



THE AVOCET

The Newsletter of the Santa Clara Audubon Society

May 2002

Stop, hey — what's that sound?

Birding by ear adds enjoyment, improves your overall 'game'

by Grant Hoyt

Back in the mid-1980s I was taking a springtime hike at Coal Mine Ridge in Portola Valley, hoping to kindle a spark of enthusiasm in my new girlfriend for the offbeat pastime of birdwatching. While trying to get good looks at a Chestnut-backed Chickadee, we were joined on the trail by an elderly couple, diligently ambling up the path as part of their regular morning constitutional.

The woman, clad in spiffy jogging sweatsuit and matching visor, stopped to query us about our activity. "Oh, you're birdwatchers!" she exclaimed in a proper British dialect. "Well, I say — who is this 'Johnny-One-Note' I keep hearing in the trees? He's awfully persistent!" I was able to identify the singer as a Hutton's Vireo, whose slurred, repetitive "zu-weep" song can be heard throughout our region in oak and mixed woodland habitat. She thanked me for the bit of bird-lore, and the two continued their uphill sojourn, newly armed with the ability to identify future Hutton's Vireos by ear.

Who knows if they did, indeed, recognize the next Hutton's they heard, but Karen and I still get a chuckle over Johnny-One-Note's song whenever we're out birding, recalling the inquisi-

tive hiker and her amusing characterization of a bird's song. The anecdote underscores not only the value of a sharp ear as a tremendous asset to one's ability to identify birds in the field, but how much fun it can be, too.

Spring is the time of year when breeding birds' songs are warbled, trilled, twittered, hooted, and croaked with great passion and intensity by our local avifauna. After all, it's a matter of survival — successful breeding often depends on a male bird's ability to attract a female with song. You know those all-night songfests delivered by Northern Mockingbirds, the ones that prompt your neighbor to say, "I know you're a birdwatcher, but I'm gonna kill that *#\$*!@!* bird if it keeps me awake one more night!"" Just a poor bachelor bird, desperately trying to get a date for the breeding season.

Birding by ear is a struggle for many of us. Every year I have to freshen up my listening skills when the vireos, warblers and other neotropical migrants return to local habitats to set up breeding territories. Even common, year-round residents like Song Sparrow and Bewick's Wren can give us trouble if we don't pay attention to details of their respective songs. And just when you think you've got Oak Titmouse pegged as "that raspy tone" you hear one deliver a burst of decidedly non-raspy chirps.

That's why it's so helpful to your whole "game" to develop your birding ear. As with visual identification, you don't have to go crazy — you can take your ear-birding to any level you're comfortable with. Don't be put off if you can't hear Brown Creeper and Golden-crowned Kinglet, either. The high-frequency songs of those two species and a few others are inaudible to many birders. Just try to identify the familiar songs and call notes you hear most

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**General Membership Meeting
"Grassland Birds of the Central Valley"
with John Fulton
Wednesday May 15, 7:30 PM
Palo Alto Arts Center
Newell & Embarcadero Rds.**

John Fulton is very much behind the good birding habitat at San Luis and Los Baños refuges and has some great slides of grassland birds. He has worked as a biologist in this area for 8 years and has accomplished wonders on recent successful habitat restoration projects in the Refuge "Grasslands." He will also be a highlight speaker at the Refuge on the May 11th International Migratory Bird Day, one of the many bird festivals celebrated throughout the world on this very important day for birds and birding. Western Merced County has a block of habitat, a grassland ecological area of 180,000 acres, which includes 35,000 acres of federal refuge, 30,000 acres of state parks,

cont'd on Page 5

**Special Cheesemans'
Tour Offer
Benefits SCVAS
—see Page 9**

May Field Trips

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

LO = Lunch optional

RC = Heavy rain cancels

Saturday May 4, 8:30 AM

Stevens Creek Co. Park

Half day. Leader: TBD (Call Bob Reiling (408) 253-7527). From I-280 in Cupertino take Foothill Expwy exit south 2.1 miles, becomes Stevens Canyon Rd.; turn left into first (Chestnut) park entrance and meet in first parking lot. Excellent riparian birding spot for migrants, local breeding birds. Possible \$4 entrance fee. **LO**

Wednesday May 8, 8:00 AM

Anderson Lake County Park

Half day. Leader: Emelie Curtis (408) 779-2637. From Hwy 101 in southern San Jose (Morgan Hill) take Cochrane Rd. east; at the very base of dam turn left and meet at parking lot on left. **LO**

Saturday May 11, 8:00 AM

Charleston Slough

Half day. Leader: Nick Yatsko (408) 247-5499. Meet at Terminal Way at end of San Antonio Rd. north off Hwy. 101 in Mountain View. Beginners welcome; all are encouraged to attend.

Sunday May 12, 7:30 (8:15) AM

South coastal San Mateo Co.

Half day plus. Leader: Al Eisner (650) 364-3686, days and voice mail (650) 926-2018. Trip begins with "sea watch" at Pigeon Point until at least 8:15; if 7:30 is a bit early, feel free to arrive later. If you have a scope be sure to bring it. Meet at large pullout on Pigeon Point Rd. immediately north of lighthouse (about 28 miles north of Santa Cruz, 22 miles south of Half Moon Bay.) We will then move on to other habitats in the Pescadero area. Highlights; variety of breeding (and singing) songbirds, resident marsh birds, migrating seabirds and shorebirds. **LO**

Saturday May 18, 8:00 AM

Grant Ranch County Park

Half day. Leader: Dave Cook (408) 275-1492. **Limited to 20 participants**; call Dave for reservations. A rare opportunity

to bird closed areas of the park and view results of Bluebird Nestbox Program firsthand. From I-680 take Alum Rock Ave. northeast, turn right on Mt. Hamilton Rd; go approx. 9 mi. to park. Meet at Hall's Valley Lake parking lot on left, just past main park entrance on right.

Sunday May 19, 8:00 AM

Almaden Quicksilver County Park

Half day. Leader: Ann Verdi (408) 266-5108. A short loop of 1.5 miles taking Mine Hill, Guadalupe and Senador Mines Trails, while birds are most active. Target birds: W. Wood-Pewee, Ash-throated Flycatcher, W. Tanager; newly fledged Oak Titmouse, C-b Chickadee, juncos, woodpeckers, etc. Take Almaden south past Blossom Hill Rd. and Coleman Rd.; turn right at next exit (McAbee Rd.) and follow until it dead-ends at park entrance. Pierce dairy farm is on right, parking is along street. Meet at trailhead entrance.

Saturday May 25, 8:30 AM

Arastradero OSP

Half day plus. Birding by Ear 8:30 AM, Butterfly Watching 1:00 PM. Leader: Garth Harwood (650) 879-0724. From I-280 take Page Mill Rd. west, turn right on Arastradero Rd. and meet in parking lot about 0.5 mile on right. For butterfly portion of trip please bring close-focusing binoculars and a strong interest in the subject. Use of "Local Butterflies" guide (available from SCVAS for under \$10) is recommended. Moderate walking. **RC**

Wednesday May 29, 8:00 AM

Monte Bello Open Space Preserve

Leader: Rita Colwell (650) 949-1869. Meet at large Monte Bello OSP parking area on the left side of Page Mill Rd about 7 miles southwest of I-280. Possible Grasshopper Sparrow, Lazuli Bunting, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Ash-throated Flycatcher. Possible cold, wet, foggy weather. Moderate, but hilly walking. **LO**

Saturday June 1, 8:30 AM

Elkhorn Slough

Full day. Leader: Rick Fournier (831) 632-2473. Meet at Elkhorn Slough National

Estuarine Research Reserve Visitor Center. Take Hwy 1 south to Moss Landing, left on Dolan Rd., left on Elkhorn Rd and after about 2.2 miles, left into Reserve. Morning birding in Reserve, then Moss Landing, Moonglow Dairy in the afternoon. Specialties: nesting Caspian Terns, Great Blue Herons, Great Egrets and Double-crested Cormorants. Other possibilities: Warbling and Cassin's Vireos, six different species of warblers and more. Expect 60+ species. Great trip for all level of birders. Entrance fee of \$2.50.

Saturday June 1, all day

Palo Alto Summer Bird Count

For those who can't wait for Christmas Bird Counts, an all-day (night, too!) bird census in the 15-mile diameter Palo Alto CBC circle, including habitat from Skyline Blvd. to the Baylands, and portions of Redwood City, Menlo Park, Woodside, La Honda, Stanford, Palo Alto, Mt. View, Los Altos and Los Altos Hills. Contact Compiler Matthew Dodder at: <mdodder@earthlink.net> or the SCVAS office at (408) 252-3747 for details.

Sunday June 2, 8:00 AM

Skyline Ridge OSP

Half day. Leader: Bob Reiling (408) 253-7527. Meet at northwest corner of Skyline Blvd. (Hwy. 35) and Page Mill Rd. (Note: Do not park in Russian Ridge parking lot!) Moderately strenuous walking with some elevation change. Highlights: possible Chipping Sparrow, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Western Tanager. Bring extra layers of clothing as temperatures can vary wildly. **LO**

Saturday June 8, 8:00 AM

Monte Bello OSP

Half day. Leader: Rita Colwell (650) 949-1869. From I-280 in Palo Alto take Page Mill Rd west, toward Skyline Blvd. (Hwy. 35), for approx. 7 miles, meet at large Monte Bello OSP parking area on left. Possible Lazuli Bunting, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Chipping and Grasshopper Sparrows. Be prepared—can be cold, wet and foggy. **LO**

Calendar

Wednesday May 1, 7:30 PM

Bay Area Bird Photographers presents John Cang with an update on South Florida birding, with slides from the past five seasons. Lucy Evans Baylands Interpretive Center, E. Embarcadero Rd., Palo Alto.

Saturday May 4, 8:45 - 3PM

Creek Group Conference

McClellan Ranch Park, Cupertino (see story on Page 5).

Tuesday May 7, 4:30 PM

Education Committee meeting
McClellan Ranch Park.

Tuesday May 7, 7:30 PM

Board of Directors meeting

McClellan Ranch Park. All members welcome to attend.

Saturday May 11, 10 - 4

Int'l. Migratory Bird Day

Don Edwards National Wildlife Refuge, Alviso (see announcement at right and *Volunteer Ventures*, Page 4, for details.)

Tuesday May 14, 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: Pileated Woodpecker

Wednesday May 15, 7:30 PM

General Meeting, Palo Alto

John Fulton on grassland birds of the Central Valley (see Page 1)

Wednesday May 22, 7:30 PM

Environmental Action Committee

meeting at McClellan Ranch Park.

Note: General meetings in Campbell will resume later this year or early next year when Campbell Community Center renovations are completed.

"International Migratory Bird Day" at Don Edwards SF Bay NWR Environmental Education Center



*Earth Day illustration by Rumi Oba,
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Friday, May 10

7:00 PM – Adult Twilight Bird Walk

8:30-9:30 PM – SFBBO Presentation

Saturday, May 11

8:30 AM – Adult Bird Walk (Reservations Required)

Shade-grown Coffee Tasting

10:00-3:00 – Tables with crafts for kids

Building Birdhouses

Bird Gardening Workshops

Worm Workshops

12:00 – Family Bird Walk

1:30 – Family Bird Walk

1:30-2:30 – Adult Bird Walk

3:15-4:00 – Presentation by SCVAS

Scheduled throughout the day:

Live bird presentations (1:30, 2:15)

Tours of SFBBO Banding Station (7, 9, and 11 AM)

For details, call Don Edwards NWR at (408) 262-5513.

Volunteer Ventures

by Jennifer Peritz

SCVAS Programs Coordinator

“Volunteerism is the voice of the people put into action. These actions shape and mold the present into a future of which we can all be proud.” —Helen Dyer

Many of our volunteer positions offer you the opportunity to impact the future. The **Wetlands and Woodlands Discovery Program**, one of our Education Committee’s strongest programs, allows volunteers to clearly leave an impression on the numerous students, teachers, and parents we lead on field trips each year. As we wrap up the end of our Discovery Program field trips for this season, I’d like to give a whole-hearted thanks to those who made this program possible over the past few months. Thank you to **Elaine Gould, Jerry Towner, Peg Bernucci, Lee French, Beth Anderson, Anne Creevy, Eleanor Sherman, Marilyn Donahue, Janet Bertaina, Kris McNamara, Linda Johnson, Anne Mortimer, Susan Bell, and Bobbie Handen**. I always enjoy the three months each fall and each spring when we run this program, and look forward to next September when things gear up again. In the meantime, if anyone is curious about this interactive and impacting program, please give me a call. Although we aren’t currently running trips, I’m always happy to begin training eager volunteers!

Another great opportunity to help mold the future of SCVAS and our programs is to be involved with one of our committees – Membership, Education, Environmental Action, or Fundraising. In particular, the **Fundraising Committee** is in search of members who have development, grant-writing, corporate sponsorship, or long-term planning experience. One way to support the many programs provided by SCVAS is to participate in the Fundraising Committee, which secures funding for all our committees and programs. Continuing to expand programs during uncertain economic times means that our chapter will need to put greater effort into diversifying sources of income. Volunteers interested in this committee will be asked to participate in evening meetings once or twice per month.

The Environmental Action and the Education Committees are also interested in recruiting members – particularly individuals from the **South County area**. As our programs expand southward, so must our volunteer base, so please let me know if you want to volunteer or have contacts in this area.

SCVAS is also looking for volunteers to help at **International Migratory Bird Day** at the Don Edwards SF Bay National Wildlife Refuge in Alviso. As co-sponsors, SCVAS will participate in the main event, which takes place on Saturday, May 11 from 10 AM-4 PM (*see calendar section*), and give a presentation on the special birding areas

around us at 3 PM. Volunteers are needed to help support the SCVAS tables, which include the Nature Shop, Membership, nature arts and crafts, and building birdhouses. This is a fabulous opportunity to promote the chapter and send a message to the community about the importance of migrating birds. If you’d like to help, but don’t want to miss any of the fun, you need not stay all day at one table. Volunteers will work in shifts and thus be able to participate in the day’s events, such as joining one of the adult or family bird walks or listening to a bird-gardening or bird-banding presentation.

One of our chapter’s most popular volunteer positions is still available . . . **Nature Shop Assistant**. Volunteers who work in the Nature Shop get to experience SCVAS activities from a front row seat! These volunteers handle everything from assisting customers and completing general office tasks to planning and decorating the office for events and Open Houses. We are eager to fill this position, so please contact me today for more details.

For more information on these or other volunteer programs, please contact Jennifer at (408) 252-3740 or <programs@scvas.org>.

Space available for Sierra Bird Class

Birds of the Sierra Nevada

Instructor: John Mariani

This course will focus on Sierran bird species, their identification and ecology. The single class meeting on Monday, June 24 at McClellan Ranch Park will be followed by a weekend field trip to Yosemite National Park, June 28-30. Target birds include Blue Grouse, Great Gray Owl, Calliope Hummingbird, Black-backed Woodpecker, Williamson’s Sapsucker, and Pine Grosbeak, among others.

Participants are responsible for their own lodging and transportation. Our base within the park will be Curry Village in Yosemite Valley, from which we will commute to higher elevations. Accommodations in the park must be reserved early! To reserve space for this course, call the SCVAS office at (408) 252-3747 as soon as possible. The class is limited to 18 participants. Fee is \$75; additional \$1.50 materials fee payable to instructor at first class meeting.

John Mariani

redknot@worldnet.att.net

www.birdswest.com

Creekside News, Vol. 4 is published

Creek group meeting set for May 4

SCVAS members can call or e-mail the office and we'll send you a copy of the newest edition of *Creekside News*, our nearly annual newsletter of local creeks and creek advocates around Santa Clara County.

We published the first edition of *Creekside News* in the spring of 1998, and this latest edition is Volume Four. In addition, whenever we publish the newsletter, we also host a day-long discussion of local creek issues and projects, where local activists or just interested individuals gather with representatives of government agencies and other nonprofit organizations to share their ideas and possible common projects. This year's Creeks Conference will be held Saturday, May 4 from 9 - 3 at our offices in McClellan Ranch Park in Cupertino.

In the past, *Creekside News* has been influential on public policy and has become a catalyst for increased involvement in local projects sponsored by the dozen or more creek-oriented groups around the county. For example, as was mentioned in the *Avocet* recently, the first volume of *Creekside News* contained a list of three changes the Santa Clara Valley Water District should make to gain the support of the conservation community for increased District funding. In one form or another, the Water District has adopted all three of those recommendations.

SCVAS started this publication as a way to allow smaller creek groups and individual activists to get their message out to a wider audience. Without Audubon to provide the funding and compile the newsletter, many of those people would simply not have the resources to commu-

nicate county-wide. We send *Creekside News* to every city council member, planning commissioner, and parks commissioner in the county, as well as to many other local and regional decision makers. In addition, each creek group can distribute the newsletter to their members, and we get them out to many schools and libraries.

This year's *Creekside News* contains articles on:

- ♦ Biological indicators of stream health
- ♦ Children's books about creeks
- ♦ SCV Water District's new grant program for nonprofits
- ♦ Project updates from local creek groups
- ♦ Including diverse communities
- ♦ Guadalupe and Los Gatos Creek Trails plan
- ♦ Guadalupe River Parks & Gardens demonstration project
- ♦ FAHCE Project to improve local anadromous fisheries

To get a copy of *Creekside News*, call Susan at (408) 252-3747. If you want to come to our Creeks Conference on May 4th call Kelly at (408) 252-3740.

Bird Quiz

A herd of cattle. A drove of pigs. A . . . flock of birds?

No, we'll need to be much more specific than "flock" for this month's quiz on obsolete terms for groups of particular types of feathered creatures. It seems that back in Will Shakespeare's day the huntsmen, gamekeepers, and perhaps even birdwatching enthusiasts of the British Isles had specific appellations for aggregations of birds. Some of these terms have persisted into modern times — a *covey* of quail is not unfamiliar, though in olden times a covey referred to partridges, while a *bevy* meant quail.

Here is a list of unusual (by our standards) terms for groups of birds. Can you match the terms from Column A with the appropriate species from Column B?

A

1. A *cast* of
2. A *chattering* of
3. A *company* of
4. A *congregation* of
5. A *covert* of
6. An *exaltation* of
7. A *fall* of
8. A *gaggle* of
9. A *murmuration* of
10. A *muster* of
11. A *plump* of
12. A *siege* of
13. A *skein* of
14. A *spring* of
15. A *watch* of

B

- a. herons or bitterns
- b. geese
- c. wildfowl
- d. larks
- e. geese (flying)
- f. nightingales
- g. choughs
- h. teal
- i. wigeon
- j. hawks
- k. plovers
- l. peacocks
- m. woodcock
- n. starlings
- o. coots

(Answers on Page 9)

Grassland bird program

cont'd. from Page 1

25,000 acres of Fish & Game land, and 65,000 acres of federal easements on private duck club land. It's the largest contiguous block of wetlands left in the Central Valley, the wintering area for over 20,000 Ross's Geese, a half million ducks, and over 15,000 Lesser Sandhill Cranes. Bitterns, White Pelicans, thousands of shorebirds, the California endemic Tricolored Blackbird and the recently de-listed endangered species, Aleutian Canada Goose, all seek the good habitat in this very birdy area. John will cover birding opportunities in the Central Valley, grassland ecology, habitat restoration projects, San Luis and Los Baños refuges, and International Migratory Bird Day.

Field Notes

by Bill Bousman

Pelicans through Gulls

No overwintering **American White Pelicans** were found last year in March, but this year they were widespread, albeit in low numbers. On the Mountain View salt ponds, there were nine on 4 Mar with one still there on 29 Mar (WGB). In the Bolsa de San Felipe, in the south county, six were seen on 8 Mar (MP) and more were at San Felipe Lake in nearby San Benito County on 21 Mar (WGB). A number of birds were seen at Lake Cunningham on 10 Mar (EFe) and six were at the Parkway Lakes on 18 Mar (MJM). Single **American Bitterns** at the Mountain View Forebay on 24 Mar (DSt) and in the outer Palo Alto Flood Control Basin (FCB) on 28 Mar (JY) were nice finds for March. A lingering **Greater White-fronted Goose** was seen at Lake Cunningham 7-9 Mar (TeG, ViT). The adult **Snow Goose** wintering at Calero Reservoir was last seen on 10 Mar (AV). **Wood Ducks** declined in March at their favored Almaden Reservoir with 15 there on 9 Mar (AV), 12 on 18 Mar (JMa), and two on 31 Mar (AV). Single **Eurasian Wigeon** were seen in Salt Pond A1 in Mountain View with observations on 4 Mar (WGB), 9 Mar (MJM), and 27 Mar (WGB). **Blue-winged Teal** continued in the Palo Alto FCB with 10 found on 2 Mar (ViT), up to three on 9 Mar (MJM, LB), and two on 25 Mar (KH). A male and two female **Red-head** on Salt Pond A1 on 9 Mar (MJM) appear to be the last of the large influx of birds this winter. Two plus **Red-breasted Mergansers** in the Alviso salt ponds on 21 Mar (RWR, FV) were the last report of the winter. A **Ferruginous Hawk** east of the Ogier Avenue ponds on 2 Mar (GHt et al.) was the last bird noted this winter. A **Lesser Yellowlegs** seen north of the old Alviso marina on 2 Mar (MJM) is probably one of the two birds seen more or less regularly in the Alviso area this winter. Five **Sanderlings** were at the same location on 2 Mar (MJM) and two were seen there on 17 Mar (ViT). The Lake Cunningham **Lesser Black-backed Gull**

was seen in early March with the last report on 10 Mar (EFe et al.). Quite exciting, another **Lesser Black-backed Gull** was seen at the San Jose-Santa Clara Water Pollution Control Plant (WPCP) on 9 Mar (MMR). This bird is undoubtedly the adult first found in Alviso on 22 Oct 1995. It has not been seen at all this winter—the last observation was 8 Oct 2000. A 2nd- or 3rd-winter **Glaucous Gull** was a one-day wonder at Almaden Lake on 10 Mar (EFe et al.)—we've not had any 1st-winter birds this year.

March was graced with two Lesser Black-backed Gulls — our regular Lake Cunningham bird and an adult in Alviso, irregular there over the last 6 1/2 years

Owls through Goldfinches

A **Long-eared Owl** was seen at Ed Levin CP on 30 Mar (D&PB). They nested here last year. A true will-o-the-wisp, a single **Short-eared Owl** put in brief appearances in the Palo Alto FCB on 4 Mar (MMR) and 19 Mar (RC), and nearby at Byxbee Park on 21 Mar (CS et al.). Nearby in San Mateo County, up to 10 **Vaux's Swifts** were seen in Portola Valley and Woodside on 26 Mar (PS). This is at least a week earlier than birds normally turn up on this side of the Santa Cruz Mountains. Migrant male **Rufous Hummingbirds** were picked out of the mixed *Selasphorus* hummers at Ed Levin CP with one on 9 Mar (MMR), two on 12 Mar (RWR, FV), one on 23 Mar (AME), and one on 30 Mar (D&PB). The wintering **Lewis's Woodpecker** on Bailey Avenue in the Coyote Valley has remained at least through 21 Mar (WGB). A single bird was seen in Pacheco SP, off Hwy 152, on 8 Mar (RK, PK). There has been little ornithological exploration in this area and it is unclear if this species

regularly winters here. The immature female **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** wintering on the Santa Clara Valley Water District ponds off the Almaden Expressway was seen regularly in March, including an observation on 30 Mar (AV). A male sapsucker observed in Pacheco SP on 8 Mar (RK, PK) showed characteristics of a hybrid **Red-naped x Red-breasted Sapsucker**. It appeared to be largely typical of a Red-naped, except for a red wash in the black breast band and around the nape. Another hybrid bird, at Ed Levin CP 9-12 Mar (MMR, RWR, FV), showed considerably more red invading the black chest band and appeared similar to the hybrid described from there last November. A single **Cassin's Kingbird** was found along San Felipe Road south of Hwy 152 on 31 Mar (RWR et al.). This spot remains the lone outpost of this rare breeding flycatcher. **American Dippers** were found along Stevens Creek above Mt. Eden Road, with two on 11 Mar (FV) and one on 24 Mar (MJM). The wintering male **Nashville Warbler** found in a Palo Alto yard in January was seen once again on 16 Mar (PMB). Single **Western Tanagers** seen at Almaden Lake on 13 Mar (RWR, FV et al.) and in a Milpitas yard on 28 Mar (R&JL) are thought to be wintering birds. The first migrants normally appear in the second and third weeks of April. The **Green-tailed Towhee** wintering on Coyote Creek below Tasman was seen on 3 Mar (JH) and 10 Mar (EFe et al.). Although we occasionally encounter this towhee in spring migration, known wintering birds appear to leave by late February or early March. A **Swamp Sparrow** along the wastewater outfall at the Palo Alto Baylands on 20 Mar (WGB) was molting into its alternate plumage. It seems likely that this is the same bird seen nearby earlier in the winter. A wintering **White-throated Sparrow** was again noted at a San Jose feeder on 1 Mar (JAC). One along Coyote Creek below Tasman on 10 Mar (EFe et al.) was at a location where one was found earlier in the winter. Another White-throat was seen in an east San Jose yard on 20 Mar (PB). The only

Trip reports

Alum Rock Park March 30

This morning's field trip to Alum Rock Park had an excellent turnout of 26 people, nice weather (sunny after some initial low clouds, but never too warm) and dry trails. What more could one ask for? Oh: birds!

We were greeted at the Rustic Lands parking area by a chorus of singing Bullock's Orioles. I estimated about eight there, easily viewable and in various plumages, plus three more later on our walk. We had a pleasant hike of about three or so miles, with a couple of uphill stretches, making for a rather long "half day". The group put up admirably with having to walk single-file along the Todd Quick trail to our highest-altitude point.

Field Notes *cont'd*

Lawrence's Goldfinch found in March was a single bird flying over Ed Levin CP on 9 Mar (MMR). Reports of breeding **Nutmeg Mannikins** continue from Almaden Lake and upstream on Alamitos Creek (v.ob.). However, some birds are reported carrying nesting material, some building nests, while others are feeding young fledglings. Are their nest activities really this asynchronous?

Observers: Lou Beaudet (LB), Peg Bernucci (PB), Bill Bousman (WGB), Dennis & Patricia Braddy (D&PB), Phyllis Browning (PMB), Richard Carlson (RC), Jack Cole (JAC), Al Eisner (AME), Eric Feuss (EFe), Ted Gross (TeG), Kirsten Holmquist (KH), Grant Hoyt (GHt), John Hutz (JH), Roland Kenner (RK), Pat Kenny (PK), Randy & Janet Little (R&JL), Mike Mammoser (MJM), John Mariani (JMa), Mark Paxton (MP), Bob Reiling (RWR), Mike Rogers (MMR), Paul Saraceni (PS), Cagan Sekercioglu (CS), Dick Stovel (DSSt), Vivek Tiwari (ViT), Frank Vanslager (FV), Ann Verdi (AV), and James Yurchenco (JY).

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

But the reward on that trail was, for many, the species of the trip: three to five Rufous-crowned Sparrows. One of the first pair was only seen adequately by a couple of birders; most of us got good looks at one or both of the second pair; but the last bird simply posed for us at close range for over a minute. The top of the trail is also a good Western Kingbird spot — when we had just about given up on seeing it there, one finally flew in, perching and flycatching in full view, sometimes with an oriole perched right next to it.

Other spring birds included one male Allen's Hummingbird (excellent scope views of a bird high in a eucalyptus), several small, separate groups of Violet-green and Northern Rough-winged Swallows, two Orange-crowned Warblers (heard), about five singing House Wrens, and a singing male Black-headed Grosbeak. Continuing winter birds included two Hermit Thrushes and two Townsend's Warblers. Soaring birds included many Turkey Vultures, several Red-tailed Hawks, and one (or at most two) each of Northern Harrier, Cooper's Hawk and Red-Shouldered Hawk, plus a Sharp-shinned Hawk and an American Kestrel seen by a few. Last, and I insist least, since I failed to hear it, one Wild Turkey was heard. (More *sotto voce* gobbling from this quarter.)

So, nothing really unusual (we've had Golden Eagle and Canyon Wren each in about half of recent SCVAS trips at this time of year, but neither today), but we had a very pleasant trip, and a collective total of 57 species.

—Al Eisner

Almaden-Quicksilver Co. Park March 24

About 14 of us made the trek from the Hacienda (New Almaden) entrance up Mine Hill Trail to Capehorn Pass amid intermittent showers on a cool day. Birds were unusually quiet on this trip and in many cases we were only able to get a quick glimpse or scope-view of some of the species. Nonetheless, with good eyes, good ears, and good scopes we tallied over 40 species. Here are some of the highlights:

A calling Pacific-slope Flycatcher along Alamitos Creek by La Foret Res-

aurant obliged us by perching out in the open so everyone was able to get nice views of this early spring migrant. Violet-green and Northern Rough-winged Swallows swooped around the hillsides by the parking area with the N. Rough-winged Swallows perching on wires. A male Wild Turkey in full puffed-up display strutted among his harem of four females at the far end of the reduction works field. Heading up the trail we could hear Orange-crowned Warblers calling throughout the oak woodlands and were able to get scopes on a couple of them. Our best view of this little "leaf warbler" (so aptly described by Kirsten Holmquist) was seen at the end of our trip as one foraged out in the open in a budding oak by the trailhead.

Among other birds seen and heard in the oak woodlands were Hutton's Vireo, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Lesser Goldfinch, Purple Finch, Pine Siskin, Band-tailed Pigeon, and scope-views of a flock of Cedar Waxwings. An unidentified owl was seen by some silently flying through a deep shaded gulch; it was thought that it may have been a Great Horned Owl.

At Capehorn Pass the group as a whole missed Blue-gray Gnatcatcher this time; however, Roland Kenner and Pat Kenny found this species as they took another route down via Hacienda Trail to the Mockingbird Hill entrance. In another week or so this species would be more abundant in the chaparral here. Other birds seen and heard briefly at Capehorn Pass included California Thrasher, Bewick's Wren, and Wrentit.

On our return down the trail a small flock of White-throated Swifts zoomed by overhead and Western Bluebirds were seen among the trees and fence posts at the parking area near the trailhead. Two of us headed over to Almaden Reservoir after the trip where four Wood Ducks were seen in the backwaters of the upper end of the reservoir. As we move into breeding season, this species becomes much more secretive. On my way home I stopped by the SCV Water District pond where the female Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was still working the pepper trees in the northeast corner of the pond.

—Ann Verdi

Canoe Palo Alto Baylands!

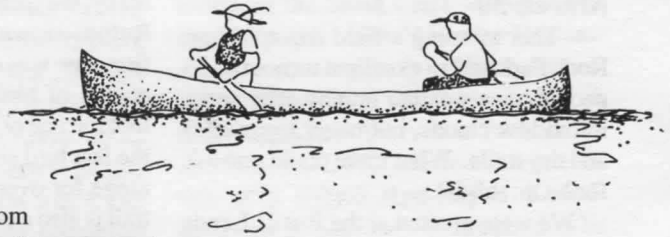
by Debbie Thompson

SCVAS Membership Committee Chair

SCVAS is sponsoring two separate canoe trips to the Palo Alto Baylands in June, one for families and one for adults. These trips are for members only (and it's not too late to join SCVAS, just use the membership coupon on the back of this *Avocet!*).

Save the Bay, a non-profit organization dedicated to celebrating, protecting and restoring the San Francisco Bay, will lead the tour for us. We will spend the morning hours exploring and learning about the Baylands estuary. Save The Bay naturalists who are certified in canoe instruction and Wilderness First Aid will lead the trip. Find out more information about Save the Bay on their website at www.savesfbay.org.

All the necessary equipment will be provided for you. The trip costs \$35 per person and includes a snack. It will last about 4 hours, from 8:30 AM to 1 PM. All participants must meet at the Palo Alto Baylands at 8:30 AM sharp (as a courtesy to others, we cannot wait for latecomers). Each canoe seats two paddlers with a possibility of a third paddler (depending on the total number of participants) sitting on a cushion on the floor of the canoe. The position of each participant will be made at the beginning of the trip. Each trip requires a minimum of 15 participants.



If you've never felt the magic of slipping silently through wetlands, here is an opportunity that shouldn't pass you by. BB-W

The first trip on Saturday, June 1, is for adults only (18 years and older). On this trip, we will be able to take a maximum of 22 paddlers, which includes some paddlers sitting on the floor of the canoes.

The trip on Sunday, June 2, is for families only. All children must be in the 4th grade or older and those in the 4th and 5th grades must be accompanied by an adult in the canoe. Children in the 6th grade and older can be placed in a canoe with other older children or adults. On this trip, we will be able to take a maximum of 26 paddlers, which includes some sitting on the floor of the canoes.

Call Debbie Thompson at (408) 227-4604 to reserve your space on a first-come, first-served basis. All fees must be received by May 17 to confirm your reservation. Full details about the trip, including a release form, will be mailed to you after the receipt of fees. Cancellations after May 22 will be refunded \$20 only. All fees paid benefit Save the Bay and SCVAS.

Birding by Ear

cont'd from Page 1

commonly. Take the time to match the sound with the bird, and next time you're out birding, you're likely to catch yourself subconsciously saying "Hey, I know that song, it's a robin," before you actually see the bird.

Few of us can hope to reach the level of birding by ear attained by some of the phenomenally skilled, upper-echelon birders. Legendary tour guide Bret Whitney prepares for leading tours by listening to tapes of birds in regions he's preparing to visit, memorizing the songs and calls. He is said to have gotten off a plane in the Amazon jungle on Day 1 of a tour, and, cocking his ear toward the forest as the plane's engines quit, announced that he didn't recognize a particular song from the tapes he'd studied. After some diligent tracking, he found the vocalist — a brand new, hitherto undescribed bird species!

That's not likely to happen in Santa Clara County, but you can certainly improve your listening skills by studying recorded bird songs (there are many use-

ful tapes and CDs for sale at the Audubon office). There is no substitute for field study, though, and now is the time to get out there and improve your skills. Local sites like Stevens Creek Park, Arastradero Preserve, Alum Rock Park and Grant Ranch Co. Park all feature easily-accessible habitat with good diversity of breeding birds. Why not make this the year you nail down Orange-crowned, Wilson's, and Yellow Warbler songs, or finally distinguish Warbling Vireo from Purple Finch? Never again confuse Chipping Sparrow with Dark-eyed Junco! Call out that Cassin's Vireo in mid-song, while it's pausing before "answering" its "question"! Astound your fellow birders by separating Lark Sparrow, Lazuli Bunting, and House Wren as they sing simultaneously from the same oak tree! Identify migrant warblers in mixed flocks by their "chip" notes! (If you get that far, we'll be calling you to lead a field trip!)

Or, be happy to listen to the lovely songs of American Robin, House Finch, and Lesser Goldfinch in your back yard.

Whatever your level of birding, it's likely to be enhanced by paying just a little more attention to the aural, as well as visual, clues that come your way. Who knows what might result? Sixteen years ago a springtime discussion of Hutton's Vireo song led to a wonderful and long-standing "pair bond." These days I confine my nocturnal singing to within the house.

Take A Vacation – Make A Donation

Doug and Gail Cheeseman, owners and chief tour guides for Cheeseman's Ecology Safaris, have generously offered to donate \$300 to SCVAS for every SCVAS member, family member, or friend who signs up for one of their trips. So, we think you need a vacation!

Many of you know Doug and Gail from the excellent slide shows and talks they give at our general meetings. What you may not know is that the Cheesemans have been instrumental in the growth and success of Santa Clara Valley Audubon. The Cheesemans helped convince the SCVAS Board to hire an Environmental Advocate in the early 90's, and they supplied some of the first funding for that position. Over the years they have given generously of their time, resources, and knowledge to Audubon and our members.

For more than 20 years the Cheesemans have been leading ecotourism expeditions to their favorite spots around the world — the Manu Reserve in Peru, Kenya and Tanzania, Costa Rica, and more recently the Arctic and Antarctic. Over the years they have developed an incredible knowledge of birds and other wildlife as well as where to find some of the most biodiverse spots on earth. Doug and Gail lead many of the tours themselves; other times they hire local experts. Their tours are intimate in scale, allowing for better access to both the wildlife and the Cheesemans' wellspring of experience. Doug and Gail's infectious enthusiasm for the natural world brings many Audubon members back year after year.

Another trait that sets the Cheesemans apart from many other ecotourism leaders is their passionate dedication to conservation issues, both locally and internationally. You can visit their conservation website at www.environmentalaction.net to see background information

and action alerts on such subjects as preserving Monarch Butterfly habitat in North America or protecting the Wandering Albatross and other seabirds from illegal longline fishing.

Our donation special applies to the Cheesemans' longer safaris; understandably, the day trips to Monterey Bay and other shorter trips are excluded. Some of the upcoming Cheeseman Ecology Safaris that are not already booked up include:

◇ **In 2002:**

Tanzania and Kenya: June 24 - July 21
New Zealand: November 8 - December 3

◇ **In 2003:**

Tanzania and Kenya: February 17 - March 12
Costa Rica: March 26 - April 13
Grey Whales and Kayaking – Sea of Cortez: March 29 - April 10

◇ **In 2004**

Falklands, So. Georgia and the Antarctic: December 27, 2003 - January 24, 2004

For more information about Cheesemans' Ecology Safaris and a complete list of their tours, see www.cheesemans.com. Our sincere appreciation goes out to Doug, Gail, and their son Ted for their continued support, and we hope a few of you out there will treat yourselves to a safari and help SCVAS in the process.

Quiz answers:

1. j (a *cast* of hawks)
2. g (a *chattering* of choughs)
3. i (a *company* of wigeon)
4. k (a *congregation* of plovers)
5. o (a *covert* of coots)
6. d (an *exaltation* of larks)
7. m (a *fall* of woodcock)
8. b (a *gaggle* of geese)
9. n (a *murmuration* of starlings)
10. l (a *muster* of peacocks)
11. c (a *plump* of wildfowl)
12. a (a *siege* of herons or bitterns)
13. e (a *skein* of geese in flight)
14. h (a *spring* of teal)
15. f (a *watch* of nightingales)

Sources: The Birds, Time-Life Books, 1963; Webster's Unabridged Dictionary, 1989

Whether it is birdseed
or bird books, bird note
cards or bird socks,
bird jewelry or bird
shirts, you can find
them all at the SCVAS
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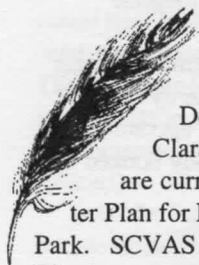


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Speak up if you bird Los Gatos Co. Park

by Kelly Crowley
SCVAS Environmental Advocate



The City of Campbell, the County Parks and Recreation Department, and the Santa Clara Valley Water District are currently updating the Master Plan for Los Gatos Creek County Park. SCVAS worked with the Water District to create the first master plan for the area in 1974. Since then the park, particularly the East Side and the Oka ponds, has become a popular birding spot. Your participation in the master plan process is needed to ensure protection of the wildlife areas in the park.

In recent years portions of the park have been used as an informal off-leash dog park, and some say they have witnessed an owner or two training their hunting dogs in the recharge ponds, which are important waterfowl habitat, especially in the winter. Dog owners have been rather vocal about their very real need to have an off-leash dog park. To ensure that the dog park is not placed in a sensitive wildlife area, please take a moment to let the master planners know how you use the park! There is a sample letter on the SCVAS website ([HYPERLINK "http://www.scvas.org"](http://www.scvas.org)) that explains the issue in more depth. The schedule of public meetings will also be posted on our site. If you have further questions, contact Kelly Crowley at (408) 252-3740, or [HYPERLINK "mailto:advocate@scvas.org"](mailto:advocate@scvas.org) advocate@scvas.org.

Nesting bird issues

As I sit down to write this article, the signs of spring are all around me. The grasses in the park are as high as my shoulders, and the flowers are blooming. The oriole feeder hangs from the corner of the building, and one timid guy has been coming and going, when visitors are not coming and going through the front door. Daylight savings is here. The skies have been blue and the temperatures warm the entire week. But in one of the clearest

signs of all, I am receiving phone calls every few days from people who are concerned about human interference with nesting birds.

One call came from someone concerned about the bluebird boxes across from her house and adjacent to a new construction project. Another call was about Cliff Swallows trying to nest under the eaves of a local school gymnasium. Yet another person called about Red-winged Blackbirds in a San Jose park. Though all of the calls have been about different issues, the response can be pretty much the same.

Federal law protects birds

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) protects virtually every bird in the region. This act makes it illegal to "take," possess, sell, import, export, transport or purchase a native migratory bird, its eggs or its nest. Because the law applies to native migratory birds, it does not protect European Starlings, House Sparrows and other non-native birds in the Bay Area. The meaning of "migratory bird" is interpreted very broadly, and could include even birds like the Wood Duck that live most of their lives on the ground but nest in trees.

Interfering with the nest of a native bird would be considered "taking" and is therefore illegal. For example, discing a field that is being used by Red-winged Blackbirds would violate this Act, as would cutting down trees containing nests, or hosing down swallow nests that are in use. Of course, this applies only during nesting season.

Determining exactly what is nesting season is not as simple as it sounds. Generally speaking, a good rule of thumb is from January through August. Hummers can start as early as January, and chickadees and titmice, among others, start in late February or early March. By the time this article is published, we will be well into nesting season. If you are still witnessing activities such as discing or tree-cutting where birds are nesting, or other nest removal, you should make some phone calls.

If city workers or your neighbors are interfering with nesting birds, it is often due to ignorance. You should explain that the birds are well into their nesting season, and that removing their nests causes them to waste precious time and energy, building and rebuilding, instead of reproducing. You should also say that removing nests constitutes a violation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and can be punished with potentially severe fines.

"Win-win" conflict resolution

Keep in mind that conflicts between humans and nesting birds do not have to be, and really should not be, an annual clash. Often nests are removed, directly or indirectly, as a city is pursuing public health and safety. Last year, the swallows nesting above the door at the Charleston Slough pump house caused a real mess for the maintenance workers using that door, and made it unsanitary for people to use the drinking fountain. SCVAS, with help from the public, managed to convince the City of Mountain View to stop removing the nests during the nesting season last year, and to put up deterrents in areas where they might pose a health risk before nesting starts. This year, swallows should be able to construct their nests all around the pump house, except under the eaves above the maintenance door, where exclusionary measures were put in place well before nesting season.

Similarly, cities are going to remove trees (hopefully always for public safety reasons.) Tree removal ideally should take place between the end of August and the beginning of January. This is the easiest and best way to ensure that nests are not removed with the trees! Ask your city to refrain from tree cutting during the nesting season. If they cannot avoid the nesting season, ask them to have a biologist inspect trees for nests.

It sounds improbable that cities would be interested in doing either of these things, but, surprisingly, even San Jose seems amenable to them. SCVAS recently weighed in on San Jose's Heritage

cont'd next page

Audubon Advisory List — It's "E-activism"

Taking action, staying informed have never been so easy and fast!

by *Leda Beth Gray*
Environmental Action Chair

Audubon has joined the ranks of other environmental organizations that offer their members and the public e-mail or fax updates and alerts so they can stay informed and take fast and effective action on national environmental issues. I joined the Audubon Advisory list almost a year ago and have appreciated this great new service that Audubon is offering its members.

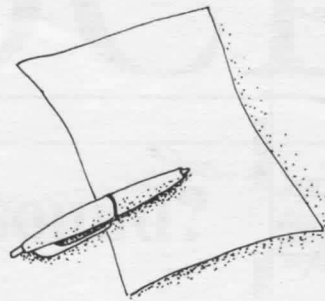
Here is how it works on e-mail. There are usually several issue updates in each Advisory e-mail message. Those issues that need action have a link right in the e-mail message. Simply click on that link and your web browser will take you to the Audubon website where you can edit into your own words a letter that has already been written to the appropriate legislator or government official. Then you just click a button to have it e-mailed or faxed to that person. The first time you connect, you fill out a simple registration form. Audubon promises not to exchange your contact information with third parties.

If you don't have e-mail or just prefer a different route, you can sign up to re-

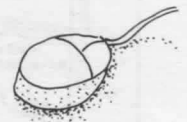
ceive alerts by fax instead. Phone calls to legislators are fast and easy and a viable alternative to using the website.

The Audubon Advisory comes out twice a month and contains information on pressing environmental issues, including pending legislation in Congress and the Senate, as well as actions that Federal Agencies have taken or are planning to take. You get insider reports on the latest in Washington D.C. by Audubon staff members who are monitoring the progress of legislation. On the most important issues affecting the environment, such as drilling in the Arctic or the Farm Bill, Advisory updates may contain the names of legislators who are on the fence about the issue, or on the conference committee that will decide the final provisions of the legislation. That way the constituents of those legislators can contact them and have a major effect on the issue.

One of the issues that really interested me was the Department of Agriculture's proposal to poison Red-winged Blackbirds to keep them from eating part of the sunflower crop in the Dakotas each year. The majority of this sunflower goes to the Nation's sunflower cooking oil, however some, ironically, goes to bird seed! Ted Williams wrote an informative article about it in *Audubon* magazine last November, explaining that there are better alternatives to control blackbirds than killing them (such as removing non-native cattail monocultures that the blackbirds roost in, and replacing with native vegetation). He also noted that studies have already shown this method to be ineffective on the blackbirds and potentially damaging to the environment. The Audubon Advisory folks have stayed on top of this issue, and provided a link in the last several Advisories where people can connect to send a fax to Secretary of Agriculture Anne Veneman urging her not proceed with this terrible proposal.



No matter how you communicate: e-mail, fax, phone or snail mail, taking action has never been easier.



I gave this particular link to Jill Clay, who manages our Armchair Activist program, to send out with the monthly Armchair Activist letter so participants can try out the Audubon website. In addition, some of us have been collecting signatures of folks who come to the SCVAS Nature Shop, our General Meetings and various environmental meetings that I go to, on a petition asking Secretary Veneman to not poison blackbirds. It may not be solely because of SCVAS, but California led the nation in communicating their outrage to Secretary Veneman on this ill-conceived proposal. We have yet to hear the outcome.

You can also take action on issues by connecting to the Audubon's "Take Action" web page at <http://www.capitolconnect.com/audubon/>. Check it out — and if the Red-winged Blackbird issue is still there, read about it and let Secretary Veneman know what you think.

To sign up for Audubon Alerts, contact National Audubon Society Grassroots Coordinator for California, Judd Klement at jklement@audubon.org or via Audubon's toll-free message hotline at 1-800-659-2622. You can also register online at <http://www.capitolconnect.com/audubon/registration.asp>.

A regular old letter is still a more effective way of getting a legislator's attention on an issue. Sometimes when I have the time, I use the information that Audubon provides in the alerts and on the website to write a letter and send it via "snail mail." But being able to use Audubon's site to send faxes and e-mails really increases the number of issues I can address. I really appreciate that.

Advocate *cont'd*

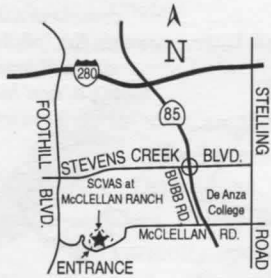
Tree ordinance, which requires a permit before cutting a heritage tree. We asked that trees not be cut between March and August. Following the public meeting on the heritage ordinance, one of the Councilmembers thanked Craig Breon for his input and said the issues we raised would be addressed in the ordinance.

More often than not, violations of the MBTA are due to ignorance. If you think that your city's or your neighbor's activities are interfering with nesting birds, try some of the arguments I presented in this article. Be sure to understand your city's or your neighbor's interests, or why the interference is occurring in the first place. Once you do that, it will be easier to find a solution that serves everyone's interests, including the birds.

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GENERAL MEETINGS are held on the third Wednesday of each month except July, August and December and are open to the public.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS meetings are open to all members. Call the office at (408) 252-3747 for times and directions.

RARE BIRD ALERT: (415) 681-7422

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

SCVAS welcomes gifts, including those made in honor of or in memory of friends or relatives. Such gifts will be used at SCVAS' discretion for its programs and activities unless specified otherwise by the donor. Tax-deductible donations may be made in the form of a check made out to SCVAS and sent to our Cupertino address. In addition, we gratefully accept bequests, which should specifically identify Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society as recipient. Gifts and bequests will be recognized by the Chapter in *The Avocet* unless the donor prefers otherwise.

The Avocet is published monthly (except for July and August) by the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society, address is above. Deadline is the 25th of two months prior. Send submissions to *The Avocet*, c/o SCVAS at the above address.

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

2002 Volume 49, Number 5

Membership in the National Audubon Society (NAS) and Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society (SCVAS).

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