



THE AVOCET

The Newsletter of the Santa Clara Audubon Society

December 2004

1994 - 2004: A look back . . .

Outgoing Executive Director reflects on decade-long stint at SCVAS

by Craig Breon

I decided to start writing this article while sitting with my laptop (Apple, of course) along Stevens Creek at McClellan Ranch Park. It is here that I've come to work for the last eleven years. Having the creek run within a hundred yards of my office has been a blessing — a constant reminder of what I was here to do.

I couldn't ask for a better going away present. Recently the Cupertino City Council voted to move forward with an adventurous plan to enhance the Stevens Creek corridor as it runs through McClellan Ranch Park and Blackberry Farm, over a mile in all. The



Craig Breon, Outgoing Executive Director

city will pull back the picnicking areas within Blackberry, clearing the way for six acres of new streamside trees and shrubs. With help from the Santa Clara Valley Water District, Cupertino has launched a plan to eliminate barriers to fish passage through this stretch of creek, remove some of the rock walls and cement lining the banks, and install a recreational trail through the area, allowing local residents to enjoy greatly improved riparian habitat and all the birds and wildlife that entails.

I have long yearned for our chapter, and our region, to not only fight against the inexorable ravages of development, but also realize opportunities to bring back some of the glorious streams and wetlands that this valley was blessed with historically. So I sit next to Stevens Creek, a decade of hard work and passionate activism behind me, a year of exploring the world ahead of me, and the sounds of a familiar creek coursing through me as through the land.

[By the way, I just heard the rattle of a kingfisher downstream. It reminds me of the time I was driving north on Highway 5 near Sacramento when a couple birds caught the

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*Special Edition:
Craig Breon's
11 years at
SCVAS*

— and a peek into the future . . .

In January of this year, I gave the Board one year's notice that I would be leaving to go traveling. That long lead-time was purposeful. This has allowed the Board, the other staff, and I to prepare well for the transition from our first to our second Executive Director. From the beginning, I have wanted the organization to continue the growth of our programs, while acknowledging that new leadership will bring a different set of talents into the chapter. In truth, I'm quite excited about this. I feel like I have helped bring the organization to its current place, and now it's time to hand off the task of helping to shape the next version of SCVAS.

Details, details

A number of tasks have been completed to smooth the way for the next Executive Director. Prior to this year, we had a loose set of personnel policies housed in a variety of places. During the summer, we organized and modified those, and we now have a comprehensive set of policies for all staff (all three of us). The SCVAS bylaws needed modernizing as well, to deal with things like e-mail or conference call votes by the Board, as

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10 years at SCVAS as advocate, birder, Executive Director

corner of my eye. As I whizzed by at 65 miles an hour, there on the guardrail of a small bridge over a denuded creek sat — within a few feet of each other — a Belted Kingfisher and a Burrowing Owl. I know it's an unlikely sight, but believe me. I am still just a mediocre birder, but I have come to thrill at such moments. This job has given me the gift of birding, and I now take that gift with me wherever I go.]

Some time ago

At twenty-seven years old, I applied for the newly created position of Environmental Advocate with the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society. I had a law degree and good conservation experience in summer jobs, internships, and fellowships, but this would be my first career position. At my interview, I was asked incredulously, "Why would an attorney apply for this job?" It was, after all, half-time, paying about \$12,500 a year. I frankly don't recall what I said, but what I would say today is, "I grew up here. This is one of the most beautiful spots on earth, and it gave me a childhood full of hikes in the hills, catching tadpoles, and listening to creeks. I now want to give back."

As it turns out, the SCVAS Board offered the job to someone else, a highly-regarded young woman working with the Mono Lake Committee. Luckily for me, she could not handle the meager salary. I could because my father was willing to let me live with him in Portola Valley, where I was raised. Thus, my first "Thank you" of this article. My father put me up for the first three years of my work with the chapter, allowing me not to take a second job to make ends meet, so I could throw myself into the boom of Silicon Valley in the mid 1990's and start making some environmental headway. My father has also been a strong financial supporter of SCVAS over the years, and has always encouraged my work. Thanks, Dad.

The chapter took a chance on me. It really didn't have the money to support my position without drawing down its small reserve fund, the interest and dividends on which the chapter relied for

core services. The Board had, so I heard at the time, debated whether to venture more forcefully into the world of conservation advocacy for some time. Finally, the strong conservationists won out, but I came to the chapter with nearly half the Board doubtful about whether I should be here. Then, in that first year, a dispute over who would succeed to the Board Presidency of SCVAS led to two of my staunchest supporters leaving the organization. Not an auspicious beginning.

However, in that same first year, I had led a successful effort to pass the Riparian Corridor Policy in San Jose. The policy called for everything from increased setbacks of new buildings from creeks to control of lighting and chemical storage to specifying that the Planning Department should initiate a comprehensive analysis of restoration opportunities along the City's waterways. At the time, the policy was seen as a breakthrough in the local relationship of land use and natural resources. While many would say the Riparian Policy has since been more honored in its breach than its observance, it nonetheless provided a consequential tectonic shift in the local conservation landscape.

The doubters on the SCVAS Board began to soften. Perhaps this conservation thing was worth it after all. They became more convinced when later that year our annual fundraising letter — a tradition which was initiated in order to support my salary — brought in about \$11,000, nearly what I was costing the organization. Within two years the annual letter would raise more than my salary, as it has ever since.

So here's "Thank you" number two: to the many donors who have come through year after year when we sent out our annual fundraising letter. Those funds now significantly exceed my salary (currently \$52,500 — I believe we should be as open as possible in discussing what we do with your investment in the



Burrowing Owl by Bonnie Bedford-White

chapter), and thus help to pay for the other wonderful services we provide this community. By the time this special edition of *The Avocet* is published, our most recent annual appeal should have landed in your mailbox. I hope you respond generously. This one letter raises about one-third of our annual budget, and thus allows us to focus more of our time on the conservation, education, and birding services that warrant your support.

What I'm most proud of

As my time with the chapter draws to a close (for now at least), several people have asked me what accomplishments during my time here I am most proud of. So here's a short list:

The Water District — As was mentioned in this year's annual appeal letter, the transformation of the Water District from a more traditional flood control and water supply entity to a progressive, more holistic organization that considers the many ways in which the people of this region interact with water resources has, over the last decade, been dramatic. What credit can we take for that? A very significant portion. In my first years with SCVAS, it would be fair to say that we were often at odds with the District. Critical of many of their policies and on-the-ground projects, I fought Board and staff members on a regular basis.

Slowly, the relationship changed. Perhaps I softened my approach and understood the many factors that have to be balanced in making decisions on multi-

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million dollar projects. Certainly the District evolved to embrace many of the policies, and some of the philosophy, we were fighting for. Whatever the exact reasons, we now have a strong, mutually supportive relationship with the District.

I still have some significant disagreements with the District. For example, its policies relating to statewide water supply could still be described as near Neanderthal, not reflective of the majority of the people it serves. Nonetheless, we have written letters of support for several of their grant applications; they have funded some of our recent work; I sit in an advisory role on a number of District committees; and we continue to work in a productive manner to forge new District policies and shape new projects in a manner that respects the impressive natural resources remaining in our valley and surrounding lands.

The Ulistac Natural Area — Most of the time, we do not try to stop development. Frankly, that is often an unrealistic goal given the money and power held by the developers. On occasion, however, we take a tougher stand, saying that “this piece of land” should remain open for the people and wildlife of our community. Nowhere was that tougher stand more on display than with a 40-acre stretch of an old golf course along the Guadalupe River

in the City of Santa Clara.

When then SCVAS Vice-President Clysta Seney came to me with the proposal to stop the sale of this property by the City, which owned it, and convince them to declare it the City’s first and only open space preserve, I gave us about a 10% chance of saving some of the land. After all, it was 1997 — near the height of the boom — and the land was worth at least a million dollars an acre.

Nonetheless, eight months later and after a lot of work by SCVAS and scores of volunteers, we had a unanimous vote to save the whole darned thing. We then wrote the first grant to begin restoration of the property. Now, trails crisscross the site, a native plant garden hosts birds and butterflies in impressive numbers, approximately 200 oak seedlings are slowly growing into a future oak forest, and the city is restoring wetlands and riparian habitat out at Ulistac.

I love to note that in this one campaign we saved \$40 million worth of land — the equivalent of the current SCVAS budget for the next 160 years. There’s no way that POST, or The Nature Conservancy, or a city or county parks department would ever spend that much money acquiring just 40 acres. If this land was going to be saved, only advocacy could do it. And we did it!

“Thank you” number three: to the

volunteers. As with Ulistac, many of our conservation victories would not be possible, not even imaginable, without the caring people who take time from their busy lives to help SCVAS make the South Bay a better place to live. Take Chris and Jeanne Salander, who met during the campaign to save Ulistac, eventually married, and put their hearts not only into each other but also into this piece of land. I would not be exaggerating to say that they have since put more than 1,000 hours into building this idea of an urban open space preserve into reality. Some people give an hour here or there, some give a day or two, and some give a good slice of their lives. All of these people are needed to see this organization thrive.

Alviso

The first time I drove into Alviso in North San Jose, I noticed something was different. Not a lot of pavement here, no plastic strip malls, no fast food, no office buildings to speak of. Instead, there were Bay breezes, Northern Harriers prowling ample open spaces, lots of children out on the sidewalks and streets, and the distinct feel of small town Mexico meshing with the history of the Valley of Heart’s Delight.

Ever since that day, we have tried to serve *la gente y la tierra de Alviso* in a special way. I’ve spent an inordinate amount of time there, working on the following:

- First on attempts to stop the expansion of the Owens Corning Landfill (we lost, but a settlement with the community brought other benefits);
- Then on the Alviso County Park Master Plan;
- Then on the Alviso Master Plan (where we won some substantial changes, such as more open space and a new gymnasium for the kids);
- Then on the Cargill Landfill redevelopment (where we won open space for Burrowing Owls and other critters and a large contribution to a community fund);
- Then on Cisco Systems Site 6 (where we won more open space for Burrowing

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*A family enjoys Ulistac Natural Area —
Santa Clara’s jewel and an SCVAS success story, photo by Craig Breon.*

Alviso victories especially gratifying

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Owls and wetlands, as well as additional parkland for the community and significant traffic improvements);

- Then on the U.S. Dataports development (where we won more land for Burrowing Owls as well as a sizable contribution to community benefits);

- And most recently on a proposed project to restore more than twenty acres of illegally-filled wetlands, to be added to New Chicago Marsh (home of some of the best local rare bird sightings in recent years).

Personally, I have something that I'm especially proud of accomplishing in Alviso. In 2000, I nominated Luis and Maria Tapia to receive a "Community Heroes" award from the Crissy Field Center in San Francisco. Luis and Maria have been activists and leaders in their community since the 1960's, when they fought for integration of local schools, through the absorption of Alviso into San Jose, and through many of the campaigns I mentioned above. All the while, they served their community in smaller ways as well, such as Maria's work with other women in the community to provide food for weddings and funerals for those who might otherwise have a hard time affording that.

So, "Thank you" number four: to people like Luis and Maria Tapia who care so much about their community — you can't help but want to work with them. Thanks also to Maria for all the great food when I dropped by (but please, no more menudo).

"Thank you" number five goes to the many good people who have populated the SCVAS Board over time. In Alviso, they allowed me to work not only on wildlife and habitat issues, but also to work on some community issues, such as that new gymnasium. The Board and I have crafted a lot of policies and priorities together, melding our opinions to work towards fulfilling this organization's mission. At times they have given me free reign, and at other times reigned me in (when I likely needed it). That interaction and support has been crucial to my development as a professional conservationist.

Alviso is now undergoing some major changes — new housing, office complexes, and wider roads. I hope its residents manage to maintain their unique neighborhood and vital open spaces, and Audubon continues to help them do that.



Craig tends an oak seedling at Ulistac Natural Area, photo by Tang Tao.

Speaking the truth to San Jose

People I deal with often refer to San Jose as the "800 Pound Gorilla" of our region. I take offense at that... on behalf of the gorillas. The worst thing about this job is losing, losing at things that I really care about, that go to the core of myself as a passionate human being. This feeling is all the worse when a bad decision is made for little or no reason. We often argue for very reasonable changes, changes that would cost little (i.e. relative to overall profit) and yet provide long-term benefit. No place locally is more frustrating to argue reasonably with than the City of San Jose.

We have had substantial victories in San Jose (note the above work in Alviso as an example). Nonetheless, we have had more than our fair share of losses there. I have been criticized for being too strident, too unreasonable in my approach to the City. My response would be the same as a French actress once said about her personal life, "*Je ne regret rien.*" Of course, she probably had regrets as well, as I do, but the sentiment is right. One of the best things I can say about my work in San Jose is that even when I lost, I knew

that many of the Council members and staff people knew that I what I was asking for was right.

Quakers have a term called "bearing witness." It means, roughly, that due to their pacifist ways, they protest bad acts by simply being there as witnesses. While I have stood many times in front of the San Jose Council knowing that I could make positive change, there were many other times when I made my arguments knowing that, at the end of the day, I was simply bearing witness. The time was still worth it, and I'm proud of the stances we took.

Don't take this as a blanket indictment of the City's leadership and staff. Councilwoman Linda Lezotte, for example, has been an intelligent, caring voice for years [See Councilwoman Lezotte's tribute to Craig on opposite page], and is just one of the many leaders who want to do what's best for their city. Still, they make a lot of lousy land use decisions, and I only wish I could have been there more often to tell them so.

Behind the scenes victories

Sometimes we win even when the public at large doesn't realize it. It may not be packageable in the news, or it may be a slow victory that is legitimately tough to see, but we win nonetheless. I savor these victories, while at the same time I sometimes bristle at the lack of credit for SCVAS. In the end, we have to remember that the credit is less important than the outcome.

I'll give you one example: Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve. This 1,100-acre property in the hills above Los Gatos might have succumbed to housing and golf course development. Might have, except for the fact that SCVAS along with the Sierra Club, Greenbelt Alliance, Committee for Green Foothills, and local residents defeated one proposal and were heading towards defeating a second development scenario when the property owner agreed to sell to the

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Behind the scenes *cont'd.*

Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District.

In the end, the papers touted the Midpen purchase (and deservedly so), while mentioning that the County Board of Supervisors had turned down development proposals for the land. Somewhat lost was the fact that without our work, the undeveloped land would never have been there for Midpen to buy. (Another very similar example would be Bair Island near Redwood City, but that's too long a story to get into.)

Suffice it to say that behind the scenes we are making things happen. If someday The Nature Conservancy purchases Sargent Ranch, we will again play the role of silent partner in that acquisition. While I would have to admit that the limelight is gratifying, I'll take the victory for conservationists any day.

"Thank you" number six: to the other regional conservation organizations and their employees, Boards of Directors, and volunteers. Rarely does a sizable conservation victory occur in this county without a good amount of collaboration. Please give your time and/or donations to all of these worthwhile community groups.

OK, enough

As I write, I am nearing midnight Sunday, no longer near Stevens Creek, but still thinking about it. Several years ago, on a REALLY hot day in the summer, I waded out into the creek to cool my toes. The feeling was so good that I ventured upstream a bit to a bend in the creek just below the McClellan road bridge, where a sharp turn has allowed the high flows of the rainy season to scour the creek bed down deep. I didn't know how deep until I stepped in. Neck high in the cool water, all I could think about was how refreshed I felt, and how wonderful to be immersed in nature, the pure joy of it flowing around me.

I wish that feeling for all of us.

A Voice for the Wilderness

San Jose Councilwoman calls Craig Breon a "champion" of local environmental scene

My favorite part of driving Highway 280 is around the Portola Valley/Stanford area. I've always wanted to take a stroll along those beautiful hillsides and forest to the west. One day about seven or eight years ago I received a call from my friend Craig Breon. Ever been on a hike with Craig? I can hear some of you chuckling as you read this. Perhaps you had the adventure I did one Saturday long ago. I met Craig at his home in Portola Valley and drove to the appropriate trail head. We hiked along to the top of a lovely rolling hill and surveyed the valley to the east.

After about an hour or so of hiking, rather than backtrack our steps we headed into the underbrush looking for "that shortcut trail" Craig had remembered from another hike. Well, the 2-person trail quickly became a 1-person trail, then a horse trail, then a dog trail, then a rabbit trail, then a mouse trail — you get my drift. Hopelessly without a trail to follow, we followed our instincts and common sense. Just head down the hill and we should hit the road, some road, any road would do. From there we would easily find home. Needless to say we survived.

Nice story, but my point? You might not always know where Craig is going or why, but his determination to get you there is unrelenting.

I first met Craig while I was a Planning Commissioner for the City of San Jose. Who was this young man, shirt not quite ironed, hair a little askew, challenging the City to implement its riparian corridor policy, protect burrowing owls, and increase/enforce environmental mitigation? During the past seven or eight years of rapid development in San Jose, Craig has been there advocating for environmentally sound alternatives to sprawl, pollution, and ruined habitat. As a Planning Commissioner I welcomed Craig's challenge to require more than the minimal environmental mitigation, to question the necessity of "overriding considerations" when an environmentally preferable solution was before us. His greatest talent lies in his ability to point out the obvious to policy makers and ask them to do the right thing. As a councilmember, I respect his ability to know when the votes aren't there, but to make the environmentally sound argument anyway.

I believe we have a stronger riparian policy, greener city and more savvy planning staff because of Craig's ability to work with staff (and around them, if necessary) to protect the environment. Craig has his detractors, as does anyone passionate about their beliefs. They can disagree about his beliefs, but none can fault him for his passionate belief that the environment needs champions. For eleven years Craig has been a champion for the environment with Audubon. He's off on a new hike. The trail ahead is as unclear as it was that Saturday morning. Follow your instincts as you travel, but come home again, my friend.



—Linda J. LeZotte
San Jose City Council, District 1

From Lynn Tennefoss to Craig Breon, SCVAS has been keeping the South Bay green

by Deborah Jamison

SCVAS and I go back a ways, and in a sense have come full circle .

It all started in 1984 when I moved to Cupertino and took a staff position with the Peninsula Conservation Center Foundation (now Acterra). I found myself working alongside Lynn Tennefoss, Managing Director of SCVAS, both physically and programatically. My small desk area was shared closely with Lynn such that we knew each other's business whether we wanted to or not! Plus, my duties included co-leading the South Bay Wetlands Coalition with Lynn, as well as working on other environmental issues of concern to both of our organizations. Having been an active member of New Jersey Audubon Society, I joined the chapter and began a happy collaboration with this multi-talented woman. Lynn did it all. She was SCVAS's only staff person with a lot of administrative duties, yet still managed to be a very respected and productive leader in the Peninsula and South Bay environmental communities. I look back fondly on those years of working with Lynn to save habitat.

But Lynn moved on and so did I. Around 1990, Cupertino environmentalist and community leader Nancy Hertert told me that the fate of two buildings along Stevens Creek were soon to be decided by the city. One was the McClellan Ranch house, and the other the Simms house just across the creek from McClellan Ranch. It took no more than a millisecond for me to realize that either of these houses should become the next headquarters for SCVAS! The chapter had grown and needed more space, and what could be better than having offices on a nature preserve? The end result of a lot of lobbying and organizing was that the ranch house was designated the Cupertino Environmental Center and SCVAS its principal occupant! It was a fortunate development for Cupertino to have one of the region's biggest and most active conservation organizations in our city.

Meanwhile, I served on the McClellan Ranch Master Plan committee and spent the next 2 1/2 years writing and getting the plan approved by the city. Other than going on birding field trips and pledging for one of the birdathon teams, I wasn't real involved with chapter activities during that time. Shortly after the Master Plan was completed and approved, Craig Breon was hired in a new SCVAS staff position, Environmental Advocate.

I started to become aware and impressed with his work through *The Avocet* and began to realize that Craig was unusual. The articles were sometimes personal, and expressed ideas that would have been suppressed by other more cautious

and self-editing representatives of "respectable" conservation groups. For example, I'll never forget the article titled: "Confession: I'm a Big Fan of Floods" (February 1998). In it he boldly declares (after expressing sorrow for human flood victims): "I really enjoy floods . . . I love to see Mother Nature mess with people . . . I'd rather be swept away in a creek and dashed against a coast live oak than meet death in a vehicle collision." Now this was a man after my own heart! I had just come back from a trail run to observe the torrent of water that made Stevens Creek and Stevens Canyon Rd. one big river. It

was exciting to see the creek take over the whole canyon, its historical domain. "Chalk one up for nature!" I told myself. Craig was obviously unafraid to express his opinions and the chapter unafraid to allow him to do so. I was proud and pleased that the chapter had created the Advocate position, managed to find a real leader to fill it, and resided in my town to boot! Even though we barely knew each other, I remember calling him up to tell him how much I liked that article.

"We have many opportunities to preserve and restore, to educate and inspire, to struggle and pressure here, where we live and where we share space with our fellow creatures."

After several years of helping to downsize the Seminary property development in Cupertino, fighting a couple of inappropriate uses for McClellan Ranch, and various other projects, an issue arose that continues to consume my time. A task force was recommending that a wide, hard-surfaced, multi-use (bicycles, skateboards, etc.) trail be constructed through McClellan Ranch Park. Having helped write the Master Plan, and understanding the well-documented purposes for setting aside McClellan Ranch for historical and natural preservation only, I knew that this type of trail was prohibited by city ordinance, not appropriate, and had to be challenged. The city subsequently decided to begin a more comprehensive plan for the entire Stevens Creek corridor which to date includes significant riparian restoration, no small thanks to Craig's persistent input. When Craig talks, city officials listen. The trail issue is still unresolved, and I hope that the chapter can continue to influence the city without Craig's active participation in the debate next year.

Thus began the collaboration with Craig and other chapter activists that I now have, as I once did at my old PCCF position with Lynn. The parallels aren't perfect, but it seems my destiny to be working with SCVAS on local issues.

In recent years, my husband Steve and I have become, in the parlance of non-profit development, "major donors." SCVAS' important leadership role in preserving and restoring

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The year we hired an Advocate

by *Clysta McLemore*

It is February of 1995. I am the Board member assigned to conduct a performance review for the new SCVAS Environmental Advocate (EA). Craig Breon has now completed his first year and the Board had committed to do the review by November 1st of 1994 in his contract. Craig is running fast in a Valley that is on a fast track. Already the Board is running behind.

Craig and I sit outside, under the trees in front of the Blacksmith's shop, a light, cool breeze carries bird songs to our conversation. We begin with me asking him how he thinks he is doing.

Lynn to Craig con't-

habitat in Santa Clara County during Craig's tenure was the main reason why we decided to prioritize SCVAS as a recipient of our donation dollars. We especially appreciated the chapter's efforts to watchdog projects to make sure promised mitigation measures actually got done. And Craig's reasoned and respected voice seemed to be everywhere habitat and wildlife were at risk, just as Lynn's was twenty years ago.

Among all the worthy causes that vie for our financial support, I submit that you could do no better than to support this particular Audubon chapter. There are problems needing solutions all over the globe, that's for sure. But we have endangered species here. We have disappearing habitat here. We have many opportunities to preserve and restore, to educate and inspire, to struggle and pressure here, where we live and where we share space with our fellow creatures. The chapter needs your support now more than ever as it transitions to a new executive director and plans to re-establish the position of environmental advocate. Join us in becoming donors above and beyond your membership dues. We must continue Craig's legacy.

He is in his late twenties, an attorney by education with an engaging smile, unruly wavy brown hair and a lack of ironing skills. The Environmental Action Committee (EAC), my favorite, has come alive under his leadership this last year.

He is saying that he's uncertain about his accomplishments. In finding his place he has upset existing pecking orders. No doubt.

Craig does not know that I have gone out and interviewed SCVAS partners and stakeholders — aides to local legislators, the Water District, fellow Board members, other environmental organizations. The Board wants to know if this risk, this investment in an EA role is paying off. I had asked; do you know Craig, how does he represent SCVAS, what do you think the SCVAS environmental priorities are?

As a member of both the EAC and the Board I'd seen Craig at least a couple of times every month. I am surprised as I listen to him express his uncertainty — and then consider that this is probably his first ever performance review. Mine was in the 1970's so I've had a little more experience, albeit in business. We share performance anxiety stories and laugh while watching a Nuttall's Woodpecker forage above.

Lotta work, little pay

I know he is working over 40 hours a week on this low-paying 20 hour job. The comments from the folks I interviewed were consistent: first class, articulate, passionate, dedicated, electric. They all knew what SCVAS' priorities were. He is surprised when I share this.

A relative newcomer to birding, Craig took on a sector in the 1994 Christmas Bird Count (CBC) — because it was the right thing to do. Since then he has become an old CBC pro and a darn good birder. His willingness to go above and beyond EAC impressed the Board in 1994. Participating in the CBC was not in his job description.

My memory fades so I pull out Craig's first review from my files. Two pages of accomplishments remind me of how little we had in place when Craig came and how

much he did the first year. I chuckle at one of the "goals for next year:" build an organized filing system. In those first years Craig's cubby-hole had piles of EIRs stacked on the floors, accumulated faxes and miscellaneous reports and "please call ASAP" notes strewn about. Perhaps that was the one goal that always remained on Craig's "to do" list.

Another task on the 1995 goal list: become electronically linked to local agencies and NAS. These days Craig seems to have evolved a computer pouch such that he is always plugged in and his piles of paper have become html computer links. This method of outreach via the Internet has made SCVAS a stronger organization.

The EAC grew effective working with Craig. An example of this was the counsel and strategy he provided for two years to help the citizens of Santa Clara in 1998 finally preserve and plan 40 acres of open space along the Guadalupe River. Ulistac Natural Area is now an environmental resource for both the citizens of Santa Clara as well as students of the Santa Clara Unified School District and Santa Clara University. When we began that campaign we were told it couldn't be done because that land was worth millions. Craig helped broaden the support base and clarify the issues so we were able to last through the long haul.

Craig and the EAC kept awareness of the plight of Burrowing Owls in Santa Clara County in front of local politicians. The County's General Plan and key development projects impacting creeks were reviewed and commented on. Ongoing campaigns to save our hillsides and urban growth boundaries were put in place. Sargeant Ranch, Pajaro riparian areas, Coyote Ridge and Coyote Valley took time, energy and dedicated leadership and networking. Craig was featured in Parade magazine as one of the Top Ten people for politicians and land use specialists to pay attention to in Silicon Valley.

Creeks were the Board's #1 priority in

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Fledgling advocate morphs into "Silver-tongued Creek Friend"

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deciding to hire an Environmental Advocate. Today we have an annual Creek conference and the "State of the Creeks Report," ongoing mitigation monitoring, dedicated funding from the Water District for environmental work (though it must be tapped) and an Environmental Advisory Committee for the Water District which Craig chaired in its first year. The Water District now seeks out Audubon's opinions and positions before setting environmental policy. None of this existed in 1994.

Craig also has a gift for writing and getting talented people to donate themselves to SCVAS work. He would surface and convene different constituencies, get them to share knowledge, divvy up work, define a strategy, get grants if applicable and follow through. Jill Clay on the EAC publishes a monthly Environmental Action Newsletter to get the word out beyond the Committee members. The Chapter now has talented interns, an upbeat programs coordinator and an office manager; at certain times over the last ten years Craig wore each of those hats. He held it all together while willing volunteers and Board members stretched to support him. And always the EAC stayed on task and Craig's creative *Avocet* articles kept the chapter aware of our important work.

One activity that Craig took to like a duck to water was the annual fundraising letter. Our chapter has become a model for successful fundraising for the environment. Craig understood the chapter needed donations of both time and money. He made sure the EAC was aligned with the Education Committee wherever appropriate so our effectiveness counted.

I always wonder how it would be to work for a non-profit Board. The Board members are volunteers, they change all the time and each has their own idea of what should be the number one priority. As SCVAS grew Craig had to not only

manage the wonderful volunteers, but also, the wonderful volunteer Board members. His skill was evident. When the time came the Board chose Craig to be SCVAS' Executive Director. Staff grew and Craig's leadership style became embedded into the SCVAS culture.

It's eleven years later; Craig's hair is streaked with gray and there are laugh lines around his eyes. He is in mature plumage and it is time for a long migration of his own. His legacy of environmental stewardship will continue. He has assured a funding stream, an organizational structure and a vision for the EAC. Well done, Craig.

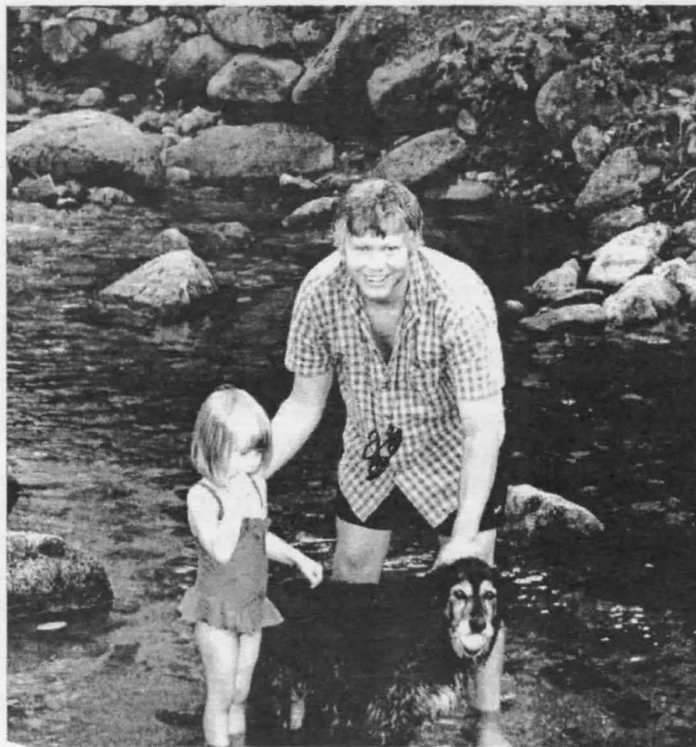
One of my favorite authors is Jake Page. Years ago he chided the AOU (American Ornithological Union) about tinkering with the common names of birds. He had no trouble with them controlling the Latin names. But he was troubled, for example, with formally renaming the

sparrow hawk to kestrel. So, Jake used poetry to give it another name: windhover.

In this independent spirit I unpoetically dub Craig Breon, in his role as the SCVAS Environmental Advocate, as the Silver-tongued Creek Friend (STCF), a bold, wide-ranging bird, numbers dropping, found in specialized habitats: Environmental Action Committee meetings, County Supervisor's offices, City Council Chambers, Burrowing Owl Consortiums, Water District Board Meetings, Sacramento and the great outdoors. Its call is always a call to action and its song is full of hope.

The EAC will always protect habitat in Santa Clara Valley for the STCF and wish this wild bird nothing but warm thermals, meandering creeks and lots of cover. We will keep our eye out for his return.

With love and gratitude, Craig. The EAC thanks you for a decade of powerful leadership.



Craig with his niece, Brook, and favorite dog in the whole world, Shasta. All are standing in a creek with moving water, one of Craig's favorite aspects of nature. Photo by David Hall.

Editor's perspective

He didn't do it for the money

by Grant Hoyt

Clysta McLemore's very warm and heartfelt tribute to Craig Breon (Page 7) brought back a lot of memories for me. I was also a member of the Personnel Committee in 1994, and I can tell you that hiring SCVAS' first Environmental Advocate was damn exciting. Here our little old Audubon chapter was taking a giant leap forward by doubling our work force (from one to two employees) and making the audacious commitment to actually pay this new employee the staggering sum of \$12,500 annually for 20 hours a week to protect habitat and open space in the Santa Clara Valley. Local environmentalists knew that the booming Silicon Valley economy, while obviously beneficial in many ways, could have devastating effects on wetlands, riparian corridors, and the very ecological health of our region. The SCVAS Board, including a mix of birders, educators, and conservationists, decided to make Audubon an active force for protecting and preserving bird and wildlife habitat in the South Bay region by hiring an Advocate, and I'm so glad we did.

Little did I know that Craig Breon, the personable young law school graduate from Portola Valley, would make such a tremendous impact on the environmental scene when he accepted the Advocate's position. As Clysta pointed out in her article, Craig was indeed the second choice of the Personnel Committee. His now-legendary fondness for loquacity was quite evident in his first interview, and mildly alienated a couple of the Committee members, but his intelligence, sincerity, and almost nonchalant lack of concern for financial compensation tipped the scales in his favor. I found myself, in spite of my aversion to long-winded types, a supporter of Craig over several other worthy candidates for the job. I'd bet that every member of that committee would agree that we made the right choice.

Craig does talk a lot, but that's because he has a lot to say and *because he cares*. When he took the half-time job for the paltry salary he made it clear that he could afford to do so, and that his mission in life did not necessarily include making a lot of money. Over the years it's been abundantly clear to all of us who have worked with him that he means it. Craig's passion for environmental causes comes from his very heart and soul; he wouldn't have been with us for 11 years, working at least 50-hour weeks, always underpaid and overcommitted, if it were otherwise. Make no mistake, this man's dedication to protecting wildlife habitat and open space has been hugely beneficial to every birder, hiker, conservationist and citizen who appreciates the struggle to maintain a balanced, healthy ecosystem in the teeming Santa Clara Valley region.

As a Board and Committee member who hired and supervised Craig, and as editor of this newsletter, I've gotten to know Craig pretty well. He is anything but one-dimensional (ever listened to his radio show?) and able to converse enthusiastically on any number of subjects. He's also thoughtful, introspective, and, yes, a good listener (you may need to let him know when it's time to listen, but he will). The eclectic mix of traits I noticed during his first interviews — amiable, confident, humble, passionate, cerebral, spiritual — have certainly manifested themselves in the numerous *Avocet* articles he's written. (So has the uncanny knack for tardiness — Craig never met a deadline he didn't miss — but that's a pretty typical editor's lament, so we'll just ignore it and move on.) I've toned down the rhetoric in his *Avocet* material more than a few times, but generally let him go ahead and rant, muse, opine and declaim as he wishes, and I regularly hear from readers who enjoy his combination of quirky first-person narrative and hard-hitting environmental reportage.

I wish I'd spent more time with Craig away from Audubon; he's a fascinating character. I think one of the reasons he and I get along well is our mutual appreciation for humor — running the gamut from sick and twisted to whimsical and silly — as therapy. (The costume he concocted for the large Halloween party we threw a couple years ago defies description — “political activist meets Nanook of the North” is the best I can do.) My wife and I are also very grateful to Craig for house- and pet-sitting for us on numerous occasions over the past several years. In particular, our large Akita dog, Rusty, will be distressed to learn that Craig will no longer be available; Rusty absolutely *loves* Craig.

Whatever the future holds for Craig, I hope we keep in touch with him. I'm excited that he's taking off on a world adventure, the kind that many of us never quite get around to as adults. If he ends up back on the Peninsula, he'll be welcome at SCVAS (even if we can't hire him back, he could volunteer for the EAC!). At the very least, I will demand that he not only write a couple of articles for this newsletter upon his return, but also a detailed account of the cool new birds he saw in all those exotic places. We may have hired you as an Advocate, my friend, but we turned you into a birder, and don't you forget it!

What does future hold for SCVAS? *cont'd. from Page 1*

well as closed sessions of the Board when issues such as potential litigation are discussed. The updated bylaws will have to be passed by a majority of members at a future membership meeting, probably early next year.

In addition to those organizational documents, SCVAS is now printing our first ever professional-looking brochure. Up to now, we have had a two-page handout that we copied when needed. The new brochure will allow us to communicate our mission, goals, and accomplishments to a broader audience, hopefully resulting in increased local memberships.

We already had a Strategic Plan in place for the chapter, as well as a five-year financial projection for income and expenses. The Board adopted the latest version of the Strategic Plan two years ago, and to date we are on track with nearly all the targets for programs, operations, membership, and chapter services.

Our Environmental Action Committee has also been working through the many conservation projects we are currently involved in, and those that we may take on in the future. The idea is to prioritize these projects and figure out which ones volunteers can take on and which should be the responsibility of staff. It is assumed that the new Director will not be able to tackle quite the same number of projects that I have in recent years. That's just a fact, since we are losing someone with eleven years of experience locally, and all the knowledge of the land, the projects, and the players involved. Our prioritization should ensure that the projects most vital to our members and those where we can make the most difference stay foremost in the new Director's mind.

All these projects combine to place SCVAS on more solid organizational footing, so that the next Executive Director can step in to the position and move immediately to advocacy and program development.

The Job Search

We put out the job announcement for the Executive Director's position in mid-October. To date, we have about half a dozen good candidates, and we will begin interviewing toward the end of November. We hope to make an offer of employment sometime in December.

Luckily, I'm flexible in my travel plans. Therefore, we can wait until the right candidate for this position is found, and then there will be a period of overlap where I can work with the new Director to ensure a smooth transition.

Of course, the new Director will bring with them new skills and background, and I believe that is a healthy thing for SCVAS. If they are not quite as good a public speaker as I am, they will almost certainly be better organized. They will view the conservation issues of our region with different eyes, and they will come to decisions with the Board, staff, and volunteers in a different manner. That's all good. At times, I have worried in recent years that our conservation work in particular had become so closely identified with me that we might be missing some opportunities to approach problems with a fresh perspective.

Whoever takes the job, I am counting on all of you to support them in their new endeavor. We have an impressive collection of minds and hearts in our chapter, and the new Director will be greatly served if he/she relies on that base and builds upon it.

Possible New Directions

We will remain a strong birding, education, and conservation organization, but I can't help wondering what else we could be as well. Over the years, many opportunities for new programs and activities have come along — some we have taken, and others we have declined. Perhaps the new Director, working closely with the Board and staff, will take flight in a new direction. Here are a few of the possibilities:

- It makes sense to me that Audubon

members in San Benito County should be part of our chapter. Currently they become members of the Monterey Bay Audubon Society. Not only are we geographically closer to the cities of San Benito County, but many of those people work in the Santa Clara Valley, and surely our growth has a much larger impact on Hollister and San Juan Bautista than does growth in Monterey Bay. Finally, we already do some work in San Benito, and we have a much greater capacity to expand our work in that county than does Monterey Bay Audubon.

- What about becoming a landowner? Many Audubon chapters run wildlife sanctuaries of various sizes. Taking on land ownership certainly comes with burdens as well as benefits, but perhaps as the chapter grows in terms of financial resources and capacity, this would be a good direction.

- We could partner to a greater extent with Cupertino in establishing the new environmental and science center at McClellan Ranch. We already support the concept, and we will certainly benefit from the additional classroom space placed on the site of a former mobile home, so no new lands will be covered. If we decided to help plan and raise funds for the project, we could end up with a facility that better suits our needs, with greener building techniques, and perhaps ask the City for reduced rent in the future to compensate the chapter for our assistance.

If you have opinions on these concepts, or if you have other ideas, please let us know. We want to reflect the values and priorities of our members, and we think we do, but we could always benefit from more input. My email is craig@scvas.org, and my phone is (408) 252-3748. One way or another, I hope the new Executive Director, and the new Environmental Advocate we hope to hire next year, will help you create the Audubon chapter that you want and will continue to support the way you have supported my work for the last eleven years.

My Travel Plans, And How You Can Help Shape Them

by Craig Breon

I have been planning this year-long trip in my mind for some time now, and slowly saving the money I would need. I've spent two years abroad before, first when I was 20 studying in England and traveling around Europe, and then when I was 22 teaching in Shanghai and traveling throughout much of China. Both of those years helped me make decisions about my future, and I hope this coming sojourn will do the same.

With that in mind, I want to give you, our readers, a chance to offer me some travel tips. Often the word of a friend is far better advice than anything from a travel guide, so I hope to tap your collective experience. Below are my current plans, but they are very flexible. Please feel free to recommend places to go, things to do, places to stay, people to meet, and give me any other advice you wish to offer.

At this point, I will likely take off in February or March in my car, and spend the first four or five months in the United States and Mexico. I will start traveling the California coast, see Baja and the Sea of Cortez, then head eastward through Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Louisiana, some of the South, and end up in Florida. I may also try to get to Cuba, though that can be difficult.

In August of next year, my girlfriend will join me, and we will then do six months in Central America, South America, and Africa. I've traveled in Central America before and found Belize and Costa Rica to be great, so I'll be going back there. This time I may try to branch out to lesser-known areas such as Nicaragua as well. I've never been to South America, but my current plans would include Venezuela, Ecuador, Chile,

Peru, Argentina, and perhaps Brazil. I've also never been to Africa, but I have a good friend living in Zimbabwe, so we will probably base ourselves there to visit several of the large game reserves in Southern Africa. Then I hope to get to West Africa — Senegal, Mali, and the Gambia — largely to hear music.

That's it — my next year in two paragraphs. I like to hike, bike, kayak (I hope to take a bike and a kayak for the U.S. portion of the trip), snorkel, raft rivers, see cultures, get to out-of-the-way spots, nap, read, and of course go birding. I also hope to see interesting environmental issues along the way, and explore how people are addressing those issues. Finally, I expect to keep some sort of a travelogue online, so if you have suggestions for that, great.

So have at it. Any advice can be sent to me at craig@scvas.org.



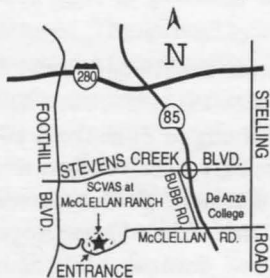
The future of SCVAS? What about branching out to San Benito County? Or managing our own wetlands restoration project.

Photo of San Felipe Lake in San Benito County by Mike Kahn.

Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society
 22221 McClellan Road
 Cupertino, CA 95014

Phone: 408-252-3747
 Fax: 408-252-2850
 E-mail: scvas@scvas.org

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OFFICERS

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 Debbie Thompson 408/227-4604

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Joan Leighton '03-'06 408/252-3747
 David McIntyre '04-'07 650/561-9356
 Ralph Schardt '03-'06 408/994-3474

STAFF

Executive Director 408/252-3748
 Craig Breon craig@scvas.org

Office Manager 408/252-3747
 Susan Bell scvas@scvas.org

Programs Coordinator 408/252-3740
 Kim Yuan-Farrell programs@scvas.org

Office Fax 408/252-2850

E-mail scvas@scvas.org
Website www.scvas.org

CHAIRPERSONS

Avocet
 Editor: Grant Hoyt 650/969-7892
 Graphics and Print Preparation
 Bonnie Bedford-White 408/261-8210

Bay Area Audubon Council Delegate
 Leda Beth Gray 831/336-1127

Education
 Bobbie Handen 408/356-4263

Environmental Action
 Nancy Teater 650/321-0252

Field Trips: Weekend
 Bob Reiling 408/253-7527

Field Trips: Weekday
 Phyllis Swanson 408/274-2349
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Photo Club
 Pete LaTourrette 650/961-2741

Programs
 Doug & Gail Cheeseman 408/741-5330

Webmaster petelat1@stanford.edu
 Pete LaTourrette 650/961-2741

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

RARE BIRD ALERT: (415) 681-7422

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