

The

AVOCET

Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society

Winter 2023 • Vol 71 Num 1



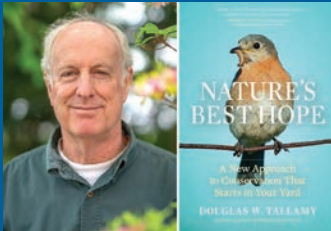
Pond A12 from the Alviso Marina *Matthew Dodder*

SAVE THESE DATES!

Special Events in collaboration
with Golden Gate Audubon

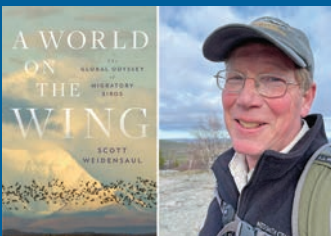
Douglas Tallamy

Wednesday, January 11 (via zoom)



Scott Weidensaul

Thursday, February 16 (via zoom)



Exact time and topic of each talk will be
provided as details become available.

Watch scvas.org for details.

What do we want to be?

Matthew Dodder, Executive Director

In the final few minutes of a recent committee meeting the question was asked, “where should we go with field trips?” The inquiry was not intended to tease out new ideas for destinations or even how to find more leaders. It was directed at something much larger. The question was asked to encourage conversation about our audience—to discuss why people sign up for trips and what they are hoping to get out of them... The motivations to join a trip are endlessly varied, of course, but could probably be distilled into three or four large categories. We want to make sure we provide what people are looking for. Are we a birder’s destination, an education program, a social gathering or outdoor experience, are we a conservation powerhouse? I suggest that we can be all of these, and quite possibly more if we allow ourselves.

Certainly this nuanced committee question deserved a thoughtful response so it was decided we would all think about our feelings and open the question up again at our next meeting.

It made me wonder though about our Chapter as a whole. We are rapidly approaching our 100 year anniversary as an organization, and events like a Centennial Celebration inspire serious reflection of our history and goals. It was on January 6, 1925 that the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society held its first meeting at the historic Saratoga Inn and the agenda included comments on the wording of what would eventually become its mission. We have since revised and refined those words in acknowledgment of our current culture and activities, but they remain largely consistent with that initial conversation.

Continued on next page



John Nicholas Trail, Sanborn Park. Photo by Matthew Dodder

The crucial thing to remember is that our membership has grown well beyond its 45-member beginnings. Santa Clara County's population as a whole has undeniably grown as well. It was roughly 120,000 people one hundred years ago, and is now approaching 2,000,000—an increase of more than 1600%. So many changes in that time frame! We are more culturally diverse today, we live longer, speak more languages, travel more and rely on technology we could scarcely imagine in 1925. The only constant of course, is change...

Inspired by our multiculturalism and our nation's realization that we must face some deep social imbalances, we actively seek to reach new audiences, welcome them with open arms and work to address their concerns. These efforts have been successful for the most part. But there is so much more to do. So many people to learn from and celebrate. So many people with which to share our love of birding and the environment.

We have three pillars to our mission: Education, Conservation, and Birding. If we are to survive another hundred years, we will have to develop each of these equally so as to retain what we have spent so long developing and continue to grow. That means responding to current issues, both environmental and social.

Many of you have heard that the National Audubon Society is examining a potential name change. It is weighing the benefit of dropping of the name "Audubon" from its organization altogether. This is in response to John James Audubon's ownership of slaves from 1810 to 1820 as well as other racist activities we all wish to disassociate ourselves from.

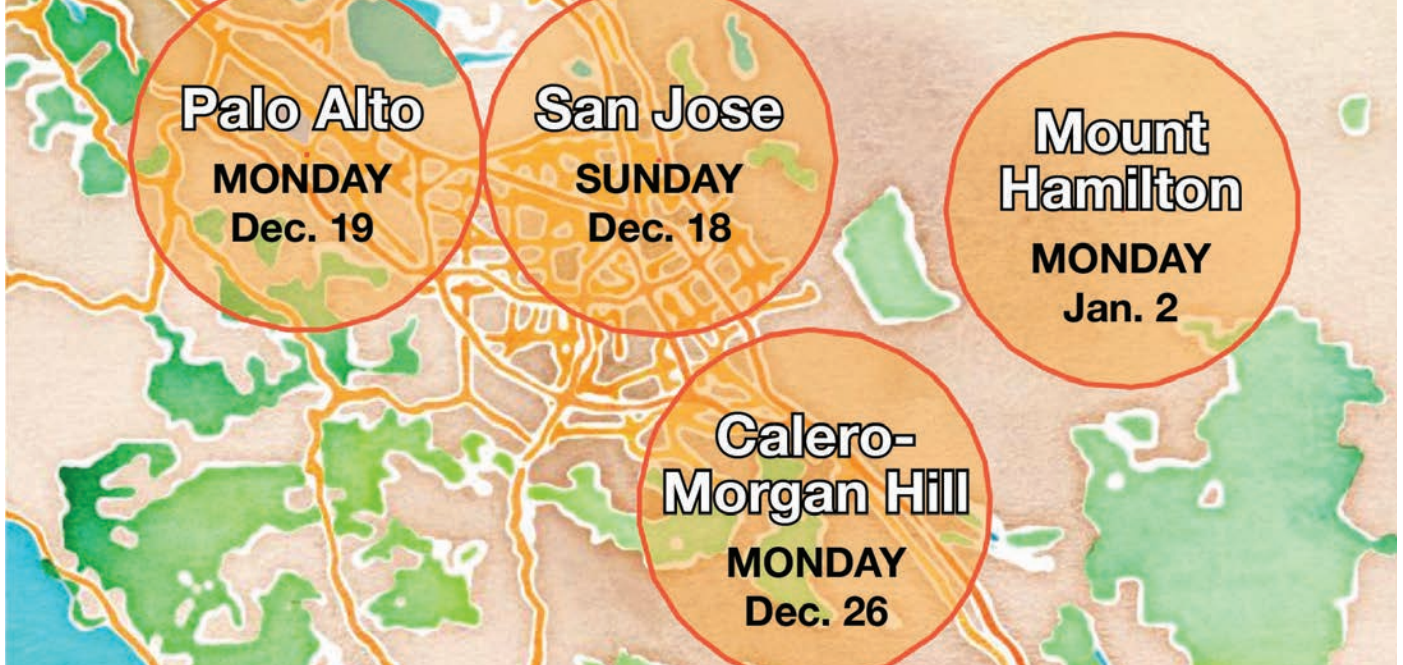
The National Audubon Society has held this name since 1905 and it has become recognized worldwide as standing for the protection of birds. The organization's decision to discuss a name change arose from recent social protests, particularly Black Lives Matter, but also the Central Park birder incident

where our nation's legacy of racial issues came into full view. The National Audubon is embarking on this potential action by conducting a nation-wide survey of its members and affiliates to find out what their thoughts are. I responded already, and perhaps you have as well. It is curious however, that the general public has not yet been included in this information gathering effort. I certainly hope that is part of their discovery efforts.

SCVAS has not taken a stand on this issue nor will it for some time. The entire birding community is interested in what National discovers from its survey, and likely no chapter will act until that is known. If the Board eventually takes a stand, one way or another, it will be opened for comment and no decision will be made without considerable input from our members and community. My questions have so far been, "what are the positives of changing Audubon's name?" And "what are the negatives of not changing the name...?" I'd like to know who is adversely affected by our association with the Audubon name, and who has been discouraged from joining because of it? Is our name preventing us from reaching the people we need to attract in order to grow? Are we in danger of erasing the dark history of John James Audubon? Is it possible a name change could function as a way to address the past by bringing it into the full light of day? These are very complicated questions that I trust National Audubon is considering all the subtleties. They involve many people, vastly different audiences, and quite clearly very strong emotions.

Field trips? So what do we do with them?? These sound like simple questions but they have very complicated answers—large and hinging on something more fundamental...

So again, I ask, what do we want to be? I will need your help to find an answer because this is where we are—just about 800 days before we celebrate our first 100 years, and usher in the next. If we succeed, whatever we do as a Chapter, wherever we go in our future, we will do so together. ●



CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Ann Hepenstal, SCVAS volunteer

This annual bird survey is a great time to get out birding and gather data on the number of individual birds seen for each species you find. Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society sponsors 4 "Count Circles" for the Christmas Bird Count (CBC). Typically participants go out in a small group (between 2 to 6 people) to cover an assigned territory. They report their data to the Count Compiler, and at the "countdown," get to hear about all the great birds that were found!

If you've joined the CBC in the past, please save the date, and contact your team leader or coordinator now to let them know that you want to join the 2022 CBC. If you're new to the count, contact the coordinator for the one you wish to join

(note: while beginner birders may be able to help with CBC activities, this is not a teaching opportunity). Please volunteer sooner rather than later; we cannot assign volunteers to teams later than 2 weeks before the count.

2022 Christmas Bird Count Dates and Contacts:

- ▶ **December 18 (Sunday):** San Jose Count Circle
Mike Azevedo, geochelone@aol.com
- ▶ **December 19 (Monday):** Palo Alto Count Circle
coordinator Ann Hepenstal, paloaltocbc@gmail.com
(compiler, Al Eisner)
- ▶ **December 26 (Monday):** Calero-Morgan Hill Count Circle
Rick Herder, rick.herder@gmail.com
- ▶ **January 2 (Monday):** Mount Hamilton Count Circle
Bob Hirt, hirttax@gmail.com

Meet our new EA Assistant

My name is Rani Fischer, and I am taking a break from teaching math at De Anza College and the College of San Mateo to help Shani in the environmental advocacy arm of SCVAS. I have been dedicated to protecting nature all my life, especially with climate action in Peninsula Interfaith Climate Action, 350.org, Silicon Valley Climate Action Now, and most recently the Sierra Club. My grandmother was an avid birder who instilled in me her love of open space, a sense of adventure, and birds. I enjoy hiking and birding, but I don't have as much time as I would like since most of my non-Audubon time is spent practicing the pipe organ at St. Bede's Episcopal Church, Menlo Park, where I am the organist. I look forward to learning a lot in the next four months and fighting to preserve what matters most, wildlife. ●



WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Matthew Dodder
Executive Director



There is a stillness in the woods of winter. The backyard feeders may be loud with the clamor of hungry Sparrows, Finches and Chickadees. Likely the intermittent song of a White or Golden-crowned Sparrows is heard. The ponds may be a ruckus of geese and ducks. Many songs of the meadow have been muffled except for the faint overhead twittering of a Goldfinch or Pipit. But the forest—it is silent, at least it would seem so at first. A slow walk through the woods will gradually reveal the subtler sounds of the season. Single notes from a Brown Creeper, or the distant call of a Flicker—these replace the elaborate songs of spring. Despite the relative quiet, life is still everywhere, just subtler as if to match the lower light and grayer sky.

Whether birds arrive to spend the winter with us, or live here year round, the winter season has several themes that are consistent with this quietude. The birds' attention is no longer on fending off rivals, finding a mate or raising a family. It is trained on surviving through the lean times ahead.

Locating

Everyone needs to eat, obviously. A bird's preferred diet influences where it spends its winter because that food may become scarce or absent depending on season. As was the case in autumn for example, flying insects are more challenging to find during the cooler months so it should be no surprise that we see fewer insectivores (Vireos, Flycatchers, etc.) in our wood. There is a new urgency to move on or adapt to the changing availability of specific foods. What results is an influx of birds that are able to include more seed and fewer flying insects. Hence a large number of Sparrows—White-crowned, Golden-crowned, Lincoln's, Fox, **Swamp**, Vesper... who definitely enjoy seeds, but also excel at finding beetles and grubs below the leaf litter.

We also witness large flocks of Shorebirds probing for invertebrate prey just beneath the surface of the mudflat as

well as great rafts of diving ducks gathered in the Bay and on the ponds. Perhaps also it is because the trees have fewer leaves and the branches are more visible, but in winter I feel the presence of Raptors more powerfully. I notice their silhouettes more quickly, and the open fields seem to be more of a focus for their attention. Our neighborhood Merlin spends much of the winter outside my home office window, Prairie Falcon is easier to locate in Coyote Valley, and Ferruginous Hawks show up in unexpected locations. Winter is indeed the time for carnivores!

Remember the Yellow-rumped Warbler too, an especially hearty insectivore that has no trouble dealing with our temperate winter. It benefits from the presence of other members of its species—a flock of sorts—that vocalizes quite loudly as it forages. Nearby Yellow-rumped Warblers undoubtedly hear these calls and understand it means food has been located. Which brings me to the second theme.

Evading

This is crucial, especially when food can be more challenging to find. Sometimes, one must forage in the open without the cover of dense foliage—exposed and vulnerable. I'm thinking winter flocks of Sparrows, Pipits, Geese and Cranes. In the case of the Sparrows, they often forage "openly" but near the safety of cover. In any case, each of these birds shows a strong tendency to gather in groups, sometimes numbering in the hundreds or thousands, presumably to find safety in these crowds. A large number of birds makes each individual less likely to fall victim to a predator. Even our Bushtits, famous for their sizable groups which tumble from bush to bush, form such flocks primarily in winter.

In Coyote Valley as well as other open areas like Merced, the danger of being a bird alone is on full display. There, the meadows and marshes where geese and ducks gather, a Bald Eagle, Ferruginous Hawk or **Prairie Falcon** may appear out of nowhere and claim a victim. The predator has been observing from somewhere not far away. The unfortunate bird that has become separated, or was stationed on the periphery might just be the eagle's next meal...

Photos L to R:
Fox Sparrow, Golden-crowned Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow *Tom Grey*



Swamp Sparrow
Photo by Tom Grey



Prairie Falcon
Photo by Tom Grey



Northern Waterthrush
Photo by Tom Grey



Hooded Mergansers
Photo by Tom Grey

Sheltering

You may have noticed some of the less common birds of winter are skulkers. Swamp or Nelson's Sparrows, **Northern Waterthrush**. Keeping to the hidden areas obviously benefits a wayward visitor. Open areas are filled with danger for solitary birds. I remember one January in Boston where I found a Yellow-breasted Chat sharing a small snow-covered berry bush with a shivering Carolina Wren. I had heard some soft, unfamiliar calls which caught my attention. The birds were hesitant to come out of hiding and I had to wait nearly an hour before I got an unobstructed view of either one. The lesson I learned that day was that in winter, patience is definitely required and sensitivity to the small, shrinking sounds of winter can bring great discoveries. Search the dense branches of trees, the tangled vines of blackberry, and the wall of faded willow. There is safety in these haunts and wintering birds, particularly Passerines, may avoid detection by hiding deep within them.

Preparing

A few hearty birds actually begin nesting in late winter. Red-tailed Hawk and Great Horned Owl come to mind. We may begin to hear more vocalizations from these early-nesting species. If they are not actually securing a nest however, they will be moving toward that task by finding a mate. A few other groups like ducks and cranes may begin pair bonding as well. We can see this among birds like Green-winged Teal and **Hooded Mergansers** who actively display to potential mates in winter before returning to their breeding grounds with their new date. A trip to the Central Valley in mid-winter often brings great views of dancing Sandhill Cranes. All of this in preparation for the nesting season ahead. Prior to this though, birds will need to recover from their long journey and build up reserves for the next.

My advice for winter birders—be cognizant of these four themes and see if you can find examples of each. My guess is they may help put what you see in context. My hope is you will succeed and your season of cool weather birding will be rewarded with fresh discoveries. ●



Let there be Dark

The devastation that LED lighting causes to insects, birds, and ecosystems has been a focus of our advocacy work in recent years. It is amazing to us that a technology, which in so many ways harms the health of almost every life form on earth, is promoted not only by industry but also by state and local jurisdictions. We must better regulate the brightness and spectrum of lighting and use light like medicine—only where and when it is needed and at the right dose. Here are some of our efforts in recent years and some of the outcomes (and please let us know if you would like to join us in protecting the night).

Light Tower

“Breeze of Innovation” now envisioned in Plaza de Cesar Chavez park. We first learned that the San Jose Light Tower Corporation proposed a reconstructed Light Tower in downtown San Jose in 2018. We immediately expressed concern and apprehension. We did not wish to see a repeat of the past. When the historical light tower operated, it aimed to provide illumination to the downtown area. In December 1981, the Sacramento Daily Union reported that “the light was bright enough to throw distinct shadows 1 mile away... and the police on the local beat made money selling birds that collided with the tower to local restaurants.” Would a new Light Tower repeat this carnage?

We advocated with the proponents and the City of San Jose to be cautious, yet the city allowed the Light Tower Corporation to proceed with a global design competition that would place the winner of the competition at the worst

possible location—the confluence of the Guadalupe River and Los Gatos Creek at Arena Green Park. The Light Tower Corporation, eager to despoil Arena Green Park, changed its name to Urban Confluence. The projected cost of this monument was \$150 million.

In 2020, at the request of the proponents, we spent days participating with community groups to select the winning design. At the end, the proponents selected a design that was not recommended by the stakeholder advisory group: the Breeze of Innovation, a 200-ft tall light polluting structure. In public meetings, stakeholder groups, and in the media, we expressed our opposition to this monumental light generating art that would intentionally introduce light pollution in the Guadalupe River corridor.

We published an opinion in the San Jose Mercury News that alerted readers to the hazard of light pollution at this location to birds and human aviation and the importance of dark creek corridors for fish migration and wildlife connectivity. We discussed residents' desire for nature in parks: “The pandemic sharpened our senses and helped us appreciate the value of nature, of birdsong, of dark starry nights and the beauty of the Milky Way. Why would San Jose willfully select an icon that obscures the sky and symbolizes a legacy of dead birds and enduring environmental harm?”

As a result of our advocacy, the City Council stipulated that the structure should not have significant impacts on the environment.

In September 2022, we learned that due to “environmental concerns with the riparian corridor, regulatory challenges, and air traffic noise,” the proponents of the project are no

Shani Kleinhaus, Environmental Advocate

longer seeking to place it in Arena Green and are now hoping to build their Breeze of Innovation at Plaza de Cesar Chavez instead. It is amazing to us that the proponents of the project waited so long to seek a less impactful site.

Even in growing cities, such as San Jose, residents prioritize access to the wild in the city's core. We will continue to follow the project to ensure that future lighting does not harm the environment.

Light pollution bill vetoed by Governor Newsom

SCVAS occasionally takes a position on state-wide legislation, but the increase of light pollution resulting from the transition to LED lighting technology required us to be more proactive. In 2022, together with Audubon California and the National Park Conservation Association, we sponsored California Assembly Bill 2382. This bill was introduced by Assemblymember Alex Lee (Assembly District 25), who was later joined by Senator Ben Allen (Senate District 26). It would have required all outdoor lighting installed or replaced on state buildings and structures after January 1, 2023, to have external shields to redirect light, be equipped with either an automatic shutoff device or be motion-activated, and be a maximum Correlated Color Temperature of 2700 Kelvin to reduce the blue light emitted. The bill made it through the Assembly and Senate but was vetoed by the governor. The reason given was the unbudgeted expense for 24,000 buildings to comply. Assemblyman Lee responded to the [Los Angeles Times](#), "This bill would have protected our night skies and migratory species, while reducing wasteful and unnecessary electricity consumption." We are considering options for the next legislative session.

Light Pollution Symposium

Over two hundred people registered for our November 16, *Light at Night: A Glowing Hazard symposium*, jointly organized with the Sierra Club Loma Prieta Chapter and the Sierra Club Bay Alive Campaign to educate our public, city staff, and elected officials about light pollution, its ecological impacts, and ways to protect our environment while providing safe and practical lighting solutions. Assemblyman Alex Lee provided introductory remarks followed by authorities on dark sky:

- ▶ ***Ecological Effects of Light Pollution***
by Travis Longcore, Ph.D., Associate Adjunct Professor, UCLA, Institute of the Environment and Sustainability
- ▶ ***Finding Darkness Within The Light: The built environment as the key to solving the problem of light pollution***
by John Barentine, Ph.D., Executive Officer and Principal Consultant, Dark Sky Consulting, LLC
- ▶ ***Light impacts on Bird Collisions***
by Christine Sheppard, Ph.D., Director of the Glass Collisions Program, American Bird Conservancy
- ▶ ***Building a Case for Dark Skies***
by Mary Coolidge, BirdSafe & Lights Out Campaign Coordinator, Portland Audubon

These experts provided much needed insight and solutions to our current crisis. We are extremely grateful to our speakers and to our many supporters. ●

WHY A NEW CHECKLIST?

Matthew Dodder, Executive Director

Annual overhaul is complete

Checklist updates are as ancient and reliable, yet they are also as **unpredictable** as the wind. The powers-that-be (American Ornithological Society) simply love to lump and split species with impunity. They do this after thorough review of the research and intense debate of each proposal's merit. These powers also annually change the names of familiar birds around the globe and seem to take pleasure in causing widespread confusion—it's a perverse joy.

Luckily, neither of the above scenarios affected us this year. Instead, a rare and wonderful surprise arrival attracted hundreds of astonished birders—the Oriental Turtle-Dove of last winter. And when we were nearly finished with the formatting, a Painted Redstart made an appearance and had to be squeezed in. There was also a new record of breeding in Santa Clara County when the Least Bitterns (quite rare in Santa Clara County) decided **this** year to start a family. We have made every effort to bring this edition of the checklist up to date, and while we believe we were successful, no doubt we will be proven wrong and the list will want a revision before next year. Such is the wind...

Of course, the County checklist started long before this most recent edition. Bill Bousman, author of the Breeding Bird Atlas of Santa Clara County assembled all the records of species found for many years to create our first official checklist which was last updated in 2016. It was indispensable in the creation of a new list. But with the impressive growth of eBird, Barry and I knew we had to use this new data and build an updated checklist—one we planned to update annually as more eBird data becomes available.

In this edition, you will find we have introduced **Rarity Codes** which have existed for decades but were not included in earlier checklists. These numerals refine our understanding of each species beyond the **Bar Charts** which often tell us more about how many **sightings** have been recorded (in all the years records have been kept), but not the number of individual birds involved. In other words, the bar chart for Townsend's Solitaire makes it appear that it is present annually from January through February, which is not true. It **may occur** during that time but not every year...

We have also made several manual adjustments to these bar charts to reflect the actual number of individual birds. For example, eBird represents the vagrant Oriental Turtle-Dove

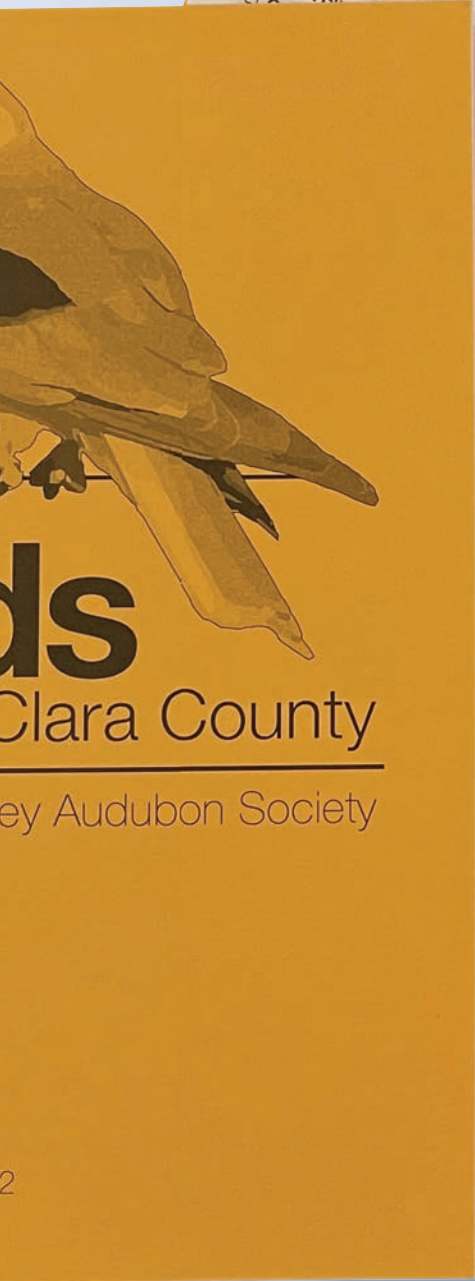
with the same thick green bar as Band-tailed Pigeon or Eurasian Collared-Dove. This could be very misleading to those who don't realize the Oriental Turtle-Dove in Palo Alto involved a single bird seen by many hundreds of birders. So it, along with several other species were manually adjusted. These new codes **and** the adjustment of each bar chart were discussed and debated by our group of reviewers, Pete Dunten, Richard Jeffers, Brooke Miller, Mike Rogers, Steve Rottenborn, Matthew Dodder and Barry Langdon-Lassagne.

We have made small changes to the list of **introduced** (non-countable) species, as well as the **historical records** to incorporate species with no modern sightings that would otherwise be lost. Perhaps we will see some of these historical birds in the future, or species we have not even considered yet...

The tables included in this article capture some of the review team's conversation regarding specific birds that needed special consideration because their rarity had changed in recent years, or eBird data distorted the actual numbers present in our county. You will notice that occasionally the commenters do not agree which is quite natural during a project like this.

This is an ongoing effort to incorporate eBird data into our checklist. It is not perfect, and will always be changing. Still we will continue to refine it each year. If you believe something should be adjusted, please let us know and we will reexamine the report to improve the list in future editions.





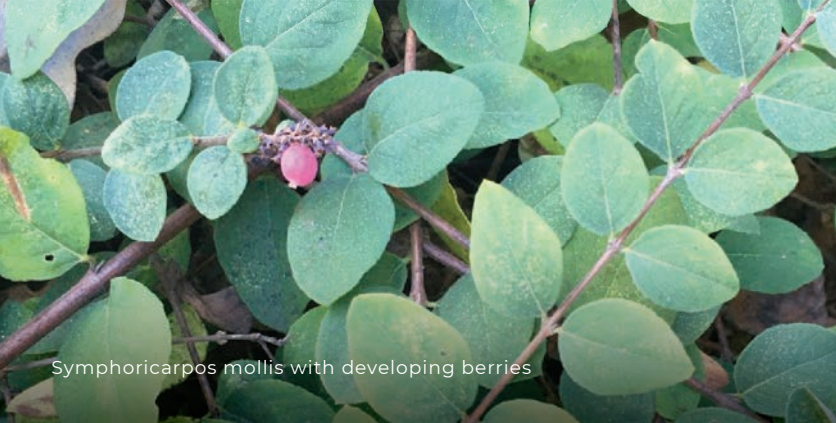
South Bay Birds
 Santa Clara County
 Audubon Society

	Rainy	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
<input type="checkbox"/> Double-crested Cormorant**													
Pelicans													
<input type="checkbox"/> American White Pelican													
<input type="checkbox"/> Brown Pelican													
Hérons, Egrets, and Bitterns													
<input type="checkbox"/> American Bittern*													
<input type="checkbox"/> Least Bittern*													
<input type="checkbox"/> Great Blue Heron													
Kingfishers													
<input type="checkbox"/> Belted Kingfisher**													
Woodpeckers													
<input type="checkbox"/> Williamson's Sapsucker													
<input type="checkbox"/> Yellow-bellied Sapsucker													
<input type="checkbox"/> Red-naped Sapsucker													
<input type="checkbox"/> Red-breasted Sapsucker													
<input type="checkbox"/> Lewis's Woodpecker													
<input type="checkbox"/> Acorn Woodpecker													
<input type="checkbox"/> Downy Woodpecker**													
<input type="checkbox"/> Nuttall's Woodpecker**													
<input type="checkbox"/> Hairy Woodpecker**													
<input type="checkbox"/> Pileated Woodpecker**													
<input type="checkbox"/> Northern Flicker**													
Falcons and Caracaras													
<input type="checkbox"/> Crested Caracara													
<input type="checkbox"/> American Kestrel**													
<input type="checkbox"/> Merlin													
<input type="checkbox"/> Peregrine Falcon**													
<input type="checkbox"/> Prairie Falcon**													
New World and African Parrots													
<input type="checkbox"/> Mitred Parakeet													
Tyrant Flycatchers													
<input type="checkbox"/> Olive-sided Flycatcher**													
<input type="checkbox"/> Western Wood-Pewee**													
<input type="checkbox"/> Willow Flycatcher (*)													
<input type="checkbox"/> Least Flycatcher													
<input type="checkbox"/> Hammond's Flycatcher													
<input type="checkbox"/> Gray Flycatcher													
<input type="checkbox"/> Dusky Flycatcher													
<input type="checkbox"/> Pacific-slope Flycatcher**													
<input type="checkbox"/> Black Phoebe**													
<input type="checkbox"/> Eastern Phoebe													
<input type="checkbox"/> Say's Phoebe**													
<input type="checkbox"/> Vermillion Flycatcher													
<input type="checkbox"/> Ash-throated Flycatcher													
<input type="checkbox"/> Tropical Kingbird													
<input type="checkbox"/> Cassin's Kingbird*													
<input type="checkbox"/> Thick-billed Kingbird													
<input type="checkbox"/> Western Kingbird**													
<input type="checkbox"/> Eastern Kingbird													
<input type="checkbox"/> Scissor-tailed Flycatcher †													
Vireos, Shrike-Babblers, and Erpornis													
<input type="checkbox"/> White-eyed Vireo													
<input type="checkbox"/> Bell's Vireo*													
<input type="checkbox"/> Hutton's Vireo**													
<input type="checkbox"/> Yellow-throated Vireo													
<input type="checkbox"/> Cassin's Vireo**													

Remember, anyone who has ever posted a report to South Bay Birds or eBird, whether you knew it or not, you helped locate and document birds on this list. You made this possible. **Thank you!** ●

Stop by the Ranch to pick up your copy of the new Checklist, or download a pdf at: <https://scvas.org/county-checklist>.

Checklist continued on page 13



Symphoricarpos mollis with developing berries



Ribes sanguineum with berries

PRUNING: NATIVE PLANTS, RATS, CATS AND BIRDS

Ann Hepenstal
SCVAS Volunteer

If you've been working to increase the habitat value of your yard by replacing the exotic plants with California native plants, you can use the winter months to do some "landscape care."

Each plant has its own pruning season so that you encourage the growth, flowers, berries, etc. that you want. Before cutting anything, take some time to look up the best time to prune the specific species that you have and consider the bird activity at that season. And remember—there is no exam on pruning, so you can do it the way that works best for you.

Pruning: December and January are a great time to look around your yard from the point of view of the animals to check what you've created, and make corrections to the growth pattern of your plants. You can guide the development of your landscaping, while working with the plants and providing birds with places to take cover from predators and with places to build nests. Consider how the plants provide places to hide from Cooper's Hawks and cats (keep this cover!), and evaluate how your landscaping may be helping rats and other pests to thrive (reduce homes for rats!). Take the time to look up when your plants like to be pruned, in order to avoid diseases and encourage the desired growth.

Shrubs low to the ground: Are you providing hiding spaces for rats? I take in the bird feeders at night, dump the bird bath, sweep up the seeds—but the many fruit trees in yards around me and other attractants simply give the rats too good of a living. Periodically, I need to prune the shrubs to lift them up from the ground and reduce the cover they give to rats, as well as to my neighbor's cats.

- ▶ Cutting back the hedge of Pacific Ninebark (*Physocarpus capitatus*) not only creates a neater, "husband-pleasing" look but also exposes potential rat highways.
- ▶ I love the look of the Creeping Snowberry (*Symphoricarpos mollis*) in my yard and how it has spread, but I'm sure the rats have a hiding place there. Because cutting it back would greatly diminish the beauty and its ability to provide hiding places for the

sparrows, I leave it alone to preserve the bird habitat value (and try not to think about rats—it's a choice).

Berry-producing shrubs: my landscaping includes multiple bushes which provide hummingbirds with nectar and berries to feed Western Bluebirds, Cedar Waxwings, and Robins.

- ▶ The Red-Flowering Currant (*Ribes sanguineum*) flowers approximately December through March, and produces fat, purplish berries in summer. Prune these bushes in the spring after they're done blooming, in order to best encourage the flowers for the hummingbirds. You can remove dead branches, cut the bush back to size, and fix shape issues. If you want to do shaping in December and January when you can more easily see the plant's shape, be careful to not cut too much or you'll impact flowering.
- ▶ California Coffeeberry (*Frangula californica*)'s tiny flowers produce fat berries ranging from reddish color to black. You may want to prune this for size or shape, but remember that it grows to 6 feet tall, and may get as high as 12 feet—don't fight the inevitable! It will accept pruning into a hedge shape, if you want to do that. The leaves provide good cover to the birds, so I like to leave these bushes very full and just cut back the most overenthusiastic branches. Prune this after it finishes flowering.

Perennials: before you give in to the temptation to "clean up" your yard, consider the nature of the plant.

- ▶ California Fuchsia (*Epilobium canum*) offers hummingbirds its bright red, trumpet-shaped flowers from mid-summer into fall. By November, its leaves have dried out and it looks terrible. Once the new growth has begun to sprout from the roots, I cut the old stalks down to the ground. The sparrows and juncos enjoy hunting for seeds amid the stalks, and the plant resprouts quickly to make more red flowers for the hummingbirds.

All photos Ann Hepenstal



Frangula californica showing variety in berry color



Eriogonum fasciculatum as its flowers go to seed

- ▶ Red-flowered Buckwheat (*Eriogonum grande* var. *rubescens*) produces seed-pods, offers nectar to pollinators, and hosts butterflies such as the Gray Hairstreak. Cutting off the old flowers will encourage the plant to bloom more, but I like to leave them on to add interest in the garden and offer the seeds to the finches and sparrows. I'm encouraging

the plant to grow larger, so I only lightly pinch it back to encourage the shape that I want.

- ▶ And remember—leaving the leaves provides cover to overwintering invertebrates including spiders, moths, butterflies and more. Be a lazy gardener. ●

Resources

Books and websites offer a wealth of pruning tips, including specifics on which plant likes pruning in which season. Some to look at:

- ▶ **California Native Plant Society's Pruning Tips:**
<https://www.cnps.org/gardening/digging-deeper/pruning-tips-techniques>
- ▶ **How to Prune Native Plants**
by Laurie McGonagill
<https://ucanr.edu/sites/ucmgplacer/files/339455.pdf>
- ▶ **How to Prune Native Plants (without killing them)**
from Las Pilitas Nursery, with times of year, by plant.
<https://www.laspilitas.com/garden/howto/pruning.htm>

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NEST BOX PROJECT *Sravika Nemani* Bird House Builder

The Girl Scouts Association gives their scouts the opportunity to do awards such as the Silver Award project. In the Silver Award project, each scout should create a project that targets an important issue. As I was brainstorming for ideas for my Silver Award project, I heard about the opportunity to work with the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society or SCVAS.

After talking with some of the members, I learned about the problem that they were trying to address. Birds, especially cavity nesters, are losing their homes because humans are taking down trees. Cavity nesters live in the small holes in trees and since the trees are being removed by humans for various reasons, the birds no longer have a home. Their organization's mission resonated with me because I couldn't fathom the idea that one of the birds that visit my backyard may not have a home. To address this problem, the members of SCVAS helped me decide on my project to build 5 nest boxes. Nest boxes are homes for animals to live or nest in.

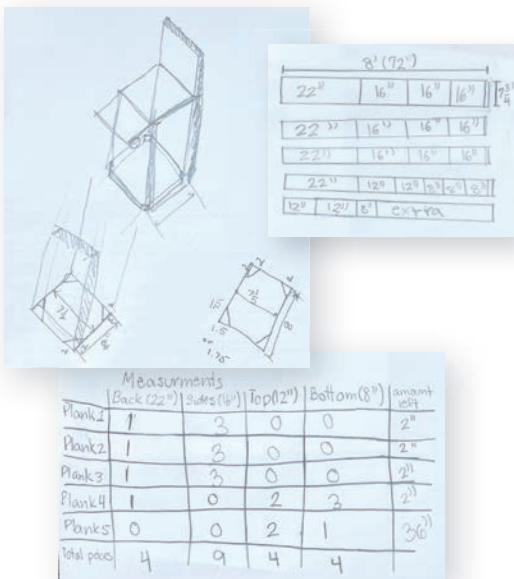
To begin with, I browsed several designs for the nest boxes. I also researched the materials needed, including nails, wood, hinges, screws, etc. I picked a simple design as this would be my first wood construction project.

To assemble the first box, I lined up all of the wood pieces and nailed them together with some help from my father. After completing the first box, I moved on to the next 4 boxes. The challenge was that I had to figure out how to cut the wood without wasting any, so I did multiple calculations to determine how to optimize the amount I had of wood when cutting it (as shown on the right). Once all the nest boxes were completed, I contacted the SCVAS organization and I dropped the nest boxes off at one of their locations.

In retrospect, I feel as though this issue needs more attention and is often overlooked. My experience getting involved was a new one for me, but I still enjoyed it. It was fulfilling to work with others to make an impact on an environmental issue. I gained new skills such as communicating with organizations, woodworking, planning, and problem solving. Also, the SCVAS organization greatly helped me and continuously supported me by answering all of my questions and guiding me throughout this project.

Currently, the next boxes are being sent to people who will hang them up at their houses so the birds can live in them. These cavity nesters will have found their new home after their old one was demolished. We as humans, should remember that we are not the only beings on the Earth and therefore, help the species who can't help themselves.

I wonder if someday I will see a bird in my backyard that was born in one of the boxes that I built. ●



	Old v. New Rarity	eBird Chart	Comments on Rarity changes. Updated 10/03/22
<input type="checkbox"/> Greater White-fronted Goose	4 3		On par with Cackling Goose, or at least not as scarce as Snow and Ross's Goose
<input type="checkbox"/> Brant	6 5		Match Tundra Swan & Garganey
<input type="checkbox"/> Eurasian Wigeon	4 3		In recent years, we see more Eurasian Wigeon than Barrow's Goldeneye
<input type="checkbox"/> Redhead*	3 2		Increased observations over time
<input type="checkbox"/> Red-breasted Merganser	3 2		Easier to find suitable habitat than Hooded Merganser, which is 3
<input type="checkbox"/> Mountain Quail*	5 6		**Steve (see note on rarities pg)
<input type="checkbox"/> Ring-necked Pheasant**			There are very few in the county, and aside from the few in the Sunnyvale/Alviso area right along the edge of the bay, others in the county are likely from recent releases. Should be 4, en par with Blue-winged Teal or Barrow's Goldeneye
<input type="checkbox"/> Band-tailed Pigeon**	2 1		Fits Rarity '1' definition
<input type="checkbox"/> Eurasian Collared-Dove**	3 2		Increasing across the county
<input type="checkbox"/> Black Swift			Black Swift undoubtedly occurs in the county in numbers (certainly hundreds and probably 1,000+), every year, but the flocks move through quickly along ridge lines and birders have to luck into encountering them. Considering it a code 5 is inaccurate because it definitely occurs every year, but it may not be seen every year. Downgrade this to 4.
<input type="checkbox"/> Black-chinned Hummingbird**	4 3		There are many more, and they're much more widespread, than species like Snow Goose, Ross' Goose, Barrow's Goldeneye, and Blue-winged Teal
<input type="checkbox"/> Costa's Hummingbird*	5 5		It probably breeds in the county every year, in places that birders can't access in the interior Diablos, and it wouldn't be surprising if 100+ occur in the county every year. It's just not frequently encountered.
<input type="checkbox"/> Calliope Hummingbird	5 4		Believe there are thousands moving through the Diablo Range each April-May, they're just infrequently encountered.
<input type="checkbox"/> Rufous Hummingbird	4 3		Believe that many migrate through in spring unnoticed
<input type="checkbox"/> Ridgway's Rail**	2 3		Frequency reducing over time
<input type="checkbox"/> Red Knot			Red Knot are in the county every year in numbers, even discounting that most San Francisco Bay area birds are in San Mateo County. They are pretty reliable at the Stevens Creek delta and the Alviso ponds when habitat is good (which is not always the case).
<input type="checkbox"/> Ruff	4 5		Ruff should definitely not be considered more common than Ruddy Turnstone (5)
<input type="checkbox"/> Stilt Sandpiper	4 5		We used to get more in the 90s
<input type="checkbox"/> Short-billed Dowitcher	1 2		They are present in large numbers along the immediate bay edge, but are easily missed without access to the bay edge and present almost nowhere else except in fall migration.
<input type="checkbox"/> Greater Yellowlegs	2 1		Fits Rarity '1' definition
<input type="checkbox"/> Heermann's Gull	5 6		Lack of recent records
<input type="checkbox"/> Iceland Gull			Probably more widespread, and possibly more numerous, in the county than Short-billed Gull (2). It's definitely more numerous than Western Gull (1).
<input type="checkbox"/> Lesser Black-backed Gull	6 5		There are well over 10 records, and it's nearly annual in the county
<input type="checkbox"/> Elegant Tern	4 3		Being seen every year since they started breeding just north in San Mateo County
<input type="checkbox"/> Black Skimmer*	4 3		Being seen every year since they started breeding on the island at Shoreline Lake and Salt Pond A16
<input type="checkbox"/> Brandt's Cormorant	6 5		Even aside from the weird incursions that have brought large numbers to the county, this species has occurred more regularly than a 6
<input type="checkbox"/> Brown Pelican	3 2		Increased numbers in county. They are all over the bayside in season and almost impossible to miss
<input type="checkbox"/> Little Blue Heron*	5 6		Last recorded in 2006
<input type="checkbox"/> Golden Eagle**	2 3		Increasing in the county
<input type="checkbox"/> Sharp-shinned Hawk**	2 3		Frequency here is similar to Golden Eagle & Bald Eagle
<input type="checkbox"/> Bald Eagle**	4 3		Breeding in several places in the county for several years now
<input type="checkbox"/> Swainson's Hawk*			Even aside from the two nesting pairs, this species would be recorded annually in the county, and suspect that hundreds migrate north through the Santa Clara County portion of the Diablo Range each spring. The species' California populations have been increasing and expanding considerably.
<input type="checkbox"/> Western Screech-Owl**	1 2		Rarity '2' seems more appropriate
<input type="checkbox"/> Belted Kingfisher**	2 3		Present only in small numbers and nowhere very reliable
<input type="checkbox"/> Lewis's Woodpecker			There aren't many in the county, and they're very localized (e.g., compared to Red-breasted Sapsucker (3)). LEWO on par with Pileated Woodpecker (4).
<input type="checkbox"/> American Kestrel**	1 2		Declining in county
<input type="checkbox"/> Hammond's Flycatcher	5 4		Thousands of these birds move through the Diablo Range in spring.
<input type="checkbox"/> Pacific-slope Flycatcher**	2 1		Fits Rarity '1' definition
<input type="checkbox"/> Black Phoebe**	2 1		Widespread and numerous; the most-reported bird by # of eBird checklists in the county
<input type="checkbox"/> Cassin's Kingbird*	5 4		More reliably found, range expanding?
<input type="checkbox"/> Loggerhead Shrike**	2 3		Loggerhead Shrike has declined in the county, and it's disappeared even from many areas where habitat remains suitable
<input type="checkbox"/> Common Raven**	2 1		Fits Rarity '1' definition
<input type="checkbox"/> Golden-crowned Kinglet*	3 4		Similar to Pygmy Nuthatch (4)
<input type="checkbox"/> Red-breasted Nuthatch**	4 3		Numbers increasing in county
<input type="checkbox"/> Rock Wren**			Rock Wrens are numerous in good habitat, such as along Coyote Ridge, around the edge of Anderson Reservoir, and in rocky grasslands on private lands in the Diablo Range, but birders have access to only very limited areas of such habitat. In contrast, Canyon Wren (4) is much, much less abundant in the County due to its limited and localized habitat.
<input type="checkbox"/> Grasshopper Sparrow**	4 3		Similar to Rock Wren in that it is relatively common in good habitat but birders don't have access to most of that habitat.
<input type="checkbox"/> Bell's Sparrow	3 4		Less common than Grasshopper Sparrow (3).
<input type="checkbox"/> Swamp Sparrow	5 4		More county reports in recent years
<input type="checkbox"/> Yellow-breasted Chat**			Adjust based on number of observations (suspect there are 10-20 pairs of chats breeding along the Pajaro River, Llagas Creek, and Pacheco Creek every year that we can't access)
<input type="checkbox"/> Yellow-headed Blackbird (*)	5 4		Slightly higher numbers in recent years
<input type="checkbox"/> Hooded Oriole**	3 2		Often easier to find than Bullock's Oriole (1)
<input type="checkbox"/> Great-tailed Grackle**	4 3		A lot more in the county in recent years
<input type="checkbox"/> Tennessee Warbler	6 5		Based > 10 records
<input type="checkbox"/> Northern Parula	6 5		Based > 10 records
<input type="checkbox"/> Chestnut-sided Warbler	6 5		Based > 10 records
<input type="checkbox"/> Hermit Warbler*	4 3		Regular along Skyline
<input type="checkbox"/> Western Tanager**	3 2		A common migrant that is only missed "sometimes."



Field Notes

Please report rarities to
pdunten@gmail.com

Pete Dunten
SVAC Volunteer

Swifts through Bobolink

A young **Vaux's Swift** was found inside a house near Rancho San Antonio on 29 Jul (RWR). A few manage to find chimneys for nesting, making them one of our rarer breeding birds. A nice collection of uncommon shorebirds arrived at the end of the breeding season. They included a **Pacific Golden-Plover** along the entrance road to the Don Edwards NWR on 22 – 23 Oct (fide eBird) and a second individual on 27 – 28 Oct (FV, MMR). Single **Black Turnstones** were seen on 20 Aug on Charleston Slough (PDo) and on 12 Sept along Alviso Slough near the boat launch (MDa). Single **Semipalmated Sandpipers** were noted on 25 Jul, when an adult was in New Chicago Marsh (BM), on 6 Aug, when an immature was in the marsh (MMR) and on 13 Aug, when an immature was at Palo Alto Baylands (NoA). A **Red Phalarope**, usually found offshore in California, wandered into the bay and stopped on pond AB1 on 31 Jul (MMR) for our first July record. Rounding out the shorebirds, single **Solitary Sandpipers** were seen at Pearson-Arastradero Preserve from 7 – 9 Aug (NC, m. ob.), at Foothills Park on 10 Sept (GLk) and at Guadalupe River Park on 14 Sept (EF). An adult **Long-tailed Jaeger** flew over Palo Alto Baylands on 25 Aug (JM) for only the 5th county record. The county records indicate the odds of an adult Jaeger staying in the south bay for more than a day are quite low. Three of every four Jaegers visiting the south bay are seen on only one day. Of the Jaegers that have stayed longer, one in eight was an adult. A **Common Murre** posed for a photo between dives in Alviso Slough on 17 Sept (MDa). Murres are not seen every year. **Sabine's Gulls**, another species occurring less than annually, stopped in the south bay between 13 – 24 Sept. One was over Alviso Slough on 13 Sept (GL), one visited Coast Casey Forebay on 16 Sept (TJ), and one to two were found on or around pond A8 between 17 – 24 Sept (MJ, GL, m. ob.). Six **Black Terns** on the A10/A11 levee on 27 Jul was a nice count for the fall, when solo terns are the norm (PKy). A **Common Tern** joined our local Forster's Terns on the pilings in pond A1 between 4 – 23 Aug (PDU, m. ob.). The pair of **Least Bitterns** at Calero Reservoir fledged two young, with the last report being a sighting of one Bittern on 12 Aug (ABu et al.). One to two **California Condors** have been seen recently in the southeast corner of the county at Casa de Fruta, at the edge of the Diablo Range. One was noted on 23 Oct (TL), two on 24 Oct (SW), and one again on 26 – 27 Oct (MMR, RJ, MJM, GL). A **Tropical Kingbird** put in a brief appearance at Coast Casey Forebay on 30 Sept (MnS). A late-to-depart **Western Kingbird** was at Shoreline Park on 18 Oct (RPh). The Kingbird identification challenge will become easier after October when Western Kingbirds should be absent. Two **Townsend's Solitaires** enjoyed the Madrone berries in the upper part of Sanborn CP along Skyline Blvd on 27 Oct (WGB). Migration brought four **Clay-colored Sparrows**, with the first at Sunnyvale Baylands on 21 Sept (SSm) and two there on 22 Sept (GL), followed by one at J Grant CP on 16 Oct (GL) and finally one at Palo Alto Baylands on 18 Oct (ABu, MJM). On 21 Sept, the Clay-colored Sparrow at Sunnyvale Baylands had the company of a **Brewer's Sparrow** (GL). A **Yellow-breasted Chat** was a lucky find at Hellyer CP on 24 – 25 Sept (fide eBird). **Green-tailed Towhee** occurs less than annually, and at unpredictable locations. One at the Palo Alto Baylands Duck Pond between 16 – 18 Oct (Sal, m. ob.) was enjoyed by many. A **Bobolink** found the Stanford O'Donohue Family Educational Farm on its way south on 1 - 2 Oct (JWs, m. ob.). It was the 18th county record and only the second to have stayed for more than a day.



Long-tailed Jaeger
Photo by Julio Mulero



Common Murre
Photo by Mike Danzenbaker



Bobolink
Photo by Zihan Wei



Painted Redstart
Photo by Thomas O

Warblers through Tanagers

Those who look forward to the annual appearance of vagrant warblers in the fall were not disappointed. There were almost, if not quite, enough to fill a Bingo card! This fall also brought to light two previously under-appreciated locations, Agnews Historic Park in Santa Clara and Hellyer CP in San Jose. Agnews Historic Park is a jewel, with water from sprinklers, Bottlebrush in bloom, and Chinese Pistache loaded with berries. Hellyer CP includes a stretch of Coyote Creek and good cover amidst tangled underbrush. First of the vagrant warblers to arrive was a **Northern Waterthrush** at Vasona Lake CP, found on 12 Sept (MFa, SW) and 17 Sept (BSp). Another was along Stevens Creek below Hwy 101 between 30 Sept – 5 Oct (MMR, m. ob.). A **Black-and-white Warbler** was at Vasona Lake CP between 16 – 19 Sept (MKn, m. ob.). Another was at Sunnyvale Baylands on 19 Oct (PL). **Tennessee Warblers** visited three locations, with the first at Agnews Historic Park in Santa Clara on 17 Sept (GLk) and again on 3 Oct (MZ). One was at Santa Clara University on 3 Oct (ER) and another at Stanford campus on 13 Oct (ABu). An **American Redstart** stopped at Hellyer CP between 21 – 25 Sept (GL, m. ob.). **Single Chestnut-sided Warblers** graced Los Gatos CP between 17 – 19 Sept (CR & JmR), Hellyer CP between 20 – 25 Sept (SPv, m. ob.), Agnews Historic Part between 26 – 28 Sept (TY, m. ob.) and Vasona Lake CP between 6 – 14 Oct (EvM, m. ob.). Solo **Blackpoll Warblers** were at Sunnyvale Baylands on 24 Sept (JSc), Vasona Lake CP on 28 Sept (TaJ), the Palo Alto RWQCP on 2 Oct (EvM) and nearby at the Palo Alto Baylands ranger house on 11 Oct (MDo) and at Agnews Historic Park on 19 – 20 Oct (JCh, GL). The latest warbler to arrive, and one that sometimes overwinters, was a **Palm Warbler** at Stevens Creek Reservoir on 28 Oct (WGB). A **Canada Warbler**, only the 5th for the county, was a nice find in a backyard in Campbell from 20 – 22 Sept (LM). The surprise of the season was a **Painted Redstart**, found 28 Sept at Agnews Historic Park (MBa, EC). The Redstart was a county 1st. It has remained through the end of the period and can often be found visiting Sapsucker holes on one of the park's large conifers. A **Summer Tanager** added a bit of fall color at Vasona Lake CP on 12 – 18 Sept (SPv) and another individual with even more red hues was found further north along the Los Gatos Creek Trail on 23 Sept (OA). A third was photographed at Sunnyvale Baylands on 8 Oct (SCR).

Observers Sreedhara Alavattam (SAI), Ozzie Altus (OA), Noah Arthur (NoA), Meg Barron (MBa), Bill Bousman (WGB), Adam Burnett (ABu), Nicole Chan (NC), Jim Chiropolos (JCh), Ellyn Corey (EC), Mike Danzenbaker (MDa), Matthew Dodder (MDo), Peggy Don (PDo), Pete Dunten (PDu), Marion Farber (MFa), Erin Fisher-Colton (EF), Richard Jeffers (RJ), Melissa Johnson (MJ), Tara Johnson (TaJ), Tom Johnson (TJ), Parker Kaye (PKy), Mark Kinsman (MKn), Garrett Lau (GL), Thomas Leeman (TL), Greg Luckert (GLk), Patricia Lynch (PL), Mike Mammoser (MJM), Eve Meier (EvM), Brooke Miller (BM), Julio Mulero (JM), Lisa Myers (LM), Sergey Pavlov (SPv), Ryan Phillips (RPh), Bob Reiling (RWR), Mike Rogers (MMR), Edward Rooks (ER), Steve Rottenborn (SCR), Celeste Royer (CR), Jim Royer (JmR), John Scharpen (JSc), Manish Sharma (Mns), Scott Smithson (SSm), Becky Spence (BSp), Frank Vanslager (FV), Susan Weinstein (SW), Jacob West (JWs), Tristan Yoo (TY), Mark Zdeblick (MZ). ●



Photo by Matthew Dodder

At first glance, these two feathers (found in the same back yard) appear similar and were assumed to come from the same bird. They both have spots and are similar dark coloration, after all... But closer examination reveals subtle differences that call that assumption into question. One can even determine from what portion the body the feathers came. The larger is 3.75" long.

Books

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

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

Answer (FALL 2022)



Last issue's mystery was a remarkable nape feather from an sub-adult Bald Eagle. Notice the pointed shape and speckling at the base. It is a good thing our member left the feather exactly where it landed. Not only is it a federal offense to possess such feathers, the species is sacred to our local tribes and feathers can only be kept by tribal authorities.

Matthew Dodder
Quiz Master

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those who renewed!



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