

The

# AVOCET

Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society

Summer 2023 · Vol 71 Num 3



Photo by Matthew Dodder

## BIRDATHON AWARDS EVENT

Saturday, June 3



**Save the date**  
for an early evening  
in-person event.

There will be food,  
refreshments, and live music  
to help us celebrate this year's  
incredible Birdathon.

We will recognize the many  
prize winners and crazy  
stories from this year's teams.

Special jazz performance by  
Bill Walker

More details to be  
provided soon at  
[scvas.org/events](https://scvas.org/events)

## How SCVAS helped me sleep at night

*Rani Fischer, SCVAS Volunteer*

On April 10, the Sunnyvale Planning Commission unanimously voted to prioritize the development of a **Dark Sky ordinance for all private properties as a study issue for 2024**. This unanimous vote brings me hope. While the Commission's recommendation is unlikely to result in the elimination of existing lighting on private properties, it can raise awareness and hopefully help reduce future proliferation of harmful lighting. But it is sad that the city has so little influence on what's already in place. It seems that unless new lighting requires a permit, the city has no say. And usually, replacing a light fixture - however large and bright - does not require a city permit.

Still, I was pleasantly surprised to hear the commissioners' expressions of dismay at the level of light pollution in Sunnyvale. The motion to study lighting was put forth by Councillor Carol Weiss whom Shani and I had run into at a coffee shop in January when meeting with city councilmembers on light pollution. That brief encounter led to her watching videos of our online Dark Sky Symposium and to this study issue. Even before I had given public comment, there was a general murmur about strengthening the scope of the study to include not just residences, but all private property. Councillor Daniel Howard hoped that his children and grandchildren could someday see the stars from Sunnyvale. Chair, Martin Pyned, added that his star-gazing had been so hampered by the glow of the suburban sky that he had to drive to remote places.

I, too, suffer from light pollution in Sunnyvale. I learned about SCVAS's advocacy work through my personal circumstances fighting a bright light from the Fortinets

*Continued on next page 2*

company building that was shining into my living room window, half a mile away, keeping me awake at night. Prior to last summer, I had no idea that Audubon did advocacy work, and after talking with Shani Kleinhaus, I joined SCVAS and have been advocating since. SCVAS helped me write a letter to the editor which was published in the SJ Mercury News. This letter motivated my city and the Fortinet Company to change the angle of its outdoor lights so that they didn't shine as harshly into my living room. Fortinet is an example of private property unaffected by the current Sunnyvale ordinance. Now, the light still shines in my window, but I can no longer make shadow puppets with my fingers. Now, I see only my hand as a blob when I hold it up.

A study issue is a step in the right direction, and I am heartened to hear the same sentiment from the Planning Commission. Birds, which cannot draw black-out shades in their bedrooms, have gained a little from our efforts.

Here is the public comment I provided to the Planning Commission:

I am Rani Fischer, a volunteer with the Environmental Action Committee at the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society, and a resident of Sunnyvale.

I speak in favor of strengthening Sunnyvale's lighting ordinance and recommend that we study the creation of a Dark Sky Ordinance for ALL private property in Sunnyvale, not just residences. Light pollution is a real problem in our city.

In August last year I succeeded in getting the Fortinet company to change the angle of its outdoor lights so that they didn't shine into my living room which was 1/2 mile away. Asking nicely was not effective. After I wrote a letter to the editor of the SJ Mercury News, Fortinet worked with George Schroeder of Sunnyvale staff to lessen the problem of their light pollution. This is an example of private property unaffected by the current ordinance.

Sunnyvale has an ordinance for private properties SMC 19.42.050, and also our Bird Safe Building Design Guidelines which include, "No up lighting or spot lights on site; Ensure all site lighting uses shielded fixtures; and, Turn building lights off at night or incorporate blinds into window treatment to use when lights are on at night"

I think we should have a Study Issue that will consolidate and expand our lighting regulations and protect public and environmental health by including a limit on the correlated color temperature (to be no more than 2700K), this would be a great win for migrating birds and our sleep cycles.

Cupertino Dark Sky and Bird Safety ordinances include restrictions that protect public safety and the function of businesses, and at the same time ensure that light is used when it is needed, where it is needed, and at the lowest brightness and correlated lighting temperature appropriate for specific private establishment needs. This is good housekeeping - it saves energy and protects aesthetics of the city at night, and protects public health and wildlife alike. Let's develop a strong ordinance in Sunnyvale. ●

## Varied Thrush

Orange and black flashed in the woods.  
Scurrying about, pecking for lunch.  
Barely discernable among tan oaks and redwoods,  
Trilling and buzzing and whistling its melody.  
Startled eyes beheld,  
A jewel of the forest.  
Orange and black and gray.  
An ornament out of place.

Do my eyes deceive?  
Do my ears betray?  
Is this a mystical being,  
Come to challenge my reality?

I gaze on this denizen of the forest,  
Memorizing all details.  
Size, distinguishing marks, location,  
Behaviors, song, call.

My mind is in a swirl  
As I try to paint a mental picture  
Of this forest dweller  
Who has captured my imagination,  
Tested my credulity.

I sprint down the trail,  
Firmly planting my feet  
Into each switchback.  
The ranger will know what it is...I hope.

Words stumble out: "bird, orange, black",  
A smile slowly lights up her face.  
She can read my mind,  
Before I can get it all out.

"Varied Thrush" she informs me.  
"It commutes to here,  
From far off Alaska in winter".

My spark bird.  
I'm hooked!

by *Craige Edgerton, Winter 2020*

Craige Edgerton has been a very casual birder since the Varied Thrush incident in the early '90's. Since retiring in 2017 he has become more active. Writing is also a "late in life" venture with most of his writing starting in 2018 after joining a group sponsored by SJSU and SJ MLK Library. He always wondered what he would be when he grew up and finally found out after turning 70!



Varied Thrush  
by Luis Villablanca



Wrong Terns



Mary Ann Allan displays her Birdcasso composition

## BIRDATHON STORIES

Compiled by *Carolyn Knight*  
Education and Outreach Manager

Every year, Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society holds our annual Spring Birdathon. This event is an amazing illustration of our Chapter, with teams coming together to bird our beloved hotspots across the county.

Some teams go out for the competition, some for the cause, and some just for the company! This year we had multiple cycling teams, our art team collected members from across the country, and our young birders showed up for birding and fundraising, to great effect.

Check out some of the Birdathon stories that have been shared with us this year, and if you haven't already, please consider donating to support this event. Funds raised by Birdathon go to support our education and advocacy work in Santa Clara County.

"The Wrong Terns adhere to one law and that law is Murphy's. At least that's the conclusion I've come to after years of taking part, and later leading SCVAS's education team. Whether it's due to the exhaustion of just wrapping up, or being in the midst of, a busy spring education schedule, or we're simply not used to birding without minding a dozen third graders at the same time, the fact remains that something inevitably goes awry when the Terns hit the trail. Just as inevitably though, we have a good time with it. Lunch is always a more pressing goal than adding to our species count.

While this year's first stop on our itinerary, to the Palo Alto Baylands where we hold school field trips throughout the year,

went as expected, though the high tide limited our sightings to thirty-three species before it was time to move on. Still, we took a moment to appreciate the small group of Black-bellied Plovers who still lingered in the mud, their breeding plumage a rare treat for us to marvel at.

If you're wondering where it went wrong, this is when. The plan, at least on paper, had been to do a tour of locations that we bring classes to. In practice, this meant we arrived at Coyote Valley OSP just in time to learn that the parking lot was closed, and we could expect at least an hour-long wait if we wanted to enter the parking lot. No problem. We still picked up Red-winged Blackbirds and Turkey Vultures for our list while we regrouped at the side of the road to plan our next move.

Unfortunately, we had the exact same problem at the North Coyote Valley Conservation Area. An unexpected event had the area busy with people, and we had no interest in intruding on the Open Space Authority's plans for the site. The temperature was rising fast, and we had lost nearly an hour to these unexpected hurdles. So with the birds quieting down, we decided that lunch was the best idea.

While I wouldn't recommend holding regular tailgate lunches on the side of Santa Teresa Boulevard, I do have to say that

*Continued on page 4*



Anastasia Nguyen  
Birdcassos



Lean Mean Birding Machine



Blue-gray Gnatcatcher  
DeDUCKtions



Cycling Siskins

the company made it an enjoyable time, and the Yellow-billed Magpie that closed our day with a well-timed flyover certainly didn't hurt."

**Carolyn Knight, Wrong Terns**

This 10-hour team, an entirely art-based activity, had more artists this year than ever before! A week earlier, John Muir Laws had invited Matthew to talk about the project on his monthly webinar, and as a result the Birdcassos team received signups from well beyond our normal Santa Clara County. We had entries from Northwestern California, Oregon, Kentucky and Japan!

Several local teammates joined me at Shoreline Lake to draw the birds there. We all had different styles and enjoyed seeing each other work. Drawing from life, at least for me, is very difficult, but I love the challenge and the encouragement of my fellow artists. We sat together on the shore and worked for about 4 hours before separating. With the remaining time, we refined the drawings, perhaps adding color or additional birds from home. Anastasia was our youngest contributor and her sharp eyes and enthusiasm for the subjects was inspiring. Mary Ann did a remarkable landscape with multiple birds in one composition, Leena always impresses us with her glorious watercolors, and Jack Laws joined us briefly to cheer us on.

The collected artwork will be released on our website soon with statements from each artist and a summary of this year's effort."

**Matthew Dodder, Birdcassos**

"...As we rode up the paved road which forms an arc over the main Rancho meadow, a flyby Cooper's Hawk caught our eye, a relatively rare sighting for Rancho San Antonio. It was welcome, because we had not seen or heard (nor would we) the far more common for the area Red-shouldered Hawk. You take what you get. By the time we got to the base of the PG&E trail, we had added the recently arrived Ash-throated Flycatcher. We knew Lazuli Buntings were at the top of the hill,

and we wouldn't see them elsewhere, but a walk up the hill (and back down!) would involve a minimum of 15 minutes and time is of the essence. I knew there were also House Wrens to be heard up the hill, and a day earlier I had been able to hear their joyous call from the bottom, but after waiting several minutes, we had to give up on them too. Time management!

We rode the short distance to the "Wetlands" and set up our spotting scope to look for the Wilson's Snipe. As we did that, a Green Heron suddenly flew out of the area. In the past we had seen it in the Cemetery, but here was good too! I'm pretty sure there's only one in the area, that divides his time between the pond on Cristo Rey and the Cemetery (and apparently now the Rancho Wetlands as well). The Killdeer was not on its still taped-off nest, but Killdeer were still in the area. Suddenly the unmistakable "whinnying" of the Sora was heard. Bingo! Just seconds later Mary was able to zero in on the Snipe, so our two special species were accounted for.

I had just mentioned to Bill and Mary that California Thrashers seemed to be scarce to non-existent at Rancho this year so naturally, as we rode just another 100 yards toward the back entrance of Gate of Heaven Cemetery, there was a Thrasher babbling away. We didn't see it, but hearing is just as good, and when the clock is ticking, there's no time for unnecessary things like actually seeing the bird!"

**Steve Patt, Lean Green Birding Machine**

"This was a 10-hour Birdathon team comprised of Jim Dehnert, Christopher Klein, Joyce Zhang, and Matthew Dodder. We limited our destinations to the mid-county area in an effort to cut down on long drives and as a result fell short of our goal of 100 species. Areas along the Bay, had we had time to visit them, would have bumped us over our goal. Still, it was a lovely day, unhurried and fun. The flowers, especially the brilliant California Poppies were everywhere on the hillsides! Joyce was especially happy with our results because she got many life birds!

Despite all the planning, we still made a silly mistake. We hiked up the Stile Ranch trail in search of Grasshopper Sparrow and Horned Lark, but found the area completely silent! Doh!! The reason of course was it was high noon, 85+ degrees and all the birds were sheltering from the bright sun and heat like the wise creatures they are. Humans... not so much."

**Matthew Dodder, Hot Spotters**

"This was the first year for the Cycling Siskins Birdathon team. We had 7 members and were a distributed, 4 hour, birding-while-biking team. Although most of the morning was quite overcast, the sun finally peeked out after a few hours. (Two of us also had flat tires to start the day!) Still, we were able to identify 90 bird species in total. Most importantly we had a wonderful time on our bikes, enjoying the birds and the beautiful California Spring weather!"

**Jennifer Oliver, Cycling Siskins**

"This year we were lucky in our choice of date as the day was fair and mild, and spring migrants had recently arrived in numbers and variety. We ended up with 116 species for the day - the highest number yet for the Almaden Eagles.

We found "big birds" (Bald Eagle, Great Horned Owl, Osprey) over to "little birds" (Black-chinned & Rufous Hummingbirds, Scaly-breasted Munia, Least Sandpiper) - and everything else in between - spring migrants - lingering winter birds - and familiar resident birds.

We had eight duck species including some wintering ducks (Ring-necked Duck, Bufflehead, Lesser Scaup), but the highlight was an adult Wood Duck with three young ducklings on the Los Capitancillos Ponds. It's possible that the male Wood Duck who overwintered on these ponds may be the Daddy!

Nine species of warblers were counted with most seen in the wooded hills of the Sierra Azul - Hermit, Townsend's, Black-throated Gray, Oranged-crowned, Nashville - others seen

included Wilson's, Yellow-rumped, Common Yellowthroat, and Yellow.

Sparrow species included Lark Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Golden-crowned Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, and Rufous-crowned Sparrow.

Then, a plethora of spring migrants: Purple Martin in with other swallows, Hooded & Bullock's Orioles, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Western Wood-Pewee, Western Kingbird, House Wren, Black-headed Grosbeak, Warbling & Cassin's Vireos, Lazuli Bunting.

Other highlights of note: Caspian Tern, Swainson's Thrush, Horned Lark, Lewis's Woodpecker, Rock Wren

It was a good day. In closing I want to thank the members of the Almaden Eagles team - Janna Pauser, Kirsten Holmquist, Marion Farber, Bobbie Baker - you all made it happen. Hope we can do it again next year!"

**Ann Verdi, Almaden Eagles**



Hotspotters

The Trip Reports feature on eBird is not new, but surprisingly few people make use of it. It's designed to help compile your sightings from a multi-stop day like a Birdathon, or an extended birding vacation. The steps to create a handsome

map and itinerary are easy. Follow the steps below to create your own Trip Report and you'll find an easy and elegant way to share your birding trips with friends, or provide mid-trip updated totals to your teammates.

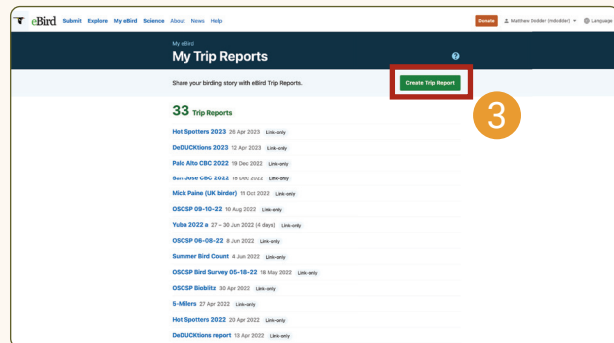
### Step 1:

You will need to have an eBird account before continuing. If you have an account, go to [eBird.org](http://eBird.org) from your phone or home computer. (Note: The Trip Reports feature is not yet possible through the eBird app so you must use your browser from your phone or desktop to reach the site.)



### Step 2:

Click on My eBird and look for the Trip Reports link. If you are using your phone to do this, the link is found by clicking the blue Manage button on the upper right of your profile page. If you are using your home computer, the link will be on the left column navigation of the website. As always, if you need to add or delete species to your individual checklists, those changes will be reflected when you visit the trip report again.



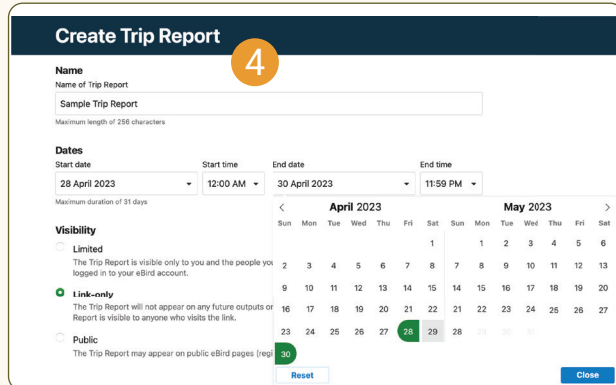
### Step 3:

Click on the green Create Trip Report button. You will see a blank text field where you can enter the name of your trip report. Below that you will see four more cells where you indicate the Start date, Start time, End date, and End time. Clicking these will reveal a calendar or a dropdown menu for time of day. Set your timeframe for your trip.

I hope you will make use of this feature on your next vacation or "big day." Consider it an easy and elegant way to share your adventure with others.

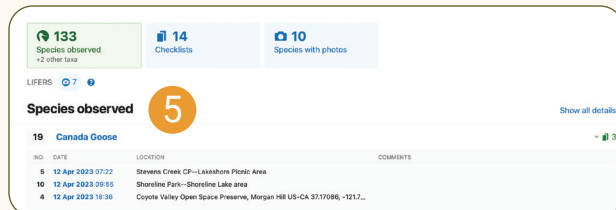
### Step 4:

Select your visibility option. I usually choose "Link-only," but you can choose any one you wish or change it later if you want. Click Create Trip Report. (Note: if you have not entered a name or the dates of your trip, the Create Trip Report button will appear gray or disabled. Only after you have entered the required dates and time will it appear green and allow you to submit.)



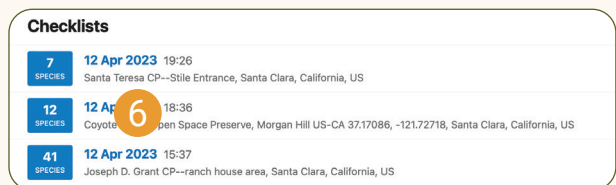
### Step 5:

From this point on, any checklists you submit within the trip report period will be added to the final report. You can review your trip report at any time from the My Trip Reports page. As each new checklist is submitted (within the report period) it will be added to your existing report.



### Step 6:

At any time, you can edit or change the parameters of your trip report including writing a brief summary of the trip to help you remember the event, or de-selecting specific checklists you may have unintentionally captured by the report. Most helpful, you can share the trip report with any members of your team or travel companions, add photos or share a link with the public. ●



# WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Matthew Dodder  
Executive Director



## Not all those who wander...

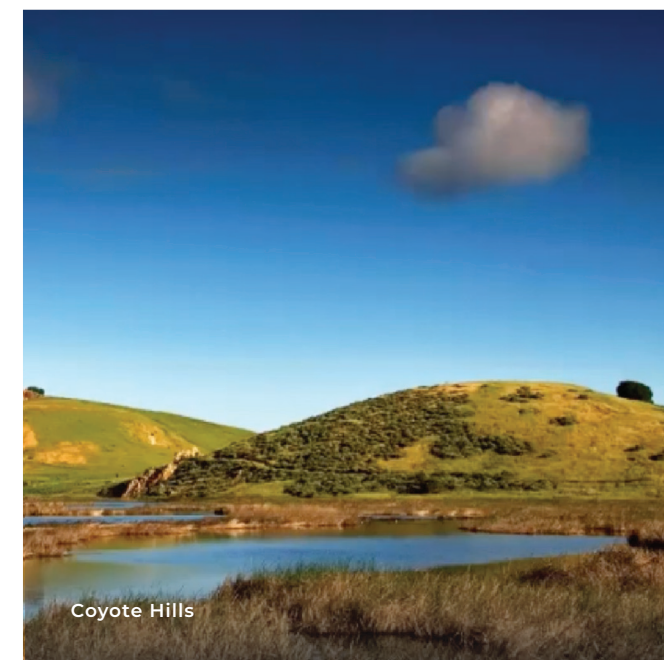
In April, SCVAS was invited, along with other Bay Area Audubon chapters, to participate in a three-part webinar spotlighting each county's best birding destinations. The series was moderated by Sirena Lau of San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory (SFBO). There were six Audubon chapters participating, each with insights about what makes their area enjoyable for birders. Here is a sample of the locations they presented, and at the end you will find links to each recorded session. So if you feel like wandering out-of-county, think about exploring some of these great locations. (The SCVAS portion is not included here, but the link to the recording can be found below.)

**OHLONE AUDUBON**  
[ohloneaudubon.org](http://ohloneaudubon.org)

**Bob Toleno** (Southern and eastern Alameda County)

### Coyote Hills Regional Park

With the combination freshwater marsh, grassland, riparian, rocky hillside, chaparral and oak woodland, Coyote Hills represents some of the best birding in the county. The park is adjacent to the Don Edwards National Wildlife Refuge and is popular among hikers, bikers, and birders. On a recent excursion there, Cricket and I found Eurasian Wigeon, American Bittern, Rock Wren, and Purple Martin.



### Hayward Regional Shoreline

This large area is located near the east end of the San Mateo Bridge and features salt and freshwater marshes, seasonal wetlands and some grassland. The huge checklist includes Red Knot, Solitary Sandpiper, Red-necked Stint, Least Tern, Short-eared Owl, and countless Waterfowl. Our favorite place to visit is the "Mount Trashmore" area located at the west end of Winton Avenue. Each winter, there are reports of Lapland Longspur in the short grass hilltop, as well as a variety of Geese. A pleasant walk north along the shore brings one to "Frank's Dump" which is famous for the massive roosts of Shorebirds.



### Garin/Dry Creek Pioneer Regional Parks

Created by the union of two historic ranches, the Garin/Dry Creek Pioneer Parks feature grassy hills and rich riparian areas. Spring is a wonderful time to visit and provides opportunities to view Western Kingbird, Lazuli Bunting, Grasshopper Sparrow, Bullock's Oriole and various Raptors. Cricket and I found it to be a picturesque location with an assortment of spring species.

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## WHAT TO LOOK FOR *Continued from page 7*

### Mines Road

Many of you are familiar with Mines Road. It has long been a spring destination for Santa Clara birders who are looking for some less common species. Phainopepla, Lawrence's Goldfinch, Lewis's Woodpecker, Greater Roadrunner, and Bell's Sparrow come to mind. Each of these birds can also be found on the southern end of Mines Road which enters Santa Clara County and would be covered later in our own Chapter's portion of the series.

### GOLDEN GATE AUDUBON [goldengateaudubon.org](http://goldengateaudubon.org)

**Whitney Grover** (San Francisco and east Alameda Counties)

### Dotson Family Marsh

This is on the southern border of Point Pinole Regional Park, Richmond has wide, well-packed gravel paths on the Bay Trail, making it very accessible. The trail provides great observation of Waterfowl, especially during winter, and the adjacent grassy area offer the songs and sights of open country birds like Savannah Sparrow and Western Meadowlark.

### Arrowhead Marsh

This famous winter destination, part of Martin Luther King Shoreline, is popular with birders wanting to view Rails. It is located west of the Oakland Arena and during the King Tides in December and January, Ridgway's Rails are easily found, as well as Sora, Virginia, and one winter a Yellow Rail delighted hundreds of visitors! For us, a highlight has always been the possibility of Swamp Sparrow and Nelson's Sparrow. Check the tides before you visit!

### Chain of Lakes (part of Golden Gate Park)

Three small lakes found along Chain of Lakes Drive on the west end of Golden Gate Park are popular birding destinations. A paved trail makes the location easy to navigate with many small trails leading off the main one. Exotic trees and plants dominate this beautiful urban park which captures great numbers of Passerines during migration. Warblers and other Passerines are especially attracted to this area. The nearby Bison Paddock is also worth checking as it is a wide open area attracting different birds. The Botanical Garden and Stowe Lake are well-birded and worth visiting.

Whitney touched on other good birding spots, including the Presidio, Heron's Head, Land's End and Lake Merced. In the East Bay, she promoted Lake Merritt, Tilden Regional Park as well as several others.

### MOUNT DIABLO AUDUBON [mtdiabloaudubon.org](http://mtdiabloaudubon.org)

**Jerry Britten** (Central and eastern Contra Costa County)

### Contra Costa

This under-birded hot spot is at the far eastern end of Contra Costa County. It is a manmade reservoir built to hold water from the Delta before sending it south along the California Aqueduct. The inland sea is noteworthy for attracting vagrants that are otherwise strictly coastal and the diverse habitat means a typical day can see up to 85 species. In addition to the expected waterbirds like Ducks, Shorebirds, Waders, and Bald Eagle the bay has seen extreme rarities like Long-tailed Jaeger and Sabine's Gull.

### Jersey Island

This Delta hotspot is owned by the Ironhouse Sanitation District and, as expected, features fodder crops, livestock grazing, and biosolids disposal. Open ground, canals and ditches, seasonally flooded fields attract Shorebirds, Waterfowl and Raptors in winter. It is mostly car birding from levee roads but can be birded by bicycle as well. There are no facilities and a scope is recommended.

### MADRONE AUDUBON [madroneaudubon.org](http://madroneaudubon.org)

**Susan Kirks** (Sonoma County)

### Spring Lake Regional Park

It is located in Central Sonoma County and sounds like a marvelous place to bird. It is a medium-sized recreational lake with level trails leading around it providing access to ample riparian habitat and open water for a variety of birds. An Egret rookery is a major attraction and the edges of the lake occasionally produce roosting Owls. A number of Sparrows and migrant Warblers can be found here as well.

### Doran Beach

This can be accessed from the southern end of Bodega Bay. We have been here many times and it is spectacularly beautiful. It is especially interesting in fall and winter when migrant Passerines occur in the marsh and coastal trees, and the bay fills with Waterfowl, most notably thousands of Brant. Bald Eagle and Osprey can be found here, and as they pass overhead, the swarms of Geese and Shorebirds can be stunning! One cannot visit this area without also checking out Bodega Head for stunning views and possible views of migrating Whales.

### Ellis Creek Wastewater Recycling Facility

Located In Southern Sonoma County. This is similar to the more familiar Las Galinas Ponds in Marin County or our own Gilroy Water Treatment Ponds. A network of ponds and narrow levee trails brings birders close to wetland habitat that supports Waterfowl and Shorebirds in winter as well as migrant Passerines in season.

### NAPA-SOLANO AUDUBON [napasolanoaudubon.com](http://napasolanoaudubon.com)

**Tom Slyker** (Napa and Solano Counties)

### American Canyon Wetlands

This is best in late August to mid-April when large numbers of Shorebird and Waterfowl are present. Easy walking on flat, paved or packed gravel trails, makes the area easy to traverse. There are benches but little shade, so come prepared.

### Benicia State Recreation Area

The site covers marsh, grassy hillsides and rocky beaches along the narrowest portion of the Carquinez Strait. This area is on the western edge of the of the "Suisun" Song Sparrow's range, which is restricted to the salt marsh of Suisun Bay and the Strait. There is a second local Song Sparrow in the neighboring San Pablo Bay to the west, and a third in the South Bay.

### Lake Solano County Park

It is north of Vacaville is on the banks of the Putah Creek and features open oak, pine and lovely riparian woodland as well as the Lake Solano Nature Center. A shoreline interpretive trail is accessed from the main lot. Common Merganser, Phainopepla and Yellow-billed Magpie are found year round, while Lewis's Woodpecker is present in winter. ●

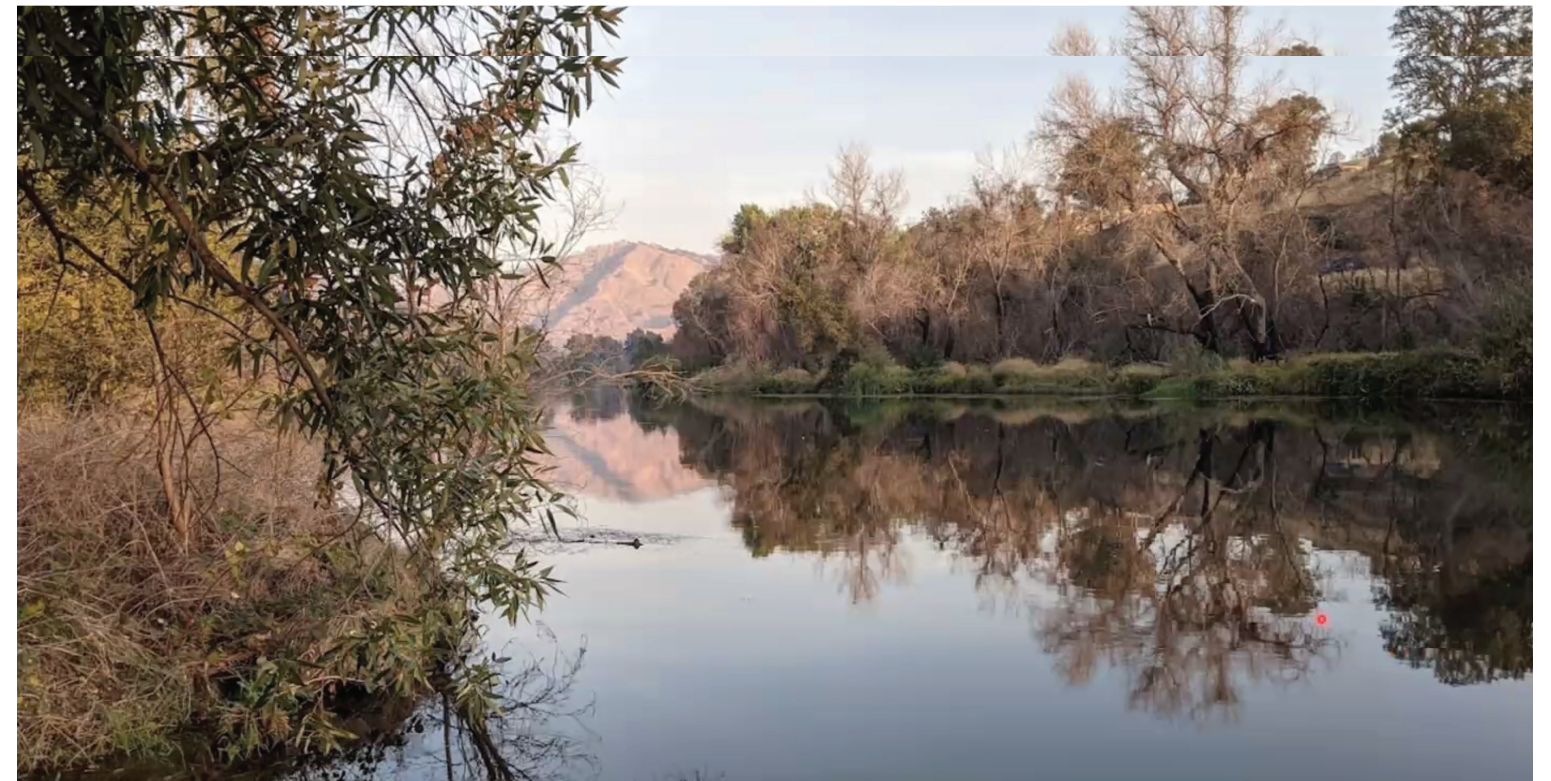
### Video links:

**Part 1: Golden Gate, Mount Diablo, Ohlone**  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=abciObJQwKs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=abciObJQwKs)

**Part 2: Santa Clara Valley**  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=BPYvBFJdRm8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BPYvBFJdRm8)

**Part 3: Madrone, Napa-Solano**  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=qwwoWgElxu4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qwwoWgElxu4)

If you haven't already, check out our self-guided field trips at [scvas.org/self-guided-field-trips](http://scvas.org/self-guided-field-trips).





# Conservation Corner

Shani Kleinhaus  
Environmental Advocate

## Our Advocates at Work

In Spring 2023, we continued to advocate for birds and nature in our urban and open space landscapes. We would like to share examples of public comments that our Environmental Action Committee staff and volunteers delivered to decision making bodies:

**In Mountain view, we successfully supported the adoption of the Shoreline Wildlife Management Plan.** On 3/14/2023, SCVAS volunteer KC Hetterly delivered the following comment:

Good evening Mayor Hicks and Council Members

My name is KC Hetterly and I am a volunteer with the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society.

SCVAS has been advocating for development of the Shoreline Wildlife Management Plan (SWMP) for 5 years. The preparation of the SWMP was expected to start in 2019, but it was delayed due to Covid and eventually incorporated into the work plan for the Council Priority of preserving biodiversity in Mountain View. During the Covid restrictions, the importance of an effective SWMP became clearer than ever. Wildlife thrived during the stay at home period. Later, as people started visiting parks in greater numbers than ever, public appreciation of wildlife and nature, as well as visitor impacts on wildlife and habitat, became evident. The wildlife of Shoreline must be protected and their habitat cherished if they are to persist in our landscape.

The SWMP achieves most of our hopes and expectations:

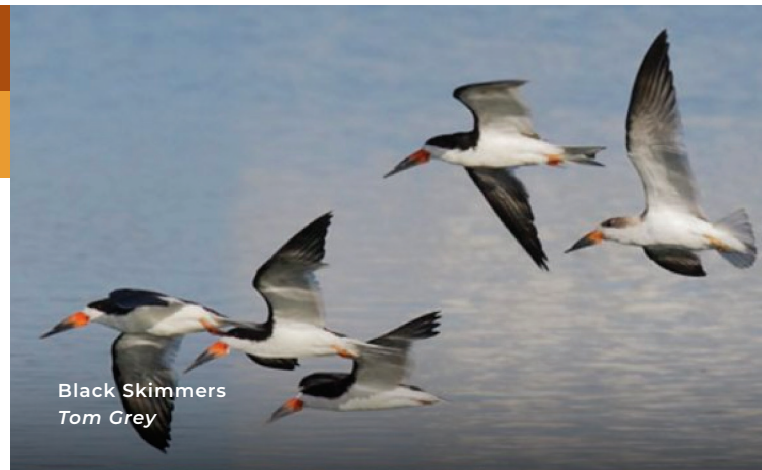
It clarifies the regulatory framework and requirements that protect species and their habitat and Captures best practices that are currently employed by City staff in protecting and providing for the species that call Shoreline home.

It develops and documents Standard Operating Procedures and protocols for evaluating new and ongoing projects (landfill, public works, recreation, events etc.) in an adaptive management approach.

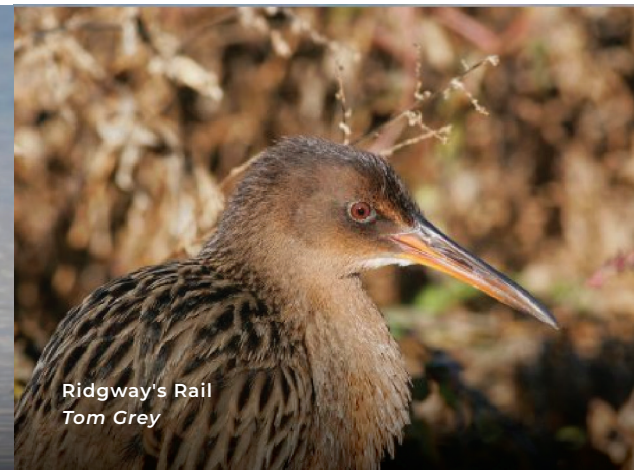
We ask you tonight to approve the plan and accept the Parks and Recreation Commission's (PRC) recommendations to provide an annual presentation to the PRC and to prioritize Capital Investment Projects (CIP) to ensure that special wildlife assets are protected and enhanced, especially the island in the Sailing Lake.

The biggest threat to wildlife is visitor access and activities. We need to maintain and increase the protection of wildlife and critical habitat areas, especially during the nesting season.

Mountain View is making progress on developing a Biodiversity Strategy, with the initiation of a Parks and



Black Skimmers  
Tom Grey



Ridgway's Rail  
Tom Grey



White-tailed Kite  
Tom Grey



Common Yellowthroat  
Tom Grey

Recreation Strategic Plan, an Urban Forest Plan, and a Dark Skies ordinance. We are presently concerned, however, that current tensions over funding between the City and the School District can impact critical programs and projects in Shoreline Park. Therefore, on April 3rd, our Environmental Action Committee Chair delivered the following comment to the Mountain View City Council:

Good evening Mayor Hicks and Council Members

My name is Annie Yang, and I am the Chair of the Environmental Action Committee of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society.

Council members are familiar with the advocacy and conservation arm of our organization. We have been advocating with the City Council for many years, and working closely with city leadership, staff, and the community. Our work - and yours - has advanced programs that protect birds and wildlife and engage the community in conservation actions. Mountain View can be rightfully proud of its achievements, including the 10-year-old Burrowing Owl Preservation Plan, the newly adopted Shoreline Wildlife Management Plan, the City's implementation of bird safe buildings, and more.

You may be less familiar with our education programs. Our classroom education program reaches every 4th-grader in the Whisman School District. We provide in-class programming in all of the District's elementary schools, introducing students to concepts such as migration, habitats, and conservation, using local ecosystems and birds as case studies. We help students foster a sense of appreciation and understanding for the complex habitats that we are surrounded by. In addition, we conduct school field trips to Charleston Slough each year to introduce elementary students to wetlands. We regularly host bird walks around Rengstorff House, the lake, and the wetlands of North Bayshore. During the nesting season, we lead educational events at the Egret Rookery of Shorebird Way.

As every 4th grader in Mountain View knows, Shoreline at Mountain View is a special place. It provides critical habitats for a large number of endangered species, including some of the most iconic - and threatened - species of our region (such as the Ridgeway's Rail, Burrowing Owls, and Black Skimmers). The City of Mountain View and the School Districts should all prioritize and safeguard programs that

benefit these and other species, community protections from sea level rise and legacy environmental hazards, and the ongoing care and maintenance of Shoreline Regional Park.

We hope the City and School Districts work together for a future that serves the community in the best possible way, stewards the environment, and educates students to be responsible, collaborative, and engaged residents in our fast changing world.

**On March 16, at the Valley Water Board of Directors meeting, we spoke in opposition to the proposed Pacheco Dam expansion.**

Shani Kleinhaus, our Environmental Advocate, commented:

Good afternoon Chair Varela and Directors, thank you for allowing me to speak.

My name is Shani Kleinhaus, I am the Environmental Advocate for the SCVAS, requesting that you direct staff to stop working on the Pacheco Reservoir Expansion Project.

The staff presentations show that Valley Water taxpayers will continue to spend money on this outrageously expensive project, and it seems that a clear decision point will not come to you unless you specifically set a date for staff. Otherwise, the process will continue, the EIR recirculated, lawsuits resolved, costs evaluated and reevaluated, and additional tens of millions of dollars spent.

Staff and directors mentioned protecting downstream communities from flooding. This is of course critical. But there are better alternatives. Valley Water should purchase ag land to provide adequate flood plain function - it's far less expensive than this dam, more resilient, and provides better benefits to communities and ecosystems. Don't use flooding as a red herring. Study alternatives.

When the Dam was first proposed, Audubon did not oppose it. We took time to study promises to restore salmonid migration, and the allocation of water to wildlife refuges in the central valley that are critical to migratory birds. We looked for a silver lining to the immense harm that this project would cause to our County's remaining natural landscapes and waterways.

We found no silver lining. The proposed biological benefits were minute compared to the harm. Only a meager water allocation was offered to the central valley refuges, and

it was not offered in dry years when such allocation is most needed. At the Pajaro, operations of the dam are likely to cause significant harm, and alternatives exist that can provide better solutions for salmonids. The harm to terrestrial, riparian and aquatic species and ecosystems is devastating.

The further you allow this doomed project to move forward, the more difficult it will be to stop. Please find a way to stop it today. Focus on alternative ways to supply water instead.

And Annie Yang provided:

Good morning, Chair Varela and Board Members. My name is Annie Yang, and I am the Chair of the Environmental Action Committee of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society. I am speaking on behalf of the Committee to oppose the Pacheco Reservoir Expansion Project. Our Committee is focused on promoting a healthy regional ecology that supports biodiversity and human well-being through protecting open space, wildlife, and their habitat. And this project destroys intact habitat and wildlife connectivity, which we and the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society have worked so hard to protect in our County. Not only will the reservoir destroy oak and sycamore alluvial woodlands and riparian habitat, it will introduce poor quality delta water and, with it, invasive aquatic organisms and/or pathogens that will be impossible to keep out of our local watersheds and Monterey Bay. We know that invasive species are one of the primary drivers of species extinction and ecosystem collapse. These impacts are not something that can be mitigated.

However, we don't need to take this risk nor flood existing habitat because, as others have mentioned here, there are other ways to meet water reliability needs through conservation, efficiency, and recycling, many of which Valley Water is already engaged in. Let's maximize those efforts before building a new reservoir.

**Valley Water continues to process the Pacheco Dam Project, and we are following closely.**

We commented on many additional projects and processes in Palo Alto, Mountain View, Sunnyvale, San Jose, Gilroy and more. If you would like to join our speakers at public meetings, please contact Shani at [Advocate@scvas.org](mailto:Advocate@scvas.org).

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If you've been working on a writing project you think would be of interest—a nature story, book review, commentary or other project you'd like to share with our readers—our editorial staff would be happy to review it. We are eager to welcome new voices to the AVOCET.

**Don't have a story yet?** Contact us for suggestions about topics we'd love to include in a future issue.

**For more information,** email Matthew at [director@scvas.org](mailto:director@scvas.org)





# Field Notes

Please report rarities to pdunten@gmail.com

*Pete Dunten*  
Santa Clara County eBird Reviewer

## Doves through Boobies

A **White-winged Scoter** was on Sanchez Pond on 3 Apr (WL, ESc). They don't occur every year and are more often found near or on SF Bay. **Long-tailed Duck** doesn't occur every year, is found most often in winter, and frequently occurs on ponds in the Alviso area miles from any trailhead. Hence one on Shoreline Lake beginning on 7 Mar (DW) was a nice find. The duck has remained into late April (m. ob.). The wintering **Curlew Sandpiper** at Palo Alto Baylands was last seen on 18 Feb (MDo). Last year it stayed through 15 Mar. Two of five **Black Turnstones** at the San Francisquito Creek mouth on 15 Apr spent some time on the Santa Clara county side of the county line (SW, ABu), with the others staying in San Mateo county. A solo **Solitary Sandpiper** was at Jumpoff Creek in San Antonio Valley on 25 Apr (WGB), the first migrant of the spring.

## Alcids through Woodpeckers

A **Common Murre** was photographed in Permanente Creek near the Google campus on 8 Mar (BW). Inland Murres tend not to fare well; this one wasn't seen again. **Red-throated Loons** were still on the move in February and March, with one unhealthy loon on dry land at Stanford Escondido Village on 15 Feb (MRs, ABu), one in a channel at the Sunnyvale WPCP on 18 Feb (LzF), and one on Shoreline Lake on 7 Mar (DW). None of the loons stayed for longer than a day. A **Common Loon** was on Lake Lagunita on 4 Mar (ASn, ABu), a surprising location given the shallow depth of the lake. It wasn't seen again. A **Williamson's Sapsucker** spent at least part of the winter at Vasona CP for the second year in a row. It was noted on 1 Feb (JPa) and last seen on 3 Feb (m. ob.). Last winter the Sapsucker was seen through 19 Feb. The **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** at Frenchman's Park was last seen on 3 Feb (MJM, JHa). The fourth Yellow-bellied Sapsucker of the winter was found at Vasona CP on 10 Feb (BM) and last seen on 25 Feb (ML).



White-winged Scoter  
Susan Weinstein



Long-tailed Duck  
Thomas Olson



Curlew Sandpiper  
Ann Vaughan



Black-and-White Warbler  
Garrett Lau

## Tyrant Flycatchers through Old World Flycatchers

On 3 Apr a male **Vermilion Flycatcher** returned to J Grant CP for the 5th consecutive year (HF). As a pioneer outside the breeding range of Vermilion Flycatcher, he faces long odds in finding a mate. Another pioneering male spent three summers from 2019 – 2021 at Palo Corona RP outside Monterey without finding a mate. One **Tropical Kingbird** was found at Lake Cunningham Park in December and January. Two were there on 17 Feb (JPa). The latest date one was seen at Lake Cunningham Park was 3 Mar (TC). An **American Dipper** at Smith Creek near the CalFire station in J Grant CP was a nice find on 23 Apr (ChS, JIS). After the heavy rains, Smith Creek is carrying a lot of water. Dippers have occurred along Smith Creek at lower elevations, in areas that are rarely visited. A belated report of a **Siberian Rubythroat** came in after review of trail cam footage. This Asian species hadn't been found anywhere in the lower 48 states, yet one was caught on camera on 19 Nov on the Google campus in Mountain View (SSo, JCV).

## Sparrows through Tanagers

A tattered **Clay-colored Sparrow** was spotted on 4 Apr at Alviso Tech Park (HAn). It was seen through 13 Apr (KnC), with photos showing some fresh feathers replacing the old, worn generation. Two **Black-and-White Warblers** were discovered in February. One was at Guadalupe River Park near downtown San Jose on 7 Feb (TY) and again on 7 Apr (TY). A second was found at Machado Park in Santa Clara on 12 Feb (TY) and seen through 28 Feb (GL).

Summer Tanagers were noted at two new locations, bringing the total from last September through April to seven. On 25 Feb one was photographed at a feeder in the Willow Glen neighborhood of San Jose (fide CG). On 9 Mar the Tanager that spent the winter along Penetencia Creek Trail was seen again (ChJ). This first-spring male now has a lot more red on its head, upper breast and back, based on a comparison of photos taken in November and March. On 1 Apr a female was found at a new location, Edenvale Gardens Park in San Jose (JPa). This Tanager was seen through 11 Apr (m. ob.). ●

**Observers** Heather Anderson (HAn), Bill Bousman (WGB), Adam Burnett (ABu), Ken Chen (KnC), Tom Cho (TC), Matthew Dodder (MDo), Howard Friedman (HF), Liz Frith (LzF), Carter Gasiorowski (CG), Janet Hanson (JHa), Chris Johnson (ChJ), Garrett Lau (GL), William Lawton (WL), Max Leibowitz (ML), Mike Mammoser (MJM), Brooke Miller (BM), Janna Pauser (JPa), Mischa Rosenberg (MRs), Elena Scott (ESc), Andre Sena (ASn), Charles Sismondo (ChS), Jillian Sismondo (JIS), Sierra Sowa (SSo), Jessica Castillo Vardaro (JCV), Bill Walker (BW), Dave Weber (DW), Susan Weinstein (SW), Tristan Yoo (TY)



Photo by Matthew Dodder

Anyone who has ever discovered a Barn Owl roost during the day is probably familiar with the fuzzy pellets deposited beneath the bird. Of course, these are the undigestible remains of the Owl's previous meal, tightly compacted into a neat (hopefully dry) package containing the entire skeleton of a small mammal. After swallowing their prey whole, all Owls regurgitate these pellets, but not all Owls eat small mammals. Some, like the Great Horned Owl, eat noticeably larger creatures, Screech-Owls eat very small rodents and large insects, and Pygmy-Owls eat quite a few birds and lizards. Close examination of these pellets can help us identify their creator, and it should be no surprise that not all the contents will be bone. Fur, feathers, scales, and insect shells are often found in these pellets.

Despite the apparent abundance of pellet-producing bird families in our area, finding most of them would be difficult. The smaller pellets are often inconspicuous, easily overlooked and quick to decompose, others contain fewer of the large recognizable remains of prey complicating identification.

For now, just relish the occasional discovery of an Owl pellet. Think about what students and researchers can learn about regional diet of species, and any changes in the recipe that occur due to rising climate or loss of habitat. That little glob of indigestible material certainly has a lot to teach us.

**Answer** (SPRING 2023)

The feather discovered by Cricket's 2nd-grade class came from a Band-tailed Pigeon. *Photo: Tom Grey*

Matthew Dodder  
Quiz Master

TRACK & FEATHER







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