included Red-tailed Hawk, Red-shouldered Hawk, a Cooper's Hawk and a distant pair of American Kestrels. Several first-year and one adult Thayer's Gull on the shore of one of the islands in the northernmost pond were a nice addition to the California and Herring Gulls seen bathing in the pond. The adult Thayer's Gull was desperately trying to relieve itself of something that it had eaten earlier.

Later, while we enjoyed close-in high power views of a perched Osprey a large, light gray bird was spotted on the lawn north of the main parking lot off of Dell Ave. Closer examination revealed that the bird was a fairly healthy looking, alert Red-throated Loon that had apparently beached itself intentionally. (We were subsequently informed that the bird had earlier chased someone who had gotten too close to it.) Realizing the plight of the bird, which is extremely awkward and vulnerable on land and seldom seem more than a few feet from the water, we discussed many possible courses of action, in the presence of the park ranger, following which it was decided to let nature take its course. The loon was a life bird for three to four people on the trip.

—Bob Reiling

Almaden/Quicksilver CP

Mar. 25

The SCVAS field trip to Almaden/Quicksilver CP on Sunday, March 25 took place under cloudy skies as about 14 of us made the trek up Mine Hill Trail to Capehorn Pass, then over to English Camp and back down again. Early in the morning as participants were arriving, Northern Rough-winged Swallows flew around the parking area and two Bullock's Orioles were seen in a bare tree near the ranger station. As the trip officially got underway, Western Bluebirds were seen on fence posts and in the first oak tree leading up the trails. As we hiked up into the oak woodlands, Orange-crowned Warblers could be heard on either side of the trail and we were able to get good looks at two or three of the elusive songsters. Among other birds seen and heard in the oaks and brush were Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Oak Titmouse, Hutton's Vireo, Bushtit, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Dark-eyed Junco, Nuttall's Woodpecker, Lesser Goldfinch, Bewick's Wren, Wrentit, Spotted Towhee, Yellow-rumped Warbler (both Aububon and Myrtle coming into breeding plumage), and Violet-green Swallows overhead.

Up in the chaparral at Capehorn Pass we found newly arrived Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, including good looks at a pair in a blue oak. A singing California Thrasher was perched out in the open in the brush and a brilliant male Rufous Hummingbird dove into the chaparral brush like a tiny glowing meteor. Unfortunately, only one person saw this little gem of a hummer although we searched the chaparral and blooming ceanothus bushes for him. A male Cooper's Hawk soared above and landed in a tree farther up the hill.

In the English Camp area we found Band-tailed Pigeon, American Robin, Golden-crowned Sparrow, and Hermit Thrush. Back in the parking area after the long hike we were rewarded with sightings of Wild Turkeys—one on the hill across

continued on page 8

Thrasher Survives Collision with Birder

by Bonnie Bedford-White

My daily commute brings me from Gilroy to Santa Clara every morning, and back again in the evenings. Birding while driving in traffic is a honed skill and I especially enjoy my Friday afternoons along county road G-8. It is a beautiful and relaxing way to start the weekend providing I travel swiftly enough so the SUV behind me doesn't get too anxious.

One afternoon a California Thrasher flew right in front of my car, and though I didn't hear that sickening "thunk" sound, my rear-view mirror confirmed that it was hit—sprawled in the middle of the on-coming traffic lane, feathers blowing in the wind. As I traveled down the road I remembered that SCVAS might like a California Thrasher for taxidermy purposes, so I turned around to claim the casualty, trying to turn my grief into a deed with at least some merit.

Still in the middle of the traffic lane, the thrasher's feathers were limp in the wind and I was thankful for the wide spot in the road allowing me plenty of room to pull over.

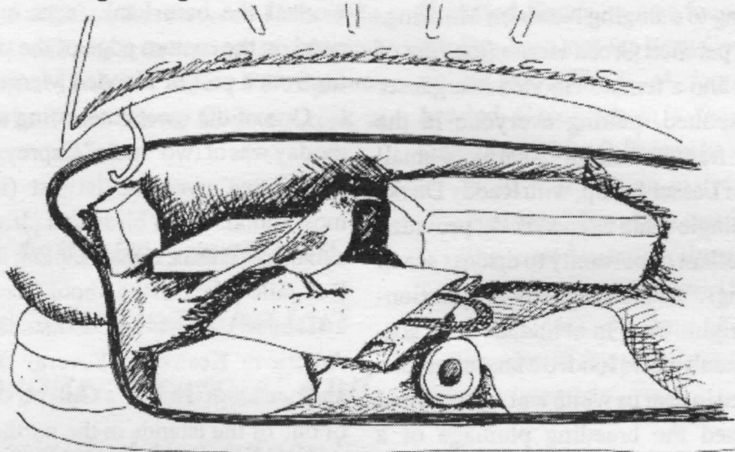
My car's trunk is a testimony to my Girl Scouting background—I had plenty of materials in which to wrap the little carcass. As I bent to scoop up the thrasher, it suddenly gave a loud screech and I realized I was holding a live, injured bird! One of my canvas grocery bags served as a makeshift towel while I called WERC (Wildlife Education Rehabilitation Center). The line was busy. I headed home with the thrasher in my trunk, thinking that surrounding it in darkness would have a calming effect. I called WERC again. The line was still busy. Once more. Busy.

By then I was home, so I got a more appropriate towel and opened my trunk. The thrasher was standing up, giving me an "unsettled bird" look. I tried to towel him, but he hopped out onto the cement floor. I closed the garage door and my husband and I had quite a chase; me

realizing that the thrasher seemed just fine except it wasn't flying very high, then remembering that this species seldom does. After finally catching the bird I made the decision to return it to its habitat on Day Road. When I released it, it flew off low to the ground.

But it *was* flying, leaving me to wonder if I did the right thing. If it recovered

from the center of the road, stood up and hopped off, what were its chances of being hit by another car? Maybe it really was more seriously injured and I should have kept it and taken it to WERC. Since then, I've wondered about doing "the right thing"—it remains one of those things I'll never know.



"The items in my trunk have me prepared for nearly anything, but I was not expecting my California Thrasher to be standing up and glaring at me!" —BB-W



Trip Reports continued from page 7

from the park and three in former reduction works area near the parking lot. Also a pair of Common Ravens was seen soaring overhead—a rare sighting for this area.

Afterwards three of us opted to check Almaden Reservoir and the Alamitos/Twin Creeks area. Wood Ducks were seen in a secluded seasonal woodland pond near the dam (where the White-throated Sparrow had been seen previously). Farther along Alamitos Rd. near the O'Day property we added Great Blue Heron, Belted Kingfisher, Hairy Woodpecker, White-breasted Nuthatch and Cedar Waxwing to the day list.

A good field trip with over 50 species tallied. Everyone on the trip completed the full Mine Hill/Capehorn Pass/English Camp loop—you were all troopers!

—Ann Verdi

Alum Rock Park April 1

A group of 23 birders participated in a long and pleasant walk through Alum Rock Park on April 1. Cloud cover kept things cool during the uphill walking, but the sun came out a bit later. We saw about 50 species, but missed the more unusual specialties this year, and even a few of the regulars (Golden Eagle, Northern Pygmy-Owl, Allen's Hummingbird).

But we did find three Rufous-Crowned Sparrows (including one bird singing up close for all of us), a posing California Thrasher, several Brown Creepers, and a male American Kestrel that appeared to be repeatedly catching mice, taking them alive to a perch, and then dropping them. One Wild Turkey was heard calling. The only spring migrants were Northern

continued next page

Dramatic Warbler Fallout Follows Storm

by Mike Mammoser

They travelled through the night, using the darkness as an ally. Within it, they could make time toward their destination, while avoiding their enemies. They trickled along at first, but eventually began to gather in larger and larger groups, moving always in the same direction, always toward their common goal.

Initially, their progress was good. But soon a storm began to rage, lashing and stinging them with wind-driven rain. They could not go on. They had to find shelter from the onslaught; to wait for another night, and for their friend the darkness, to continue the journey.

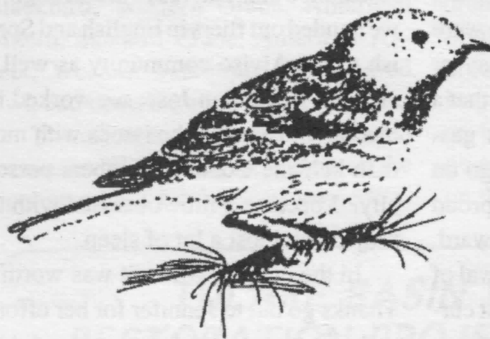
* * * * *

I woke early on this Saturday morning in late April. I was scheduled, as a volunteer, to join a couple friends and do a bird census along an urban riparian corridor. It had rained the night before and I was expecting lousy conditions, knowing the amount of mud through which we would have to trek. Still, I pulled myself from the warmth and comfort of my bed and headed out.

After crossing the weedy field that adjoins the creek, serenaded all the way by the songs of Common Yellowthroats, we entered the riparian forest. The overcast sky created a color-saturated scene, lacking the dark shadows and harsh glares of the bright sun. The greenness of the vegetation enveloped us. And in that greenness was movement—lots of movement. The trees were alive with birds.

In front of us an Orange-crowned Warbler was bathing. Not in a puddle on the ground, but in the wetness of an elderberry bush. It flapped its wings and shook its body, spraying water droplets in all directions as it flitted from one leafy bathtub to another. These birds had already set up housekeeping in the local area almost two months ago; this one was probably heading further north.

Wilson's Warblers prowled the undergrowth, flashing their shiny black caps. Their desire for dense low-lying vegetation would seem to be perfectly fulfilled by this habitat, at least to my undiscerning eye. Unfortunately, the birds had a different view of it and would eventually move on. Meanwhile, their more uniformly-colored cousins, the Yellow War-



Hermit Warbler
by Bonnie Bedford-White

Trip Reports *cont'd*

Rough-Winged Swallows, House Wrens (at least 7 birds singing), Bullock's Orioles (at least 6), and a couple of uncooperative Western Kingbirds uphill from the top of the Todd Quick trail. Lingered winter birds included several sparrow species (one birder saw a Lincoln's), several Hermit Thrushes, a singing Townsend's Warbler, and a few Ruby-crowned Kinglets and Yellow-Rumped Warblers. Raptors included both accipiters and a White-Tailed Kite, along with numerous Red-Tails. We were told at the Youth Science Institute that the captive Swainson's Hawk had died a few months ago at the age of nearly 30; an injured Red-Tailed Hawk was out for air.

Thanks to all participants for their contributions to the trip.

—Al Eisner

blers, called from the canopy. This riparian-loving bird just might stay around to breed here.

Two species that had been around for the entire season were now looking for the exit door. The dapper black and yellow Townsend's Warbler, one of our more colorful birds, would move further up along the west coast to breed before returning again for the off-season. The Yellow-rumped Warbler had worn a rather drab plumage for most of the winter, but was now brightened considerably under a surge of hormones. Though there is some localized breeding in the surrounding mountains, these individuals would generally vacate the area in the coming days.

The unexpected always adds spice to an outing and this trip was no exception. It started with three Nashville Warblers, those gray and yellow sprites that seem to carry a perpetual wide-eyed look of wonder. This was followed by a nice male Hermit Warbler, its golden head shining like a miniature sun. Finally, two MacGillivray's Warblers slunk through the tangles and roots, alternately showing themselves and then disappearing, as if playing hide-and-seek with us.

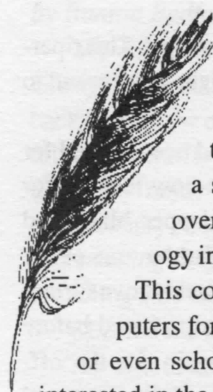
We managed to see nine species of warblers on this day, of the eleven species that can typically be expected for this part of the west coast. It may not be the stuff of legend, as are eastern or Texas coast fallouts, but it was about as good as it gets in Santa Clara County.

* * * * *

Rain is the life blood of the terrestrial flora and fauna of this planet. The water it brings provides a bounty that nourishes the earth. Sometimes, the bounty borne by the rain simply nourishes the soul.

Alviso Habitat Saved

continued from page 1



of the funds. No guarantees yet, but it seems likely. In addition, Dataports agreed to a similar \$1 million fund over ten years for technology in the Alviso community.

This could translate into computers for the school and library, or even scholarships for local kids interested in the field of high-tech.

On the energy and air pollution issues, the jury is still out. The diesels were approved, with conditions that may or may not help in the end. It appears that a larger, 200-250 megawatt natural gas-fired power plant may eventually go on the site. All in all, we should be proud that our efforts reaped so much reward. As is almost always the case, approval of the US Dataports project means that currently beautiful open lands will be paved. However, back in 1998 we fought hard during the Alviso Master Plan approval for a goal of one-third open space on the large sites in the area. In this case, we got pretty close to one-third, starting with next to nothing.

Behind the Scenes

The tactics and long hours it took to achieve what we did are a story of their own, with not enough room here to tell. We started with our own Conservation Assistant Jennifer Peritz and I commenting on the Environmental Impact Report (EIR), and my meeting with representatives of the company. They seemed nice and interested in addressing our concerns, but in reality they changed nothing about the project before taking it to the San Jose Planning Commission.

That angered me (developers so often talk about "win-win scenarios" and so rarely mean it), so our approach got decidedly more aggressive. We began writing comment letters to the Commission and the Council. Eventually, we would

write seven such letters, ranging from the history of protective measures for Burrowing Owls in the region to an appeal of the Planning Commission's decision to certify the EIR. Jennifer and I also appeared at the Commission hearing, and after a four-hour hearing the Commission recommended the "Open Space Alternative" for the project, as well as several other conditions to address impacts to air quality, noise, and aesthetics. We researched alternatives to diesel engines; we handed out fliers in English and Spanish to the Alviso community as well as areas of North San Jose; we worked the media. I discussed the issues with more than half the Council members personally. I became a little obsessed with the project, and lost a lot of sleep.

In the end, however, it was worth it. Thanks go out to Jennifer for her efforts, and even those of her sister, who did the Spanish for our fliers. Thanks also to Councilman Chuck Reed, who could have ignored our concerns but instead took them seriously (and in fact shared many of them), and negotiated compromises on several issues. It appears Mr. Reed will be a hard worker for the Alviso area, and he deserves encouragement.

Down the Road

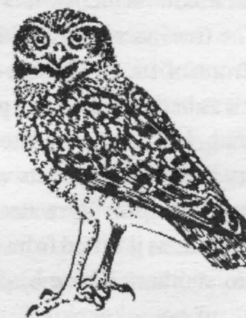
We still have to be concerned about a larger power plant in the Alviso area. The San Jose Council unanimously rejected the Metcalf Energy Center in South San Jose just a few months ago. Now, they seem poised to place a large plant in Alviso, raising issues of environmental justice. I should note a few inconsistencies that strike me as hypocritical. Cisco Systems, after being a staunch opponent of a power plant on the Metcalf site near its proposed Coyote Valley campus, said next to nothing publicly about the Dataports project, despite the fact that the project EIR clearly identified Cisco's child care facility in North San Jose as the

nearest sensitive receptor for air pollutants from Dataport's dirty diesel engines. Another hypocrisy award may have to go to the Santa Teresa Neighborhood Association. They also opposed the Metcalf facility vehemently, largely on air pollution grounds. A leader of their group pledged to help assure that no power plant would be built in the Alviso area either. But she was a no-show on Dataports. Maybe if a larger plant is proposed for Alviso, they will fulfill their commitment.

Back to Up-beat

Last month I may have been unduly harsh in my criticism of the San Jose Council. While the current Council is by no means "green," it may be the most environmentally progressive Council I've seen in San Jose in my seven years working for Audubon. Council members Linda Lezotte, Chuck Reed, Ken Yeager, Forest Williams, and Cindy Chavez have demonstrated sensitivity in weighing issues before them and seem inclined to make balanced decisions. Other council members also show some promise in their approach toward environmental issues.

Still, it remains our role to bring critical conservation and land-use issues to the fore. On the Dataports project we did just that as we promoted our agenda reasonably but strongly. And that's one way land gets saved.



Nearly 25 acres near Coyote Creek will be permanently preserved for these rare owls.

Audubon Receives Million Dollar Grant For Wetlands Protection, Restoration

Tulare Basin to Benefit from Federal N. American Wetlands Conservation Act Grant

Sacramento, CA, Monday, April 2—The National Audubon Society has received a million-dollar North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) grant, allowing the conservation group to launch a program to restore and enhance wetlands and uplands in the historic Tulare Basin of the southern Central Valley of California.

The NAWCA grant, the first to apply to the southern San Joaquin, will support the acquisition and restoration of wetlands on 2,762 acres and the enhancement of more than 22,400 acres. Ducks Unlimited, Inc. (DU) will partner with Audubon to deliver the projects.

"Historic Goose Lake, along with Tulare, Kern, and Buena Vista Lakes, once provided homes for millions of waterfowl and shorebirds. Today, these areas are dry in all but the wettest of winters," said Audubon California State Director Dan Taylor in announcing the grant. "This project allows a desperately needed restoration of what was once among the nation's most significant wetland habitats. We look forward to working with Ducks Unlimited to help this area recover its natural resource value."

"The work will focus upon improving water delivery systems to restored and existing wetlands, enhancing levee systems, and restoring wetland basins. Nesting cover adjacent to the wetland projects also will be enhanced," said Ducks Unlimited Project Leader Dan Connelly.

Less than 1 percent of the Tulare Basin's historic 520,000 acres of wetlands and seasonal wetlands have survived agriculture and development. The grant is expected to have major long-term environmental benefits to waterfowl, shorebirds and mammals. A total of 214 bird species have been counted in the region's remaining wetlands.

Partners contributing to the habitat rescue effort include the Natural Resource Conservation Service, U.S. Fish and Wild-

life Service, private landowners, the Semi-tropic Water District, and DU. Partner funds and matching funds total over \$11 million of the \$12.7 million proposal.

Wildlife benefiting from the project includes numerous duck species, such as Northern Pintail, Mallard, Lesser Scaup, Greater Scaup, Redhead, Canvasback, Ring-necked Duck and American Wigeon. The Mountain Plover, Long-billed Curlew, Nuttall's Woodpecker, Black-headed Grosbeak, Tricolored Blackbird, Western Grebe, American Bittern, Sandhill Crane, American Avocet, Western Sandpiper, Short-eared Owl, and dozens more will also benefit.

The effort to create permanent and seasonal wetlands hinges, in part, on the pipeline project by the Semi-tropic Wa-

ter District. The pipeline will play a major role in supplying water, particularly during drought periods.

Land acquisitions will be made through the Natural Resource Conservation Service's Wetland Reserve Program. The 2,762 acres will be converted into 1,657 acres of seasonal wetlands and 1,105 acres of associated uplands.

Founded in 1905, Audubon connects people with nature through education and experience on the land. We help children, families, and adults from all walks of life develop an understanding and appreciation of birds and other wildlife. We inspire them and give them the tools to act on behalf of the environment—in their own homes and communities, as well as on the national level and beyond.

TULARE BASIN WETLANDS RESTORATION PROJECT FACT SHEET

The North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) grant-funded program to restore and enhance wetlands in Tulare Basin will fund the following habitat improvements:

◆ Willow Creek Ranch/Badger

Almond Restoration—The major portion of the western edge of historic Goose Lake. A total of 2,762 acres will be restored to wetlands and uplands. Work will include contouring the laser-leveled agricultural fields, constructing levees and installing water controls.

◆ **Kern National Wildlife Refuge Water Control**—More than 4,600 acres of the Refuge will be enhanced through construction of levees and installation of water control structures.

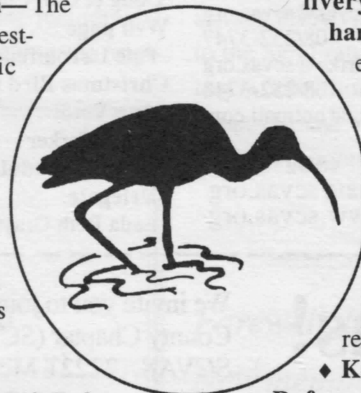
◆ **South Pintail Pipeline**—An area of private wetland parcels will benefit from the construction of lateral irrigation pipelines from the South Pintail Pipeline.

This area has depended upon deep water wells, limiting the ability to maintain or expand wetlands. The establishment of a reliable and less costly water source will benefit 2,236 acres.

◆ Goose Lake/Perimeter Water Delivery Ditch, Habitat Enhancement

Two peripheral water supply ditches will be constructed to supply water to existing wetland acres and create a water resource for future wetland development. The area involves about 2,900 acres, 1,450 of which are currently managed as wetlands.

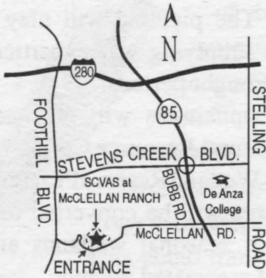
◆ **Kern National Wildlife Refuge Wetland Enhancement**—A 6,000-foot long levee will be constructed to divide a wetland management unit so water management may be improved. The levee will enhance refuge manager's ability to control vegetation and allow water levels for White-faced Ibis and Tricolored Blackbird nesting during summer months.



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RARE BIRD ALERT: (415) 681-7422

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

2001 Volume 48, Number 5

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