



THE AVOCET

The Newsletter of the Santa Clara Audubon Society

January 2002

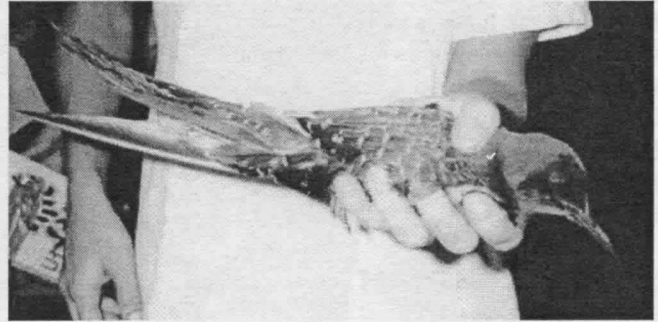
“Tossing” Stranded Seabirds

Fun-loving sea captain shares traditional rescue technique

by Leda Beth Gray

In my previous career as a geologist, I spent a fair amount of time on oceanographic vessels. Early on in this career, before I was much of a birder, I learned from a British captain, who had fished for much of his career, about rescuing seabirds stranded on the decks of ships. This fellow was quite a prankster, and liked to make fun of scientists, so when he told me the best thing to do for these stranded seabirds was to “throw them over,” I just didn’t believe him.

He had heard about a storm-petrel (I don’t know which species) that I had scooped off the deck and put in a box, thinking it was sick. The captain came down to the lab to advise me. “Just toss it over,” he said, “it will fly off.” He was amused at my disbelief, and then explained to me how most seabirds can’t really walk around on decks of ships due to anatomical constraints. With legs positioned far back on their bodies for optimal paddling efficiency, deck-bound birds just fall forward on their bellies and flail around with their wings. That’s why I thought my stranded storm-petrel was sick.



Leda Beth Gray prepares to “toss” a Sooty Tern to freedom (photo by unknown crew member)

Still suspicious of the captain, I took the box outside on the aft deck, reached inside and picked up the storm-petrel. The little bird’s body fit within my hand, its head and tail sticking out on either side. It struggled against my grip and feebly tried to peck at my fingers, without much effect. It seemed so frail, and I didn’t have much confidence for its well-being.

I stood next to the railing and held it over the deck, but not out over the side. Reluctantly, I gently tossed it straight up in the air, thinking that if it really was sick, I could catch it again on the way back down. The little bird immediately snapped into action, fluttering off over the water and quickly

continued on Page 8

**“Albatrosses to Woodpeckers:
the Best of Oregon Birds”
with Steve Shunk
Palo Alto Arts Center
Newell & Embarcadero Rds.
Wednesday, January 16, 7:30 PM**

Join Oregon naturalist and former SCVAS board member Stephen Shunk for a dynamic slide presentation featuring some of Oregon’s most exciting birds. Steve will highlight specialty birds representing an amazing diversity of habitats: from the deep waters off the continental shelf to the lava fields of the Cascade Crest, from the alpine tundra of Eastern Oregon’s Steens Mountain to the expansive marshlands of the Malheur Basin. Beginning and expert birders alike will delight in images of the rare Shy Albatross and the secretive Hutton’s Vireo; the gregarious Pinyon Jay and the flamboyant Sage Grouse. Steve will discuss specific behaviors of Oregon bird species as well as regional conservation issues. He will also share some of his very favorite Oregon birding hotspots. (See photo on Page 3)

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Has it been 8 years?-----Page 10
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January Field Trips

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

LO = Lunch optional

RC = Heavy rain cancels

Saturday Jan. 5, 8:00 AM

Post-CBC Rarities Chase

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

Sunday Jan. 6, 8:00 AM

Charleston Slough

Half day. Leader: Bob Reiling (408) 253-7527. 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. Bring a spotting scope if you have one.

Wednesday Jan. 9, 9:00 AM

Ed Levin County Park

Half day. Leader: Harriet Gerson (408) 252-6244. Take Hwy 237 east to Calaveras Rd. in Milpitas, go approx. 2 miles past I-680 to just past golf course entrance; park is on right across from school. (Do not turn left on Downing Rd.) **LO, RC**

Saturday Jan. 12, 8:00 AM

Panoche Valley

Full day. Leader: Clay Kempf (831) 761-8260. Meet at Paicines Store on Hwy 25 approx. 11 miles south of Hollister. Specialties: Phainopepla, Mtn. Bluebird, Prairie Falcon, Ferruginous Hawk, Golden Eagle, Bald Eagle; rarer possibilities include Mountain Plover, Vesper Sparrow, Roadrunner and Chukar. Bring lunch and full tank of gas; carpooling is strongly recommended due to limited parking on the narrow roads (bring a carload or expect to become part of one). Limited restroom facilities.

Sunday Jan. 13, 8:30 AM

Oka Ponds/Los Gatos Creek Park

Half day. Leader: Frank Vanslager (408) 257-3647. From Hwy 17 in Los Gatos take Lark Ave. exit west. Turn right on Oka Rd., left on Mozart Ave. and an immediate right on Oka Lane. Meet at gate. **RC**

Saturday Jan. 19, 9:00 AM

Ed Levin County Park

Half day. Leader: John Arnold (650) 948-4250. Take Hwy 237 east, crossing I-880 and I-680 (becomes E. Calaveras Blvd. in Milpitas, then Calaveras Rd.) to park entrance about 2 miles past I-680. Meet at parking lot on right side of Calaveras Rd. Entrance fee. **LO, RC**

Sunday Jan. 20, 9:00 AM

Arastradero OSP, Palo Alto

Half day. Leader: Roland Kenner (408) 725-0468. From I-280 take Page Mill Rd. west, turn right on Arastradero Rd. and meet in parking lot about 1/2 mile on right. Moderate walking. **RC**

Wednesday Jan. 23, 9:00 AM

Charleston Slough

Half day. Leader: Rose Green (650) 493-8378. From Hwy 101 take San Antonio Rd. north, toward Bay. Meet inside gate at intersection of San Antonio and Terminal Way. **RC**

Saturday Jan. 26, 8:30 AM

Pillar Point Harbor

Half day. Leader: Al Eisner. Days, voice-mail (650) 926-2018; evenings (650) 364-3686. Meet at Pillar Point parking lot in Princeton, 4 miles north of Half Moon Bay on Hwy 1. Turn west at traffic light on Hwy 1; then left at Prospect Way. Continue as straight as possible to West Point Ave.; then right to parking lot on left. Bring a scope if you have one. Loons, grebes, sea ducks, rocky shorebirds, gulls, miscellaneous small landbirds. A "pre-trip" may visit the large gull flock at Pilarcitos Creek mouth; contact leader for meeting arrangements if interested. Some additional after lunch birding possible. **LO, RC**

Sunday Jan. 27, 8:30 AM

Ogier Ponds

Half day. Leader: Dave Cook (408) 275-1492. From Hwy 101 in Morgan Hill take Cochrane Rd. west to Monterey Hwy, turn right, go north 2.6 miles, turn right towards Model Airplane Park where power towers cross highway. Follow road for 1/2 mile and park in gravel lot at bend in road. **RC**

Saturday Feb. 2, 9:00 AM

San Francisco's Southern Parks

Half day. Leader: Alan Hopkins (415) 664-0983. Meet at Candlestick Point State Recreation Area for shorebirds, bay ducks, loons and raptors. We will then visit San Francisco's second largest park, McLaren Park, for land birds and dabbling ducks. Other lesser known but birdy parks may be visited, time permitting. From Hwy 101 exit just past Brisbane Lagoon at Candlestick/3Com Park off-ramp. Continue east along Harney Way and turn right onto Jamestown/Hunters Point Expwy. Watch for entrance to Candlestick State Recreation Area on right and enter (no fee). Meet at end of paved road that runs through the park.

Sunday Feb. 3, 9:00 AM

Charleston Slough

Half day. Leader: Allen Royer (408) 288-7768. Meet at Terminal Way at end of San Antonio Rd. north off Hwy 101 in Mt. View. As always, all are welcome but birding and discussions will be geared toward the beginning birder. Bring a scope if you have one.

Wednesday Feb. 13, 8:30 AM

Coyote Reservoir

Half day. Leaders: Emelie Curtis (408) 779-2637 and Jane Glass. Take Leavesley exit east off Hwy 101 in Morgan Hill; go east 1.5 miles, turn left on New Ave. then right on Roop Rd. to reservoir. Meet at Lakeview Picnic Area. Waterbirds, raptors. **LO, RC**

Calendar

Tuesday Jan. 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. Topic: American Coot.

Tuesday Jan. 8, 4:00 PM
Education Committee meeting
McClellan Ranch Park.

Tuesday Jan. 8, 7:30 PM
Board of Directors meeting
McClellan Ranch Park, All members welcome to attend.

Wednesday Jan. 9, 7:30 PM
Bay Area Bird Photographers presents Joe Fuhrman and his "Adventures in Bird Photography — Joshua Tree National Park" slide show. (Note that this is the *second* Wednesday in the month.) Lucy Evans Baylands Interpretive Center, E. Embarcadero Rd., Palo Alto.

Saturday Jan. 12, 9:00 AM
Volunteer Breakfast Social
McClellan Ranch Park
See Jennifer's Volunteer Ventures column on Page 4 for details.

Wednesday Jan. 16, 7:30 PM
General meeting, Palo Alto
"Best of Oregon Birds" with Steve Shunk (see description on Pg. 1; photo at right).

Wednesday Jan. 30, 7:30 PM
Environmental Action Committee
meeting at McClellan Ranch Park.

PLAN AHEAD:

Wednesday Feb. 20, 7:30 PM
General meeting, Palo Alto
David Suddjian will offer an in-depth look at Marbled Murrelets in the Santa Cruz Mountains, based on his own intensive research conducted over the past decade.



Photo by Stephen Shunk

This Red-naped Sapsucker is one of 12 woodpecker species that nest in Oregon, 11 of which nest in Central Oregon's Deschutes County, where Steve Shunk, featured speaker at our January general meeting, resides.

"Birding on the Bay" Young Audubon Boat Trip Sunday, January 20 Tourist Wharf, Monterey Bay 9:30-12:00 noon

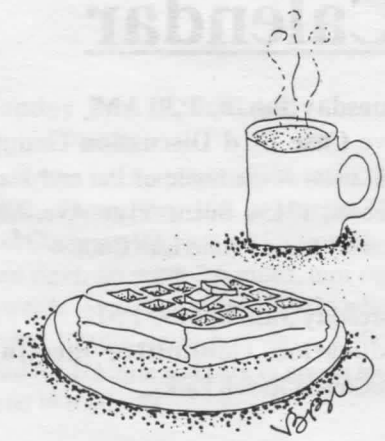
Join the Young Audubon group for a boat trip on Monterey Bay. The trip is scheduled during the peak of the Gray Whale's southern migration and may also yield views of sea otters, sea lions, porpoises, and of course, sea birds! The cost for this 2-hour tour is only \$15 per person, **and ALL adults must be accompanied by children.** That's right, adults, you must bring a child if you want to join this trip. Space is limited, so contact the SCVAS office at (408) 252-3747 to reserve your space today! Once payment is received, SCVAS will send out detailed information packets for the trip. Dress for cold and rain. Rainy weather does NOT cancel this trip. Because the boat is pre-paid, no refunds are available.

Volunteer Ventures

by Jennifer Peritz
Programs Coordinator

January 2002 — hard to believe another New Year is upon us! As we say goodbye to the holiday season and purchase our new calendars, I can't help but think of the cycles that we all go through . . . the cycle of time, the cycle of the seasons, and the cycle of nature. The turning of the seasons is certainly present here at McClellan Ranch Park. The beauty of our little stretch of Stevens Creek often amazes me, and I remind myself how lucky I am to work here. For those of you who have never been out to the Audubon office and Nature Shop, now is a great time for a visit. The creek is flowing, the field is green, and the wintering birds are here.

As if the beauty of the park wasn't enough to bring you out to McClellan Ranch, take a moment to reflect on your plans for the new year . . . anyone thinking of volunteering with SCVAS? When you make those important New Year's resolutions, I hope you'll consider the various volunteer opportunities we have to offer. Volunteers are an integral part of the work we accomplish, from conservation campaign efforts to birding field trips, educational outreach to office and Nature Shop support. Whether working from home or out of our office, once a week or once a month, volunteering for SCVAS can be one of the most worthwhile decisions you make for 2002.



Have Breakfast With Us!

A perfect way to learn more about our volunteer programs is to talk to the volunteers themselves! Join us on Saturday, January 12 from 9:30 – 11:30 for our Volunteer Breakfast and Social at McClellan Ranch. Shmooze with other potential or current volunteers while enjoying freshly cooked Belgian waffles; explore the ranch and creek, learn more about SCVAS and our programs. Everyone is welcome, but an RSVP is requested. Please contact me at (408) 252-3740 by noon on Wednesday, Jan. 9 to confirm your attendance.

Last month I was happily overwhelmed by the sight of volunteers crammed into our conference room stuffing, stamping, and sealing envelopes for our annual year-end fundraiser. It was an incredible feeling to watch volunteers from three organizations — Meeting for Good, Volunteer Match, and SCVAS — come together for a common purpose. So many people showed up to lend a hand that we overflowed into the back office to accommodate everyone! Thank you to all who joined us on December 1 for the envelope stuffing — we really could not have done it without you!

“Volunteers are not paid — not because they are worthless, but because they are priceless.” (source unknown)



Radio Towers Defeated

In the November *Avocet* I wrote about radio station KYCY's proposal to construct communications towers on a portion of the Newby Island landfill, potentially leading to a tremendous number of bird fatalities. Thanks to SCVAS' strong opposition to this project, as well as that of the California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), KYCY has withdrawn its plans. Many thanks to Clyde Morris of DFG and Dave Johnston of FWS. Their efforts were key in our win on this project. And thanks to our members and other who wrote letters of opposition — your voices really do make a difference!

—Kelly Crowley

SAN DIEGO BIRD FESTIVAL

FEBRUARY 7 - 10, 2002

MARINA VILLAGE
CONFERENCE CENTER
Mission Bay – just west of Sea World



EXCITING TRIPS AND TOURS—
Whale- and bird-watching boat trips
Hawks, falcons, and owls
San Diego-100 birding trip
Guided walk along S.D. Flood Channel



Enjoy a walk through the bird enclosure,
native raptors, hiking trails, and more
at Chula Vista Nature Center



Day-long and overnight natural history
and birding outings to
Northern Baja California



Nature Festivals of San Diego
P.O. Box 120426
Chula Vista, CA 91912

For registration visit our website:
www.flitetours.com/festival.htm
Telephone: (619) 429-5378
e-mail: birdfest@flite-tours.com



Fremont Bird Classes with Alice Hoch

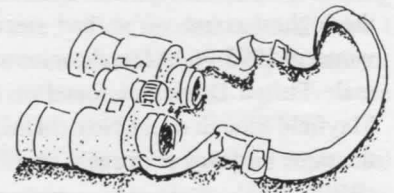
Alice Hoch's next Birding Field Trips class begins Tuesday, January 8th and continues through February 12th. Register by Thursday, Jan. 3rd by calling the Fremont Adult School at (510) 791-5841. For the first time, another similar set of classes will begin on Friday mornings. This set will begin on Jan. 11th and continue through Feb. 15th. Register for the Friday classes by Tuesday Jan. 8th at (510) 791-5841.

Class size is limited to 15, so call early. The Friday classes have been added because so many students have been turned away from previous classes which were filled early.

The classes will bird a different site one morning each week for 6 weeks from 9:30 AM to 12:30 PM. (Tuesday and Friday classes may bird the same site, depending on tides, weather, etc.)

Alice has been teaching Birding Field Trips for over 26 years and is an active member of Ohlone Audubon Society. Her classes are filled with friendly, helpful people at all levels from absolute beginner to very experienced. Be prepared to birdwatch at the first class meeting.

If you have questions call the Fremont Adult School at (510) 791-5841 or Alice at (510) 657-0475. If you have problems getting into any of the classes, call the instructor to find a better time for an additional class.



Field Notes

by Bill Bousman

Grebes through Skimmers

An adult **Red-necked Grebe** in basic plumage was found on Shoreline Lake after wind and rain on 25 Nov (MJM) and was seen through the end of the month (m.ob.). This is the first Red-neck since the 1998-99 winter. **Brown Pelicans** were mostly found in ones and twos in November with a high count of six south of the Palo Alto estuary on 25 Nov (MJM). Calero Reservoir and the decoy Canada Goose flocks were successful this month in attracting an immature **Snow Goose** on 10 Nov (AV, CH) and an adult on 17 Nov (MJM, AV). Also at Calero, the male **Eurasian Wigeon** found in September remained there at least through 11 Nov (v.ob.). Three males at the Sunnyvale Water Pollution Control Plant (WPCP) ponds on 26 Nov (MJM) was a good count. A single male was seen at the Palo Alto Flood Control Basin (FCB) on 29 Nov (MJM). As is often the case, **Blue-winged Teal** were found in the Palo Alto FCB during the month but appeared to move around somewhat. A male was seen there on 6 Nov (RWR, FV), a male and female were in an outer pond on 17 Nov (ViT), and on 26 Nov a male was in Adobe Creek (RWR, FV), while six males and a female were in an outer pond (GHt). A single male **Red-head** was found on outer Adobe Creek on 17 Nov (DSt). By 26 Nov, four birds were in the Palo Alto FCB (RWR, FV) and 97 were counted on the Sunnyvale WPCP ponds (MJM). The latter total is the highest count we've had since the winter of 1995-96. A female or immature male **Tufted Duck** was found on outer Mayfield Slough on 11 Nov (MJM) and the same bird was seen again on 13 Nov (RWR, FV). At least two male goldeneyes at Shoreline Lake from 11 Nov through the end of the month were intermediate between **Common** and **Barrow's Goldeneyes** (AME, MJM, MMR). No unequivocal Barrow's were found, how-

ever. **Hooded Mergansers** were found at the Santa Clara Valley Water District pond off Almaden and Calero Reservoir, but their major concentration was at the Oka percolation ponds (m.ob.). The high count at the latter location was 12 on 9 Nov (LS, DS). A count of 29 **Common Mergansers** on Calero Reservoir on 3 Nov (MJM) may represent more northern birds rather than our small, local breeding population. In unusual winters we have seen 300 to 400 birds on some of our south county reservoirs. An imma-

*A harbinger of winter,
perhaps, a Chestnut-collared
Longspur was found
along the windswept
Sierra Road summit*

ture **Bald Eagle** found along Uvas Road on 10 Nov (AV, CH) was a good early season find. Two adult **Ferruginous Hawks** seen at the Ogier Avenue ponds on 4 Nov (GHt et al.) were the only ones reported this month. The winter flock of **Black Skimmers** at Charleston Slough has now grown to 22 birds (m.ob.). Often active at dawn and dusk, flying birds give strange barking calls — the “beagles of the air” chasing after some unseen rabbit.

Hummingbirds through Longspurs

An adult male **Costa's Hummingbird** was found in Stevens Creek CP on 23 Nov (LE). This Lower Sonoran hummingbird is rare at any time, but there is a summer and fall movement to the California central coast. There are three previous November records for Santa Clara County. A **Red-naped x Red-breasted Sapsucker** was seen at Ed Levin CP on 26 Nov (PLaT) and may be the same bird that wintered there last year. A well-

described intergrade **Northern Flicker** found in downtown San Jose on 13 Nov (EFe) was largely a Yellow-shafted Flicker except for a red moustachial mark. A kingbird found at Stevens Creek CP on 23 Nov (LE) was thought to be a Western Kingbird, although not all diagnostic features were seen. In November, Tropical, Cassin's, and Western are about equally likely. We have one prior record of Western Kingbird from November. A single **Tree Swallow** was seen over the Alviso marina on 27 Nov and three swallows, probably Trees, were over the Ogier Avenue ponds on 3 Nov (GHt). Tree and Violet-green Swallows are our typical (if rare) winter swallows. A **Townsend's Solitaire** was found at Mt. Madonna CP on 4 Nov (DLSu), near the fallow deer enclosure. This mountain wanderer is found somewhere in the county nearly every winter. A male **Black-throated Gray Warbler** seen near Mission College and Great America Parkway on 9 Nov (MJM) is probably attempting to winter. A vocal **Northern Waterthrush** was seen along Stevens Creek above Crittenden Lane on 23 Nov (WGB). This may be the same will-o-the-wisp found here in September. A **Western Tanager** was calling in Palo Alto on 19 Nov (DSt) near Cowper and Oregon Expressway, and is likely wintering somewhere in this area. **White-throated Sparrows** at feeders include a bird in Sunnyvale on 13 Nov (RS) and one in Los Gatos on 19 Nov (JD). Banded White-throateds include one along the Guadalupe River below Trimble on 15 Nov with a second on 28 Nov (SH) and two on Coyote Creek below Montague on 19 Nov (SH). An immature male **Chestnut-collared Longspur** was found at the Sierra Road summit on 6 Nov (MMR) for the fifth county record. Even in a good winter, hunting for longspurs here at their Santa Clara County “metropolis” is often a painstaking and fruitless task.

Storm abates, Sac'to Valley shows off its birds

Sac'to Nat'l Wildlife Refuge November 23-24

We gathered at the Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) on Friday morning, eyes posted to the skies. We weren't only looking for birds — we were hoping the weather forecasters were wrong once again. Would we be dodging huge buckets of rain? The ducks and geese certainly wouldn't mind.

Dave Cook and others called out various flying skeins of birds, including Greater White-fronted Geese, Snow Geese, Ross' Geese and White-faced Ibis. There were individual birds as well: an American Bittern and Green Heron. Turkey Vultures roosted among the eucalyptus along the entry road.

Once we were all gathered we started the drive toward the first observation platform, Mike Mammoser in the lead. We kept a cheerful outlook even though Sacramento NWR no longer lets you get out of your car wherever you'd like. The viewing platform and the road on either side yielded wonderful views — fields of Ross' and Snow Geese (including one blue phase Snow Goose tucked in among the sea of white), Ring-necked Duck, Bufflehead, Cinnamon, Blue-winged and Green-winged Teal, American Wigeon, Gadwall, Northern Pintail, and Mallard, to name a few, plus one Eurasian Wigeon (looking like a mahogany tennis ball,

head tucked in close to his body). There were hundreds of everything, and we stayed dry.

The slow drive to the second viewing area at the Refuge was punctuated by one stop. Our eagle-eyed leader, Mike, spotted — you guessed! — a Golden Eagle sitting on a snag. The bird was at least a half mile away, reminding me how fantastic some people's eyes really are and also to look at everything closely.

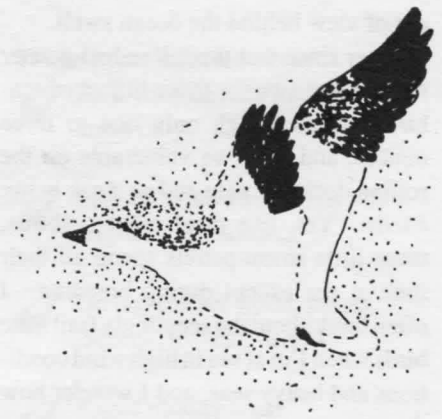
We slowed for more fields of Snow and Ross' Geese including a single blue phase of each of these species. When we arrived at the second viewing area we were treated to terrific views of a Peregrine Falcon. Having been to this spot over half a dozen times over the years and hearing this falcon is usually present, I was happy to have finally seen it.

After lunch, Mike led us through some washboard back roads for great views of Sandhill Cranes and an enormous flock of White-faced Ibis. Then we proceeded to Gray Lodge. Still dry — the weather forecasters had missed their mark.

At Gray Lodge we drove the perimeter loop, stopping as we pleased to see more ducks and geese including another Eurasian Wigeon. Then we walked to the observation platform and waited until the waterfowl flew out for the night; the astonishing whoosh of their wing beats is never a disappointment. Such an ethereal sound; possibly slightly upstaged by the Sandhill Cranes coming in to roost. I especially enjoyed that we were not the only people watching the scene. We shared the platform with parents, children, and other couples (hopefully future Audubon members).

Our walk back to the cars was interrupted by one sharp-eyed participant who saw a Great Horned Owl fly into a tree. We spent a fair amount of time looking at or trying to find it, depending on where you were standing. A perfect example of camouflage.

The drive into Williams yielded one Barn Owl swooping across the road followed by dinner at Granzella's Restaurant.



Snow Goose by Bonnie Bedford-White

The weather remained dry until sometime in the middle of the night when the skies must have opened up. When I opened my motel room door in the morning I was greeted with at least 6-8" of flooding outside my room! Staff was trying to squeegee the excess out to the parking lot. The clouds looked angry, streets were flooded and the hunters at the local McDonald's said more storms would be coming in. So most of the group elected to drive home and call it a day — except for a few of us who continued on our own.

Mike Mammoser went to the Sutter Buttes area which we had skipped the day before. He saw a dozen Tundra Swans to the east side of the buttes and more Sandhill Cranes. In a flock of sparrows at the northwest side he found a Grasshopper Sparrow and a couple of Pine Siskins.

Frank Vanslager and I drove to Colusa NWR and saw the usual ducks, but also large groupings (8-10) of male Ring-necked Pheasants and many very soggy Red-tailed Hawks, four of them sharing one tree, which seemed unusual since I have been told that they are quite territorial and normally wouldn't gather in the same tree like that.

In all, this trip is always a wonderful experience. Thousands of birds, always leading me to ponder what the area looked like a hundred years ago before the wetlands began to disappear and become the farms of today.

—Bonnie Bedford-White

Field Notes *cont'd*

Observers: Bill Bousman (WGB), Jean Dubois (JD), Al Eisner (AME), Larry English (LE), Eric Feuss (EF), Grant Hoyt (GHt), Sherry Hudson (SH), Caralisa Hughes (CH), Peter LaTourrette (PLaT), Mike Mammoser (MJM), Bob Reiling (RWR), Mike Rogers (MMR), Debbie Stevenson (DS), Dick Stovel (DS), Rosalie Strait (RS), David Suddjian (DLSu), Linda Sullivan (LS), Vivek Tiwari (ViT), Frank Vanslager (FV), and Ann Verdi (AV).

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

Tossing seabirds

cont'd from Page 1

out of view behind the ocean swell.

Ever since that time, I've had greater respect and awe for these littlest of seabirds, which weigh only one to three ounces, and seem so vulnerable on the rolling deck of a ship and so weak in my hands. Yet, like most other seabirds, these little storm-petrels spend all their time at sea except during breeding. I often think about the seemingly frail little birds when I'm at sea in high wind conditions and heavy seas, and I wonder how they manage to survive.

I have "tossed" many seabirds, including shearwaters, petrels, storm-petrels, and auklets since that initial rescue experience. Once, I thought I was going to have to figure out a way to capture a Laysan Albatross that had landed on the foredeck of our ship off the Northwest Hawaiian Islands. Albatrosses can stand on a ship's deck, but need such a long take-off distance that getting up and over the ship's railings is a real problem. To my great relief, this bird figured out a way to scramble over the railing and launch itself, unassisted, while I was looking for something to throw over it. Larger seabirds can be quite strong and uncooperative during an attempted rescue, and not shy about pecking the hand that tries to save them. I took care to wear gloves when capturing and releasing the larger shearwaters and petrels.

Why do seabirds get stranded on ships? Here's my theory: Like nighttime radio tower lights that attract birds who end up colliding with the tower guywires, a ship's lights attract seabirds at night, causing them to unintentionally end up on decks. I think this is especially true of ships that have nighttime deck operations requiring a lot of light, like some types of fishing, or in our case, geological coring operations. Often I would make rounds of the decks first thing in the morning to check for seabirds, and release any that had become stranded overnight. Usually, however, stranded birds were first noticed on deck by crew members or one of the scientists on deck during the night. If

Trip report

Sunnyvale hosts fine dining for Peregrine Falcon

The renowned "TBA" (aka Frank Vanslager) led an SCVAS walk on Saturday morning, Dec. 8 at the Sunnyvale Water Treatment Plant under ideal calm and mostly sunny conditions. We started out with Burrowing Owls on each side of the creek near the parking area. Our walk along the side of the dump was rewarded with another Burrowing Owl, a perched

not on night watch myself, I was often roused from my sleep to go out and deal with the unlucky avian guests.

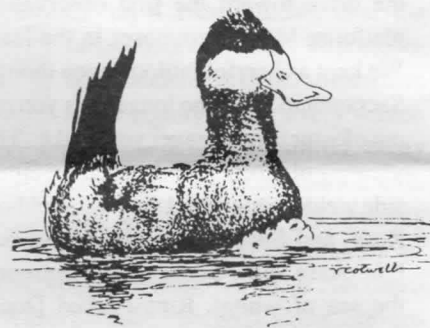
After launching a shearwater one night, and having it come right back onto the deck again, I decided to wait until dawn to release stranded birds. A rescued seabird would sit in the lab in a box until dawn, then upon being released it would fly off like a shot from a cannon.

The numbers of birds that I released from the deck varied from cruise to cruise, somewhere around three to four per week on cruises where deck operations went on at night. We didn't get as many stranded birds on other cruises that primarily involved sonar mapping of the ocean floor, done by towing instruments behind the ship and not requiring much in the way of lighted nighttime deck operations.

I hope that those of you who have friends and family members who go to sea, especially those who operate at night, will share this information with them, so that they will check the decks and "toss" birds in need of rescue. I assume, since there is nothing much else to be done for stranded birds unless an actual shipboard rehab facility were in place, that most birds found stranded on deck probably get tossed anyway, whether an intentional rescue or not. It is important to check the decks early in the morning in order to find the birds promptly and give them the best possible chance for survival by tossing them.

Merlin, two Peregrine Falcons, many Common Snipe, and a Eurasian Wigeon, among other things.

Later one of the peregrines took off from its power tower, swooped low over a levee, and on the wing, I think, took an unknown small duck. We were able to watch the peregrine's sometimes gruesome meal, and later during the walk we passed through its dining area. They are messy eaters. The meal was a Ruddy Duck. According to Sibley's new bird



"The meal was a Ruddy Duck. According to Sibley's new bird guide, a peregrine and a Ruddy Duck are 1.6 and 1.2 pounds, respectively."

Ruddy Duck by Rita Colwell

guide, a peregrine and a Ruddy Duck are 1.6 and 1.2 pounds, respectively.

In the main pond we had several sightings of Eurasian Wigeon, probably two individuals, one Redhead, and many scaup, but we were unable to find the Tufted Duck. Overhead were at least three Brown Pelicans and a flight of eight American White Pelicans. Toward the end of the walk near the pump station we saw many Bonaparte's Gulls, a Sora, and a Fox Sparrow.

Thanks go to Frank, and the birds of course, for a very enjoyable walk.

—Roland Kenner

Sudden Oak Death and Birding

by Jim Liskovec

The signature tree of California, the graceful coast live oak *Quercus agrifolia*, and three other native oak species are in trouble in Santa Clara County and neighboring coastal counties. Sudden Oak Death (SOD) attacks and kills live oaks, black oaks, Shreve oaks, and tanoaks, as well as California huckleberry and rhododendrons. We birders have a responsibility to see that our activities do not compound this serious problem.

The California Oak Mortality Task Force is a non-profit organization, formed in August 2000, that brings together public agencies, non-profit groups, and private interests to address SOD. For more information the best website is: www.suddenoakdeath.org.

Recommendations for management of SOD will change as new research findings are made. There are a lot of unknowns, but much has been learned in a very short time. Here is what is known:

- ☛ The disease is caused by a pathogen of the genus *Phytophthora*, not previously known to occur in California. Currently there is no name for the pathogen.
- ☛ At this time SOD is present only in Marin, Sonoma, Napa, San Mateo, Santa Cruz, Monterey, and Santa Clara counties.
- ☛ The host range is expected to increase.
- ☛ The pathogen has been found in soil, rainwater, and downed wood.
- ☛ The disease has been found almost exclusively in mixed oak forests, woodlands, or urban-forest interface situations, mainly

on shady hillsides and ridges in relatively natural stands of mixed hardwoods or hardwoods and conifers.

- ☛ A few positive samples have been seen in urban situations where a residential backyard tree is a remnant of a previously natural stand.
- ☛ None of the samples in residential or other urban locations has been SOD positive.
- ☛ There is no known cure for the disease at this time.

There are external clues to the presence of the disease, but only laboratory testing can confirm it. Spontaneous drooping or wilting of new growth may occur throughout the crown of tanoak prior to the appearance of bleeding cankers. On the true oaks bleeding is the first visible symptom.

Infected stems develop bleeding cankers that produce a reddish-brown to tar-black viscous seep. Foliage changes occur in the advanced stages of decline. Color changes rapidly from healthy green to chlorotic yellow and finally brown. Leaves may cling to branches for up to one year.

Unless proven otherwise, all forms of infected woody material will be assumed to be capable of dispersing the fungus. Birders who travel into infected areas can do their part to ensure that the disease is not spread.

The Marin Municipal Water District posts the following information on their reader boards. Similar material is posted by the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District.

While in an infected area:

- ☛ Park your vehicle in designated areas only.
- ☛ Stay on established trails and respect trail closures.
- ☛ Do not collect wood, plants (acorns, leaves), or soil.
- ☛ Avoid muddy areas.

Before returning to uninfected areas:

- ☛ Clean soil and mud off shoes, mountain bikes, horse's hooves, and pet's paws.
- ☛ Wash off soil or mud on tires, wheel wells and the undercarriage of your vehicles at the nearest automated car wash.

These precautions will help to contain the disease. It will also keep us from possibly infecting trees in our own yards and neighborhoods.

The information presented here was extracted from two sources: (1) the University of California Cooperative Extension Pest Alert #5, dated March 2001, "Sudden Oak Death: Diagnosis and Management," and (2) the Marin Municipal Water District poster.

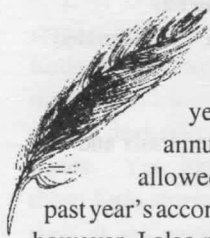
There is that classic springtime scene of an ancient coast live oak, with its huge canopy, on a hillside covered with wildflowers. It would be so sad to lose that. We must do our part.



California live oak, *Quercus agrifolia* leaves and acorns by Bonnie Bedford-White

Eight Years and Counting, Proudly

by Craig Breon



I have just finished my eighth year with SCVAS. At the end of each of those years, helping to write our annual fundraising letter has allowed me to reflect on the past year's accomplishments. Each time, however, I also marvel at the number of additional issues where we could be making a difference. We constantly reflect on where our resources are best used — a complex calculation involving our mission, directions from our board, staff time and resources, allies and opponents. Here's some of what I look forward to during the upcoming year.

Crucial Park Bond

In March, Californians will have a chance to vote for the 2002 Park Bond, which could provide \$2.6 billion for preservation of state, local, and urban parks, watersheds, and agricultural land. With the state and local budgets tight, the bond act could provide crucial funding for some local projects. Word is that the deal to acquire and restore 17,000 acres of Cargill's South Bay salt ponds is in jeopardy unless the bond act passes. Acquisition of the Bahia site along Marin's baylands — one of the few places in the Bay where oak woodlands come down to meet tidal wetlands — may also hinge on a positive outcome in March. I'll write more about this in next month's *Avocet* as the vote approaches.

Coyote Ridge

Thanks to a proposal written by SCVAS Conservation Chair Leda Beth Gray, National Audubon has agreed to help SCVAS lobby in Washington to preserve lands with rare serpentine soils in the Diablo Range east of San Jose and Morgan Hill. Serpentine lands host many rare and endangered plants and animal species. In particular, the area known as Coyote Ridge, just east of Highway 101, is targeted. In addition to wildlife benefits, protecting these lands would preserve views from the Valley floor and provide trails close to urban areas.

Our HCP

Under the Endangered Species Act, Habitat Conservation Plans (HCPs) are a planning tool that can reduce conflicts between development and rare fish and wildlife while considering the needs of large regions rather than trying to preserve species on a project-by-project basis. Santa Clara County, along with the City of San Jose and the Santa Clara Valley Water District, have agreed to create a Habitat Conservation Plan in concert with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the California Department of Fish and Game. How long this process will take, how much public participation there will be, and other variables are still up in the air. SCVAS intends to engage with the local jurisdictions and state and federal agencies involved to give our HCP the best chance of success.

Celebrating the Bay

In April, the Bay Area's Earth Day will focus on "Celebrating the Bay." SCVAS volunteer Jill Clay will be working with a coalition of other organizations around the Bay to coordinate efforts. I have suggested that we focus on convincing local cities and regional agencies to adopt the goals of the SF Bay Ecosystem Habitat Goals Report (long name, great document). These goals involve the restoration of more than 100,000 acres of wetlands around the Bay and have already been adopted by National Audubon's SF Bay Restoration Program. Getting local cities to adopt these same goals could help in two ways: 1) changing local land use plans to be more protective of the Bay's wetlands; and 2) convincing state and federal legislators to team up and lobby for the resources needed to complete the goals. We will also be hosting our second annual Earth Day event in Gilroy.

Canyon Heights

In our own Cupertino back yard, an inappropriate proposal to build a private school in an old quarry along Stevens Creek surfaced last year, and should come to a head this year. Some of the best fish

and bird habitat along Stevens Creek would be affected, and sensitive wetlands in the quarry would be paved over. Along with local neighborhoods, SCVAS will lead opposition to this project, suggesting a more appropriate urban location for the school.

Creek Mapping for Restoration

Thanks to a grant from the Santa Clara Valley Water District, SCVAS will acquire the equipment and funding needed to map non-native, invasive species in four creeks in the County. Once the species have been mapped, SCVAS, the Water District, and other community groups can use the information to mount efforts to remove the invasives and plant natives. We will rely heavily on volunteers to do the field work, so if you want to learn about plant identification and GPS equipment, and walk a creek or two, call Jennifer at (408) 252-3740.

Et cetera

There's really too much to mention, and my seven years as Environmental Advocate bias me toward talking about conservation issues, when our work and goals in birding and environmental education are also impressive. For example, our revised version of *Birding at the Bottom of the Bay* will come out shortly, and, I predict, to strong reviews. As always, we will bring you great free field trips, an informative publication in the *Avocet* (thanks to Grant Hoyt, Bonnie Bedford-White and others), wetlands field trips for hundreds of students, and lots more. Who knows, the SCVAS Board may even allow me to work on one of my fantasy projects — the Audubon Bus (don't ask . . . yet).

I should say that these aspirations are all made possible by two things: the vision of the SCVAS Board and the support of our members. If you haven't responded to the fundraising letter we sent out in December, please do. Your volunteer time and financial support are fundamental to our reaching many of the goals mentioned above.

Bay kayak outing inspires stewardship

by Kelly Crowley

SCVAS Environmental Advocate

I am a big fan of the Monterey Bay Aquarium. It is far and away my favorite tourist attraction in the Bay Area. (That's a bold statement, given my love of Ghirardelli chocolate and, thus, Ghirardelli Square in San Francisco.) But there's no question about it — the Aquarium tops my list. If you haven't been there, set down the *Avocet*, put on your shoes and go. The sights are unbelievable and the lessons invaluable.

The whole Aquarium is mind-boggling, really — from the underwater wonders of the natural world to the mechanics of operating and maintaining those model ecosystems. I typically stand in front of the exhibits, mouth agape, muttering, "Wow . . ." or "Neat-o!" When I listen to the visitors around me, I find that others are also reduced to such basic vocabulary.

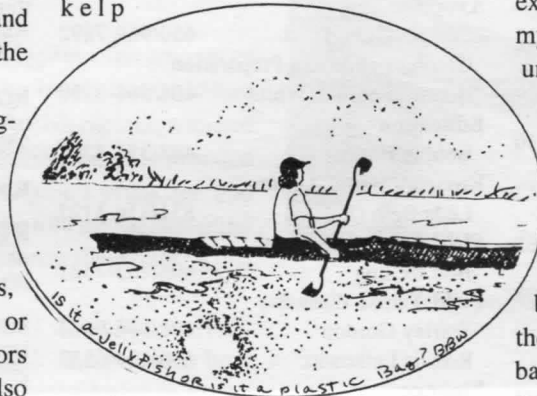
What is it about the Aquarium that evokes child-like wonder in its visitors? In part, it is the sheer magnitude of the Aquarium: the big windows in the tanks, the big schools of fish, the big whale hanging from the lobby ceiling. In part, it is the little things: the furry faces of the otters, the glittery schools of anchovies, the sea snails on the kelp. There's also the weird things, like "invisible" jellyfish, pet-able sting rays, and, of course, *Mola mola* (the giant sunfish).

But probably most of all, it's the simple fact that only a few inches of glass separate visitors from ocean life. It's an odd juxtaposition of two realms that typically don't meet.

Certainly, the experience is different for everyone. For me, the most evocative moment is when I walk out the back doors to the decks overlooking Monterey Bay. I am reminded that the amazing, unimaginable, unbelievable scenes in the tanks are REAL. From the Aquarium's outdoor decks I could spend hours looking out over the real kelp beds, spotting otters, birds, and always a few kayakers. Until

recently, those kayakers were the objects of my envy as they bobbed silently up and down with the kelp in the ocean swells, paddles resting peacefully on their laps.

Out in a kayak, there are no glass windows. There is no juxtaposition — the kayaker is part of the ocean environment, if only temporarily. I longed to be one of those kayakers. To get kelp



caught in my paddle! To see an otter in its real habitat, and up close! (At a safe distance of at least 75 feet, of course.)

A few weeks ago I finally had the opportunity to see the Aquarium from the ocean side. Venturing Crew 14, a coed group of 14 to 21-year olds (under the umbrella of the Boy Scouts of America) for which I am an advisor, planned a Monterey Bay kayaking trip. We rented kayaks for the day, and after spending the morning learning to launch the boats through the surf and maneuver them around large groups of sea lions, we paddled the short distance to the kelp beds outside the Aquarium.

Indeed, we became part of the kelp beds for the afternoon. We floated listlessly in the thick brown leaves, and watched waves crash into the concrete pillars and walls of the Aquarium. We saw one otter that had wrapped itself in kelp to take a nap, and one that was dining on a sea urchin. We saw a few jellyfish and numerous sea snails. Our paddles caught in the densely growing kelp as we floated about.

At one point, after seeing at least a half-dozen jellyfish, I caught sight of a large one about two meters from our two-seat kayak. "Whoa . . . look at that huge jellyfish on the right!" "Oooohh . . ." replied my boatmate. We sculled closer. "Oh," I said, almost laughing. "It's just a plastic bag." And we started to turn back to shore.

In that moment, yet another Aquarium exhibit became vividly real. Suddenly my heart sank into my stomach, and I understood how sea turtles and other marine mammals could mistake our trash for a meal. I had made the same mistake as a sea turtle, even though we are differentiated by, among other things, my capacity for analytical thought, my understanding of "plastic bags," and my superior eyesight. Out of the corner of my eye, that plastic grocery bag looked exactly like a jellyfish. For me, the error was a provocative experience that illustrated a lesson as a child at the Aquarium. For a sea turtle, such an error is just plain deadly.

We spun full circle and plucked our "jellyfish" from the Bay. We also picked up a few other pieces of trash as we made our way back to shore. Two of our crew members paddled the mile-and-a-half back to the beach towing behind their kayaks a waterlogged sleeping bag they'd found. Once at the beach they somehow hefted it 100 feet across the sand to the nearest trash can.

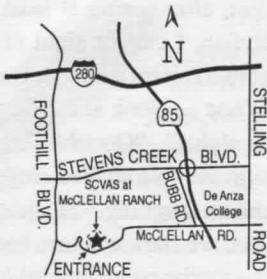
My point here is simple. Go to places like the Monterey Bay Aquarium. "Oooh and aaah" over the eye-popping exhibits. Recognize that the things you see and the lessons you learn are real. Then go home and do the little things that make a difference. Turn off unused lights, keep trash off the ground, pick up after others.

Thanks to the Venturing Crew members who heroically dragged that disgusting, cumbersome sleeping bag out of the ocean. And thanks to those of you who have been doing the little things for years. Keep up the good work.

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