



# THE AVOCET

The Newsletter of the Santa Clara Audubon Society

Nov - Dec. 2003

## New faces, new projects

### Interns bring infusion of energy to SCVAS education, conservation efforts

by *Craig Breon*  
*Executive Director*

Clear some space in the office! SCVAS recently hired two interns—Jackie Olson and Kim Yuan-Farrell. Jackie will work closely with Programs Coordinator Jennifer Peritz, while Kim will be leading a project under my supervision. Both these internships are funded partially by grants and partially by you, our members and donors, so take a moment to read what we



*Intern Jackie Olson*

have in mind, and then pat yourselves on the back.

Why interns? Quite simply, we run up against staff and volunteer limitations, and choosing to use interns strategically can give us the “oomph” we need to kick-start a new project or improve on the ones we have.

Beyond the value to our organization, there’s real value for the interns as well. Since I have the good fortune to work in a nonprofit setting on issues I really care about, I in turn want to see others given the same opportunity. Some members

will recall that Jennifer started with our chapter as an intern, producing the third volume of *Creekside News*. Jennifer’s initial ten-week internship has led to more than three years with SCVAS. She does a wonderful job and hopefully has a long future of working with children and adults in the realms of education, conservation and nature appreciation. Jennifer alone is proof enough for me that internships can lead to great careers.

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#### Jackie

Jackie comes to us after graduating from UC Davis and working for the Sacramento Zoo. At our annual Wildlife Education Day at McClellan Ranch in October Jackie could be seen taking on one task after another, working with volunteers and the families who attended. For days in advance Jackie helped Jennifer prepare for the event, and that preparation paid off. More than 600 people came to the Ranch in just four hours, and the scene greeting them was filled with hands-on activities, live wild animals, local conservation organizations, arts and crafts, and wildlife presentations. The day went smoothly, and the kids seemed to be both learning and enjoying themselves. For younger children especially, just feeling good about nature, animals, and plants is a great step in the right direction.

More effective programs serving more of our community—those are

*continued on Page 15*

### General Membership Meeting “Natural History of East African Predators”

with **Doug Cheeseman**

**Palo Alto Arts Center, Newell & Embarcadero Rds.**

**Wednesday, Nov. 19**

**Doors open 7:30; Program 8:00**

Tonight’s program features a variety of wildlife behavior from Doug’s multitude of safaris to Tanzania and Kenya. Spectacular closeups of predators, including birds of prey, with Doug’s fact-filled, high-energy narration will make for a most entertaining evening. On safari there’s action to be filmed at all hours of the day, although before breakfast and late in the afternoon the light is most superb. Doug’s photographs will demonstrate the diversity of E. Africa’s fascinating small predatory mammals and birds. Doug taught college zoology and ecology for 35 years at De Anza College in Cupertino and has led safaris since the 1970’s. He has had numerous photographs published in nature and birding magazines, encyclopedias and calendars.

◆ *Meet Bob Hirt—Page 4*

◆ *2 Hudsonian Godwits  
—Field Notes, Page 6*

◆ *Christmas Bird Counts  
—Page 10*

◆ *“Will bird for cookies”  
—Page 11*

◆ *Bluebird nestbox results  
1997-2003—Page 12*

# Nov. - Dec. 2003 Field Trips

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

**LO = Lunch optional**

**RC = Heavy rain cancels**

**NF = No facilities available**

## **Saturday Nov. 1, 8:00 AM Charleston Slough**

Half day. Leader: Ann Verdi (408) 266-5108. Meet at Terminal Way at end of San Antonio Rd. north off Hwy 101 in Mt. View. Trip is designed for beginning birders. A good place to get familiar with your spotting scope.

## **Sunday Nov. 2, 8:00 AM Moss Landing, Elkhorn Slough, Moon Glow Dairy & vicinity**

Half day plus. Leader: Rick Fournier (831) 632-2473. Meet in parking lot on ocean side of Hwy 1 just north of Elkhorn Slough bridge in Moss Landing (used to be Maloney's Restaurant). Trip begins along ocean, then to Elkhorn Slough for ducks, shorebirds, land birds, vagrants. Trip finishes up early afternoon after lunch. Bring food, liquids and dress in layers. **RC**

## **Saturday Nov. 8, 8:30 AM Grant Ranch County Park**

Half day. Leader: Alan Thomas (408) 265-9286. From I-680 take Alum Rock Ave northeast, turn right on Mt. Hamilton Rd., then proceed approx. 9 miles to park. Meet at Hall's Valley Lake parking lot on left side of road just past main park entrance on right. Fresh water ducks, oak woodland birds, possible Golden Eagle. Moderate 2-mile walk. **LO, RC**

## **Sunday Nov. 9, 8:30 AM Ogier Ponds**

Half day. Leader: Grant Hoyt (650) 969-7892. From Hwy 101 in Morgan Hill take Cochrane Rd. west to Monterey Hwy, turn right, go north 2.6 miles, turn right toward Model Airplane park (street unnamed). Follow road for 1/2 mile, park in gravel lot at first bend in road. Raptors, freshwater marsh birds, passerines. **RC**

## **Wednesday Nov. 12, 9:00 AM**

**Los Gatos Creek, Percolation Ponds**  
Half day. Leader Shirley Gordon (408) 996-9863. From Winchester Blvd go east on Hacienda 1 block to Dell. Turn left; enter park about 100 feet from intersection and meet in parking lot. Entrance fee. About 2 miles of easy walking. **LO, RC**

## **Saturday Nov. 15, 8:00 AM Oka Ponds/Los Gatos Creek Park**

Half day. Leader: Grant Webb (408) 578-0409. From Hwy 17 in Los Gatos take Lark Ave exit west, turn right on Oka Rd., left on Mozart Ave, then immediately right on Oka Lane. Meet just inside gate. **RC**

## **Sunday Nov. 16, 8:00 AM Uvas Creek Park Preserve**

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

## **Wednesday Nov. 19, 9:00 AM Pescadero Marsh & State Beach**

Half day. Leader: Sue James (650) 348-0315. Note that this is the third, not fourth Wed. of Nov. Meet at first parking lot south of bridge over Pescadero Creek on Hwy 1. Outgoing tide, exposed rocks should be good for rocky shorebirds. Bring spotting scope, layers of warm clothes. **LO, RC**

## **Saturday Nov. 22, 8:30 AM Alum Rock Park**

Half day. Leader: Kirsten Holmquist (408) 747-0988. From Hwy 101 or I-680 take McKee Rd. northeast toward hills, then left on Toyon Ave, right on Penitencia Creek Rd. and continue into park. Meet in Rustic Lands parking area on right just before "T" intersection and underpass. Moderately strenuous 3 to 4 mile walk on muddy trails. Possible entrance fee. **LO, RC**

## **Sunday Nov. 23, 8:30 AM Arastradero Preserve**

Half day. Leader: TBD, questions call (408) 253-7527. From I-280 take Page Mill Rd. west approx. 1/2 mile to Arastradero Rd. Turn right, meet at parking lot 1/2 mile on right. Variety of woodland and grassland species; a good assortment of raptors possible. Two miles of moderate walking. **RC**

## **Fri. - Sat. Nov. 28 - 29, 9:00 AM Sac'to Valley Wildlife Refuges, Gray Lodge, Sutter Buttes**

Full day and a half. Leaders: Mike Mammoser & Frank Vanslager, for information contact Mike (408) 578-2429. Meet at Sacramento

NWR headquarters on I-5 approx. 20 miles north of Williams. Take Road 68 (Norman Rd.) exit east from I-5, then immediately north on frontage road to Refuge. Bring spotting scope, full tank of gas. Allow 3 hours from South Bay. [For overnight stay at Williams, confirm with Dave Cook (408) 275-1492.] Ducks, geese, swans, cranes, raptors. Great trip for beginners. (No children under 12, please.)

## **Saturday Dec. 6, 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 Mt. View. As always, all are invited to attend but birding will be geared toward the beginning birder. Bring a spotting scope if you have one.

## **Sunday Dec. 7, 8:00 AM Sunnyvale Water Treatment Facility**

Half day. Leader: TBD, questions call (408) 253-7527. From Hwy 101 take Hwy 237 east, exit North on Caribbean Dr., turn right on Borregas Ave, then left to parking area. Good numbers, variety of ducks; scopes recommended. A fairly easy but long walk. **RC**

## **Wednesday Dec. 10, 8:30 AM Grant Ranch County Park**

Half day. Leader Alan Thomas (408) 265-9286. From I-680 take Alum Rock Ave northeast, turn right on Mt. Hamilton Rd. and go approx. 9 miles to park. Meet at Hall's Valley Lake parking lot (first lot on left after passing main entrance on right). **LO, RC**

## **Saturday Jan. 3, 7:30 AM County Chase**

Half day. Leader: Bob Reiling (408) 253-7527. Get a head start on your 2004 County Year List with some 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 the Christmas Bird Counts in Santa Clara County. Meet in the Alviso Marina parking lot. From Hwy 237 in San Jose take Gold St. north to the end, bear left on Elizabeth St., then right on Hope St. to Marina parking lot. Be prepared to carpool. **RC**

## **Sunday Jan. 4, 8:30 AM Charleston Slough**

Half day. Leader: Dave Cook (408) 275-1492. Meet at Terminal Way at end of San Antonio Rd. north off Hwy 101 in Mt. View. Birding geared toward beginning birders but all are encouraged to attend. Don't forget to bring your spotting scope.

## Events Calendar

**Wednesday Nov. 5, 7:30 PM**  
**Bay Area Bird Photographers**  
presents long-time BABP member Chuck Tribolet's slide program on the undersea life of Monterey Bay, including a photo of a bird taken at a depth of 60 feet (try to guess the species)! Lucy Evans Baylands Interpretive Center, E. Embarcadero Rd., Palo Alto.

**Saturday Nov. 8**  
**Young Audubon**  
**Wild on Wetlands Walk**  
Call office for details.

**Tuesday Nov. 11, 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: Oak Titmouse.

**Tuesday Nov. 11, 7:30 PM**  
**Board of Directors meeting,**  
McClellan Ranch Park.

**Wednesday Nov. 19, 7:30 PM**  
**General membership meeting,** Palo Alto. Program starts at 8 (details on Pg. 1).

**Wednesday Nov. 26, 10 -11 AM**  
**Coffee Hour and Bird Chat,**  
Nature Shop, McClellan Ranch Park.

**Tuesday Dec. 2, 7:30 PM**  
**Board of Directors meeting,**  
McClellan Ranch Park.

**Wednesday Dec. 3, 7:30 PM**  
**Bay Area Bird Photographers**  
presents David Cardinal with his "Spring in the South Bay: Photographing breeding season with SFBBO" program, including images of the "Stavocet" and other wonders of the salt ponds. Lucy Evans Baylands Interpretive Center, E. Embarcadero Rd., Palo Alto.

**Saturday Dec. 6, 10 - 2**  
**Holiday Open House** at McClellan Ranch Park. See announcement at right.

**Tuesday Dec. 9, 9:30 AM**  
**Eve Case Bird Discussion Group**  
will meet at the home of Pat and Jean Dubois, 17150 Buena Vista Ave., Los Gatos (408) 395-4264. Topic: Peregrine Falcon.

## Nature Shop Holiday Open House Saturday, December 6<sup>th</sup> 10 AM-2 PM

Please join our staff for refreshments, discounts on merchandise, and a friendly Fireside Chat to discuss our current and ongoing projects.

Wildlife art will be on display by local artists.

Shop for the newest selection of birding books:

*Birding on Borrowed Time*

*Owls and Other Fantasies*

*Raptors of Western and Eastern N. America*

*Birding at the Bottom of the Bay*

And many more ...

Select the perfect gift:

2004 Sibley and Audubon Calendars  
Audubon Premium Shade Grown Coffee  
or, if you can't decide, we can help!

*The Nature Shop is open daily Monday-Friday 10-5*

*Saturdays 10am-2pm*

*Questions: Please call (408) 252-3747*

### **Beginning Birdwatching with Lisa Myers**

*The following class is sponsored by the SCVAS Education Committee. To register please call the office at (408) 252-3740. All cancellations require 72-hour prior notification for refunds.*

Specially designed for beginners, this class covers an introduction to birding, including field guides, classification and taxonomy, birding resources, birding ethics, and much more. Participants will learn strategies for identifying and listing birds and have the opportunity to hone those skills during field trips to local birding sites. Optics (both binoculars and spotting scopes) will be reviewed for better understanding of equipment available to new birders.

Class sessions are held at McClellan Ranch Park in Cupertino and are based on the instructor's handouts and slides. Focus will be on local birds, particularly those found in winter. Field trips will last approximately four hours; locations are to be announced (depending on high bird activity). Fee is \$40 for members, \$45 for non-members. Classes will be held on 11/10, 11/17, 11/24 from 7-9 PM; field trips on 11/15, 11/22.

Lisa Myers is a local native who has been birdwatching since she was a teenager. Introducing new people to birding has been a goal for Lisa as she has taught classes and conducted workshops for several years through the City of Campbell, the Wild Bird Center in Los Gatos and SCVAS. Lisa also leads birding trips to hot spots in and around the Bay Area. With a degree in Communications and a passion for birds, Lisa's classes are a non-intimidating, educational, fun-filled way to learn all about birding!

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# Volunteer Ventures

by Jennifer Peritz  
SCVAS Programs Coordinator

Thanksgiving is nearly upon us, and I'd like to take this opportunity to give a big THANKS! to all of SCVAS' hard-working volunteers. It's been an incredible year: we've monitored over 45 bluebird trails, reached out to nearly 6,000 school-aged children, kept the Nature Shop filled with happy customers, offered free field trips nearly every weekend, written numerous letters commenting on critical conservation issues, and much, much more. From the Board of Directors to the committees to the day-to-day volunteers, you truly are the heart and soul of our organization and for that we say "Thank you!"

For those of you looking for volunteer opportunities during the holiday season, be sure to keep SCVAS in mind. One volunteer request that is becoming more common is for Birding Companions. Many people in the community are interested in going birding or attending our monthly meetings, but have difficulty transporting themselves. These people are in need of Birding Companions who can spend 3 to 4 hours every week or two (or in the case of a monthly meeting, once per month) helping them to enjoy the world of birding. Often times, they are avid birders who have a lot to share with others about their knowledge of the birding world. If you'd like me to help match you with another birder, please give me a call!

Another way to keep busy in the month of November is to lend a hand with our Annual Fall Fundraiser. Every year we hand-address nearly 4,000 envelopes to send to all of our members. It's a huge task, and we can't do it without your support! Volunteers are needed not only to address the envelopes, but also to join us for an Envelope Stuffing Party here at the Ranch on Saturday, November 15. We will be stuffing, sealing, and stamping the envelopes to prepare them for the mail. This is a fun opportunity to help the chapter, meet other members, and enjoy the beauty of McClellan Ranch Park. Snacks will be provided, and afterwards we'll offer a short bird walk by the creek (weather permitting). Call for details!

In December, the event most birders and SCVAS members look forward to is, of course, the Christmas Bird Count, and our chapter sponsors four different counts (see page 10 for details). I went on my first CBC in December of 2000, a few months after I started working for SCVAS. I had no birding experience and thought I would be out of my league with the other birders, but I couldn't have been more wrong. My team welcomed me with open "wings." If you're new to birding, don't be intimidated to join the count! We'll pair you with more experienced birders in your area, and you, too, can become a part of a long standing Audubon tradition!

The opportunities listed above are just a sample of what SCVAS has to offer. I invite you to come to the office during our November Coffee Hour/Bird Chat (see page 3) or

the December Holiday Open House to discuss other opportunities. If you're eager to get started sooner, just give me a call at the number below!

For information on how YOU can become a volunteer, please contact Jennifer at (408) 252-3740 or [programs@scvas.org](mailto:programs@scvas.org).



## Scope on membership

By Debbie Thompson

The Board of Directors is lucky to have the infusion of new ideas and expertise through the addition of new board members. Bob Hirt joined the Board in June 2003 and quickly immersed himself in the workings of our chapter.

Bob comes to us with 25 years experience in the corporate finance world, including a position as Vice President of Corporate Finance for a large Silicon Valley company. Bob is not only successful in the corporate world, he has devoted much of his spare time to "birding-centric" non-profit groups such as ours. He has been president and served on the board of Golden Gate Audubon, served on the boards of Audubon Canyon Ranch and Friends of Richardson Bay, and currently participates in many Bay Area Christmas Bird Counts.

Bob grew up in Michigan but has lived in California for the past 30 years. He became interested in birding in the early 70's when he and a friend went backpacking in Sequoia National Park. His friend was responsible for identifying trees and Bob responsible for birds. This soon turned into a competition between two friends to see who could identify the most species of birds (I have a feeling that Bob won).

Since he became hooked on birds, traveling around California and the world to see them has been one of his favorite pastimes. He recalled a trip to Venezuela where he was caught in the middle of an army ant swarm. "It was several minutes before I could pass," he said, "so I just stood on a rock watching the birds snatch the flushed insects all around me."

In the past, Bob has led many deep-ocean pelagic trips where his favorite birds to find are *pterodroma* petrels. In fact, they had the first North American record of Dark-rumped Petrel and the first photographically documented record of Stejneger's Petrel. The trips were rough and so infamous that they were written up in the Wall Street Journal. "Pelagic tours are like a treasure hunt," he explained. "Out of nowhere a bird shows up right in front of you and then disappears again into the horizon."

Currently Bob is Chairperson of SCVAS' Strategic Planning Committee, where he and others are setting the long-term goals of our chapter. He is also putting his extensive finance experience to work on our Finance Committee. We greatly appreciate having board members like Bob help guide our chapter to the next level.

# Education Day event sets attendance record

The 12th Annual Wildlife Education Day held at McClellan Ranch Park was a huge success! Each year this event has become bigger and better with the participation of more families, more SCVAS members helping, more high school volunteers, more environmental groups, and more live animals. Approximately 650 people attended, an increase of about 100 over last year. Along with SCVAS' booths and activities, twenty other organizations attended to help spread the message of environmental stewardship. New additions this year included the S.F. Zoo and a large contingent of students from Lynbrook, Westmont, Homestead, and Piedmont Hills High School who helped things run smoothly by ably handling a variety of our hands-on activities.

The early morning bird walk at Charleston Slough drew approximately 50 people and was led by Freddy Howell, Peg Bernucci, Jim Liskovec, Lee French, and Allen Royer, four of whom are Education Committee members. The kids were quite excited at the array of ducks, herons, pelicans, etc. When Jim Liskovec got a scope-filling view of a Black-crowned Night Heron, he informed the group that this was the best view of this bird they would ever get. While looking through the scope, an excited girl called out, "Oh my gosh! Daddy, you've got to come quick and see this!!"

Back at the park, it was quite astonishing and rewarding to walk around at this event and see the myriad of things taking place and the sense of fun and excitement. The outside of the building was festooned with lines of colorful, award-winning

## Fall Fundraiser Heading Your Way

We're not a "YOU MUST GIVE NOW TO SAVE THE BABY HARP SEALS" type of organization. Nor do we send you six, eight, ten appeals a year asking for funds. Our style is straightforward and simple. Once a year we tell you what we accomplished with your help this year, we set goals for next year, and we ask you to support the wildlife and quality of life in this region.

We expect to be sending this year's annual appeal just before Thanksgiving. As before, it will be packed with a roundup of our accomplishments in the areas of conservation, environmental education, restoration, and birding. Besides being our biggest fundraiser of the year, this is the one place where you can review our year at a glance.

Last year's annual appeal was our most successful ever, raising more than \$74,000 (about one-third of our yearly budget). Our goal this year is to top that mark—a lofty goal, but achievable. When that letter gets to your mailbox, we hope that you will take the time to read it and respond.

Out of kindness to our feathered friends, we're not going to say that SCVAS stretches a dollar until the eagle screams. However, we believe that if you read our annual appeal, you will know that we are a lean, effective little machine. Thank you for your past support, and please support SCVAS again this year.



Isaac Lam from Strouse Studio proudly poses next to his winning poster of a Plover. Lam won Honorable Mention in the 3rd grade Art Studio category.

posters drawn by school children. Volunteers from Wildlife Rescue showed an immature Red-shouldered Hawk, an American Kestrel, and Socrates, the Great-Horned Owl, a long-time favorite. Two handsome goats were led around by 4H participants, and everyone had to be careful not to step on the gnarled tortoise slowly moving through the crowd. Diverse and colorful snakes and lizards were on display from the Bay Area Amphibian and Reptile Society (BAARS), and there was also a wonderful display of insects in "Bugville."

Favorite hands-on activities for kids were birdhouse building, making a messy bird feeder with pinecones and peanut butter, creating a hummingbird mobile or sun catcher, making origami animals, a scavenger hunt along the creek, and a puppet show presented by Freddy Howell. Presentations about bird-banding by Vicky Silvas-Young, snakes by BAARS and an interactive presentation on bats by Dave Johnston plus the presentation of prizes to poster contest winners made this event a huge success.

## Thank you Sponsors and Donors

**The Mercury News**  
The Newspaper of Silicon Valley



Richard Lowenthal,  
Cupertino City Council Member



## Raffle and Poster Contest Prize Donors

Wild Bird Center of Los Gatos  
Orchard Supply Hardware  
Summer Winds  
An-Jan Pet and Feed Supply  
Naturals from the Earth  
Wooden Horse  
Hicklebee's Books  
Gold Crest  
Mollema & Son

# Field Notes

by Bill Bousman

## Pelicans through Hawks

A count of 1100 **American White Pelicans** on Salt Pond A9 on 28 Sep (MMR, MJM) was a good total for the early fall. On the same day, 68 **Brown Pelicans** were also on the same salt pond (MMR, MJM). Inland, the immature Brown Pelican found on Almaden Lake in late July was seen there through 2 Sep (AV) and is likely the same bird seen at Calero Reservoir 20-25 Sep (AV, MDd). An **American Bittern** hunkered down in Stevens Creek at La Avenida on 3 Sep (FV) was in an unusual location for a wintering bird and may have been a migrant. **Snowy Egrets** nested successfully at the Palo Alto Duck Pond this summer, with up to nine birds fledged from three or more nests (WGB, v. ob.). Increasingly rare in the county, a single **Cattle Egret** was seen at the Sunnyvale Baylands on 27 Aug (RS). The percolation ponds at Los Gatos Creek CP were a magnet this fall for **Green Herons** with at least 12 birds counted on 29 Sep (LSu). At least one pair of **Black-crowned Night Herons** also nested in the palms at the Palo Alto Duck Pond. One to two nestlings were seen in August and at least one fledged (CJC, DB, DM). Single **White-faced Ibis** appeared in a few places but did not linger. One was at the New Chicago Marsh on 16 Aug (RK, PK) and this bird or another was at the Sunnyvale Baylands on 9 Sep (RS). An injured male **Eurasian Wigeon** in the outer Guadalupe Slough was seen regularly in August and September (MMR, MJM). A female **Canvasback** was in outer Guadalupe Slough again on 1 Aug (MMR, MJM) and two males were found in the outer Palo Alto FCB on 12 Aug (MMR). Two of the three birds had obvious injuries which had forced them to oversummer. Single female/immature **Buffleheads** at New Chicago Marsh on 10 Sep (MMR) and Alviso Slough on 16 Sep (MMR, MJM) may have oversummered as most wintering birds do not arrive until October. A female **Common Merganser** on Salt Pond A4 in Sunnyvale on 24 Aug (MMR) was an unusual find along the

Bay edge as this species tends to avoid salt water. A female or immature **Red-breasted Merganser** was seen in Salt Pond A10 in Alviso on 28 Sep (MMR, MJM) and may be the same bird seen in that vicinity in July. A **Broad-winged Hawk** east of Casa de Fruta along Pacheco Creek on 12 Sep (PF) is the seventh county record and the first we've had in the fall since 1994. It is also the earliest bird we've had by 14 days.

## Shorebirds through Murres

New Chicago Marsh was the center of shorebird mania in August and September. A molting adult **Lesser Golden-Plover** was found there on 9 Sep (WGB)

*A Broad-winged Hawk along Pacheco Creek was a good find, but the surprise of the season was two Hudsonian Godwits found in Alviso*

and was identified as an **American Golden-Plover** (WGB, MJM). This bird engendered much controversy over the next few weeks as its tertial-primary-tail offsets did not match well with either golden plover species. However, this bird was molting its inner primaries which is expected for Pacific Golden-Plover but is considered exceptional for American Golden-Plover, which normally does not start wing molt until it arrives on its South American wintering grounds. The consensus is that this bird must be a Pacific Golden-Plover, although the primary length appears exceptional. Life was much easier when an unaged Pacific Golden-Plover was found nearby in Salt Pond A16 on 20 Sep (RWR) and a juvenile in New Chicago Marsh 25-30 Sep (DW, RWR, FV, MMR, v.ob.), both showing typical tertial-primary-tail offsets. **Snowy Plovers** were well represented in the period with one to three birds seen in Salt Pond A8 in August (MMR, MJM) and also one to three birds in the vicinity of the Alviso Marina and

New Chicago Marsh throughout August and September (m. ob.). The fall passage of **Lesser Yellowlegs** got a slow start but picked up in the second week of August. High counts were 14 at Crittenden Marsh on 2 Sep (WGB) and 20 at New Chicago Marsh on 29 Sep (MMR). The latter count is the best we've had since 1999.

The biggest news at New Chicago Marsh this fall was the discovery of two juvenile **Hudsonian Godwits**. The first bird was seen briefly on 27 Aug and then studied on 28 Aug (DM). Reported on 29 Aug, this bird, a third county record, was well seen throughout 29 Aug (m. ob.). Observers came out in force again on 30

Aug, when amazingly, two birds were found (JL). Initially the two birds were apart, but eventually one was flushed and joined the other. These birds were missed during most of the following week, but were seen once again on 6 Sep (JMy), the last observation. Single **Red Knots** were found in Salt Pond A5 in Alviso on 15 Aug (MMR, MJM) and at New Chicago Marsh on 30 Aug (JAC). A juvenile **Sanderling** was seen on Salt Pond A8 in Alviso on 7 Sep (MMR, MJM). A juvenile **Semipalmated Sandpiper** was found in the west oxidation pond at the Sunnyvale Water Pollution Control Plant (WPCP) on 16 Aug (RWR, FV, MJM) and remained there at least through 18 Aug (m. ob.). A second juvenile was at the Coyote Creek Field Station (CCFS) waterbird pond on 19 Aug (RWR, FV). Two or three juvenile **Baird's Sandpipers** were found on Salt Pond A8 in Alviso on 31 Aug (MMR, MJM), but none were found elsewhere for the poorest passage since 1990. It was a relatively poor passage for **Pectoral Sandpipers** as well. An adult was found on the Sunnyvale WPCP oxidation ponds on 11 Aug (RK, PK) and was seen there through 17 Aug (m. ob.). The first juvenile was found at the New Chicago Marsh on 20 Aug (DW, AME, WGB) and one to three birds were there irregularly through the end of September (v. ob.). Three juveniles were in ponds in the Palo Alto Flood Control Basin (FCB) on 6 Sep (TGr) and seven were at the CCFS waterbird pond on 13 Sep (RK, PK).

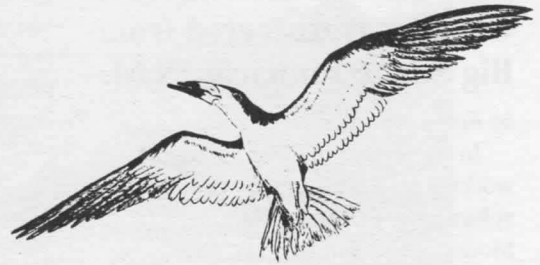
## Field Notes *cont'd*

Singles at other spots included a juvenile along Adobe Creek in the Palo Alto FCB on 13 Sep (MMR) and on Salt Pond A8 in Alviso on 16 Sep (MMR, MJM). An adult **Stilt Sandpiper** was found at the New Chicago Marsh on 19 Aug (RK, PK) and has been enjoyed by many through the end of September. An adult female **Ruff** showed up at the New Chicago Marsh on 7 Aug (RWR, FV) and was seen irregularly over the next two weeks. It was last spotted there on 23 Aug (DW). Then on 24 Sep, a juvenile male Ruff showed up in the marsh near the Alviso EEC entrance road (MW, VL). This bird has been quite cooperative through the end of September (m. ob.). Approximately 1750 **Wilson's Phalaropes** were in closed salt ponds in Alviso on 1 Aug (MMR, MJM). As expected, numbers dropped quickly in August. Few birds are left in September so 100 plus birds on Salt Pond A8 in Alviso on 16 Sep (MMR, MJM) was a bit unusual. A single bird in the New Chicago Marsh on 29 Sep (MMR) was late. The migration of **Red-necked Phalaropes** peaks later than Wilson's. A record count of 7200 birds was tallied on closed ponds in Alviso on 31 Aug and numbers remained high there in September with more than 1190 Rednecks counted on 28 Sep (MMR, MJM). As always in the South Bay, the **Common Tern** is not common. One was found at the Sunnyvale WPCP oxidation ponds on 6 Sep (MJM) and seen through the next day (v. ob.). Another bird was found on Salt Pond A5 in Alviso on 16 Sep (MMR, MJM). Staging **Least Terns** continued into August with a high count on Salt Pond A5 of 114 on 15 Aug (MMR, MJM). Numbers there dropped to 22 by 31 Aug and they were gone by early September (MMR, MJM). About 24 birds on Salt Ponds A2E and B2 was the high count for birds staging near Stevens Creek (RWR, FV). A juvenile **Black Tern** showed up near Alviso Slough on 15 Aug (MMR, MJM) and another was at the Sunnyvale WPCP oxidation ponds the same day (RK, PK). Multiple birds were found at Sunnyvale in the next few days with a high count of six on 17 Aug (DBr). Three birds at

Sunnyvale on 7 Sep (RK, PK, DM, JMe) were the last seen there. The terns that were aged were juveniles. The big news on **Black Skimmers** was the extensive numbers in the vicinity of Salt Pond A8 in Alviso during August and September. A peak count of 27 was obtained on 28 Sep (MMR, MJM) and this included three juveniles and 3 1st-basic birds, suggesting good nesting success this year. Up to 4 adults and 2 fledglings were seen in the outer Palo Alto FCB 6-10 Aug (MMR) and a pair on Salt Pond A16 fledged at least one young on 10 Aug (RK, PK). In the latter case, however, it is not clear the fledgling survived beyond its first day. As sometimes happens in late summer, misoriented **Common Murres** come into the South Bay. A juvenile seen in outer Guadalupe Slough on 7 Sep (MMR, MJM) appeared healthy.

### Swifts through Sparrows

Typically in August and September we see **Vaux's Swifts** along the edge of the South Bay, but it is unclear whether these are dispersing birds from the Santa Cruz Mountains or southbound migrants. Two to ten birds were found at multiple locations along the Bay with 10 over the Sunnyvale WPCP ponds on 7 Sep (RK, PK) and 10 over New Chicago Marsh on 9 Sep (WGB). But birds also remained near areas where they nest including eight over Saratoga High School on 31 Aug (MMR) and 12 over Los Gatos Creek CP on 20 Sep (LSu). A female **Black-chinned Hummingbird** was raising nestlings through 4 Aug (WGB, KO) along the Guadalupe River below Curtner. A female or immature was seen along Stevens Creek below La Avenida in Mountain View on 8 Sep (MMR). A female **Rufous Hummingbird** was banded near Felter and Sierra roads in the Diablo Range on 8 Sep (RCO). They are a very scarce fall migrant in the Coast Ranges. An immature **Lewis's Woodpecker** was seen near Kelly Lake in Henry Coe SP on 31 Aug (JY, AL) and is likely a dispersant. Calling **Pileated**



*"The big news on Black Skimmers was the extensive numbers in the vicinity of Salt Pond A8 in Alviso during August and September. A peak count of 27 was obtained on 28 Sep..."  
Sketch by Emélie Curtis*

**Woodpeckers** in the Santa Cruz Mountains were heard east of Skyline Boulevard near Castle Rock SP on 17 Aug (LCh) and southwest of Skyline Ridge OSP on 5 Sep (GS). The **Willow Flycatcher** migration along our valley creeks and wetter areas began on 17 Aug when a single bird was seen at the Sunnyvale WPCP (RK, PK et al.). A high count was of seven birds along Stevens Creek from Hwy 101 to Crittenden Lane on 25 Aug (MMR). Birds were still being found locally to the end of September (v. ob.). Surprisingly, one to two birds were found at Kelly Lake in Henry Coe SP on 31 Aug (JY, AL), well into the Diablo Range where we do not normally expect to find birds during the fall passage. Juvenile **Bank Swallows** appeared in reasonable numbers near Alviso with the first found on 20 Sep (KO) and two juveniles there by 23 Sep (RWR, FV). Birds continued to be seen in this general vicinity through 29 Sep (MMR). **American Dippers**, although resident, are seldom reported in early fall. This year one was found along Saratoga Creek at Saratoga Springs on 7 Sep (LMy) and another was at Alum Rock Park on 25 Sep (JMy). We rarely find **Hermit Warblers** during fall, so a male along San Francisquito Creek near the bike bridge above Middlefield on 16 Sep (MDd) was a treat. A **Northern**

*continued on Page 8*

# Condors returning to Pinnacles

## Part One: California Condors transferred from Big Sur to Pinnacles N.M.

by Ralph W. Schardt

In September of 2002 I started working on a photography project as a volunteer at Pinnacles National Monument in San Benito County. My idea was to photograph the entire California Condor reintroduction process: picking the site, building the aviary, transferring birds, and finally, the release into the wild of the California Condor (*Gymnogyps californianus*) at Pinnacles National Monument. By the time my proposal for the project was approved, Pinnacles N.M. and Ventana Wilderness Society wildlife biologists had chosen a site on top of North Chalone Peak at the southwestern edge of the park.

North Chalone is at an elevation of over 3000 feet and provides panoramic views of the Santa Lucia coast ranges and southern Salinas River valley. The original condor release site was just below a fire lookout station that had been unused for several years. A 4.5 mile trail from the visitors' center

located at the east end of the park was one of two access points to the site and a very precarious dirt road provided access from the west. It was because of this road that this site had

Pinnacles. Ventana Wilderness Society volunteers and Pinnacles park staff had also hiked the trail and performed helicopter long-haul delivery of construction materials to the site before it



Young California Condors await release into the wilds of Pinnacles National Monument south of Hollister

## Field Notes *cont'd*

**Waterthrush** was a good find along Stevens Creek below La Avenida on 2 Sep (MMR) and was seen once again on 3 Sep (RK, PK). Two **MacGillivray's Warblers** were banded at CCFS on 13 Sep (*fide* MJM). The only others found were singles along Stevens Creek below La Avenida on 24 Sep (MMR) and at the end of Embarcadero Way in Palo Alto on 28 Sep (WGB). A female **Summer Tanager** in Palo Alto's Foothills Park on 30 Aug (DLSu) was a good find. The first **White-throated Sparrow** of the season was banded at CCFS on 28 Sep (*fide* MMR).

**RARITIES:** Please drop me a note: Bill Bousman, 321 Arlington Way, Menlo Park, CA 94025, or: barlowi@earthlink.net

to be abandoned—one of the private property owners exercised his right to restrict numerous agency vehicles through his property. Since this was the only way to safely access the site for construction and bird transfer, another site had to be selected.

I had hiked up to the original site (round trip almost 9 miles) with 50 pounds of photography gear and another 10 pounds of food and water. The view was worth the journey and it was a good introduction to the kind of work I was soon to experience with the reintroduction of the condor at

was abandoned. It would be almost 8 months before another site was selected and environmental assessments were completed.

In May of this year I got a call from the Chief Ranger at Pinnacles telling me we were "back on" with the condor reintroduction project. By June, things were hopping and helicopter long-hauls had already transferred building materials from the original site to the new site at the east end of the park. The new site was a smaller, 2000 foot unnamed peak near the east park entrance. My first visit to the site was a 3.5 mile walk on a 4-wheel drive road to the base of the peak. From there it was 1900 feet straight up, no trail, to the new site where the rearing and release facility would be built.

I had converted most of my original photography equipment that I carried up to the first site to digital SLR format so I didn't have as many camera bodies and lenses to carry up the mountain with me. It was still quite a climb, as my pack weighed over 50 pounds with equipment and a full day's worth of water. The other volunteers and wildlife biologists also had to carry food and water along with miscellaneous construction tools and materials. A typical day on this

*cont'd. next page*

*Observers: Deborah Bartens (DB), Bill Bousman (WGB), Dennis Braddy (DBr), Les Chibana (LCh), Jack Cole (JAC), Rita Colwell (RCo), Chuck Coston (CJC), Matthew Dodder (MDd), Al Eisner (AME), Paul Fox (PF), Tom Grey (TGr), Roland Kenner (RK), Pat Kemy (PK), Va Landschoot (VL), Amy Lauterbach (AL), John Luther (JL), Dean Manley (DM), Mike Mammoser (MJM), John Meyer (JMe), Jean Myers (JMy), Lisa Myers (LMY), Kris Olson (KO), Bob Reiling (RWR), Mike Rogers (MMR), Georgia Stigall (GS), Rosalie Strait (RS), Linda Sullivan (LSu), Frank Vanslager (FV), Ann Verdi (AV), Dave Weber (DW), Michael Wienholt (MW), and James Yurchenco (JY).*



# Condors

*continued*

peak in July saw temperatures soar to well over 100 degrees, and the first thing we did was construct some shade!

Pinnacles and Ventana biologists and staff worked every day building the condor facility that would eventually house the birds. Water tanks to hold water for the birds were brought in by helicopter to the site, and park maintenance workers had to work out a system of PVC piping to pump water from holding tanks 1900 feet below the facility to three tanks at the top. In addition to a water system, an all terrain vehicle (ATV) road was built in anticipation of transferring the birds to the site and hauling up still-born calf carcasses for food. Unfortunately, the road was not stable for vehicular traffic and it was used as the main walking trail to the construction site. That hike was shorter by 3 miles than the first site, but it was steeper and was quite a workout to traverse with gear and materials for the project.

Biologists who study the condor's history believe that it has been over 100 years since the California Condor soared above the mountains and ranches south of Hollister in the regions around Pinnacles N.M. Everyone on the project was very excited about the prospect of having condors back in this area and extremely dedicated to the project. During one activity of construction I counted over 25 volunteers helping cut and line up netting for the flight pen. Everyone hiked that trail and put in their time in the hot sun.

Construction at the site was accomplished in an astonishing time of six weeks, and by the end of August we were putting the final touches on the facility in anticipation of transferring the condors to their new home from Big Sur. On September 9, 2003 a group of wildlife biologists from Pinnacles N.M., Ventana Wilderness Society and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service collected seven condors from the Big Sur facility, and the birds arrived by vehicles in the early hours of September 10 to Pinnacles N.M.

A small group of us watched over the birds overnight as they awaited the



*Park staff and volunteers transport a condor to the release site*

journey up the hill. Of the seven birds, one is a mentor adult male and 6 are sub-adult males. All the birds were carried up the trail by humans using poles and harnesses attached to large kennels. The transfer went smoothly and the condors are now awaiting release into the wild sometime in December of this year as they continue to acclimate to their new home.

My work on this project not only included photo chronology, but I also helped build the facility and participated in the transfer, which included the release of an adult into the wild at Big Sur. This project provided me with an in-depth education on the condor and the people who are dedicated to bringing it successfully back to the wild in California. I feel fortunate to have worked on such a wonderful endeavor and anticipate the day when I can photograph the first California Condor to be released into the wild at Pinnacles National Monument.

Access to the sight is highly restricted, but after December of this year, I look forward to taking a group of people down to Pinnacles and viewing the sight from a distance to see the magnificent condors soaring overhead.

*Part two will include the story of the release of the first condors into the wild at Pinnacles N.M. – stay tuned!*

## Phil Hand 1916 - 2003

One of SCVAS' most active birders for several decades, Phil Hand, passed away in October of this year. Phil was a dedicated field trip leader and participant who will be greatly missed by the local birding community.

In the early '60's Phil's daughter Carolyn did a school paper on "Birds of Barron Park," the Palo Alto neighborhood where the family resided, and Phil's interest in birding never waned from that time. A Hewlett-Packard employee from the mid-1940's, Phil retired in 1973 and became more involved in birding, leading field trips for SCVAS and travelling around the country augmenting his life list. He was often accompanied on birding outings by his dear sister Pauline, who passed away several years ago.

As a trip leader, CBC participant, or birding companion, Phil was a keen but modest birder, and was always ready to help others improve their birding skills as he imparted his considerable knowledge willingly, with warmth, intelligence, and a fine sense of humor. Those of us who had the pleasure of sharing time with Phil in the field will remember him as a wonderful birding companion and a true gentleman.

—Grant Hoyt

# The Christmas Bird Counts are coming!

Each year SCVAS is proud to sponsor four different Christmas Bird Counts (CBC's) that take place either wholly or partially in Santa Clara County. The idea is to send teams of birders into a 15-mile diameter circle and count as many species and individuals as possible.

That's right, somebody actually counts every gull, blackbird and sparrow, as well as the less-common birds, including the occasional unusual "vagrant." At the end of the day everyone gets together for a countdown dinner and tabulation session. It's fun to hear about high and low totals, weird birds encountered, and weather-related adventures (the counts take place rain or shine). Veteran counters look forward to the CBC's each year as they census birds in every nook and cranny of the county, but newcomers are always welcome. Even if you're a novice at identifying birds, your spotting and tallying skills are still valuable to your team of counters, so look over the CBC announcements that follow and sign up to develop your skills on these important, volunteer-based annual bird censuses.

The National Audubon Society records and maintains all CBC data. This year NAS is implementing on-line registration for CBC participation. To check historical CBC data, learn more about CBC's in general and register for your favorite CBC, go to the website at: [www.audubon.org/cbc/](http://www.audubon.org/cbc/).

## San Jose—Sunday, Dec. 14

The San Jose CBC will be held on Sunday, December 14th. It is the longest running local count and covers diverse habitats from Alum Rock Park to the urban jungle of downtown San Jose; from the Alviso shore to Calaveras. Come one, come all for what is sure to be a classic day of winter birding. Birders of all experience levels welcome. The countdown dinner will be at the Leininger Center in Kelley Park. There is a \$5 charge to cover the cost of CBC result publication. If you are interested in participating in the count, please contact Kirsten Holmquist before December 5 at (408) 747-0988 or via email at <[kirrosee@earthlink.net](mailto:kirrosee@earthlink.net)>.

## Palo Alto—Monday, Dec. 15

From the hills of Skyline Drive to the shores of San Francisco Bay, birders will be scouring the redwoods and mudflats for each and every bird willing to stand up and be counted during the Palo Alto CBC on December 15<sup>th</sup>. This count is conducted half in Santa Clara and half in San Mateo County.

Last year we saw at least seven uncommon species on the count, including Pileated Woodpecker and Pacific Golden-Plover. What we find this year depends largely on how many people participate, so you are encouraged to contact one of the Region Coordinators below, or myself, and join in the fun! If you are new to the count, or have a particular area in which you would like to count, let me know and I will find just the right spot for you. Forms and other details, like the countdown dinner, will follow. Al Eisner has once again graciously volunteered to compile the Count statistics.

Jack Cole (coordinator) (408) 996-0434  
[snoyowl@yahoo.com](mailto:snoyowl@yahoo.com)

Region 1 TBD

Region 2 Mike Rogers  
[mrogers@nas.nasa.gov](mailto:mrogers@nas.nasa.gov)

Region 3 Garth Harwood  
[gharwood@hiddenvilla.org](mailto:gharwood@hiddenvilla.org)

Region 4 Phyllis Browning  
[pbisis@worldnet.att.net](mailto:pbisis@worldnet.att.net)

Region 5 TBD

Region 6 TBD

Region 7 Leda Beth Gray  
[lbg2dd@earthlink.net](mailto:lbg2dd@earthlink.net)

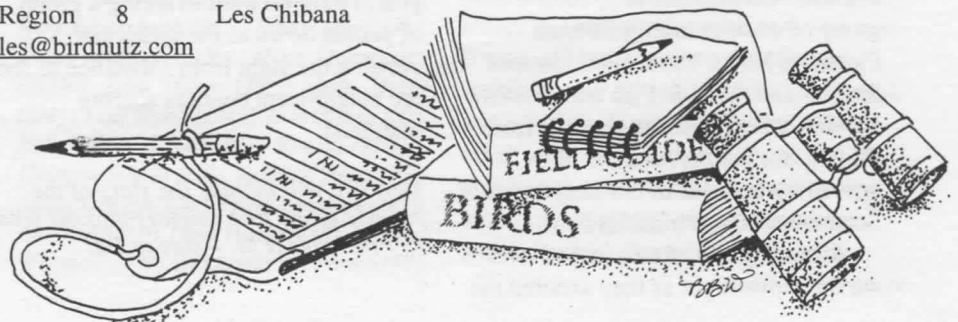
Region 8 Les Chibana  
[les@birdnutz.com](mailto:les@birdnutz.com)

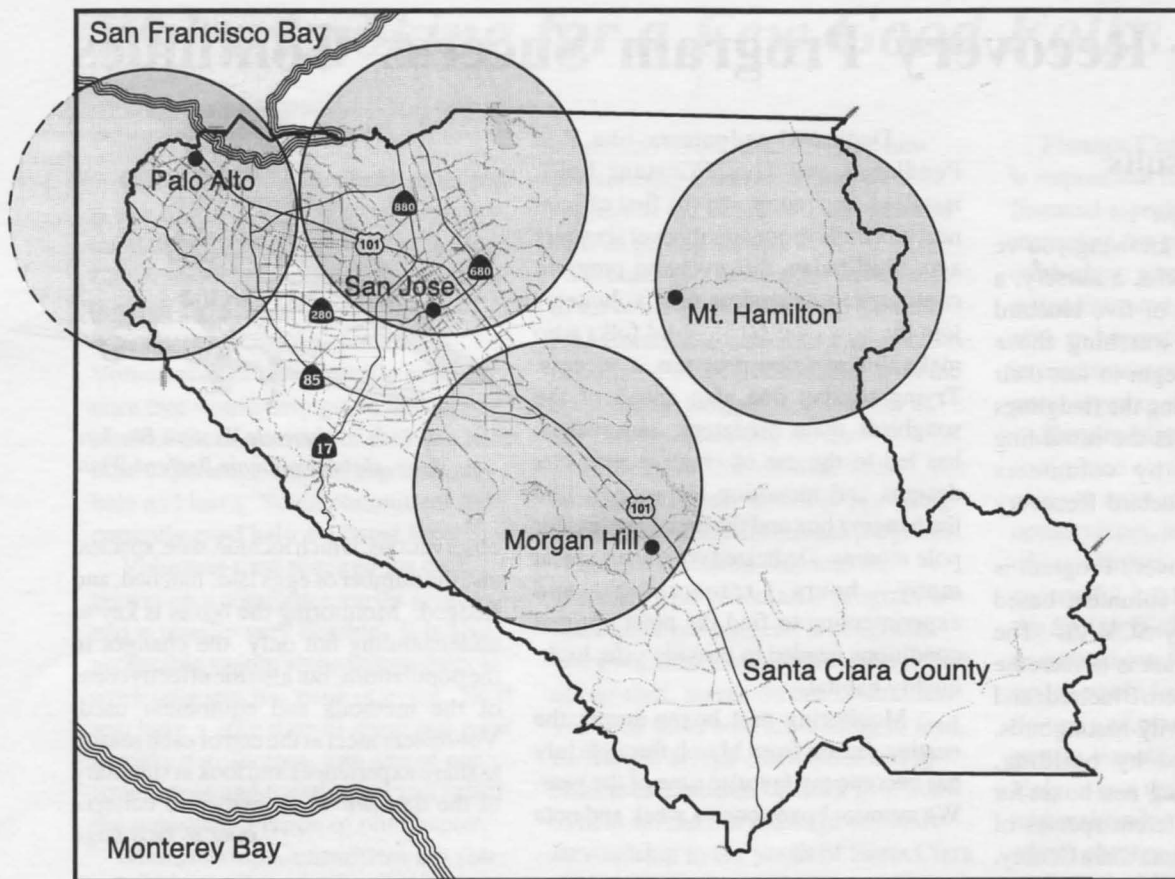
## Calero-Morgan Hill—Sunday, Dec. 28

The Calero-Morgan Hill CBC will take place on Sunday, Dec 28. Our focus is on South Santa Clara County ranging from the Diablo Foothills to the Santa Cruz Mountains and including Almaden Valley plus Coyote Valley where ponds and lakes are interspersed along the Coyote Creek riparian corridor. Local "hot spots" include Calero Reservoir, Ogier Ponds, and Almaden Lake. Among other areas visited are Almaden/Quicksilver CP, Santa Teresa CP, Edenvale Garden Park, Guadalupe Oak Grove Park, Coyote Ridge, and the Water District ponds. Special birds found on previous counts have included Pacific Loon, Snow Goose, American Bittern, Bald Eagle, Lewis's Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, American Dipper, Mountain Bluebird, Hermit Warbler, Grasshopper Sparrow, and Great-tailed Grackle, to name a few. Please plan to join us in documenting wintering birds in the many varied, yet often under-birded, habitats of this count circle—and perhaps discover a rarity along the way. For more information and/or to sign up for the count, please contact Ann Verdi by email <[wodu10@aol.com](mailto:wodu10@aol.com)> or by phone (408) 266-5108.

## Mt. Hamilton—???

Help! One of our CBC's is in trouble! Don Schmoltdt, founder and compiler of our county's most remote and unpredictable CBC, is stepping down after 26 years. Don will be happy to train a new compiler for this exciting CBC in the eastern hinterlands of Santa Clara County, but as yet no one has stepped up. Contact Don at (916) 739-8821 if you're interested in assuming compiler duties for this very special CBC.





Map of Santa Clara County showing the location of the 4-count circles. Mapping by Perry Thorwaldson

## "Will bird for cookies"

**Birdathon leader's tasty incentives inspire Bonnie to a new level of birding**

by Bonnie Bedford-White

I had the fine opportunity to participate in a Birdathon to benefit Point Reyes Bird Observatory in late September.

Usually this group (named "Fly by Dawn") is led by the founder, Ted Chandik, but on this particular day Ted's good friend, Rig Currie, led our group.

The day was splendid.

Assortments of good birds were in all the classic Point Reyes locations. The famed Nunes Ranch was peppered with warblers: Chestnut-sided, Townsend's and Blackpoll, interspersed with American Redstarts. They all reminded me of winky holiday lights twinkling at random. These beauties were everywhere, and such a sight to behold. A Green-tailed Towhee added even more interest to that location. It was hard to decide where to look.

Later we proceeded to the Fish Docks area. I'd been to Point Reyes several times over the years but the fog had always been dense. This was the first time I realized that



"Fish Docks" was named for actual fish docks that were visible and covered with cormorants on this particular day. Rumor has it that there is always a Great Horned Owl that roosts in the Fish Dock trees. When our leader, Rigdon, yelled out, "A cookie for whoever finds the owl first,"

binoculars went up en masse. Was that what made my eyes work so swiftly? Seconds later I was pointing it out, a perfect silhouette in the tree branches.

In the afternoon we headed out to Limantour Beach. A small inland body of water yielded hundreds of American Wigeon. Again the call came, "A cookie

for a Eurasian Wigeon!" This time it took a few short minutes before I had the bird in my scope, and once again I received my reward.

We all practice honing our skills in the field. Sound and sight coupled with good optics, and seasoned with knowledge and luck. I never would have guessed that cookies could be additional force. Of course, I'd like to think that my skills as a birder are simply getting better and better, but it just may have been the promise of cookies that provided the leading edge.

# Bluebird Recovery Program Success Continues

## Summary of 1997 to 2003 results

by David "Tex" Houston

Imagine the joy of knowing you've helped to provide a home, a nursery, a sanctuary, for a clutch of five bluebird hatchlings. Imagine watching those hatchlings grow and begin to test their wings. Imagine watching the fledglings take first flight. This is the rewarding feeling experienced by volunteers participating in the Bluebird Recovery Program.

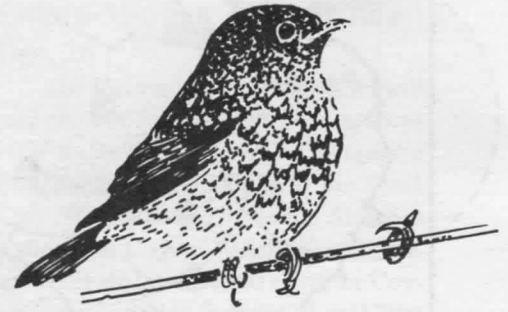
The Bluebird Recovery Program is one of the strongest volunteer-based programs sponsored by SCVAS. The main goal of this program is to increase nesting habitat for Western Bluebirds and many other species of cavity-nesting birds. This is accomplished by building, installing, and monitoring nest boxes for more than a dozen different species of cavity nesting birds in Santa Clara County.

SCVAS works in collaboration with volunteers, schools, public and private landowners, and other community groups to help increase the populations of a diverse number of songbirds and other cavity nesters. While the Western Bluebird will always be the main focus of the program, helping all species of native cavity nesting birds is just as important. Many challenges lie ahead for the bluebird and other wildlife in Santa Clara County as human needs and activities compete for the natural resources needed by all living creatures.

The loss of habitat for bluebirds is the main challenge that sparked SCVAS volunteers in 1997 to start a formal monitoring program. Simply put, cavity-nesting species require holes, like those found in an old oak tree, in order to build their nests and raise their hatchlings. As dying trees are removed and more and more land is cleared for development, these species are quickly losing their opportunities to nest and reproduce. Combine this with threats from predators, non-native species (such as the English House Sparrow), and even meddling humans, and the populations of these birds have been seriously threatened.

Dedicated volunteers like Red Pendleton and Gus Constant built, installed, and monitored the first official nest box trails in our county over six years ago. Still today, this evolving program continues to expand as new volunteers join the now over 60 bluebird folks who make this amazing program a success. Trying to stay one step ahead of the songbirds main predators, and snakes, has led to the use of creative new box designs and mounting techniques, like the hanging box and the metal or elevator pole mounts. Dedicated volunteers spend many hours researching and experimenting to find the most optimal conditions needed to provide safe, high-quality habitat.

Monitoring nest boxes during the nesting season from March through July has become my favorite time of the year. We monitor boxes once a week and note



Juvenile Western Bluebird sketch by Bonnie Bedford-White

observations, which include, date, species, and the number of eggs laid, hatched, and fledged. Monitoring the boxes is key to understanding not only the changes in the populations, but also the effectiveness of the methods and equipment used. Volunteers meet at the end of each season to share experiences and look at summary of the data we've all helped to collect.

*cont'd. next page*

## Santa Clara County bluebird recovery results, 1997 to 2003 Chicks fledged from boxes monitored by volunteers

| Species       | 1997       | 1998       | 1999       | 2000       | 2001       | 2002        | 2003        |
|---------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|-------------|
| WEBL          | 90         | 274        | 189        | 204        | 271        | 432         | 378         |
| VGSW          | 52         | 175        | 198        | 89         | 107        | 295         | 177         |
| OATI          | 5          | 122        | 167        | 173        | 133        | 249         | 128         |
| CBCH          | 5          | 13         | 50         | 96         | 106        | 127         | 104         |
| ATFL          | 25         | 17         | 54         | 60         | 84         | 128         | 95          |
| BEWR          | 0          | 27         | 23         | 33         | 38         | 29          | 19          |
| HOWR          | 11         | 18         | 3          | 13         | 44         | 61          | 36          |
| WBNU          | 10         | 5          | 4          | 20         | 6          | 29          | 25          |
| TRSW          | 31         | 46         | 55         | 54         | 73         | 166         | 128         |
| HOFI          | 0          | 0          | 0          | 4          | 10         | 0           | 0           |
| AMKE          | 0          | 0          | 0          | 0          | 1          | 2           | 3           |
| WESO          | 0          | 0          | 4          | 4          | 0          | 0           | 0           |
| BNOW          | 0          | 0          | 0          | 4          | 4          | 11          | 12          |
| WODU          | 0          | 0          | 0          | 0          | 0          | 6           | 20          |
| <b>TOTALS</b> | <b>229</b> | <b>697</b> | <b>751</b> | <b>747</b> | <b>877</b> | <b>1535</b> | <b>1184</b> |
| TRAILS        | 17         | 20         | 21         | 23         | 23         | 42          | 34          |
| BOXES         | 230        | 295        | 338        | 395        | 420        | 492         | 443         |
| SPECIES       | 8          | 9          | 10         | 12         | 12         | 12          | 12          |

(Test your knowledge of species nomenclature—"WEBL" denotes "Western Bluebird" in the table above; can you identify the other species listed? Answers on Pg. 14)

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# We're Looking for a Few Good Folks!

by Debbie Thompson  
President, SCVAS

Our chapter has very bold goals and is one of the most influential environmental and educational groups in the Bay Area. We accomplish these goals through the help of our dedicated volunteers serving on committees. Volunteers can have specific experience that would help guide the decisions of the committee or they can have little experience with an eagerness to help and learn. Some committees that currently need help are listed here.

Volunteer time required for each person on a committee varies greatly and is usually very flexible. It is also acceptable to join some committees to work on a specific issue or event. So if you have a little time to spare and want to make a difference, join one of our committees and together we can fulfill the important mission of our chapter.

**Membership Committee:** Do you enjoy interacting with people? We are looking for a people-oriented volunteer who has a background in membership development, marketing or sales to chair and revitalize our Membership Committee. The mission of the Membership Committee is to recruit new members, improve membership retention, increase member satisfaction and diversity, and promote community

awareness of our chapter. The new Membership Chair will have the full support of the Board of Directors and staff in getting started.

We are also looking for volunteers to serve on the Membership Committee. Committee activities can include organizing events, interacting with the community, helping in our booth at fairs and membership drives.

**Education Committee:** This committee is very active in providing youth and adult educational programs. Wildlife Education Day and the Wetlands and Woodlands program are just two of our successful programs. The Programs Coordinator, who is part of our staff, serves on this committee. We need folks who are willing to lead field trips, design curriculum and in-class presentations, or work in schools to help spread our message of nature stewardship to the youth of Santa Clara County.

**Environmental Action Committee:** EAC volunteers work with SCVAS staff and other organizations on conservation issues around the county. This is one of our most popular and active committees. Please join the EAC if you would like to make a difference in the quality of life in our area. Meetings are once a month.

**Finance Committee:** This committee is responsible for monitoring the financial aspects of SCVAS including managing our investments, reviewing our budget, preparing our financial statements, and filing taxes. Anyone with an interest in finance or experience in investment portfolio management is encouraged to join this committee.

**Fundraising Committee:** This committee comes up with ideas and plans to raise money to meet the conservation, education and other goals of our chapter. It helps implement our successful fall fundraising appeal and the Spring Birdathon. We would like to expand our fundraising activities, which could include identifying big donors and planning fundraising parties, events, raffles and auctions. Help us put the "fun" into fundraising and make a big impact on the success of our chapter.

**Board of Directors:** We are looking for dedicated leaders to serve on our Board of Directors. The Board is responsible for setting the mission, tone and direction of the chapter while at the same time maintaining a social and fun atmosphere. Board meetings occur once a month with a full day retreat held in the summer. Each member is expected to also serve on a committee. Currently, we have a well-rounded board with a wide range of experiences and interests. Help shape your chapter by applying to serve on the Board of Directors.

**Contact us:** There are additional interesting and rewarding committees that need volunteers, such as Christmas Bird Count, The Birdhouse Network, and Field Trip Committee. Please call or email our Programs Coordinator, Jennifer Peritz, if you would like to join one of our important committees, have a special interest not described here or want to apply for the Board of Directors ([programs@scvas.org](mailto:programs@scvas.org) or (408) 252-3740).

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## Bluebird *cont'd*

All of our monitors form a wonderful natural bond with the birds and take pride in knowing that their efforts help to increase the birds' chances of nesting successfully.

This season we had 1184 fledglings reported from 34 different trails throughout the county. Four backyard birders also added to this year's totals. A total of 473 nest boxes from these trails and backyards were monitored and reported during the 2003 season. We had fledglings reported for thirteen different species, from Chestnut-backed Chickadees to Barn Owls. Many thanks

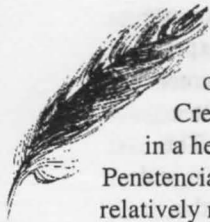
to the volunteers and various groups who made this season another success for all who love to watch the bluebirds and others fly.

There are many ways that you, too, can get involved. Please join the fun and help improve bird habitat by volunteering to monitor a trail, or by allowing a trail or nest box to be installed and monitored on your property, or by contributing materials or donating to the bluebird recovery program of SCVAS.

If you have questions regarding how you can get involved please contact David "Tex" Houston at 650-529-9023..

# SCVAS Considers Legal Action to Protect Penetencia Creek

by Craig Breon  
SCVAS Executive Director



The SCVAS Board is considering possible legal options to protect Penetencia Creek in East San Jose. While in a heavily urbanized area, Penetencia Creek remains in a relatively natural state compared to many of our valley-level riparian areas. Penetencia also supports one of our few remaining spawning grounds for steelhead trout, a species listed as threatened by the federal government.

The San Jose City Council recently approved a residential development project near the creek that may indirectly cause harm to a stretch of Penetencia. The problem is that this creek floods, and the Santa Clara Valley Water District is working with the Army Corps of Engineers to develop a flood control project that would both protect homes and businesses in the area while maintaining the health of the creek. In an urban setting that is not an easy task.

The main thing the Water District needs in order to do a progressive, environmentally responsible flood control project is land—land near the creek. The residential project approved by the San Jose Council could limit the Water District's options, leading to a more damaging flood control project. To its credit, the San Jose Council did require the developer to set back the homes at least 100 feet from the creek. However, for the Water District to do the job right, it may need even more room than that. It is this complex interaction of different projects that forms the grounds for our potential legal action.

It should be noted that here, as always, we try to avoid the courts. We wrote to the Council and appeared at the public hearing on this project, requesting that the City delay approval of the project until city staff and the

developer had sat down with the Water District, Army Corps, and other concerned resource agencies to see if an agreement could be forged on how to move forward. As so often happens at San Jose Council, we were largely ignored, as were the resource agencies. As a result, we consider our other options.

In this situation, the City seems to have made a fatal mistake. By not circulating its environmental documentation to the appropriate resource agencies, the City essentially cut them out of the process, in violation of state law. The attorneys we consulted to discuss this feel that if we have to sue, we will have a winning case. As a first step, we authorized the

firm of Shute, Mihaly, and Weinberger to send a letter to the City demanding that it rescind its approval and recirculate the environmental documents. Hopefully, the City will realize that it is on shaky ground and do what we have asked in order to avoid a legal confrontation.

In the end, there's no guarantee—even if we go to court and win—that the development project will change for the better. However, if we do not act, it only encourages the City to engage in more lawlessness in the future. Issues such as this make for difficult decisions for the SCVAS Board, but we have shown the willingness in the past to stand up strongly for our beliefs, and this has served us well.

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## Library upgrades

For anyone who has ever visited SCVAS' offices in McClellan Ranch Park, you've no doubt experienced the obvious treasure that the beauty and natural diversity of the park provides. One hidden treasure at McClellan that people sometimes overlook, however, dwells inside the building... the SCVAS library. This wonderful resource is filled with interesting and varied material just waiting to be discovered.

Joy Robinson and Joan Leighton, SCVAS volunteer librarians, have been working for the past eight months or so to catch up with various backlogs in the SCVAS library. As a result, nearly 150 books have been added to the collection in that time. All of these recent additions were donated by past and current SCVAS members — many thanks to each of them!

The collection is now quite strong, particularly with field guides from countries in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. In addition, a small collection of videotapes and audiocassettes has been catalogued and is now available. These range from birding by ear CDs to videos focusing on conservation to species-specific programs.

For those wishing to know about birding

activities in counties other than Santa Clara, the library receives newsletters from Audubon chapters in other counties around the Bay Area as well as those in Tucson, Los Angeles, Seattle, Portland, San Diego, and even Honolulu. The periodicals don't end at the newsletters—there's also a small collection of birding magazines such as *Audubon*, *Birders' World*, and *Birding*. Just stop by and ask the office staff to help you locate these.

All library materials, except the few marked reference, may be borrowed by SCVAS members for up to three weeks. To make the collection easier to review, Joy has been working very hard to update the catalogue, arranged by author, title, subject, and call number. Thanks to her efforts, a current version of the catalogue is now available. So, the next time you swing by McClellan Ranch Park to go birding by the creek or to buy a bag of birdseed, come on in and browse the library shelves. You may find something to help you prepare before you embark on your next birding trip, or maybe something to help you learn more about local birds. Whatever your birding interest, you're bound to find something worthwhile in the newly updated collection.

## Interns bring new energy to SCVAS programs *from Page 1*

the results we expect when hiring an intern. Jackie will also be working with Jennifer and many SCVAS volunteers on our in-class programs and field trips. Thanks to grants from the Center for Venture Philanthropy and the Yahoo! Employee Foundation, and thanks to your donations to last spring's Birdathon and other fundraisers, SCVAS will be able to serve more schoolchildren this year, and we will be realigning our approach to schools and families with our educational services.

Learning from some well-researched theories on effective environmental education, we will be trying to reach students with multiple experiences in a single year, occasionally working with consultants to hone our approach, and collaborating with other environmental education providers to see if our combined efforts can deliver better services. By taking on a leadership role in the classroom and on field trips, Jackie will allow Jennifer the time to recruit more volunteers, develop curricula, and explore the integration of our programs with the efforts of other educators.

Jackie will be working approximately twelve hours a week with SCVAS. From what I've seen so far, she will add significantly to our educational accomplishments.

### Kim

For some time now, I have wanted to approach the issue of mitigation monitoring in a more systematic and concentrated manner. Think of mitigation monitoring as holding developers and local cities to the commitments they make toward environmental protection. We had a significant success when Kelly Crowley was with us, monitoring construction sites during the rainy season and looking for water quality violations. Kelly produced an excellent report on this issue (which can still be seen on our website at [www.scvas.org/stormwater.html](http://www.scvas.org/stormwater.html)), drawing attention to a systemic problem locally. As a result of her work, local jurisdictions and our Regional Water Quality Control Board paid more attention to the issue, and thus



*Intern Kim Yuan-Farrell*

creeks are healthier. Other monitoring efforts have been more sporadic, depending on what I notice around the county and my time constraints.

Unfortunately, Kelly moved on, and I simply do not have the time to cover her previous work in addition to my own. This is where Kim comes in. She comes to us from Santa Clara University, where she graduated earlier this year as an Environmental Studies major. A former student of mine, Kim is bright and articulate, with a proven commitment to conservation work.

A grant from the Santa Clara Valley Water District will partially fund a two-semester internship delving ever further into the murky world of mitigation monitoring. Kim will be responsible for learning both the laws and the realities of holding developers to their promises. I make that distinction very purposefully—in this area, what the law says should happen often diverges greatly from the facts on the ground.

As I write this, Kim has not yet started, but I already have a few leads for her. We know that a Shea Homes project in south San Jose has failed to fulfill its commitments to wetlands and riparian protection. While we have pointed this out before, the city only partially responded, and there's more work to be done. In addition, I have a strong suspicion

that something is wrong at the Cisco Systems development in Alviso. Also, a tip from an employee leads me to believe that the Water District—typically one of the more responsible agencies in our region—may not be fulfilling its commitments to local fisheries. I've also heard rumor that the Eagle Ridge development in Gilroy has problems. In short, I expect Kim to hit the ground running, turning these leads and possibilities into the research and follow-through needed to preserve and enhance local natural resources.

Ideally this project will not only benefit our region, but also have wider ramifications. Kim and I will document our successes and frustrations, with the thought that a future publication may help other community organizations deal with this same issue. The problem is widespread; we will not solve it, but we may bring some substantial attention to it.

Please join me in welcoming Jackie and Kim to SCVAS.

---

## Quiz answers:

VGSW — Violet-green Swallow  
OATI — Oak Titmouse  
CBCH — Chestnut-backed Chickadee  
ATFL — Ash-throated Flycatcher  
BEWR — Bewick's Wren  
WBNU — White-breasted Nuthatch  
HOWR — House Wren  
TRSW — Tree Swallow  
HOFI — House Finch  
AMKE — American Kestrel  
WESO — Western Screech-owl  
BNOW — Barn Owl  
WODU — Wood Duck

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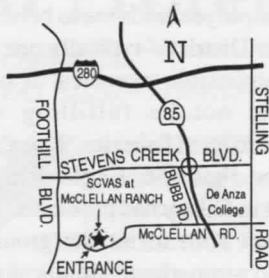
## Requesting drawings and photos

Please send drawings and photos for consideration in future *Avocet* publications to Grant Hoyt or Bonnie Bedford-White. Call Bonnie at 408-261-8210 for more information.

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**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.

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