

The

# AVOCET

Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society

Fall 2021 • Vol 69 Num 4



Creek trail at McClellan Ranch Matthew Dodder

## New Class

MATTHEW DODDER

WARBLERS: PARTS I, II, III

Mon, Sept 6, 13, 20 at 7 pm  
via Zoom



Learn about the fall migration of our Warblers, from the most common and familiar to the rare and unexpected.

How can we tell them apart when they lose their breeding plumage? How can we explain so many "eastern" Parulids on our local checklist? Can we predict when and where to find them? Join us for a 3-part online examination of these mysterious and beautiful birds.

Register at [scvas.org](http://scvas.org)

## Shoshin

Matthew Dodder, Executive Director

There comes a time in many birder's lives when the everyday species become, well...less exciting. That's usually when said birder plans a trip somewhere exotic—a place with a new complement of birds. Perhaps this birder travels to another state or to a different country—someplace tropical, or even a new hemisphere! But definitely different. That change of latitude brings a distinct change in **attitude**. Every sighting is new and thrilling. Nothing is less exciting. Even the songs are different and newly challenging. That's what any birder hungers for. Not knowing **everything**.

But traveling still doesn't feel right now, does it? The thought of cramming into a stuffy airplane with more than a hundred passengers, coughing and sneezing... Nope.

Why do we occasionally get bored with our common birds anyway—the Black Phoebe, the California Towhee? Have you ever noticed how the beginning birder **never** tires of House Finches? Why is that?

I believe it's because the beginners haven't heard all the stories yet. They don't know the things you do. For instance, you've probably heard more than once something like, "I saw this bird yesterday. A woodpecker. It was blue!" **Ok**, the experienced birder thinks, *That wasn't a woodpecker...* The conversation *could* end there if one were to let it. But there is an opportunity here if the old birder continues. "Tell me more. How'd you know it was a woodpecker?" The beginner might continue (as she actually did), "it had a pointy head and was pecking on an acorn."

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You understand now. You remember making that same mistake. The conversation continues. That new birder, and I say "birder" because that is what you've helped create, might come back later and say proudly, "I saw that Steller's Jay again. I was watching it through my window. He's kind of a bully to the other birds, but that **blue** is pretty amazing."

A few days later, "I saw a different blue bird. **Not** a woodpecker. Had orange too..."

Your job is done. Or is it just starting? The **blue appreciation society** has a new member because of you. And you, the lapsed member, for a time unimpressed by Jays, now renews! That blue truly *is* wonderful!

I believe that beginning birder is all of us, or at least was all of us. And that was when birding was its most fulfilling. We could be the ones that know the answer to every mystery and cease to be excited. But that chance encounter with the new or non-birder can awaken **Shoshin**, the beginner's mind, in each of us. Make us feel what they are feeling. Teaching does that.

As we resume field trips and education programs, we need everyone to have the "beginner's mind". Not that they should lack knowledge, but rather lack the **knowing**... Don't **know** the answer right away, feel your way though it, struggle and solve. Let the beginner make you a beginner too. Your knowledge will grow tallest if you allow yourself to be as eager and open as the one who asks questions. ●



Acorn Woodpecker at its granary  
Chuq Von Rospach

## FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

In addition to our cautious return to a normal field trip schedule, and the fall start of our Wetlands Discovery Program, we will be considering the merits of an annual event. The question is, of course, should it be a physical event, or another online one such as last year? There are good arguments for both directions. We are currently looking at both options and we will keep you posted. Whatever we end up doing, it is without question we miss being together.

We miss our big social events whether they be Speaker Series, Birdathon Awards, CBC countdowns, or annual meeting, but we have also learned the value of remote. Consider the Speaker Series we've had recently, where guests came from across the country to meet us online. **Minnesota, Boston, Washington DC, Seattle**... How great is that?! Well, whatever we do with these traditionally in-person functions, we know we have to continue making them available to those folks who live too far away. So we'll be recording everything and posting on our YouTube channel.

As my opening piece implied, there is always a need for **teachers**. Our new Oak Savanna Community Science Project (OSCSP) based in North Coyote Valley, will need volunteers to help in a number of capacities ranging from bird surveys, bioblitzes, guided field trips, and curriculum building. We also need **naturalists** of every flavor to help gather eBird and iNaturalist data which will be the basis of our high school curriculum. For more information about these opportunities, see Carolyn Knight's piece in this issue, and drop her an

## Odds, Ends (and Evens)

email to find out how you specifically might assist in making our **Education Program** even better.

While we're talking about volunteers, here are some spaces we'd like to fill: Someone with an **event planning** background would be wonderful. That person might also help with locating and booking interesting and varied guests for our **Speaker Series**. It's a lot of work, but rewarding to see the calendar fill with high-calibre speakers. We strive to host Authors, Artists, Explorers, Researchers—folks who can share wonderful compelling stories with our members—perhaps you know some you'd like to suggest... A **content coordinator** would also be helpful in assembling material for both **The Avocet**, and the monthly **Avocet Update**. Diversity of stories and authors will keep our publications fresh. As we find new and more creative ways to broadcast our Chapter's activities, this position will become quite exciting.

Our Nature Shop is now fully open for visitors during the week, and our bookshelves have been stocked with new titles, and many "gently used" books available at discounted prices. T-shirts are always available, but are in short supply, so drop in for a visit. We're always happy to see you. It's been too long!

**Matthew Dodder**  
Executive Director



**Barry Langdon-Lassagne**  
Board President

As Chuq Von Rospach journeys his way north to his new home in Washington State, I wanted to take a moment to express my appreciation for all he has done for our Chapter and for the exemplary way he has handled the transition of his many volunteer duties to his successors. Chuq has enriched our birding lives in so many ways I'm not sure I can do his work justice. Whether you know it or not, Chuq has made your birding life better.

When a person does their job really well, they can be almost invisible: this is an apt description of Chuq's handling of the South-Bay-Birds email list. Our list has stayed focussed on its core—bird sightings—as a result of Chuq's gentle but firm guidance in the background. Without someone (or someones) to keep everyone on-topic, mailing lists can have a habit of devolving off their primary focus or being derailed by acerbic interchanges. Not only has Chuq kept this list on track, but he he's been doing it since 2004! (n.b. He's actually been doing this type of work since the 1980's; in fact, the word netiquette was coined by Chuq in 1983. Fitting.)

Now he's paved the way for Jim Dehnert to take on this role and keep Chuq's good work going. Chuq began training Jim and others how to do list management in 2019 and handed the reins over to Jim early this year, with Brooke Miller assisting. During this transition time, he also worked with Matthew and the Board to move ownership of South-Bay-Birds to SCVAS, where it now resides.

## A FOND SENDOFF for Chuq Von Rospach

When the Birdathon Committee needed a leader, of course Chuq volunteered. He had been an active participant in the Birdathons for many years and had the organizational skills needed to guide the group to success. Chuq recruited me to the committee and when he stepped down I became chair and built on his solid foundation. At the same time that Chuq took on the Birdathon Committee, he began chairing the Outreach Committee. His successor, Ann Hepenstal, has followed in his footsteps and Outreach is now one of our most active and engaged committees.

Chuq has helped launch many new birders through teaching and leading field trips. He encouraged everyone to explore and in doing so, he naturally led them to take an interest in SCVAS. Many of those students have become teachers themselves. They joined our chapter and eventually lead field trips to help others like themselves on their own journeys. Chuq's favorite trips to lead were to the refuges of the Central Valley, especially Merced National Wildlife Refuge. He created an eBook with beautiful photos and stories of his many trips to Merced, called **And the Geese Exploded** which you can find on his website at [www.chuq.me](http://www.chuq.me). Chuq's beautiful bird photography has been featured on our website and graced the pages of **The Avocet** many times.

Volunteering at SCVAS changed both Chuq and our Chapter for the better. Our organization is strong because of the people who work together to make it so. I'm proud of all our

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# WHAT TO LOOK FOR Matthew Dodder Executive Director



Everything happens on schedule, and for a reason. At least in the natural world. Take Autumn for example. The shortening day, the lowering temperatures, the disappearance of flowers, the appearance of seeds and berries... All due to that small tilt of the earth. These circumstances then provoke birds to respond, in a variety of ways, with each species on its own schedule.

## On Time

Late summer we saw the arrival of some post-breeding Terns. Elegant, Least, Black. They had completed their nest cycle and paused here before heading toward their wintering grounds. The Black Tern showed up earlier than usual this year, impressing scores of birders with its fabulous jet black breeding plumage. It looked for all intents and purposes like a three-dimensional silhouette—eyeless and impossibly cool. As it lingered, we began to see its plumage change—slowly dusting white, making it look more like the later summer Black Terns we usually get. That change in appearance was another sign of the new season we face and the transitory conditions.

Adults within many bird families undergo dramatic changes after breeding. Their colorful feathers show the wear and tear of wind, sun and the exertion of raising young. Among our migrant Shorebirds, the crisp and colorful juveniles show up after the worn adults. Almost everyone is traveling south, from one seasonal opportunity to another, making fuel stops wherever the habitat can provide. Shorebirds assemble in enormous mixed species groups in the marsh and on the salt ponds where food fuel is abundant, and Warblers find the woods and thickets where weary travelers can hide and seek. All of them feeding voraciously before moving on again. Clearly, many birds arrive and stay for the Bay Area winter, and their first arrivals occur now.

For two years now, I've written about Shorebirds and Warblers that show up in fall. These two large groups are conspicuous arrivals and among the most welcome among birders, especially when something less common shows up. This is an established pattern, and our checklist confirms these occurrences. But exactly when and where the next rarity will be discovered is the question on everyone's mind. We birders gather in droves to search for what we need.

## Wonderfully Common

This year I want to focus on some common arrivals. Cedar Waxwings—the handsome and familiar eater of berries. As I write this, there isn't a Waxwing in sight. A month from now when this issue is released, I expect flocks of Waxwings and their sibilant whistles will be heard throughout the day as they feast on small berries on my street. Someone asked me recently if they could find a Waxwing during their summer vacation. My answer was disappointing, but honest. "Come back in September." That's when the food they like will be available.

The first few of the many thousands of "Crowned Sparrows", (Golden-crowned and White-crowned) that will dominate the area begin to arrive... in September. They are highly migratory, of course. But interestingly, if you find yourself on the coast in July and spot a White-crowned Sparrow, it's not a rarity. That will be one of the resident populations, a non-migratory subspecies confined to the fog belt on the immediate coast.

There are more than a few Lincoln's Sparrows reports in spring and summer in the Bay Area, but almost without fail, these turn out to be the confusingly similar juvenile Song Sparrow. The bulk of our real Lincoln's Sparrows will start to arrive in September. While we're on the topic, I wonder what *Melospiza lincolnii* will be called if its eponymous name is abandoned...

Similarly, the replacement of breeding Swainson's Thrush with wintering Hermit Thrush is worth watching. The two species are famously puzzling to birders, especially during the time when both may be encountered—September. Yes, keep an eye open for the rufous tail of Hermit Thrush, but also watch for its frequent nervous wing and tail flicking, which is not performed by Swainson's Thrush. Their call notes are distinctive as well as their facial pattern—Hermit with an eye ring, Swainson's with "spectacles".

## Look Up

The annual fall Raptor migration can be spectacular on Hawk Hill in the Marin Headlands. One thing that has always baffled me is the large numbers of Broad-winged Hawks that show

Photos L to R:  
Lincoln's Sparrow, Golden-crowned Sparrow, Western Gull,  
Hermit Thrush, White-crowned Sparrow *Tom Grey*

## FIELD TRIP LEADERS NEEDED

SCVAS is growing our team of field trip leaders. We are looking for a diverse group of people who are enthusiastic about sharing their love of birds. We'll help you develop the kind of field trips you want to lead, whether it's for special groups such as bilingual trips or wheelchair accessible trips, or a bird walk in your favorite park, a photowalk, or whatever type of trip you feel enthusiastic about.

Contact *Eve Meier* at [fieldtrips@scvas.org](mailto:fieldtrips@scvas.org) if you are interested in joining our team of field trip leaders.

up on Hawk Hill each fall. From mid-September through October, Broadwings can be seen by the dozens as they cross the Golden Gate and onto the Peninsula. What happens to them after that? Primarily they are seen south in the hills and along the coast from Pacifica to Half Moon Bay, Santa Cruz and Monterey. But only rarely in Santa Clara County. They clearly show a preference for the cooler climate. But let's make this the fall we intercept one or two of them, possibly in... September.

And now one of my favorite topics, Gulls. I do love a challenge, and the occasional surprise among the hundreds of expected birds is quite a reward after you patiently scope through a flock. California Gull is our default. It breeds right here. The Western Gull breeds on the immediate coast and on offshore islands. So finding Western Gull in Santa Clara County is not easy, until September, or so. That's when our checklist sees a bump in Western Gull numbers and they are easier to find. Herring Gulls begin to increase in numbers about this time too. They remain with us for the winter, but of course they breed far to the north. Both of these birds are large, but if anything, Glaucous-winged Gull is even bulkier. Look for it in September too. I can't help but notice that it was September of 2020 that a Sabine's Gull showed up at the Sunnyvale ponds... Might be worth another look there this month. We can talk about the other Larids in the winter issue.

In closing, the September-October period has its traditional and expected natural events. But year after year we see more obvious impacts of climate change such as unseasonably severe weather. On top of that, we have experienced devastating fires. All of this must have an impact on our birds. So in addition to watching for what is expected, and what is historically verifiable, let's all watch for the new and unexpected—changes in the pattern... Everything happens for a reason. ●



Broad-winged Hawk  
*Bill Walker*

Cedar Waxwing  
*Bill Pelletier*

Sabine's Gull  
*Tom Grey*



Shani Kleinhaus, Environmental Advocate  
Giulianna Pendleton, Advocacy Assistant

## Welcome Our New EA Assistant!

Our newest staff person, Giulianna Pendleton, joined us in May. A Los Gatos native, she has supported advocacy efforts on bird safe design measures, light pollution, native plant restoration, land use and development, and riparian setbacks.

*Since graduating from Gonzaga University in Spring 2020, I have explored areas of environmental advocacy: working on a political campaign in Alaska, volunteering with climate change and sustainability focused groups, and volunteering in my own town of Los Gatos. I realized I wanted to focus my time and energy ensuring rights for nature and enhancing environmental protections for wildlife. I feel so lucky to work with SCVAS as the Environmental Advocacy Assistant. Through Shani's guidance and mentorship, I am learning how to research and understand land use and development plans, advocate for birds and their habitat, and communicate our SCVAS positions to various audiences. **Giulianna***

## Light & Bird Safety

Artificial light at night attracts migratory birds, diverting them away from healthy habitats and migration routes to inhospitable urban areas where food is scarce, and collision risks are high. We are engaged with the Los Gatos General Plan Update, the San Jose Parks and Recreation Services, the Santa Clara County Library District, private developers, and others.

One major focus has been the proposed **Breeze of Innovation light tower** in **Arena Green Park, San Jose**. As an SCVAS member, you have most likely seen our alerts and action updates for this 200-foot tall light tower to be placed in a sensitive riparian corridor.

*This has been a major advocacy learning opportunity for me. I have been able to help with campaign website content development, help develop an online petition, give presentations to local groups, and speak at public meetings. We are committed to heightening our advocacy efforts to save this unique riparian habitat and community gathering place in San Jose. **Giulianna***



San Jose at night  
Keith Wandry



Lehigh Cement & Permanente Quarry  
Dicklyon



Giulianna Pendleton

Please check out [nolighttower.org](http://nolighttower.org), the new campaign website, and sign the petition to say "No Thanks" to this preposterous "gift" of light pollution.

*Advocating for dark sky initiatives and bird safe design in my hometown of Los Gatos brings with it an emotional commitment to protecting the natural area and wildlife that I hope to still exist in the next ten, twenty, thirty years. I have been able to connect with Council members, review and draft policy regarding the General Plan update, and engage with local advocacy groups. I look forward to continuing our advocacy efforts as the General Plan advances to the Planning Commission and Town Council this fall. **Giulianna***

## Quarries in Cupertino

The Lehigh Quarry and Cement Plant (under various names and ownerships) has been mining Permanente Ridge for decades. In the process, Lehigh accumulated multiple citations for polluting the water of Permanente Creek with heavy metals. Dust and truck traffic continue to plague Cupertino residents. Visitor experience at Rancho San Antonio Preserve has been degraded. The strongest restriction that is currently imposed on the Lehigh Quarry is the County's 1972 Ridgeline Protection Easement to the District. This is an important tool for protecting the Permanente ridgeline, this biodiversity hotspot, and Rancho San Antonio.

In 2019, Lehigh Quarry applied to the County for permission to allow mining of additional limestone, modify the easement agreement, and haul unprocessed aggregate to the adjacent Stevens Creek Quarry. With other groups and residents, we successfully advocated with the County to advance Supervisors' Joe Simitian and Otto Lee memo that reinforced

the Ridgeline Protection Easement by initiating discussions with the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District regarding joint enforcement responsibility. In addition, we are supportive of the County recommendation to deny the corporation's request to allow processing of Lehigh-mined aggregate at Stevens Creek Quarry. Hopefully our advocacy efforts will be successful and the Santa Clara County Planning Commission will affirm the staff recommendation to deny the zoning interpretation application.

## Tideline Ferry Protest

Tideline Marine Group, a private commercial ferry operator, filed an application with the California Utilities Commission seeking approval for unlimited Uber-like boat service throughout the Bay and its navigable rivers and tributaries. With the Sierra Club and the Citizens Committee to Complete the Refuge, SCVAS filed a formal protest arguing that this new service can have impacts on the Don Edwards National Wildlife Refuge and on wetlands and estuaries all around the Bay. We asked for an Environmental Impact Report prior to approval of the project.

## Protections for Birds & Habitat

In June, the National Audubon Society released **Natural Climate Solutions Report: Maintaining and Restoring Natural Habitats to Help Mitigate Climate Change**. This report highlights "what's good for birds is also good for climate change mitigation." The report also found that "urban and suburban areas present opportunities to restore natural ecosystems and create carbon sinks, while also protecting biodiversity, increasing environmental equity, and delivering health and quality of life benefits for communities." This is critical for our work, where much of our advocacy is within urban spaces.

In the **City of Campbell**, the Santa Clara County Library District is in the process of constructing a "government office and facility" adjacent to Los Gatos Creek County Park (also known as Oka Ponds). We engaged with the Library District to offer recommendations for bird safety measures, plantings of native species, and the development of environmental education programs. We are excited to report that the Santa Clara County Library District took our recommendations into consideration and are including **100% native plants** in their landscaping designs, along with our other recommendations for lighting and bird safety.

The **City of Cupertino** is considering the future of the Blackberry Farm Golf Course. Options included expansion of the golf course and intensifying use of the area, minor repairs to the existing golf course, and returning the golf course to natural habitat. We advocated for the native habitat option, and did not oppose minimal repairs. In July, the City Council approved the preparation of a feasibility study for 1) restoring the golf course to nature, and 2) conducting only minimal repairs to the golf course. Let's root for restoring Blackberry Farm to its natural habitat.

## Free Virtual Class with Tours

The Sierra Club Bay Advocacy Program is offering a free class: 10 virtual classes and 3 tours will take place September through November 2021 to review the history of SF Bay, Bay wildlife and habitats, and nature-based adaptation for sea level rise. Experienced environmental activists, elected officials and legislators will discuss how to make positive change. Space is limited. For information, contact Susan DesJardin (408) 480-6057 or Gita Dev (415) 722-3355. ●

*Interested* in more? Email [advocate@scvas.org](mailto:advocate@scvas.org)



# Friends of SCVAS



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Mystery Feather  
Matthew Dodder

I've been finding feathers all my life. They always slow my progress through the woods. In fact, this week I was walking through a grove and found feathers from four different species of birds, and I thought to myself, how wonderful for those birds to let me know this is their home—seems they had just gone out to run some errands. But I knew the birds would be back. Only now I know to look for them. But I'll call ahead and make sure it's a good time to visit.

The feather for this season's installment was discovered in a level section of Guadalupe Oak Grove Park on August 1 of last year. See if you can guess what species it came from and where on the bird it originated.

Answer will be posted in the next issue of *The Avocet*.

### Books

Bird Feathers:  
A Guide to North American Species  
by S. David Scott & Casey McFarland

**Note** The collection or sale of feathers from native species is prohibited by law. If you find a feather, admire it and leave it behind.

**Answer** (SUMMER 2021)  
A key to identifying the owner of the feather is habitat. The rocky hillside with poppies and Artemisia, as well as the lack of trees suggests a ground bird. The mystery bird is a male **Common Poorwill**, and this particular feather comes from the left side of its tail. *Image: Public domain*



Saved by Nature  
Matthew Dodder

## LET'S GO BIRDING TOGETHER

Our Outreach Committee works to reach communities who aren't yet SCVAS members, make SCVAS a welcoming place for birders of all levels, and increase representation from all Santa Clara County demographics.

Most recently, SCVAS partnered with the **Billy DeFrank LGBTQ+ Community Center** to host a birdwatching outing for Pride Month in June. SCVAS' very first in-person program since the pandemic, this walk at Charleston Slough was well-attended by enthusiastic participants. SCVAS 2021

Let's Go Birding Together programming also included **Jennifer Rycenga's** talk "Queer Birds: Community Inclusion, Community Building, and Community Science" in the SCVAS Speaker Series and new t-shirts/mugs/logo merchandise in the SCVAS Nature Shop.

SCVAS has established a partnership with **Saved By Nature**, and provided birding expertise to their July and August walks. We're working to map accessibility of popular birding sites, engage with the **Feminist Bird Club**, and reach out to other communities. Watch for the announcement of **Hispanic Heritage Celebration** events in September! — **Ann Hepenstal**

## FIELD TRIPS RESUME

SCVAS and our volunteer field trip leaders are excited to resume our free field trips! We are eager to get you out there to learn about and appreciate the birds!

All our trips will now have two volunteers to provide everyone with a better experience. We encourage everyone to try a trip out, whether you are a new or experienced birder, regardless of your physical abilities and age. We will aim to have something that appeals to everyone.

Masks are not required (unless you are unvaccinated) and you may share scopes and other equipment. We will limit group sizes, have a liability waiver to be signed at the trip start, and everyone is required to RSVP. Check our calendar regularly as we continue to add more trips.

**Go to [scvas.org/fieldtrips](https://scvas.org/fieldtrips)** for our schedule and to reserve your spot!

**Interested** in becoming a field trip leader? Contact Eve Meier at [fieldtrips@scvas.org](mailto:fieldtrips@scvas.org).



Field Trip Committee  
Matthew Dodder



# NATIVE PLANTING IN FALL

**Ann Hepenstal**  
SCVAS Volunteer

As someone who values birds and the natural world, you already know the value of habitat. Using native plants in your home landscaping can provide birds with important food sources, places to hide, and even a place to raise their young.

Fall is the ideal time to plant California natives, while the soil is still warm and the rains are about to arrive. Many native plant societies hold plant sales in October (check [www.cnps-scv.org/](http://www.cnps-scv.org/) for the annual plant sale by the Santa Clara Valley chapter of the California Native Plant Society). By planning now, you will know what you want to purchase and plant in your yard or containers in October.

## Food

Some birds like nectar, while others like insects, seeds or berries. Based on the birds you want to attract and the conditions in your yard, you can select from a wide variety of native plants. In my home yard, I've become a victim of Hummingbird Mind Control and have planted many nectar sources. However, I also have some plants which produce berries, hoping to feed Western Bluebirds (successful!), California Thrashers (visited only once), and others.

## Hiding & Nesting Places

You already know that some birds want to nest in cavities, others on branches, and others low in bushes or on the ground. In my yard, I do offer several nestboxes successfully. In addition, I grow plants which provide good cover where Spotted Towhees and Oregon Juncoes have raised young. I grow Ceanothus and Coast Live Oak which provide excellent cover, and host insects the birds feed to their nestlings.

## Resources

In addition to your local Native Plant Society programs and experts, the internet offers some excellent resources:

- ▶ **Calscape** provides plant information by zipcode, or by name of plant. [Calscape.org](http://Calscape.org) shows photos of the plant, where it grows wild, information on its mature size and cultivation needs (e.g. full sun), and notes the wildlife it supports (including a list of butterflies).
- ▶ **Las Pilitas Nursery** website has highly informative write-ups and photos of their plants, along with great guides (e.g. to varieties of manzanita and to ceanothus). [laspilitas.com](http://laspilitas.com)



*Ribes sanguineum*, pink-flowered current  
Ann Hepenstal

- ▶ **Santa Clara Valley Chapter of California Native Plant Society** website has recordings of past educational events along with some excellent gardening resources including lists such as *Hummingbird Plants and Berries for the Birds*. [cnps-scv.org/gardening/gardening-resources](http://cnps-scv.org/gardening/gardening-resources)
- ▶ **East Bay Wilds** offers their expertise on Native Plants for containers [eastbaywilds.com/Good%20California%20Plants%20for%20Containers.doc](http://eastbaywilds.com/Good%20California%20Plants%20for%20Containers.doc)
- ▶ And, a tour of native plant *gardening for the birds* [youtube.com/watch?v=65bHTEMTeBc](https://youtube.com/watch?v=65bHTEMTeBc)

# A WILD START FOR OSCSP

**Carolyn Knight**  
Education & Outreach Manager

At the end of April, SCVAS signed a grant for funding the Oak Savanna Community Science Project (OSCSP). A lot of words and hours and many, many zoom meetings went into it. And now here comes the fun part.

The birding, the exploring, eventually the teaching. This three-year project combines bird surveys, bioblitzes, and classroom-supplemented field trips for high school students to create an education and outreach effort geared to our south county. We're focussing on the oak savanna itself, the plants and animals that make this iconic Californian landscape, the intricate roles each organism plays within the complex food webs, and the many threats and challenges to protecting areas like the North Coyote Valley Conservation Area.

Our surveys so far have recorded seventy-four species of birds on this site (we know there are more, but seasons change and we're itching for the changes fall migration will bring). We've found wild pigs and black-tailed deer, garter snakes and fence lizards. We've seen the water dry up and we're looking forward to the day we arrive to find the trails muddy and the vernal pool full once more. We've counted crows and cows alike.

This is a site full of potential. Twice now on surveys, we've been in the front-row seat to watch falcons (Prairie and Peregrine) snatch prey from the sky, sending feathers flying and silencing the chatter of starlings and sparrows alike. We've trailed after Wild Turkeys on their way back into the hills, picked out the cowbirds hiding amongst the starlings, and staked out Rufous-crowned Sparrows in the hopes of getting a good shot of them hiding amongst the poison oak. We've been side-eyed by so many cows. And every time we go out we find a new species for the lists.

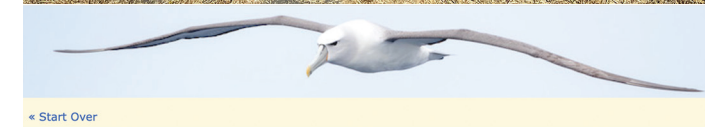
More than anything else, the goal of this program is to instill an appreciation and enthusiasm for nature in the people it touches. So whether that spark bird for a student is a Yellow-billed Magpie or a European Starling, or maybe something that isn't even a bird at all, we are here for it.

If you're interested in contributing to our knowledge of the area, want to go birding in a new location, or are interested in helping build this new program from the ground up, please get in touch. Whether you're a veteran birder, a budding naturalist, or an educator yourself, we're excited to have you involved! ●

**Contact** Carolyn Knight at [programs@scvas.org](mailto:programs@scvas.org)



Surveying the Meadow  
Matthew Dodder



**Bird Observations**

Date Range: Jan-Dec, 1900-2021

Change Location: [ OSCSP Vernal Pool Transect (Restricted) ] [ OSCSP South Creek Transect (Restricted) ] [ OSCSP Oaks/Meadow Transect (Restricted) ] [ OSCSP Levy Transect (Restricted) ]

Updated ~15 hr(s) ago.

74 species (+0 other taxa)	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Canada Goose	✓	✓										
Cinnamon Teal	✓	✓										
Mallard	✓	✓										
Green-winged Teal	✓	✓										
Hooded Merganser	✓	✓										
California Quail	✓	✓										
Wild Turkey	✓	✓										
Rock Pigeon	✓	✓										
Band-tailed Pigeon	✓	✓										
Eurasian Collared-Dove	✓	✓										
Mourning Dove	✓	✓										
Anna's Hummingbird	✓	✓										
Virginia Rail	✓	✓										



In the Spring 2020 issue, Chuq Von Rospach evangelized *eBird*. I couldn't agree more with his praise of the platform. Anyone who spends any time with me knows I will eventually ask if you are familiar with *eBird*. Do you use it? Don't you love it?? I'm not ashamed to say I am completely addicted to the platform although I didn't sign on immediately. It took some time.

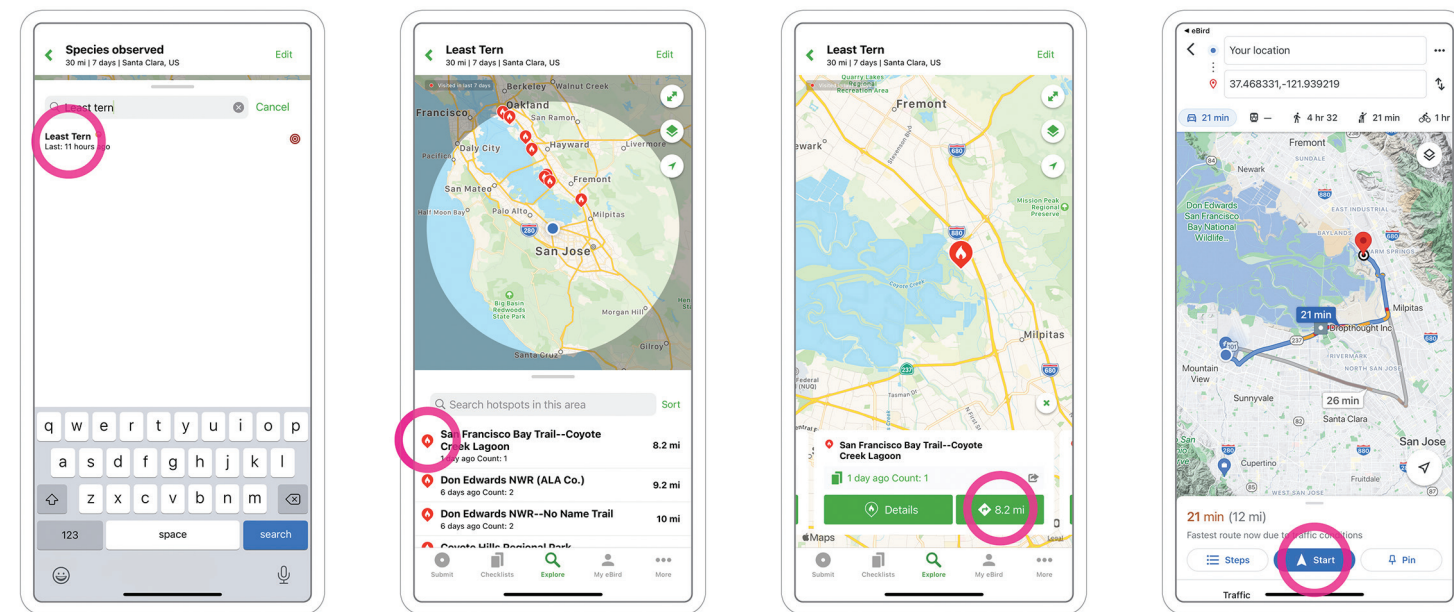
Now I visit *ebird.org* daily—looking at, planning how—to find my next bird. I faithfully use the mobile app to record my sightings, and I set up alerts through the site to send me emails when a rare bird has been found. I use it to plan our vacations, what time to get up in the morning, and if there's any possible way I can get a good bird on my way to my mother-in-law's... But I realize the true value is not these simple perks, but what this crowd-sourced wonder provides to the entire birding community. Developing trends in bird populations are increasingly clear as big data is processed.

My guess is many of you suffer from this same *eBird* affliction. Perhaps not so seriously though. Anyway, if you have somehow avoided learning to love this indispensable community science platform, let me give you one more reason to get on board: *eBird's* embedded *Explore* feature is found on the lower edge of your mobile app. It was

available on Android a few months prior to Apple, but now it is available to all.

For several years, *eBird* provided no way to search for a species' location on your smartphone. It was essentially a mere input device for your checklists, and in being only that, it offered no help to for traveling birders wanting to locate birds they wished to see. While we all waited, *Birds Eye* filled that gap, but had its own issues. With *eBird Explore*, one can now search recent sightings for desired species and get directions to their location. How great is that?

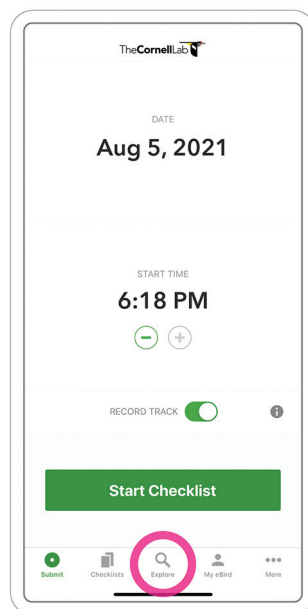
Let's take Least Tern as an example. As I write this I have not yet seen one this year in Santa Clara County. By the time this story is printed, I hope to remedy that.



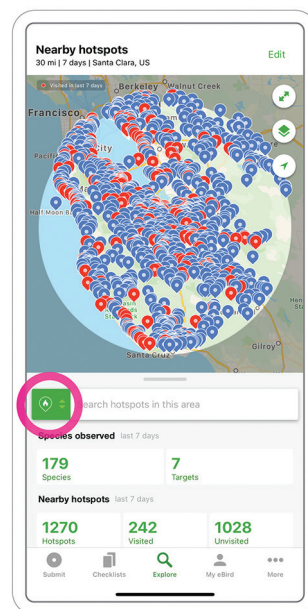
**Step 4** *eBird* will create a map for your desired species. Unfortunately, no *eBird* reports were located in Santa Clara County for Least Tern this time. The closest one is not far from my home... Bummer. It's in Alameda County. Oh well.

**Step 5** Click on the closest sighting to you and *eBird* will provide directions to the location. Imagine how enormously helpful this would be if you were to travel to an unfamiliar area, like we did over the summer. Go get the bird. You deserve it! ●

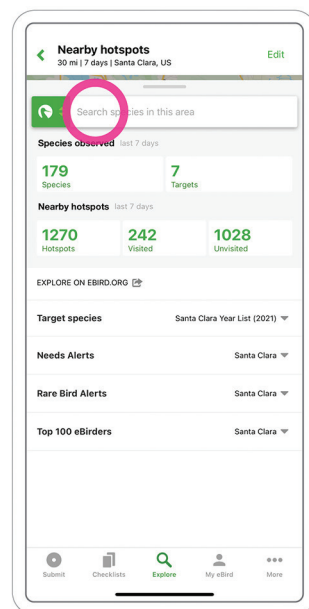
*Still not convinced?* Look for some some "Get Started with *eBird*" workshops at SCVAS soon!



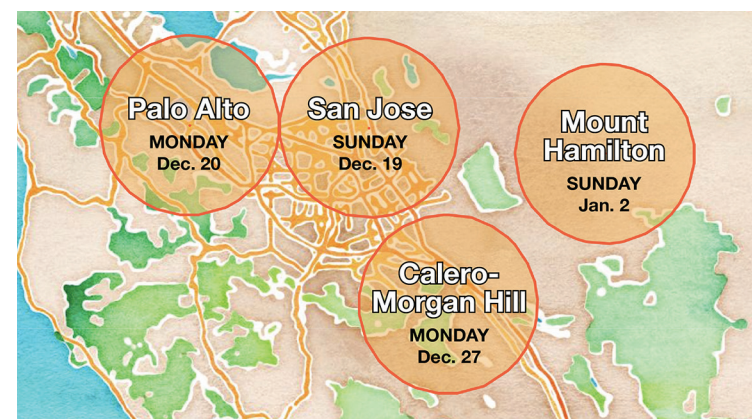
**Step 1** Open the *eBird* app and click on the Explore button on the bottom edge.



**Step 2** The default setting will take you to HotSpots, which isn't helpful to me at this moment. Click on the green square with the HotSpot icon to switch to the species search feature.



**Step 3** Enter the species you wish to see. Alternatively you could click on the green numeral in the Targets cell and select from the list. Either way, Least Tern is just a few clicks away...



### CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

More details will be provided on [scvas.org](http://scvas.org) when available

- San Jose Circle  
Sun, Dec 19
- Calero-Morgan Hill Circle  
Mon, Dec 27
- Palo Alto Circle  
Mon, Dec 20
- Mount Hamilton Circle  
Sun, Jan 2

### 2021 ELECTION RESULTS

The following officers were re-elected: *Barry Langdon-Lassagne* as President, *Bill Walker* as Vice President, *Joan Leighton* as Secretary, *Bob Hirt* as Treasurer. *Gabrielle Feldman* and *Vivek Khanzodé* have been renewed as Directors. *Sue Pelmulder* has been confirmed as Director. We're pleased to announce that *Vivek Tiwari* was approved to the Board in July and will stand for election next year.



Burrowing Owl pair at their burrow  
Chuq Von Rospach





# Bird Notes

Please report rarities to  
pdunten@gmail.com

*Pete Dunten*  
Santa Clara County eBird Reviewer

## Spring & Migration

A **Common Murre** was on Vasona Lake in Los Gatos Creek CP on 2 May (KG). The bird didn't appear healthy and was last seen on 5 May (m. ob.). Murres occur roughly one year in two in the county. **Black Swifts** are one of the latest migrants to pass through the county in the spring. Fourteen were over J Grant CP on 23 May (MMR). Most years a few wayward migrants from the east are found in May or June towards the end of spring migration. This year the sole representative in that category was a singing **Plumbeous Vireo** found near Los Gatos Creek Trail north of Vasona Lake (SCR). An immature male **Yellow-headed Blackbird** put in a brief appearance in the vicinity of the Lockheed marsh on 18 – 19 May (DW, GL).

## Summer & Nesting

One to two **Black Rails** were heard calling at the Sunnyvale WPCP on 19 Jun (GL) and 26 Jun (DA, MDo et al.) One was also calling along Alviso Slough on 7 Jul opposite A11 (EvM, PL) and on 19 Jul opposite A9 (DW). Though their movements are hard to track, we're fortunate to have that problem. A **Golden-Plover** was photographed on 4 Jul at the edge of Alviso pond A9 (fide eBird). The Golden-Plover appeared to be a second-year bird but where it spent the summer is a mystery.

A **Black Tern** found on 23 Jun at the Sunnyvale WPCP (BM) has stayed in the south bay through the period. It's favored Shoreline Lake since mid-July (m. ob.). We find more Black Terns as migrants in the fall than in spring, and even fewer Black Terns over the summer. The **Common Tern** that was found at Emily Renzel Wetlands on 22 Apr has stayed in the south bay over the summer through the end of July (m. ob.) The tern, a second-year bird, has replaced its primary feathers during its stay. On 22 Apr it had five retained juvenile primaries, on 3 May it had four retained primaries, and on 14 July the two outermost primaries were being replaced with new feathers growing in. Inasmuch as this individual was the only Common Tern in the south bay over the summer, its movements were relatively easy to track. In May its daily pattern began with foraging at Emily Renzel, and late in the day it moved to the pilings on A1 (ABu). At the end of June, it was found at the Sunnyvale WPCP in the evenings and early mornings roosting on the floating booms. And in July it was noted frequently at Shoreline Lake.



Purple Martin  
Carter Gasiorowski



Common Tern  
Garrett Lau



Semipalmated Sandpiper  
Pete LaTourette

The **Black Skimmer** colony on the island at Shoreline Lake has had an excellent year, with counts of over 100 on multiple dates breaking all previous records. Highest of those high counts was 132 Skimmers on 2 Jun, including 2 nests with young and 23 nests with eggs (RPh). Another group of Skimmers has been seen on the islands in pond A16, with a high count of 22 on 11 Jul (ChJ).

The **American Bittern** seen at Calero Reservoir in April was reported again on 25 May (MJM) and 20 Jun (BM). On the May date the Bittern paid a visit to the small Tricolored Blackbird colony on the edge of the reservoir, causing much distress for the Blackbirds (MJM). It's not hard to imagine the Bittern may have been taking young blackbirds out of the nests. The male **Vermilion Flycatcher** at J Grant CP continues to be seen, most recently on 20 Jul (WGB).

**Purple Martins** were found in good numbers at Calero Reservoir in the early evenings, with 7 on 24 May (MJM), 11 on 28 May (CG) and 10 on 13 Jun (CG). On 6 Jun it appeared the females were taking shells from the lakeside, possibly as a source of calcium for their own eggshell production (MJM). A **Yellow-breasted Chat** first noted in late April in J Grant CP was found repeatedly through 1 Jun (m. ob.). Two were reported from the park on 26 May (KPn). Chats have nested at J Grant CP in the past. Another Chat was found along Los Alamitos Creek Trail near Pfeiffer Park on 18 Jun (EvM) through 20 Jun (m. ob.).

## Fall & Migration

Several sightings of adult male **Rufous Hummingbirds** on migration came in this year beginning with one at feeders in Morgan Hill on 30 Jun (SCR). One was at Loma Prieta on 2 Jul (MVR), one visited feeders in the Diablo Range foothills on 17 and 18 Jul (WP, KON), and one found a flowering eucalyptus tree at Saratoga Quarry Park on 20 Jul (DSu). As a rule, the migration route taken by adult male Rufous Hummingbirds during the fall is further east than the routes taken by adult females and young birds, and the adult males typically migrate three to five weeks earlier than the young birds. The most westerly route is taken by hatch-year birds, accounting for most of the migrants in our area. Our first-of-fall **Semipalmated Sandpiper** was an adult on Alviso pond A13 in the company of Western Sandpipers on 26 Jul (PDu). A juvenile was on Mallard Slough on 28 Jul (LWm, KDu).

**Observers** Dorian Anderson (DA), Bill Bousman (WGB), Adam Burnett (ABu), Matthew Dodder (MDo), Konshau Duman (KDu), Pete Dunten (PDU), Carter Gasiorowski (CG), Chris Johnson (ChJ), Garrett Lau (GL), Patricia Lynch (PL), Mike Mammoser (MJM), Eve Meier (EvM), Brooke Miller (BM), Kitty O'Neil (KON), William Pelletier (WP), Ryan Phillips (RPh), Karen Pinckard (KPn), Mike Rogers (MMR), Steve Rottenborn (SCR), David Suddjian (DSu), Manny Vara (MVR), Dave Weber (DW), Lynette Williams (LWm)



Snow Geese lift off at Merced NWR  
Chuq Von Rospach

**CHUQ** Continued from page 3

leaders and volunteers, and excited for our future leaders and volunteers, but today I'm thinking especially about Chuq's gentle guidance, wisdom and example.

I've known Chuq for many years; we were both at Apple back in the 1990's and have crossed paths through technology and birding many times. I have had numerous long talks

with Chuq where we troubleshoot website and server issues, exchanged birding stories, brainstormed ideas for the future of SCVAS, and shared our dreams. I'll miss those talks, but I know that we'll still see each other from time to time. Maybe a birding trip to Washington, maybe Chuq coming down to California to see a Black Phoebe again. Or maybe we'll see each other on Zoom—technology bridging the distance—it's all good. Thank you, take care and happy birding in Washington, Chuq! ●





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