



Coyote Creek Riparian Station
P.O. Box 1027, Alviso-Milpitas Road
Alviso, CA 95002 • (408) 262-9204
Email: ccrs@best.com

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Newsletter of the Coyote Creek Riparian Station

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Blackbirds, Cowbirds and Conservation

by Alvaro Jaramillo

The subfamily of the New World Blackbirds is exceedingly diverse as far as birds go, nearly 100 species are known. All of them live strictly within the Americas, including the Caribbean. The family includes some of the most common and well known birds, such as the **Red-winged Blackbird** (*Agelaius phoeniceus*), to some of the rarest of New World Birds, such as the **Selva Cuckoo** (*Cacicus koepckeae*) which is known from two specimens and has not been seen since the 60s. In size they range from the huge Oropendolas of the tropics to the nearly sparrow sized **Bobolink** (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*), a species of songbird that undergoes one of the longest migrations known in the Americas. Many blackbirds are black, often beautifully glossed with blue, green or purples while the rest of the group tends to be brightly colored, usually with reds, oranges or yellows. In fact, the subfamily's scientific name Icterinae refers to their yellow, not black coloration! I would guess that one of the first birds a beginning birder learns is the common and widespread Red-winged Blackbird, a beautiful and distinct species.

Perhaps, its rasping song is also one of the first that the neophyte birdwatcher learns. Sadly, in the quest for newer experiences the blackbirds are often the group that the bird lover first begins to ignore. What is often missed is that the blackbirds as a whole are an exceedingly interesting and fascinating group of birds, particularly

with respect to their behavior, song, migration, management and conservation.

The mating strategies of blackbirds are variable. Some are

monogamous with males being responsible for a great part of the work involved in raising the young, as in many orioles. Other species, such as the oropendolas and **Boat-tailed Grackles** (*Quiscalus major*), are highly polygynous with each male defending a harem of females from other males; these males do not contribute whatsoever to the raising of the young. In fact their lifestyle, and great size, is

more akin to that of **Northern Elephant Seals** (*Mirounga angustirostris*) than it is to any bird species! Researchers have studied the behavioral ecology of blackbirds and have realized that there are interesting correlations between body size and plumage differences between the sexes and their particular form of mating system. These correlations have helped to understand the evolution of plumage patterns and the role of sexual selection in behavior and appearance. Scientists have learned a huge amount of biology by looking at blackbirds.

A great deal of research has been focused on the brood parasitic blackbirds, the much maligned cowbirds. There are five, perhaps six, parasitic cowbirds in the Americas. This behavior is shared by several other groups of birds, such as some cuckoos, the honeyguides,

Whydahs and Indigobirds, the **Parasitic Weaver**

(*Anomalospiza imberbis*) and the **Black-headed Duck** (*Heteronetta atricapilla*) among others. However, in no other group does host specialization vary so much as in the cowbirds. The **Screaming Cowbird** (*Molothrus rufoaxillaris*) of Argentina parasites mainly one host species, while the eggs of its relatives, the **Brown-headed** (*Molothrus ater*) and **Shiny** (*Molothrus bonariensis*) cowbirds have been found in nests of hundreds of species. The extreme range in potential hosts in the latter two species is exactly why they have become a management concern. The lack of a dependency on any one host species allows for the possibility of the extinction of the host without incurring any negative effects to the cowbird itself.



Western Meadowlarks, a member of the Blackbird family Icteridae, frequent the open areas around the Station.

Meet Alvaro Jaramillo Thursday, February 6 from 7 to 9 pm for a talk and slide show on Blackbirds and Cowbirds. See Calendar of Events, back page for more information.

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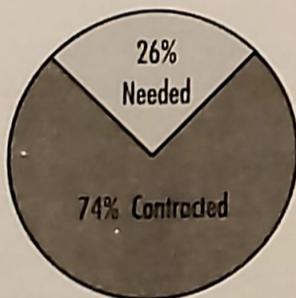
Director's Desk:

Neil Pelkey

The story of Sangeetha—which by the way is true—that appeared in the director's column last issue was titled "Lessons and Examples". That title was not mine—I really don't know what the lesson from that story should be. There are probably many—the value of friends, the cold hearted predictions of science, and the value in the faith of drunk shaman. I really do not have any great lessons from the story. It just reminded me of CCRS. A lot of people with very different skills trying to do a good thing — and succeeding. Succeeding when it looked pretty hopeless.

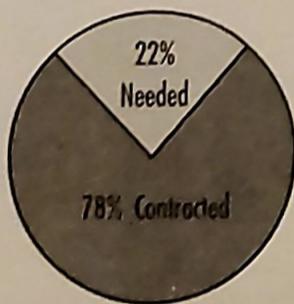
When I joined CCRS as the managing director things looked pretty hopeless as well. I will not go into the gory details because they are now irrelevant. Instead, this director's letter will focus on the current status of the station which—thanks to our friends, supporters, volunteers, and really fine staff—is pretty good. The rest of this article will paint the picture of where we stand going into 1997.

StreamKeeper 1997 Contracts



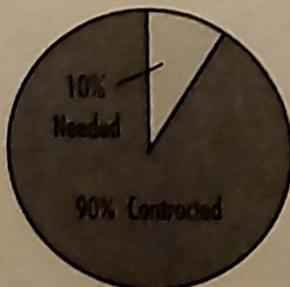
StreamKeepers has recently pulled together a set of four projects. The first is a continuation of the Stream-Keeper programs on three creeks—Coyote, San Francisquito, and Alamitos creeks. The second is a two day teacher workshop for the Santa Clara Valley Nonpoint Source Pollution Control Program (SCVNPCP). The third is a classroom outreach program to San Mateo schools on the value of urban creeks. The fourth and final is a mobile library display on pollution control. These projects will provide 74.46% of the necessary funding for SK for 1997.

Community Creek Watch 1997



Community Creek Watch now has five projects on line for 1997. The first is the San Francisquito Creek Watershed Project. The second is a project for SCVNPCP to create a stream resources brochure for Penitencia creek. The third is a literature review for the watersheds above the reservoirs in Santa Clara County. The fourth is the continuation of the biological assessment project on Saratoga Creek. The fifth is a model community pollution incident liaison project with the City of Saratoga. Thus the CCW program is going into the new year with 78% of its necessary funding on line.

Avian Research 1997



The Avian Research Program has three contracts heading into 1997. The first is the continuation of the SCVWD wildlife monitoring program. The second is a continuation of the shorebird monitoring project. The third is an expansion of the shorebird program. The Avian Research Program thus has 90% of its funding requirements on line to begin 1997.

Cross Programmatic Projects:

We have three projects that will not be housed under any of the specific programs. The first project brings Mike Rigney back to CCRS as a regional watershed information coordinator. He will be amassing the geophysical and biological information necessary to perform accurate watershed modeling in the Santa Clara Valley. This project is with the City of San Jose. The second project is a subcontract with H.T. Harvey and Associates to assist in a ecological resources inventory of the San Jose Sewage Treatment Facility. The final project is the Web Page project where we will be making our data available to our members and the public. The addition of these three projects brings CCRS past the 90% funding necessary for 1997.

The progress we have made has been due to the hard work of the staff and our Board of Directors. Our volunteers have provided the work and support that makes this place really special. We still have some substantial work to do that includes:

- bringing the funding to 100% for the three currently funded programs;
- bringing the herpetology program to a fully funded entity; and
- adding more training for our members (this will include a computer building workshop and a course in Geographic Information Systems).

With continued hard work, support from our friends and members, and a little luck, all this will happen. ✨

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 memberships; 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; email address ccrs@best.com. Letters to the editor are welcome.

The Birds of Santa Clara County

Bill Bousman
(Copyright December 1996)

Vultures and Hawks Part 3

The Buteos, the soaring hawks of grasslands and woodlands make up Part 3 of the Vultures and Hawks.

Red-shouldered Hawks are now a fairly common species in the county in their preferred habitats although they were considerably more rare a generation ago. Birds are largely resident although we occasionally find a few away from their breeding habitat in the winter. In the late 1960's and early 1970's the Red-shouldered Hawk was a rare bird in Palo Alto and San Jose bird counts and was not seen every year. The local population started to grow in the late 1970's and, apparently, this increase is still continuing. The population growth over the last 20 years is about 15% ($p < 0.005$) for the Palo Alto Christmas Bird Count (CBC) data and 7% ($p < 0.025$) for the Palo Alto Summer Bird Count (SBC) data, while the San Jose CBC shows about a 13% increase ($p < 0.005$) over the same time period. The p-values indicate that these changes are highly significant. There is some evidence of increasing populations elsewhere in California including urban areas (Shuford 1993, Wilbur 1973).

During the county's breeding bird atlas we found red-shoulders nesting along and near riparian corridors on the valley floor and at its edges. Although most birds were located on valley alluvial soils or the nearby foothills, nesting birds were also found at higher elevations, such as at Grant Lake at 1600' (Dick Elliott), on the San Felipe Ranch east of Anderson Reservoir at 1280' and 1480' (Amy Lauterbach and James Yurchenco), and off Marsh Road near Calaveras Reservoir at an elevation of 1000' (Mike Rogers). In each of these cases these birds were associated with man-made lakes, reservoirs, or healthy high-elevation riparian areas. Breeding records extend from 5 Jan 93 when birds were seen constructing a nest at Stanford (Steve Rottenborn) to 6 Aug 89 when young off the nest were seen being fed near Saratoga (David Suddjian).

Grinnell and Miller (1944), in describing the red-shoulder's state-wide distribution, wrote that this hawk was "originally common" in California. By the turn of the century, however, it was decidedly rare in the South Bay. Van Denburgh (1899) did not include it on his summary of county landbirds, while Barlow (1900) noted that a set of eggs had been taken at Sargent in April 1896 and that Rollo Beck had seen this species near San Felipe during February 1900. Fisher (1904) recorded this hawk as a "rare resident of the valley." By mid-century Sibley (1952) judged it as uncommon in the South San Francisco Bay Region. It was not

recorded on early Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society (SCVAS) trip reports (Steve Rottenborn, pers. commun.); the first trip record not occurring until 1952, at Searsville Lake, in nearby San Mateo County. (Anonymous 1952).

What is the reason for this population increase? Is it occurring because of the massive urbanization of the South Bay over the last four decades or in spite of it? These are fascinating questions and difficult to answer.

The **Broad-winged Hawk** is the common woodland hawk of eastern North America and famed for its autumn migration along the ridges of the Appalachian Mountains. But here on the west coast it is a very rare vagrant. Although this species is now detected annually at western hawk watches there are only four records for Santa Clara County. The first record was of an immature in Palo Alto seen by David Suddjian over Arastradero and Foothill on 31 Oct 86 (AB 41:138). Steve Rottenborn found two immatures over Monte Bello Ridge in 1993 (NASFN 48:148), the first on 26 Sep and the second on 3 Oct. Our fourth record is unusual in that it was a bird that was captured at the Marin Headlands and had a radio transmitter installed on 27 Sep 94. On 28 Sep it flew across the bay and entered the county along the front of the Diablo Range. It flew south and spent that night near Hwy 152 east of Gilroy. The next morning, untouched by birder's eyes, it left the county heading south (Karen Hoyt, pers. commun.).

Swainson's Hawk is a summer resident in the Central Valley and in the interior west, but a very rare migrant in Santa Clara County. It is more often encountered in the spring than in the fall. Relatively large flocks were recorded in the county in the early part of the century. Sibley (1952) notes that W. E. Unglish saw a flock of about 25 moving north near Sargent on 13 Apr 27 and Pickwell (1932) saw about 20 in Arroyo Calero on 28 Jul 28, not far from today's Calero Reservoir. Since World War II we have had about eight records with five of them in the months of April and May. The earliest of these recent records is of an adult over Uvas Creek on 28 Mar 96 seen by David Suddjian (pers. commun.) and the latest record is of three seen by Dave DeSante over Stanford on 27 Sep 66 (AFN 21:73). The only summer observation is of a light-morph adult over Metcalf Canyon on 9 Jun 94 recorded by Steve Rottenborn (NASFN 48:985). A "kettle" of five birds was reported moving along the borders of Monterey, Santa Cruz, San Benito, and Santa Clara counties on 5 Apr 91 by Kent Van Vuren (AB 45:492) and is the largest number found in recent years.

The **Red-tailed Hawk** is our most common resident Buteo in Santa Clara County and has always been so (Fisher 1904; Grinnell and Wythe 1927). It is common in valley and mountain, grassland and woodland, and now, even in our

urban areas. There appears to have been little change in this species population in historical times. A pair even nested in an eucalyptus tree on the FMC test track in the middle of Santa Clara (Paul Noble, pers. commun.), undisturbed by the noise and commotion. This species has a high tolerance for man and is a successful breeder wherever there is adequate foraging and protected nest sites. It is also a delight to the active birder with its sometimes bewildering range of plumage variation.

During the atlas field years of 1987 to 1993 we found this species in all of the blocks in the county except a few bayside and urban blocks and we obtained confirmed breeding evidence in 53% of all blocks. We noted birds carrying nest materials as early as 11 Feb 90 in the Arastradero Preserve area (Grant Hoyt) and carrying food for young as late as 10 Aug 93 in the Monte Bello Open Space Preserve (Mike Rogers).

The "Harlan's" and "Krider's" subspecies of Red-tailed Hawk are different enough from our "Western" Red-tailed Hawk that well-marked individuals can be identified in the field. A male "Harlan's" was shot in Mountain View on 10 Nov 1855 by J. G. Cooper (Grinnell and Miller 1944) and initially was considered a separate species. I am not aware of any satisfactory identification since then of this subspecies. An immature "Krider's" was described from Sargent's Landing on 27 Jan 91 by Mike Rogers and Jim Corliss (AB 45:316) but may have been a very pale "Western" or intergrade. An adult "Krider's" found 20 Nov 93 in Joseph Grant County Park by Steve Rottenborn (NASFN 48:148) is considered representative of this subspecies. Identification of any red-tail subspecies requires not only the opportunity to make a definitive study of a bird, but also a thorough knowledge of plumage variation in this species. No report is satisfactory, of course, without a detailed description.

Ferruginous Hawk is a regular but rare to very rare wintering Buteo in the county. This hawk nests in the grasslands and prairie of the interior west and winters in California in the grasslands bordering the central valley and in similar areas in Santa Clara County. Fall birds first appear in October and the greatest number are seen in December and January and then numbers tail off until the end of March. Our earliest fall records are of an adult near Morgan Hill and an immature near San Martin, both found on 1 Oct 95 (Steve and Heather Rottenborn). Our latest record is of an immature over Monument Peak on 6 Apr 96 (Mike Rogers). This hawk is found most often in grasslands on the western slope of the Diablo Range but also uses open areas in the south county, airports, and high-elevation grasslands in the Diablo Range, such as the San Antonio Valley.

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The 1996 Summer Season

by Bill Bousman

Banding days were down this summer with 19 days in June and 13 days in July. The information that follows is from the Summary Board in the Banding Lab and is based on new captures unless otherwise noted. There is no normalization of the data so comments on population trends are speculative.

Our local hummers, **Black-chinned**, **Anna's** and **Allen's** were banded in lower numbers than in recent years and this was particularly true for Anna's Hummingbird. Are we capturing fewer because we are putting out fewer nets or are there just fewer birds? Some of our other local breeding species, such as **Common Yellowthroat**, **Black-headed Grosbeak**, and **Song Sparrow** were banded in pretty typical numbers. Our boom species of recent years, **Bullock's Oriole**, was banded in the lowest numbers since 1991.

As for some of the others, well, sixty plus years ago, Professor Pickwell (1932) described Coyote Creek at the Alviso-Milpitas Road:

"The stream here flows through the rich alluvial soil of the lower Santa Clara Valley, has built up the dikes characteristic of California streams in such places, and these in turn provide a luxuriant growth of cottonwoods, box elders, red willows and other trees, with a rank undergrowth of brambles, poison hemlock and other coarse herbs. Such a condition provides ideal breeding grounds for many small birds such as the Russet-backed Thrush, Song Sparrow, Traill Flycatcher, Willow Goldfinch, Pileolated Warbler and Yellow-throat."



The Traill Flycatcher, now called Willow Flycatcher, has probably not bred in this valley in thirty years. Russet-backed [Swainson's] Thrush and Pileolated [Wilson's] Warbler are also no longer regular breeders along Coyote Creek. Both of the latter are common migrants along the creek in the spring and still nest at higher elevations where apparently they succeed in raising young despite the **Brown-headed Cowbird**, but along our creek they are mere ghosts of what they once were. The tail end of the Swainson's migration lasted into June, but we also banded single birds on 19 and 21 Jul. Similarly, the Wilson's Warbler migration was over by 5 Jun, but single birds on 10 and 21 Jul are like a memory of what once was. More than likely these July birds are failed breeders or unpaired birds that start to wander when the season has passed them by.

Other "not quite" breeding species along the creek this summer include **Pacific-slope Flycatchers** on 23 and 26 Jun, an **Ash-throated Flycatcher** and a **Warbling Vireo** on 28 Jul (both early migrants), and an **Orange-crowned Warbler** on 14 Jul. We had our last migrant **Yellow Warbler** on 7 Jun and it does not appear that they nested along the creek like last summer. For the third July we've had an influx of **House Wrens** with seven banded this year--what is responsible for this change? In the past any **Dark-eyed Juncos** along the creek were considered very unusual. This summer we banded four and they appear to be expanding out of the foothills as breeders on the valley floor.

There were a few surprises on the Banding Board this summer, but nothing truly rare. A **Rufous Hummingbird** was identified on 17 Jun which is very unusual for the season. A **Hermit Thrush** re-captured on 17 Jun is clearly overwintering as was the **Myrtle Warbler** banded on 21 Jun. Although **Savannah Sparrows** nest along the bay shore they are rarely found upstream in the summer so a bird on 26 Jun is of interest. The true rarity of the summer was noted not on the Banding Board but below the banding trailer where Al Jaramillo found a calling **Yellow-billed Cuckoo** on 24 Jul. This bird called, more or less, regularly until the end of the month. It too is a ghost of the creek's past and may very well have been extinct even before the arrival of the cowbird.

Reference:

Pickwell, G. 1932. A station of frequent observation of the cowbird in the San Francisco Bay region. *Condor* 34:100.

Birds of Santa Clara County

 Continued from page 3

There have been more sightings of this species in the early 1990s than the 1980s, but how much this is a result of observer effort is unknown. The San Jose CBC, which records this species regularly, has not shown a significant increase in numbers.

Barlow (1900) considered the Ferruginous Hawk an irregular winter visitant and noted a specimen shot at Berryessa by Beck. Grinnell and Wythe (1927) considered it rare and irregular as well. The records of the last two decades suggest that this species is found more regularly, certainly annually, but it is unclear how much of this is a result of observer effort or, possibly, improved field guides.

The **Rough-legged Hawk** is also a winter visitor to Santa Clara County, like the Ferruginous Hawk, but is far more rare. This hawk breeds in the Alaskan and Canadian tundra and moves south in the winter, but we often go a winter or two without seeing any birds locally. On average, we see only one rough-leg for five

ferruginous. In addition, many of our Ferruginous Hawks appear to be on winter territories and are seen repeatedly through the season, while the Rough-legged Hawk is seldom seen more than once in any one place during the winter. Our earliest fall bird is one at the Sunnyvale Water Pollution Control Plant on 22 Oct 89 (Peter Metropulos) while our latest bird is one that was seen this spring over the Cambrian Plaza in southwestern San Jose on 29 Mar 96 (Joan Priest). We have recorded this species in eight of our last 16 winters. Grinnell and Wythe (1927) considered this species a very rare, mid-winter visitant while Sibley (1952) referred to it as uncommon. Despite the different choice of words, the status appears little changed in the last century.

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Notes from the Field

by Alvaro Jaramillo

Some of you may not have ventured beyond the trailers and discovered that a mile beyond, lies the CCRS Waterbird Pond. Part of the ongoing work at CCRS is to manage the water levels and salinity of the Waterbird Pond to encourage waterbird, particularly shorebird, use of the pond. As well, we work to document waterbird use of the Waterbird Pond. The birds using the pond are counted at least once a week, which allows us to track seasonal and species-specific changes in the numbers present on the pond. In addition, shorebird-crazy CCRS staff routinely eat lunch by the pond searching for any odd species, often joined by members doing a little lunch time birding themselves. This has allowed us to compile a large database of bird records from the pond. For example, we have learned that the highest number of shorebirds visit the pond during July. Numbers decline through the fall, stabilize in October and stay low until February when small increases are noted. The spring peak of migrants is not nearly as large as the fall peak. During the last year the three most common shorebirds were **American Avocets** (35.6 % of the shorebird numbers), dowitchers (32.8%), and **Western Sandpiper** (16.2%). Notice that I didn't specify which dowitcher species were observed during the surveys, this is because this is an extremely difficult identification to make. **Long-billed** and **Short-billed dowitchers** are similar in all plumages, and are largely impossible to identify in the winter plumage. Juveniles are the easiest to identify, breeding adults are tougher but manageable. However, when one has to count several hundred birds, some of which are flying from one end of the pond to the other, it is impossible to separate the two species from each other with any reliability. This does not mean we don't try! During our counts we

count the total number of dowitchers present and estimate the proportions of the two species based on the overall call types we hear (the two species' calls are rather different) and the identifications we can make based on the plumages of the birds. This year we noted an interesting pattern, which we will be looking to confirm next season. In



early July, most of the adult dowitchers in the pond were Short-bills but this quickly changed. By mid July Short-billed Dowitchers were still rather common in the pond, but the majority (4 out of 5 approximately) were Long-bills. The last Short-billed Dowitchers were detected in early August, after which all we could see and hear were Long-billed Dowitchers. So it appears that both dowitchers use the waterbird pond, the Long-billed is the species that is common during most of the fall and in the winter but for a short period during the start of the southbound migration, Short-billed Dowitchers predominate.

Apart from documenting the migration of common birds, we have also been lucky enough to see some exciting rarities in the pond. These rarities brought in many visiting members to the ponds this fall. The string of good birds began with several Semipalmated Sandpipers being present in mid-August. The **Semipalmated Sandpiper** migrates largely east of the Rocky Mountains, but a few make their way down along the Pacific Coast. On the

19th of August a juvenile **Stilt Sandpiper** showed up. This is also an eastern species, but it is much more unusual here than the Semipalmated Sandpiper. A juvenile **American Golden Plover** was sleeping on one of the mud islands on September 9th and another was present there on September 28th. One of the most interesting events this fall was noting a large number of **Pectoral Sandpipers** using the pond. The Pectoral is a rare but regular migrant through our area so it was quite a surprise to see 40 at the pond in late September. My experience living in Vancouver, British Columbia was if you find a good number of juvenile Pectoral Sandpipers look very hard for the similar, but rare, **Sharp-tailed Sandpiper**. This species is a rare vagrant from Siberia; it appears that a few young of the year consistently migrate south along the wrong continent flocking with Pectoral Sandpipers. Persistence paid off when on September 28th a pretty juvenile Sharp-tailed Sandpiper was found sleeping with a flock of 101 Pectoral Sandpipers! To add even more spice to the day, a juvenile Ruff, another visitor from Asia was also present. Fortunately both of these rare birds stayed for several days and were enjoyed by many, many birders. The Sharp-tailed Sandpiper was kind enough to stay for our annual general meeting and picnic where it was seen by many more folks. After the Sharp-tailed left things got back to normal, but what a fall it had been on the ponds! This is illustrative of what regular surveys, long term monitoring, and volunteer effort can turn up. When you drive by the waterbird pond, it doesn't look like much but look a little closer - anything can show up there.

We encourage you to visit the waterbird pond and make your observations known to us by writing them on the sightings board (hangs outside the white trailer) or sightings book (in the bird banding trailer). Thanks. ✨

Transitions

Continued from page 7

and threatened animals doing recovery, listing, and permitting.

David Blau, Board President since 1994 and Board Member since 1993 has stepped down from the Board to devote more time to his consulting business. We appreciate David's stewardship during CCRS's

growing years.

CCRS has two new Board Members: **Trish Mulvey** has been active in water policy issues and organizations throughout the Bay Area for many years. She has sat on the Board of Directors of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society and Save San Francisco Bay Association, president and co-founder of CLEAN South Bay, a founding member of Santa Clara County Creeks Coalition, and

a former Board Member of Greenbelt Alliance.

Dr. David Ainlee is internationally recognized for his extensive research experience in community ecology and trophodynamics of marine birds and mammals and has been part of the Point Reyes Bird Observatory since 1972.

Welcome aboard Trish and David! ✨

Creek Currents

Outreach Outings

The Riparian Outreach Specialist, Cyndi Brinkhurst, has been active on Saratoga Creek since July 23, 1996. Cyndi has met with streamside residents to provide information on riparian conservation, increase recognition and understanding of CCRS's goals and activities, recruit new members and volunteers, and act as a critical contact point for community leaders and citizens.

Through Riparian Outreach, 115 people have agreed to support CCRS and become a member. Creek Watcher guides have been distributed to 119 concerned citizens. CCRS's informational brochure and other related information have been welcomed into 727 homes along Saratoga Creek from Highway 280 at Lawrence Expressway to Pierce Road.

Thank you for becoming a member and/or a Creek Watcher. You are very important to CCRS' programs and the local creeks. Thank you to the people who have been reporting incidents that they see, wildlife that they have observed and the people recording rainfall amounts. Please be assured that we receive and use this vital information. Are you interested in collecting rainfall amounts, reporting rare wildlife, or logging wildlife that you see? Give Cyndi a call to get set up.

CCRS co-edits Volunteer Monitor

Have you discovered the national newsletter of citizen-based monitoring, *The Volunteer Monitor* yet? This biannual publication features the many ways citizens are contributing to our knowledge and understanding of water bodies throughout the country. There are great tips on nearly every aspect of volunteer monitoring, and it's lots of fun to see what everyone is up to. The latest issue, entitled *The Wide World of Monitoring* was co-edited by CCRS, and features articles on the Avian Research Program and advanced stream monitoring techniques by Associate Director Mike Rigney. Check it out! To get your free copy of *The Volunteer Monitor* call Chris Fischer at the Station.

You've Got Questions

Many thanks to those of you who have already responded to our special appeal in December! As we had hoped, many of you included excellent questions regarding CCRS and the state of our streams along with your response. We have included just a couple of the questions and our answers here; the next newsletter will include another installment! If you have a question you have not yet had an opportunity to ask, simply jot it down on a postcard or note and we'll do our best to answer it!

How many tiger salamanders are lost each year down storm drains for want of rolled curbs or other mechanisms for escape? Bert Manriquez, Palo Alto

Most California tiger salamander (CTS) populations occur in undeveloped areas where storm drains aren't a problem, but when the range of a population does overlap an urban area, storm drains are a one-way ticket to nowhere for salamanders during their annual breeding migrations. One well known locality is the Lagunita population at Stanford, where over the last five years, CCRS and Stanford biologists have rescued hundreds of CTS from storm drains where they would have perished or at least failed to breed. Stanford is currently formulating plans to install salamander-proof lids on storm drains near the lake.

When conducting creek restoration, how long does it take for your target riparian vegetation to become established? Rosie Dyste, Oakland

The time needed for target riparian vegetation to become established depends on the type of plant (herb, shrub or tree); whether it is being grown from a seed, cutting, or pot; the species; and the conditions on the site. Cuttings from willow trees can be planted where conditions are optimum, closer to the water table, where they establish quickly. Most herbaceous vegetation and shrubs will also establish very quickly, but trees that we associate most with a mature riparian forest may require three to four years of watering, allowing their roots time to grow down to the water table where they can get enough water to survive on their own.

I miss being a fisheries volunteer! Where's everything at and how 's it going? Janelle Johnson, San Jose

We miss being out on creeks, too! Most of the data collection for our current projects have been completed, and the staff is hard at work analyzing the information and preparing reports. We will be back out on San Francisquito Creek this spring. In the meantime we can use help with water chemistry testing, rain gauging, and of course, the ubiquitous office work! ✨

Blackbirds, Cowbirds and Conservation

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This occurs partly due to the cowbirds efficiency at competing against their foster siblings while in the nest. In many cases, if a cowbird young is present in a nest the young of the host all die before fledging. In addition, the clearing of forests, fragmentation and narrowing of riparian zones, and irrigation of deserts has allowed these cowbirds to spread throughout their range to areas where they were previously absent, and where hosts have no previous experience or anti-cowbird strategies. This has caused a great deal of concern throughout our continent.

What effect do cowbirds have on our songbirds? What can we do to save our songbirds, or do we have to do anything at all? These, and similar, questions remain largely unanswered but an increasing amount of data suggests that the answers are not black and white and that habitat preservation may be the key to preserving our songbirds. Cowbirds are a component in the dynamics of songbird populations, but perhaps less so than other factors such as nest predators and habitat fragmentation and degradation, both here and in the tropics. Come to the February 6th talk to learn more about blackbirds, their varied plumages, behaviors, biogeography and to gain a further understanding of cowbirds, what effects they have on other birds, and in particular what makes them such interesting species in their own right. ✨

Volunteering Has Its Rewards



Volunteer Opportunities

Station Maintenance

The Station could use some 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.

Native Planting

Join Elinor Spellman and her restoration team in planting and maintaining native riparian trees and shrubs out here at the station. Give Elinor a call at (408) 2791884.

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.



Become a StreamKeeper

StreamKeeper is doing outreach within the Coyote, San Francisquito and Alamitos Creek Watersheds. If you know a homeowner, business owner, or school teacher who would like StreamKeeper to come out and present our slide show and talk on creek pollution, give Karen or Mark a call at the office.

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) 2629204 if you would like to volunteer days, evenings or weekends.

Volunteer Thank Yous

Cyndi Brinkhurst wants to thank **Diane Kodama**, **Jill Bernhard**, and **Charles Preuss** for volunteering to join her on her Saratoga Outreach Outings. Their support was much appreciated.

Trish Kasper has been a big help entering biological data into the computers for the Community Creek Watch Program, for many, many months. Thanks Trish!

Without such dedicated and talented

volunteers, CCRS staff would be "up a creek".

Donation Thank Yous

Those of you who received our end-of-the-year appeal, may have noticed the circular CCRS stickers in the upper left hand corner of the envelopes. **Vic Monia**, President of MircoClean, donated 10,000 of these beautiful new stickers. Vic also donated several head cleaning kits for computer disc drives and a case of coffee cups made from recycled paper. Vic Monia and MicroClean also made a generous loan to CCRS when we had a cash shortfall. Your generosity gave staff and Board a big morale boost.

Thanks also to **Elise Richey**, **Irene Beardsley** and **Elinor Spellman**, Board Members, for their assistance with the printing of the Streamside Planting Guide.

CCRS need not fear being up a creek without a paddle, thanks to a donation from **Marty Sidor**, one of our banders. Marty donated an almost new seven foot inflatable raft complete with paddles and two life jackets. We're looking forward to testing it on the rivers of Santa Clara County.

Ouch! **Chris Otahal** donated a paper cutter to the office. Our cuts are shaper and more precise, now.

For months we've been asking for computer donations with very little response. Last issue we've asked for computer parts and now we're swamped! Apparently computer cannibalization is in! Thanks to everyone who responded: **Mike Rigney** with a 486-33 Mother Board and various other parts, **Mike Barrett** with a 486-33 computer, **Irene Beardsley** with a 483-36 computer with 20 Bytes of RAM and 800 Megs of disc space, **Byron Ryono** with a 486-33 with keyboard and mouse, and a fax modem, and last but not least, **Joel Tesler** with a 486-dx33 computer with keyboard and mouse, CD ROM, sound drive, video card and modem.

Donations Needed!

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, does 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
paper towels	trowels
clippers	pruning shears and saws
loppers	carvass bags
waders	

Don't throw that old computer chip away, recycle it with a donation to CCRS. Call Neil or Charles at the office.

486 or better motherboards
32 pin RAM
IDE hard drives
VGA Monitors

Transitions

Steve Morris, StreamKeeper Program Associate has left the Station for a new life in Tacoma, Washington. Steve felt he needed to be closer to the mountains and wilderness and a special someone. We will miss Steve's unique talent for bringing in Girl Scout Cookies and unsolicited cash donations whenever he went out to give talks about the creeks and making sure that Karen didn't take her work too seriously.

Mark Agan will be taking Steve's place as the StreamKeeper Associate. Mark just completed his Bachelor of Science degree in Environmental Studies from San Jose State University. While taking classes at SJSU, Mark volunteered with the Community Creek Watch program on the Invertebrate and Vegetation Survey teams and also assisted Elinor Spellman's native plant restoration work here at the Station.

Mike Westphal has been a fixture with CCRS since 1986 when he was a volunteer bird bander. He was hired as the Station's herpetologist in 1993 and it is hard to imagine life here at the Station without him. Mike recently took a job as a Biological Technician with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife in the Ecological Services, Endangered Species Division. Mike will continue to work on the red-legged frog as well as other endangered

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Calendar of Events

Quarterly Thursdays Talks

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

Winter Talk: Blackbirds, Cowbirds and Conservation February 6, 7 to 9 pm

Al Jaramillo, our new Avian Research Associate, will be speaking on the diversity of New World blackbirds and in particular, the group of brood parasitic blackbirds, known as the cowbirds.

Spring Talk: Streamside Plantings May 8, 7 to 9 pm

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

May 10, 1997 International Migratory Bird Day

For the third year in a row, CCRS is joining forces with Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society and the Don Edwards National Wildlife Refuge to celebrate the return of all feathered migrants to our communities. This year San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory will also be joining in the festivities! This event is the very best opportunity you'll have all year to

enjoy the secret wilderness surrounding the little town of Alviso. Bring bicycles to get the most out of the morning! CCRS will be hosting bird walks, monitoring demonstrations and, of course, the ever-popular native plant sale. To reserve your plants ahead of time, please contact Heather Maynard for a list of available plants. To help with planning or "pulling off" the event, please contact Chris Fischer!

May 17, 1997 Santa Clara County-wide Creek Clean-ups

This year our creek clean-up will be held as part of National River Clean-up Week, instead of on Earth Day, so that Santa Clara County can join in to bring national attention to the plight of our rivers. Look in the next issue for the location of CCRS's clean-up site.

Board of Directors

Elinor Spellman, Treasurer
Elsie Richey, Secretary
Craig Edgerton, Member
Dr. Michael Rogers, Member
Dr. Scott Terrill, Member, ARC Advisor
Steve Rottenborn, Member
Meg Caldwell, Member
Irene Beardsley, Member
Trish Mulvey, Member
Dr. David Ainlee, Member

Staff

Neil Pelkey, Station Manager
Heather Maynard, Office Manager
Christopher Otahal, Avian Research Director
Alvaro Jaramillo, Avian Research Associate
Diane Kodama, Avian Research Associate
Chris Fischer, Community Creek Watch Director
Charles Preuss, Technical Coordinator
Jill Bernhard, Program Associate
Cyndi Brinkhurst, Riparian Outreach Specialist
Karen Cotter, StreamKeeper Director, RipariaNews Editor
Mark Agan, StreamKeeper Associate
Rich Seymour, Herpetology Research Associate
Elinor Spellman, Restoration Coordinator (volunteer)
Pam Peterson, Administrative Associate (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.

New Members

Cheryl Abbott
Mark & Linda Allen
John S. Arnold
Yana Arnold
Garth Bacon
Antonea Bikakis
Jerry Brown
Ann Burrell
Pat Bustamonte
John Cane
Stephen & Patricia Coggins
Maureen Corcoran
Douglas Der
Jack & Kathryn Douglas
Jo-Ann Fairbanks
Adora Fisher
William Foley

Michael Guild
Walter Hall
Tony & Linda Hoeber
Stephen Holtzclaw
Byron & Mary Howard
Wen-Chang Hsu
Karl & Shirley Huber
Susan Ivey
David & Naomi Kalmus
Debie Kinsey
Leila Knuist
Janet Larson
Sunny & Fai Fai Lin
Randy & Janet Little
Tricia Lowe
Martha Lundquist
Bill Marshall

Joanne, Michael, & Jessica Martens
Bob McBirney
John McCollum
Kathryn Medeiros
Tim Merrifield
Larry Milstead
T. Charles Moore
Julianna Neale
Teruya Oshidari
Wilys & Betty Peck
Chandra Permaul
Jason Plater
The Quenelle Family
Julie Ray
Paul & Inge Roberts
Richard Sanguini
Thomas Schaefer

Thomas Seccombe
Jean Smith
Christopher & Lynn Store
Michael Sunderland
Terry & Rosemarie Townsend
Roel & Megan Van Kriekan
Michael & Joan Waestefeld
Wend Weisman
David Wetterbolt
Meaghan Wheeler
Christine Wolfe
Stan Wright
Kathryn Young
Lou & Jean Young