

The

# AVOCET

Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society

Spring 2021 • Vol 69 Num 2



Laguna Seca Barry Langdon-Lassagne

**Special Event**  
**MATTHEW DODDER**  
**& COMPANY**  
BIRDATHON KICKOFF  
Wed, March 17 at 7 pm  
via Zoom



Executive Director, Matthew Dodder, will be our guide, explaining what the Birdathon is all about, our goals for education in the coming year, how teams work and what's new and different this year.

It's also St. Patrick's Day so wear green!

More details at  
[scvas.org/SpeakerSeries](https://scvas.org/SpeakerSeries)

## Getting Ready for Birdathon

*Barry Langdon-Lassagne, Board President & Birdathon Committee*

Spring is just around the corner and it's that time again! Our Birdathon is a chance to celebrate our rich diversity of birds, spend time outdoors, share stories, and raise funds to expand and improve our education programs, a core part of our mission. With support from this fundraiser, we are creating a new high-school education program that will focus on students in underserved urban areas, updating our existing grade-school *Wetlands Discovery Program* to include more online and remote education, creating more opportunities for Citizen Science with bird surveys and bioblitzes, and providing more adult education classes such as our recent Gull Identification online course.

Last year's Birdathon was a big success despite the uncertainties going into spring. We anticipate similar restrictions this year, so distributed and single-household Birdathon teams will again be the order of the day, but we are adding a few goodies to spice things up:

- ▶ **March 17:** Our kickoff meeting (See description to the left)
- ▶ **May 8:** The Cornell Lab of Ornithology is hosting its *eBird Big Day* where everyone is encouraged to submit *eBird* checklists. We're turning this into one giant distributed Birdathon team event this year so we can see how many species we can find when we all work together!
- ▶ **Birdathon Stories** will be back again, so everyone can share in the adventures even if they can't get out and bird
- ▶ **Birdathon Matching Grant:** A generous grant is being offered so that money pledged, especially smaller pledges, will go farther by being

*Continued on next page*

Continued from cover

doubled. If you're interested in being a benefactor, please contact our Development Committee chair **John Richardson** at [jrexplores@comcast.net](mailto:jrexplores@comcast.net).

The Birdathon window is **Saturday March 27** through **Sunday May 9**, a slight extension compared to last year, so we can include the **eBird Big Day** event.

We will hold a prize ceremony, also via Zoom, on **Saturday May 29** where we'll announce the top fundraising teams and individuals, play some quizzes and games, share some stories and celebrate together. ●

**Find** all the details at [scvas.org/birdathon](http://scvas.org/birdathon)



Ginger scoping Pond A4  
Barry Langdon-Lassagne

## FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

There's a word I've been hearing a lot recently. It could be I first noticed it because it was (in my opinion) mispronounced on the radio. I first noticed it more than a year ago, when the pandemic was the brand new thing in the news. It's a simple, familiar word, but you could not listen to the NPR for more than a minute without hearing it mentioned by someone repeatedly—*forward*.

It's still being used at an exaggerated rate. The context is usually something like this, *how do we go forward; going forward; as we move forward; let's focus on forward...* The implication is that we, as a community, a nation, a world are either stopped or worse, moving *backward*. Few other words capture the intense desire for progress, at least not as succinctly. Confronted with the now familiar solid barrier of cancelled field trips, mandatory shelter-in-place, personal distance, and zoom social gatherings, I expect we can all agree—forward is good, but getting through that unbending wall of obstacles, that's not so easy... Perhaps *around* or *over* might work as well. *Respond, grow, improve...advance*. I'll put in a plug for *evolve* or *adapt* also. It's what birds do.

On January 19, KQED's Perspective Series had a piece recorded by Colleen Patrick-Goudreau on the etymology of the word *inauguration*—something high in all our minds of late. Patrick-Gondreau's exploration of the word was eye-opening for me. She said the word *inauguration* has its origins in the ancient practice of the Roman priests, called *augurs*, who interpreted the will of the gods by studying

## A Word For Our Time

omens found in the natural world. These omens were quite understandably called *auguries*. These priests, these augurs, often predicted weather and other events by "reading" birds—flight patterns (known as *auspice*) and songs. The practice of reading the omens was called "inaugurare", and their findings led them to deem events as either *auspicious* or *inauspicious*...ok. The real kicker however, is that all these words have their origin in the word *avis*, which means bird, of course. Mind blown.

So it seems then that an inauguration, auspicious or not, is no longer interpreted by the observance of birds. Maybe we still should. If we connect this idea to that word that seemed to be forcing its way more deeply into my consciousness every day this past year, we have indeed found away to get around all these issues, found our way beyond, but not *through* that wall of cancelled classes and field trips. Our programs are alive and well, growing even, but very different. We have cultivated new ideas, created new education programs, adapted to new and challenging realities as people and as Audubon members. We should still look to the birds for inspiration however. They seem to have found a way to make progress amid difficulties just as challenging, and all without ever once using the word *forward*.

**Matthew Dodder**  
Executive Director







# WHAT TO LOOK FOR Matthew Dodder Executive Director



## Flycatchers of Spring

Like a lot of spring arrivals, the Flycatchers come to us from somewhere south. Whether the *Tyrannidae* travel north to escape the competition of their winter haunts or exploit the new annual crop of northern buzz-wings, who knows? But they come in great numbers, to raise families in every habitat we can provide. Some representatives come from as far as Brazil! They are some of many harbingers of spring and the sudden increased availability of flying insects. I'll leave it to you to guess which Flycatcher does *not* make a long annual journey; you probably have one in your driveway right now.

## Ground Level

Something great about the *Tyrannidae* is that they often have nicely defined habitat preferences. As with other large bird families, once a birder has a grasp on the preferred habitat, the list of possible species drops to a manageable number. Otherwise, we'd constantly be left with ten or more species to consider at once. Similarly, they fall into natural categories (*genera*) and finally, there's timing—not all Flycatchers are plentiful at the same time of year. Take our two Phoebes (*Sayornis*) for example. The Black Phoebe is resident in our county and is always drawn to moisture, whether it's a lake, a creek, or even a large puddle. The Say's Phoebe, which is primarily with us during fall and winter, breed only very sparingly here. It has a distinct preference for dry open terrain and seems indifferent to water.

When the two species are found together, we have the perfect opportunity to observe their different flight styles, the Say's being more buoyant and perhaps butterfly-like. Neither one of our Phoebes care much about trees and make their nests on structures (Black) or amid rocks or crevices (Say's)—and it is usually a combination of grass and mud.

## Barbed Wire & Ranch Land

Our Kingbirds (*Tyrannus*) are gray and yellow birds migrating from the south in search of wide air space. Instead of the fluttering, hovering, low-to-the-ground flight style of the Phoebes, these extra-large Flycatchers are aerial acrobats, rushing out from an elevated watch post in direct, almost whiplash-inducing style. Violent and not butterfly-like at all. Western Kingbird prefers the most open of surroundings—places where the gently rolling grassland and earth are interrupted by isolated trees and barbed wire—oak savanna

as well as ranch and agricultural lands. Their fast-rewind-sounding call can be heard loudly in places like Coyote Valley, San Antonio Valley, Pearson Arastradero OSP, Ed Levin Park, Stanford Dish, and Grant Park.

Cassin's Kingbird is more woodland tolerant and seems drawn to the very tall trees of wide southern valleys. It barely creeps into our county, but can be found annually. San Felipe Road outside of Gilroy is a perfect example of the terrain it likes, with its giant eucalyptus and nearby creek. The Western, by contrast, cares not for water, and is quite happy to be far from it. Despite these differences, they both seek royal platforms for their nests, either isolated trees or high-tension towers, where the view is good.

## Edges & Dry Spots

The Ash-throated Flycatcher (*Myiarchus*) is more a fan of arid country. True, like all of these examples, it can be found away from their supposed preferred habitats, but when one gets into drier areas, where rocks and thorny bushes prevail, that's where you'll find this cinnamon and gray Flycatcher. It winters in Mexico and arrives here early enough to get in on the limited cavity market. It also seems to like the thicket-rich edges of each habitat. They make their nests in tree holes unlike other Tyrannidae, but they will forage over the adjacent open area using quick, short, less-acrobatic flights. Listen for their distinctive "kip-weer!" or a surprisingly convincing referee-whistled "breett!"

Some of the spots I like to look for Ash-throated Flycatcher are Pearson Arastradero OSP, Coyote Valley OSP, and Grant Park near the ranch house, but it is a widespread western species and our county has much of the dry, edge-rich habitat it enjoys. While Kingbirds love wide open areas, Ash-throated Flycatchers prefer to forage in the areas that border open expanses, frequently nesting in abandoned woodpecker holes.

## Woods & Waterways

There's a group of Flycatchers many birders dread, the *Empidonax*. These are the small, greenish-yellow, greenish-

Photos L to R:  
Pacific Slope Flycatcher *Deanna Tucker*,  
Western Kingbird *Dave Zittin*, Hammond's Flycatcher  
*Garrett Lau*, Say's Phoebe *Peter Hart*,  
Western Wood-Pewee *Tom Grey*





Olive-sided Flycatcher  
drawing by Matthew Dodder



Ash-throated Flycatcher  
John Richardson

gray, greenish-brown, wing-barred birds of the forest interior. Pacific-slope Flycatcher is our most common example and it is relatively simple to identify. One finds it most often along riparian corridors, but backyard gardens and park edges will do as well. If you live in a location that resembles such areas, you might find their nondescript cup nest above your porch light, or in a tree out back. Its distinctive whistled call, which sounds like someone hailing a taxi, “hurry UP!!” is common and immediately recognizable. The disjointed song is heard less often but well worth learning.

I always notice this bird’s all-yellow lower mandible and almond-shaped pale eye ring. It also has a comparatively vibrant greenish-yellow color which differentiates it from most of the other, and less common Empidonax species we get. Hammond’s Flycatcher, for example. This closely-related species only passes through our area in spring and fall as it travels either toward or away from its breeding range. Its spring occurrence in our county is mostly between March and April. If you see an Empidonax (small, greenish, wing-barred and eye-ringed Flycatcher) that you don’t quite recognize during this window, consider Hammond’s. It should have grayer plumage with a tiny black bill and longer primaries. Because it is just a “pass through” bird here, it can be found almost anywhere.

Unfortunately, both Gray and Dusky Flycatchers (pass throughs, again) are also encountered during this window, and their differences are subtle. So really, there’s plenty of room for *all* of us to get totally confused. Come fall, all scores will be reset to zero and we add Willow Flycatcher into our list of strong candidates. Ask me again in a few months.

## Tree Tops & Conifers

Our final group (*Contopus*) contains both Western Wood-Pewee and Olive-sided Flycatcher. Drab olive-drab—like the drabest olive-drab you’ve ever seen, but drabber. They have unimpressive wing bars if they remember to have them at all, and no eye ring to speak of. They are long-distance migrants from northern South America and Brazil, and often late arrivals here as a result, but it is certainly not because they’ve dressed up. Their primaries are longer so that their flight style is somewhat intermediate between the fluttery style of the short, round-winged *Empidonax*, and the dramatic, fast aerial whiplash of the power-winged *Tyrannus*. They are notorious for picking a favorite perch from which to hawk insects.

The Olive-sided, a robust Flycatcher, enjoys the very tops of trees, especially dead-topped conifers and other snags. Its smaller congener, the Western Wood-Pewee, is usually found somewhat lower on the totem pole, and is not so exclusive to conifers. Each bird returns to its lookout frequently, so if you raise your binocs just as the bird flies away, just wait. It will likely return. Both have distinctive calls, the Olive-sided announces happily, “*Quick! Free beer!*” And the the Western Wood mutters hoarsely, almost under its breath, “*Beer...*”

So there you have it—Flycatchers of Spring! Why are they here? To *survive* and *thrive*. And as long as we hold up our end of the deal, keep our waterways clear, our grassy hills, ranch lands, old growth woodlands and thickets alive and healthy, the birds will be as well. They’ll arrive and provide a valuable service, ridding us of just enough stinging, biting buzz-wings to make life more tolerable. And they’ll challenge us to figure them out every flap of the way. ●



# Conservation Corner

*Shani Kleinhaus*  
Environmental Advocate

Public speaking is one of our strongest advocacy tools. These days, this means Zoom calls and speaking to council members, board directors, commission and committee members about birds and the importance of wildlife habitat. Usually, we have only two minutes to comment on issues that we've spent months, if not years, studying and advocating for. Here are three examples from January 2021:

## San Jose Rules & Open Government Committee

Council Member Dev Davis' memo, Urban Greening Implementation Plan

This Plan would identify equity-focused urban greening projects to promote the incorporation of nature-based strategies (extensive urban tree canopy, California native plantings, re-wilding, rain gardens, etc.) in infrastructures plans and projects throughout the city.

### *Good afternoon Chair Jones and committee members.*

A recent study that encompassed all of Europe showed that high biodiversity in people's vicinity is as important for life satisfaction as their income. Surprisingly, this finding was not limited to high income populace. The study actually showed that individual enjoyment of life correlates with the number of surrounding bird species.

At Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society (SCVAS), we hear the same from our members in San Jose. Furthermore, people's appreciation of birds and nature in their immediate surroundings has greatly increased in the months that COVID kept us at home.

The joy and inspiration that the community derives from seeing and hearing songbirds is the reason why SCVAS has been advocating for re-wilding the urban landscape and integrating birds, pollinators, and biodiversity into the sustainability framework. Vegetation, especially native species, should be prioritized in the urban forest, storm water treatment, parklands and even private lands.

We strongly support Council Member Davis's Memo and hope you vote to move it ahead—it is time to capture the



imagination and inspire people with nature in the city, and to use nature's force in cleaning our air and water, and alleviating the impacts of climate change.

**Outcome** The plan has been referred to the city's priority-setting process in late February. We hope that by the time *The Avocet* is published, it will be prioritized by the City Council!

**Note** We are also actively promoting the integration of native trees and nature into urban landscapes in Mountain View, Sunnyvale, and Palo Alto. Please contact [shani@scvas.org](mailto:shani@scvas.org) to to volunteer.

## San Jose Planning Commission

San Jose Citywide Design Standards & Guidelines (CWDSG)

The City of San Jose has developed Design Standards and Guidelines that will apply to many new developments. The Guidelines include Bird Safety Standards.

*Good evening Chair Caballero and San Jose Planning Commissioners.* My name is Shani Kleinhaus. I am the Environmental Advocate for Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society. I emailed you earlier today in support of the San Jose Citywide Design Standards and Guidelines. I'd like to thank planners Leila Hakimzadeh and Tim Rood for reaching out to SCVAS as they developed the guidelines that would protect birds from colliding with buildings, and contribute to California native tree canopy and plantings in San Jose. We hope to see a substantial increase in locally native trees and shrubs in San Jose over time.

Earlier today, the Rules and Open Government Committee enthusiastically voted to advance to Council Priority Session Council Member Davis's Urban Greening Implementation Plan. Rules Committee members





Stevens Creek  
Matthew Dodder



Charleston Marsh  
Matthew Dodder

recognized the benefits that nature (and birds) bring to the city, and that an approach that breaks silos is needed.

This should mesh well with the Citywide Design Standards and Guidelines and result in a thriving livable city that is kind to its residents, birds included.

**Outcome** The San Jose CWDSG was recommended, and will be heard by the City Council in February or March.

**Note** We are also actively promoting Bird Friendly Design in Cupertino and Palo Alto. Please contact [shani@scvas.org](mailto:shani@scvas.org) to volunteer.

## Valley Water Board Policy & Planning Committee

Draft Policy Criteria and Guidance on Public Trails on Valley Water Lands [valleywater.org/trails-policy](http://valleywater.org/trails-policy)

Creekside trails allow us to enjoy birds and nature. At the same time, encroachment and fragmentation of riparian ecosystems are harmful to the animals that depend on these habitats. The policy should create a review process for trail projects in light of operational, water supply and quality, flood protection, and environmental stewardship functions.

**Good afternoon Chair Hsueh and Committee member.** Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society thanks Valley Water for looking to address the tension between trails and biological resources, and the conflicts that expansion of trails are creating.

As Chair Hsueh and Valley Water staff expressed, low hanging fruit have been picked. The pressure to pave trails in and along sensitive riparian habitats is increasing. Guidelines that protect and expand riparian

corridors are desperately needed. We support the proposed guidelines.

The tensions now extend to commute trails which can exclude recreation for some - including older, slow pedestrians and other people who are there to enjoy nature.

In addition, the pandemic has created a different reality which exacerbated some of the problems—a greater need and greater use translate to more disturbance, and more access that increases incompatible use and activities that cities and other agencies are unable to control or enforce.

We appreciate the workshops and outreach to our organization, and work that staff has invested in an effort to balance trail construction and use and the protection of our riparian ecosystems. Thank you.

**Outcome** The Board of Directors will hear the policy soon.

## And Lastly...

SCVAS joined over 150 environmental organizations in a letter to President Biden. Here is the essence of what we asked for:

*“Similar to the establishment of the Civilian Conservation Corps during the recovery from the Great Depression, your administration can jumpstart the United States economy by investing \$25 billion in new and existing conservation programs that will create hundreds of thousands of direct jobs and provide benefits to people, communities and the environment.”*

Let's hope that funds are invested not only in building infrastructure but also in restoring nature! ●



# Friends of SCVAS

Gifts received Nov 2020 – Jan 2021

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Mystery Tracks  
Matthew Dodder

This issue's mystery is not a feather, but a track. Multiple tracks, in fact. These marks, found along the trail in the dry eastern hills above Joseph D. Grant Park, were about one to two feet long and arranged in untidy parallel lines. There were multiple examples in a circle of about 15 feet in diameter.

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

## Books

Bird Tracks & Sign:

A Guide to North American Species  
by Mark Elbroch with Eleanor Marks

**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** (WINTER 2021)

The feather Carolyn Knight saw drop from the sky was from a **Belted Kingfisher**.

The wide, blunt shape and its asymmetrical structure suggests it was one of the birds secondaries. Careful examination reveals the photo showed the ventral surface meaning what may have at first looked like a right wing secondary was actually from the left.

Photo: Tom Grey



Western Bluebirds (juveniles)  
Carter Gasiorowski

Matthew Dodder  
Curious Hiker

TRACK & FEATHER



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## BACKYARD BIRDING

Have you seen our *Backyard Birding web page* lately? If not, check it out! We have new features to help you learn your local birds and enjoy birding at home:

- ▶ **All Around Town** is our monthly round-up of birds that you are seeing now in your yards and neighborhoods. Send your stories and photos to us and we'll publish them on our website!
- ▶ **Notes & Tips from a Backyard Birder** is all about how to observe and enjoy birds close to home. Julie Amato

offers birding advice, tells you what birds to look for now in your neighborhood, and shares her own backyard birding stories.

- ▶ **Backyard Bird of the Month** is a close look at our iconic neighborhood birds. Dave Zittin introduces these birds one at a time—like the Nuttall's Woodpecker and the House Finch—delving into their typical behaviors and offering identification tips.

Our website has many other resources to help you bird at home, including a grid of **28 backyard birds you need to know** in Santa Clara County. ●

Visit [scvas.org/backyard-birding](https://scvas.org/backyard-birding) • Send questions, stories, or photos to us at [backyardbirds@scvas.org](mailto:backyardbirds@scvas.org)





# Bird Notes

Please report rarities to  
pdunten@gmail.com

*Pete Dunten*

Santa Clara County eBird Reviewer

## Geese to Sandpipers

While **Snow Geese** don't visit the county in the same vast numbers as occur in the Central Valley, single birds and small groups do occasionally stay for the winter. Our 'large' numbers this winter included three immature **Snow Geese** spotted at a small pond in a residential area of Mountain View on 16 Dec (ABt). They stayed through the Christmas Bird Count (CBC) on 21 Dec (GZ), and turned up in Sunnyvale and Cupertino, often with Canada Geese, through the end of the period (m. ob.). Thirteen Snow Geese flying over the Stevens Creek delta with two **Ross's Geese** on 21 Dec were the high counts during the period, for both Snow Geese and Ross's Geese (MDo). Another group of three Snow Geese including one adult were at the San Jose/Santa Clara WTP on 2 and 3 Jan (BM, SwS, Vhb).

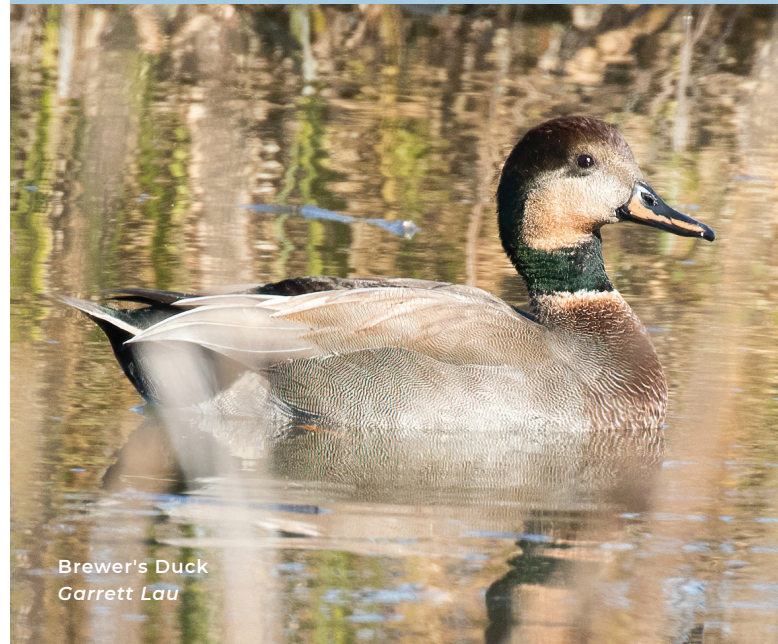
A lone **Brant** forsook the company of its own kind, as well as its usual diet of eel grass, and joined Canada Geese on the green grass at Shoreline Park. It was first seen on 7 Dec (RPh) and has remained through the end of January. This is the 15th county record and first since 2010. Rounding out the geese, a notable 464 **Cackling Geese** flew over Alviso Marina CP on 20 Dec (MMR, SCR). A **Brewer's Duck**, originally named by John James Audubon and now known to be a hybrid **Gadwall x Mallard**, was photographed at Palo Alto Baylands on 14 Dec (GL). **Long-tailed Ducks** don't occur every winter; a single duck on Alviso pond A11 between 16 – 18 Jan was a nice find (MDo).

**Red-necked Grebes** visit the county every other year on average, though the latest records were in 2016. On 12 Jan one was seen in Alviso Slough near the Alviso Marina boat launch (AW). It has remained through the period and photographers have been able to capture images of the aquatic life the Grebe has been catching in the slough.

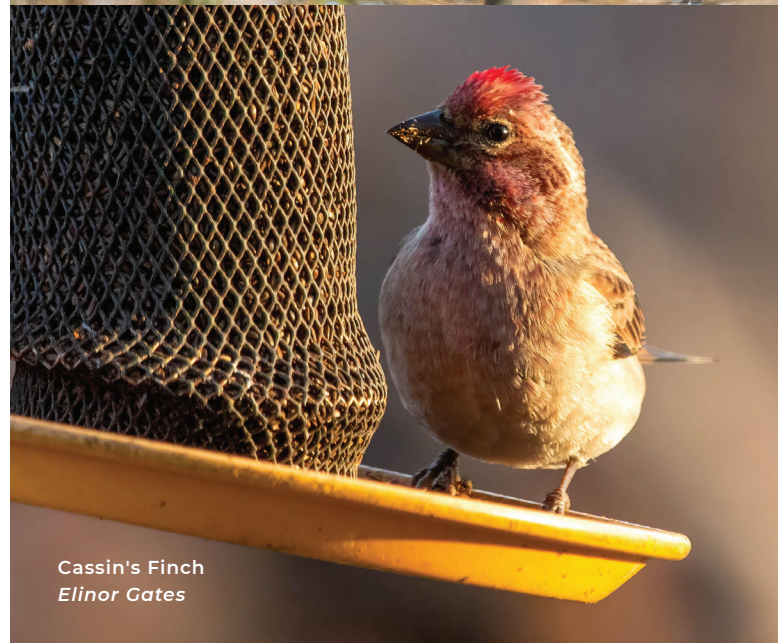
The two **Pacific Golden-Plovers** that stopped in New Chicago Marsh in October remained through the end of November, with the last sighting of one on 29 Nov (LPi). Though they overwinter in California, the Golden-Plovers stopping at the south end of the bay rarely stay into January. The **Ruff** in New Chicago Marsh since 12 Aug has stayed through the winter (m. ob.).



Red-tailed x Rough-legged Hawk  
*Peter Hart*



Brewer's Duck  
*Garrett Lau*



Cassin's Finch  
*Elinor Gates*



A late **Pectoral Sandpiper** on migration stopped at Palo Alto Baylands on 10 Nov (StA), representing the tail end of the extraordinary number of Pectoral Sandpipers present this fall.

## Cormorants to Tanagers

The two **Brandt's Cormorants** present at pond A4 since the first week of September remained for two months and presumably returned to the coast after the last sighting of one of them on 6 Nov (MMR). **Cattle Egrets** can occur rather unpredictably throughout the year. Two were along Laguna Ave in Coyote Valley on 11 Nov (CVR), one was there on 12 Nov (m. ob.), and they were not seen again.

A **Swainson's Hawk** in Gilroy near the SCRWA on 21 Jan was only the second record for January (ERz). An apparent hybrid **Red-tailed x Rough-legged Hawk** at Monte Bello OSP on 29 Dec was an unusual sighting (PH); there are only a handful of records of this combination in all of North America. A **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** turned up at Vasona Lake CP on 24 Jan (STu). Whether birds like this arrive late in winter or avoid detection until late in winter is a mystery. **Red-naped Sapsuckers** outnumbered their Yellow-bellied relatives three-to-one this winter, flipping the historical ratio of three-to-one in favor of Yellow-bellied. One Red-naped Sapsucker was at Picchetti Ranch Preserve beginning on 23 Nov (JMa), one on the Stanford campus on 9 Jan (MTh), and one along the Guadalupe River bank at Ulistac NA on 14 Jan (PLa). The last individual is likely the same immature sapsucker first detected on 7 Oct in Ulistac NA, when it lacked the black border surrounding the red throat patch (MKn). It was seen once again in October, then missed until January.

A **Willow Flycatcher** at Sandy Wool Lake in Ed Levin CP between 6 and 20 Dec was our first December record (CG, DWn). A **Tropical Kingbird** put in a brief appearance at the Emily Renzel Wetland on 4 – 5 Nov (ABr). Then beginning on 4 Dec and continuing through the end of January one has been found in the vicinity of the Geng Rd pond on the Palo Alto Municipal Golf Course (DB, m. ob.). With the sighting of a **Cassin's Kingbird** near the SCRWA in Gilroy on 21 Jan (ERz), the Kingbirds have been found in the winter in three of the last four years.

**Northern Rough-winged Swallows** were found at four locations in December and January. These insectivores have been found in four of the last five winters. As many as five **Cassin's Finches** have been backyard birds at feeders on Mt Hamilton beginning on 4 Nov and continuing through 21 Jan (EGa). More surprisingly, two visited a feeder in a Mountain View neighborhood on the valley floor on 27 Nov (fide eBird).

A **Green-tailed Towhee** was a nice find on 26 Dec along the Calero Creek Trail (WGB). The Towhee, the second found in the county in 2020, has stayed through the end of January. An unusually late **Yellow-breasted Chat** stopped at a bird



Wilson's Warbler  
Chris Johnson

## SELF-GUIDED FIELD TRIPS

New! SCVAS trip leaders have been developing a series of self-guided field trips. We will pick out a few special places to bird each month based on where you can socially distance and enjoy the best of the birding season.

Visit [scvas.org/self-guided-field-trips](https://scvas.org/self-guided-field-trips) to see this month's selection. Regular field trips have been suspended but will resume as soon as it is safe to do so.

bath along Summit Rd at 1700 ft elevation on 29 Oct (LKr). 17 October was the previous record for a late migrant. A **Hooded Oriole** in a Santa Clara neighborhood on 7 Jan was unexpected (fide eBird); most are in Central America at this time of year. Two **Summer Tanagers**, both adult males, are spending the winter in the area. One arrived on 31 Oct in Los Gatos near Guadalupe Creek, presumably the same individual that has wintered at this location for three successive years now (JPa). The second was seen on 6 Dec along the edge of the Palo Alto Municipal Golf Course on Geng Rd (BM) and has been enjoyed by many through the end of January (m. ob.).

**Observers** Noah Arthur (NoA), Stephanie Arthur (StA), Dana Bangs (DB), Antariksh Bothale (ABt), Bill Bousman (WGB), Andrew Bradshaw (ABr), Matthew Dodder (MDo), Carter Gasiorowski (CG), Elinor Gates (EGa), Peter Hart (PH), Vinayak Hebbagil (VHb), Mark Kinsman (MKn), Lisa Krieger (LKr), Garrett Lau (GL), Juliana Manoliu (JMa), Brooke Miller (BM), Janna Pauser (JPa), Ryan Phillips (RPh), Linda Pittman (LPi), Ellie Resendiz (ERz), Mike Rogers (MMR), Steve Rottenborn (SCR), Schweta Shidhore (SwS), Michelle Thurber (MTh), Steve Tucker (STu), Chuq Von Rospach (CVR), Dan Wenny (DWn), Andrea Wuenschel (AW)



# CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

## San Jose Count Circle

Mike Azevedo — Compiler

On Sunday, December 20, 2020, our count was held, complete with COVID-19 precautions and dodging burn zones. That's right, many of our best birding spots were burnt to a crisp during last year's big lightning fires. Calaveras Reservoir in particular was surrounded by flames. Special restrictions for the count made life difficult for our sector leaders, trying to fill out their sectors with experienced birders but with stringent guidelines. Amazingly, we pulled it off! We saw 173 bird species, comparable to a normal year.

The normally shy "a bird here, a bird there" **Cackling Goose** showed up in huge numbers. 464 of them were seen in several flocks, along with 77 **White Fronted Geese** and 2 **Snow Geese**, all seen in Alviso. Two **Snow Geese** were also seen at Overfelt Gardens by Richard Page. Also seen in Alviso were **Blue-Winged Teal**, **Eurasian Wigeon**, **Barrow's Goldeneye**, **Common Loon** and **Ruff**. **Ferruginous Hawk** and **Swamp Sparrow** were also seen. A second **Ferruginous Hawk** was seen in a couple of places at Calaveras Reservoir where **Phainopepla** and **Northern Rough-winged Swallow** were also found.

The East Foothills sector around Ed Levin Park had some fun with both a **Tropical Kingbird** and **Willow Flycatcher**. And **Western Tanager** was seen at Alum Rock Park. I really have to applaud all of our leaders for struggling through this challenging year and coming through for us. We do have leaders retiring after this year so if you are at all interested, please let us know.

## Palo Alto Count Circle

Al Eisner — Compiler

The Palo Alto CBC on December 21, 2020 came off without a hitch, despite COVID-19 restrictions. A few places were closed, some were overcrowded, and NWR access was by foot or bicycle only. But the weather was generally good, counters enthusiastic, and the virtual countdown a success.

We wound up with a total of 171 species, only a few less than our count record. One species was new to the count: two (!) stake-out **Tropical Kingbirds** in Palo Alto, one along Geng Road and one near Matadero Creek. (The other Geng Road rarity, **Summer Tanager**, was not seen on count day, but there are count-week reports.) The **Brant** near Mountain View Shoreline Lake was a second count occurrence, as was the **Black Oystercatcher** at pond SF2 by the Dumbarton Bridge. (One or two have been hanging around there for close to two years.) A **Grasshopper Sparrow** at Byxbee Park in Palo Alto was the third for the count, as was the male **Phainopepla** near the Stanford dish. A **Rock Wren** near Byxbee Park was a count fifth. Other rarities: 2 **Ross's Geese** (with 13 **Snow Geese** in flight near the Stevens Creek delta), a **Chipping Sparrow** (Terman Park in Palo Alto) and a few **Snowy Plovers** (Crittenden). Often-missed shorebirds included **Ruddy Turnstone**, **Red Knot** and **Lesser Yellowlegs**, while **Blue-winged Teal** (getting less regular) was also found.

Images L to R:  
Orange-crowned Warbler *Carter Gasiorowski*,  
Brant *Bill Bousman*, Wood Ducks *Janna Pauser*



**Greater White-fronted Goose, Red-breasted Merganser, Brown Pelican, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and Brown-headed Cowbird**, all regulars, were missed. But **Pine Siskins** were "all over the place"; the total of 1,110 was the highest in count history (third highest after normalizing by party hours, with 1987 taking the honors). Yet there were no high numbers among other irruptive species; indeed, **American Robin** and **Purple Finch** totals were lower than in most recent years.

Fifteen species were in record high numbers, several by quite substantial margins: **White-breasted Nuthatch** (which has climbed over the past few years), **Hairy Woodpecker** (likewise, while **Downy Woodpecker** has been stable or even declining, with much lower numbers), **Acorn Woodpecker**, and especially **American Crow**. On the other hand, **Eurasian Collared-Dove** has decreased steeply after reaching a peak two years earlier. Lastly, the **Redhead** explosion locally has continued, with this year's new high surpassing **Canvasback** numbers for the first time.

Thanks are due to our hard-working Region coordinators, to all of our participants, and to Carolyn Knight of SCVAS for setting up the virtual countdown.

## Mount Hamilton Count Circle

Bob Hirt — Compiler

The Mount Hamilton CBC scheduled for January 3, 2021 was cancelled for only the second time since its inception in 1979. With the massive destruction of habitat in the Count Circle due to the SCU Lightning Complex fires, the COVID-19 Santa Clara County's Stay-at-Home orders (except for Essential Travel), and the normal risks of driving on tortuous mountain roads (compounded by the threat of rain in the weather forecast); prudence dictated cancellation. So sorry, but we'll be back next year.

The only count done on Mount Hamilton this year was done by Elinor Gates at a two-hour feeder watch. Elinor lives on Mount Hamilton and works as Senior Astronomer at Lick Observatory in addition to being the Hostess for our CBC Compilation Dinner each year.

## Calero-Morgan Hill Count Circle

Rick Herder — Compiler

The Calero-Morgan Hill Christmas Count held its 22nd count on Dec. 26, 2020, on a beautiful sunny day. 82 observers reported 144 species. Two major challenges this year were the COVID restrictions, which lowered the number of observers, and the loss of access to Anderson Reservoir and part of Anderson Lake County Park due to a major dam reconstruction project.

Observations of ducks and shorebirds were quite low, but a total of 144 reported species was in line with recent counts. And high counts were reported for a remarkable number of species including **Band-tailed Pigeon, Hairy Woodpecker, Say's Phoebe, Oak Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Marsh Wren, Western Bluebird, California Thrasher, White-crowned Sparrow, Song Sparrow,** and **Pine Siskin**.

Observers reported 2 species never before recorded on the count. Steve and Ozzie Altus reported a **Pileated Woodpecker** at Uvas Canyon County Park and Bill Bousman found a **Green-tailed Towhee** at Santa Teresa County Park that was later seen by many observers. Mike Mammoser found **Northern Rough-winged, Tree,** and **Violet-Green Swallows**. Thanks to all the sector leaders who put together great socially distant teams in spite of the difficult circumstances. ●

**Note** For full results by CBC circle, see following two pages



### NEW! OSCSP PROGRAM

For almost a year, SCVAS staff has been working on a grant proposal to support an entirely new project in North Coyote Valley. When the Open Space Authority acquired the 937-acre Laguna Seca property, see photo on cover, we considered how it might become a focus for study.

With that habitat in mind, we proposed a project similar to our successful Wetlands Discovery Program with the goal of introducing high school students to this pristine open space. The 3-year project was

awarded full funding in December and the all new *Oak Savanna Citizen Science Project* will begin this spring. Regular bird surveys and BioBlitzes will gather data to create the curriculum to be launched in the second year.

The surveys will continue through the grant period to establish a deeper understanding of the area's ecology. On a recent visit, our staff saw a Prairie Falcon capture a Killdeer—what an amazing experience that was! We are excited about the opportunity to learn more about this beautiful preserve and build a high school curriculum to serve the mid-county.

**Contact** Carolyn Knight, our project lead, for details about the many volunteer opportunities at [programs@scvas.org](mailto:programs@scvas.org)



## 2020-2021 SANTA CLARA COUNTY CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

Species	MOUNT			
	San Jose 12/20/20	Palo Alto 12/21/20	Hamilton 1/3/21	Calero Morg-Hill 12/26/20
Snow Goose	3	16	-	-
Ross's Goose	-	2	-	-
Greater White-fronted Goose	77	-	-	4
Brant	-	1	-	-
Cackling Goose	464	1	-	8
Canada Goose	1,784	1,104	-	671
Tundra Swan	CW	-	-	-
Wood Duck	-	2	-	61
Blue-winged Teal	3	3	-	-
Cinnamon Teal	220	17	-	7
Northern Shoveler	4,050	9,338	-	17
<i>Blue-winged Teal X Northern Shoveler</i>	1	-	-	-
Gadwall	511	288	-	129
Eurasian Wigeon	5	3	-	-
American Wigeon	3,728	668	-	13
Mallard	2,374	828	-	476
Northern Pintail	1,162	223	-	1
Green-winged Teal	1,163	1,446	-	18
Canvasback	1,205	2,258	-	6
Redhead	258	2,448	-	-
Ring-necked Duck	79	92	-	80
Greater Scaup	1,789	341	-	8
Lesser Scaup	5,001	601	-	11
<i>Greater/Lesser Scaup</i>	3,576	4,269	-	-
Surf Scoter	5	580	-	-
Bufflehead	1,256	223	-	84
Common Goldeneye	1,506	135	-	5
Barrow's Goldeneye	3	4	-	-
Hooded Merganser	31	20	-	2
Common Merganser	32	8	-	114
Red-breasted Merganser	77	-	-	-
Ruddy Duck	5,879	11,961	-	100
<i>duck sp.</i>	3	300	-	-
<i>Aythya sp.</i>	-	-	-	9
California Quail	323	263	1	323
Wild Turkey	34	85	-	212
Pied-billed Grebe	245	78	-	87
Horned Grebe	6	6	-	-
Eared Grebe	583	59	-	10
Western Grebe	134	19	-	6
Clark's Grebe	27	26	-	-
<i>aechmophorous sp.</i>	89	13	-	-
Rock Pigeon	885	712	-	472
Band-tailed Pigeon	78	261	-	1,508
Eurasian Collared-Dove	130	17	-	166
Mourning Dove	246	248	-	350
White-throated Swift	60	40	-	58
Anna's Hummingbird	337	768	-	421
Ridgway's Rail	-	8	-	-
Virginia Rail	6	3	-	1
Sora	53	14	-	4
Common Gallinule	6	4	-	5
American Coot	6,617	3,900	-	1,073
Black-necked Stilt	466	142	-	7
American Avocet	1,036	1,581	-	-
Black Oystercatcher	-	2	-	-
Black-bellied Plover	23	127	-	-
Killdeer	199	106	-	49
Semipalmated Plover	8	39	-	-
Snowy Plover	2	2	-	-
Whimbrel	1	19	-	-
Long-billed Curlew	21	67	-	-

Species	MOUNT			
	San Jose 12/20/20	Palo Alto 12/21/20	Hamilton 1/3/21	Calero Morg-Hill 12/26/20
Marbled Godwit	8	4,036	-	-
Ruddy Turnstone	-	1	-	-
Red Knot	-	16	-	-
Ruff	1	-	-	-
Sanderling	1	-	-	-
Dunlin	116	2,123	-	-
Least Sandpiper	614	1,432	-	2
Western Sandpiper	150	4,250	-	-
<i>peep sp.</i>	-	400	-	-
Short-billed Dowitcher	1	6	-	-
Long-billed Dowitcher	333	136	-	-
<i>dowitcher sp.</i>	17	1,457	-	-
Wilson's Snipe	101	1	-	3
Spotted Sandpiper	7	9	-	6
Lesser Yellowlegs	-	1	-	-
Willet	8	1,427	-	-
Greater Yellowlegs	93	82	-	2
Bonaparte's Gull	61	107	-	-
Mew Gull	186	3	-	-
Ring-billed Gull	564	341	-	8
Western Gull	126	13	-	-
California Gull	2,090	429	-	1,112
Herring Gull	3,540	122	-	651
Iceland Gull (Thayer's)	66	3	-	8
Glaucous-winged Gull	539	34	-	20
<i>Western X Glaucous-winged Gull</i>	1	1	-	-
<i>Herring X Glaucous-winged Gull</i>	1	-	-	-
<i>gull sp.</i>	3,304	170	-	588
Forster's Tern	32	91	-	-
Common Loon	2	-	-	-
Double-crested Cormorant	440	129	-	199
American White Pelican	107	13	-	-
Great Blue Heron	37	17	-	15
Great Egret	60	39	-	20
Snowy Egret	90	75	-	20
Green Heron	5	6	-	5
Black-crowned Night-Heron	145	108	-	-
Turkey Vulture	230	111	-	285
Osprey	1	-	-	-
White-tailed Kite	17	13	-	27
Golden Eagle	8	3	-	20
Northern Harrier	31	15	-	18
Sharp-shinned Hawk	6	4	-	6
Cooper's Hawk	25	15	-	24
<i>accipiter sp.</i>	-	3	-	5
Bald Eagle	7	5	-	5
Red-shouldered Hawk	26	38	-	49
Red-tailed Hawk	175	115	-	127
Ferruginous Hawk	2	-	-	6
<i>buteo sp.</i>	2	-	-	-
Barn Owl	3	1	-	2
Western Screech-Owl	3	2	-	4
Great Horned Owl	21	1	-	10
Northern Pygmy-Owl	-	-	-	1
Burrowing Owl	-	1	-	-
Northern Saw-whet Owl	-	1	-	-
Belted Kingfisher	13	6	-	14
Acorn Woodpecker	277	557	4	527
Red-breasted Sapsucker	14	11	-	22
Downy Woodpecker	6	7	-	18
Nuttall's Woodpecker	71	100	-	127
Hairy Woodpecker	9	72	-	27

Species	Mount Calero			
	San Jose 12/20/20	Palo Alto 12/21/20	Hamilton 1/3/21	Morg-Hill 12/26/20
Northern Flicker	130	119	-	192
Pileated Woodpecker	-	3	-	1
<i>woodpecker sp.</i>	1	-	-	-
American Kestrel	73	23	-	67
Merlin	11	5	-	4
Peregrine Falcon	9	5	-	7
Prairie Falcon	3	-	-	1
<i>psittacara sp.</i>	-	12	-	-
Tropical Kingbird	1	2	-	-
Willow Flycatcher	1	-	-	-
Black Phoebe	216	331	-	208
Say's Phoebe	46	40	-	75
Loggerhead Shrike	5	2	-	6
Hutton's Vireo	2	27	-	16
Steller's Jay	96	255	-	168
California Scrub-Jay	323	444	2	661
Yellow-billed Magpie	104	-	-	159
American Crow	530	1,832	-	1,053
Common Raven	135	242	2	258
Horned Lark	19	-	-	139
Tree Swallow	35	6	-	1
Violet-green Swallow	-	6	-	2
Northern Rough-winged Swallow	2	-	-	1
<i>swallow sp.</i>	18	4	-	-
Chestnut-backed Chickadee	155	867	-	268
Oak Titmouse	143	435	3	442
Bushtit	500	1,065	-	729
Red-breasted Nuthatch	13	CW	-	-
White-breasted Nuthatch	83	200	2	231
Pygmy Nuthatch	-	62	-	-
Brown Creeper	6	37	-	10
Rock Wren	5	1	-	5
House Wren	4	1	-	-
Pacific Wren	-	5	-	1
Marsh Wren	76	31	-	9
Bewick's Wren	100	238	-	150
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	-	-	-	1
Golden-crowned Kinglet	31	2	-	1
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	231	447	-	310
Wrentit	72	161	-	74
Western Bluebird	185	335	4	391
Hermit Thrush	100	191	-	156
American Robin	131	413	-	256
Varied Thrush	10	108	-	48
California Thrasher	3	26	-	44
Northern Mockingbird	90	22	-	67
European Starling	2,132	2,304	-	1,741
Cedar Waxwing	248	555	-	201
Phainopepla	1	1	-	2
Scaly-breasted Munia	-	-	-	1
House Sparrow	124	21	-	63
American Pipit	117	136	-	148
House Finch	654	1,043	5	821
Purple Finch	13	76	-	78
Pine Siskin	140	1,110	30	655
Lesser Goldfinch	350	666	1	689
American Goldfinch	18	68	-	120
<i>spinus sp. (goldfinch sp.)</i>	-	3	-	-
Grasshopper Sparrow	-	1	-	-
Lark Sparrow	45	-	-	48
Chipping Sparrow	-	1	-	3
Fox Sparrow	24	58	-	34

Species	Mount Calero			
	San Jose 12/20/20	Palo Alto 12/21/20	Hamilton 1/3/21	Morg-Hill 12/26/20
Dark-eyed Junco (Oregon)	247	1,308	-	556
<i>Dark-eyed Junco (Slate-colored)</i>	-	1	-	-
White-crowned Sparrow	2,085	1,733	-	1,997
Golden-crowned Sparrow	826	1,519	-	1,141
White-throated Sparrow	2	1	-	3
<i>zonotrichia sp.</i>	-	-	-	79
Savannah Sparrow	252	260	-	113
Song Sparrow	57	216	-	165
Lincoln's Sparrow	55	50	-	38
Swamp Sparrow	2	1	-	-
California Towhee	259	320	-	326
Rufous-crowned Sparrow	6	-	-	25
Green-tailed Towhee	-	-	-	1
Spotted Towhee	30	229	-	154
<i>sparrow sp.</i>	4	33	-	-
Western Meadowlark	481	378	-	463
Red-winged Blackbird	285	112	-	793
Tricolored Blackbird	6	-	-	332
Brown-headed Cowbird	352	-	-	4
Brewer's Blackbird	672	200	-	985
Great-tailed Grackle	42	3	-	23
<i>blackbird sp.</i>	728	-	-	27
Orange-crowned Warbler	1	1	-	1
Common Yellowthroat	63	51	-	11
Yellow-rumped Warbler	778	843	-	736
<i>Yellow-rumped Warbler (Myrtle)</i>	10	74	-	37
<i>Yellow-rumped Warbler (Audubon's)</i>	179	893	-	89
Townsend's Warbler	14	92	-	5
Summer Tanager	-	CW	-	-
Western Tanager	1	2	-	CW
<b>Total Species</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>171</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>144</b>
<b>Total Individual Birds</b>	<b>76,654</b>	<b>86,316</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>29,479</b>

### Key

**bird names in *italic*:** subspecies, hybrids and indeterminate species

**sp.:** species

**CW:** Count Week—seen during the week of CBC not on the day of

**Special Note** The Mount Hamilton CBC was canceled due to COVID-19 pandemic concerns and poor road conditions following the SCU Lightning Complex wildfire. Totals here are from Elinor Gates, who lives near the summit of Mount Hamilton and counted species during a two-hour feeder watch.

**San Jose** compiled by Mike Azevedo

**Palo Alto** compiled by Al Eisner

**Mount Hamilton** compiled by Bob Hirt

**Calero-Morgan Hill** compiled by Rick Herder

Data reconciliation and aggregation by John Hurley. Additional formatting by Barry Langdon-Lassagne. Species order and names follow the ABA checklist version 8.0.7 (January 2021).

31 January 2021



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