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# RipariaNews

Spring 1997 Newsletter of the Coyote Creek Riparian Station Volume 12, No. 2

## Enhancing Streamside Property

by Karen Cotter and Bill Halleck

For many of us, creeks are more than just a collection point for rain water runoff. For those of us lucky enough to live next to a creek or close to a creek, we experience a connection to California's untamed wilderness. Riparian vegetation provides the basis for complex food webs that support an immense biological diversity from the endangered Western pond turtle to the diminutive grey fox to long distance travelers such as warblers and flycatchers.

Before creeks were controlled for agriculture or housing by impoundment or channelization, rivers and creeks flowed fast and full. Creeks meandered and changed course freely. The forest surrounding the creeks were more dense and wider in the past and this helped to stabilize streambanks

or aided in the recovery as creeks forged new channels. Today, much of the riparian vegetation is lost and streambank erosion occurs at a greater rate with much greater impact, especially for people whose homes and back yards abut creeks. Many property owners and public agencies use artificial means such as gabions or concrete walls to stop streambank erosion but this means more vegetation is lost and its wildlife value is even more diminished.

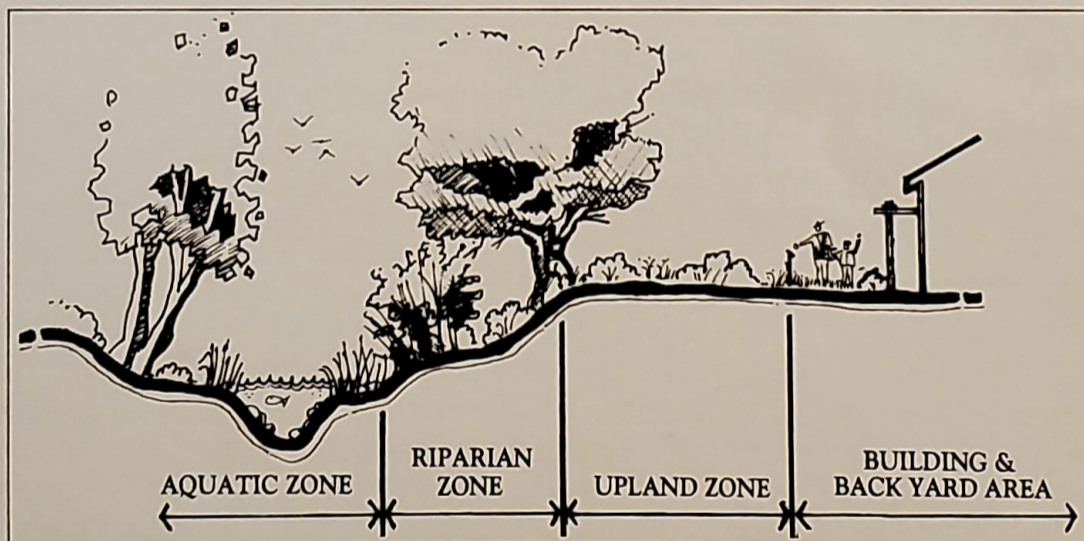
**Meet Bill Halleck, Wednesday, May 7, 14 from 7 to 9 pm for a talk on using native riparian trees and shrubs on streamside property. See Calendar of Events, back page for more information.**

But people who live next to creeks can buffer their streambanks from damage and create valuable habitat by adding to their riparian corridor

through planting native riparian trees and shrubs in their own backyard.

Planting along a riparian corridor requires an understanding of the structure and nature of a stream system. A stream corridor can be broken down into three zones: the aquatic zone, the riparian or streamside zone, and the upland or buffer zone. Each zone supports a plant community with unique water and light characteristics. For example, the riparian zone contains very moist soils;

trees and shrubs located here "love to get their feet wet." With their spreading and complex root systems, they are adapted to fast flowing water and shifting streambeds. Willows, alders, and dogwoods are riparian zone species. Trees located in the upland zone, the area higher on the streambank, don't require as much



water but still prefer a moist environment with cool temperatures and shade. California bay, buckeye, oaks, and snowberry shrubs may come to mind when thinking of the upland habitat. Check out nearby creek systems and see for yourself where plants grow in relation to the stream.

Understanding watershed dynamics is important when planning your project. Plant material should be collected within the same stream or at least within the same watershed. Local plant material is more likely to be adapted to local site conditions, more likely to be part of the existing "gene pool," and therefore be more likely to survive.

If you don't have time to re-landscape your backyard, you can still improve your creek by removing invasive, non-natives from

# Director's Desk:

Neil Pelkey

Well it was that time again, time to write another piece for the RipariaNews. As I was more than a little late getting this in, some of the staff sent along a few suggestions. These included 1) how wonderful the staff is, 2) the neat things we will be offering our members, or 3) another story from India. Well I thought long and hard, and ... I could not make up my mind so I will do all three.

First, the staff here at CCRS is incredibly talented, they have recently been featured in a variety of publications including *GIS Info Systems* and the *Volunteer Monitor*. They have been asked to give talks to the Bay Area Storm Water Management Agencies Association, the San Francisquito Creek CRMP, and NASA's Jason Project. With such a wonderful staff, I think it would only be fair to share some of these talents with our members and the general public. The first effort will be an introductory course in Geographic Information Systems. It will be a one day event where you will learn the basics of GIS, get a free software package, and a CD containing data on the Bay Area.

The cost will be \$50 for members and \$100 for non members. If you are interested, please give Charles Preuss a call at CCRS for more information.

Finally, a story from India:

The Periyar Tiger Sanctuary in the southern Indian State of Kerala sports a natural magnificence rivaled in few places. A traveler through this sanctuary may push through upstart creepers climbing and spiraling toward the precious sunlight percolating through the dense canopy 50 meters overhead. Suddenly the traveler will be startled, by the shriek of a couple of bonnet macaques fighting over a branch to sit on. The hoot-hoot-hoot of the Nilgiri Langurs beat out a rhythm in the background. The traveler's pace quickens a little from the cocktail of fear and laughter served up by the macaques. The swoosh of a white neck stork leaving its nest and heading for water tells this traveler that the dense forest will soon usher in the marshy grasslands that embroider the edges of the 100 year old reservoir that was once the property of the Maharaja of Travancore.

A rumbling thunder of a herd of wild boar shortly precedes these short and furry beasts rapid exit from the forest out onto the marsh. Three little sausages with legs trail the pack—the smallest also being the slowest. He lets out a high pitched bweet, bweet, bweet with each centimeter he falls behind his companions—evolution and natural common sense have instilled one of the hard laws of nature into this little piglet—the last pig in the pack is din-

ner. The little fellow is only followed by a herd of Elk, dancing and flagging out of the forest, so his immediate danger is quite low. But what trails the Sambar? A tiger on the prowl? A pack of leopards? Elephants in a bad mood?

The traveler stops and watches, patience and curiosity keeping fear on a tight reign. The snapping of large branches, the crashing of shrubs and a frustrated trumpet is the marquis of a full grown Male elephant on a mission. First a female breaks free of the trees. She is fully mature maybe 25-30 years old, 10 feet tall, and weighing in at a robust 3.5 tonnes. She is pursued by one slightly shorter tuskless male—a muknah. She resists his advances with a short kick. She then spins and gives him one sharp whack with her trunk. Perhaps this fellow suffers from some Napoleonic complex due to his lack of tusks? Perhaps he is just dense? Whatever the case, he continues his pursuit another 4 whacks and then gives up. Was she too picky? Did she come from a long line of females who prefer males with tusks? Maybe she just wasn't in the mood?

Whatever her reasons, they did not baffle our traveler nearly as much as the Muknah's unwillingness to take whack for an answer. You see our traveler is an elephant biologist and she knows that no one has seen an adult tusker in Periyar sanctuary in over three years. She has been counting and enumerating the elephants in the sanctuary and also is privy to the fact that there are only three or four Muknahs in the Lake area to service the 200 or so adult females. Poaching pressure driven to apocalyptic proportions by the world's lust for ivory has shortened the incarnation of every adult Tusker in the area—most are killed by the time they are only eight years old.

The very fluke of genetics that have saved these three Muknahs from the poacher's blood-greed has also made them the second choice at best for the female of the species. Yet they are what is left and they are left running from pillar to post to find a female who finds them suitable. They are the hope of the future of the species in this area. Inadequate support, motivation, and equipment on the side of the wildlife protectors gives the poacher's a decided edge in the animal wars. Habitat destruction in various areas have cut off the corridors that would have allowed a disgruntled tusker from another area the pathway to these fields of plenty.

The bell tolls for this population of elephants which seems destined to become a society of old females and three tired Muknahs. ✨

## Watching the River Run:

The water rises in the overflow channel at the Station during the rains of January.



# The End of an Odyssey

by Michael Rigney

A journey which began on a spring day in 1977 on a remote island in San Francisco Bay, came to a close at the beginning of this year in Sunnyvale. The closing chapter came in the form of a "Report to Bander", a non-descript government printout from the U.S. Bird Banding Laboratory in Laurel, Maryland. Only three lines long and coded with numbers and terse abbreviations, the "report" indicated that a **Great Blue Heron** with band number 0977-07131 was recovered dead by Curtis Black somewhere in Sunnyvale on January 13, 1997.



Closing a band around leg of Great Blue Heron nestling. Mike Rigney, bander.

The beginning chapter of this story was written by an eager group of college students and a dedicated college professor, ecologist and conservationist, Dr. Richard Mewaldt (Dick to most of us). During the early 1970's, Dr. Mewaldt and graduate student Bob Gill, operating as the Avian Biology Laboratory, had conducted extensive breeding bird surveys of San Francisco Bay's tidal marshes, salt ponds and levees. One location in particular, Bair Island, stood out as one of the most productive breeding areas in the entire estuary. During the ensuing years, Mewaldt and Gill undertook an extensive banding program focused on the several colonial nesting species on the island to better understand survival rates and dispersal patterns.

On the northern tip of the island, a small dredge spoil deposit supported a dense growth of coyote brush which three species of herons found to their liking. Forming a sort of low-rise condominium complex, Great Blue Herons built their 5-foot diameter nests on the tallest and stur-

diest bushes, while Snowy Egrets and Black-crowned Night Herons used the lower portions of the bushes for their smaller nests. It was not unusual to find as many as six or seven nests in one bush. After Bob Gill graduated, a rag-tag bunch of Mewaldt's students (who would later found with Dick, the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory and CCRS) took over the banding program on Bair Island. And it was on a fine spring morning in 1977 that a Great Blue Heron chick became known as 0977-07131 (07131 for short).

We know little of what happened to 07131 during the intervening years. We do know a great deal about what happened to the nesting colony where she/he (we could not determine sex at the time of banding) was born. During the remaining 70's and early 80's the colony held steady but it became evident that the coyote bushes supporting the ever growing and heavy Great Blue Heron nests were becoming old and brittle causing many of the nest bushes to collapse. At about the same time a major development proposal which would have encompassed over half of the island was submitted to voters of Redwood City. In an effort to show how important Bair Island was to the ecology of San Francisco Bay, the fledgling South Bay Institute for Avian Studies (the precursor to the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory) worked with community activists to educate residents on Bair Islands' unique natural resources. By a slim margin, the development proposal was defeated and a portion of the island, including the heron colony was added to the newly established San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge.

Since the early 80's, SFBBO has surveyed for colonial nesting water birds i.e. terns, herons and egrets and have documented the rapid decline of what was once the largest heron rookery in the Bay Area. Sometime during the early 90's a ferocious predator, the eastern red fox discovered Bair Island and the easy meals afforded by the low nesting herons. As a result of this intense predatory pressure and the failing coyote brush, the Great Blue Herons abandoned the colony for the safety of the high voltage transmission towers and perhaps other Bay Area heron colonies. The Snowy Egrets left the island altogether. The Black-

crowned Night Herons still continue to use the colony but according to SFBBO biologists, nesting success has been near zero.

While all of these events unfolded on Bair Island we know little of the major events in the long life of Great Blue Heron 07131. Did she/he continue to nest on Bair Island or was she/he one of those early pioneers of the Mallard Slough heron colony in Alviso? How many Great Blue Herons owe their existence to 07131? How many times did you unknowingly watch 07131 feeding in the marshes and wetlands of the South Bay?

Although 19 years 8 months is a ripe old age for almost any bird, it is not a longevity record for this species. That record belongs to another bird which lived to the riper old age of 23 years.

And what of Bair Island? Just recently, the owner of the majority of the Island, Japanese industrial giant Kumagai Gumi, under intense pressure from conservationists, sold the property to Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) for \$15 million. POST, will in turn, sell the land to the San Francisco



A bird's eye view of Bair Island.

Bay National Wildlife Refuge. The Wildlife Refuge is undertaking a major effort to eradicate red foxes from Bair Island. Time will tell whether that effort will result in renewed successful nesting of herons on Bair Island.

The banding efforts on Bair Island taught us a great deal about heron and egret populations in San Francisco Bay. Great Blue Heron 07131 taught us that populations are made up of individuals with important stories to tell - if we only listen.

Editor's Note: Thanks to Janet Hansen, Ex-Director of SFBBO for her assistance in writing this article. ✨

# Banding Summary for 1996

by Chris Otahal,  
Avian Research Program Director

This year marks the completion of the fifteenth banding season on our study site on lower Coyote Creek. Capture (3,845 birds) and recapture (2,333) numbers as well as total species banded (76) were down again this year (Table 1, Figure 1). This was mainly due to reduced effort during migration (both spring and fall) and to reduced effort during early winter (October and November) due to heavy flooding and flood control structure maintenance activities (we only operated 15 days as opposed to our typical 46 during October and November). The capture trends depicted in Figure 1 have not been corrected for effort (i.e. number of trap or net hours) and most of the fluctu-

ation in numbers represent changes in effort rather than actual population changes.

Despite our reduced captures, some very interesting birds turned up in our nets including **American Redstart**, **Brewer's Sparrow**, **Least Flycatcher** and a **Nashville Warbler**. We also captured our first **Western Meadowlark**. This last bird is not particularly unusual for the area but was apparently attracted to the net lanes after the overflow channel was mowed for flood control purposes.

Another interesting recapture was a **Downy Woodpecker** recaptured on May 19, 1996 by one of our long time bird banders, Lynne Cropper. This bird was originally captured April 28, 1985! At eleven years and one month, this bird represents the

Station's longevity record for a bird banded on site. This individual has been recaptured 35 times during its stay and we anxiously await its next record breaking recapture. This is but one example of the tidbits of information which can be gleaned from long term studies such as these.

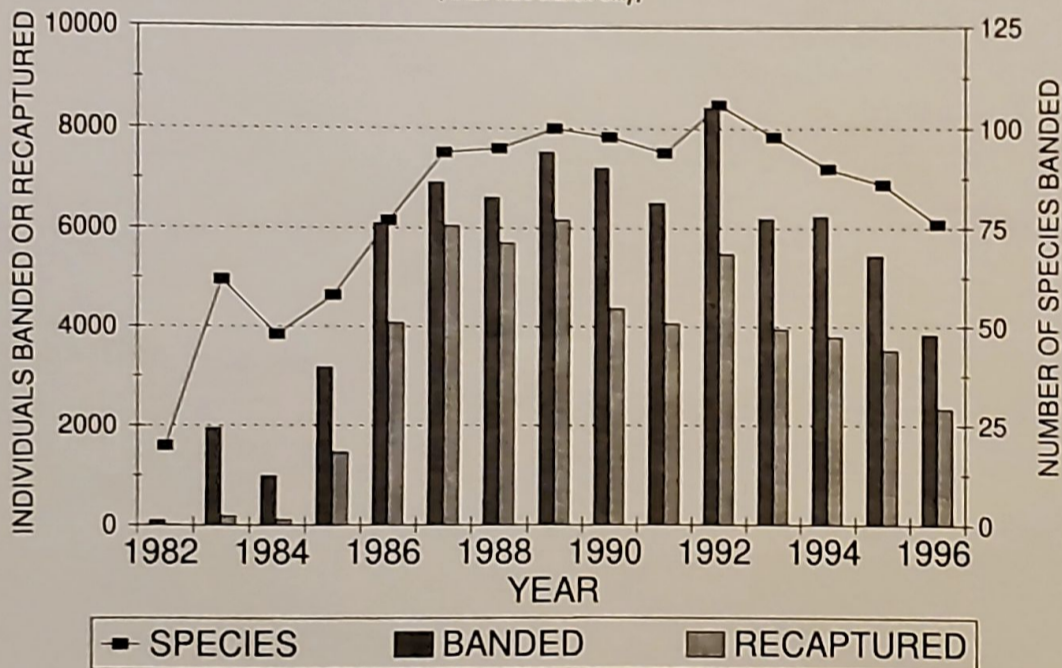
As always, this banding could never have occurred without the dedicated efforts of the many volunteers which contribute their time and energy to the program. Table 2 lists the volunteers which contributed time to the banding program in 1996. Thanks!!!

**Table 2. Active Banders in 1996**

Michael Azevedo	Chris Illes
Irene Beardsley	Dorothy Johnson
Joelle Buffa	Alvara Jaramillo
Joyce Bartlett	Debie Kinsey
Craig Bowers	Diane Kodama
Dave Bise	Jenny Kranz
Lynn and Mike	Danielle Lefer
Cropper	Kay Loughman
Les Chibana	Rosalie Lefkowitz
Maryann Danielson	Clyde Morris
Gerry Ellis	Lynn Neibauer
Eric Fagundes	Chris Otahal
Bob Frey	Troy Obero
Arleen Feng	Tonya Pangrazio
Chris Fischer	Doug Padley
Enid Fox	Jerry Roe
Tom Goodier	Susan Sandstrom
Helen Green	Vicki Silvas-Young
Christina Garcia	Jeff Sicklesteel
Stephen Holtzclaw	Zona Walcott

**Figure 1. Banding Summary 1982-1996 for CCRS**

(Alviso Field Station Only)



## Breeding Bird Atlas Update

by Michael M. Rogers

By the time you read this newsletter, the 1997 breeding season will be well underway. The Alameda County Breeding Bird Atlas is in its fifth and final year of field work and is well ahead of schedule for achieving excellent coverage of the entire county. Sixty-six of the atlas's 99 blocks are already "complete"; enough of the expected species have been found and had breeding confirmed to make further work in these blocks no longer essential. Most of the remaining 33 blocks also have substantial coverage already, with the result that the atlas is over 87% complete after four years

of field work. Most of the blocks that still need coverage lie in the northeastern portion of the county.

Another recent accomplishment of the Alameda Breeding Bird Atlas is the completion of a set of "preliminary" atlas maps that show the results of the many hundreds of hours of field work done to date. The information that these maps contain is, as expected, astounding and they are extremely interesting to analyze. They are also aesthetically very pleasing, with elevation contours, bodies of water, and major roads superimposed on them to aid in understanding the distribution of each species.

The Santa Clara County Breeding Bird

Atlas is now in the process of seeking out authors for many of the species accounts. Draft species accounts now exist, in various stages of completion, for about twenty of our breeding bird species, and this number is growing all the time.

If you would like to help out with coverage in Alameda County this year, contact your regional coordinator (see the list in the recent atlas newsletter) or project coordinator Bob Richmond at 510-475-5412.

If you are interested in helping to put together the Santa Clara County Breeding Bird Atlas, contact project coordinator Bill Bousman at 415-322-5282.

**Table 1: Coyote Creek Riparian Station Bird Banding Summary for 1996**

Species	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUNE	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	Total
Sharp-shinned Hawk	1	1											2
Red-tailed Hawk				1									1
Killdeer			4										4
American Avocet					5								5
Mourning Dove		1	2	1	2			1					7
Black-chinned Hummingbird				4	1	2	4	5					16
Anna's Hummingbird	2	2	8	8	8	3	2	11	10	5	4	4	67
Rufous Hummingbird			1	8		1		4	1				15
Allen's Hummingbird			8	3	4	5	1						21
Nuttall's Woodpecker							1						1
Downy Woodpecker					2	4	6	1					13
Western Wood Pewee					1				1				2
Willow Flycatcher								13	28				41
Least Flycatcher								1					1
Western Flycatcher				5	6	4	12	96	317	20	1		461
Black Phoebe					25	24	8	9	9	3		1	79
Ash-throated Flycatcher							1	2					3
Tree Swallow				1	2								3
Cliff Swallow					46	3	1						50
Barn Swallow					7	2	1						10
Scrub Jay				1	2	2		2					7
Chestnut-backed Chickadee					14	1	6	2	3			1	27
Common Bushtit	9	4	7	10	25	9	14	4	1	2	2		87
Bewick's Wren			1		1	1	2	3	2	1	1		12
House Wren						1	7	9	1	2			20
Winter Wren								1	5				6
Golden-crowned Kinglet			3							4	5	12	24
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	1	1		4					1	18	44	21	90
Swainson's Thrush				2	116	12	3		8	1			142
Hermit Thrush	6	14	21	16	3				7	26	16	23	132
American Robin	1		3	2	4							2	12
Varied Thrush											1	4	5
Northern Mockingbird		1	1	1	7	11	8	18	15				62
Loggerhead Shrike								1	1				2
European Starling					4	1							5
Solitary Vireo									1				1
Warbling Vireo							1	2	10	1			14
Orange-crowned Warbler		1	2	16	15		1	1	16	7	2	4	65
Nashville Warbler				1									1
Yellow Warbler					35	6		5	52	3			101
Myrtle Warbler	2	12	17	6					2	1			40
Audubon's Warbler	4	39	53	9					5	18		2	130
Black-throated Gray Warbler									1				1
Townsend's Warbler					1			1					2
American Redstart						1							1
MacGillivray's Warbler					1			4	9	1			15
Common Yellowthroat		1	11	53	21	6	18	33	47	6	1	3	200
Wilson's Warbler				12	52	3	2	9	27	3			108
Western Tanager					1								1
Black-headed Grosbeak				1	4	3	4	1	1				14
Lazuli Bunting				1	5								6
Green-tailed Towhee						1							1
Spotted Towhee	1										1		2
California Towhee	1			1	2		2	7	3				16
Brewer's Sparrow									1				1
Savannah Sparrow						1		1	3	1			6
Fox Sparrow	4	2	2						14	13	14	12	61
Song Sparrow		1	4	19	83	59	18	22	9	2		2	219
Lincoln's Sparrow	12	16	22	34				1	57	22	15	9	188

**Table 1: Coyote Creek Riparian Station Bird Banding Summary for 1996 (continued)**

Species	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUNE	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	Total
White-throated Sparrow									1				1
Golden-crowned Sparrow	22	13	26	49	1				16	23	18	7	175
Puget Sound Wh.-cr. Sparrow	16	6	15	7					44	50	18	9	165
Gambel's Wh.-cr. Sparrow	13	8	6	12					23	28	8		98
Oregon Junco			2				3	2	1				8
Red-winged Blackbird				1	26	20	4						51
Brewer's Blackbird				1	1								2
Brown-headed Cowbird				3	6	2	2						13
Western Meadowlark												1	1
Hooded Oriole								1					1
Bullock's Oriole				4	20	17		2					43
House Finch	24	33	3		24	109	181	73	24		9	15	495
Lesser Goldfinch	2				3	19	14	1	3	4	1		47
American Goldfinch			9	18	13	21	25	17	11	1			115
House Sparrow					1								1
New Bandings	121	156	231	315	600	354	352	366	791	266	161	132	
Cumulative	121	277	508	823	1423	1777	2129	2495	3286	3552	3713	3845	3845
Species Banded	17	18	24	34	41	31	29	36	41	27	18	18	
Cumulative	17	22	29	44	58	62	64	70	74	74	75	76	76
Recaptures	244	189	296	367	256	186	136	119	169	67	84	220	
Cumulative	244	433	729	1096	1352	1538	1674	1793	1962	2029	2113	2333	2333
Days of Operation	12	10	21	28	30	18	13	19	22	7	4	11	
Cumulative	12	22	43	71	101	119	132	151	173	180	184	195	195

Exciting publishing news at CCRS! Now, CCRS staff have expanded their realm of influence on professions from papers in avian scientific journals (Chris Otahal and Avian Research personnel) to articles on GIS and technology (Charles Preuss and Staff). We have just been featured as the cover story in *Geo Info Systems'* February issue, a magazine with 30,000 subscribers, focusing on applications of GIS and related spatial information technologies. CCRS also produces reports on annual avian research data collected at the CCRS site and summary reports on riparian biological inventories including Saratoga Creek and Guadalupe River watersheds. CCRS members have access to these reports as well as a rich library of riparian, avian, and other ecological references and journals.

### The Foothills of Stevens Creek

by Steve Wayne - Volunteer

The scenic view of mountains that encompass Santa Clara Valley are the remnants of a volcanic range that had their origins in the Pacific Rim. Their ageless appearance are the results of an "erathem," or millions of years of erosion and weathering. Today, the foothills support diverse and distinct wildlife that make them worthy of preserving.

On trails leading up the hillsides of Stevens Creek Park, the evidence of metamorphic formation are obvious from the evidence of limestone, chert, and weathered metabasalt that trace the outline of ancient rivers called paleocurrents. These rivers exposed igneous rock, appearing as quartz, brought out from the earth's interior in an earlier upheaval. Another area includes fossil quartz mixed with clay. This site, further into the mountains, tells tales of seismic activity in these picturesque foothills. ✨

### Transitions



Continued from page 9

Board Members, having served as Board Secretary for many years. We have come to rely on and appreciate Elsie for many things. She is an expert birder, very active and a former Board member of the Western Bird Banding Association. She helps us to identify native and nonnative plants and for many years served as the unofficial hospitality director of CCRS preparing distinctive dishes for potluck and annual member meetings. We have really appreciated her help with the Board over the years. Elsie still comes to the library to catalog and reshelv books and helps give the staff at CCRS a sense of place and history.

**Ariane Bertrand**, our new Assistant Director, is a recent graduate of the Masters Program in Energy and Environmental Analysis at Boston University. She received her BS in Environmental Biology from UC Davis. Ariane is writing grants for the station, tracking budgets, and giving various projects a helping hand. ✨

# Notes from the Field

by Alvaro Jaramillo

## A Varied Thrush Invasion

This fall and winter will be remembered for its invasion of several northern and mountain bird species. There were **Red Crossbills**, large numbers of **Red-breasted Nuthatches**, **Evening Grosbeaks**, **Cassin's Finches**, **Townsend's Solitaires** and good numbers of **Varied Thrushes** around to enjoy. Bird invasions typically occur during the winter and have been noticed for many years, but it is still unclear exactly why they occur, what it means to the bird populations and exactly where they are coming from. For this column I have chosen to look at our banding data to see what it tells us about one of these eruptive species, the Varied Thrush. I should mention that this is based entirely on numbers of captures, even of previously banded birds, and these are not standardized by the number of net hours per year. Obviously these corrections would

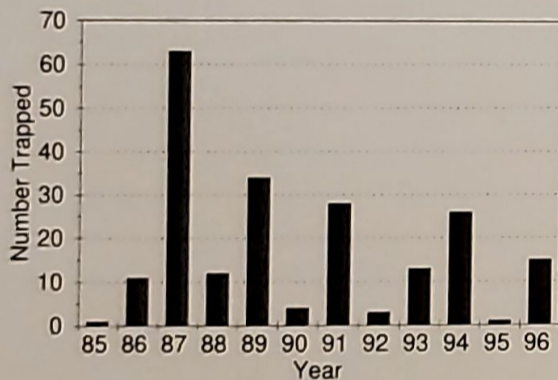


Figure 1. Varied Thrush at CCRS

have to be made in a more detailed analysis.

This last fall and winter (96-97) was widely noted by banders and birders to be a very good year for **Varied Thrushes** here at CCRS. Between September and mid-March we have trapped Varied Thrushes 15 times, indeed a good number for this uncommon species. However, there have been several seasons that have nearly equaled, or far exceeded this last year in the number of Varied Thrush captures at CCRS (see Figure 1); keep in mind that by season I mean the period including the fall, winter and spring, basically the time of the year when Varied Thrushes may be seen in this part of California. The season of 87/88 appears to have been the great granddaddy of all Varied Thrush invasions, at least since we have been keeping track. The seasons of 85/86

and 95/96 were the lowest in our records. The fact that the previous winter was so poor for Varied Thrushes at CCRS may have influenced people's perceptions that the present was a banner year for the species, when in fact this last season was below the average. Since 1985 we have trapped Varied Thrushes 207 times, giving us an average of just over 17 per year. Note, however, that the large number from 87/88 inflates this average somewhat. Females are three times more commonly trapped at CCRS than males, 119 females vs. 44 males, the remaining birds

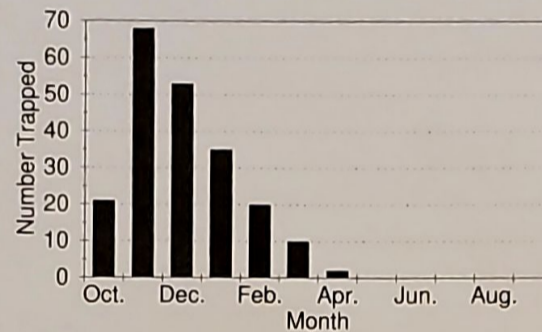


Figure 2. Monthly Abundance of Varied Thrush at CCRS

could not be reliably sexed.

Two interesting patterns are seen in our data. First Varied Thrushes tend to appear in small numbers toward late October, but peak in November (Figure 2). Their monthly numbers drop incrementally in consecutive months until only a small number are netted in April. A detailed analysis of recaptures would have to be conducted to gain further understanding as to what this pattern means. Perhaps it is indicative of a large initial push and then a period of dispersal from our site throughout the winter, another possibility is that the Varied Thrushes are not surviving the winters here, therefore their numbers steadily decrease after their arrival. The main point of interest here is that a spring migratory peak of northbound migrants is entirely lacking in our data. A more intriguing pattern is seen in Figure 1, notice that between the years 1987 and 1993 low Varied Thrush years always follow a good year. This has also been noted in larger data sets such as the Christmas Bird Count, Breeding Bird Survey and Project Feederwatch which show that winter populations of the Varied Thrush typically follow this low, high, low... pattern; it is clearest in the Pacific Northwest where Varied Thrushes are more abundant in winter (see, Wells, J.V., K.V. Rosenberg, D.L. Tessaglia and A.A. Dhondt. 1996).

Populations Cycles in the Varied Thrush. *Canadian Journal of Zoology* 74: 2062-2069).

What does this all mean? Well, it is difficult to say given our current state of knowledge, but it does appear that the fluctuation in numbers of the Varied Thrush, and other irruptive winter birds, is dependent on food supply rather than temperature. Many of the main seed trees that birds feed on in the winter also show a two year pattern of abundance, and the birds appear to track these peaks and troughs in their food. The above mentioned study identified acorns as a major winter source of food for the Varied Thrush, at least in parts of its range. The production of acorns by various species of oaks shows a two year pattern, this may be a key in understanding what makes for an invasion year of Varied Thrushes in our neck of the woods. However, a large number of Varied Thrushes winter in coastal British Columbia where oaks are absent altogether, so this may only be part of the explanation. The high relative abundance of females to males here is odd and suggests that males winter further north than females, this has also been observed in several other songbird species. What is interesting about this last fall and winter is that several species that have different dietary preferences invaded us; these broad scale invasions are the most difficult to understand. Perhaps they are due to a generally bad year for seed, catkin, acorn, and cone production caused by some weather phenomenon that struck a wide area of northern North America. It is fun to speculate, particularly after one of these invasions has passed and has given you the chance to marvel as to why they occur, but for the most part we are still in the learning stage and do not understand the details of winter invasions. We may be able to detect some broad patterns, but many details differ every time one of these invasions occurs. In the meantime, we have to be content to enjoy these infrequent visitors to the Bay Area and try and make an accurate accounting of what went on during the invasion. With enough data we will eventually understand what it all means. 🐦

# Creek Currents

## International Migratory Bird Day

Grab your binoculars! Load up your bicycle! Round up your friends and family and join us for a great day of celebrating the return of the migrants! May 10 is International Migratory Bird Day, our annual day to play. This year the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society, Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge, San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory, the City of San Jose Environmental Services and CCRS are all pitching in to provide lots of opportunities for learning and adventure. The day will start with a **Creekside Cleanup** out at CCRS (the floods brought us many strange and wonderful things from the upper watershed). Our **Native Plant Sale** and **Audubon Nature Shop** will provide folks with lots of great Mother's Day gift ideas, and of course we'll be offering **guided walks** and plenty of opportunities to wander around on your own. Great events will also be happening at the Refuge, and a shuttle between the two sites will help you make the most of the day. A new event and highlight for the day will be a **Birding By Bicycle Tour**, starting at the George Mayne School at the corner of North First Street and School Street in Alviso. Meet us there any time between 9 am and 11:00 for guided birding tours for the whole family – be sure to bring your bikes! To register for the bike event (it's free, but we need to know how many people to expect!) and to get more information about the event, please call the Wildlife Refuge at (408) 262-5513 or Chris Fischer at CCRS. See you there!

## Upper Penitencia Creek Stream Stewardship Program

New things are afoot on the east side of the Valley! CCRS has begun a new project on Upper Penitencia Creek, that lovely stream which flows through Alum Rock Park and winds its way between the Alum Rock and Berryessa neighborhoods before joining Coyote Creek out near Berryessa Road. The Community Creek Watch project is working with the residents of these neighborhoods to develop a Watershed Brochure for this creek, similar to those developed for the San Francisquito and Saratoga watersheds. Creek cleanups and other stewardship activ-

ities are also planned. For more information call Ariane at the Station (408) 262-9204.

## Clean Creek Tips

It's always a thrill to visit our local creeks during and after the heavy storms to see what Mother Nature has wrought. Seeing the power of water and its impact on our urban creeks leaves one both awed and humbled. However, I am also humbled by how the floods expose our proclivity towards littering. Have you seen the plastic bags hanging off the cottonwoods, the clumps of drinking bottles caught up in the willows, the polystyrene peanuts among the blackberry bushes?

Last fall, I had the opportunity to travel to Switzerland. One of the first things I noticed was the absence of trash. No litter along the highways, none on the streets or parks, and most peculiar, no litter along their railroad tracks. Matter of fact, the Swiss plant flower and vegetable gardens next to and in between the tracks! Here in America, railroad tracks operate as a central collection and distributing point for trash. Why is there a difference between Switzerland and America? Could it be that they don't have as much plastic to begin with? They have very few fast food restaurants there, therefore very few Giant Gulp cups are waiting to hit the wind. As of today, they are not getting their dinner salads out of re-sealable plastic bags. When I tried to get coffee to go from a cafe in between train rides, the mystified waitress gave me a ceramic coffee cup and told me to turn it into the train attendant when I was done and she would walk to the train station and pick it up later.

In a lifetime, the average American will throw away 600 times his or her adult weight in garbage. This means that a 150 lb. adult will leave behind 90,000 lbs. of trash. Packaging makes up a third of this trash. How much of this trash has escaped the landfill and are decorating our creekside forests? Plastics in the ocean kill up to one million seabirds and 100,000 marine mammals each year. No one has collected data on the affects of plastic in our wetlands and our creeks. What can you do to help? First, reduce the amount of plastic you bring home: purchase a travel mug, bring along

canvas bags when shopping, buy products with less packaging. Re-use: wash out plastic vegi bags for reuse, why buy tupperware – re-use your yogurt and sauce containers. Finally, recycle: return plastic shopping bags to the store, recycle all coded 1 and 2 plastic containers with your curbside pickup. And while you're at it, join us to clean a creek on Saturday, May 19. See Calendar for more details.

## Friends of Los Alamitos Creek

meet the 2nd Monday of every month at the United Church of Christ, 6581 Camden Avenue in San Jose from 7 to 9 pm. Call Lilah Freitas at 997-6383 to participate in the Friends' meetings and activities. ✨

## Enhancing Streamside Property

*Continued from page 1*

your backyard. German ivy, English ivy, and vinca (periwinkle) are extremely adverse to riparian vegetation. These vines spread over large areas, taking away sites for native plants. German ivy climbs mature trees, pulling down and breaking off branches and kills young trees.

Planting in and near creeks can be a bureaucratic challenge. Because you are working in a system that may provide drinking water, recharges ground water, provides habitat for protected species, and/or belongs to a public agency, local, state and federal agencies will need to be notified before work can be undertaken. From streambed alteration agreements to CEQA forms, make sure you have all the required permits before you begin.

We invite streamside residents, community tree planting groups, and public agencies to a talk by Bill Halleck, co-author of the Streamside Planting Guide for San Mateo and Santa Clara County Streams, on preserving and enhancing the forests creekside behind our homes. Bill, a native habitat revegetation specialist and a California licensed Landscape Architect, has worked on wetland mitigation, creek restoration projects, and park resource conservation plans throughout Northern California and the Central Valley. His experience enables him to discuss stream care with homeowners and resource professionals at both the watershed and site-specific level. ✨



# Volunteering Has Its Rewards

## Volunteer Opportunities

### Station Maintenance

The Station needs on-site help for general maintenance around the offices. We need someone with a hitch on their car or truck to pick up our water supply, repair equipment, paint, water plants, etc. If you would like to help us out about twice a month, please call Chris Fischer at 408-262-9204.

### Photograph Cataloging

Help us out at the station by straightening up and cataloging our slides and photos. Contact Charles at the office.

### German Ivy Removal

Join members of the San Francisquito Creek CRMP in its efforts to eradicate German Ivy from the creek. Contact Karen at 415-329-8544

### Artists

We need sketches of fish, insects, amphibians, reptiles, creek scenes, riparian birds, and people enjoying the creek. Call Karen at (408) 262-9204 if you would like to donate any artwork or could work with CCRS staff on specific projects.

### Data Entry

The Stream Inventory Program could still use your help putting their data into the Paradox Data Base. Give Charles a call at (408) 262-9204 if you would like to volunteer days, evenings or even weekends.

## Volunteer Thank You's

Jeff Sticklesteel, not only printed up business cards for us, recently he installed his design into our computers so we can print up our own business cards. Thanks again Jeff.

Thanks so much to Pam Peterson for all the hours she has put in preparing CCRS's budget in preparation for the annual Board Retreat and for her assistance in the front office.

Thanks goes out to Alviso resident, Jesse Rodriguez for his hard work out at the Station cleaning and organizing the tool shed, cleaning up the grounds, and maintenance.

A big, big thanks to all of you!

## Donation Thank You's

A big thanks to Trimble Navigation for donating three licenses for the Pathfinder Office software package. This enables CCRS to operate the Pathfinder on three computer systems. Now we're cooking!

Thanks go out to Ernest R. Abeles for his generous donation of nets, banding tools and bird identification books for the Banding program.

We would like to thank Ronald Stecker of SJSU's Biology Department for his donation of a box load of books including books on Entomology, Marine Biology, twelve copies of the SF Estuary Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan, and one the editor really appreciates, the Associated Press Stylebook.

Thanks to Jeff Bonville for his donation of an IBM compatible 286 PC and an Epson LQ 510 printer and to John Mena for a PC computer NEC powermate with NEC monitor, keyboard, and an Epson LQ 510 Dot matrix printer.

Chris Lonowski not only volunteers for us he also has scoured the earth for us and donated office supplies including binders, dispensers and other items.

## Donations Needed!

Wanted - old or new photos of CCRS - including the banding trailer and field sites, banding operations, people pictures, and other CCRS activities for an updated photo album for the station. Mail to Gerry Ellis, here at the station, or call him during the evenings at 265-7012.

Its expensive to keep our library up-to-date with current scientific journals and new books. We would like to receive donations of local field guides, reference books on riparian ecosystems, and subscription donations for journals. Call the Staff at the office for ideas or surprise us.

The Company you work for may have a corporate giving program where they donate used office equipment. Ask your company if they would like to donate a copier, computers, digitizers, printers, or even old binders and office supplies to CCRS. In particular we are looking for a 386 or 486 (or better) IBM-compatible computer and a PC printer that can withstand large printing jobs, can

do duplex printing, and has a high dpi. We also need a copy machine that can copy on both sides as well as sort. And of course, a color copier would be even more lovely.

CCRS could also use the following donations:

dissecting scope	shovels
a case of paper towels	trowels
pruning shears and saws	clippers
loppers	waders
canvas bags	

We desperately need small, inexpensive printers for our staff. Any donations of DeskJet printers would be really appreciated.


## Transitions

Cyndi Brinkhurst, our indomitable Riparian Outreach Specialist, has forsaken knocking on doors to return to her beloved creeks. Cyndi's claims to fame are too numerous to list, but include knocking on



the door of virtually every resident who lives next to Saratoga Creek (and talking to most of them), devoting scores of volunteer hours to successful fundraising and outreach activities, being a capable (and apparently inexhaustible) ally to all CCRS endeavors, and pretty much just being plain phenomenal. She has moved on to be a professional creek walker as a Field Biologist for the Santa Clara Valley Water District. Good Luck, Cyndi!

Elsie Richey, has recently stepped down from the Board. Elsie has been involved with CCRS back to its creation in 1982 and she is the last of the original

Continued on page 6 

# Calendar of Events

## Quarterly Talks

Our quarterly talks are held at the Cupertino Library Community Room at 10400 Torre Avenue in Cupertino. A \$5.00 donation is requested.

### Spring Talk: Streamside Planting Wednesday, May 14, 7 to 9 pm (please note new date)

Bill Halleck of the Habitat Restoration Group and co-author of the Streamside Planting Guide, will help homeowners choose native riparian plants to enhance and improve their streamside property.

### Summer Talk: Historical EcoAtlas Wednesday, August 13, 7 to 9 pm

Even wonder what the South Bay might have looked like 200 years ago? Now is your chance to step back in time through the wonder of computers and a lot of hard

work by a team of scientists and volunteers. The EcoAtlas, developed by the San Francisco Estuary Institute (SFEI), provides a picture of the past and present condition of habitats in the South Bay and will be presented by Mike Rigney, CCRS's Watershed Management Initiative Director.

### International Migratory Bird Day Saturday, May 10 8 am to 3 pm

See page 8 for more info:

- Native Plant Sale: 8 am to 1 pm
- Creek clean-up: 8:30 am to 10:30 pm
- Bike Ride: 9 am to noon, two routes to choose from

Call Chris to pre-order plants and register for ride.

### National Rivers Clean-up Day Saturday, May 17 9 am to noon

Creek clean-ups are taking place at over 21 locations throughout Santa Clara

County. CCRS hosts the Roosevelt Park site along Coyote Creek in San Jose at 21st and Santa Clara Avenues. Call CCRS if you plan to attend this site. Other sites include:

- San Francisquito Creek at Manhattan and Woodland
- Guadalupe River at Children's Discovery Museum
- Coyote at Watson and Kelly Parks
- Saratoga at Wildwood Park

Call the SCVWD at (408) 265-2607 ext. 2049 for the location nearest you.

### Creek Workshop for Teachers

A free creek ecology and monitoring workshop for middle and high school teachers will take place this August sponsored by the Santa Clara Valley Urban Runoff Program. Call Karen to get on the mailing list. 🌿

## Board of Directors

Dr. David Ainlee	Trish Mulvey
Irene Beardsley	Dr. Michael Rogers
Meg Caldwell	Steve Rottenborn
Craige Edgerton	Elinor Spellman
Vic Monia	Dr. Scott Terrill

## New Members

Mary Arginteanu	Christine Mandras
Ken and Jan Clark	Lisa Meyer
Nicholas Clinch	Sally Parks
John Dutton	Jerry Roe
Evelyn Johnston	Emily & Jim Thurber
Barbara Frutchey	Dawn Vogelsang
Thomas Grey	Judith Wagner
Vicki Hoffman	Alan Walther
Thomas & Rosemary Hollis	Claire Wolfe
Richard & Annette Jaffe	Christine & Sara Zak
Gary Kittelson	

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Neil Pelkey, Station Manager  
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 Mike Rigney, Watershed Management Initiative Director  
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 Diane Kodama, Avian Research Associate  
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 Charles Preuss, Technical Coordinator  
 Jill Bernhard, Technical Specialist  
 Karen Cotter, StreamKeeper Director, RipariaNews Editor  
 Mark Agan, StreamKeeper Associate  
 Rich Seymour, Herpetology Research Associate  
 Elinor Spellman, Restoration Coordinator (volunteer)

## CCRS Membership

Member	\$25 annually
Senior or Student	\$15 annually
Family	\$35 annually
Supporting	\$50 annually
Sustaining	\$100 annually
Corporate	\$500 annually
Life	\$600*
Patron	\$3,000*

\* Life and Patron categories can be single payments or 4 quarterly installments.

Life membership payments and 10% of all other membership payments and general contributions go toward long-term support of CCRS activities. We acknowledge memorial contributions in RipariaNews. We welcome bequests including those of real property.

Coyote Creek Riparian Station is a community supported non-partisan, non-profit organization devoted to research, restoration, management, and education regarding riparian habitat. With the help of many dedicated members and volunteers, the Station collects biological data, analyzes, and disseminates information to local, state, and federal agencies as well as the public. Our goals are to advance understanding of these complex ecosystems, provide a sound basis for environmental education and promote informed decision-making.

The Coyote Creek Riparian Station (CCRS) began in 1982 as a field station for the study of migratory land birds and was part of the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory. Under the direction of Dr. L. Richard Mewaldt, Professor of Zoology at San Jose State University, the Station became a non-profit research institution in 1986. The Station gains much support both with time and money from its 500+ members.

CCRS operates in cooperation with the Santa Clara Valley Water District, San Jose/Santa Clara Water Pollution Control Plant, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, California Department of Fish and Game, and the San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge.

RipariaNews is published quarterly for the information of our members; the personnel of the cooperating federal, state, and local agencies; and other organizations and individuals concerned with the flora and fauna of riparian and wetland habitats.

You can reach us at: Coyote Creek Riparian Station, P.O. Box 1027, Alviso-Milpitas Road, Alviso, CA 95002; (408) 262-9204; Fax (408) 263-3523; email address [ccrs@coyotecreek.org](mailto:ccrs@coyotecreek.org). Letters to the editor are welcome.