



THE AVOCET

The Newsletter of the Santa Clara Audubon Society

Jan. - Feb. 2004

Good news, bad news

Burrowing Owls take a big hit; promising new restoration group convenes — all in one day

by *Craig Breon*
Executive Director

What a day — it would be tough to imagine one of greater contrasts. On the morning of December 4th the California Fish and Game Commission voted 4-0 to reject our petition to list the Burrowing Owl as a Threatened or Endangered Species in the state, ending yet another chapter in the sad demise of Santa Clara County's Burrowing Owl population. On that same afternoon of December 4th the California Coastal Commission convened the first meeting of the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Stakeholders Forum, designed to help guide the restoration of 16,000 acres of wetlands and associated habitats in the South Bay. Whiplash! — stinging defeat and then radiant hope within a few hours!

SCVAS has been and will continue to be an integral part of these two major conservation efforts. Exactly where we go from here I cannot tell you. Frankly, I could use some advice.

The Petition

In April of 2003, SCVAS and the Center for Biological Diversity, Defenders of Wildlife, San Bernardino Valley Audubon Society, Tri-County Conservation League, and

California State Park Rangers Association filed the petition to list the Burrowing Owl. We knew we faced an uphill battle, but we also believed we had the scientific information needed to meet the applicable legal standard—"threatened with extinction overall, or a **significant portion** of its range" in the State (emphasis added).

We could show that the owl was extirpated (i.e., locally extinct) or nearly extirpated in 10-20% of its historic range in California. We could also show that the owl was in severe, or at least significant, decline in another 40% of its range. Nonetheless, we also admitted from the beginning that the Burrowing Owl retains healthy populations in several areas — in particular the Imperial Valley, where more than 70% of the statewide breeding owl pairs likely reside, the Palo Verde Valley along the Colorado River, and the Southern San Joaquin Valley.

The Fish and Game Commission, consisting of four men (the fifth having been recently appointed to a position in the new Schwarzenegger administration) would decide the future direction for the owl: continued decline and eventual disappearance from much of the state, or a renewed focus of our conservation energies, perhaps leading to recovery in some areas and stability statewide.

We were dealt a significant setback by the Department of Fish and Game (DFG) staff, who in October issued a staff report recommending denial of the petition. The staff report hardly discussed the "significant portion of its range" issue, focusing instead

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General Membership Meeting "Woodpecker Wonderland"

with Steve Shunk

Palo Alto Arts Center, Newell & Embarcadero Rds.

Wednesday, Jan. 14

Doors open 7:30; program 8:00

On the east slope of Oregon's Cascade Mountains stretches a 15-mile swath of forest where 11 species of woodpeckers, half of those occurring in North America, annually raise their young. The region's volcanic soils and extreme elevational variation in rainfall support tremendous habitat diversity, the key to its woodpecker variety. White-headed Woodpeckers abound in the ponderosa pine forest; Lewis's breed in snags at the juniper-pine interface; Three-toed and Black-backed Woodpeckers range from subalpine forest into the blackest of burns; and three different sapsuckers hold territories throughout the region. Join Oregon naturalist Stephen Shunk for this exciting introduction to the ecology

cont'd on Page 5

*Young Audubon
whale-watching
excursion*

See Page 5

◆ *1st county Pinyon Jays*
—Field Notes, Page 6

◆ *Birding in Kauai— Page 8*

◆ *EPA - Wetlands cause
pollution (?!)—Page 11*

Jan. - Feb. 2004 Field Trips

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

LO = Lunch optional

RC = Heavy rain cancels

NF = No facilities available

Saturday Jan. 3, 7:30 AM

County Chase

Half day. Leader: Bob Reiling (408)253-7527. Get a head start on your County Year List for the new year 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 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 end of street, bear left on Elizabeth St. then right on Hope St. to Marina parking lot. **Be prepared to car pool. RC**

Sunday Jan. 4, 9:00 AM

Charleston Slough

Half day. Leader: Roxie Handler (408)730-1745. Meet at Terminal Way at end of San Antonio Rd. north off Hwy 101 in Mt. View. Birding will be geared toward the beginning birder but all are encouraged to attend. Don't forget to bring your spotting scope and your enthusiasm. **RC**

Saturday Jan. 10, 8:00 AM

Oka Ponds

Half day. Leader: Pat Kenny (408)725-0468. From Hwy 17 in Los Gatos take Lark Ave exit west. Turn right on Oka Rd, left on Mozart Ave and immediately right on Oka Lane. Meet just inside gate. **RC**

Sunday Jan. 11, 8:00 AM

Panoche Valley

Full day. Leader: Clay Kempf (831)761-8260. Meet at Paicines Store on Hwy 25 approx. 11 miles south of Hollister. One of the better trips of the year, traversing oak woodland and open grassland via back roads. Targeted species include Phainopepla, Mountain Bluebird, Prairie Falcon, Ferruginous Hawk, Golden Eagle; other possibilities include Mountain Plover, Bald Eagle, Vesper Sparrow, Greater Roadrunner and Chukar. Bring lunch and a full tank of gas, carpooling is strongly recommended due to limited parking on narrow roads.

Wednesday Jan. 14, 8:30 AM

Charleston Slough

Half day. Leader Harriet Gerson (408) 252-6244. Meet at Terminal Way at end of San Antonio Rd. north off Hwy 101 in Mt. View. Bring spotting scopes! **LO, RC**

Saturday Jan. 17, 8:30 AM

Coyote Point/Foster City

Half day. Leader: Al Eisner (days and voicemail: (650)926-2018; evenings: (650)364-3686). Meet at parking lot adjacent to yacht club at Coyote Point. From 101 northbound, exit at Dore Ave; immediately turn north along frontage road. After about a mile, follow road as it bears right around a golf course. Enter park (not golf course) through the kiosks (likely admission charge), continue along golf course fence to end of road. Good trip for shorebirds (including "rockbirds") and waterfowl, but we'll also look for landbirds. A scope will be very useful. **RC**

Sunday Jan. 18, 8:00 AM

Almaden Lake Park, Alamos Creek

Half day. Leader: TBD (questions - call Bob R. 253-7527). Meet in west parking lot of Almaden Lake Park. From Hwy 85 take Almaden Expwy south. Park is on east (left) side of Almaden Expwy. Continue just past Coleman Rd. (and Park); return northbound on Almaden Expwy to park entrance on right. 3 miles of easy walking. Waterfowl, raptors, and a wide variety of riparian birds. **LO, RC**

Saturday Jan. 24, 8:00 AM

Ogier Ponds

Half day. Leader: Kirsten Holmquist (408)747-0988. From Hwy 101 in Morgan Hill take Cochrane Rd. west to Monterey Hwy, turn right, go north 2.6 miles, turn right on unnamed road toward Model Airplane Park where power towers cross Hwy. Meet at gated entrance to ponds. **RC**

Sunday Jan. 25, 8:00 AM

Fremont Lagoons

Half day. Leader: Bob Reiling (408)253-7527. From I-880 north of San Jose take Gateway Blvd exit west, turn left on Fremont Blvd. Park in lot on right at end of street. Come prepared to help me ID gulls. Possible Thayer's, Glaucous Gulls. Be sure to bring your scope. **RC**

Wednesday Jan. 28, 9:00 AM

Charleston Slough

Leader: Rose Green (650) 493-8378. Meet at Terminal Way at end of San Antonio Rd. north of Hwy 101 in Mt. View. Bring spotting scopes! **RC**

Saturday Jan. 31, 9:00 AM

San Francisco's Southern Parks

Half Day. Leader: Alan Hopkins (415)664-0983. Meet at Candlestick Point State Recreation Area. Shorebirds, bay ducks, loons and

raptors. San Francisco's second largest park, McLaren Park, features land birds and a few dabbling ducks. Other lesser known but birdy parks may be visited, time permitting. From Hwy 101 exit just past Brisbane Lagoon at Candlestick/3Com Park off-ramp. Continue east along Harney Way, turn right onto Jamestown/Hunters Point Expwy. Watch for entrance to Candlestick State Recreation Area on right and enter (no fee). Meet at end of paved road that runs through the park. **RC**

Sunday Feb. 1, 9:00 AM

Charleston Slough

Half day. Leader: Allen Royer (408)288-7768. Meet at Terminal Way at end of San Antonio Rd. north off Hwy 101 in Mt. View. Birding and discussions geared toward beginners. A good place to bring your scope. **RC**

Saturday Feb. 7, 8:30 AM

Coyote Reservoir

Half Day. Leader: Bob Reiling (408)253-7527. From Hwy 101 in Gilroy take Leavesley Rd. east for 1.5 miles, turn left on New Ave. then right on Roop Rd. Go left at "T" intersection, then after 1.3 miles left again on Coyote Reservoir Rd. and on to Lakeview Picnic area. **LO, RC**

Sunday Feb. 8, 8:30 AM

Alum Rock Park

Half day. Leader: Dave Cook (408)275-1492. From Hwy 101 or I-680 take McKee Rd. northeast toward hills then left on Toyon Ave, right on Penitencia Creek Rd. and on into park. Continue under bridge and meet at far end of upper parking lot. Moderately strenuous 3 to 4 mile walk. Resident breeding birds, possible Rufous-Crowned Sparrow, and Canyon Wren, early migrants, lingering winter birds. Be prepared for some mud! **LO, RC**

Wednesday Feb. 11, 8:30 AM

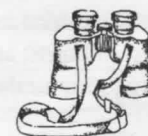
Alum Rock Park

Half day. Leader: Rick Page (408) 377-1092. See directions above. May be muddy. **LO, RC**

Saturday/Sunday Feb. 14 - 15

San Luis Obispo County

Two days. Leader: Jim Royer (e-mail address below, questions call Bob Reiling (408)253-7527). Two full days of birding by car caravan (bring a lunch, liquids, warm clothes, and a full tank of gas each day). Meet on Saturday the 14th at the very end of Coleman Dr. at Morro Rock in Morro Bay by 7:30 AM.



Field Trips cont'd

Morning birding around Morro Bay and south along coast; stops will be determined by location of wintering rarities. Day 1 should include gulls, loons, grebes, ducks (Eurasian Wigeon), Peregrine Falcon, rocky shorebirds, passerines, possible rarities. Group dinner Sat. evening and discussion of the day's birds. Gas up Sat. night, meet on Sunday at 6:00 AM at parking area on east side of Motel 6 (near Highways 1 and 41, at north end of Morro Bay) and proceed to Carrizo Plain for Ferruginous Hawk, Prairie Falcon, Golden Eagle, Short-eared and Burrowing Owls, Mtn. Bluebird, Vesper Sparrow, etc.; possible Rough-legged Hawk, Sage Thrasher. We'll try to finish at or near Hwy 101 by mid-afternoon for those who have to drive back home on Sunday. **Contact Jim Royer at <jcadroyer@aol.com> for any questions and to reserve a spot.** The Morro Bay Motel 6 is a convenient place to stay. Saturday night restaurant reservations can be arranged near our last coastal stop - contact Jim if interested in dining with the group. Participants should show up 10-15 minutes prior to the two morning meeting times or risk being left behind. Later meeting places will not be arranged. Plan on very cold temperatures on the Plain, possible sprinkles (heavy rain will cancel), mud, possible poison oak, and moderate walking. This trip welcomes enthusiastic beginners, but please expect a quick birding pace. Scopes helpful.

Saturday Feb. 21, 8:00 AM Arastradero OSP

Half day. Leader: Grant Webb (408)578-0409. From I-280 take Page Mill Rd. west, turn right on Arastradero Rd. and meet in parking lot about 1/2 mile on right. Moderate walking. **RC**

Sunday Feb. 22, 9:00 AM Pescadero Marsh and Vicinity

Half day. Leader: Sue James (650)348-0315. Meet at first parking lot south of bridge over Pescadero Creek on Hwy 1. Shorebirds, gulls, grebes, ducks. Scopes helpful. **LO, RC**

Wednesday Feb. 25, 8:30 AM Bottom of Windy Hill OSP

Leader: Kirsten Holmquist (408) 747-0988. Meet at parking lot at Sausal Pond edge of preserve. Possible Wood Ducks, Hooded Mergansers at pond. From I-280, exit Alpine Rd. in Portola Valley; go south (toward hills) on Alpine Rd. about 2.9 miles to Portola Rd. first stop sign). Turn right on Portola Rd. and travel 0.8 mile to parking lot on left just past The Sequoias. **LO, RC**

Saturday Feb. 28, 8:30 AM Coyote Hills Regional Park

Half day. Leader: Frank Vanslager (408)257-3647. Take Hwy 84/Dumbarton Bridge east toward Newark. Exit right on Thornton, then left over freeway as Thornton becomes Paseo Padre. Turn left at Patterson Ranch/Commerce Rd. into park. Meet at far end of Quarry Parking lot 1/4 mile past park entrance. Probable entrance fee. **LO, RC**

Sunday Feb. 29, 7:30 AM Santa Cruz Coastal Hot Spots

Half day. Leader: Todd Newberry, Santa Cruz Bird Club (831) 426-8741. Meet at 7:30 AM sharp at Santa Cruz lighthouse on W. Cliff Drive. From Hwy 17 take Hwy 1 north (toward Half Moon Bay), turn left on Bay St. then go right at end of Bay onto W. Cliff Dr. to lighthouse. Trip will tour local hot spots, pursue recently reported rarities. Dress in layers; trips goes rain or shine. If running late, at 8 AM we will be on W. Cliff Dr. checking inter-tidal shelves approaching Natural Bridges overlook (west end of W.C.Dr.).

Saturday Mar. 6, 8:30 AM Ogier Ponds

Half day. Leader: Rich Page (408)377-1092. From Hwy. 101 in Morgan Hill take Cochrane Rd. west to Monterey Hwy, turn right, go north 2.6 miles, turn right on unnamed road toward Model Airplane Park where power towers cross Hwy. Follow road for 1/2 mile, park where it bends to the right. **RC**

Sunday Mar. 7, 9:00 AM Stanford Campus

Half day. Leader: Dick Stovel (650)856-6105. From Hwy 101 in Palo Alto take University Ave exit west through downtown and into Stanford campus (University Ave becomes Palm Dr.). Meet at end of Palm Dr. at entrance to Main Quad. Local breeding birds, early returning migrants. Trip recommended for beginning birders, all are welcome. **RC**

March 13 and 14th Honey Lake, Eagle Lake

Weekend trip to NE California to see Sage Grouse on their booming grounds. Other expected birds would include eagles, hawks, geese, ducks, cranes, woodpeckers and other mountain species such as Townsends Solitaires, Cassin's Finches, Mountain Bluebirds and Pinyon Jays. The trip is limited to 20 participants. Please call the leader, Bob Hirt, to reserve your space and for further details. (408) 821-2732.

Events Calendar

**Tuesday Jan. 6, 7:30 PM
Board of Directors meeting,
McClellan Ranch Park.**

**Wednesday Jan. 7, 7:30 PM
Bay Area Bird Photographers** presents Richard Kuehn's "Kenya's Wonderful Wildlife" and discussion of digital video filming. Lucy Evans Baylands Interpretive Center, E. Embarcadero Rd., Palo Alto.

**Thursday Jan. 8, 4 PM
Education Committee mtg.** Location TBA.

**Saturday Jan. 10, 10 AM – 12 noon
Young Audubon** whale-watching trip, Monterey Bay. See Page 5 for details.

**Tuesday Jan. 13, 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: American Crow.

**Wednesday Jan. 21, 7:30 PM
General membership meeting,** Palo alto. See Page 1 for details.

**Wednesday Jan. 28, 10 AM
Coffee Hour/Bird Chat,** McClellan Ranch park.

**Wednesday Jan. 28, 7:30 PM
EAC meeting,** McClellan Ranch Park.

**Tuesday Feb. 3, 7:30 PM
Board of Directors meeting,
McClellan Ranch Park.**

**Wednesday Feb. 4 7:30 PM
Bay Area Bird Photographers** presents Roy Toft's slide program "Japan's Winter Wildlife" including Snow Monkeys, Red-crowned Cranes, Whooper Swans, and Steller's Sea Eagles. Lucy Evans Baylands Interpretive Center, E. Embarcadero Rd., Palo Alto.

**Tuesday Feb 10, 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: Wood Duck

**Thursday Feb. 12, 4 PM
Education Committee mtg.,** location TBA.

**Wednesday Feb. 18, 7:30 PM
General membership meeting,** Palo Alto See details on Pg. 5.

**Wednesday Feb. 25, 10 AM
Coffee Hour/Bird Chat,** McClellan Ranch.

Volunteer Ventures

by Jennifer Peritz

SCVAS Programs Coordinator

This past Thanksgiving I had the pleasure of experiencing the beginnings of a white winter in Ann Arbor, Michigan. While sipping my hot cocoa and watching the flurry of snow fall onto the trees, I began to think of how the New Year would quickly be upon us. What will my resolutions be this year? Will I actually follow through on them? How can I make a difference by helping others and myself? Well, here it is — January 2004 has arrived!

If you're having similar thoughts, consider turning your resolutions into actions by volunteering once a week, once a month, or even once a quarter with SCVAS. Remember, volunteering benefits everyone — Audubon gains from your support and, at the same time, you gain by learning new skills, meeting others, and feeling a sense of accomplishment. Volunteering can be tailored to you and your interests, so read the descriptions below to see if anything suits you. If these opportunities aren't your cup of tea (or cocoa, as the case may be), give me a call to find out about other volunteer possibilities.

Wetlands Discovery Program Docent — This program shares the wonder and importance of wetland habitats with fourth and fifth graders throughout Santa Clara County. Volunteers participate both in-class and in the field helping students explore the plants and wildlife of the wetlands. No experience is necessary, as we provide a training manual, video, and field training. We do require, however, a love of nature and a desire to share it with children. Through this program SCVAS offers a unique opportunity for over 700 children to discover one of the Bay Area's most precious habitats. This program is rewarding for both volunteers and the children and parents who participate. Don't just take my word for it; if you'd like to speak directly with one of our current docents about the program, I'm happy to match you with one of our veteran volunteers.

Nature Shop Assistant — With so many wonderful and exciting programs, SCVAS requires strong support from our office. We are currently looking for someone to assist in our office and Nature Shop either Thursday afternoons or Friday (morning or afternoon). Some tasks include inventorying merchandise, arranging displays, filing, typing, preparing mailings, and offering support to ongoing projects. Shifts are generally 2-4 hours and can be weekly or bi-monthly. Not only is this a great opportunity to gain an inside perspective of the chapter and our activities, but also it is a fun way to get to know the staff and other volunteers. You can also enjoy the beauty of McClellan Ranch Park in Cupertino, where we are headquartered.

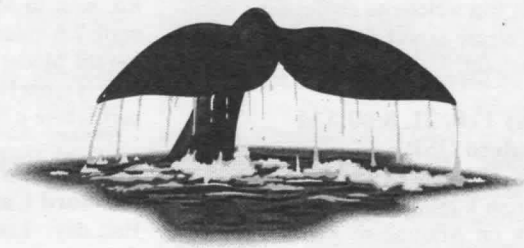
Adult Education Coordinator — In recent months, the demand for and participation in Adult Education classes has really grown. The Education Committee has surpassed its goal of offering one class per quarter. In order to meet the increased demand, we are seeking a volunteer to coordinate

the planning of classes. The volunteer would act as a liaison between our instructors and the Education Committee, and would contact instructors, set up class schedules, prepare announcements for *The Avocet*, and produce a flier. Templates have already been produced to help in the process. Because classes can be arranged ahead of time, this opportunity can be a twice-yearly project or more regularly, depending on your availability.

Data Input — Tracking members and donors is critical to our internal success. We are seeking individuals who have experience inputting either financial or membership data into QuickBooks, FileMaker, or other database programs. Experience with mail merges is particularly helpful.

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

SCVAS presents
**Young Audubon's
Winter Whale Watching**
-a boat trip for children and their families-



Saturday, January 10
10:00 - 12 noon

Fisherman's Wharf,
Monterey Bay **\$20/person**

Observe the magnificent Grey Whale during the peak of its southern migration! Other sealife you'll be likely to spot include otters, sea lions, dolphins, and of course, birds!

SPACE IS LIMITED,
contact SCVAS (408) 252-3740
for reservations

Winter bird classes

The following classes are sponsored by the SCVAS Education Committee. To register, please call the office at (408) 252-3740. Registration for all classes begins January 1. All cancellations require 72-hour prior notification for refunds.

Beginning Birdwatching with Lisa Myers

Specially designed to cater to beginners, this class covers an introduction to various field guides and how they differ, birding ethics, available birding resources, classification and taxonomy, and much more. You will review optics (both binoculars and spotting scopes) and, most importantly, you will learn the strategies of identifying and listing birds and have the opportunity to hone those skills during field trips to local hot spots. Class sessions are held at McClellan Ranch Park in Cupertino and are based on Instructor-created handouts and slides. Focus will be on local birds, particularly those found in winter. Field trips will last approximately four hours and locations are to be announced (depending on high bird activity).

Fee: Members \$40, Non-members \$45

Dates: Class 1/26, 2/2, 2/9; 7-9 PM

Field trips 1/31, 2/8 (half-day)

Minimum: 8 students; maximum: 18

Local Birds: A Closer Look with Steve Rutledge

This course offers field seminars and a classroom session that introduce beginning and intermediate birders to field identification, ecology, behavior, and taxonomy of local birds. The field seminars will explore both oak woodland and bayland habitats. During the classroom session (held at McClellan Ranch Park in Cupertino), the instructor will introduce his 12-step program for identifying and appreciating birds. Unique to the field seminars is the low student-to-teacher ratio, which allows even beginning birders to work closely with and gain information from the instructor. Participants can purchase two (optional) handouts developed by the instructor ("Birding By the Dozen" and "The Big List of Little Birds") for \$5 each. For the field seminars, binoculars and day packs are required; please bring a sack lunch.

Fee: Members-\$30, Non-members-\$35

Dates: Classroom session 2/11 7:00-8:30 PM

Field seminars 2/15, 2/29; 8:00 AM-2:00 PM

Minimum: 4 students, maximum: 8

Bay Area Sparrows with Les Chibana

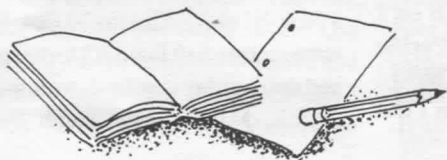
Often thought of as "little brown jobs," sparrows can be a challenge to identify. You may not realize how many species are often found in the greater San Francisco Bay Area. This class will review these species, focusing on their seasonal plumages, as well as differences in age and sex. This class is geared for the beginning to intermediate birder and will cover some of the local rarities. Four classes will be held at McClellan Ranch in Cupertino and will be composed of lectures with slide presentations and handouts. An optional field trip through BirdNUTZ (at a discounted rate) will provide the opportunity to apply classroom learning to field experience.

Fee: Members-\$45, Non-members-\$55

Dates: Class Thurs., 3/4, 3/11, 3/18, 4/1; 7-9 PM

Field trip (optional add-on) 3/27

Minimum: 12 students, maximum: 16



Spring Roundup 2004 SCVAS Birdathon Approaching!

It's time to dust off those pledge sheets and binoculars and get ready for the Spring Roundup 2004! The Spring Roundup is our version of a birdathon, a uniquely Audubon way of enjoying one of our favorite pastimes while raising money to support SCVAS' local education programs. It's also a fun way for you and your friends to compete against other teams for valuable prizes.

Last year we raised \$20,000 for the chapter, and gave away some fantastic prizes (including a spotting scope and binoculars) to winners in various categories like most money raised, most species seen, most unusual birdathon, and most species seen while sitting in one spot! You don't have to be an expert birder to participate — this is a "fun" fundraiser! Start planning for this year's event now — details in the March - April *Avocet*.

February General Membership Meeting "Alaska Birds and Wildlife"

with Les Chibana

Palo Alto Arts Center, Newell & Embarcadero

Wednesday, Feb. 18

Doors open 7:30; program 8:00

Les Chibana co-led two birding and wildlife viewing trips to Alaska for Sierra Club Outings (yes, birding, not hiking!). The trip, designed by Carol Dienger of Palo Alto, travels through many of the unique habitats of Alaska. The early June timeframe of the trip provides long hours of daylight for extensive birding. From finding Asian rarities to our common wintering birds now dressed in their breeding best, Alaska offers some of the most excellent birding possible. And, if that isn't enough, the mammals, wildflowers, and spectacular landscapes are irresistible diversions. Les, a self-described "bird geek," has been photographing birds and teaching birding classes for over 9 years. He has guided birding trips to Hawaii and on Monterey Bay for Cheesemans' Ecology Safaris and has his own business, BirdNUTZ, offering California birding trips.

Woodpecker Wonderland *cont'd from Page 1*

and natural history of Central Oregon's woodpeckers. Steve will cover identification, habitat preferences, courtship and communication, as well as current woodpecker monitoring and conservation projects in the western states. He will also introduce the other 11 species of North American woodpeckers with an emphasis on unique behaviors and hybridization within the Picinae subfamily.

Former SCVAS board member Stephen Shunk fledged as a birder here in the Santa Clara Valley, where he began teaching birding classes in 1992. Through his company Paradise Birding, Steve now leads birding tours throughout the Western U.S. and Canada. He currently serves as president of the East Cascades Bird Conservancy, is a founding member of the Oregon Birding Trails Advisory Board, and the project coordinator for the Oregon Cascades Birding Trail.

Field Notes

by Bill Bousman

Loons through Waterfowl

A **Pacific Loon** flying over Shoreline Park on 1 Nov (WGB) was the first (and only) loon of the winter season. A couple of **American Bitterns** were found during the October and November months with one at the Ogier Avenue ponds on 8 Oct (RWR, FV) and one in the Palo Alto Flood Control Basin (FCB) on 8 Nov (MMR, MJM). The few **White-faced Ibis** we see are usually off-course spring migrants or dispersing fall birds. One found at the Coyote Creek Field Station (CCFS) waterbird pond on 4 Nov (RWR, FV) was particularly late. The first **Greater White-fronted Goose** of the season was found at Calero Reservoir on 5 Nov (AV) with the large Canada Goose flock there. It was seen again on 11 Nov (AV). Another bird was seen flying over Shoreline Park with two Canadas on 12 Nov (AME). An immature **Snow Goose** was spotted on Grant Lake on 22 Nov (WGB). The first of our fall **Eurasian Wigeon** was found at the Sunnyvale Water Pollution Control Plant (WPCP) oxidation ponds on 17 Oct (DA) and one to two birds have been found here since then (v. ob.). A male was seen at Gilroy's old sewer ponds on 7 Nov (MP). Three male **Blue-winged Teal** on Adobe Creek in the Palo Alto FCB on 13 Oct (GBa) were the first of the fall and a number of birds have been found there regularly in subsequent weeks (m. ob.). A male was seen on the Lockheed Martin ponds on 25 Oct (RWR, FV et al.), a pair was nearby at the edge of the Sunnyvale WPCP ponds on 26 Sep (RWR), and a pair was on the ponds again on 27 Oct (MMR). **Redhead** showed up at the end of October with a male seen at the Sunnyvale WPCP ponds on 28 Oct (RWR, FV) and 43 birds on Salt Pond A10 in Alviso on 30 Oct (MMR, MJM). The Sunnyvale flock had increased to 59 birds by 23 Nov (MMR). An apparent adult female **Tufted Duck** was found at the Sunnyvale WPCP ponds on 25 Oct (FV, RK, et al.). This bird's tuft seemed long for a female, but otherwise showed typical markings of a female. She could not be found subsequently. An immature **White-winged Scoter** was found on Shoreline Lake on 11 Nov (RWR, FV)

and remained through at least 23 Nov (m. ob.). This scoter's population is declining and this is the first bird we've had since the late winter storms in 1998. A female **Barrow's Goldeneye** showed up with first flocks of Common Goldeneyes on Shoreline Lake on 4 Nov (MMR) and has remained through the month (v. ob.). One to two immature Barrow's have been found there on 8 and 23 Nov (MMR). A hybrid male **Common x Barrow's Goldeneye**, much like last winter's bird, was seen at Shoreline Lake on 19 Nov (WGB). Wintering **Common Mergansers** have started to move in with a count of 46 on Calero Reservoir on 5 Nov (AV).

A coastal invasion of Pinyon Jays extended to Santa Clara County with its first record

Hawks through Skimmers

A wintering **Bald Eagle** was seen at Calero Reservoir on 29 Nov (AV). This appears to be the same adult as has been here in the last few winters. It is frequently seen in the southwestern corner of the reservoir. The first **Ferruginous Hawk** of the season was over Monterey Road and Hwy 101 in Gilroy on 10 Oct (MP). An immature was seen at the south end of Calaveras Reservoir along Marsh Road on 10 Nov (MO'B) and again on 21 Nov (WGB). An adult returned to the northeast side of Gilroy on 12 Nov (BB-W), apparently for its 11th winter. Another adult was seen in San Antonio Valley on 22 Nov (WGB). **Prairie Falcons** in the Santa Clara Valley or the western foothills include one near Hellyer and Hwy 101 on 4 Oct (JCS *fide* MMR), one at Palo Alto's Arastradero Preserve on 22 Oct (AJ, FV et al.), and one over the Palo Alto FCB on 2 Nov (MJM). The long-winged adult **Pacific Golden-Plover** found in the New Chicago Marsh in September was last seen on 1 Oct

(KPa). Single **Snowy Plovers** were found north of the Alviso Marina on 19 Oct (RWR et al.) and on Salt Pond A8 in Alviso on 30 Oct (MMR, MJM). Numbers of **Lesser Yellowlegs** taper off quickly in October. Six to eight birds were found in the New Chicago Marsh 18-21 Oct (LCh et al, MMR), three were in the Lockheed Martin ponds on 27 Oct (MMR), and a very late bird was at the CCFS waterbird pond on 4 Nov (RWR, FV). A Los Gatos surprise was a **Wandering Tattler** found 22 Oct (RPo) along Los Gatos Creek above Camden Avenue. All of our other records have been at the edge of the Bay. Two **Red Knots**, well down the Bay, were seen at the Stevens Creek mouth on 18 Nov (RWR, FV). Eighteen **Sanderlings** were on Salt Pond A8 in Alviso on 14 Nov (MMR, MJM). **Pectoral Sandpipers** are often found in good numbers well into October, but in this poor passage year only two birds were seen, both in a tidal channel at the Palo Alto Baylands on 5 Oct (DBu), where unexpected. Far more surprising was the juvenile **Sharp-tailed Sandpiper** that was seen with the Pectorals that day (DBu). The adult **Stilt Sandpiper**, found in August in the New Chicago Marsh, was seen there more or less regularly in October (v. ob.) and was there at least through 4 Nov (RWR, FV, v. ob.). Surprisingly, an apparent second adult was at the Lockheed Martin ponds on 28 Oct (RWR, FV), 3-4 km distant as the sandpiper flies. A basic **Ruff** was seen at the New Chicago Marsh on 25 Nov (RWR, FV), but was not easily sexed. The female Ruff, found here in the late summer, has not been seen since 22 Aug. The **Red-necked Phalarope** passage trails off in late September, so 13 birds tallied on Salt Ponds A7 and A8 in Alviso on 16 Oct (MMR, MJM) were unusually late. Strong northwest winds blew all through the day on 29 Oct and into the night. This caused a coastal wreck of **Red Phalarope** which carried over into the South Bay. Seven birds were found on Salt Pond A14 in Alviso on 30 Oct (MMR, MJM) and four to six birds were seen in nearby ponds through 4 Nov (v. ob.). Also on 30 Oct, four birds were seen on Salt Pond A8 to the southwest, and the next day nine birds were found there (MMR, MJM). This South Bay wreck

Field Notes *cont'd*

extended to other locations with single birds at the Palo Alto Baylands on 30 Oct (JAC, CM), the Sunnyvale WPCP ponds on 30 Oct (RK, PK), and the Palo Alto FCB on 1-2 Nov (ALi, MJM). We hope that these wind-driven waifs made it back to the ocean where they belong. Persistence with the Bonaparte's Gull flock at the Palo Alto estuary paid off when a 1st-winter **Franklin's Gull** was found on 19 Nov (WGB, MMR). Likely the same bird was found again on 27 Nov (PS, MB). In the last six or seven years, the invading **Black Skimmers** have established a winter roost on Charleston Slough but none were found in October and November. A sizable flock has remained on Salt Pond A8 in Alviso, with 23 on 16 Oct and 25 on 30 Oct (both MMR, MJM).

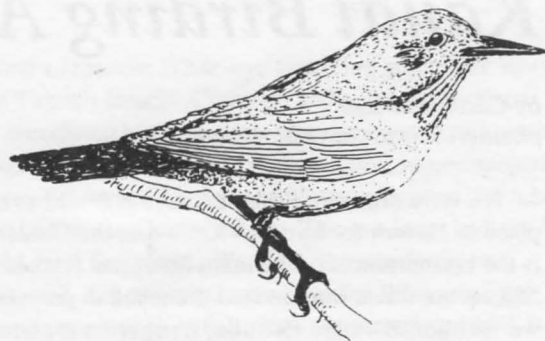
Roadrunners through Swallows

A **Greater Roadrunner** was seen on 13 Oct (MMR) along Arroyo Bayo, east of Mt. Hamilton. A **Northern Pygmy-Owl** was calling along Colorado Creek at Mines Road on 11 Oct (WGB). Many species are dependent upon particular plant species and when the crops from these plants fail, these birds must seek other sources of food. Their struggle, sadly, is our reward, as they wander well away from their usual haunts and we enjoy their presence in these new locations. **Lewis's Woodpeckers** appear to be one species this fall that is struggling with a significant oak crop failure. Three Lewis's were found in the vicinity of Alpine Pond in Skyline Ridge on 9 Oct (RSTh), with at least one in Santa Clara County, and up to five birds have been found here through late November (m. ob.). Other wandering Lewis's have been found just east of the summit of Mt. Hamilton, at about 3700 feet with 5-10 birds on 13 Oct-22 Nov (MMR, WGB) and one bird along Summit Road near Mt. Madonna CP on 18 Oct (DLSu). It appears that our San Antonio Valley resident birds have not faced these same problems, as four to 12 birds have been found there during the fall (m. ob.). **Pileated Woodpeckers** continue to be found locally with two at Monte Bello OSP on 8 Oct (WGB), one heard in the Los Trancos OSP on the same day (MMR), and one southwest of Skyline Ridge OSP on 13 Nov (GS). A few **Willow Flycatchers** are

still found in early October, so one banded on 1 Oct at CCFS (*fide* MMR) is not surprising. Another species affected by crop failures this fall has been **Pinyon Jay**. This species typical of the Basin and Range Province is rarely found on the coast, but this year we have had a veritable invasion. One must keep one's tongue firmly in one's cheek when using the word invasion, as there have been very few birds in widely scattered locations. Two to three birds were found along Skyline on 7 Oct (ADeM *fide* RSTh). One was seen to the east of Skyline Boulevard near the Christmas tree farm at Skyline Ridge OSP, but the Santa Clara County line is a few hundred meters east of this point, so this remains only a San Mateo County record. However, on 10 Oct, Matthew O'Brien and his brother had brief views of a single Pinyon Jay in San Antonio Valley, for the first record for Santa Clara County. Three **Tree Swallows** over the Mountain View Forebay on 4 Nov (MMR) were probably birds wintering in the South Bay. Six **Violet-green Swallows** along Llagas Creek above Bloomfield on 7 Nov (MP) and nine along Coyote Creek below Hwy 237 on 9 Nov (MMR) were probably in the same category. The **Bank Swallows** near Alviso in late September lingered to 1 Oct (KPa), with two over New Chicago Marsh and a juvenile in Alviso. This is the latest record I have for this now rare swallow.

Wrens through Crossbills

House Wrens tend to stay into October and sometimes November. Three in Henry Coe SP on 11 Nov (MMR) seemed late and at a relatively high altitude as did the two in San Antonio Valley on 22 Nov (WGB), a place where they have occasionally wintered. An **American Dipper** was again found in Alum Rock Park being seen on 20 Oct (BS). Two **Golden-crowned Kinglets** in Mt. Madonna CP on 18 Oct (DLSu) were probably part of our resident population. Four plus birds in Henry Coe SP on 11 Nov (MMR) and three beside Mines Road at Colorado Creek on 22 Nov (WGB) were irruptive birds. A late **Blue-gray**



*"Another species affected by crop failures this fall has been **Pinyon Jay**...on 10 Oct, Matthew O'Brien and his brother had brief views...in San Antonio Valley, for the first record for Santa Clara County."*

Blue overall with a streaked white throat and short tail.

Sketch by Bonnie Bedford-White

Gnatcatcher was

banded at CCFS on 26

Oct (*fide* MMR). This gnatcatcher tends to be sporadic through-out the fall and into early winter. A male **Phainopepla** was on Colorado Creek at Mines Road and two females were in the northern San Antonio Valley on 11 Oct (WGB). The number of migrating **Yellow Warblers** dropped rapidly in early October. One at the CCFS waterbird pond on 9 Nov (MMR) was very late. **Black-throated Gray Warblers** can migrate quite late and some overwinter. Single males were along the Guadalupe River between Montague and Trimble on 25 Oct (MMR) and in the Coulter pine belt east of Mt. Hamilton on 29 Oct (WGB). A female was at the Charleston Road marsh on 4 Nov (JMy). October and November have provided a few vagrant warblers. A **Palm Warbler** was found at the Mountain View Forebay on 1 Nov (WGB) and seen there again on 8 Nov (MMR, MJM). A **Black-and-White Warbler** was seen at Rancho San Antonio OSP on 3 Nov (JLi). A **Northern Waterthrush** was found at the marsh off Charleston Road on 16 Oct (LS) and was seen there at least through 23 Oct (v. ob.). A waterthrush apparently wintered here last year and this is possibly the same bird. Most of the time it has been very secretive. The fall passage of **Western Tanagers** is normally over by the first week in October. Three birds at Stanford on 11 Oct may have been late migrants and at least one of these tanagers was still heard as late as 26 Oct (both DL). A female was seen in Milpitas on 20 Oct (RL) and two

continued on Page 9

Kauai Birding Adventure

by Carolyn Straub

photography by Steve McHenry

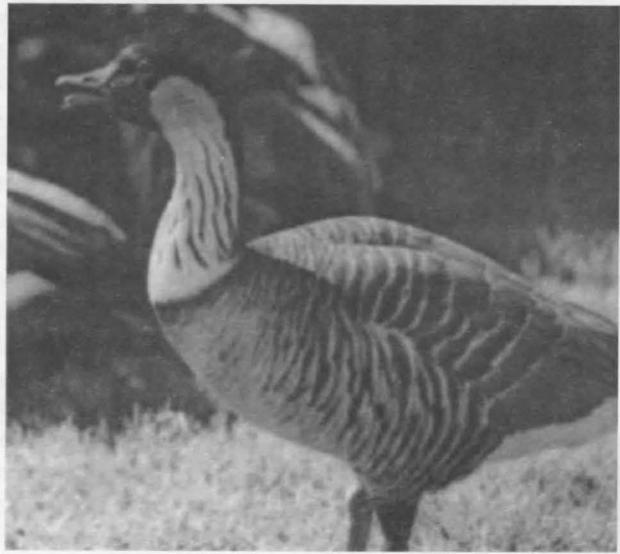
We were drawn to Kauai because it is said to be *the* place in Hawaii for birders. Known as the Garden Island, it is the northernmost of the main Hawaiian Islands. Kauai's 553 square miles were indeed drenched in greenery when we vacationed within its valleys, sugar-cane plains, and warm Pacific waters last September. We were celebrating my companion Steve McHenry's recovery from a serious illness. Our decision lit on Kauai because we are budding bird nuts and Santa Clara Valley Auduboners. Call us intermediate birders.

A few of Kauai's native species can be found nowhere else, and a good book to take along is "The Birds of Kauai" by Jim Denny. This Kauai author's book is island-specific, and made our search for local avifauna fruitful. Of some 65 photographed birds found on Kauai, we located 31. Denny divides these birds into native, introduced, and migratory, so you have an idea of who is who. We made a schedule and went off it many times.

Throughout Waimea Canyon, called the "Grand Canyon" of Hawaii for its resemblance to the Grand Canyon of our West, we stopped at lookouts along Waimea Canyon Drive. We got dizzying views of the White-tailed Tropicbird, a seabird with distinguishing black wing bars, soaring with its long, thread-like, white tail between the vertical cliffs, where it nests in season.

North of the canyon, we took an ancient rain forest trail called the Pihea ("loud din"). When Capt. James Cook first saw Kauai in 1778, the Pihea housed hundreds of calling birds. That afternoon it was quiet. Overlooking the Kalalau Valley, we hiked toward the Alaka'i Swamp, the most pristine native forest, where as many as 14 native forest species have once been seen. It rained heavily, and we were forced to return. Dense foliage challenged us, but we viewed two native forest birds in the 'ohi'a tree leaves outside of the swamp. They were quick. We identified the red, black-banded Apapane, the most common native forest bird, a honeycreeper. We also saw a yellowish, black-masked 'Akeke'e, from the Hawaiian word for active. Of three introduced mannikins on Kauai, we found the Warbling Silverbill also in these leaves.

Re-entering Koke'e State Park from the trail head, we paused several times to photograph the Red-crested or Brazilian Cardinal, a most beautiful bird introduced from South America, and seen everywhere in the lowlands. With its striking red head, the adult mingled in family groups with bronze-headed "juvies" or juveniles, and attracted other tourists. We had also seen the Northern Cardinal, introduced from North America, in Kauai lowlands, where it shot unexpectedly from a branch in front of us. It was delightful on Kauai to meet new birds, no seagulls, and few Rock Doves, except at our hotel.



Nene (Hawaiian Goose)

Red Junglefowl or Moa grazed the parkland in front of the Koke'e Museum. Males have bright red feathering. The Polynesian settlers introduced the Moa early. Even more varied plumages of introduced Domestic Chicken moved without a care everywhere in the lowlands.

We spotted the Erckel Francolin on our way back down the drive. These introduced, chicken-like birds could be seen in early evening. An upland bird, I thought I heard its "laughing" call near the Pihea, but perhaps it was an island spirit. I also listened for the loud, buzzy, high-pitched call of the Black Francolin, but had seen it earlier scurrying above the shoreline. At the Coconut Beach Resort, where we stayed on the East Shore, the Common Myna ruled. A black, introduced species with a small golden face patch, its melodious song was a treat. The Zebra or Barred Dove, introduced from Malaysia with its delicate striping, was mixed with the mynas at the hotel.

Cattle Egrets, introduced from Florida, dotted the lowland in large numbers. Long-legged Pacific Golden-Plovers, migrants arriving in late summer from the Arctic, were common sights on grassy areas. We saw old Santa Clara County friends, of course, the House Finch, House Sparrow, Northern Mockingbird, Ring-necked Pheasant, and Western Meadowlark. But we also saw the two remaining introduced mannikins on Kauai, the light-chested Nutmeg Mannikin and cinnamon-colored Chestnut Mannikin. Not the least of our sightings was the Common Peafowl, though an introduced, captive bird, strutting for show at Smith's Tropical Paradise.

On the north shore is the road to rockbound Kilauea Lighthouse National Wildlife Refuge. An excellent place to find nesting seabirds in season, it juts to the ocean. Hours are 10AM to 4 PM every day. Before closing, it was still worth it. Kilauea Point, with a half dozen species of sea

Kauai *continued*

birds, had majestic cliffs in the waning sun. Red-footed Boobies covered the Crater Hill slope. Misnamed by sailors for its "stupidity," the booby with its red feet and red throat patch soared a few feet from our heads while it fished and returned to the cliff. A Great Frigatebird, with forked tail and wide, black wingspan, circled, too, perhaps looking to steal food from the booby. It is said to be named after the frigate pirate ship of the high seas. We found the Brown Booby living separately off Lehua Rock near the remote island of Niihau the following day on a boat trip. Its white facial beak and brown sock-like neck were obvious. The Laysan Albatross ("gooney bird"), also called the Moli in Hawaiian, had not yet arrived to winter, but was expected.

At the lighthouse, a dozen native wetland Hawaiian Geese or Nene (pronounced 'naynay') waddled over. Though once nearly extinct on Kauai, a reintroduction was successful. They are distant cousins of the Canada Goose, but shorter, stockier, and not as water-oriented. Their legs were banded to keep track of them. Nene have been an endangered species on Kauai, according to Denny.

We found a Japanese White-eye twittering among the leaves of a tree at Tunnels Beach. Common and adaptable to Kauai, this small introduced bird has white eye rings and is yellowish. Its eye rings tell it apart from the various native honeycreepers.

In Princeville, named for a young Hawaiian prince, we hiked down a sea cliff to the Queen's Bath. This is a large lava pool with an inlet from the ocean. We hiked the rain forest trail, close and humid. On our way, we caught the White-rumped Shama sitting on a branch in full view. An introduced bird, it has a dark head and neck, and the other half is a robin-colored orange body. It can be seen mornings. We then saw the Spotted Dove (Chinese or Lace-necked Dove). A pretty, blue, introduced bird from Asia, it is common. It has a dove-like appearance and lacy, spotted neck collar. Driving back through residential Princeville, we encountered a flock of small Java Sparrows in the road. Native to Indonesia, this introduced bird frequents feeders. Puffin-like, this colorful bird has a pinkish beak and large, white face patch.

We spent nine days on Kauai. It was on the nib of winter, before migratory birds arrive. We saw enough, though, to become full-fledged "bird nuts."

Field Notes *cont'd*

were along the Alamitos Creek Trail on 16 Nov (JPa, JA). The latter birds may be attempting to winter. **Chipping Sparrows** are found occasionally in the fall. An adult and a juvenile were found just south of San Antonio Junction on 11 Oct and two adults were at the same spot on 29 Oct (both WGB). **Grasshopper Sparrows**, however, are much less expected so a bird in Henry Coe SP on 11 Nov (MMR) was a surprise. Two **Swamp Sparrows** were found along the runway trail at the Palo Alto Baylands on 23 Nov (TO) and seen through the end of the month (v. ob.). There have been a smattering of **White-throated Sparrows** in November. Single birds at Hidden Villa on 11 Nov (GHa) and at the Palo Alto Baylands on 25-29 Nov (ViT, JMj) were away from feeders. Feeder birds included one at The Sequoias in Portola Valley on 2-3 Nov (D&MW), a Los Altos yard on 14-18 Nov (KHt, GHt), and a Los Gatos feeder on 20 Nov (JD). A **Chestnut-collared Longspur** was found on Salt Pond A8 in Alviso on 14 Nov (MMR, MJM) for only the sixth county record. Not seen since the breeding season, five female **Great-tailed Grackles** were found at the Coyote Creek GC on 30 Nov (MJM). A number of these birds wintered here last year. A male **Hooded Oriole** seen in a Campbell

neighborhood 17-24 Oct (BM et al.) may be trying to winter locally. Five **Red Crossbills** crossed over Summit Ridge into Santa Clara County on 11 Oct (MMR) for one of our few recent records.

Observers: David Armstrong (DA), Joy Aspinwall (JA), Gordon Barrett (GBa), Bonnie Bedford-White (BB-W), Bill Bousman (WGB), Daniel Bump (DBu), Michael Burns (MB), Les Chibana (LCh), Jack Cole (JAC), Al DeMartini (ADeM), Jean Dubois (JD), Al Eisner (AME), Garth Harwood (GHa), Grant Hoyt (GHt), Karen Hoyt (KHt), Alberta Jasberg (AJ), Roland Kenner (RK), Pat Kenny (PK), David Lewis (DL), Jim Liskovec (JLi), Randy Little (RL), Al Liu (ALi), Mike Mammoser (MJM), Barbara Monahan (BM), Charlie Moores (CM), Jean Myers (JMj), Matthew O'Brien (MO'B), Tom Olson (TO), Kathy Parker (KPa), Janna Pauser (JPa), Mark Paxton (MP), Robert Power (RPo), Bob Reiling (RWR), Mike Rogers (MMR), Bob Schultz (BS), John Sterling (JCS), Georgia Stigall (GS), Lennie Stovel (LS), David Suddjian (DLSu), Patti Sutch (PS), Ron Thorn (RSTh), Vivek Tiwari (ViT), Frank Vanslager (FV), Ann Verdi (AV), and Duncan & Mercedes Williams (D&MW).

Thank you, Don Schmoldt

This winter marks a milestone for Don Schmoldt. In 1977, Don organized the first Mt. Hamilton Christmas Bird Count and, this year, after running the count for 26 years, Don has stepped down. This count, running from just west of the summit of Mt. Hamilton east into Stanislaus County and north into Alameda County, is largely comprised of privately held land. Don took the initiative to contact landowners and obtain permission for a once-a-year visit to many of these properties. Most count compilers burn out after a few years, but Don has kept going all this time. The consequence of his efforts is a remarkable time series of data on wintering birds from the interior of the Diablo Range, for which we are all indebted. There are also special memories of birding on awesome days with the wind-driven snow finding the slightest crevice in one's parka or surviving an eight-hour downpour and still finding a few birds. Thanks, Don.

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

Good news, bad news *cont'd*

on what they perceived to be a "population shift" from urbanizing areas to some agricultural lands.

The term "shift" is misleading, in that it implies that the owls are moving from one area to another. Based on the record of banded owls to date, we see very little movement of this sort. There is also scant evidence of owls from other, distant regions (the range of the western subspecies is from Canada to Central America) moving to California and successfully breeding, although we do know that many migrants pass through the state. Rather, the owls appear to have fairly independent regional populations, and when we lose one of those, we cannot assume that someday when things are better, the owls from the Imperial Valley are going to be able to recolonize other areas of the state. To the contrary — there is no evidence to date that any population that has been extirpated has later recovered.

We had heard that our petition led to vigorous debate within DFG, with lawyers and biologists disagreeing on what the final staff report should say. When the lead spokesman for the staff addressed the Commissioners on the 4th, he admitted that the staff had "agonized" over this decision, but he went on to strongly defend their recommendation.

In the end, it seemed that the Commissioners focused not on whether the owls are threatened with extinction throughout a significant portion of their range, but rather whether they are healthy throughout a significant portion of their range, which we agree that, for now, they are. Commissioners were clearly uncomfortable trying to determine what constitutes a significant portion of the species' range, especially in light of the implications such a determination could have for other species.

This last point I understand. Several times during the course of the morning's debate, DFG staff or Commissioners pointed out that many species have disappeared from portions of their range, as those portions have been paved. This is clearly true, but unlike many other species, the Burrowing Owl in California lives almost exclusively on valley floors, and thus stands in the path of human development more steadfastly than most other creatures.

Commissioner Sam Schuchat ended the morning with a particularly telling observation. Sam is formerly the head of the League of Conservation Voters. I have known him and respected his opinions for many years. Sam simply said that the endangered species laws that we have are not very good at handling a situation where a species is clearly in dire straits in some areas, while healthy in others. True enough, but for those of us in the "dire straits" areas of the state, this provides little consolation.

Charting a Future Course

So where do we go from here? And I mean that honestly as a question. Over the past decade, we have tried several approaches. Fighting individual developments on owl habitat has led to a few significant victories, but mostly frustrating defeats. Attempts at citywide or regional planning have failed, with the exception of Morgan Hill, where we had to sue the city to get a plan in place, and we succeeded only after the city's owl population dwindled to one or two birds. We have tried state legislation, which passed both the Assembly and Senate only to be vetoed by former Governor Davis, and such efforts would likely not fare better in the current administration. And for now at least, listing the owl seems unlikely.

Our chapter's work to preserve the Burrowing Owl locally has taken considerable time, resources, and energy for a decade or more, and yet we have made only marginal gains. At what point, if ever, should we accept that Santa Clara Valley's owls will likely not survive the onslaught of development, and shift our resources to other, perhaps more winnable, conservation issues?

If you have an opinion on this question I have just posed, please e-mail me at <craig@scvas.org>. I am interested in whether you think this species should continue to be a focus of our chapter, and if so, what the best way forward might be.

The Salt Ponds

We can all be forgiven if the busyness of our days allows us to overlook the remarkable occurrences around us. When the deal to acquire and restore 16,000 acres of Cargill salt ponds was announced,



*Leaving Santa Clara Valley
— forever?*

there was an intense, if brief, flurry of regional and even national media attention. Then for most of us the issue receded to the background — a good or even great thing that nonetheless seems removed from daily life.

Consider, however, what we are about to embark upon. This will be the second largest restoration project ever attempted in North America, after the Florida Everglades. The Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge, which is already the largest urban wildlife refuge in the nation, will undergo changes that we can hardly predict at this time, other than to say that they will be dramatic. And while the purchase price for these lands was hefty enough at \$100 million, that amount will pale in comparison to the restoration work ahead of us.

These humbling facts set the stage for the first meeting of the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Stakeholders Forum. Some 30 Bay Area residents have been appointed to the Forum. Audubon will be well represented, with Arthur Feinstein from Golden Gate Audubon, Mike "Call me Ike" Sellors from Audubon CA, and yours truly. Other participants represent the business sector, local politicians, public works departments, recreationists, and community activists. There is always a delicate balancing act in setting up such a group trying to limit the numbers while providing broad-based representation — and the organizers of the Forum deserve credit for their initial effort.

We are about six months into a five-year timetable for developing and approving the restoration plans. The

cont'd. next page

Salt Ponds *cont'd*

Stakeholders Forum is intended to convene for the next two years. Participants were told to expect a workload of eight to ten hours a month for those two years, an impressive amount of time to ask of already busy people.

In general, it appears that no participants oppose the overall concept of massive restoration in the South Bay. However, factions within the group will need to negotiate their differences. The recreationists and conservationists will almost assuredly butt heads over the extent and types of public access allowed in the new refuge lands. The flood control entities and sewage treatment plant operators may guardedly worry about the extent to which restoration could interfere with their essential functions. The mosquito abatement people and residents adjacent to the restoration sites may weigh in heavily regarding the potential downsides of restored tidal marsh. I do not envy the managers of this process; they may have a tiger by the tail.

Beyond the personalities and potential factionalism, the scientific uncertainty of what we are embarking on also warrants caution. While we have some beautiful examples of restoration around the Bay (the LaRiviere Marsh in Fremont near the Refuge headquarters springs quickly to mind), other projects have stumbled or failed outright. Smaller salt pond restoration efforts in the North Bay encountered sizable obstacles and have yet to achieve near what was originally envisioned. To their credit, the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Department of Fish and Game — partners in this venture with the Coastal Conservancy — have clearly learned from past errors and are already incorporating some of those lessons learned into their current land management and planning regimes.

Potential problems acknowledged, we are nevertheless on the verge of something beautiful. If we seize this opportunity, avoid some obvious pitfalls, and work well together, the Stakeholder Forum will be a key tool to shaping both the restoration project itself and, in particular, public acceptance of the difficult decisions to come. I expect this to be one of those times when people rise to the occasion, and I am eager to be a part of that. And some day I want to go birding out there and have my mind blown by the sweep of our ambitions.

Advocate's Corner

EPA-approved study says wetlands cause pollution

by Jill Clay

A U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) biologist recently left the agency after it accepted a developer-financed study concluding that wetlands discharge more pollutants than they absorb. Whether the biologist, Bruce Boler, left voluntarily or not is unclear, although an environmental group published his "resignation statement."

Environmental groups are alarmed by the recent turnabout by EPA, which used to carefully review water quality impacts by proposed development. The EPA now uses a new policy that speeds up permit review for projects that use a calculation methodology to predict that no more pollution will flow from the land after development than before. This methodology was paid for by an organization of major Southwest Florida developers and engineering consultants: the Water Enhancement and Restoration Coalition, Inc. The methodology has become known as the Harper Report, after its author, Harvey Harper, who works for a consulting firm.

The Harper Report concludes that:

◆ Wetlands generate pollution, based upon sampling collected in wetlands next to highways and bridges.

◆ Developers can escape federal wetlands restrictions by employing a tactic called "rent-a-cow," whereby the landowner allows a few cattle to graze in the wetland so it can be classified as "improved pasture."

Generally, scientists consider wetlands as filtering agents that reduce pollution.

Extensive public outreach is also intended to be a significant part of the restoration planning process. Part of my role as a Forum participant will be to bring the issues discussed there to a wider audience. With that in mind, if you wish to be notified of upcoming meetings or updates in the planning efforts, let me know. I will forward your e-mail or ground mail address to the organizers of the Forum, and they will keep you apprised of the process and the issues involved.

According to Boler, the water quality data used by Harper came only from samples collected where urban runoff is the most concentrated. Boler used a methodology called the Water Quality Initiative. However, the state chose the Harper methodology.

Bruce Boler worked for the EPA for three years. Before that, he worked for the Florida Department of Environmental Protection for 10 years. An environmental group, Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER), has posted what it calls a resignation statement from Boler on its website <<http://www.peer.org/>>. In the statement, Boler says that policy changes seemed to coincide with the Bush administration's appointment of Jimmie Palmer as Regional Administrator. According to Boler, Palmer said that "EPA would not oppose state positions, so if a state had no water quality problems with a project then neither would EPA."

[This article used information and quotes from the following sources:

PEER <<http://www.peer.org/>>

The Conservancy of Southwest Florida
The Fort Meyers News-Press]

If this article about the EPA disturbs you (and we think it should), there's a simple action you can take—join SCVAS' Armchair Activists! We currently have over 90 activists on our list, and we ask them to take just one half hour per month to write a letter on an important state or federal conservation issue.

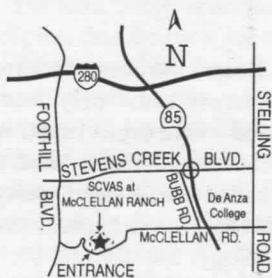
When you sign up, we will mail or e-mail you a brief monthly newsletter containing all the background information you need to write an effective letter, plus a sample letter and the address to send it to. We know these letters work because politicians have responded to our letters on many occasions.

To join, simply send an e-mail to our Armchair Activist volunteer coordinator, Jill Clay, <j.clay@mindspring.com> and tell her whether you want ground mail or e-mail. Don't get dejected when you read of the latest news from Washington or Sacramento, get busy writing!

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

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