

The

AVOCET

Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society

Summer 2021 • Vol 69 Num 3



Henry Coe State Park, Hunting Hollow Entrance *Matthew Dodder*

Monthly Speaker Series

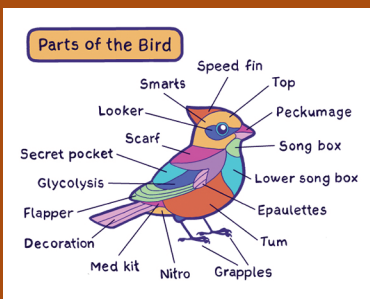
ROSEMARY MOSCO

ARTIST & CREATOR OF
BIRD & MOON, SCIENCE
& NATURE CARTOONS

BIRD & MOON

Wed, July 21 at 7 pm

via Zoom



Rosemary is a naturalist and science writer. Blending humor with solid facts about birds, bugs, plants and everything wild. Her comics are hugely popular and frequently passed around our office. She has a unique style of illustration that makes birding even more fun than it already is.

More details at
scvas.org/events

We Went Cocoon

Matthew Dodder, Executive Director

It's been more than a year and we are all *more-than-a-little* tired of the changes we've had to make since the virus arrived. Thankfully, vaccines are finding their way into people's arms and lives are slowly crawling toward normal—we're hugging our friends again. But I wonder, what about our birding? Has it changed since the pandemic?

Well, I can't speak for everyone obviously, but I can say Cricket and I changed our birding—*we went alone*. We've not been able to bird in small social groups like we used to, no class field trips. I think a lot about our chapter and how it's been affected. For an organization that was built on a social format—the friendly chemistry between a leader and a group of other birders, each from different households... Suddenly being denied that activity, well, it put us all off balance. Our field trips will return of course—eventually—but not without a few changes we'll get into later. In the interim, our trip leaders have been devoting their unexpectedly open schedules to *writing* about the areas they know, and helping readers explore them *without* their leader. I may be a glass-half-full sort of person, but I think that experience has been good—empowering both the writers and those who read their stories.

We stayed local. For 360 days of the past year, Cricket and I didn't leave Santa Clara County. I can't remember the last time we stayed so close to home. As a result we used less gas, explored new trails, and entirely new very tiny parks we never knew existed. Our county year-list ballooned far beyond the year before and we set new, more modest goals that didn't involve hotels, restaurants, parties or our best friends. It was a sort of *correction* (think stock market),

Continued on next page

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except not seeing our friends, or my mother-in-law. We zoomed of course, but you know how that goes. It's not the same as cooking for her or a walk together after dinner.

We tinted green. We drove less, biked more, figured out how to attach the spotting scope to the back, got better at using eBird while walking, figured out how to take a break and have lunch at home and go out again. And I think we got to bed a little earlier too, feeling quite satisfied with our new, smaller life. We were perfectly happy to gaze out the window and be ok with the knowledge that birds flew freely, entirely unhindered by the restraints the rest of us were enduring.

We all want to go somewhere, see somebody, fly somewhere warm, visit family again. Hell, just have friends over for dinner... But we're also more comfortable than ever before just staying home or walking to the park down the street. Life is just too short not to enjoy where you are. And this year has reminded us of that. ●



Cedar Waxwings
Mary Ann Robertson

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

Like all of you, the staff and volunteers of SCVAS have been patiently waiting for their chance to receive the COVID vaccine. Only after that point would the time be right for our Chapter to resume regular activities—field trips, education programs, and public events... I am happy to announce we are now there and have begun planning to reopen both our field trips and our education programs beginning this summer. There will be some unsurprising changes to the format and some expected precautions for leaders and participants, but those are still under review and will be posted soon. We are also preparing to embark on a large community science program in the North Coyote Valley Wildlife Conservation Area, and actively discussing how to hold in-person events before the end of the year. Still, there remains a need for circumspection, and we refer constantly to state and local health recommendations to make sure we are up to date and operating safely. We fully expect the return to normal will be smooth and comfortable, but it will take some time.

Perhaps this is surprising, but in the months and years ahead, I believe we will embrace some of the recent changes and continue to offer many services online as well as in person. Popular activities such as adult classes (including

Marching Toward Normal

Shorebird migration, and Fall Warblers), the speaker series, and chapter events will likely be offered online and in-person. This is something I would never have predicted, but we are seeing members from all corners of the county joining in the fun when given the opportunity to stay home, avoid traffic and login from the comfort of their living rooms. That is a good thing!

The nature shop has also been stocked with new and used books, shirts, feeders and gifts. It will be resuming normal hours soon and we in the mean time we will continue to update the Nature Shop portion of our website to facilitate your shopping. Stay tuned for more details about shop hours and curbside pick up.

All in all, this has been a period of positive growth, from our membership, our programs, and even to our Birdathon, which despite a few COVID challenges, did quite well! I'm happy to call this place my home, this Chapter my passion, and all of you my friends. Thank you for your constant support of SCVAS. Now, let's get out and find some birds!

Matthew Dodder
Executive Director





Laura & Starr
California Towhees



Lawrence's Goldfinch
Barry Langdon-Lassagne

BIRDATHON STORIES

Carolyn Knight
Education & Outreach Specialist
Birdathon Coordinator

Another Birdathon has gone by and we're once again left in awe of our birding community! Every year our Spring Birdathon raises funds to support our efforts in environmental education for Santa Clara County.

These funds help us bring owl pellets and adaptations to classrooms, bring elementary students to the wetlands of San Francisco Bay, and this coming year will help us develop brand new curricula for our Oak Savanna Community Science Project to bring high school students to North Coyote Valley.

Just as much a part of Birdathon is the experiences of the birders who make these efforts possible though. Whether it involves a meticulous plan of traversing the whole of the county or simply stepping out a front door to bird a neighborhood park, Birdathon participants got to share their experiences with us through the Birdathon Stories page on our website.

With the Stories we've gotten to explore the sillier side of birding with the *Foolish Flamingos'* tours of their neighborhoods and even homes as this team searched out avian iconography on their April Fools outing. We got to exercise vicariously with Steve Patt and Chuck Wilson on their 9.5 mile run through Arastradero for the *Fartlek*

Falcons. The *California Towhees* invited us to explore their neighborhood birds with them as this 29-person team set a record for participant size and backyard birding enthusiasm. The *Birdcassos* have shared their art with us as they flex their creativity to depict their sightings in digital, watercolor, and pencil mediums. We've gotten to see the efforts of brand new teams of new birders and the teams that have become Birdathon institutions as they've navigated the new waters of distributed birding. And that's just a small sampling of all of the teams who shared their love for birds with us this Birdathon.

So check out our Stories! Read about the missed sightings, the chases for that last species just before the time runs out, see the pictures we've snapped and drawings we've worked on. We've spent an entire year birding apart by this point, but the Birdathon Stories are an invitation to share in the birding experience of all of our teams. We might not be at the point where we can all bird together, but at least this way we aren't birding alone.

Continued on page 8

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Matthew Dodder
Executive Director



Summer is the time to remember what youth is like—that not-entirely-accurate moment when a fawning adult looks at a squirming newborn and says something like, “you look just like your parents”... It’s also when fledgling Juncos and Chickadees show resemblance to their parents, but are far from being mirror images. In some cases, these young ones are a challenge to recognize—not exactly like their parents, but generally identifiable with an extended look.

Doldrums?

Summer is also the time when at the moment we begin to feel confident about the songs around us, the birds mostly stop singing... And when most of the exciting arrivals of spring are now so familiar that we impatiently watch for something new. And nothing shows up. Not yet.

Last year at this time, I mentioned something called “froth” which is my name for a phenomenon that we often see in summer. Think of the slow turning bubble in a tide pool after a wave has rushed in and the next one hasn’t yet hit the beach. It’s that June-August time period after most breeding has occurred and a few lost, exhausted or discouraged birds wander into unexpected areas. This coincidence of late arrivals, failed breeders, wayward travelers accounts for some of our rarest and most astonishing discoveries of summer, perhaps even the year. One has only to look at our checklist (scvas.org/birding) to see the sprinkling of unexpected birds that have shown up over the years—things like Common and Lesser Nighthawk, Broad-tailed Hummingbird, Least Flycatcher and Eastern Kingbird to understand the variety that is possibilities during these “doldrums” birders often bemoan.

What I’d like to talk about though is not the unexpected, not the rare, but the predictable birds of summer. Most notable are the species that annually (or close to annually) arrive in our area shortly after breeding elsewhere. These are the post-breeders. These are not so much the “pass through” species I’ve mentioned before—birds like Red-necked and Wilson’s Phalaropes, or Hammond’s Flycatcher that come through in spring and fall, nor the wintering species that remain with us for several months, but the species that show up specifically after breeding and are quite reliable for a brief period in summer. It’s an under-appreciated seasonal category of birds

but one that I look forward to every year in addition to the southward movement of Shorebirds which also begins in summer.

One Good Tern...

The most obvious example I think would be the Least Tern. Fond of freshwater areas in the eastern portion of its range, here it is all about salt and coast. These tiny aerialists arrive in California from Mexico in spring and are easy to view on their nesting grounds on Alameda Point. One can learn about their migration and even view these endangered birds as they forage at the Crab Cove Visitors Center not far from their nest sites on the Point. Seeing them in Santa Clara County, even though they breed just an hour away, is not so easy until the nesting is done and the families head back south. They pass through the South Bay beginning in June and feed on A2E and adjacent ponds each year, predictably. For almost two months out of each year, we have our smallest tern, an endangered sprite, delighting local birders before they leave for Mexico again, probably not to be seen again until next year.

The Black Tern has a related story. This one actually is rare, but I want to mention it anyway. Black Terns breed in the northern Central Valley, Sierra Valley and the Klamath Basin. They winter in Central and South America. Like the Least Tern, we don’t see them in Santa Clara County during the breeding season, and only rarely during spring migration. We see them mostly in summer, again after breeding is completed elsewhere. They show up less commonly, and in far fewer numbers, in the same salt ponds as their slightly smaller cousin. When/if they do arrive here, they are usually in their blotchy non-breeding or juvenal plumage, so...probably *not* black. They feed on insects primarily, and do not dive like other Terns. While you’re out admiring the Least Terns on A2E, A12 or A16, it’s always a good idea to keep an eye out for the Black. Common Tern? Yes, that happens too.

Elegant Tern is a perfect example of a post-breeder. Considered a species of concern due to its limited breeding colonies in western Mexico, they have shown a remarkable ability to adapt to changing climate and colonize areas further north—first in Southern California, then Monterey,

Photos L to R:

Brown Pelican *Tom Grey*, Least Tern Juvenile *Carter Gasiorowski*, Black Tern *Tom Grey*, Elegant Tern *Tom Grey*, Common Tern *Tom Grey*

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 for this month's selection. Regular field trips have been suspended but will resume as soon as it is safe to do so.



Elegant Tern
Chuq Von Rospach



Brown Pelican
Tom Grey



Black Tern
Tom Grey

San Mateo and onward. Perhaps some day we'll even see them breed in Santa Clara County. The real story here is not their summer arrival in the South Bay but that this species has travelled increasingly further north after breeding along the coast, making sightings as far up as Seattle familiar. Ocean temperatures and climate change seem to be a likely explanation. Whatever the reason, these large Terns, mid-size between Forster's and Caspian, can usually be found July–November on large ponds such as A2W, A4, A12, A16, SWPCP or even Shoreline Lake. Learn to recognize their loud grating “kee-rick” call so you’ll know if they are anywhere within earshot.

One final example of this post-breeding phenomenon deserves mention, the Brown Pelican. These huge, awkward birds breed along the rocky coast from Mexico to Monterey. When I moved to California in 1981, I had never seen a Brown Pelican away from the coast. I think maybe they were still rebounding from the DDT poisonings. Occasionally I would see one among the many Cormorants on the San Mateo Bridge, but I don't recall seeing them in Santa Clara County, certainly not the Baylands near my home. It seems the species has made a remarkable recovery and can now be seen almost year round in our county. Look for them especially after breeding is complete, with numbers peaking in late summer.

The Future

Rich Stallcup used to refer to the Brown Pelican, the Elegant Tern *and* the Heermann's Gull as the “three Amigos” because of their close association and similar schedules. We see examples of their closeness just a few miles away in Half Moon Bay. With Brown Pelicans and Elegant Terns becoming a more reliable sighting, perhaps we should watch for them here as well, during the summer doldrums... ●





Conservation Corner

Shani Kleinhaus
Environmental Advocate

Our Environmental Advocacy work in the first half of 2021 focused on the built environment. Here are some of the issues we tackled:

Integrating Nature into Cities

Worldwide, the loss of biodiversity has been devastating and scientists believe that we are in the midst of a mass extinction event similar to the Cretaceous-Tertiary Extinction 65 million years ago, when 75% of all plant and animal species on earth were wiped out.

The importance of wildlife in cities (Urban Ecology/Urban Nature/rewilding) to people and in sustaining biodiversity has been highlighted in many books and studies. *Win-win Ecology* and *Biophilic Cities* were among the first books to highlight the integration of nature into human civilizations. Recently, the San Francisco Estuary Institute published a study, titled *The Biological Deserts Fallacy: Cities in Their Landscapes Contribute More than We Think to Regional Biodiversity*, showing the importance of nature in cities.

Biodiversity has been shown to be important to people's happiness. Using data from the "2012 European Quality of Life Survey" to study the connection between species diversity in their surroundings and life satisfaction in more than 26,000 adults from 26 European countries, researchers showed that an additional **10% of bird species increases life satisfaction as much as a comparable increase in income**. Other studies also linked happiness and life satisfaction to biodiversity in nature preserves, parks, open space, and people's everyday lives.

In our region, cities are starting to consider 'Nature-Based Solutions' and 'Ecosystem Services' to increase sustainability and to become more resilient to the effects of climate change. SCVAS has been advocating for protection and habitat enhancement for local biodiversity within these efforts. We ask cities to increase parklands and wetland areas, to plant locally native plants when they engage in stormwater management and streetscape projects, and to include native trees in parks and in the urban forest. We ask for special attention to the needs of local pollinators and birds to sustain local biodiversity.



Townsend's Warbler
David Zittin

Our work to highlight the importance of nature to cities and their residents is slow, persistent, and ongoing. As we advocate with City leaders, we recognize that this is a shift in a long-standing paradigm, but this is the time to recognize that biodiversity is the biological fabric on which we all depend. When biodiversity is the goal, then climate action, sustainability and the urban forest all fall well within the paradigm. But if the goals of climate action and sustainability assume that biodiversity is an end result, and nature is viewed as a "service" to our anthropocentric universe, we will continue to lose habitat and species.

We are making progress! We thank Mayor Ellen Kamei, Vice Mayor Lucas Ramirez and Mountain View City Council Members Lisa Matchak, Alison Hicks, Margaret Abe Koga, Pat Showalter, and Sallie Lieber for their inclusion of Livability and Biodiversity as a goal in the *Strategic Roadmap Action Plan for the City*.

Bird Safety & Dark Sky

Artificial Light at Night is a relatively new threat to species and ecosystems. A recent (Nov 2020) comprehensive review of the biological impacts of Artificial Light At Night (ALAN) in a leading scientific ecological journal explores the evolution of response to light in biological evolution. The study, titled *Exposure to Artificial Light at Night and the Consequences for Flora, Fauna, and Ecosystems* (<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fnins.2020.602796/full>), concludes, "It is not surprising therefore that ALAN impacts natural systems at all levels of organization, from unicellular to eukaryotes, from systems physiology to community structures, from population behaviour to trophic interactions" and in combination with other human induced stressors. "The result is a dramatic acceleration in extinction of species,



Healthy Creek
Matthew Dodder



Night Sky
Matthew Dodder

followed by disorganization and collapse of ecosystems.” The authors propose that “efforts should be made to limit nighttime illumination to more essential purposes”.

We are proud of the Cupertino City Council that voted unanimously to adopt a Bird Safety and Dark Sky ordinance.

On April 6th, 2021, the City Council passed the ordinance, which controls lighting to reduce light pollution on all private properties in Cupertino. In addition, the ordinance mandates bird safe design treatments to all glass surfaces in “bird-sensitive areas”. These include parcels in hillside areas as well as within 300 feet of water features and vegetated open space. We thank Mayor Darcey Paul, Vice Mayor Liang Chao and Council Members Hung Wei, John Willey and Kitty Moore for caring and taking action. This is a great step forward for protecting sensitive habitat, native and migratory birds.

We are also pleased that the town of Los Gatos included Bird Safety and Dark Sky policies in the Draft General Plan update.

We continue to work in Los Gatos towards the development of appropriate standards or ordinance.

We continue to fight the proliferation of Artificial Light at Night and light pollution in our area, advocating for other cities in Santa Clara County to adopt lighting ordinances and to address over-lighting by city owned fixtures and light installations.

Oka Ponds in Campbell

The Santa Clara County Library District is in the process of constructing a “government office and facility” at 1344 Dell Avenue, adjacent to Los Gatos Creek County Park (also known as Oka Ponds) in Campbell. The planned office included a vast glass wall less than 50-ft from the pond. We have expressed concern that the proposed project will result in

bird collisions with the glass facade of the building. In our letter we explained that Oka Ponds provide an important resource for birds and the birders who love them. We discussed the tragedy of bird collisions with glass and the negative effects of artificial night lighting and reviewed relevant requirements by government agencies in the Bay Area and potential solutions. We ended by discussing the lost opportunity to create habitat for birds and pollinators, and to educate the public about the need to protect and promote biodiversity.

In our recommendations, we suggested that Santa Clara County develop partnerships to use the building and its immediate environment as an educational tool to educate the public about:

- ▶ Avian species that can be found at Oka Ponds
- ▶ Bird migration
- ▶ Global threats to biodiversity
- ▶ Creating habitat by using California Native Plants
- ▶ Bird-friendly building design
- ▶ The impacts of lighting on ecosystems, light pollution, and the importance of dark sky
- ▶ The role of percolation ponds in supplying water to our community ●

Interested in protecting birds and their habitat in your community? Our Environmental Action Committee is looking to expand. Please contact shani@scvas.org.

Friends of SCVAS

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Larry & Charlotte Langdon

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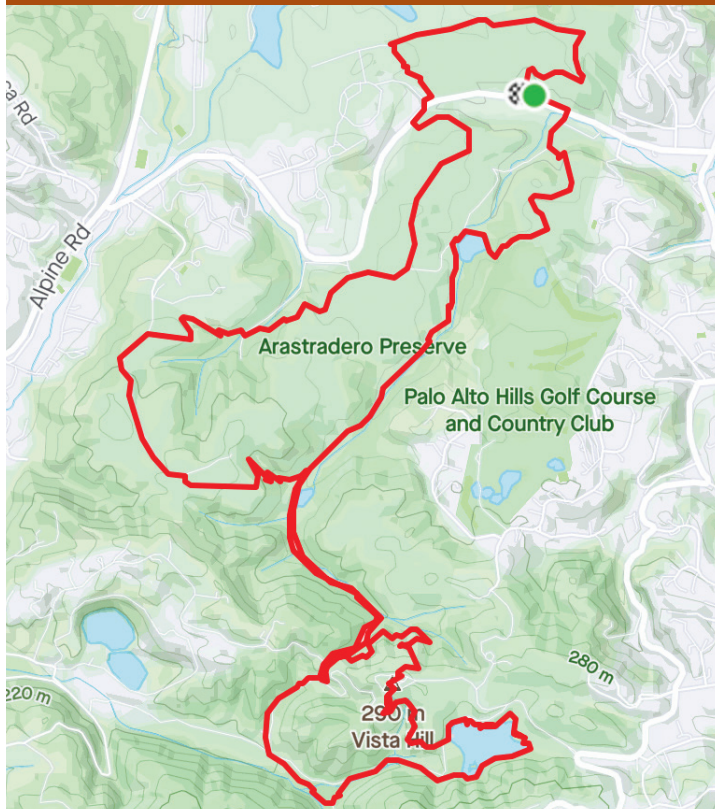
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BIRDATHON *Continued from page 3*

Fartlek Falcons

Steve Patt and **Chuck Wilson** combined intense exercise with birding throughout Arastradero Preserve and Foothills Park (see route on left), finding 54 birds as they traversed 9.5 miles of trail with 1,450 feet of elevation gain.

"Fartlek" is a Swedish word meaning "speedplay", and is a running training method in which fast running is alternated with slow running in a semi-random fashion (as opposed to "intervals" which do so in a methodic manner). In our case, the "fast" portion was actually a trot and the "slow" portion was fully stopped, looking at birds, but "fartlek" still seemed an appropriate description.

Flycatchers

A father-and-son team conducted their first-ever Birdathon.

We arrived at the Shoreline Kite Flying Area with only an hour and fifteen minutes left and 44 birds left to find, so I quite literally sprinted the mile to the end to the pump



L. C. Boros & Michael Smith • Elinor Spellman • Kizhanatham Srikanth • Keith Stattenfield • Marcella Stauber • Synopsys Inc. & The Synopsys Foundation • Annette Teng • Vivek Tiwari • Barbara Tyler • Craig & Joan Urich • Charles Van Orden • Maureen Vavlas • Ann Verdi • Matthew Weaver • Andrew West • Peter White • Riley & Virginia Willcox • George Wortiska • Virginia S. Wright • Dagmar Zimdahl • Floy & Dave Zittin • Gena Zolotar

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*house and back, and got incredibly lucky with all the birds I was hoping to find (Savannah Sparrow, Western Meadowlark, American Pipit) plus a bonus Lincoln's Sparrow. I was quite winded after only running a mile, so I really admire the endurance the Fartlek Falcons have for their marathon outing. **Carter Gasiorowski***

California Towhees

A distributed team of twenty-nine different members birded their backyards and neighborhoods, setting a record for most participants in a team. Spanning three counties, they found 109 species including at least 49 California Towhees.

*My husband Todd and I had a great day birding on Sunday morning. In total we identified 38 birds, 4 of which were new to us. It's amazing we have so many birds within a mile area of our home! **Jennifer Oliver***

I rode my bike to Raynor Park and followed the Self-Guided Field Trip from the Audubon website. This park is in the Sunnyvale Birdland neighborhood and just under a mile from my house. Here I saw a Western Bluebird for the

*first time this year. Later I saw a Lesser Goldfinch trying to collect cobwebs, maybe for a nest. **Sue Umeda***

*This was my first Birdathon, and I got up early to try to see the birds that are around in the early morning. I started out with watching the birds at my feeder and around my home. At first, I saw the usual birds, House Finches, Lesser Goldfinches, Anna's Hummingbirds. After about five minutes, I finally saw our team's namesake, the California Towhee! **Massimo Bafetti***

Piratical Flycatchers

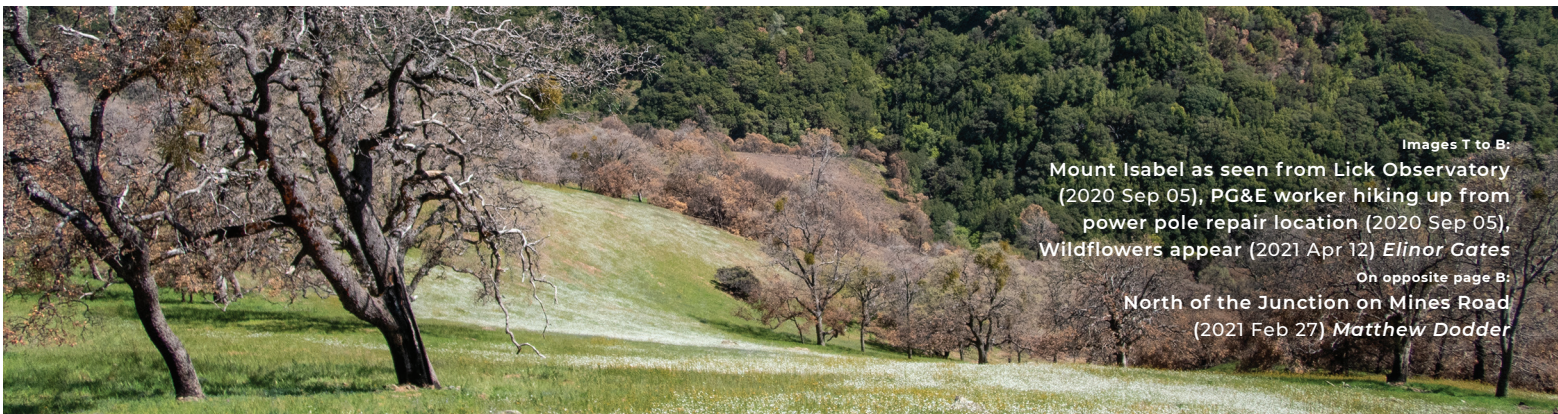
Barry and Ginger Langdon-Lassagne had a successful 24-hour Birdathon starting at Joseph D. Grant County Park and birding their way down to the Baylands, finding 134 species.

Smith Creek was just above the marine cloud layer when we arrived so while all the world below was in fog, we and the birds were being woken up by the first warming rays of sunlight. A pair of Northern Rough-winged Swallows,

Continued on page 12

WITNESSING A RECOVERY

The SCU Lightning Complex fires burned in California's Diablo Range between August and September of 2020. The fire destroyed a total of 393,624 acres within six counties, making it the third-largest wildfire recorded in California's history. While it has been nearly a year since the flames have been extinguished, the land will take decades



Images T to B:
Mount Isabel as seen from Lick Observatory (2020 Sep 05), PG&E worker hiking up from power pole repair location (2020 Sep 05), Wildflowers appear (2021 Apr 12) *Elinor Gates*
On opposite page B:
North of the Junction on Mines Road (2021 Feb 27) *Matthew Dodder*

to recover. The memories and lessons of this tragedy will last far longer however. Fire is indeed a natural part of California's ecology, but this event was different—undeniably fueled by climate change. As part of an ongoing public effort to document and

celebrate the regeneration of this precious area, SCVAS will be collecting images of the Mount Hamilton, San Antonio Valley and Del Puerto Canyon portions of the fire zone and posting them on a regular basis, hopefully providing evidence of the return of life to this damaged landscape. On these two pages, we reflect on the first collection of images, hopefully, we will see evidence of new growth soon. — *Matthew Dodder*



NEW MEMBERS Feb – Apr

Thank you and Welcome!

Esther Abahazy • Kim Acker • Evleen Anderson • Massimo Bafetti • Barbara Bailey • Meg Barron • Curt Bianchi • Vicki Bien • Diana Whittier, Scott & Paul Burke • Candyce Carter • Alisa Chang • Carolisa Cheung • Martha Carlene Clark • Luca

De Alfaro • Linda Do • Neena Duggal • Dee Eduardo • John Edwards • T. N. Eulaus • Kathi & Michael Fay • Joe Fisher • Tad Furutsuki • Louise Y. Furutsuki • Chandrasekar Ganapathy Subramanian • Elizabeth Gardner • Monica Grodin • Puneeth Gundu • Oregon Guy • David Hohmann • Cynthia Hoskins • John Jones • Sharon Jue • Nikhil Kalyankar • Barbara Kerckhoff • Joseph Kidney • Amy

Kieraldo-Sanchez • Amy Kim • Stanley King • Christopher Klein • Ann Kohlhaas • Linda Koski • Mykhaylo Kurinnyy • Barbara Lenci • C. Y. Lin • Peggy Macres • Melissa Malley • Clara Marchese • Stepheny McGraw • Paulette Moore • Szimonetta Mulati • Jordan Murphy • Reggie Murray • Peggy F. Nute • Jennifer Oliver • Ronald Owes • Jamie Pearson • Christina Punter • *Continued on back cover*

CA TOWHEES



BIRDATHON *Continued from page 9*

whose nest was clearly somewhere nearby, circled above the gravel parking spot and alighted on the telephone wires as we started our dawn-to-dusk adventure: the first bird on our checklist.

Birdcassos

This year the team grew to ten members, all drawing and painting birds in the field. They even created a unique book of their artwork, containing renditions of ninety-six local species.

*This year, due to work, I had to bird in the late afternoon. Even though it is not the best time to bird, I was able to secure 42 species around my house and Shoreline Park/ Terminal Rd. Cold and wind made it difficult to draw and put watercolor down on paper. Given this, I had to improvise and had to do quick sketches and only to paint the key identification marks. **Leena Khanzode***

*When I go out to draw I usually use watercolors. Instead I decided to bring my iPad because it was more portable and less susceptible to wind. I'd never done live drawing digitally before! I use Procreate to do all my drawings and used the Studio Pen for the linear and the Watercolor brush for color. I drew close to every bird I saw. I heard several more, but couldn't see them to observe them for a drawing. **Audry Nicklin***

Through sketching, I felt like I paid more attention to certain features that I had overlooked before—like the white stripe above the eye of a Common Yellowthroat or the yellow base of the black bill of a Snowy Egret. While I have drawn at leisure before, this Birdcasso

*Birdathon was such a great way of observing birds keenly, capturing the finer details and learning much more in the process. **Shweta Shidhore***

Bayside Ramblers

Like many 4-hour teams, **Eve Meier** and **Patricia Lynch** could feel the clock ticking throughout their brief trip, the first of this year's Birdathon.

We arrived at our last stop with only 8 minutes to spare but heard a House Sparrow calling as soon as we got out of our cars. Then bam, bam, bam - we had many new birds to add to our list in short succession - Turkey Vulture, Bald Eagle, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Bullock's Oriole and a Fox Sparrow! My timer went off and we were done!

Foolish Flamingoes

On a uniquely fun April Fool's Day Birdathon lead by **Ginger Langdon-Lassagne**, this team set out to find as many plastic flamingoes, cement ducks, birdy street signs, paintings and other representations of birds as possible. The final tally? A staggering 294 species in our county!

Sue Umeda biked for nearly the whole 4 hour time span to reach every single one of the street signs in Sunnyvale's Birdland neighborhood! Fantastic effort! She also found additional birds along her ride, and later in her own home, to come in as our top contributor of species number.

Photos L to R:

California Towhee drawing by Massimo Bafetti
Black-crowned Night-Heron drawing by Shweta Shidhore

On opposite page top, below L to R:

Harry Adamson's Avocet artwork circa 1956
One-time SFBBO Headquarters: Bayside Canning Company
Mewaldt in Point Reyes 1967

Two Solo Birdathons

Chuq von Rospach conducted Thank Smew (4-hours) and The Lonesome Dove (24-hours).

I knew I wanted to get to Coyote Valley if I could and if I waited too long, traffic would make things nasty, so I decided after Spring Valley to head south, given the relative non-birdy nature of the Milpitas area on that warm day. I arrived at Coyote Valley OSP, where it was also warm but with a nice breeze, set up my camp chair and sat down to see what showed up.

*Cooley Picnic Area is, I think, the spring equivalent to Picchetti's magic persimmon tree in fall: when it kicks in, it's magic. For me, that's what happened. I drove up and parked, and as I got out of the car, I had a Spotted Towhee fly by and dive into the brush past me. A rather auspicious start. It sat there hidden, calling much of my visit. I was immediately adopted by a couple of Steller's Jays, one of whom spent much of my visit following me around and yelling at me for trespassing on their turf. I ended up spending just under an hour at Cooley and logged 20 species. **Chuq von Rospach***

These quotes barely scratch the surface; the Birdathon Stories page tells all of these stories in full, and more stories and photos are continuing to come in, so go take a look! ●

Go to scvas.org/spring-birdathon-stories



FROM THE AVOCET ARCHIVE

Barry Langdon-Lassagne
Board President



It was in the April 1965 *Avocet* that Dr. Mewaldt, professor at San Jose State College (now San Jose State University) at the time, presented his plans for a Point Reyes Bird Observatory and our Board donated \$500 to help kick off the project.

In 1986, Dick Mewaldt founded the Coyote Creek Riparian Station (CCRS). CCRS merged with SFBBO in September 1999 and became Coyote Creek Field Station (CCFS).

In the September 1987 *Avocet* Bill Bousman wrote:

A breeding bird atlas has been started for Santa Clara County and has been organized under the auspices of the Coyote Creek Riparian Station...The atlas is a scientific project and Dr. L. Richard Mewaldt has agreed to chair the atlas's Scientific Advisory Panel to insure that our methods and procedures are correct and will provide trustworthy data.

Dick Mewaldt was also on the SCVAS Board for many years, holding several titles including President and Vice President. He chaired several committees, was the editor of *The Avocet* and was the official compiler for the Christmas Bird Count for over a decade starting in 1957, continuing his involvement in the CBC until late into the 1980s.

In April 1990, Dick and his wife Francis Mewaldt as well as SFBBO's Mike Rigney lead Birdathon teams. Dick died a few months later, in August 1990. A lovely obituary was written by Grant Hoyt in the October 1990 *Avocet*.

Thanks to volunteer Dick Blaine for scanning over 110 historical *Avocets* (so far!) and for Bob Hirt, Al Eisner and Mike Rogers for giving us access to their *Avocet* collections. ●



L. RICHARD MEWALDT, 1917-1996

Head on over to scvas.org/the-avocet-archive

What connections will you discover when you peruse this wonderful collection? Let us know what you find!



Bird Notes

Please report rarities to
pdunten@gmail.com

Pete Dunten

Santa Clara County eBird Reviewer

Sandpipers to Woodpeckers

Movement of **Solitary Sandpipers** through the region began on 11 Apr, with one at Smith Creek in J Grant CP (CG) and others the same day in Merced and San Benito counties. Three more stopped in the county on their way north in late April, one at Coyote Lake on 22 Apr (MDo), one at Los Capitancillos Ponds on 24 Apr (CG) and one at Ulistac NA on 29 Apr (EFI). None of these migrants were found on more than one day.

In March, four **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** were seen in the Alviso area, a record number for a winter season. On 5 Mar an adult was found at pond A12, followed by a 3rd-winter gull on 11 Mar (both NoA). Two Lesser Black-backed Gulls were present on 13 Mar, a 1st-winter and an adult (STu, NoA, m. ob.). The 3rd-winter and adult gulls were seen again on 19 Mar (NoA), and a second adult was at pond A12 on 25 Mar (NoA). All sightings occurred at Alviso ponds A12 and adjacent A13, save for one report of an adult moving between A16 and the adjacent New Chicago Marsh on 12 Mar (DB). In the following weeks, water levels were brought up on A13 in preparation for work on the levees, reducing the attractiveness of A13 for gulls.

A **Common Tern** at Emily Renzel Wetlands on 22 Apr was a nice find (BM). The tern was our 4th spring record. An **American Bittern** at Calero Reservoir on 1 Apr (MGy) was an intriguing find. Sightings a bit later in the year are of particular interest, as Bitterns have been found nesting in the county on only three occasions in modern times. Two **California Condors** soared over Bohlman Rd in Saratoga on 25 Apr (fide eBird), for our 4th county record. With their ability to cover large distances, it is surprising there haven't been more visits from the Condors resident at Pinnacles NP in San Benito county. A **Pileated Woodpecker** was at Hunting Hollow in Henry Coe SP on 4 Apr (ER). While rare in the Diablo Range, the frequency of records is increasing. First noted in 2006, ten of our twelve sightings have been in the years from 2017 to 2021, and eleven of twelve have been in the months between December and April.

Flycatchers to Tanagers

An **Eastern Phoebe** spent part of the winter along the Guadalupe River near Ulistac NA, for our 10th county record. The Phoebe was first noted on 16 Feb (EFI) and last seen on 3



Common Tern
Brooke Miller



Solitary Sandpiper
Garrett Lau



Lesser Black-backed Gull
Garrett Lau

Apr (GLk), which is now the latest date we have for a wintering Eastern Phoebe. The male **Vermilion Flycatcher** returned to J Grant CP on 8 Mar this year (GL). The Flycatcher's arrival date was 13 Apr in 2020, and 23 July in 2019. It hasn't been found later than 20 Sept in the fall. Vermilion Flycatcher has an interesting status in the county—one has wintered, one was a spring transient, and the J Grant bird has been present during three breeding seasons.

Cassin's Kingbirds have nested for several years in the far south of the county near the San Benito line, and there have been occasional birds that passed through further north but didn't stay. This year repeated sightings have come in from two locations further to the north, beginning with two Kingbirds on the east side of Morgan Hill near Jackson Park the first week of March (TrP, PDu). On 9 Apr and following dates two Kingbirds were seen at the Harvey Bear Ranch entrance to Coyote Lake CP (EvM).

Four Lesser Black-backed
Gulls were seen in the Alviso
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a winter season.

This year appears to be
an irruptive year for Lawrence's
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widespread in the flatlands
this spring.

The **Cassin's Finches** at the top of Mt Hamilton were present between 5 Nov and 10 Apr (EGa), setting a record for the length of their visit. This year appears to be an irruptive year for **Lawrence's Goldfinches**—they have been widespread in the flatlands this spring. On 12 Apr a female was building a nest at Ed Levin CP (DW). Nest construction was also underway at the Smith Creek fire station in the Diablo Range on 15 Apr (MJM). A **Yellow-breasted Chat** posed briefly for photographs at J Grant CP on 29 Apr (CC). The adult male **Summer Tanager** found along Geng Rd on 6 Dec explored a nearby neighborhood in Palo Alto in search of olives and was seen there on 27 Jan and 15 Feb (MRw). An immature male was photographed in Midtown, Palo Alto on 27 Mar (OZ).

Observers Noah Arthur (NoA), Dana Bangs (DB), Caitlin Chock (CC), Matthew Dodder (MDo), Pete Dunten (PDu), Erica Fleniken (EFI), Carter Gasiorowski (CG), Elinor Gates (EGa), Michelle Geary (MGy), Garrett Lau (GL), Greg Luckert (GLk), Mike Mammoser (MJM), Eve Meier (EvM), Brooke Miller (BM), Theresa Plass (TrP), Edward Rooks (ER), Margaret Row (MRw), Steve Tucker (STU), Dave Weber (DW), Oliver Zhang (OZ)



Matthew Dodder
Quiz Master

TRACK & FEATHER

It's always fun when we can identify a bird's species from a single discovered feather. Still better when we can learn something else about it, such as its sex. This month's mystery feather was found on a dry hill trail, cluttered with rocks, California poppies and Artemisia. This particular location and habitat is not the only place this bird can be found in our county, but let's not give too much away...

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 (SPRING 2021)

The long parallel tracks on the trail were made by a male **Wild Turkey** dragging its primaries along the ground as he strutted around puffed up and displaying to females. The females do not drag their feathers in this way.

Photo: Tom Grey





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Thank You & Welcome!

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Continued from page 11
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Rawlins • Aja Reichenbach •
Pat Roberts • Katharine
Rosenberry • Dennis & MaryAnne
Ryan • Michael Sanchez •
Adam Schaechter • Linden
Skjeie • Kenneth Stampfer •
Judy Sullivan • M. Cristina
Thorson • Andras Tigyi •
Craig & Joan Uhrich • Adam
Meyer & Mary Vanatta • Kathy
Vejtasa • Tari Vickery • Mike
Voydanoff • Matthew Weaver •
Wendy Welker • Thomas
Westphal • James Young

And thank you to
those who renewed!

Office

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

Nature Shop

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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