

The

AVOCET

Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society

Summer 2020 • Vol 68 Num 3



Special Member Event

BEN PEARL

SFBBO BIOLOGIST

MEET THE SNOWY PLOVER
AND LEAST TERN

Wed, July 15 at 8 am, 4 hrs



Photo: Bill Walker

Eden Landing Ecological Preserve

Ben Pearl, Plover and Tern Program Director at the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory, will give us a behind-the-scenes tour of Snowy Plover and Least Tern breeding sites at Eden Landing Ecological Reserve. Join us!

*More details at
scvas.org/FieldTrips*

44 Days in April

Matthew Dodder

This year's Birdathon was like none before—one truly for the history books! What began as a frantic rewriting of our rules to observe health department recommendations and prevent the spread of the coronavirus, quickly became something very different. It became a startling demonstration of our solidarity and revealed how many inventive ways there are to pull together, even while separated. It showed us how productive we remain when we work as a team for something we love, organizing a major social event while at home, isolated from each other.

It also reminded us how much we love our birding companions—our friends. How nothing is quite as good, or as fun as when we find birds together and celebrate as a team after a big day. And here we are in this new reality of “distributed teams” and “shelter-in-place birding.” Welcome to the Novel Spring Birdathon of 2020!

During these strange 44 days (the bulk occurred in April of course, but it was often hard to keep track as the weeks blended together) we also learned once again how desperately we need nature, and how nothing can ever satisfy that need except the thing we need itself. It calls us out of our homes, invites us to breathe deeply, begs us to listen to its sounds, and we do, happily. Even before COVID-19 that truth was summed up perfectly on our 2020 t-shirt art. It reads “Birding is Good for the Blues.” There is no time of the year when this connection is more apparent than in spring, and it is why these past few months have been so difficult. We need to feel healthier, happier, and more whole. That happens when nothing blocks us from experiences with the nature around us.

Continued on next page

Continued from cover

Prior to the event, the Birdathon Committee decided to request photos and stories from each team to help keep the public engaged. This proved to be a bit of genius as it emboldened others to join or support the Birdathon in a brand new way.

Below you will find a selection of anecdotes and images from these stories. No matter what happens next year with coronavirus or social distancing, the Birdathon will live and thrive in one way or another, not the least of which will be these marvelous stories. Enjoy! ●

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK



A Little Help From Our Friends

It hardly needs to be stated how much our lives have changed since mid-March when we began to stay home full time and avoid crowds, to zoom our best friends, and hold committee meetings online... but ok. Our Nature Shop is now open only by appointment and classroom visits have been canceled until fall. Most of you have also received emails from SCVAS about event cancellations, and changes to our field trip policies. The annual Birdathon for example, a team-based and highly social fundraiser, has been completely reimagined to accommodate the concerns about spreading the coronavirus, and on and on and on... We're all so exhausted by the adjustments we've had to make, and eager to resume our lives as social beings.

But the fact that we have been able to continue with the Birdathon at all amazes me, and gives me great hope. One aspect of these peculiar times that keeps me positive is our resilience. People around us, not face masks, not home deliveries or Zoom calls, not Google meets, and most obviously, not politics, have risen to help make our unwanted shelter-in-place existence tolerable. We hold our Chapter together together. Confronted with a seemingly impossible obstacle, we have continued moving forward.

That goes especially for the staff and members of SCVAS. Working from home while managing the distraction of almost hourly updates from health officials is far from ideal. It makes processing new memberships, conducting committee

meetings, getting answers from insurance companies, negotiating with banks, writing grant applications, even assembling content for this issue of *The Avocet* all the more challenging—for everyone. So thank you all for your patience and your understanding.

I especially appreciate the handmade face masks sent to me and Cricket... now we can look fashionable while we prevent the spread of coronavirus. The kind notes from members have also been welcome, and the friendly waves from the many birders whose smiles we can't see through their masks. Now, if someone could figure out how to keep our eye glasses from fogging up...

Still, we're here, and by all indications—doing well! We've released new videos on our website, our Facebook page, and the Santa Clara Valley Audubon YouTube channel. Short videos such as Carolyn's "Birding Basics", and Matthew's "Ask BirdGuy", as well as a growing number of species spotlights curated by Chuq, and "Bay Area Bird Photographers" hosted by Steve. You can expect more videos from us on a regular basis and also from our members, who are invited to submit material for consideration.

We're also taking this time to reflect on what SCVAS stands for, and how we can flourish. The answer seems to be community and with a little help from our friends. From everyone at the Ranch, thank you! Stay well and stay connected.

Matthew Dodder
Executive Director



Stile Ranch Trail
Matthew Dodder

BIRDATHON STORIES

BRING US ALL TOGETHER

Barry Langdon-Lassagne
Birdathon Committee Chair
& Board President

Through necessity, most of our Birdathon outings this year moved to a new *distributed* model. We birded on the same day or the same weekend, but for our health's sake we stayed physically apart.

We managed to keep together though, through emails, texting, phone calls and Zoom meetings, and then we connected with the birding community by sharing our lists, stories and photos through social media, the South-Bay-Birds mailing list and the *Birdathon Stories* page at scvas.org/spring-birdathon-2020-stories.

I'd like to share some snippets of these stories with you here. This is just a taste, so please check out the Birdathon Stories page for many more wonderful words, pictures, checklists and, yes, even drawings, sketches and poetry. These are stories to which you can return again and again, vicariously venturing outdoors to hike a forest path, scan the edges of a bayside marsh, bicycle down Stevens Creek Trail, take a brush to canvas or just kick back and watch the birds converge at a backyard feeder.

The Pen & Quills

This team chose to focus on the power of words, in prose and poetry, to convey our experiences of the birds and their habitats.

The confluence of Sulphur Creek with Smith Creek is so mesmerizing that I have to stop birding and just sit and take in the rushing waters, the boulders and the faint sulphur smell from the creek that mixes with aromas of bay and maple leaves. The stream is louder than any bird calls, but peaceful-loud, calming-loud. The water cascades over rocks surrounding the boulder on which I meditate and collects before me into a deep, calm pool that reflects the alder leaf canopy of this sanctuary. Around me low

poison oak shrubs glisten. Ferns drip down the left bank while rounded river rocks contain the stream on my right side. In front of me, a great sycamore leans away from the creek, its roots diving deep beneath the streambed and its branches reaching up and out and away. Steady, still, full of peace, I feel part of the forest, planted upon the earth with my arms stretching out to the sky.

*Rooted on the bank:
Alder, maple, sycamore,
I too am a tree.*

Barry Langdon-Lassagne

Continued on page 6

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Matthew Dodder
Executive Director



Summer is often disparaged as a slow season for birds. An *uninteresting* time. Birders often refer to it as the summer doldrums because it seems that nothing is happening—nothing new... But I think otherwise.

For a moment, let's assume that's true, and that there's a good reason for that attitude. I think that's debatable, but remember the young have fledged, many adults have stopped singing, and the frenzy of migration has either passed us already or not yet begun. We are in a bit of a lull. So, yes, maybe nothing extraordinary is afoot.

FROTH

Occasionally though, we see an interesting rarity like last summer's "Eastern" Bell's Vireo or Eastern Kingbird... But generally, summer is a low energy season. I liken the rarities of summer to what one sees when watching the waves and tide pools along the coast. When the water rushes in, I imagine it being like a high-speed spring migration. Likewise, when the water rushes out, it seems like a tiny fall migration. The most dramatic movement passes in an instant, but watch what happens in the sheltered tide pools and eddies—the froth rotates in a a slow deliberate circle, but it moves nonetheless. That is how I imagine the Alviso Bell's Vireo and Eastern Kingbird... like froth. Rotating slowly toward us after the rush.

Summer is the time many birders travel to get their fix of *unfamiliar species*, and visit *places they haven't been before*. All in pursuit of the "new." Presumably this satisfies that desire for novelty. For teachers and students, such excursions are not even possible outside of these *summer months*, so that is when Cricket and I take our longer road trips or overseas birding tours. Traveling to the tropics, during summer, by the way means birding during the "green season"—a clever euphemism for "rainy every day." It throws a nice light on 100% humidity. At least summer trips to the tropics are not hindered by northern species in their drab winter plumages... and there are fewer birders... but the ones that remain are spectacular, and *new*.

But since such travel may still be discouraged by the time this *Avocet* is released, we as birders may be compelled to keep

our summer birding plans restricted to nearby areas. Whether or not tours are canceled, there is reason to be excited about this time of year. It is not a cause for disappointment because there are plenty of compelling reasons to bird around home, and it's high time we accept that.

CHALLENGE OF INDEPENDENCE

For one, the challenge. Great numbers of fledged young appear and confuse us. The Dark-eyed Juncos for example, with their spotted breast and streaked back often throw us off. They wear this unexpected plumage only briefly and will soon look more like their familiar parents. Luckily, those birders who remain in the area get to see this marvelous, albeit brief plumage. It provides birders a little excitement during the time it exists, and an opportunity to sharpen our skills. Similarly, all young birds (Tanagers and Orioles in particular) present us with a seasonally-specific challenge of both finding and identifying their *unfamiliar young*.

One can even keep watch for that sudden change in parental behavior, when the feeding stops and the young are forced to "get a job." I love that moment, and I enjoy seeing the newly evicted youth dig in to their independence and start getting stronger and making their way—from the altricial young Allen's Hummingbirds to precocial lawn-mowing Canada Geese. These small moments are best appreciated when we linger.

I also look forward to seeing young Brown-headed Cowbirds. Not only will the huge fledglings beg for food from their hapless hosts, but their parasitic life cycle is fascinating and almost literary in its intrigue—a tale of identity theft, fraud, and broken families. Later in the year, we will see the young male gradually acquire its glossy black plumage as he grows, patch by patch into his role as accomplice to a crime.


The summer months are also when I choose to visit Loma Prieta Avenue to search for nesting Purple Martins. It features a stunning view and a peaceful setting situated on western boundary of our County. If all goes well, they should be crossing between Santa Clara and Santa Cruz Counties as they venture out and return to their nests in the large dead conifers in the valley below. While I am up there, I always

Photos L to R:

Purple Martin Garret Lau, Wester Tanager Tom Grey, Brown-headed Cowbird: young male Tom Grey, Cowbird chick Tom Grey, Purple Martin Garret Lau

REQUEST FOR BACK ISSUES

We are working on a massive archiving project for *The Avocet*. If you have any of the following back issues, please let us know. We need issues from 1976–1988, 1999–2007, 2011–2013. If you have these, we will figure out how to get them scanned for the permanent electronic archive on our website.



Purple Martin
Brooke Miller

head to the large gravel turnout by the junction with Mount Madonna Road and listen for Black-chinned Sparrows, one of my all-time favorite songs. Bell's Sparrow, another favorite, is found in this mid-elevation chaparral too, as are a selection of Flycatchers including Olive-sided Flycatcher, Western Wood Pewee, and Ash-throated Flycatcher. One beautiful, remote spot, almost devoid of other humans, provides all the new excitement a restless birder requires.

Wilson's Phalaropes should be coming through soon too. They will be molting into their basic plumage after breeding. As I write this column, the Phalaropes in the East Bay are in glorious alternate (breeding) plumage. Red-necked Phalaropes will not be far behind Wilson's in later summer and it should be possible to see both on a good day.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

What seems pretty certain I think, as far as what to look for during these hopefully post-COVID summer months, is that nothing will be exactly as we remember. The rules surrounding outdoor activities may return to normal, but the habits we adopted in April will take a long time to break, if we are even able to do so. Our first instinct when we approach others on the trail may still be to put extra distance between us. We may continue to see facemasks in the field. The importance of social distance has been so ingrained in us by this point, it seems unlikely that we will forget it any time soon.

I expect we may continue to seek out less-populated areas for our activities, such as locations that are less-reported on eBird, and parks with wider trails or fewer people. These all seem like positive developments. We may also take the opportunity to further explore our 5-Mile Radius (5MR), our 1MR or even our immediate neighborhood. Cricket and I enjoy simply looking out our windows and gradually expanding our house list which is almost 100 as of today. All of these things have a common theme—slow down, be safe and appreciate what is right next to you—a possibility of discovery, *something new, something you've never seen, a place you've never been*. These novelties don't have to be located half a world away, nor do they have to be rare or unusual. They can simply be new and wonderful to you. ●



Bullock's Oriole
Tom Grey



Dark-eyed Junco adult and juvenile
Tom Grey



Backyard Birding
Eve Meier



Sketch book
Leena Khanzode

BIRDATHON *Continued from page 3*

The Backyard Birder

One of the first Birdathon adventures this year captures the experience of letting the birds come to us. Eve Meier's team-of-one shows us how we can make the most of our time even while sheltering in place.

I spent most of the day on my deck. I thought the rain would slow me down but I was able to stay dry and the birds were busy. My favorite moment was watching an Allen's/Rufous Hummingbird bathe in a cup-shaped orange tree leaf filled with a little rain water. There was another moment when all of the birds suddenly stopped moving about and became quiet. I looked up to see a Cooper's Hawk pass overhead. **Eve Meier**

The Birdcassos

We are a team consisting of artists who worked during a 4-hour window to draw or paint as many birds as we could. Mary Ann Allan, Matthew Dodder, Leena Khanzode and Barry Langdon-Lassagne together created over 100 drawings of 76 local species.

The Rock Wrens

This long-standing team switched to distributed mode this time around. Team members each went out to their own special patch, and returned with an impressive 166 species.

I woke with feelings of excitement and anticipation – this was the Rock Wrens' day! Time to explore and check the pulse of the spring migration, while simultaneously hoping some wintering birds were still around. **Pete Dunten**

I started out with a bang. Stepped out of my car (easy parking at Rancho at 6:45 a.m.; not so later!) and a COOPER'S HAWK came flying by overhead going "kek kek kek", landing in the trees below the PG&E trail. Five minutes later a GREAT BLUE HERON flew by. GBH is an interesting bird. They're reasonably common, even many non-birders can recognize them, but surprisingly they're easily missed on birdathon day. **Steve Patt**

The 5-Milers

The concept of birding their own 5-Mile-Radius (5MR) dovetails well with current countywide restrictions, as Santa Clara County encourages keeping close to home and San Mateo County mandates 5MR activities. Thankfully, birding falls under the essential-activity category of exercise. And every 5MR in the South Bay has dozens of hotspots.

Tree-tree beautiful tree, beautiful tree. There it was again. It had been there earlier on the edge of my consciousness. I was standing under a large eucalyptus tree in Stevens Creek County Park, searching its shaggy bark and upper branches for a roosting Great Horned Owl. My focus was on the visual: seeing a shape, a feathery brown lump that wasn't tree. That was when the faint, thin, high-pitched voice of the Brown Creeper spoke to me from a nearby oak. **Mary Ann Allan**

The Hot Spotters

One of the earliest distributed teams, they spread to the far reaches of the county for a 24-hour Big Day and came back with a combined 142 species along with great stories and photos for the day.



Warbling Vireo at Smith Creek
Barry Langdon-Lassagne

*I stopped at the Stile Ranch Trailhead along McKean Road specifically to look for Rufous-crowned Sparrows which were not cooperative at the Coyote Lake dam. Sure enough, three appeared rather quickly. On my way up to the grassy area, I also found 2 Lark Sparrows and a Horned Lark. My real goal was Grasshopper Sparrow which sang a few times and finally perched in full view on a barbed wire fence. **Matthew Dodder***

*I had a great time yesterday, hot-spotting my way through the east valley hills, gone a bit over 12 hours, seeing half as much as Matthew :-), and coming home pleasantly exhausted. **Jim Dehnert***

The Cupertino Creek Cruisers

They are a walking team that has been going strong for seventeen years.

Usually it's a group of eight or so birders going around together, surveying a route along Stevens Creek (and

the Stevens Creek Trail) from McClellan Ranch Preserve (home of Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society) through Blackberry Farm and ending at the Stockmeier Farm on Stevens Creek Boulevard. This year, however, it was a "distributed" effort, with different sub-teams (individuals or family groups) going out at separate times...

*Before leaving McClellan Ranch we returned to the barn and discovered to our surprise that we could see not one but TWO Western Screech-Owls. Apparently others have seen two since early March, but we've been there several times since then (as have many other people) and had only seen one. It seems you have to get lucky for both to be in view. **Deborah Jamison***

Board Not Bored

This team consists of current and former SCVAS board members.

Ultimately we made it to Smith Creek, which we had chosen for its remoteness (we were the only car in the parking area) and it's great birds. Now that we were done driving, it felt more like a wonderful birding hike than a mad rush from spot to spot. We were instantly greeted with the songs of Northern Rough-winged Swallows, Warbling Vireos and Hutton's Vireos.

Barry Langdon-Lassagne

*Raced up north to Mountain View Shoreline Lake with our four-hour clock ticking and found 8 Black Skimmers on the lake island along with nesting Forster's Terns and American Avocets. On the Lake were a couple of Eared Grebes and 3 Surf Scoters but the ducks had gone North already. There was squawking behind us by Black-necked Stilts in the adjacent forebay depression. **Bob Hirt** ●*

Find many more adventures on the Birdathon Stories page at scvas.org/spring-birdathon-2020-stories

NEW MEMBERS Feb – Apr

Thank you and Welcome!

Bharati Adkar • David Anderson • Mary Baker • Stephen Barlow • Arnie Berman • Edward Bill • Jomary Bolles • Dina Borromeo • Norma Bozzini • Marc & Ellen Brown • Ben Christensen • Linda Cole • Patti Colevas • Bob Connors • Carolyn

Corrao • Daniel Davenport • Karin Denson • LaRita Desimpel • Anupama Dikhit • Robert Dougherty • Pam Drew • Louis Edelson • Mishi Ellingson • Rose Eng • Michael English • Tallest Family-Member • Unice Chang & Harvey Fong • Lois Fowkes • Joanne Fraser • Marian Fricano • Mabel Furutsuki • Patricia Geoghegan • Michael Getzell • Jack Gibbany • Naomi Goodman • Patricia Guard • Sandy

Hamilton • Neil Handelman • Shelley Hatakeyama • Gary Hedden • Richard Henderson • William Henzel • Barry Hicks • Nancy & Allan Hikoyeda • Lynn Hillberg • Kenneth Hittel • Judy Hittman • Douglas Hohbach • Emmanuel Horovitz • Stan Hui • Trevor Hunter • Lyle Hutson • Michael Jensen-Akula • Linda I. Johnson • Nathan Kam • Lynette Kermaninejad •

Continued on back cover



Conservation Corner

Shani Kleinhaus
Environmental Advocate

COVID-19 brings uncertainty which we all experience, but one thing seems certain: planning for future projects never stops.

While our government agencies continue to plan and approve projects large and small, it is incumbent upon us to do what we can to protect birds and their habitat, and to keep them in sight of decision makers at this challenging time.

Here are some of the projects we have been working on:

Proliferation of Electronic Signs and Billboards Envisioned

In *San Jose*, SCVAS is concerned with an amendment to the Sign Ordinance of the San Jose Municipal Code. This proposed amendment will promote the *proliferation of electronic billboards along freeways*, and other types of programmable electronic signs in the city, all to display commercial advertisement. In a joint comment letter with the Sierra Club, SCVAS expressed apprehension regarding light pollution impacts of programmable electronic billboards and signs to biological resources, the night sky, the aesthetic character of our region, and the health, safety and quality of life in San Jose. Audaciously, the City proposed that since the electronic billboards are expected to replace standard billboards at a 1:4 ratio, this amendment will beautify the City.

The amendment process will continue this spring, and there will be opportunities to engage. But if you are a San Jose resident, please contact your Council member's office and ask your representative to put an end to this initiative. The more they hear from the voters in their districts, the better. Please contact shani@scvas.org for additional information.

Burrowing owls

With the stay-at-home directive in spring, volunteers were no longer able to help maintain habitat for the burrowing owls of *Alviso*. Our staff continued to survey the habitat at the Regional Wastewater Facility, and maintain the burrow areas free of tall grass.



Also in *San Jose*, City council approved a new *Airport Master Plan* to allow great expansion of the airport capacity to accommodate 22.5 million annual passengers by 2037, and an annual compounded growth rate of 2.4% in cargo tonnage. This translates to a new concourse, larger terminals, additional gates, a hotel, new parking garages, and additional aviation and cargo support facilities. The Environmental Impact Report proposes to mitigate the loss of only 32.4 acres of nesting habitat by paying Habitat Conservation Fees.

Ongoing expansion of the airport over the past 10 years eliminated much of the available habitat already. Mitigation failed to save the owls or replace their habitat. Indeed, the airport recognizes that maintenance of mitigation areas "has not been adequate", and that they no longer expect a viable population to be sustained at the airport. The lack of adequate maintenance was, in our opinion, one of the drivers of the decline in burrowing owl population in our region, and we are devastated at the loss of habitat at the airport which 10 years ago sustained the largest population in the valley.

In our comments on the Environmental Impact Report and in front of Council, we asked for additional mitigation funding for the Habitat Agency. But the airport, and the City Council, did not allocate additional funds. We hope that the meager mitigation fees to the Habitat Agency will help the owl population stay with us a little longer.

Bikes on Narrow Nature Trails

The California State Parks Department is evaluating a Change-In-Use (CIU) for the trails within *Castle Rock State Park* to allow expansion of mountain bike trails in the park. We are working with the local Native Plant Society and Sierra Club advocates opposing this expansion. We submitted a



Townsend's Warbler
Keith Wandry



Snowy Egrets
Shani Kleinhaus

comment letter that referred to a 1979 Sempervirens Fund study that identified Primary Avian Migration Routes and Concentration Areas for migratory birds in the park and mapped vegetation type areas, including sensitive habitats that contain knobcone pines; black oak woodland; ancient redwood forest; riparian areas and maritime chaparral, highlights the geological fragility of the area, and includes maps of seismic hazard areas and vulnerability to landslides.

Nearby parks provide at least 175 miles of bike trails and it is our experience that naturalists and birders (many of whom are seniors), tend to be wary of using trails that allow bicycling due to the risk of collision and because plant and wildlife resources near bike trails are often degraded.

Our letter asked for a sincere effort to avoid:

- ▶ Any additional encroachment and disturbance in Avian Migratory Concentration Areas
- ▶ Any additional encroachment and disturbance in habitat areas that could support nesting habitat of Pileated Woodpecker and Marbled Murrelet
- ▶ Damage to streams or fish habitat
- ▶ Segmentation of amphibian habitat (risk of running adults over during migration to and from breeding habitat)
- ▶ Encroachment and fragmentation of rare plant communities
- ▶ Damage to rare natural features of interest for scientific study
- ▶ Soil erosion, rutting, impairment of trail drainage, breakdown of trail shoulders, and other forms of trail damage

- ▶ Danger to the safety of hikers, birders and naturalists due to bicycle activity, steep grades, steep terrain, sharp curves, slippery or unstable trail surfaces, or limited visibility
- ▶ Displacement of hikers, birders and naturalists due to bikes on trails

The pressure on State Parks to open nature trails to bikes is substantial, and we hope this agency will not risk our natural habitats and trail users.

The *Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District* (MROSD) has initiated a process leading to the adoption of a Proposed *Wildland Fire Resiliency Program*. The Program would be applied on all Midpeninsula open space preserves (OSP) and other areas under MROSD management in Santa Clara and San Mateo counties. The Program encompasses a Vegetation Management Plan, a Prescribed Fire Plan, Wildland Fire Pre-Plan/Resource Advisor Maps and a Monitoring Plan. The impact to vegetation and habitat, especially along roads, infrastructure and buildings, is likely to have significant impacts to habitat and species. SCVAS will continue to attend meetings and provide comments, hoping to help minimize the impacts.

Habitat for Birds with Native Plants

The nest boxes at the restored habitat site on the banks of *Permanente Creek* at *Shoreline Park* in *Mountain View* are being used again this year! During the 2019 bird-breeding season, nest boxes were used by 3 pairs of Western Bluebirds, 10 Tree Swallows and 1 Bewick's Wren. So far this year, the monitoring effort observed 1 pair of Western Bluebirds and 8 pairs of Tree Swallows using the nest boxes. ●

Sierra Birds of Yuba Pass & Sierra Valley

Dave Zittin, Leader

The Sierra Nevada offers birders many unique habitats. In June many birds are singing making them easier to find and in some cases easier to tell apart from similar species. For a list of potential birds, check the event description at scvas.org.

There are two transit days and two full days of birding: Day 1 Yuba Pass area, Day 2 Sierra Valley. You can camp or rent a cabin with a full kitchen. Bringing your own groceries is a good idea. There are some restaurants in the area, but check on their hours before arriving. Grocery availability in this area is limited—do not rely on buying groceries locally.

Cost: \$30/member, \$50/non-member. Rain or snow cancels, with refund. Lodging and meals not provided. It is highly recommended that participants secure lodging immediately. For a partial list of lodging and more information, email dzittin@gmail.com.

Go to our calendar at scvas.org and register through the form

Meet the Snowy Plover & Least Tern

Wed, July 15 at 8 am, 4 hrs
Eden Landing Ecological Reserve in Hayward
Ben Pearl
See description on cover

Farallon Islands

Sat, July 18
Alvaro Jaramillo

World bird authority, and owner of Alvaro's Adventures, Alvaro Jaramillo will lead SCVAS members on a spectacular oceanic voyage to Southeast Farallon Island, 26 miles off the coast of San Francisco and home of thousands of nesting seabirds including Common Murre, Tufted Puffin, Rhinoceros Auklet, and Cassin's Auklet. Thousands of marine mammals may be seen on this voyage as well, including Northern Fur Seal and a variety of Whales. Alvaro, along with a crew of spotters including SCVAS Executive Director, Matthew Dodder will share stories of the islands environmental importance, its historical curiosities and the many animals that call these forbidding rocky islands their home. After circling the island and if weather permits, the boat will venture off the continental shelf and into deeper waters in search of Black-footed Albatross and other marine wonders. It is a summer trip you should not miss.

Contact Alvaro for full details and to reserve your spot at info@alvarosadventures.com

Friends of SCVAS

Gifts received February – April 2020

CALIFORNIA CONDOR
\$5,000+

Larry & Sue Langdon

GOLDEN EAGLE
\$1,000 - 4,999

Priya Balasubramaniam •
Patricia Brennan
Foundation • Christine
Carlson • Bob Hirt • Vivek
& Leena Khazode •

Barry & Virginia Langdon-
Lassagne • Blanche & Irving
Laurie • Julio Mulero •
Stephen Rosenthal

PEREGRINE FALCON
\$500 - 999

Harriett Huls • Craig Hunter •
Ho Min Lim • Marlene
Macek • Maidenherren
Fund • Eve Meier

BURROWING OWL
\$250 - 499

Emily Arcolino • Raja
Bhadury • Gordon &
Carolyn Davidson • Steven
Finney • Peter & Diane
Hart • Bill Holland • Kirsten
Holmquist • Jeff Hunter •
Anna Janakiraman •
Michael Jensen-Akula •
James & Kathryn Johnson •

Jerry & Ginny Kaminski •
Mary Kamprath • Joan &
Phil Leighton • J. Daniel
McCranie • Barbara Millin •
John Richardson • Michael
Rogers • Liz Salzer • Kathryn
Strachota • Chuq Von
Rospach • Charles & Camille
Wade • Gail Wagner • Bill
Walker • James & Kristi
Wiley • Lilly Yoshida

AMERICAN AVOCET
\$100 - 249

Bharati Adkar • Sylvia
Alderman • Mary Ann Allan •
Mike Ambrose • Apple Inc. •
John F. Atwood • Raminder
Bajwa • Margaret Barron •
Dan Bloch • Jomary Bolles •
Robert Bolles • Marc & Ellen
Brown • Gary Campanella •
Maritza Chitnis • John
Comiskey • Carolyn Corrao •
Irene Cortinaz • Connie
Cunningham • Jennifer
Dittmer • Pete Dunten •
Michael English • Gisela
Evitt • Unice Chang & Harvey
Fong • Joanne Fraser •
Harold Fukuma • Srikant
Gokulnatha • Fred Goodill •
Eric Goodill • Google Inc. •
Elaine Gould • Thomas
Grey • Waldo Griffin • Deepti
Hardas • Aiko Hayashi •



Tufted Puffin
Alvaro Jaramillo



Barry Hicks • Dennis Hunter • Trevor Hunter • John Hurley • Tom Ingram • Christine & Richard Jeffers • Linda Sue Johnson • Dale & Jane Jordan • Emily Kim • Chris & John Knight • Cheryl Sendaydiego & Bruce Ledesma • Robert Lewis • Timothy Lockyer • Cathy Loewen • Calvin Lou • M. Kay Matthews • Bill McHenry • Jim Meikrantz • Donna Meyer • Brooke Miller • George Schuttinger & Mary Murphy • Tom & Melanie O'Brien • Jennifer O'Neil • Lee Pauser • Bill & Kitty Pelletier • Renee Polizotto • Steve Pollock • Don Price • Harjeet Randhawa • Cybele Renault • Gail Richardson • Mary Ann Robertson • Pati Rouzer • Jennifer Rycenga • Byron & Elizabeth Ryono • Suhail Sheikh • Ashutosh Sinha • Michael Smith • Elinor Spellman • Kizhanatham Srikanth • Keith Stattenfield • Marcella Stauber • Elene Terry • Debbie Thompson • Tami Tran • Catherine Trejo • Charles Van Orden • Maureen Vavlas • Ann Verdi • Luis Villablanca • Bob Vizza • Yuning Wei • Peter White • Riley & Virginia Willcox • Mary Wisnewski •

George Wortiska • Martha Wright • Dagmar Zimdahl

CALIFORNIA QUAIL
Up to \$99

Margaret & William Albrets • Melissa Allison • Julie Amato • David Anderson • Gary Bailey • Lorraine Bailey • Mary Baker • Roberta C. Baker • Stephen Barlow • Bass Angler Magazine • Diane Bates • Laurie Bechtler • Harriet Benson • Cynthia Berg • Arnie Berman • Joan Bose • Buddy Boy • Norma Bozzini • Rose Brown • Juliette Bryson • Nicole Buckley Biggs • Karen Burnson • Dorothy Clapp • Betsy Cregger • Enrico Croce • Colleen & Gary Cunningham • Daniel Davenport • Jim Dehnert • Joe Dew • Deepak Dhamdhare • Howard & Carol Dienger • Lee Diggins • Anupama Dikhit • Joel Dinda • Matthew Dodder • Jann Dorothy • Pam Drew • Maureen Drobot • Louis Edelson • Lauren Edwards • Brenda Elwood • Rose Eng • Robert Enns • Berg Enz • James Estes • Tennessee Eulaus • Rebecca Everett • Tallest Family-Member •

Marion Farber • Kris Fininen • Roberta Fischer • Leslie Flint • Taylor Forester • Mary Foster-Smith • Lois Fowkes • Linda Grace Frost • Gilda Garreton • Carter Gasiorowski • Megan George • Bence Gerber • Michael Getzell • David Ghiselli • Richard & Eileen Grindeland • Laura Haberlin • Joey Hagedorn • Janet Hall • Sandy Hamilton • Neil Handelman • John Harris • Michael Hawk • Konrad Herman • William Hetrick • Howard Higley • Kenneth Hittel • Judy Hittman • Douglas Hohbach • Michael Hollars • Stan Hui • Kathryn Ingram • Robin Iwai • Trish Jakielski • Douglas Johnson • Barbara Johnson • Linda I. Johnson • John & Yvonne Jue • T. K. • Nathan Kam • Phyllis Karsten • Denise Kato • Patricia Kenny • Shani Kleinhaus • Svetlana Klier • Mark Lassagne • Wendy Lee • Hazel Lewis • Kenneth & Sally Lillis • Christopher Lin • Joan & Gregory Loney • Kurt Lueneburger • Susan Luttner • Sean Mac Aodha • Peggy Macres • Perry A Maluanag • Pauline

Marchon • Bruce Mast • Mark McCormick • Steve McHenry • Elaine McMurray • Susan Jane Mickiewicz • Marilee Mifflin • Cathy Mills • Candace Mindigo • Molly Molloy • Victoria Moore • Gina Morimoto • Chris Mossing • Gerald & Katherine Mugnolo • Jordan Murphy • Leighton Nakata • Neha Nirodi • Carol North • Lisa Oliver • Martha O'Neal • Kevin & Renee O'Neil • Susan O'Neil • Fellow Oregonian • Pacific Gas & Electric Company • Richa Pathak • Janna Pauser • PayPal Giving Fund • Bob Pedretti • Nithya Ramakrishnan • Debbie Roose • Linda Roy • Gail Ruxton • Marguerite Pelose Salamander Nature Awareness School • Vernon Sera • Glen Shaffer • Bridget Sheils • Chris Stauffer • Ruth Stevens • Patty Sweeney • Texas Instruments Foundation • Jerry Ting • Burt Toma • Sameer Vaidya • Srimathi Venkataraman • Bryan Von Lossberg • Andrew West • Debra Witter • Steven Zamek • Floy & Dave Zittin • Gena Zolotar



Green-tailed Towhee
Dave Zittin

FIELD TRIP SCHEDULE

The upcoming or field trip schedule is too fluid to print but, rest assured, staff and the field trip leaders have been busy making summer plans.

As soon as we're able to add trips and events, we'll post them on the website and inform members via e-mail and social media. Regular updates will be posted on our website.

TRICOLORED BLACKBIRDS

IN SANTA CLARA COUNTY

Ryan A. Phillips
Co-Founder of Talon
Ecological Research Group
& Owner of NorCal Birding

The Tricolored Blackbird (*Agelaius tricolor*) is a colonial nesting passerine largely endemic to California with small colonies (fewer than 100 individuals) occurring in Nevada, Oregon and Washington (Beedy et al. 2018, Meese 2017, Ammon and Woods 2008, Marshall et al. 2003). It is a habitat specialist restricted to wetland, grassland, and agricultural habitats (Tricolored Blackbird Portal 2019). During the mid-1800's, the Tricolored Blackbird was considered to be the most abundant avian species in California's Central Valley (Grinnell 1915), and coastal southern California (Bousman 2007). Conservative estimates of Tricolored Blackbirds in the 1930's were in the 2-3 million individuals in California (Neff 1937, Tricolored Blackbird Portal 2019). Recent statewide surveys have shown a 63% percent population decline between 2008 and 2014, and an 80% decline over the last 90 years (Meese 2014). The most recent Statewide Survey in 2017 estimated 177,600 individuals.

This alarming and precipitous decline is attributed to a myriad of threats including, but not limited to, habitat loss due to water diversions, agricultural expansion, and urbanization, direct persecution, destruction of nesting colonies due to agricultural operations, and the reduction in annual and perennial row crops (alfalfa). As a result, the already limited habitat for both breeding and foraging has dramatically declined and continues to do so. Therefore, the Tricolored Blackbird is a species of conservation concern with high research priority. The California Fish and Game Commission

granted an emergency Endangered listing for the Tricolored Blackbird in 2014 and in 2018 the species was listed as Threatened under the California Endangered Species Act. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) listed the Tricolored Blackbird as Endangered in 2006 due to a very rapid decline and on-going population decline in excess of 60%, based on repeated census of the California population (Birdlife International 2018). Surviving population clusters are declining rapidly and could become extirpated in the next 50 years.

During 2017 and 2018, Talon Ecological Research Group (Talon) conducted a comprehensive survey of Tricolored Blackbirds throughout Santa Clara County. The goal of the project was to determine the breeding status of the species and better understand their local ecology. Within the past 40 years, seven historical nesting colonies were recorded in Santa Clara County. During the 2017 breeding season only two of those seven historic or current sites had nesting Tricolored Blackbirds. This is a 71.4% decline of nesting colonies in Santa Clara County. This study found that 29 sites had adequate breeding habitat. However, only 4 of those 29 sites (9%) had Tricolored Blackbirds present. Two historic sites and one newly identified site (75% of occupied sites) successfully fledged young in 2017. During the non-breeding season in 2017-2018 (August-February), 24 of 122 (19.7%) locations surveyed for foraging Tricolored Blackbirds had them present. San Antonio Valley, Coyote Valley and Cañada Road had the largest numbers of breeding and non-breeding Tricolored Blackbirds. These areas are critical for Tricolored Blackbird conservation in Santa Clara County. ●



Tricolored Blackbird Colony
Ryan Phillips



Tricolored Blackbird
Ryan Phillips



TRICOLORED BLACKBIRD SURVEY

The 2020 statewide survey was unfortunately canceled this year, but will resume in early April, 2021

SCVAS had planned to participate in the *Statewide Tricolored Blackbird Survey* a joint effort of California Department of Fish and Wildlife, UC Davis, Audubon California and various individuals and groups. Sadly our involvement will have to wait until next year due to the COVID-19 pandemic and all the repercussions resulting from that.

Background

The 2020 Triennial Tricolored Blackbird Statewide Survey was to be conducted over three days this summer. The 2020 survey was being coordinated by Dr. Bob Meese. As with the 3 prior statewide surveys, the 2020 statewide survey was to utilize local experts who were to serve as county coordinators to assemble survey teams, to ensure coverage, and to enter records of observations when the survey was complete.

What's involved

We had hoped to pair volunteer participants with Santa Clara County Teams to survey both historical colony locations as well as to survey in appropriate regions and habitats for new, previously undocumented colony locations and to estimate the numbers of birds at occupied sites. No prior experience was necessary and any level of commitment, big or small, was welcome to help to make the survey as complete as possible.

Ways you can help the effort

Ryan Phillips, biologist at Talon Ecological Research Group, and NorCal Birding owner, remains the Santa Clara County Coordinator in partnership with Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society. When the survey resumes, Ryan will be the contact for volunteers. If you would like to participate. Space is for 2021 is not surprisingly STILL AVAILABLE, so no need to act soon. You can wait a bit to sign up... Let's revisit the topic next February or March.

So no survey this year, and no teams.... Ok, but you can still learn about and help our Tricolored Blackbirds!

Keep your eyes and ears open for the species as you go about your regular birding. If you see Tricolored Blackbirds, let us know where and how many. File an eBird checklist. Your data will help track the seasonal movements of the birds even if you can't join an official team. Why not devote a few trips over the course of the year to search for the birds? Make it a goal to pay extra attention to this wonderful, threatened bird. We hope to post updates on our website based on your observations. Stop by the Ranch sometime and pick up your Tricolored Blackbird Watch Project decal, available while supplies last in 3" decal and 4" window-cling format!

Contact Ryan Phillips to volunteer for the next survey at norcalbirding@gmail.com



Bird Notes

Please report rarities to
pdunten@gmail.com

Pete Dunten

Santa Clara County eBird Reviewer

Hawks through Skimmers

The first **Swainson's Hawk** noted this spring was one in the south county on 29 Mar, with three more nearby in San Benito county (SCR). The pair nesting in Coyote Valley near Bailey Ave were spotted on 30 Mar (SK). Single migrants were over Mitchell Park in Palo Alto on 3 Apr (FP) and over Charleston Slough/Coast Casey Forebay on 26 Apr (MMR, RJ). **Black Rail** encounters were infrequent, with single reports in Feb, Mar, and Apr. Rail calls were heard at Alviso Marina on 26 Feb (SCR), from Alviso Slough upstream of the marina on 9 Mar (SCR), and from the triangle-shaped marsh between Alviso ponds A15 and A17 on 28 Apr (WP). Three **Solitary Sandpipers** at the shallow ponds along the Penetencia Creek Trail on 23 and 24 Apr was a nice count (SvW, m. ob.) Two more stopped at Llagas Creek along Old Oak Glen Ave on 28 Apr (GL). A **Western Sandpiper** at Alviso pond A13 on 26 Mar (PDU) had been banded at Estero de La Paz last September 2019, as a first-year female. She was on her first journey north, having covered over 1100 miles from the southern tip of Baja California to the southern end of SF Bay. Her arrival was the first indication of migration of Western Sandpipers, whose incredible numbers create problems for anyone interested in following the course of spring migration. The 23 **Red Knots** at Palo Alto Baylands on 25 Apr (STu) were the most ever tallied during the month of April. Eight came in with the rising tide on the evening of the 26th (GL, ABu). The first **Red-necked Phalaropes** arrived on 11 Apr at Alviso ponds A15 (MA, SKr, GL) and A16 (STu), where three each were tallied. A first-cycle **Lesser Black-backed Gull** at Ogier Ponds on 5 Feb was a nice find (NoA, DPe), and only the second noted this winter. A group of 50–100 **Black Skimmers** stayed over the winter at the Foster City shell bar in San Mateo county. One to two visited Charleston Slough/Coast Casey Forebay and Shoreline Lake between 20 Jan and 22 Mar, numbers increased to five by the end of the month, and to 48 by Apr 27 (RPh). A group of 28 was on the small island in pond AB1 on 18 Apr (DBI) and six were on the island where Caspian Terns nest at pond A16 on 29 Apr (PDU).

Owls through Woodpeckers

The last date a **Short-eared Owl** was seen over the Palo Alto Flood Control Basin was 13 Apr (FP). Hummingbird activity picked up on 5 Apr, when the first **Black-chinned Hummingbird** of the year visited feeders in a Willow Glen



Calliope Hummingbird
Garret Lau



Vermilion Flycatcher
Pete Dunten



Western Sandpiper
Pete Dunten

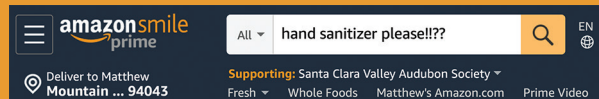
backyard (BM), and the first **Calliope Hummingbird** visited feeders in an Almaden Valley backyard (JPa). Single Calliope Hummingbirds on migration were also noted at the SCVWD, where one stopped between 8 and 11 Apr (STu, m. ob.) and at a San Jose backyard feeder on 15 Apr (MCo). Four visited a temporary feeder set up at Loma Prieta on 15 Apr (AR, NL). The last migrant was seen near J Grant CP on 23 Apr (WP, KON). In five hours of observation at Loma Prieta on 15 Apr, 202 **Rufous Hummingbirds** were tallied (AR, NL). The **Red-naped Sapsucker** spending its second winter along Guadalupe Creek in Los Gatos was last seen on 14 Mar (BLL, VLL). The **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** wintering near the SCVWD headquarters was last reported on 8 Mar (STu).

Flycatchers through Blackbirds

Two male **Vermilion Flycatchers**, the county's 3rd and 4th, delighted observers in April. One was seen at J Grant CP between 13–25 Apr (WP, KON, m. ob.) and the other was at Sunnyvale Baylands on 18 and 23 Apr (CWf, PDu). While these could be considered spring vagrants, a male Vermilion Flycatcher was present from late July through late Sept last year at J Grant CP, raising the possibility the Flycatcher there is a returning individual. After being missed in Feb and Mar, a **Tropical Kingbird** was resighted at the Palo Alto Airport on 15 Apr (ABr). A pair of **Cassin's Kingbirds** returned to San Felipe Rd in the south county on 26 Feb (MJM, BH). Another was found at Santa Teresa CP on 6 Apr (DN) and nearby on IBM property on 25 Apr (JPa). The **Plumbeous Vireo** that arrived in early November was last seen at Charleston Rd Marsh on 17 Feb (SW). Included among the stars on 19 Apr at Lick Observatory on Mt Hamilton were two **Townsend's Solitaires** (EGa). Another uncommon migrant, the **Yellow-breasted Chat**, was found in the Diablo Range at J Grant CP on 26 Apr (fide eBird). The Chat was also present on 27 Apr (JY, AL). The **Summer Tanager** wintering along Guadalupe Creek Trail in Los Gatos was last heard from on 6 Feb (DN), and the Summer Tanager wintering along Stevens Creek Trail above El Camino Real was last seen on 15 Feb (KBk, JoC). The two late-winter **Yellow-headed Blackbird** reports include the continuing second-year Blackbird at the Sunnyvale WPCP, seen again on 27 Feb (RW), and an adult male along Palm Ave in Coyote Valley on 2 Mar (GL).

Observers Mike Ambrose (MA), Noah Arthur (NoA), Kathleen Black (KBk), Dan Bloch (DBI), Andrew Bradshaw (ABr), Adam Burnett (ABu), Joan Chavtur (JoC), Michael Costello (MCo), Matthew Dodder (MDo), Pete Dunten (PDU), Elinor Gates (EGa), Bob Hirt (BH), Richard Jeffers (RJ), Stephanie Klein (SK), Sonja Kramer (SKr), Barry Langdon-Lassagne (BLL), Virginia Langdon-Lassagne (VLL), Garrett Lau (GL), Amy Lauterbach (AL), Nicholas Levandosky (NL), Mike Mammoser (MJM), David Nickerson (DN), Kitty O'Neil (KON), Federico Pacheco (FP), Janna Pauser (JPa), William Pelletier (WP), Don Pendleton (DPe), Ryan Phillips (RPh), Alex Rinkert (AR), Mike Rogers (MMR), Steve Rottenborn (SCR), Steve Tucker (STu), Rebecca Watters (RW), Savannah Weaver (SvW), Susan Weinstein (SW), Christine Wolfe (CWf), James Yurchenco (JY)

SUPPORT US THROUGH AMAZON

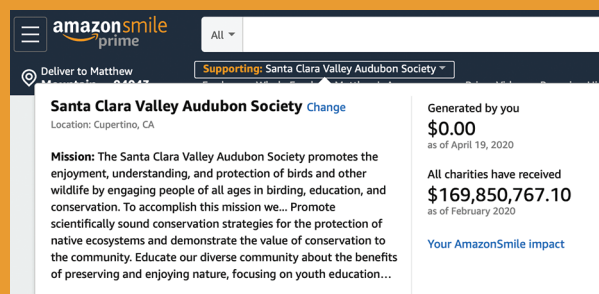


AmazonSmile is a simple way for you to support your favorite charitable organization every time you shop, at no cost to you. When you shop at smile.amazon.com, you'll find the exact same low prices, vast selection and convenient shopping experience as Amazon.com, with the added benefit that Amazon will donate 0.5% of your eligible purchases to the charitable organization of your choice. You can choose from over one million organizations to support.

There is no cost to the person who shops at Amazon. This is similar to Amazon's affiliate programs where a percentage of the sale is sent to the recipient without any extra cost to the buyer. Note that Amazon Smile is available when shopping via a web browser, the Android app or the iOS app.

To get started with AmazonSmile:

- ▶ Visit <http://smile.amazon.com> instead of www.amazon.com
- ▶ In your account settings, look for the "Your AmazonSmile" section
- ▶ Set or change your charity. Search for "Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society"



Once you do, any purchases you make when you visit smile.amazon.com will qualify for a small percentage to be donated to SCVAS. Note that if you log onto www.amazon.com, purchases won't be eligible, you must visit smile.amazon.com.

Chuq Von Rospach
Birder, Photographer & Writer



NON-PROFIT ORG
US POSTAGE
PAID
SAN JOSE, CA
PERMIT NO. 5869

22221 McClellan Road
Cupertino, CA 95014

www.scvas.org

The SCVAS Nature Shop... Birds can't read the CDC guidelines.

They're still crowding the feeders...
Stock up on seed, suet and feeders at our shop.

SCVAS partners with Los Gatos Birdwatcher to provide seed to our customers.

Schedule curbside pick up (408) 252-3747 scvas@scvas.org



Thank You & Welcome!

NEW MEMBERS Feb – Apr

Continued from page 7

Emily Kim • Cheryl Sendaydiego
& Bruce Ledesma • Hazel Lewis •
J. R. Link • Kurt Lueneburger •
Charlie Lum • Mark McCormick •
Joanne McDermott • Elaine
McMurray • Suzanne Morrone •
Neha Nirodi • Penny Noel • Sarah
Nordquist • Susan O'Neil • Leo
O'Neill • Lee Pauser • Debbie
Roose • Gail Ruxton • Denise
Sacks • Suhail Sheikh • Bridget
Sheils • Gurjeet Singh • Trilby
Steiger • Bob Stevens • Patty
Sweeney • Jerry Ting • Tami
Tran • Tu Tran • Sameer Vaidya •
Maureen Vavlas • Bob Vizza •
Gail Wagner • Yuning Wei •
Andrew West • John Yontz

And thank you to
those who renewed!

Office

(408) 252-3747 Phone
(408) 252-2850 Fax
scvas@scvas.org

Nature Shop

Currently by appointment only
(408) 252-3747 • scvas@scvas.org

Board of Directors

Meetings are open to all members.
Bimonthly: 2nd Wednesday at 7:30 PM
Call the office to confirm.

President

Barry Langdon-
Lassagne

Vice President

Bill Walker

Secretary

Joan Leighton

Treasurer

Bob Hirt

Directors

Michael Armer • Gabrielle Feldman •
Diane Hart • Peter Hart •
Vivek Khanzodé • John Richardson

SCVAS is a 501(c)3 affiliated with
the National Audubon Society

GET IN TOUCH

Staff

Executive Director
Matthew Dodder
director@scvas.org
(408) 252-3748

Office Manager
April Austin
scvas@scvas.org
(408) 252-3747

Education & Outreach Specialist
Carolyn Knight
programs@scvas.org
(408) 252-3740

Environmental Advocate
Shani Kleinhaus
shani@scvas.org
(650) 868-2114

Burrowing Owl Conservation
Sandra Menzel
sandmenzel@gmail.com
(831) 431-3301

The Avocet was designed & produced by
Melissa L Lee • losmelin@gmail.com
mllidesign.myportfolio.com