



THE AVOCET

The Newsletter of the Santa Clara Audubon Society

September-October 2004

Sierra birding hard to beat

Yuba Pass, Sierra Marsh, Gold Lakes loop offer bird diversity, peace of mind

by Grant Hoyt

From the shores of the Salton Sea to Humboldt's redwood forests, the state of California offers a diversity of birdlife that never disappoints. Here in the Bay Area, we can hop in the car and visit rich and varied bird habitat within an hour, whether it's the San Mateo coast or Grant Ranch Park. But when you crave some out of the ordinary birding and are willing to drive a little further and spend a few more days, there's nothing like a trip to the Sierra Nevada in late June for some red-hot birding.

Karen and I have been fortunate to have access to a lovely furnished home at the edge of Plumas National Forest, and we've made a point of spending a week there during prime breeding season for the past five years. I first birded the Yuba Pass and Sierra Valley region in the mid-70's with Audubon groups, picking up dozens of life birds and embracing the northern Sierra region as a permanent favorite. I introduced Karen to this birding site in 1986, and we both agree the combination of habitat diversity and serene atmosphere is hard to beat.

Situated about an hour north of Truckee, the Sierra Valley marsh is a quirky confluence of habitats, where Yellow-headed Blackbirds cackle and squawk within a few yards of Brewer's

Sparrows and Sage Thrashers. Horned Larks and Vesper Sparrows can be easily visible on roadside fences. A reedy ribbon of marshy creek winds through otherwise semi-arid sage, and the adjacent mini-wetland can yield bitterns, herons, willets, phalaropes, snipe, rails, and Black Tern, though the latter have been scarce in recent years. A few pairs of Sandhill Cranes, possibly the southernmost breeding representatives of that species in the state, stand majestically in the sagebrush, while skeins of White-faced Ibis cruise overhead. Cliff Swallows swarm like insects, marsh wrens chatter incessantly, and a smattering of ducks and Pied-billed Grebes work the waterways.

Raptors patrol the skies over and around the marsh—one might spot Prairie Falcon, Golden Eagle, or Swainson's Hawk, among others. Just west of the marsh near Calpine the mixed pine and juniper woodland is a great place to find the handsome Green-tailed Towhee, a specialty of the Sierran Eastern slope. Though it's a bit of a skulker, in the spring and early summer months its lively little song will lead the patient observer to its perch for good looks at the

green and gray body, perky rufous cap, and white throat. During our visit this year to the traditional pullout at Mountain Quail Road,

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General Membership Meeting "Antarctic Contrast: Banana Belt or Roaring Ross Sea" with Doug Cheeseman

Palo Alto Arts Center, Newell & Embarcadero Rds.

Wednesday, Sept. 15

Doors open 7:30; program 8:00

Doug Cheeseman will compare the Antarctic and Sub-Antarctic Islands in the different regions of the "Great South," Doug will discuss bird and mammal behavior that he has photographed on So. Georgia and the Sub-Antarctic Islands of New Zealand and Australia. King Penguins, for example, behave quite differently on Macquarie Island than at South Georgia. The slides will include the Antarctic Peninsula and the Ross Sea region with albatross, sea lions, elephant seals, true seals, and cetaceans, as well as the plethora of penguins in the two regions of the Antarctic and Sub-Antarctic Islands. He will have his two slide projectors using lapse dissolve. Doug, Gail and Ted Cheeseman and staff have led 12 trips to the Antarctic, including 7 of their own charters.

SCVAS Annual
Wildlife
Education Day

Oct. 23

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- ◆ Meet Kim Yuan-Farrell — Page 4
- ◆ Oct. General Meeting: "Birds of Angola"— Page 5
- ◆ Bald Eagle, Ovenbird Field Notes — Page 6
- ◆ Morgan Hill becomes frog-friendly — Page 10

Sept. - Oct. 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 Sept. 4, 9:00 AM Point Reyes

Full day. Leader: Peter LaTourette (650) 961-2741. Our annual trip to the west coast's most active vagrant trap, where birds and the weather are always exciting and unpredictable! From Hwy 1 in Marin Co. take Sir Francis Drake Blvd west approx. 14 miles, turn left to Drakes Beach, meet in parking area. Bring lunch, liquids, a full tank of gas, and be ready for fog, wind, sun and lots of difficult to ID birds. Be prepared to carpool from Drakes Beach.

Sunday Sept. 5, 9:00 AM Charleston Slough

Half day. Leader: Allen Royer (408) 288-7768. From Hwy 101 in Mtn. View take San Antonio Rd. north to Terminal Way parking area. Meet at entrance nearest San Antonio Road. Trip recommended for, but not limited to, beginning birders.

Wednesday Sept. 8, 9:00 AM Moss Landing/Elkhorn Slough

Half day. Leader: Norm Kikuchi (831) 459-9424. Meet at Jetty Rd. and Hwy 1 just north of Moss Landing at 9:00. Gulls, terns, ducks, shorebirds, raptors. **LO, RC**

Saturday Sept. 11, 9:00 AM Stevens Creek County Park

Half day. Leader: Roxie Handler (408) 730-1745). From I-280 in Cupertino take Foothill Expwy exit south 2.1 miles, becomes Stevens Canyon Rd., turn left into first (Chestnut) park entrance and meet in first parking lot. Possible \$4 entrance fee. **LO**

Sunday Sept. 12, 8:00 AM Moss Landing & vicinity

Half day plus. Leader: Todd Newberry, Santa Cruz Bird Club (831) 426-8741. Meet near kiosk on Jetty Rd. off Hwy 1 just north of Moss Landing. Preliminary itinerary: Jetty Road, Moon Glow Dairy, around Slough Reserve HQ (possible small fee), Kirby Park, and, time permitting, Harkin Slough. Dress in layers, bring lunch & water. Shorebirds, early waterfowl migrants.

Saturday Sept. 18, 8:30 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 to

ward Model Airplane Park (street is unnamed). Follow road for 1/2 mile, park in gravel lot at first bend in road.

Sunday Sept. 19, 8:30 AM Coyote Hills Regional Park

Half day. Leader: Frank Vanslager (650) 961-1505. Take Hwy 84 (Dumbarton Bridge) east to Newark. Exit right at Thornton, then go 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 on the left, 1/4 mile past entrance. Entrance fee probable. **LO, RC**

Wednesday Sept. 22, 8:30 AM Palo Alto Baylands

Leaders: Rosalie Lefkowitz (650) 494-6358 and Phyllis Browning (650) 494-6360. From Hwy 101 take Embarcadero Road east, taking a left turn where road forks just past airport. Meet in parking lot across from Lucy Evans Baylands Interpretive Center. Shorebirds, fall warblers. Spotting scopes helpful. **LO**

Saturday Sept. 25, (see times below) Hawk Hill/Marin Headlands

Full day. Leader: Nick Yatsko (408) 247-5499. To carpool, meet at Page Mill Rd/I-280 Park'n'Ride at 8 AM. All others meet at tunnel entrance near parking area on Hawk Hill at around 9 AM. Directions to Hawk Hill: after crossing Golden Gate Bridge, exit just past Vista Pt., cross under Hwy 101 and turn right just before entrance back onto Hwy 101 south. Drive up hill to highest point and park. Highlights: Migrating raptors; possible Broad-winged Hawk. Weather conditions variable; dress in layers. Bring lunch and liquids. **NOTE: This will be our only field trip to Hawk Hill/Marin Headlands this fall.**

Sunday Sept. 26, 8:00 AM Arastradero Preserve

Half day. Leader: Rich Page (408) 377-1092. From I-280 take Page Mill Rd. west approx. 1/2 mile to Arastradero Rd. Turn right and meet at parking lot 1/2-mile on right. Woodland, grassland species, raptors. 2 miles of moderate walking. **RC**

Saturday Oct. 2, 8:30 AM Grant Ranch County Park

Half day. Leader: Dave Cook (408) 275-1492. From I-680 take Alum Rock Ave northeast, turn right on Mt. Hamilton Rd. and go approximately 9 miles to park. Meet at Hall's Valley Lake parking lot on left, after main park entrance. Fresh water ducks, oak woodland birds, possible Golden Eagle. Moderate 2-mile walk. **LO, RC**

Sunday Oct. 3, 8:00 AM Charleston Slough

Half day. Leader: TBD, questions call Bob Reiling (408) 253-7527. Meet at Terminal Way at end of San Antonio Rd. north off Hwy 101 in Mtn. View. Birding geared toward beginners but all are encouraged to attend. Bring your spotting scope and a friend.

Saturday Oct. 9, 8:00 AM Local Hot Spots

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

Sunday Oct. 10, 8:30 AM Ogier Ponds

Half day. Leader: Grant Hoyt (650) 969-7892. See directions under Sept. 18 listing.

Wednesday Oct. 13, 8:30 AM Ed Levin County Park

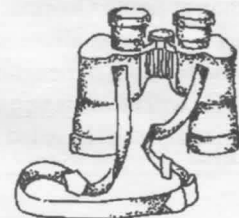
Half day. Harriet Gerson (408) 252-6244. Take Hwy 237 east, crossing I-880 and I-680 (becomes E. Calaveras Blvd in Milpitas, then Calaveras Rd.) to Ranger Station/Visitor Center parking area on right just past Spring Valley Golf Course. Entrance fee. **LO, RC**

Saturday Oct. 16, 8:30 AM Windy Hills OSP

Half day. Leader: Kirsten Holmquist (408) 747-0988. Meet in parking lot at Sausal Pond edge of Preserve. From I-280 in Portola Valley take Alpine Rd. south (toward hills) about 2.9 miles to first stop sign (Portola Rd.), turn right and go 0.8 miles to parking lot on left just past The Sequoias. **RC**

Sunday Oct. 17, 8:30 AM Carmel River

Half day plus. Leader: Kathy Parker (408) 358-2832. Take Hwy 1 south to Carmel, turn left at Rio Rd., then immediately turn right into Crossroads Shopping Center. Meet near Crossroads Cinema, at back of shopping center near river. After birding Carmel River and lagoon we will chase locally reported vagrants. Bring lunch and liquids or buy food at meeting place. Dress in layers. Rubber boots optional (riverbed may be muddy).



Field Trips *cont'd*

Saturday Oct. 23, 8:00 AM
Elkhorn Slough, Moss Landing
Half day plus. Leader: Rick Fournier (831) 632-2473. Meet in parking lot just north of Elkhorn Slough Bridge just off Hwy 1 in Moss Landing (used to be Maloney's Restaurant). Plan to bird through lunch (stopping at Phil's Snack Shack) finishing up early afternoon. Bring food and liquids. Dress in layers.

Sunday Oct. 24, 8:30 AM
Alum Rock Park
Half day. Leader: Grant Webb (408) 578-0409. 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 reaching T-intersection and underpass. Moderately strenuous 3 to 4 mile walk. Possible entrance fee. *LO, RC*

Wednesday Oct. 27 8:30 AM
Palo Alto Foothills Park
Half day. Leader: Alberta Jasberg (650) 493-9546. Fall migrants, woodland and grassland birds. Park is open only to Palo Alto residents and their guests; group will meet at Page Mill/I-280 Park-n-Ride to carpool. *LO, RC*

Saturday Oct. 30, 8:30 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. Scopes recommended for viewing rafts of ducks. A fairly easy but long walk. *RC*

Sunday Oct. 31, 9:00 AM
Western San Francisco
Half day. Leader: Alan Hopkins (415) 664-0983. *Note change in Daylight Savings Time: "fall back" or be an hour early for this trip.* From I-280 take 19th Ave to Golden Gate Park. When entering park on 19th Ave be in left lane and take Crossover Dr. to 25th Ave to Geary Blvd, then left on Geary. Meet in parking lot at Mirrie Way above Sutro Baths and Cliff House. *RC*

Saturday Nov. 6, 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 just past main park entrance on right. Fresh water ducks, oak woodland birds, possible Golden Eagle. Moderate 2 mile walk. *LO, RC*

Sunday Nov. 7, 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 Mtn. View. Trip geared toward beginners but all are welcome.

Saturday Nov. 13, 8:30 AM
Arastradero Preserve
Half day. Leader: Jim Liskovec (650) 969-5542. See directions under Sept. 26 listing. Two miles of moderate walking. *RC*

Sunday Nov. 14, 8:30 AM
Uvas Creek Park Preserve
Half day. Leader: Bob Reiling (408) 253-7527. From Hwy 101 in Gilroy go west on Tenth Street about a mile where it turns into Uvas Parkway. Turn left at Miller Ave, drive over Uvas Creek and turn left into Christmas Hill Park. Park in first aisle to right. A fairly easy but long walk. *LO, RC*

West Nile Alert

West Nile virus has been reported in Santa Clara County. This mosquito-borne disease can cause serious illness, and occasional fatality, in humans; mainly it affects birds, especially corvids (crows, ravens, magpies, jays). To report a dead bird, which may be collected for testing, call (877) 968-2473.

Help Shape Watershed Management in Santa Clara County!

The Santa Clara Valley Water District is developing Watershed Stewardship Plans for three major watersheds in Santa Clara County. Part of this process is to solicit public input and involvement, to get a sense of what residents, property owners, and community groups envision for their watersheds, and what issues are foremost in their minds. Public workshops are being planned for the months of September and October. In the meantime, the District is inviting you to visit their Watershed Stewardship website for more information:
<http://www.valleywater.org/_WMI/Stewardship_plan>

Events Calendar

Wed. 9/8, 7:30 PM
Bay Area Bird Photographers (BABP) features our annual "Members' Slides" presentation; this year it includes digital images, using our new digital projector. Lucie Evans Baylands Interpretive Center, E. Embarcadero Rd., Palo Alto.

Thu. 9/9, 4 PM
Education Committee Meeting, Location TBA

Tues. 9/14, 9:30 AM
Eve Case Bird Discussion Group meets at the home of Pat and Jean Dubois, 17150 Buena Vista Ave., Los Gatos (408) 395-4264. Topic: Summer birding.

Tues. 9/14, 7:30 PM
Board of Directors meeting
McClellan Ranch Park.

Wed. 9/15, 8 PM (doors open at 7:30)
General Meeting, Palo Alto. (see Page 1)

Wed. 9/22, 7:30 PM
EAC Meeting, McClellan Ranch.

Mon. 10/6, 7:30 PM
BABP presents Dr. Norman Kikuchi of Santa Cruz with a program of his bird photographs. (Same location as 9/8.)

Tues. 10/5, 7:30 PM
Board meeting, McClellan Ranch.

Tues. 10/12, 9:30 AM
Eve Case Bird Discussion Group meets at the home of Pat and Jean Dubois, 17150 Buena Vista Ave., Los Gatos (408) 395-4264, Topic: Bobolink.

Thu. 10/14, 4 PM, Education Committee Meeting, Location TBA

Wed. 10/20, 8:30 PM (doors open 7:30)
General Meeting, Campbell, (See pg. 5)

Sat. 10/23, 10 AM - 2 PM
Wildlife Education Day, McClellan Ranch

Wed. 10/27, 7:30 PM
EAC Meeting, McClellan Ranch

Mon. 11/3, 7:30 PM
BABP presents David Cardinal's Alaskan wildlife program.

Volunteer Ventures

by Kim Yuan-Farrell

SCVAS Programs Coordinator

During my Programs Coordinator training, Jennifer emphasized one recurring theme: the tremendous value of SCVAS' volunteers keep our organization alive and active. We depend on you, our members, to support our chapter's events, activities, and programs. And we appreciate varying skills and interests.

As the weather cools and leaves change color, autumn ushers in a variety of volunteer opportunities. Take a look at the descriptions below for more information.

Wetlands Discovery Program Docent – This program shares the wonder and importance of wetland habitats with fourth and fifth graders throughout Santa Clara County. Volunteers guide students in exploring wetland wildlife and habitat both in the classroom and out in the field. This program is rewarding for both volunteers and the hundreds of South Bay children who participate. No experience is necessary, as we will provide training for both field and class sessions. All a potential docent needs is a love of nature and a desire to share it with children.

Wildlife Education Day Support – Wildlife Education Day, our largest annual event, is a fun-filled affair with interactive booths, environmental organizations, and presentations. We will need volunteers both prior to and during the event on October 23rd from 10-2 PM. In preparation for Ed Day, volunteers will prepare handouts, publicize the event, compile a mailing, and reach out to teachers and students to inform them of our California Native Habitats Poster contest. On the day of the event, volunteers will help build nestboxes, lead nature walks, and assist in other interactive activities such as our nature scavenger hunt or potting plants. Volunteers are also needed to help with the logistics of set-up, clean-up, and "behind the scenes" work. Positions vary in time commitment and level of flexibility.

South County Development Monitors – Several conservation-related positions involving development in South Santa Clara County are available. Some volunteers will track local government agendas, alerting SCVAS when a development project with significant wildlife impacts is proposed. Most of this monitoring work can be conducted from a home with internet access. Another volunteer is needed to track the progress of a specific proposed development south of Gilroy (known as Castro Ranch). Contact with and occasional visits to the County Planning Department may be required. No experience is necessary for these monitoring positions, as we will provide necessary training.

If you are interested in any of these positions or if you have questions about how you might be able to help, please contact Kim at (408) 252-3740.



Welcome Kim Yuan-Farrell, our new Programs Coordinator

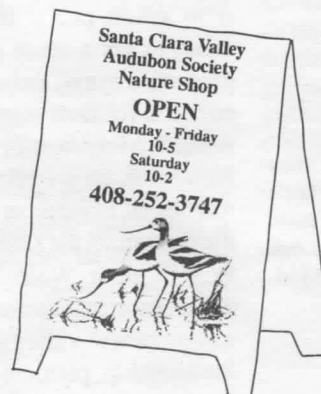
New SCVAS Programs Coordinator

by Kim Yuan-Farrell

My nine-month conservation internship afforded me a rare opportunity to experience SCVAS both as a volunteer and as a temporary staff member. I grew familiar with the office's warm and welcoming feel. I participated in a number of SCVAS events and programs and saw the impacts of our outreach in the South Bay community. I had the opportunity to meet and work with some of the volunteers who keep our programs alive. And I was able to preview SCVAS' work environment.

Now I am thrilled to be the new Programs Coordinator. I am glad to be part of the SCVAS community and am excited about working with our volunteers and South Bay children and families through our volunteer and education programs. I feel fortunate to work with others who connect deeply with nature. I expect that at first much of my energy will be spent becoming familiar with current programs and their delivery. I hope to sustain the tremendous growth achieved over the past year. However, I will also dedicate time to identify new areas for growth and development. I hope to bring new ideas and energy to the position. And I am eager to work on further developing our programs with the guidance of the Education Committee and the input of many seasoned volunteers; these individuals will prove to be valuable sources of knowledge and experience.

As all who have worked with her know, Jennifer left some enormous shoes to fill. While this might be slightly intimidating, I also know that I have a solid foundation from which to build. I am optimistic that our future programs will be productive and meaningful. I look forward to getting to know all of the SCVAS members. If you have any questions about our volunteer or education programs, please contact me at (408) 252-3740 or programs@scvas.org.



From Hawaii to Maine and points in between, ALL Audubon Members are now eligible for a 10% discount in the Nature Shop!

General Parking @ Monta Vista High School w/ FREE SHUTTLE SERVICE
Disabled Parking ONLY @ McClellan Ranch Park
IN CASE OF RAIN, all activities will be held at Monta Vista High School

"Early Bird" ~ Shorebird Walk
8:00 am @ Charleston Slough
RSVP Required

13th Annual

!!! Poster Contest !!!
Deadline -- 10/8
please call (408) 252-3740
or visit the SCVAS website
for more details

Wildlife Education Day!

Saturday, October 23, 2004

10am-2pm

McClellan Ranch Park in Cupertino

Build a Birdhouse
Live Animals
Educational Presentations
Fabulous Raffle Prizes

Make a Bird Feeder
Scavenger Hunt
Local Environmental Orgs.
And More!

General Membership Meeting "The Birds of Angola" with Cagan Sekercioglu

Campbell Community Center, corner of Winchester & Campbell, Building F (by the deli), parking is located on Winchester Blvd.
Wednesday, October 20, 7:30 PM (program begins at 8)

Angola is one of the most important and least known countries in Africa for birds. The country's ornithological importance is due to the combination of the Western Angola Endemic Bird Area, with its 14 restricted-range species (eight of which are threatened), and the location of Angola at the confluence of three very different biomes: northern Congo basin lowland forests, eastern Zambesian miombo woodlands, and southern Namib Desert. Angola is home to many spectacular, and/or threatened endemics such as Gray-striped and Swiestra's Francolins, Red-crested Turaco, Gabela Akalat, Pulitzer's Longbill, Angola Cave-chat, White-fronted Wattle-eye, Gabela Bush-shrike, Monteiro's Bush-shrike, and Gabela Helmet-shrike.

However, due to the civil war that ravaged the country between 1974 and 2002, most of what is known is based on data collected before Angola's independence in 1975. There is a dire need for more information, especially on endemic and threatened bird species. Therefore, we, with the help of Rockjumper Birdwatching Tours and Wilddog Safaris, conducted an ornithological expedition to Angola

in January 2004 to do a rapid assessment of the status of Angola's endemic birds and four globally important bird areas after the end of 30 years of civil war. Despite having no showers for over two weeks and suffering on the worst roads on earth, we succeeded in seeing over 40% of the country's bird species, rediscovered Bocage's Sunbird, photographed some species for the first time, and set up the foundation for future ornithological visits to this spectacular country. There is still hope for Angola's unique avifauna and those who want to see it.

Cagan Sekercioglu is a Turkish avian ecologist and nature photographer doing his postdoctoral research at the Stanford University Center for Conservation Biology. Cagan's academic web site is: <<http://www.stanford.edu/%7Ecagan/main.html>> <http://www.stanford.edu/~cagan/main.html>.

Examples of his photography are on <<http://www.naturalphotos.com/>> If you are interested in seeing Angola's birds comfortably, e-mail him at cagan02@yahoo.com.

Field Notes

by Bill Bousman

Changes to the Taxonomic List

Birders complain endlessly about the damn scientists who insist on rearranging the taxonomic order in which the list of species is presented. The American Ornithologists' Union 44th supplement has just been published and please feel free to moan and howl (but not at me). There are a few changes, including one species's split that is local. The small-form Canada Goose is now considered a separate species—the Cackling Goose. There are four subspecies in this new species, two of which, *leucopareia* and *minima* are seen locally nearly every winter. The large forms are still called Canada Goose and are the ones that now nest here. The other big changes are that various geese, ducks, and waterfowl are now judged more primitive and head the taxonomic list, followed closely by the pheasants, quail, and their like. Then the list continues with the loons and so on.

Waterfowl through Skimmers

How opportune to start the summer report with a **Cackling Goose**, using the new taxonomic order. A single bird was reported from Coyote Creek Golf Course on 6 Jun (MJM) and is the only summer report I know of. A male **Eurasian Wigeon** with an injured right wing was seen on Salt Pond A2W on 5 Jun (WGB). A similarly injured bird was seen last summer on Guadalupe Slough, perhaps this is the same one. A pair of **Blue-winged Teal** were in the Palo Alto Flood Control Basin (FCB) on 3 Jun (RWR, FV) and a single male was seen there on 4 Jul (GB). A pair of **Redhead** were also at the Palo Alto FCB on 3 Jun (RWR, FV), but not reported after that. A female or immature **Red-breasted Merganser** at the Palo Alto Baylands on 5 Jun (L&WG, JPo) was unexpected for the summer. **Mountain Quail** are rarely heard in June, so one calling on Mt. Umunhum on 15 Jun (AV) was exciting. An **American Bittern** seen in the evening in the Palo Alto FCB on 19 Jun (TGr) was most unusual. They occasionally breed

in some south county wetlands, but I'm not aware of any nesting along the Bay edge. An adult **Little Blue Heron** was seen along Salt Pond A4 on 21 Jun (KOD *fide* LCh) and was seen there again on 1 Jul (RK, PK, DW). An adult was seen near this salt pond last year, also for a similarly short period. **Osprey** are unusual in summer, so a single bird at Chesbro Reservoir on 2 Jun (AV) was of interest, and a family of four birds found off Black Road on 8 Jul (*fide* KPa) was surprising. A 1st-summer **Bald Eagle** was seen at Shoreline Park on 27 Jul (SCR et al.). We have few summer records of this eagle in the county. The first **Lesser Yellowlegs** of the season was a

A summer Bald Eagle was a surprise; unexpected were eastern vagrants Ovenbird, Rose-breasted Grosbeak and Indigo Bunting

single bird at Crittenden Marsh on 8 Jul (RWR, FV). Mostly ones and twos were seen after that, with a high count of four birds in the Mountain View Forebay on 12 Jul (RC). The only bird found inland was a single at Calero Reservoir on 27 Jul (AV). **Spotted Sandpipers** are rare breeders in the county so a precocious youngster at Almaden Lake on 7 Jul was a good find (SCR). The youngster and two adults were seen there at least through 26 Jul (SCR, JPa). Two **Ruddy Turnstones** were found on the A14/A15 dike in the Alviso salt ponds on 22 Jul (RGJ, MMR, MJM). One to three birds were on Salt Pond A16 on 27-29 Jul (SCR et al., v.ob.). All were in alternate plumage. **Red Knots** are always rare, but particularly in summer, so two along Coyote Slough on 1 Jul were an excellent find (RWR, FV). One was in alternate plumage and the other in basic. An adult **Semipalmated Sandpiper** was found at the Coyote Creek Field Station (CCFS) waterbird pond on 17 Jul (MJM). The first juveniles of the year were two at the

new Chicago Marsh on 31 Jul (MJM). We've had few juvenile **Baird's Sandpipers** in recent years, so a single bird found at the New Chicago Marsh on 28 Jul (SBT) was a good find. It remained through the end of the month and was enjoyed by many. Summer "ruffmania" started when a male **Ruff** was found at the New Chicago Marsh on 11 Jul (AME) and then, on 12 Jul, a female was found there as well (DM). Both have remained through the end of the month (m. ob.). The number of California Gulls breeding in the South Bay continues to increase and, occasionally, **Western Gulls** nest amongst them. Two westerns were seen on a nest in Salt Pond B2 on 5 Jun (MJM) and one or two pairs may be breeding in the Knapp colony in Alviso as well (MMR). We've had no **Elegant Terns** in the county in three years, so an adult and juvenile flying over the Sunnyvale Water Pollution Control Plant (WPCP) oxidation ponds on 17 Jul was a nice change (MMR). Two **Common Terns** were found on the Alviso salt ponds on 22 Jul (RGJ, MMR, MJM); one was thought to be 1st-summer and the other a 2nd-summer. Single birds were also seen

there on 23 Jul (RWR, FV) and 27 Jul (SCR et al.). Seven adult **Least Terns** on Salt Pond A2E on 8 Jul (RWR, FV) were the first of our post-breeding staging birds. This season appears to have been particularly good for this species, and a record high count of 258 birds on Salt Pond A2E was obtained on 27 Jul (SCR et al.), of which a third were juveniles. Eighteen more birds were seen foraging over Salt Pond B1. An adult **Black Tern** was found over the Sunnyvale WPCP oxidation ponds on 17 Jul (MJM); usually, in good years, we encounter juvenile birds in late August. **Black Skimmers** have had some breeding success this season. A pair was seen on the SE island in Salt Pond A1 on 5 Jun incubating an egg on 5 Jun (WGB) and a precocious young was seen here as late as 12 Jul (MMR). A juvenile seen at Charleston Slough on 23 Jul (GB) is likely from this nest. Up to eight adults were found on the islands on Salt Pond A16 this year. The success of incubating birds on the 4th island is unclear, but a pair on the 3rd island raised

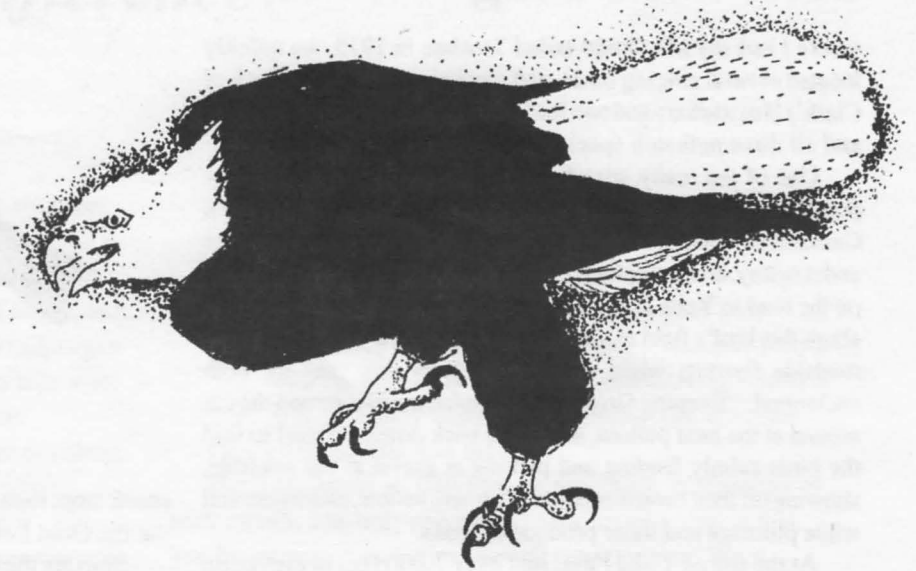
Field Notes *cont'd*

a bird to fledging (SCR, v. ob.). Incubation was also observed in Salt Pond B1 on 8 Jul (RWR, FV) and 27 Jul (SCR et al., RWR, FV). Finally, two pairs were seen incubating on nests on the eastern side of Salt Pond A2W on 27 Jul (SCR et al.).

Swifts through Goldfinches

There have been few reports this summer of **Vaux's Swifts**. Single foraging birds were seen over McClellan Ranch Park on 9 Jun (WGB), at Stanford on 18 Jun (TGr), and the Stanford dish on 20 Jun (WGB). Male **Black-chinned Hummingbirds** were found along Coyote Creek below Hwy 237 on 16-17 Jun (MMR, MJM) and along Coyote Creek below Montague on 22 Jun (RWR, FV). A female was along Guadalupe River above Montague on 11 Jul (MJM). All are at known breeding locations. A returning male **Rufous Hummingbird** was seen in Morgan Hill on 29 Jun (SCR); most fall migrants travel well to the east of us. Nineteen **Lewis's Woodpeckers** were found along Mines and San Antonio Valley roads on 15 Jul (WGB). Curiously, 12 were at the pass between Arroyo Mocho and Colorado Creek, where not previously reported, and only one was in the valley proper. Four reports of **Pileated Woodpeckers** ranged from south of Mt. Madonna CP to upper Stevens Creek Canyon (v. ob.). A **Horned Lark** singing at Moffett Field on 5 Jun (MMR) was an echo of the past when this was a common bird in pastures along the Bay edge. A **Red-breasted Nuthatch** was heard at Sanborn-Skyline CP on 13 Jun (AME) in an area where they breed. A small group of **Golden-crowned Kinglets** were along the Grizzly Flat Trail in Upper Stevens Creek CP on 5 Jun (GHa et al.) and four singing birds were in the Bodfish Creek Canyon south of Mt. Madonna on 25 Jun (DLSu). Surprising for summer was a female **Varied Thrush** found at the Alviso EEC on 16 Jun (KF). This is the second summer record for the county. A male **Phainopepla** was found on the Eagle Rock Trail in Alum Rock Park on 1 Jun (DM). The next day, two males and a female were seen at this location and a male repeatedly carried food to the same

tree, presumably to a nest (RWR, FV). A single male was here as well on 26-27 Jun (KH et al., RWR, FV) and was again seen carrying food at the same location. No **Phainopepla** were reported from San Antonio Valley this summer. A June vagrant was an **Ovenbird** banded at CCFS on 16 Jun (*fide* MJM). This is the fifth time we've found a misoriented spring migrant Ovenbird in June. A male **Yellow-breasted Chat** was heard along Llagas Creek above Bloomfield on 27 Jul (SCR) where multiple birds were heard in early May. A male **Black-chinned Sparrow** singing on Loma Prieta on 6 Jun (TO) was the only one found during the summer period. The only reports of **Grasshopper Sparrows** were of two singing at Monte Bello OSP on 5 Jun (GHa) and five singing along Metcalf Road on a Breeding Bird Survey route on 6 Jun (MMR). An injured **White-throated Sparrow** remained in a San Jose yard through 28 Jun (LWR). A male **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** showed up at a feeder in New Almaden on 2 Jun (TMS-W) but was not found afterwards. A female **Indigo Bunting** along Summit Road, about two miles northwest of Hwy 17, on 6 Jun (DLSu) was a good find. Multiple families of **Lawrence's Goldfinches**, including juveniles, were found on Mines Road and in San Antonio



Bald Eagle sketch by Bonnie Bedford-White, based on John James Audubon's aquatint.

Valley 15-23 Jul (WGB, PH). More surprising was a pair and juvenile seen at Searsville Lake on 20 Jul (LCh), as this was not an invasion year in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

Observers: Gordon Barrett (GB), Bill Bousman (WGB), Richard Carlson (RC), Les Chibana (LCh), Al Eisner (AME), Karl Fowler (KF), Lois & Wally Goldfrank (L&WG), Tom Grey (TGr), Garth Harwood (GHa), Kirsten Holmquist (KH), Pete Hosner (PH), Richard Jeffers (RGJ), Roland Kenner (RK), Pat Kenney (PK), Mike Mammoser (MJM), Dean Manley (DM), Kira Od (KOD), Tom Olson (TO), Kathy Parker (KPa), Janna Pauser (JPa), Jeff Poklen (JPo), Bob Reiling (RWR), Laurie Roberts (LWR), Mike Rogers (MMR), Steve Rottenborn (SCR), Terri Sanislo-Williams (TMS-W), David Suddjian (DLSu), Scott Terrill (SBT), Frank Vanslager (FV), Ann Verdi (AV), and Dave Weber (DW).

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

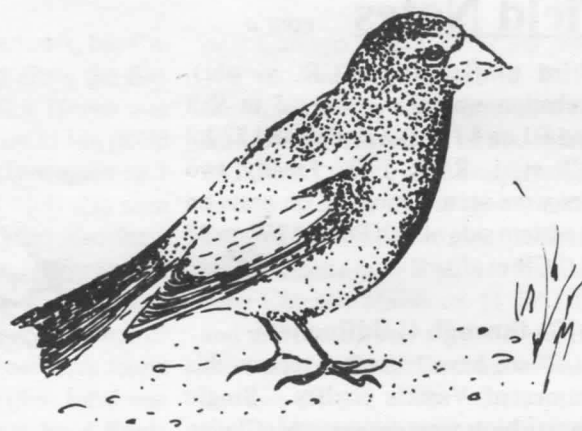
Sierra birding *cont'd from Page 1*

where I had my life Green-tailed Towhee in 1975, we quickly located several singing birds, and were also treated to a flock of Clark's Nutcrackers and two Red Crossbills. Mountain Bluebird and all three nuthatch species are possible at this spot, too.

One of the really attractive features of this area is the low population density (of humans, that is—the birds are plentiful!). Casual roadside stops are fine, as long as one uses common sense and courtesy, and we've had amazing luck with Evening Grosbeaks on the road to Yuba Pass two years in a row. There's something about this bird's field marks that jars your senses, even in a brief roadside flyover; when we spotted them this year we both exclaimed, "Evening Grosbeak!" simultaneously, turned the car around at the next pullout, and came back down the road to find the birds calmly feeding and picking at gravel at the roadside, showing off their bizarre mixture of brown, yellow, chartreuse and white plumage and those prodigious beaks.

At the top of Yuba Pass, just over 7,000 feet in elevation and about a half-hour's drive west of the marsh, we always begin by working the parking area, where woodpeckers seem to delight in showing off for bird groups. I'll never forget how excited I was to see my first White-headed Woodpecker peeping out of its nest-hole at the Yuba Pass campground in 1975; this year it was a staked-out Williamson's Sapsucker nest that had a gaggle of Bay Area Audubon birders enthralled with the pair of Williamson's feeding young at the nest. There were few other visitors to the campground until another party of nature enthusiasts arrived and fanned out over the meadow identifying every plant and wildflower. Wandering up the forest service road to the north we ran into a neighbor from Los Altos — fellow SCVAS member Pete LaTourrette, who was enjoying photo opportunities in the mixed conifer habitat. Pete gave us the mildly disappointing news that the Black-backed Woodpeckers had fledged only three days earlier from another staked-out nest site, but we managed to entertain ourselves with killer looks at White-headed Woodpecker, Red-breasted Sapsucker, Cassin's Finch, and dazzling Western Tanagers. Fox Sparrows trilled their distinctive songs, seemingly a new bird around every bend in the road, while Hermit Thrushes poured out their magical notes throughout the forest. Seldom-seen but often-heard Mountain Quail "quarked" away in the distance.

What's been fun for us in recent years is to take off and explore the roads that criss-cross the Plumas National Forest. This year we went south of the pass toward Webber Lake, but decided to return via a new route, thanks to a tip from a pair of Forest Service employees who were scouting the area for damage from winter storms. In five hours these were the only people we saw away from the campground, and this is in prime vacation season! Woodpeckers, flycatchers, Mountain Chickadees, Red-breasted Nuthatches, a Townsend's Solitaire and a Blue Grouse greeted us as we rode, hiked, birded and picnicked in this beautiful forest habitat, and we had it all to ourselves. The road took us to Bassett's, a well-known gas and



Evening Grosbeak by Bonnie Bedford-White

snack stop, then we headed back to our home base in Graeagle via the Gold Lakes Loop.

Skirting the picturesque Sierra Buttes and providing access to dozens of back-country lakes, the Gold Lakes Loop also joins dozens of Forest Service roads, and the adventurous birder may explore at will, again, often in complete solitude. Three years ago we turned off on a little-used back road and discovered a bucolic meadow with teeming birdlife (and mosquitoes!), and we visit it regularly now. It's called Freeman Meadow, and we've yet to see another person there in several visits. Lincoln's, Song, Chipping and White-crowned Sparrows breed there, along with Yellow Warbler and Lazuli Bunting; a tiny Calliope Hummingbird patrols the road next to a willow thicket. From our observations, there seem to be gems like this one sprinkled throughout the Gold Lakes/Plumas National Forest area, just waiting to be birded.

Our vacation home in the quaint, friendly community of Graeagle sits at the end of a Forest Service road that goes to Madora Lake, so we often hike up to the lake when we're there. When you can find McGillivray's and Hermit Warblers breeding within a half-mile of the house, with Pileated Woodpecker a little further up the road, you find a reason to come back year after year. Last year we were treated to a pair of elusive Pine Grosbeaks at Madora Lake; this year's surprise was a Bufflehead family, reminding me how little I know of the breeding habits of birds I see mainly in winter. I was thrilled to add a new bird to the Graeagle yard list — while I was enjoying some late-night reading, a Spotted Owl boomed forth its distinctive series of hoots not 50 yards from the house!

I've barely scratched the surface of northern Sierra birding in this account — discussions of Sierran flycatcher identification or montane birdsong would consume an entire newsletter. Suffice it to say that you really can't go wrong when you make a birding excursion to the Sierras in June or early July. The Yuba Pass/Sierra Valley/Gold Lakes Loop region of Sierra and Plumas Counties contains some of California's most vibrant and varied birdlife, much of it in easily accessible National Forest. Why not make your plans now to take a few days to bird the area next year? The only crowds you'll run into are likely to be clustered around a woodpecker hole, binoculars raised.

Want to Make a Difference? Join the EAC!

by Nancy Teater

The Environmental Action Committee (EAC) monitors local and regional conservation issues on behalf of SCVAS. Meeting once a month, EAC discusses matters such as the California High-Speed Rail project, protection of the Pajaro River watershed, and the illegal golf course built in Morgan Hill by electronics store czar John Fry. Members also write letters, attend city council meetings, and advise the Executive Director and SCVAS Board on Chapter positions.

Why do people join the EAC?

- As a member of the EAC, you can make a significant impact on land-use decisions in our area. Local officials, corporations and other organizations are interested in and sensitive to Audubon's opinion on a wide range of environmental and conservation issues.
- You will meet other like-minded people who are concerned about preserving wildlife habitat and will participate in stimulating discussions.

- It offers hands-on opportunities to learn about important environmental issues and the most effective ways to preserve open space.
- The EAC gives you a chance to use your past experience in new ways. Our group includes people with backgrounds in teaching, research, agriculture, Silicon Valley business and grass-roots activism.

That's why people join the EAC.

The EAC meets at 7:30 PM. on the fourth Wednesday of each month. The only requirement for membership is that you be interested in environmental conservation. We'd especially like to recruit a few people who live in the south part of the county because that is where many of our challenges are now concentrated. For more information, contact Committee Chair Nancy Teater (650-321-0252, nrt@hamilton.com) or Craig Breon (408-252-3748, craig@scvas.org)

Wherever You Go Birding, Tell 'em Why You're There!

On a recent trip to Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Eastern Oregon, I saw an example of wildlife conservation education at the dinner table. As our small group of birders sat down to eat at a local restaurant, our friendly waitress asked, "Are you enjoying your visit?" Gloria, one of our members, said, "Oh yes, we're here to see the birds at the refuge; we had a spectacular day!"

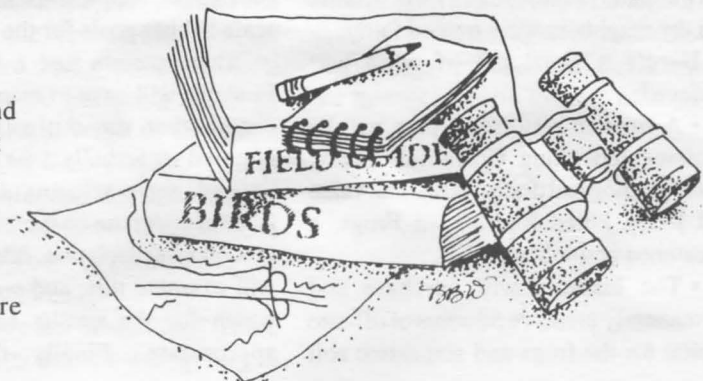
Of course the waitress, who had lived in the area all her life, knew that many tourists who traveled there came to see the birds, and we exchanged some chit-chat with her about birds she had seen, their behavior, and so on. Gloria said that the American Birding Association teaches its members to spread the word about birding and conservation by telling people who live near birding hot spots that they have some special birds in their area and that we are there to see the birds.

Needless to say, it doesn't take long for owners of motels, restaurants, gift shops and other businesses to figure out that they have an economic incentive to be sure that both the birds and birders keep coming. In fact, many communities have capitalized on the increasing

popularity of birding by organizing birding festivals and other events to draw even more visitors to their communities. And if the birds are threatened by pollution, logging, or environmentally damaging development projects, local residents are more likely to speak up to protect the birds.

So the next time you get a chance, tell 'em why you're there and how much fun you're having watching "their" birds.

—Nancy Teater



South County update: frogs, golf, and "biostitution"

by Craig Breon
Executive Director

Mr. Fry's Frogs

After more than a year and a half of working on the issue, I was pleased to see the Morgan Hill City Council take final action on a permit for the Institute Golf Course and mathematics facility.

Avocet readers will recall that this golf course in southeastern Morgan Hill was built illegally, without the proper permits or an Environmental Impact Report. This was rather embarrassing to the Council members, who were caught between the desire to please the influential John Fry (of Fry's Electronics) and the need to comply with the law and not be seen as treating the politically powerful differently than the average citizen. In the end, a series of compromises seems to have bridged that gap fairly well, although the story's last chapter has yet to unfold.

The back and forth here seemed endless. The City's consultants and staff would propose mitigation measures for a host of environmental impacts caused by the course. The Institute's consultants and backers would then deny those impacts and/or propose weaker, alternative mitigations, leading to another round of proposals and counterproposals. All the while, SCVAS and the Committee for Green Foothills commented, advocated strongly at hearings, appealed temporary permits, and even threatened litigation, all in attempt to make sure that the City did not cave in to the Institute, and ultimately to ensure that local wildlife and the neighbors were treated fairly.

Here's a short list of what was achieved:

- A riparian restoration plan will be implemented along Corralitos Creek, where grading had destroyed habitat value and likely killed Red-legged Frogs, a threatened amphibian;

- The Institute will purchase and permanently preserve 52 acres of off-site habitat for the frogs and serpentine soil

species (i.e. rare plants and an endangered butterfly);

- Ten-foot buffers will be planted around all of the ponds on the site, to filter polluted runoff coming from the turf and to provide shelter and habitat for the frogs, California Tiger Salamander, and Western Pond Turtle;

- The ponds themselves will have vegetated earthen shelves placed into them, to improve habitat quality;

- Nitrogen fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides will be closely monitored, and several new design measures will be implemented to ensure that they do not enter the creek or accumulate in groundwater;

- Buffers between the creek and the playable areas of the course will be expanded. Where encroachments are made inside the recommended buffers, off-site habitat will be permanently preserved at a ratio of 2:1;

- Various measures will be implemented to reduce on and off-site flooding;

- A landscaping plan will have to be approved by the City, hopefully providing for more native species to be planted and for neighbors' views to be restored.

In short, considering all the damage done by the unpermitted construction of the course, the City appears to have adopted adequate measures to restore much of that damage, and the requirement for off-site habitat preservation is substantial, helping us achieve larger-scale habitat goals for the County.

There remain just a few concerns. First, we will have to monitor the site to ensure that the mitigation measures required are actually done and done well. Second, there remains an outstanding issue of water use on the site and possible groundwater depletion. A long-term study will examine this, and we will have to watch for the results and respond if appropriate. Finally, there remains



*Red-legged Frogs get protection
in Morgan Hill
sketch by Bonnie Bedford-White*

possible legal action for the past and ongoing harm to Red-legged Frogs. CGF and SCVAS previously issued a 60-Day Notice of Intent to Sue under the Endangered Species Act, and despite the permitting requirements of the City, this legal violation remains. We hope to negotiate a solution with Mr. Fry and the other Institute backers rather than go to court.

Finally, a note. I've had the chance to meet several times with John Fry. Where in previous writings I could simply portray him as the wealthy backer of an illegal golf course, I now have to admit that we've had some good conversations. He claims to have a desire to support conservation projects in the region, and we should help give him that opportunity.

Corde Valle

Yes, another golf course. Corde Valle is west of San Martin where, years after the course was constructed (I worked on the original permitting in the mid-90's), it

was discovered that the owners hadn't bothered to do most of the environmental mitigations required in their permits.

Here, too, there's progress to report. The course operators have put forth plans for substantial improvements in both riparian and wetlands habitats, as well as a host of lesser measures, and they are making progress in implementing those measures. The end result will be more than 3.5 acres of new riparian vegetation, new ponds for Tiger Salamander and Western Pond Turtle, and improved water quality. We were successful in arguing that the course should be required to restore more acreage than was originally required, in order to compensate for more than five years of noncompliance and the resulting lost habitat value.

As always, there's more work ahead. The owners of the course remain recalcitrant on implementing improvements for water quality, and the question of excessive water usage has barely been addressed. The County Planning Commission meets next on this issue in October, and we will be there.

Much credit goes to Dave Johnston, California Department of Fish and Game biologist, for his diligence, and to the County Planning Commission and County staff, for their tough but fair oversight.

Bogus Growth Boundary?

What's the difference between an Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) and a "Long-Term" Urban Growth Boundary? The answer . . . political influence, it would seem.

Morgan Hill already has a UGB, designed to maintain orderly development patterns and reduce sprawl. In fact, a vote of the people of Morgan Hill in the early 90's directed the Council to implement that UGB. A previous Council then took an excessively long time to do so, and the resulting UGB was overly generous to the development community. Now it appears the current Council may be entertaining an expansion of that boundary, with a new name to disguise the effort.

Called the "Long Term" UGB, the City established a task force to draw a line outside the current UGB to encompass

lands intended for development in a more distant time horizon. For land use planners, this is a strange concept. The City's existing UGB contains enough land for the next 20 years of planned development. Planning for a longer time horizon is an exercise in guesswork. For all we know, oil could be three or four times as expensive in 30 years, leading to fundamentally different land use and agricultural patterns.

So what's the real reason for this effort? It appears to have been spurred on by a group of landowners outside the existing UGB, as an attempt to raise their land values. Any designation for urban development—even one not intended to be utilized for a decade or two—will raise the speculative value of their lands.

The Mayor of Morgan Hill and others provide a different reason. I've heard Mayor Kennedy say that this is an attempt to create a permanent greenbelt around the City. He may be earnest in that statement. However, the task force has yet to embrace a mechanism for the permanent preservation of land, such as requiring developers to place conservation easements over farmlands and open space. Perhaps the fact that the task force is made up largely of landowners outside the current UGB explains this confusion in rationales.

SCVAS volunteer John Hewitt is monitoring this process for us (thanks, John). We will give them the benefit of the doubt for now, and wait to see if they produce a mechanism for the permanent preservation of a Greenbelt around the City. If not, we will work hard to defeat this dubious effort.

End "Biostitution" Now!

Every profession has its good and bad eggs (except the conservationists, of course—we're all good folks). Consultants are no exception. Lots of them work hard to reign in the worst excesses of proposed projects and to inform the public and decision makers about the environmental impacts of a project and how to minimize or compensate for those.

Then there are the "biostitutes." These consultants are known for giving a

landowner or developer the kinds of answers they want to hear—for a price. Obviously, this is not done overtly. Some consultants just earn this reputation over time, and the less scrupulous developers seek out those consultants.

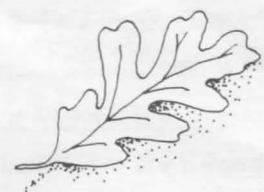
Without naming specific individuals or firms, here are a few examples of what I'm talking about:

- A developer's water consultant claiming that there were no impacts of their operations on groundwater depletion, only to have the city's consultants then point out that data was read incorrectly, and that wells closer to the development were dropping when compared to those further away;

- A different developer's consultant claiming that no water quality problems arose from their operations, while the County planning staff's read on the information indicates that nitrogen levels in a local waterway had increased by 260%.

The ultimate example that comes easily to mind occurred years ago, in Milpitas, at McCarthy Ranch, where a large residential development was proposed adjacent to Coyote Creek and an important bird research station. I asserted in written and oral comments that cats from the development could interfere with the birds in the creek and bird research. A biologist with a Ph.D. countered my claim by noting that a levee separated the development from the creek, as if a cat could not walk up one side of a sloped surface, across the level top, and down the other side. This was said in front of the City Council. I did not know whether to laugh or cry. Just consider how deeply your ethics must be compromised to make such a statement.

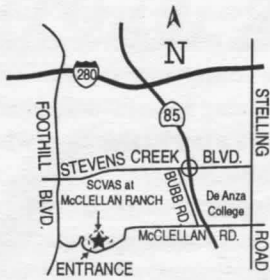
Enough said. Government agencies need to erect checks and balances in their systems to protect against such abuses—and some people need to evaluate whether the money is worth the loss of integrity.



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

RARE BIRD ALERT: (415) 681-7422

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