



# THE AVOCET

The Newsletter of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society

October 2001

## Wetlands & Woodlands Program Thriving

by Jennifer Peritz  
and Craig Breon

All Audubon members share a sense of wonder toward the natural world on some level. Yet that sense comes to us in different ways at different times in our lives. Stop for a moment and try to think of the first time you truly marvelled at nature. What first piqued your curiosity? How and when did you start your fascination with birds, or flowing water, or granite?

Through our education programs, SCVAS ignites and reinforces this sense of appreciation and wonder in both children and adults. Two years ago the SCVAS Board chose a simple yet strong direction for our chapter—more conservation and more education. As a result, we have increased the number of Audubon volunteers in our varied education ef-

forts, and now have the staff resources to train and direct those volunteers and create new programs.

SCVAS' Wetlands and Woodlands Discovery Program is greatly benefiting from the ambitious goals set by our Board and supported by so many of our members. For those of you who are unfamiliar with our Wetlands Program, it is an opportunity for 3rd-5th grade students to explore the South Bay shoreline with trained volunteer trip leaders. The program also includes an in-class component that introduces students to the wetlands prior to their field trip. By first playing a food chain card game in class, a young student then focuses more effectively on a real avocet making a living in Charleston Slough.

Our goal is to teach the value of (and threats to) wetlands in the South Bay and to invoke in the students a sense of stewardship—what they can do to keep the Bay thriving, and what rich rewards they get in return. The SCVAS Education Committee developed the program, curriculum, and supporting materials in 1988. Since then, thousands of children have explored wetlands in Santa Clara County, many for the first time.

We offer the Wetlands Program to schools free of charge and often we provide bus transportation. This allows us to reach out to under-funded schools, giving them an opportunity for a field trip that would be beyond their budgets. We particularly try to reach schools in areas of the county where kids might not have many chances to enjoy a natural setting.

This year we have an unparalleled outreach goal for our Wetlands Program. With increased SCVAS staffing, we can now expect to consistently offer both

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### “Geological Forces that Formed S.F. Bay” with Ken Lajoie

Wednesday, October 17

Campbell Community Center, Rm. 80

1 West Campbell Ave. (corner of Winchester)

7:30 Hospitality, 8:00 Program

Ken La Joie recently retired from the US Geological Survey where he began in 1970 actively working on all aspects of California geology. He is an enthusiastic birder as well as a recognized expert on Bay geology. Join us tonight for a different look at our region's most prominent geographical feature.

Just 15,000 years ago during the last Ice Age, sea level was about 350 feet lower than it is today. As a consequence, there was no San Francisco Bay—the shoreline was out beyond the Farallone Islands, about 25 miles west of San Francisco. Elephants, ground sloths, and camels roamed the broad inland valleys now partially flooded by the ocean to form the Bay. Local forests were

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*Open house-----Page 4*

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*Wildlife Ed. Day-----Page 7*

*Tobacco road-----Page 8*

*Councilman Reed*

*comes through-----Page 11*

# October Field Trips

Please carpool if possible; bring binoculars, field guides, layered clothing.

**LO = Lunch optional**

**RC = Heavy rain cancels**

## **\*\*Saturday Oct. 6, 9:00 AM**

### **Hawk Hill/Marin Headlands**

Full day. Leader: Don Schmoltdt (916) 739-8821. Meet at tunnel entrance near parking area on Hawk Hill. After crossing Golden Gate Bridge take exit just past Vista Pt., cross under Hwy 101 and turn right just before entrance back onto Hwy 101 south and bridge. Drive up hill to highest point and park. Weather conditions can be highly variable—dress in layers, bring lunch and liquids. Second of two outings to view migrating raptors from west coast's premier hawk lookout. Heavy fog may change itinerary.

## **\*\*Sunday Oct. 7, 8:30 AM**

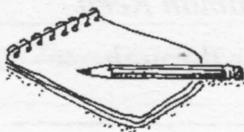
### **Alum Rock Park**

Half day. Leader: Dave Cook (408) 871-9552. From Hwy 101 or I-680 take McKee Rd. northeast toward hills then left on Toyon Ave. and right on Penitencia Creek Rd. and continue on into park. Meet in "Rustic Lands" parking area, on right just before reaching "T" intersection. Moderately strenuous 3 to 4 mile walk. Possible entrance fee; **LO, RC**

## **\*\*Saturday Oct. 13, 8:30 AM**

### **Carmel River & vicinity**

Half day. Leader: Bill Hill [Call Bob Reiling, (408) 253-7527]. 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. We'll bird the riparian corridor for land birds and check the lagoon for shorebirds, possible migrants, vagrants and rarities.



## **\*\*Sunday Oct. 14, 9:00 AM**

### **Charleston Slough**

Half day. Leader: Dick Stovel (659) 856-6105. Meet at Terminal Way at end of San Antonio Rd. north off Hwy 101 in Mountain View. Birding will be geared toward the beginning birder but all are encouraged to attend. Don't forget to bring your spotting scope.

## **\*\*Saturday Oct. 20, 7:30 AM**

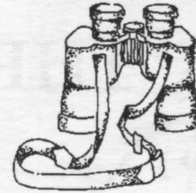
### **Local hot spots**

Half day. Leader: Bob Reiling (408) 253-7527. Meet at Alviso Marina. From Hwy 237 in San Jose take Gold St. north to end of street, bear left on Elizabeth St. and then right on Hope St. to Marina parking lot. A chance to visit some of the local bayside birding spots you hear about and, we hope, to see some good birds.

## **\*\* Sunday Oct. 21, 8:30 AM**

### **Whale Watching on Monterey Bay**

Half day plus. Leader: John Mariani (408) 997-2066. Join other SCVAS members for a whale watching and birding cruise on Monterey Bay. Possibilities include Humpback and Blue Whales, porpoises, Black-footed Albatross, shearwaters, Northern Fulmar, storm-petrels, phalaropes, jaegers, Sabine's Gull, and alcids. Space is limited; make reservations as soon as possible. Cost is \$39 per person. Meet at Sam's Fishing, on Fisherman's Wharf in Monterey, at 8:30 AM. Boat departs at 9:00 AM, and returns 4-6 hours later. Bring layers of warm clothes, hat & sunscreen, drinks & snacks, and change for parking meter. Ocean conditions vary; seasickness medication is highly recommended. For information & reservations call Monterey Bay Whale Watch at (831) 375-4658 (with credit card number ready to hold your spot). Identify yourself as a SCVAS member, and ask for space on the Oct. 21 trip. Reserve online at <[www.montereybaywhalewatch.com](http://www.montereybaywhalewatch.com)>.



## **\*\*Wednesday, Oct. 24, 8:30 AM**

### **Lower Windy Hill OSP**

Half day. Leader: John Arnold (650) 948-4250. Meet at parking lot at Sausal Pond edge of the Preserve. From I-280, exit Alpine Rd. in Portola Valley. Go south (toward hills) on Alpine Rd. about 2.9 miles to Portola Rd. (first stop sign). Turn right on Portola Rd. and go 0.8 mile to parking lot on left side of road just past The Sequoias. **LO, RC**

## **\*\*Saturday Oct. 27, 8:30 AM**

### **Arastradero OSP**

Half day. Leader: Frank Vanslager (408) 257-3647. From I-280 in Palo Alto take Page Mill Rd. west, turn right on Arastradero Rd. and meet in parking lot about 1/2 mile on right. Moderate walking. **RC**

## **\*\*Sunday Oct. 28, 9:00 AM**

### **Western San Francisco**

Half day. Leader: Alan Hopkins (415) 664-0983. **Note change in Daylight Savings Time: "Fall back" or be an hour early for this trip.** From I-280 take 19th Ave to Golden Gate Park. When entering park on 19th Ave be in left lane; take Crossover Dr. to 25th Ave to Geary Blvd. then left on Geary. Meet in parking lot at Mirrie Way above Sutro Baths and the Cliff House. **RC**

## **\*\*Saturday, Nov. 3, 8:30 AM**

### **Uvas Creek Park Preserve**

Half day. Leader: Bob Reiling (408) 253-7527. From Hwy 101 in Gilroy go west on Tenth Street (Hwy 152 East exit) about a mile where it turns into Uvas Park Drive. Turn left at Miller Ave (the first four-way stop), drive over Uvas Creek and turn left into Christmas Hill Park. Park in first aisle to right. A fairly easy but long walk. **LO, RC**

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# Calendar

**Tuesday Oct. 2, 7:30 PM**  
**SCVAS Board meeting**, McClellan Ranch Park, Cupertino.

**Wednesday Oct. 3, 7:30 PM**  
**Bay Area Bird Photographers** features Jeffrey Rich, wildlife photographer from Shasta, CA. His presentation highlights birds of the Pacific Ocean from Midway Island to Nome, Alaska and points beyond. Lucy Evans Interpretive Center, E. Embarcadero Rd., Palo Alto.

**Tuesday Oct. 9, 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: Gadwall.

**Wednesday Oct. 17, 7:30 PM**  
**Our General Membership meeting** is in Campbell this month (see announcement on Page 1) at the Community Center, corner of Campbell and Winchester. A map is provided at right.

## Saturday Oct. 20, 6 PM Burrowing Owl Event Update

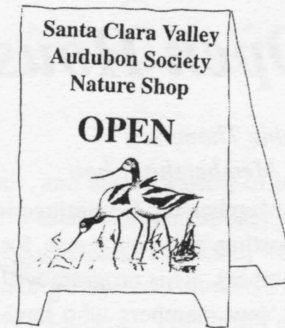
Plans for the Burrowing Owl event are proceeding well after the change of date (for full details see last month's *Avocet*). It's not too late to buy a ticket for this gala fundraiser benefitting SCVAS and Coyote Point Museum of San Mateo.

Here's another reason to attend—Doug and Gail Cheeseman have donated a two-week trip to Kenya for the live auction on the night of the event! Doug and Gail are long-time loyal SCVAS supporters, and they also run fantastic eco-tours through Cheesemans' Wildlife Safaris (check their website at [www.cheesemans.com](http://www.cheesemans.com)). Thanks, Doug and Gail!

## Nature Shop News

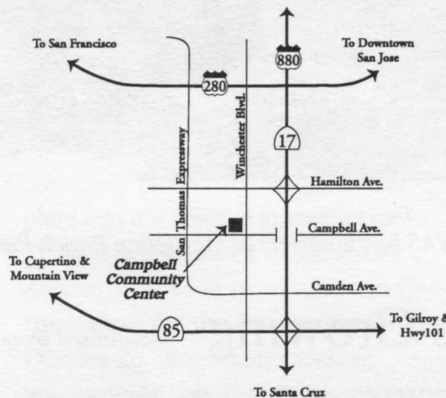
by Susan Bell

If you've had the opportunity to stop by our headquarters and browse our Nature Shop you're aware that one of the items we carry is Wild Bryde Jewelry. The staff and volunteers have always chosen a wide variety of nature-related themes as we select the jewelry for the shop. This jewelry is very detailed in design and can be worn for an evening event or a day trip to your favorite birding area.



As I was ordering for the Nature Shop, keeping the Burrowing Owl fundraiser in mind, I came across a pin depicting the Burrowing Owl in silver or gold. This pin will look great on a lapel, and is a good way to show support for the species.

If you find yourself out our way, look for our sandwich board sign, stop in and look around. All proceeds from Nature Shop sales benefit our education and conservation programs.



## Geology of S.F. Bay

cont'd from Page 1

dominated by incense cedar and cypress; redwoods and oaks, presently the most common trees in the central California Coast Ranges, were extremely rare. Freshwater marshes were common along the sluggish rivers draining the inland valleys. The lack of trees intolerant of summer drought suggests that the Ice Age climate was Mediterranean, somewhat similar to today's climate, with slightly cooler and wetter winters.

As the world climate warmed at the end of the Ice Age, the sea level rose and the ocean flooded through the Golden Gate about ten thousand years ago, giving birth to the Bay. As the sea level continued to rise, the Bay expanded and reached its present size only within the last two thousand years.

The two primary forces that formed the Bay are vertical crustal movements and climate change. A slight tectonic depression in the Coast Ranges allows the ocean to flood during interglacial sea-level highstands about every 100,000 years. Erosion and sedimentation are secondary forces that shaped the Bay, but over the past 100 years human activities have overwhelmed these natural processes and threatened the Bay's very existence.

## Field Trips *continued*

**\*\*Sunday, Nov. 4, 8:30 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 the Model Airplane Park where power towers cross road. Follow road for 1/2 mile and park in gravel lot at bend in road. Good variety of freshwater marsh and riparian species. **RC**

**Wednesday Nov. 14, 8:30 AM**  
**Calero Reservoir, McKean Rd.**

Half day. Leader: Alan Thomas (408) 265-9286. Meet at Ranger Station about 1 mile south of boat dock. Waterbirds and raptors. **LO, RC**

**\*\*PLAN AHEAD\*\***

Sat. 11/10 Grant Ranch Co. Park

Sat. 11/17 Elkhorn Slough

Fri.-Sat. 11/23 - 11/24 Sacramento Wildlife Refuges

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# Open House & Bird Walk for New Members

By *Debbie Thompson*  
SCVAS Membership Chair

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.

Our next open house is on **Saturday, October 13 at 9:30 AM** at our chapter headquarters in McClellan Ranch Park. First, we will go on 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 many different spe-



*SCVAS headquarters at McClellan Ranch Park*

cies. After the walk, we will serve coffee, tea and bagels in our meeting room. Some Members of the Board of Directors and different committees will be on hand for you to discuss our different programs, and also to hear your ideas. The SCVAS library (which is improving daily, I might add) and the Nature Shop (we are adding new items all the time) will also be open for you to peruse.

So grab your binoculars (or borrow ours!) and spend a few hours getting acquainted with SCVAS. We are very excited about meeting our new members in person, so we hope you will be able to attend.

## Education Programs Growing *continued from Page 1*

spring and fall programs. We hope to reach five schools and approximately 320 students this fall, and another six schools or nearly 400 students next spring. Never before have we offered so many trips to so many schools.

The increased number of school visits and field trips we can offer is made possible by a corresponding increase in volunteers. Programs Coordinator Jennifer Peritz has been able to organize training sessions, help produce a new training video, and compile a docent manual. Recruiting and training new volunteers is essential to the life and growth of this program. Please contact Jennifer if you think you would enjoy sharing your appreciation of nature with others.

### Going' South

Following another direction from the SCVAS Board, our education programs are looking for ways to outreach to Southern Santa Clara County. This year, for the first time, SCVAS spent Earth Day in Gilroy—leading bird walks, building bluebird boxes, and sharing the importance of conservation and education.

SCVAS volunteers, Education Committee members, and Board members flocked to Gilroy and started a tradition that we intend to continue. SCVAS is also pursuing the possibility of participating in the formation of the City of Gilroy's Environmental Education Center. The city has a beautiful site along Uvas Creek to use. Although the plans for the Education Center are still in development, the City of Gilroy has already approached our Education Committee for help in curriculum and program development.

### It's Not Just for Kids Any More

Another new emphasis in our education programs is the expansion of adult education. Beginning last spring, the Education Committee sponsored two adult education classes at the SCVAS headquarters in McClellan Ranch. Continuing this fall, we are sponsoring an additional two classes—one for beginners and one for intermediate birders. While we plan to continue offering the beginning classes, the Ed Committee hopes to extend our efforts by seeking out additional instructors for intermediate and even advanced-level students.

### Just Plain Fun

SCVAS' 10th Annual Wildlife Education Day comes to McClellan Ranch Saturday, October 27. This is one of the most fun days of the year for our chapter, though it takes a lot of preparation by the Education Committee, staff and volunteers. Numerous organizations come to host activities for children and their families. Our poster contest is always a big hit, drawing participants from a wide range of schools and age levels. Whether you come on Education Day or drops by the office in the week prior to the event, the posters alone are worth the trip to Cupertino. Some posters show amazing skill; other just make you laugh. For more details on the event, see page 7.

### The Core of our Curriculum

All these programs require a lot of dedication from our Education Committee, which deserve our sincere appreciation. Like our programs, the Education Committee has recently grown in size, from four to ten members. In addition to overseeing the development of SCVAS'

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# Volunteer Ventures

by Jennifer Peritz  
Programs Coordinator

If you've ever considered the possibility of volunteering, NOW is the time. The month of October is jam-packed with activities and programs that need support from volunteers. Before I mention the upcoming possibilities, I'd like to acknowledge the hard work of volunteers who kept the wheels at the Audubon office spinning throughout the summer. Many thanks to **Dick Blaine, Marti Oetzel, Gus Constant, Pete Letchworth, and Bernie Woods** for their help this summer on a variety of projects that ranged from reorganizing the library to cleaning and dusting SCVAS' large collection of stuffed birds.

Now on to current projects! The arrival of fall means back to school, which for SCVAS means back to the

**Wetlands and Woodlands Discovery Program** (see cover article). This fun and educational program brings local school children out to discover bay and wetland habitats, thanks, of course, to our fabulous volunteer field trip leaders. Bringing in new field trip leaders is essential to the success of the Program. We are currently seeking birders of all levels to assist in this year's In-class and Field Trip Programs. As always, if you are interested in leading walks, reviewing our new docent training manual, or watching our newly produced training video, please do not hesitate to contact me!

As was announced in last month's *Avocet*, SCVAS is sponsoring a **major fundraiser for the Burrowing Owl** on October 20. We are still seeking volunteers to help with this important and unique event. Volunteer support is needed on the night of the event to pour wine, serve dinner, and set up and arrange tables and chairs. Not only does this event benefit a worthy cause, it is also a unique opportunity to attend an exclusive night at the Coyote Point Museum. While helping out, volunteers will be able to participate in the evening's events, tour the museum, and view the California-native wildlife on display.

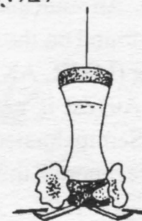
It's that time of year again! The SCVAS Education Committee is currently preparing for our **10<sup>th</sup> Annual Wildlife Education Day** on Saturday, October 27 (see flier on Page 7). Because this is my first "ED Day," I am particularly excited to welcome all SCVAS members, families, and friends to join in the festivities. ED Day activities will include a bird-banding presentation, scavenger hunt, student poster contest, bird walk, and raffle, as well as the opportunity to build a nestbox and bird feeder, see live

animals, and meet a variety of local wildlife-related organizations. With up to 400 participants expected, we will need a large pool of volunteers to make the day a success! Volunteers are needed to set up, staff SCVAS sponsored tables, direct parking, assist guests, and much more. If you're looking to give back to the community and the environment, Ed Day is a great way to get involved.

Even here in sunny California, October signals the start of the rainy season, which in turn signals the start of our Stormwater Monitoring Project. We had many successes with this project last year and for that effort, we received a \$10,000 grant to continue our work. This is where you come in! We need volunteers between October 1 and April 1 to take digital pictures of construction sites that are polluting our creeks and streams and violating the Clean Water Act. We will tell you what to look for and train you to use our cameras. We need you to become the eyes and ears of the Santa Clara County creeks. If you would like to hear more about last year's project and what we will be doing this winter, or if you can volunteer please contact Kelly or Jennifer!

With so many opportunities to choose from, how can you go wrong? Remember, we can tailor our volunteer tasks to fit your needs. So whether you're interested in giving one hour per day, per week, or per month, please give me a call!

**Jennifer Peritz, [programs@scvas.org](mailto:programs@scvas.org),  
(408) 252-3747**



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## Education *cont'd.*

adult and school-aged education programs, the Committee also plans and hosts Wildlife Education Day, develops education materials for outside groups, organizes slide shows and other presentations, and much, much more. The Ed Committee members are also active in other areas of SCVAS, as three serve on our Board of Directors, including our most recent addition to the Board, Dr. Greg Meissner. The Ed Committee is always looking for new members and projects. If you are interested in the Committee or its activities, please contact Bobbie Handen at (408) 356-4263.

SCVAS education programs have certainly been boosted by the recent increase in staff resources. As our staff and volunteer numbers grow, so does our influence and our ability to share the ideals of environmental education and stewardship.

# Field Notes

by Bill Bousman

## Pelicans through Raptors

**Brown Pelicans** were found in moderate numbers in August with high counts of 41 at the Alviso salt ponds on 12 Aug (MMR) and 44 there on 25 Aug (MMR, AK). Eight to 12 **Double-crested Cormorants** were seen nesting on the levee between Salt Ponds A9 and A10 in Alviso 12-25 Aug (MMR, AK). Twenty-six **Wood Ducks** at Almaden Reservoir on 22 Aug (AV) was a good total for what was once called the "Summer Duck." A single **American Wigeon** at the Los Gatos Creek percolation ponds on 5 Aug and two there on 20 Aug (LS) probably summered here—fall birds usually return at the beginning of September. A **Blue-winged Teal** at the Mountain View Forebay on 10 Aug (RLe, AME) was the only report since early July. A female **Lesser Scaup** with a brood of week-old chicks was seen in the Emily Renzel Wetlands on 30 Aug (WGB). A female **Hooded Merganser** was seen in the Los Gatos Creek percolation ponds on 20 Aug (LS) for another unusual summer record. Few **Osprey** are found during the quiet days of August, so one at Parkway Lakes on 16 Aug (MMR) and another flying towards the coast over Summit Road south of Hwy 17 on 23 Aug (BT *vide* DLSu) are of interest.

## Shorebirds through Skimmers

The passage of **Lesser Yellowlegs** has been about average or a bit low with birds found in typical locations along the Bay. Up to 12 birds on the pond near State and Spreckles in Alviso on 30 Aug (RWR, FV) was the high count. Two alternate-plumaged **Ruddy Turnstones** seen on Salt Pond A14 on 12 Aug (MMR) were a good find. An adult and a juvenile **Red Knot** were found on the Alviso salt ponds on 25 Aug (MMR, AK); our typical fall quota. August is normally our best month for Semipalmated Sandpipers, but none were reported this month for the first time since 1992. A juvenile

**Baird's Sandpiper** was found inland on Calero Reservoir on 17 Aug (JMa), where less expected. Another juvenile was found on the Coyote Creek Field Station (CCFS) waterbird pond on 18 Aug (MJM) and two juveniles were on the San Jose-Santa Clara Water Pollution Control Plant (WPCP) drying ponds on 26 Aug (MMR). Six **Pectoral Sandpipers** seen on the same drying ponds on 26 Aug (MMR) were the first of the season. An adult **Stilt Sandpiper** was found on the ponds at Spreckles and State in Alviso on 18 Aug (MJM) and remained through the end of

mer flock at Charleston Slough appears to have established itself earlier this year. Four birds were seen there on 10 Aug (AME) and thirteen were counted on 30 Aug (WGB).

## Swifts through Tanagers

Staging **Vaux's Swifts** were found along the Bay in August, as expected, with a high count of 30 birds over State and Spreckles in Alviso on 20 Aug (MMR). A **Willow Flycatcher** along Coyote Creek near Barber Lane on 19 Aug (AME) represents the first of the fall passage birds—the bird banded in late July, and mentioned last month, remains anomalous. Another late summer **Bank Swallow** was found at the Mountain View Forebay on 5 Aug (JMa et al.) and was seen at least through 9 Aug (v.ob.). This bird, an adult, continues the pattern of late summer birds found in recent years. A **Nashville Warbler** banded at CCFS on 12 Aug (*vide* AME) is eight days earlier than a bird banded here on 20 Aug

1988. A bird seen in the Diablo Range on 19 Jul 1992, our only summer record, was presumably a non-breeding bird. An adult **Summer Tanager** was found along the Guadalupe River below Trimble on 25 Aug (MMR, MJM). The extensive red feathering on this bird suggests an older female.

*Observers: Bill Bousman (WGB), Al Eisner (AME), Alma Kali (AK), Rosalie Lefkowitz (RLe), Mike Mammoser (MJM), John Mariani (JMa), Bob Reiling (RWR), Mike Rogers (MMR), David Suddjian (DLSu), Linda Sullivan (LS), Barbara Taylor (BT), Frank Vanslager (FV), Ann Verdi (AV), Chris Wolfe (ChW), and Claire Wolfe (CIW).*

*Early fall was marked by  
a Stilt Sandpiper and Ruff  
in Alviso and  
a Summer Tanager  
along the Guadalupe River*

the month (m.ob.). This bird was in transition from alternate to basic plumage. A bird seen on the CCFS waterbird pond on 19 Aug (CIW, ChW) was described as having the same transitional plumage and was likely the same bird. An adult female **Ruff** was found at the ponds at State and Spreckles on 19 Aug (MJM), the day after the Stilt Sandpiper was discovered. The Ruff was also molting into basic plumage, but still retained some black feathers on its breast. As with the Stilt, the female Ruff remained through the end of the month (m.ob.). A basic **Common Tern** was found in the Sunnyvale WPCP oxidation ponds on 3 Aug (MJM) and 5 Aug (FV) and is likely the bird seen there in July. Another basic Common Tern was in Salt Pond A9 in Alviso on 25 Aug (MMR, AK). The high count of staging **Least Terns** in the salt ponds east of Stevens Creek was 98 on 1 Aug (MMR). The last observation of birds was on 10 Aug (AME) when 35 were counted. The wintering **Black Skim-**

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



Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society Presents

# 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Wildlife Education Day

Saturday, October 27<sup>th</sup>, 2001

10 a.m. - 2 p.m.

McClellan Ranch Park in Cupertino

*New This Year!! Early Shorebird Walk*

8 a.m. at Charleston Slough

RSVP (408/252-3747) to get directions & reserve your space.

Caravan back to McClellan Ranch at 9:30 am for

WILDLIFE EDUCATION DAY FESTIVITIES

*LOTS OF FUN ACTIVITIES  
FOR KIDS & ADULTS*

- \* Build a birdhouse
- \* See live animals (bats, birds, reptiles)!
- \* Go on a scavenger hunt
- \* Learn about California wildlife & habitats
- \* Watch the Wonderful World of Worms
- \* Make a bird feeder
- \* See bird banding demonstration
- \* Join a guided nature walk
- \* Win fabulous raffle prizes!
- \* Visit Audubon Nature Shop

*Over 50 Environmental & Wildlife Organizations Invited*

*Enter our POSTER CONTEST & WIN great prizes!*

Winners announced starting at 12:30 p.m.

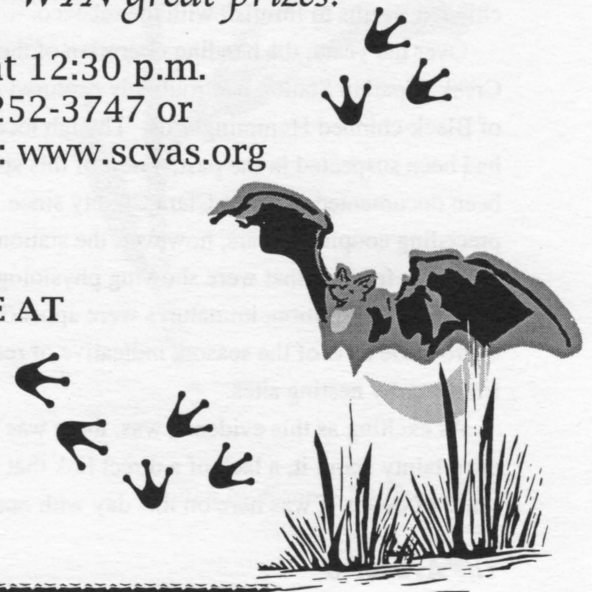
Ask for contest flier at 408/252-3747 or

visit our website for more details: [www.scvas.org](http://www.scvas.org)

**IN CASE OF RAIN, ALL FESTIVITIES WILL TAKE PLACE AT  
MONTA VISTA HIGH SCHOOL**

**GENERAL PARKING** available at  
Vista High School (east of the Park on McClellan Road)  
with **FREE Shuttle Service**

**DISABLED PARKING ONLY** at the Park



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# Tree Tobacco Road

by Mike Mammoser

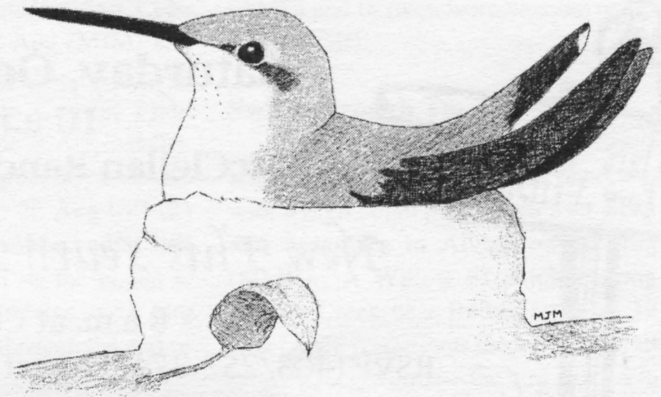
The sun shone through a cloudless sky on this day in early May of 1991, as I stood in the flood control channel of Coyote Creek, not far from its terminus at the south end of San Francisco Bay. The lush riparian habitat bordering the creek stretched in a line on one side of me, while the outer levee that was built to contain raging winter water sandwiched me in on the other. The space in between, the overflow channel, represented a drastic departure from the usual flood control strategy of clearing vegetation and channelizing creeks. On top of the levee stood the bird banding trailers of the former Coyote Creek Riparian Station.

These were heady days. Six years earlier I had begun to seriously address my interest in the natural world by purchasing a pair of cheap binoculars and spending every spare moment in the field, soaking up the bird life in all its aspects. I was now in my fourth year as a volunteer for a breeding bird atlas that was being conducted in Santa Clara County. This activity fueled my interest and allowed for discoveries, sometimes of great local import. My enthusiasm for the atlas had resulted in taking on the responsibility for coordinating one of the regions into which the county had been divided, and this lovely vestige of riparian corridor was part of that region.

One of the unintentional consequences of constructing the overflow channel was the appearance of large stands of tree tobacco (*nicotiana glauca*), a non-native plant from South America. This member of the nightshade family is quite poisonous if ingested, but is loved by local hummingbirds, who sip nectar from its tubular yellow flowers. One of our more uncommon species of hummingbirds, the Black-chinned, seems to flourish with the tobacco.

Over the years, the banding operation of the Coyote Creek Riparian Station had routinely captured small numbers of Black-chinned Hummingbirds. Though local breeding had been suspected in the past, a nest of this species had not been documented in Santa Clara County since 1907. In the preceding couple of years, however, the station had been capturing females that were showing physiological signs of breeding. In addition, immatures were appearing at the appropriate time of the season, indicative of recent fledging from nearby nesting sites.

As exciting as this evidence was, there was an air of uncertainty about it, a lack of a direct link that left a nagging sense of doubt. I was here on this day with one mission in



*Black-chinned Hummingbird*  
by Mike Mammoser

mind—to find the nest of a Black-chinned Hummingbird.

Finding the nest of a hummingbird may seem like looking for a “needle in a haystack,” but I strode purposefully down the banding trail as it wound through the riparian corridor. In doing atlas field work over the years I had found a number of hummingbird nests and developed a strategy that I hoped would pan out in this situation. I stopped at a large stand of tree tobacco growing alongside the creek, next to a mist net lane. This was the hummingbird equivalent of an outdoor cafe, and here I simply waited for the diners to show up. My idea was that if I just waited for an appropriate bird to appear and eat its fill, I could follow or trace it back to a nest.

Soon, a hummingbird flashed past my head, its wings producing a mechanical whirring sound that tipped it off as a male Black-chinned. I ignored it, knowing full well that these “deadbeat dads” would provide little in the way of clues to a nesting site. Their main activity seemed to involve fighting with and chasing other hummingbirds in a desperate, and sometimes futile, attempt to claim sole ownership of a food source.

As time crept by, I suddenly heard the soft “tew tew” calls of a Black-chinned Hummingbird coming from the tree tobacco. I searched through the vegetation, finally coming upon a female feeding on the flowers right in the center of the plant. Now was my chance. I tried to keep my eye on her as she finished drinking nectar and headed away, seemingly at light speed, right into the dark and tangled branches of a box elder tree. Here, she immediately disappeared from sight. “Oh well,” I thought, “strike one.”



I continued my vigil until she, or another, showed up again. This time the tiny blur zipped off in a new direction, and out of sight. Strike two. After a few more episodes like this, I lost all hope of ever being able to follow, visually or manually, one of these birds back to its nest. I needed a new plan.

I noticed that the majority of departures headed directly away from me, through a gap in the foliage towards the creek. Thinking that I could set myself up in line with that flight path, I moved down the mist net lane to the edge of the creekbed, positioned myself directly under that gap, and waited.

In front of me a large cottonwood tree grew on the far bank, dominating the scene. It towered above me, its branches arching all the way across the creek and over my head. I couldn't even guess what its age was; maybe a hundred years? Many of its roots were exposed where the creek flow had undercut the bank and its grip on the soil seemed tenuous at best. I couldn't help thinking that if it fell I would be right in the path of its crushing weight. Luckily, a pair of foraging Chestnut-backed Chickadees came by, distracting me from macabre thoughts.

Even more fortuitous, watching the chickadees work their way downstream brought my eyes to a movement in the branches. Shifting my gaze to this spot, I came upon a female Black-chinned Hummingbird. She was moving in a slow hover along a branch, picking and plucking with her bill into various little cracks and crevices. My experience told me that she was probably snatching insects for food, or else strands of spider silk for nest construction. More importantly, her careful searching and probing slowed her down to the point where I could follow her as she zigged and zagged through the maze of tree branches.

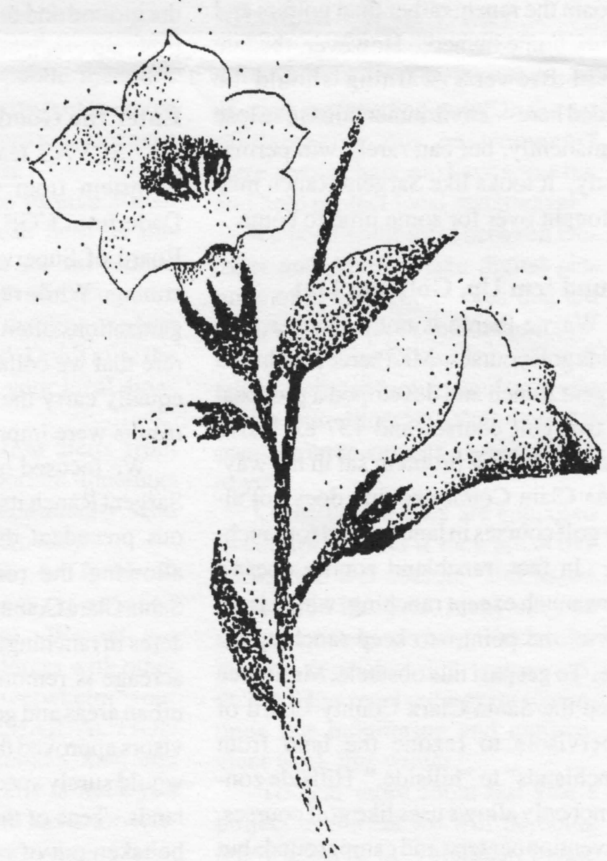
Soon, her movements brought her directly over the middle of the creek and above my head, where she moved out of sight behind a clump of leaves. I waited for her to reappear, but as time passed, she failed to show. Thinking I had lost her while she was out of sight, I remembered the same thing happening with Anna's Hummingbirds. In those cases, however, the clump of leaves had turned out to be the final destination. I shifted my position to get a different angle and trained my binoculars on the spot.

There it was! Saddled to the top of a small cottonwood branch, and anchored by taut strands of sticky spider web, was a pearly-white cup of cottonwood down. The head of the female Black-chinned Hummingbird poked above the rim of the cup as she warily watched me from the security of her lofty perch.

For a birder, some goals seem only natural to pursue. To

be able to identify hundreds of species of birds in many plumages and at many ages, for one. To understand the myriad of details concerning the day-to-day life, the natural history of these birds, for another. But to be involved in adding a little footnote to that history—to gaze upon a scene which possibly no human in Santa Clara County has for over eighty years—that is absolutely thrilling.

Some things have changed over the course of the intervening years. The Coyote Creek Riparian Station has returned to its roots, once again becoming a field station for the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory. Additional nesting of Black-chinned Hummingbirds has been documented along stretches of the urban riparian corridors of Coyote Creek, Los Gatos Creek, and the Guadalupe River. However, the large stands of tree tobacco that dominated the overflow channel for the first half of the 1990s have been tremendously reduced, for reasons not understood, and the population of Black-chinneds here has seemingly followed. Never an easy species to find, one of the keys to discovering this elusive little jewel still remains—look for the tree tobacco.



*Sketch by Bonnie Bedford-White*

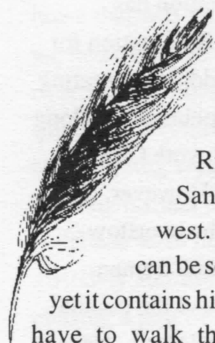
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# Dangerous Ranchland Proposal Defeated—For Now

## Collaboration key To Victory

by Craig Breon  
Executive Director



Sargent Ranch sits at the very bottom of Santa Clara County, with the Pajaro River to the south and Santa Cruz County to the west. The 5,000 acre ranch can be seen from Highway 101, yet it contains hidden attributes that you have to walk the land to appreciate. Thanks to a strong collaborative effort between SCVAS, the Committee for Green Foothills (CGF) and Greenbelt Alliance, cows and wildlife will continue to roam the ranch, rather than golfers and luxury home owners. However, the late David Brower's warning should be heeded here—environmentalists can lose permanently, but can rarely win permanently. It looks like Sargent Ranch may be fought over for some time to come.

### Round 'em Up, Golf 'em Out

Wayne Pierce is not a rancher. He builds golf courses. Mr. Pierce purchased Sargent Ranch and developed a proposal for two golf courses and 137 exclusive homes. One big problem sat in his way: Santa Clara County zoning does not allow golf courses in lands zoned for ranching. In fact, ranchland zoning doesn't allow much except ranching, which is, of course, the point—to keep ranching viable. To get past this obstacle, Mr. Pierce asked the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors to rezone the land from "ranchlands" to "hillside." Hillside zoning not only allows uses like golf courses, convention centers, and campgrounds but also clustered housing subdivisions, which are also forbidden in ranchlands.

### Unique Qualities

The ranch itself is beautiful and curious. It contains rolling hills and steep terrain—some farmland but mostly just cows and critters. Tar Creek runs through the property and provides an important spawning and rearing ground for steelhead trout. Red-legged Frogs and Tiger Salamanders also live there, making it a hotbed of rare and endangered species. Both The Nature Conservancy and the Santa Clara County Open Space Authority salivate at the thought of Sargent Ranch as a publicly held property some day.

Oddly, Sargent Ranch also produces oil. Hidden in the middle of the ranch, those dinosaur-like, head-bobbing derricks ka-chunk away, slowly extracting crude. Here and there tar seeps up through the ground and then runs downhill, like a trickling creek in super slo-mo.

### Enter the Good Guys

SCVAS teamed up with Autumn Bernstein from Greenbelt and Denice Dade from CGF in front of the County Board of Supervisors to oppose the rezoning. While regional conservation organizations often support each other, it's rare that we collaborate this closely and equally carry the load. In this case, the results were impressive.

We focused not only on the value of Sargent Ranch itself, but also the dangerous precedent the Board might set by allowing the rezoning of ranchlands. Santa Clara County has more than 300,000 acres in ranching, and while much of that acreage is remote, many parcels adjoin urban areas and good roads. If the Supervisors approved the rezoning, developers would surely speculate heavily in ranchlands. Tens of thousands of acres could be taken out of ranching and suffer tremendous ecological compromise.

If ranches became ripe for realty speculation, the costs of rural lands would rise. As a result, organizations like The Nature Conservancy or the Open Space Authority might be priced out of the market. Clearly, the Sargent Ranch zoning decision carries deeper implications than it might seem at first.

### Cut to the Chase

In short, we won . . . for now. We rallied the *Mercury News* and even some San Jose City Council members who were worried about development in the hills above their districts. County planning staff sided with us in warning of the far-reaching consequences of ranchland rezoning. Eventually, it became so obvious that the Supervisors would vote down the project that on the morning of the hearing on Sargent Ranch, Mr. Pierce pulled his application off the agenda.

Victory is sweet, but often short-lived. Clearly, Mr. Pierce and his supporters will be back; we're just not quite sure when and how. Rumor has it he may be working with a conservation organization to give his proposal a green patina. When his proposal does rear its head again, he can be assured that SCVAS, CGF, and Greenbelt Alliance will be waiting.

### End Note

Based on the above, SCVAS and our compatriots may seem oddly pro-cow. No doubt, grazing done poorly can ravage the land. Limited grazing done well, however, can harmonize with natural resource protection. In the end, a ranch can be restored, while a golf course and housing development are more permanent. Viva las vacas!



# SCVAS Thanks Councilman Chuck Reed

It's not often that I simply take the time to thank a local politician. In fact, I can be quite critical of some. However, we should all remember to praise as well as criticize. For example, former Assemblyman Jim Cunneen worked hard on issues for SCVAS. (Now he's head of the Silicon Valley Chamber of Commerce, and I hope we can still work together.)

San Jose's Councilman Chuck Reed deserves praise for his first year in office. Chuck has listened to our concerns on a number of issues—not only listened, but taken action on our behalf. In the last year, Chuck has responded at least four times to SCVAS requests.

First and most importantly, Chuck was pivotal in making the US Dataports project in Alviso more environmentally friendly. With SCVAS lobbying hard, Chuck demanded that the project provide open space for Burrowing Owls and wetlands. We ended up with nearly 30% of the site in open space, much of it permanently dedicated for owls. Chuck also convinced the developers to provide a ten-year, \$1 million fund for water quality and habitat restoration in Coyote Creek, and another \$1 million fund for the people of Alviso.

With the Mayor's office heavily behind the project from the beginning, Chuck could have simply watched it pass. Instead he listened to our concerns, and those of the Alviso community, and negotiated a better project.

Next, Councilman Reed made a budget request to add a planner to the city's staff with the responsibility to follow up on promises made by developers and hold them to those promises. His request stemmed partially from our work last winter showing San Jose construction sites in violation of the Clean Water Act. We provided the city with proof of their failure to enforce their own environmental regulations, and Chuck responded. The Mayor and other Council members eventually approved his request. Now we have to make sure the Planning Department hires that staff person quickly and gives them adequate authority to do the job right.

Councilman Reed also urged the city to enact an ordinance restricting the disking of lands on the valley floor (disking harms Burrowing Owls). We had been demanding that the city do this since the fall of 1998, with little success. With Councilman Reed's help, an ordinance was shaped and passed earlier this summer.

Of course, vigilance is still required. Several landowners have already broken this new law, and city staff is not enforcing it. SCVAS is counting on Chuck to help ensure the enforcement of the ordinance.

Finally, Councilman Reed weighed in on the proposal to rezone Sargent Ranch

(see Page 10). After meeting with me and Autumn Bernstein from Greenbelt Alliance, Chuck understood that approval of the Sargent Ranch proposal could lead other ranchlands to convert to housing, possibly on lands bordering Chuck's San Jose district.

All in all, a good record for the year. SCVAS pursues important local ecological issues and argues those issues fairly and skillfully, striving to represent the best interests of the people of our region. Unfortunately, sometimes that isn't enough to get good things done. It's nice when a politician recognizes our efforts and works with us. Thanks Chuck!

—Craig Breon

## Advocate's Corner

Do you want to find out about events BEFORE they happen? Do you want to learn about the most pressing environmental issues in your community, while there is still time to act? Attending public meetings and writing letters are two of the most important contributions you can make to your favorite cause.

By signing up to receive e-mail action alerts, you can help us improve our response to last-minute events and issues. We also can more easily inform you if the time or place of a meeting changes. Don't miss the opportunity to help your local environment!

To receive action alerts from SCVAS about important meetings and hearings in your community, send an e-mail to Kelly Crowley (HYPERLINK "mailto:advocate@scvas.org" advocate@scvas.org). We will not share your e-mail address with other organizations, or overwhelm your inbox. Please put "EMAIL ACTION ALERTS" in the subject line, and specify which local city or issue you wish to receive action alerts for. (Issues include: Burrowing Owls; Creeks and Clean Water; Coyote Valley; South Almaden Valley; South

County Agriculture; Wetlands Protection and Restoration).

### Mission: Clean Water

Did you ever want to be an undercover secret agent? Or do you dream of catching "the bad guys" in the act of damaging our environment? Here's your chance to have some fun and help protect local waterways!

We need volunteers between October and April to take digital pictures of construction sites that are polluting our creeks and streams, violating the Clean Water Act. We will tell you what to look for and train you to use our cameras. Volunteer for one afternoon, or once a week; it's up to you.

Construction sites are supposed to control erosion if they are active during the wet season. But as we discovered last year, many sites do not adequately do so, which ultimately degrades our waterways. SCVAS has received a grant to continue our monitoring and enforcement work this winter.

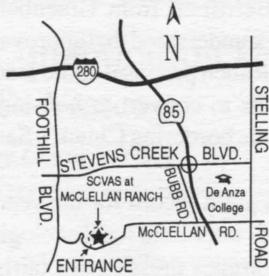
To hear more about last year's project and what we will be doing this winter, or to volunteer, please contact Kelly or Jennifer!

—Kelly Crowley

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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.

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**2001 Volume 48, Number 8**

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