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RiparianNews

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Winter 1998 Newsletter of the Coyote Creek Riparian Station Volume13, No. 1

The Native Garden at the Roosevelt Community Center

by Sue Eakins

A recent visit to the creekside in Roosevelt Park near downtown San Jose revealed a red-flowering currant (ribes sanguineum) in bloom, a sure magnet for hummingbirds and observant humans. Currants once were found along our valley creeks but are not commonly found in urban San Jose today. The currant and thirty-nine other species (so far) of common and uncommon riparian natives are once again growing alongside a section of downtown Coyote Creek thanks to the Roosevelt Park Community Action Team and members of the greater community.

Our family has lived on Coyote Creek for twenty-seven years. We chose to live here because of the abundance and variety of birds. Redevelopment efforts in the nearby Roosevelt Park involved removing and trimming many native trees and plants. As a response I became active in the neighborhood association which has the Park as its focus. The group has enthusiastically supported the idea that we develop a native riparian garden, in part to mitigate the loss of trees, but also to help develop community as we work together. Our community is diverse ethnically and economically, and the project has provided common ground as we build and maintain the garden. We are also hoping that it will provide education about nature and will serve as a demonstration garden for water conservation, for local native plants, and for plants that specifically attract birds and butterflies. We hope that our garden will be used by local schools and by Junior Rangers and Scout troops to understand the interconnectedness of living things with nature and to respect the creek as habitat.

The area we planned to develop is situated in the flood plain of Coyote Creek. It has some existing trees on the creek bank as well as valley and live oaks on the upper bank and flat area. This stretch of creek is very urban and yet sees a great deal of bird activity. It seemed an ideal spot for our purposes.

We began by getting permission from San Jose's Parks and Recreation Department and from the Santa Clara Valley Water District to set aside a portion of Roosevelt Park for the garden. We then spent many hours gathering information, visiting native plant nurseries, and conferring with many generous people. Sally Casey, a native grass expert for the south bay, provided counsel on appropriate grasses and their requirements. Published information on native grasses was hard to find, so she was a wonderful resource. Christine Coy, Interpretive Specialist and Native Garden Director for the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge spent an afternoon with us in the refuge Bird and Butterfly Garden. She has provided invaluable practical information on sequence of development, resources, and educational materials, and continues to provide supportive help. Karen Cotter and Mark Agan

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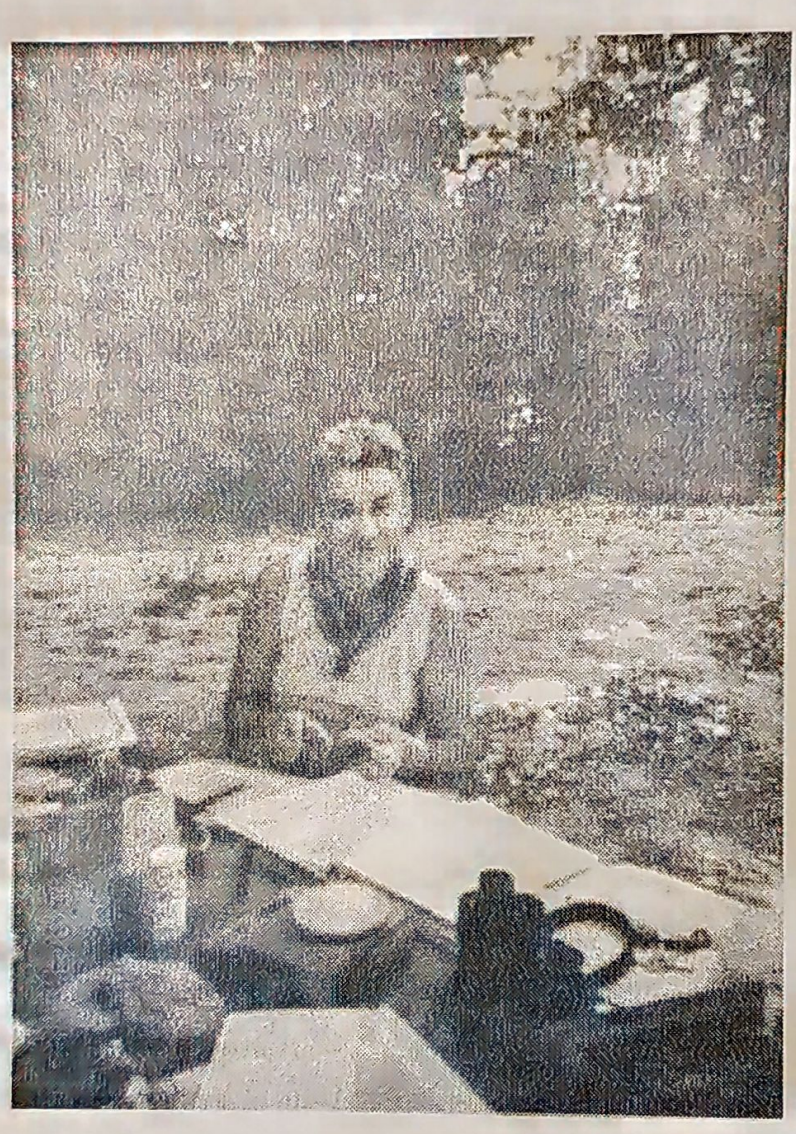
Profile of a Bander

by Diana Brumbaugh

VICKI SILVAS-YOUNG

When Vicki Silvas-Young took an ornithology class as a continuing nursing student at San Jose State University in 1975, she never realized it would lead to an extensive twenty-year bird-banding career.

"I used to look at birds in the yard, but I never really knew there was a book that had birds names in it," Silvas-Young said. Then Silvas-Young heard that a world-renowned ornithologist would be teaching one last semester before his retirement from San Jose State University. She took Dr. Richard Mewalt's course and "had a blast."



She proceeded to take a newly established bird-banding course started by Dr. Henry Weston and then graduate student Mike Rigney at SJSU and started to bird-watch whenever she could. Silvas-Young maintained her connection with Mewalt and Rigney and began banding for the newly formed San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory in the late 1970s. Her dedicated volunteerism has certainly amounted to a prolific and invaluable amount of Bay Area ornithological data. One year while banding with the Avian Biology Laboratory at SJSU, she and graduate student Kep Stone banded about 300 California thrashers which is "probably the most ever banded in the world in one season."

Although Silvas-Young has been involved with several projects, it was banding on the Farallon Islands in 1977 with the Point Reyes Bird Observatory that she considers one of her "major life events." It was during this project that she captured the first spring record of a mourning warbler, an uncommon eastern species. She often wonders where the warbler went after being released.

After a short break from banding in the mid-1980s, she received a call from a fellow bander named Allen Royer who encouraged her to band at Coyote Creek Riparian Station. "He said 'do it, do it, do it,'" recalled Silvas-Young. In early 1992 she began volunteering for CCRS, where she still bands today.

Despite a demanding schedule that includes two jobs and school, she bands two to three times a month. Nonetheless, she said if she could she "would love to band seven days a week." She is a reluctant "corporate world" employee who loves to spend time and sleep outdoors whenever possible.

Silvas-Young said that she loves to handle the birds and is grateful for all of the associations she has made with other banders. However, when reflecting upon what she enjoys most about bird-banding, she said it is releasing the bird. "Recaptures are the most valuable," she remarked. "When you release the bird you have to believe that it will be captured by someone else to tell us what we don't know about birds."

Continued from page 1

of CCRS also provided great service in practical guidance and plant suggestions. Kelly Kline, of Council member Pandori's office, has been a constant source of advice and counsel that far exceeds her administrative duties.

Once the project was defined in some detail, we began to apply for grant money. We were fortunate to receive $1,000 from the Community Foundation, $2,000 from San Jose Beautiful, and $1,000 from the Beautification and Barbecue Corps, Council member Pandori's support group for community projects.

It's all in a days work for these volunteers!

A phone call to Our City Forest resulted in one hundred free plants left over from the Guadalupe River Project. These were plants that are still commonly found along the creek and must therefore be propagated from the local strains to maintain genetic homogeneity. Volunteers repotted these and other plants we purchased or propagated in preparation for our fall planting-out date. During the summer, local tree- trimming companies donated wood chips, which we spread as an eight inch mulch over the mowed weeds of the garden site. This proved very effective in keeping them under control. Next we built a long, oval five-foot-wide decomposed granite path. Many volunteers helped in these laborious phases of the work. In October last year, over a hundred volunteers gathered to plant four hundred pots of 40 varieties of plants in the first phase of the Roosevelt Park Native Riparian Garden itself. More will be planted this spring. The work is well underway.

We found the following resources to be particularly helpful in identifying appropriate local natives:

Common Riparian Plants of California, Phyllis Faber and Robert Holland

Growing California Native Plants, Marjorie G. Schmidt

Riparian Corridor Policy Study, City of San JoseStream Care Guide for Santa Clara County, Santa Clara Valley Water DistrictStreamside Planting Guide for San Mateo and Santa Clara Streams, Coordinated Resource Management and Planning Process (CRMP)

Please come and visit our garden, or better yet, participate in a work session some Saturday morning. Call Sue Eakins at (408) 287-8437 for workday dates. The garden is located at 20th and East Santa Clara Streets (follow the creek downstream to the granite path). Plant identifiers and self-guided tours will be available starting May 2, 1998. Also on May 2, there will be a celebration of the Neighborhood Creek Festival, and all are invited.

CCRS would like to apologize for the delay in distribution of the RipariaNews. Unfortunately we are still in 'editorial transition'. We would greatly appreciate any articles, ideas, announcements or tid-bits of information you think would be useful to our membership. Please don't hesitate to call us at (408) 262-9204 with any suggestions.

Notes from the Field

by Alvaro Jaramillo

Have you noticed that ducks are kind of weird? I guess they sort of look a little funny when you think about it, but what I am referring to is their plumage cycle. In winter many birds are in a dull plumage, and then in spring they molt into a bright and colorful breeding plumage. Ducks, on the other hand, appear to always be in a bright and colorful plumage, even in winter. There are many birds that do not change appearance between summer and winter, but most of these are dull-plumaged species that never have a bright state. Therefore it seems odd that ducks would keep a bright plumage throughout the year. The truth of the matter is that ducks do have a dull 'winter' plumage, but it occurs during the late summer and early fall, not the winter. This dull 'winter' plumage is what the field guides term the eclipse plumage. However, only the birder who is active in summer may have noted that male ducks seemingly disappear during this time. This is an effect of the eclipse plumage, which turns the bright males into a dull and female-like plumage. The odd timing of this 'winter' plumage is associated with several oddities in the natural history of ducks.

The first of these is that during the eclipse plumage the molt of the wings occurs. But unlike in most birds, the wing feathers are shed simultaneously such that the duck is unable to fly for a period of time. This flightless molt period also occurs in other waterbirds, such as grebes, loons and coots. Presumably, the fact that these birds are aquatic and may seek refuge either by diving or swimming a safe distance from predators allows for this type of molt to occur. Land birds would not be able to survive a flightless period because flight is their most useful and effective type of predator avoidance. During the flightless stage ducks tend to congregated in large marshes that afford them plentiful cover during this vulnerable time. In addition, the dull coloration of the eclipse plumage allows the males to be more readily camouflaged against their surroundings, something that would be nearly impossible in their bright breeding finery. The simultaneous molt of the wing feathers allows for the entire process to be rather quick, only taking a few weeks. Birds that have to molt one wing feather at a time take longer to complete the molt. A quick molt is beneficial, however it has its own associated costs. For one, it takes a substantial amount of energy to grow the wing feathers at the same time. These feathers are large, long and have to be structurally resistant for them to be of any use in flight. Therefore, the ducks have to feed extensively prior to the molt in order to have enough fat and protein reserves available to power this expensive physiological process. In addition, a period of flightlessness puts the ducks in peril of predation. What ducks do is to make a short migration to a site that is rich in food and nutrients and high in cover, such as a large wetland. These short movements are termed molt migrations, and they are beginning to be recognized in many species now, not just ducks and shorebirds. Conservation of these molting areas has only recently become an issue.

After the wing feathers are replaced, the ducks molt back again into their bright breeding plumage. This means that in the short period after the breeding season, roughly in late July to early September, a typical duck will molt all of its body feathers once to achieve the eclipse plumage, then molt all of the wing feathers during the flightless stage, and finally, without a pause, molt all of the body plumage again to obtain the breeding plumage. A typical song bird which has a summer and winter plumage (lets say a Western Tanager) also undergoes two body molts, but these occur nearly half a year apart, not weeks apart. So why are ducks in such a hurry to be bright again?

Well, as is the case with most behavior in the animal world it has to do with aspects of their breeding. Unlike most other birds, ducks display and form their pair bonds in the winter, not in the spring. If fact, some ducks pair off early in the fall and then solidify these pair bonds throughout the winter. As an example, a male Western Tanager may molt into breeding plumage in March, so that it may arrive on the breeding grounds in May and be able to attract a mate or stake out a territory. Similarly, a drake duck has to find a mate, but he needs to do this in the fall and winter, so there is a real benefit to molting into the breeding plumage as early as possible. Since pairing occurs in the winter, it often happens that the male and female originally hatched in different parts of the breeding range. Once a pair is formed and the two birds migrate north, it turns out that the female leads the male to her breeding area. Thus, females are site tenacious in summer, but males mix around depending on where the female they paired with is from. It's worth noting that one local duck does not follow this pattern of pairing and a breeding plumage during the winter. This species is the Ruddy Duck, which molts into a bright breeding plumage in April and May. Male Ruddy Ducks are dull and brown during the entire winter, and would be difficult to differentiate from the females if they did not keep a bright white cheek patch. As one would surmise, most of the pair formation in Ruddy Ducks occurs in the spring after arriving on the breeding grounds.

As is the case with many birds, most drake ducks perform elaborate displays through which they attract a female to pair and mate with. Since pair formation occurs in the winter, all of this display activity occurs while the ducks are wintering in the Bay Area. Once one knows what to look for it is quite easy to find a group of displaying ducks to observe. Perhaps the best place to observe duck displays in the region is the Palo Alto Duck Pond at the Palo Alto Baylands Reserve. Here the ducks are tame and plentiful and usually quite active in display. In dabbling ducks (Mallards and relatives) several displays are common. First of all, listen to them. You will find that displaying ducks don't always 'quack'. Many of the displaying males give whistles and short clucks. As a generality, it is the females which quack, while drakes whistle. Sexual differences in voice are common in waterfowl. Even in Canada Geese, the males give a different call than the females. Both honk, but one sex has a

Continued from page 4

single-syllable honk, while the other has a double syllable honk; as they fly over try and spot this difference. Male Mallards perform one display where they jump up, not quite clearing the water entirely, while they whistle and put their bill tip right on their chests, before dropping down to the water again. This is termed a 'grunt whistle', and it is performed by all of the puddle ducks. Once one has learnt this display in the Mallard, it is interesting to see the variations that Pintails and Gadwalls do. Other common displays include 'sexual chases', where several males may swim or fly while chasing a female. Both of the goldeneyes perform a very nice display where the male throws his head back so that the nape lies flat on the back while uttering a nasal, Common Nighthawk-like 'peeeent' noise. This is a common and impressive display. If you have the pleasure to bird in an area where Red-breasted Mergansers winter you may have noticed a neat display called the 'courtsey'. During this display the male props up the back end of the body while submersing the base of the neck, but keeping the bill pointed upward towards the female. It's an elegant and beautiful display; a good place to see this is the Princeton Harbor in San Mateo County.

I must admit that I used to be a little bored with ducks, primarily because I associated them with city parks and begging for handouts. They didn't seem to do anything that was all that interesting. Well, this was an incorrect notion I had gathered from watching them in summer. The key is to look at ducks in the winter, when they are active and displaying. This is when they truly come to life.

Director's Report

by Neil Pelkey

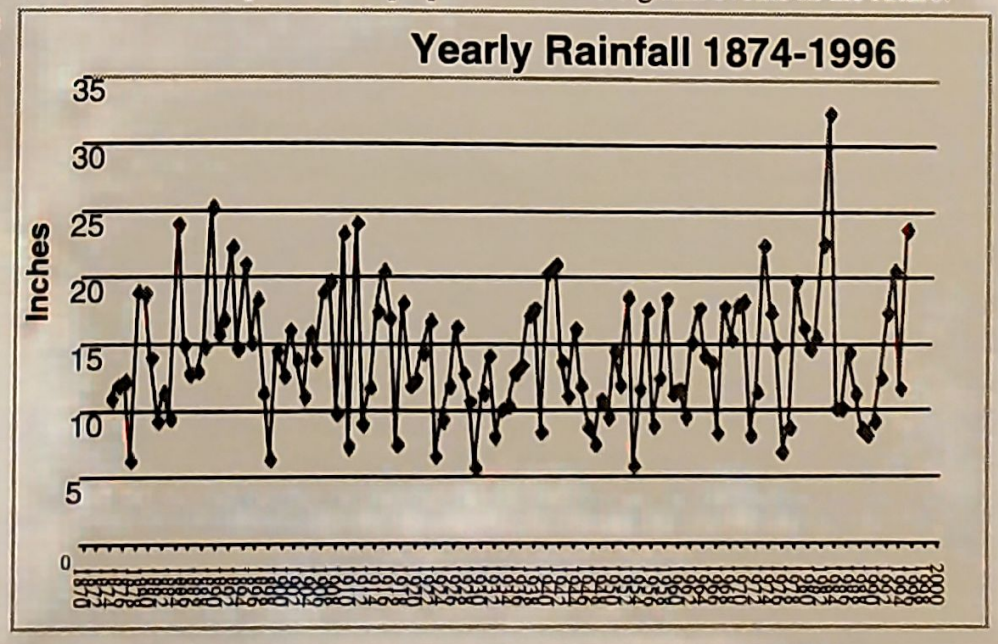
"Rain Rain Go Away, come again some other day" . During this last set of rains there were probably many of us who had this childhood rhyme stuck in our heads. I know it did the number of times I spent hours in traffic waiting for floodwaters to clear. Yet we have been asked on several occasions to answer the question—is this much rain bad for the creeks? While it is certainly bad for the homeowners and public agencies that must deal with the ravage of fast flowing flood waters, the floods themselves may in fact be good for creeks—and at least a few of the creatures who live therein. We have also been asked to answer the question, "How much of this is really due to El Nino?"

In keeping with this topsy turvy season I will answer the second question first. While El Nino has become the villain in many advertising campaigns, El Nino is a natural event. Meteorologists call these very heavy rain periods anomalous—out of the ordinary. But how out of the ordinary are these events? The floods of 1982, 1986, 1991, 1997, 1998 start to provide evidence that these 'out of the ordinary events' are becoming more and more ordinary. We have had three major flood events in the last decade. The figure below shows the pattern of rainfall by year since 1874 (Thanks to Neal Van Kuren of the SCVWD for the data). It is pretty easy to see that the rainfall of 21 inches we had in downtown San Jose this year was pretty high—higher than about 90% of the other years to date. Yet there have been rainfall levels as high or higher fifteen times in the last century. And only four of those have been associated with El Nino Southern Oscillation (ENSO) events. Thus we can probably blame this year's flooding partially on El Nino, but this should bring little comfort as more big rainfall events should be expected in the future.

The answer to the first question—Are these flood events bad for creeks—is pretty simple. Since big events are a regular events in the life of a creek, they are probably pretty important to the health of creeks. Some of the areas that we are pretty certain that help the health of creeks from flooding are:

1. **Cleaning them out:** Creeks need a good scrubbing every once in a while to stir things up. This scrubbing function is important to remove the settled sentiments from the gravel substrates that are so crucial to salmon and steelhead breeding.
2. **Moving out log jams and woody debris:** This is a pain to beavers, but it does keep the water moving faster which provide the necessary oxygen and temperature for cold water fishes.
3. **Essential for the germination of many riparian associated tree species:** Riparian trees like Cottonwoods do not germinate without the leaves and other small debris clean silt or sand bas laid down.

All in all, we can probably blame this year's rain on El Nino, but we should expect and be prepared for more big rain events in the future. Some will be caused by El Nino, but most will not. These events will create difficulties, headaches, and tears for we humans, but they a natural and necessary event for the health of the creeks.



OFF THE WALL

by Alvaro Jaramillo

For the fall season, August through November, we started on the period banding every day (migration schedule) and then dropped down to 3 days a week (winter schedule) during November. Thus, we banded a total of 100 days this fall. During this time we netted a total of 3880 birds, of which 3142 were new captures; the remainder were birds we had previously banded and now recaptured. We banded 63 species; this does not include three additional identifiable forms we keep track of: 'Myrtle' Yellow-rumped Warbler, 'Gambel's' White-crowned Sparrow, and a Yellow-shafted X Red-shafted Flicker intergrade.

The ten most common species (including one of the identifiable forms mentioned above) netted were: Pacific Slope Flycatcher, 'Puget Sound' White-crowned Sparrow, House Finch, Golden-crowned Sparrow, Hermit Thrush, Yellow Warbler, 'Gambel's' White-crowned Sparrow, 'Audubon's' Yellow-rumped Warbler, Common Yellowthroat and Lincoln's Sparrow. These ten species accounted for approximately 73% of the birds caught this fall. Comparing this list to the top ten species banded in the preceding three autumn periods, there are a few differences. Seven of the top ten species banded during the fall of 1997 were also in the list of the ten most common species in the last three falls. The three top 10 species for this season which do not number in the three-year average are the Yellow Warbler, 'Audubon's' Yellow-rumped Warbler and the Common Yellowthroat. These three warblers were caught in numbers well above the average: 226 Yellow Warblers (three year average = 75); 192 Audubon's Warblers (average = 86); 170 Common Yellowthroats (average = 88). The three species that figured in the top ten of the three preceding autumn periods that dropped in numbers were the Song Sparrow, Fox Sparrow and Ruby-crowned Kinglet. The latter two only dropped marginally in numbers this year, but the numbers of Song Sparrows fell drastically. During the fall of 1997 we banded roughly half the number of Song Sparrows caught in an average fall. Additionally, the Rufous Hummingbird, 'Oregon' Dark-eyed Junco and American Goldfinch were caught in numbers well below half the three-year average. This continued the low numbers of American Goldfinches present at CCRS noted in the summer. On the other hand, the Bewick's Wren, Orange-crowned Warbler, and Lesser Goldfinch were banded in numbers twice above the three-year average this fall. The fact that four of the six species noted to be present in high numbers this year were warblers is intriguing. It is difficult to imagine that any one factor could influence birds as divergent in habitat choice as these four: Audubon's Warbler breeds in conifer forests, the Yellow Warbler in riparian and young deciduous forests, Orange-crowned in edge and scrub areas, and the Common.Yellowthroat in marshes. Perhaps their simultaneous increases are merely a coincidence, we don't know enough to say for sure.

For the most part, the timing of migration for the arriving sparrows and many other of our common migrants was normal. However, Table 1 shows that for a few species we noted significantly late departures, including some departure records (based on 15 years of banding at our site). The cause of this protracted migration is not clear. The arrival dates did not appear to be significantly different from what should be expected, so this isn't a case of the entire migration being timed a little later. Rather it was a lengthening of the tail end of migration that occurred.

This fall will be remembered for its diversity and number of 'good birds'. The overall highlight was a Vesper Sparrow. Tom Goodier banded this young of the year on October 5th. This was a new banding record as well as a species that had never been recorded at CCRS. Another highlight was the Yellow-breasted Chat banded by Clyde Morris on October 17, this was also a hatch year bird and the latest we have caught by over three weeks! What is especially interesting about this Yellow-breasted Chat is that the measurements suggest that it may belong not to our western race, but to the eastern *virens* subspecies. We are awaiting photos which may help in making this identification; if confirmed, an eastern Yellow-breasted Chat in California would be an outstanding find. Two 'eastern' warblers were banded this fall. We banded an adult Ovenbird on September 23 and an immature male American Redstart on September 4, neither was observed on subsequent days. The Ovenbird is the fifth we have banded and the third in fall, this is a very high number of ovenbirds for one California site. The American Redstart is only the fifth we have caught, and the fourth in fall. A juvenile Least Flycatcher banded on September 10 is our 11th banding record, an outstandingly high number of this rare flycatcher for one California site. This autumn we banded two different Common Poorwills, not bad considering that we had only netted six others before this year. These were our first poorwills since 1992! All of the previous six banding records have been from October, so the one banded on September 28 of this year is our earliest ever. Other unusual species 'ringed', as they say in Britain, included one Black-throated Grey Warbler, one Hammond's Flycatcher (our latest ever), one Lazuli Bunting, one Cassin's Vireo, three Nashville Warblers, two White-throated Sparrows, and one Western Wood-Pewee. In addition, several very rare birds were observed this fall at CCRS, but not banded. These included a White-faced Ibis (Sept. 4 to 6); Black Turnstone (two flying over our site on Sept. 29);Semipalmated Sandpiper (several adults and juveniles reported between Aug. 2 and Oct. 4);an adult White-rumped Sandpiper (dates Sept. 3 to at least Sept. 5 first for county); Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (juv Oct. 3 to at least the 7th , possibly another was present on Oct. 18); Stilt Sandpiper (one Aug. 24 to Sept. 9); Buff-breasted Sandpiper (Sept.1 to Sept. 8);Ruff (two on Sept. 4, two at least to Oct. 4, and one to Oct. 19); Bank Swallow (three on Sept. 29); a Black-throated Green Warbler on Sept. 28 (second in county); Lark Sparrow (Aug.. 23, immature);Grasshopper Sparrow (an immature on Aug. 19,and a second on Oct. 5).

International Migratory Bird Day

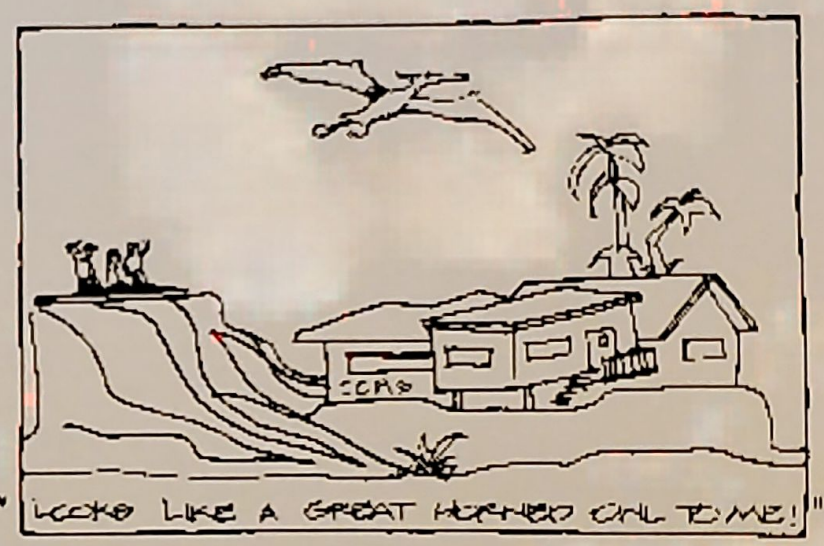
at the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge, Environmental Education Center in Alviso

Saturday, May 9, 1998 from 9:00am to 3:00pm

Free of charge

Programs:

9:00 - 10:00	Guided Migratory Bird Walk
9:00 - 11:00	Migratory Bird Workshop for Kids
10:15 - 12:15	Field Trip to Coyote Creek Riparian Station: (Limited space*) ¥ *Bird Banding Demonstration (10:30 - 11:00)* ¥ *Guided Bird Walk (11:00 - 12:00)*
11:15 - 1:15	Bird Watching Bike Tour
12:15 - 1:00	Murre Colony Restoration Project - presentation
1:15 - 3:00	Field Trip to Alviso Slough Trail (Limited space*)
1:15 - 2:15	Guided Migratory Bird Walk
2:30 - 3:00	Poster Contest Award Ceremony



*Register for field trips when you arrive at the Environmental Education Center

Ongoing Activities:

Build your own Chickadee/Titmouse nest box to take home or donate to the California Bluebird (and other cavity nesting birds) Recovery Program
• locally coordinated by *Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society* **$5.00 materials fee**

Purchase native plants to attract migratory birds to your yard
• coordinated by members of *California Native Plant Society* **Call for a pre-order form**

Participate in migratory bird games and craft activities

Taste free samples of shade grown coffee and help protect migratory bird habitat the next time you buy coffee
• provided by the *Wild Bird Center*

For more information, call (408) 262-5513

Attention all artisitc adults and kids! We want your paintings or drawings of migratory birds to display at the Environmental Education Center in Alviso for International Migratory Bird Day. You will automatically be entered into the Migratory Bird Poster Contest. Entries must be no larger than 16" x 24" and will be accepted between April 1 and April 27 at a variety of locations. Call (408) 262-5513 for an entry form and listing of drop-off locations.

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 and analyzes biological data, and disseminates information to local, state, and federal agencies as well as to 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 it's 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 to inform our membership; the personnel of the cooperating federal, state, and local agencies; and other organizations and individuals concerned with the flora and fauna of the riparian and wetland habitats.

You can reach us at: Coyote Creek Riparian Station
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Letters to the editor are welcome.

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Member	$25 annually
Senior or Student	$15 annually
Family	$35 annually
Supporting	$50 annually
Sustaining	$100 annually
Corporate	$500 annually
Life	$600*
Patron	$3000*

*** 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 our newsletter. We welcome bequests including those of real property.