

# The Stilt

Spring 2004

SAN FRANCISCO BAY BIRD OBSERVATORY NEWSLETTER

## DIRECTOR'S CORNER

### Birds that died in our sleep

It is a moment I will never forget: every detail of the room, the sounds of the audience around me and even the smell of the upcoming banquet wafting in from the hotel kitchens. It was 1987 and it was a symposium fronted by the International Foundation for the Conservation of Birds, in the very unlikely locale of the San Fernando Valley. The speaker was Jared Diamond. His talk was of the above title, which of course, piqued everyone's curiosity in a big way. It also was a turning point for me that eventually led me to this Observatory and the work that we do.

Dr. Diamond is an ornithologist of world renown, an expert on the birds of New Guinea, who also happens to be a cellular physiologist of world renown. He has since become even more broadly known for his book, *Guns, Germs and Steel*, but in 1987 the topic was birds and Dr. Diamond was one speaker in a sea of afternoon talks.

He began by quoting a passage from an obscure diary by a Swedish explorer, who wakes up to find his companion has died while he was asleep. He wondered, how many species of birds have simply disappeared while we have metaphorically slept?

In the late 80's, the best of our knowledge of endangered birds was compiled in the Red Data Book, a fat paperback that still lives on my bookshelf. Dr. Diamond made particular example of the book's listings for Guam, which included the Guam Rail and Guam Flycatcher, but did not make mention of five or six other species we now knew to be in trouble. Guam's birds, of course, have been decimated by the introduced Brown Tree Snake, but in 1987 the causative links and true extent of the damage was only beginning to dawn. Seven species are now entirely gone and two exist only in captivity. His point was that the Red Data Book was accurate and meaningful as far as it went, but that it couldn't present facts that weren't known. It couldn't tell us what was happening to hundreds of other species of birds while we slept.

This was mind-altering stuff. I knew I wasn't going off to single-handedly save Guam's birds, but began looking around for the equivalent of tree snakes in my own backyard. The issues here are far more complex, if not less lethal: loss of quality habitat, disturbance, environmental contaminants, introduced predators.

We have some data that answers some immediate questions, but the amount we do not know far exceeds what we do know. One must constantly be on the alert for assumptions such as "they've simply moved elsewhere" when habitat is degraded or lost, or that creation of marginal habitat elsewhere, even nearby, somehow lessens the damage of lost habitat. We need to awake to the cumulative effects of the many displacements of one individual or breeding pair. How easy it is to think there are plenty of Burrowing Owls or even California Quail *elsewhere*. But locally one can't fail to notice the quiet vanishing of Belted Kingfisher and Loggerhead Shrike.

*We have some data . . . but the amount we do not know far exceeds what we do know.*



VICKI JENNINGS

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MONICA LUNDY

The San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to the conservation of birds and their habitats through research, monitoring and educational activities.



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# Bay-wide heron and egret atlas of the SF Bay



PHOTO BY CHARLES COSTON

Great Blue Herons, Great Egrets and Double-crested Cormorants nest in the living and dead cottonwood trees at Shadow Cliffs, Alameda County.

**B**ird maps? If you are unfamiliar with other bird atlas projects, the idea may seem strange. The process of mapping out what habitats and areas specific birds are using for breeding or other activities can provide land managers and scientists with an overview of a specific bird: where has it been, where is it now, where might it go? Bird atlases can also define what's going on in our backyard in terms of the urbanization impact and landscape changes. Developing these "maps" is not only a process of finding where the birds are, but also involves detailing what type of land, vegetation, and surroundings the birds are using.

In conjunction with Audubon Canyon Ranch (ACR), SFBBO has embarked on a project to create such an atlas, characterizing and cataloging all known heron and egret rookeries in the Bay. Study species



PHOTO BY CHERYL STRONG

Erica Hertzog taking GPS coordinates at the now largely abandoned multi-species heron rookery. In the 1980's and early 1990's, this was one of the largest rookeries in the South Bay.

include the Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, and Snowy Egret. All known colony sites within the study area will be included in this atlas, including most of the counties within the watershed of the San Francisco estuary. ACR is focusing on the North Bay colonies, while SFBBO is concentrating on the southern portion.

Like many SFBBO projects, this is a collaboration of SFBBO biologists and SFBBO volunteers. Fieldwork was done during the 2003 breeding season by volunteers Charles Coston and Erica Hertzog. They bravely visited all of the sites currently being monitored by SFBBO Colonial Waterbird Program volunteers, along with a few historical sites including Bair Island and Mallard Slough. Currently we have about 24 active heron and egret colonies that we evaluate.

With the help of the local observers, Chuck and Erica recorded landscape characteristics including distances to neighboring colonies, nearest wetland types,

nearby human land uses, and habitat patch size. They also measured tree canopy cover, nest heights, PG&E towers, and tree diameter within the colonies.

SFBBO biologists will compile current and historic colony size and reproductive success measures. Colonial Waterbird Program volunteers have taken data since the early 1980's; thus we have a considerable amount of information on our local herons! All of the field data and colony count data is being compiled into a GIS format for the atlas by ACR intern, Michael Parkes.

Colony site analysis will be combined with annual data describing the history of colony size. With these data compiled together, we can look at the regional status and trends of each species and create a comprehensive summary on heron and egret nesting colonies in the San Francisco Bay area.

*We at SFBBO would like to thank all of the volunteers who assisted in the project. Chuck and Erica spent many hours driving, measur-*



PHOTO BY IAN WALSH

Great Blue Herons have acclimated to life on the salt ponds and use this old hunting club as a nesting site at the Eden Landing Ecological Reserve.

*ing, and counting. Local waterbird volunteers were instrumental in sharing their historical knowledge of the sites and taking Chuck and Erica out into the field. Your hard work will be put to good use and available for all to see! We hope to finish up the heron atlas by the end 2004 and publish it on the web and in hardcopy soon afterwards.*

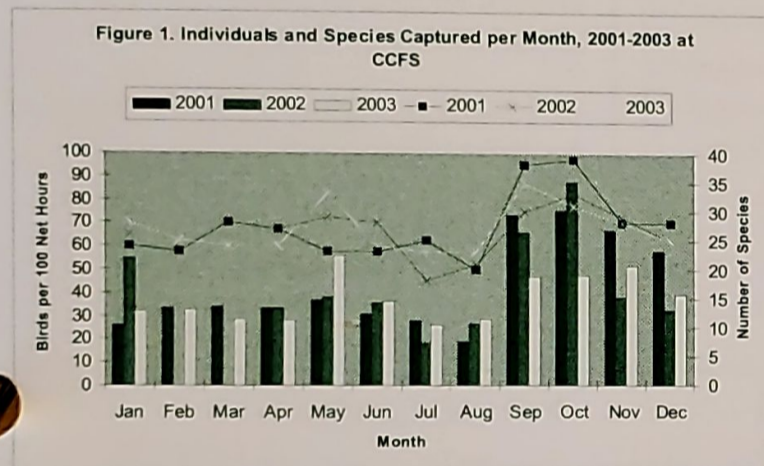
~ Cheryl Strong  
Director,  
Birds of the Baylands Program

# BANDING YEAR IN REVIEW: THE SPRING HIGH AND THE AUTUMN LOW

**A**t CCFS, we finished 2003 having captured 4175 birds, banding 2417 and recapturing 1758 with a total of 66 species. Our volunteer banders and field station assistants dedicated a total of 2916 hours to the operations at CCFS. We operated nets for 143 days.

## THE SPRING HIGH

Looking at the Figure 1, you may notice some interesting trends. In May 2003, we saw a jump in bird capture rate (number of birds per 100 net hours). I looked more closely at the spring data and discovered that 2003 was



an exceptional year for spring migration at CCFS compared to past years. Our top five spring migrants were: **Swainson's Thrush**, **Wilson's Warbler**, **Orange-crowned Warbler**, **Western Flycatcher**, and **Yellow Warbler**. All except the Swainson's Thrush at least doubled their capture rates from the previous three years. These high numbers could be a result of the late rains during May 2003. Bad weather such as heavy rain during migration may cause birds that would normally fly past CCFS to stop and wait until the weather clears.

## THE AUTUMN LOW

Another interesting trend you may notice is during fall migration. Our top six fall migrants were: **Western Flycatcher**, **Willow Flycatcher**, **Orange-crowned Warbler**, **Swainson's Thrush**, **Yellow Warbler**, and **Wilson's Warbler**. For 2003 there was not as large a jump in the number of birds between late summer (August) and fall migration (starting in September), as seen in past years (see Fig. 1). We also noticed that the overall capture rate during fall migration (September and October on Fig. 1) is lower com-

pared to the previous two years. I decided to look at our top six fall migrants by looking at their average capture rates among years.

Capture rates of Willow Flycatchers have been increasing since 2001. We discovered a decline in capture rates for both Yellow Warblers and Wilson's Warblers during fall migration since 2001. However, the overall capture rates for our top six fall migrants did not differ from 2002 to 2003, the years in question. Since our capture rates for the top six fall migrants were similar, I looked at the rest of our neotropical migrants (birds that

migrate between Central and South America to North America) for these two years to see if this would explain the differences between years. No differences existed in overall capture rates for neotropical migrants.

Finally, this led me to examine numbers of migrating birds spending the winter at CCFS. We captured Yellow-rumped

Warblers in noticeably lower numbers during fall migration since 2001, especially those of the Audubon's race. Perhaps their populations are on a decline nationwide, or maybe they simply aren't utilizing CCFS as

they once did. Could it be because of the vegetation? Weather patterns? Or did they have an unsuccessful breeding season in 2003? We will be investigating these questions, and looking to see if the downward trend continues during fall of 2004.

## UNUSUAL VISITORS

We had quite a few birds to note this year. A surprise capture was a **Calliope Hummingbird** that flew into our nets on April 30. We have captured Calliope's before, but none since 1998. We captured a hatching year **Grasshopper Sparrow** on July 20th, which was the 3rd record for CCFS. We also had our 7th record of a **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher** flying into our nets on Oct 26th. We recaptured it again on Dec 3rd and on Jan 11th of 2004. We captured two different **Golden-crowned Kinglets** on separate occasions that were apparently wintering at the field station last winter. This year was a hot year for migrants. We captured eight **MacGillivray's Warblers**, which is the most we've captured since 1998. We also captured three **Nashville Warblers**, which is the most we've captured since 1997. We captured four **Hammond's Flycatchers** during spring migration. We haven't seen this many since 1995!

~Gina Barton

Landbird Biologist

## RECOVERIES OF BANDED BIRDS

These birds were preciously banded at the place and on the date indicated below. Recoveries can be very valuable in telling us about the species.

A **Puget Sound White-crowned Sparrow**, captured on December 7, 2003 at CCFS, was banded as a hatching year bird near Sequim, WA on June 25, 2003.

A **Myrtle Warbler**, banded as an after hatching year bird at CCFS on February 16, 2003 was recaptured near Victoria, British Columbia, Canada on September 28, 2003.

An **American Goldfinch**, banded as a second year male at CCFS on March 26, 2000 was found near Fremont, CA on April 3, 2003.

A **Puget Sound White-crowned Sparrow**, banded as an after hatching year bird at CCFS on October 8, 2000 and was recaptured near Corvallis, Oregon on October 2, 2002, then recaptured at CCFS 18 days later on October 20, 2002!

A **House Finch**, banded as a hatching year bird at CCFS on September 1, 1998 was found near San Jose, CA on November 27, 1999.

A **House Wren**, banded as a hatching year bird at CCFS on October 24, 1998 was recaptured by the Big Sur Ornithology Lab near Big Sur, CA on March 29, 1999.

A **Western Flycatcher**, banded as a hatching year bird at CCFS on August 7, 1997 was recaptured 12 days later by the Big Sur Ornithology Lab near Big Sur, CA on August 19, 1997.



Shock and Awe! Top Fundraiser: Bonnie Bedford White with the coveted prize letter for Discovery Voyages.



Fall Challenge Emcee Jennifer Krauel takes pleasure in bestowing great prizes on great Fall Challenge competitors at our November Annual Meeting



Member of the \$500+ Club, Karen Demello enjoys receiving her prize.



The Refugees get their accomplishment enscribed on the new perpetual CFC trophy: Francis Toldi, Mike Rogers, and Mike Mammoser (not pictured, Al DeMartini)



SFBBO was honored to have City of San Jose Councilman Chuck Reed attend our November Annual Meeting.

# Thanks to our California Fall Challenge

## 7th Annual Event Blows the Doors

It was another year of "best ever" in the annals of SFBBO's California Fall Challenge! We are pleased to announce the CFC's best ever year for total funds raised at nearly \$30,000! There are still a few pledges out there to be collected so we will go just a bit higher.

The Fall Challenge success owes credit to a whole host of supporters. Those who chased down both

birds and sponsors, those who led teams to find those birds, those who sponsored those chasers, ALL deserve a big round of applause!

Rookie CFC birder Bonnie Bedford-White took the shock-and-awe award for outstanding fundraising effort in the 2003 Challenge. With an amazing total of \$6851, Bonnie was far out in front of the pack on the race for prized Alaska trip aboard Discovery Voyages.

And finally please join us in congratulating the 2003 California Fall Challenge Committee who spent many hours working together to bring you this "best ever" CFC.

### 2003 CFC COMMITTEE

Jan Hintermeister, <i>Chair</i>	Mike Mammoser
Gerry Ellis	Janet Hanson
Chris Gill	Sharon Miyako
Chris Illes	
Jennifer Krauel	Photos by Chris Illes
	Web genius: Bryan Dias

### 2003 CFC GUIDED TEAM LEADERS

Alvaro Jaramillo	Ed Pandolfino
Sharon Miyako	Robin W. Smith
Mike Rogers	Francis Toldi

### HIGHEST PERCENTAGE OF COUNTY LIST

1	The Refugees	Francis Toldi, Mike Mammoser, Mike Rogers, Al DeMartini	Merced	129/211	0.6114
2	Marathoners	Scott Terrill, Steve Rovell, Mike Rogers	Monterey	168/292	0.5753
3	Solano Species Seekers	Robin Leong	Solano	134/239	0.5607
4	Little Big Day	Francis Toldi, Bonnie Bedford-White; Mary Wisnewski; Bill Walker; Larry Manning	San Mateo	132/266	0.4962

### MOST SPECIES SEEN IN A SINGLE COUNTY

Marathoners Scott Terrill, Steve Rovell, Mike Rogers Monterey 168 species

# Change Volunteers

## 's Off

### OVERALL - Most Money Raised

Bonnie Bedford-White	6,851
Mike Mammoser	3,240
Sandy Moore	1,652
Larry Manning	1,617
Tom Stewart	1,149

### STAFF - Most Money Raised

Sherry Hudson	3,153
Janet Hanson	2,595
Cheryl Strong	1,450
Gina Barton	1,348
Sharon Miyako	557

### MOST SPONSORS

Bonnie Bedford-White	114
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### HIGHEST PERCENTAGE OF COUNTY LIST

Refugees/Merced	61.14%
Marathoners/Monterey	57.53%
Species Seekers/Solano	56.07%
Little Big Day/San Mateo	49.62%

### MOST SPECIES

Marathoners/Monterey	168
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### BEST TRIP REPORT

Francis Toldi – Merced

### \$500 Plus Club

Bonnie Bedford-White	6,851
Mike Mammoser	3,240
Sherry Hudson	3,153
Janet Hanson	2,595
Sandy Moore	1,652
Larry Manning	1,617
Cheryl Strong	1,450
Gina Barton	1,388
Tom Stewart	1,149
Jan Hintermeister	1,015
R.J. Adams	766
Karen DeMello	695
Sharon Miyako	557

## A FALL CHALLENGE SUCCESS STORY

Hello, my name is Sharon Miyako, and I'm a Fall Challenge success story. Nope, I didn't come close to attaining a county record. Nope, didn't win the Alaska cruise either. Nope, I'm not an expert birder who can confidently post on the south bay birders list-serv. And yes, there is really a success story here somewhere.

Birding self-esteem: I don't have much of it. As a result, when someone asked me to consider joining a Fall Challenge team a few years ago, my response was one of, well, terror. No way, no how, would I join a Fall Challenge team, because I would only drag my teammates down.

Years passed, and I found myself working for SFBBO. Now I felt obligated to join the Fall Challenge, even with my ever plummeting birding self-esteem. I had hoped to join in with other co-workers, but the dates did not fit.

It seemed the only other alternative was to lead my own team. Shudder. So after finding two great friends who were willing to come along on the Big Day of Birding, I set out to start the second part of the Fall Challenge that terrified me: asking for sponsorship.

This is where the story changes.

After reading all the advice on the Fall Challenge website, I wrote my letter, distributing it to virtually everyone I know. I say virtually everyone as I left out a graduate student friend because, well, she was a graduate student.

I was amazed at the response I received. Friends and family were excited to sponsor me. Even a friend who had moved to New Mexico wrote back promising a check in the mail. And that graduate student friend? She heard about the Fall Challenge, and demanded that she receive a letter, which was followed by sponsorship.

My fundraising progressed painlessly, and fairly successfully. But what about the Big Day?

Our team groggily met in Alviso at 8am; late for birders, but early for us. Armed with muffins and field guides, we set out to find the birds. I would venture to say that our entire team suffers from low birding self-esteem. And yet, we repeatedly found ourselves successfully identifying bird after bird. Our list grew throughout the day. Of course, our list did take a break while we ate lunch, happily consuming Mexican food and chatting. At that point, all of my fears for the day were forgotten.

We chose to stop at 4pm. We happily gazed at a list totaling out at just over sixty birds. We were not, by any stretch, competing in the Fall Challenge. However, competition wasn't on our minds when we set out that day. Every bird on that list, we could claim as our own in identification. Our familiarity and comfort with field guides had increased throughout the day. We had found great conversation amongst the three of us. And of course, we had a great lunch. The added bonus of the day: the money we raised, competitive in the Fall Challenge or not, would directly support the research and education at SFBBO. We did all that, just by having fun.

I discovered that one thing ultimately lead me through the Fall Challenge process. No, it wasn't my guilt and obligation as an employee to participate. It was my passion for birds. I may not know their names, but I love watching their behavior, watching them interact with each other and the habitat around them. My friends and family are very aware of my bird passion, as they listen to random avian facts all the time. It was that sincere interest that made it simple and natural for them to sponsor and support me. It was my interest in birds that made the Big Day fun, rather than frustrating.

The 2003 Fall Challenge is over, but 2004 is here and fall will approach swifter than you think. This article is a self-help piece for all of my fellow low birding self-esteem people out there. Even if your birding skills are at the beginning stages, you can join the Fall Challenge and have fun doing it. Need a word of encouragement? E-mail me, and we can talk. After my 2003 Fall Challenge experience, I want to see more birders like myself as well as the absolutely beginning birders out there with me when September 2004 rolls around.

Hello, my name is Sharon Miyako, and I'm a Fall Challenge success story...and you can be too.

*Thank you to my Fall Challenge team Bridget Hoffnan and Sandy Spakoff for making the day such a success.*

*Watch for ways you can participate in the next California Fall Challenge by joining an expert guided walk for your big day, a beginning birdwatching walk, or by forming your own team.*



November Open House: A crowd of SFBBO Members takes in a guided tour of the waterbird pond north of the Coyote Creek banding station.



**7th Annual  
California Fall Challenge  
2003 Prize Sponsors**

**PEREGRINE FALCON PRIZE SPONSORS**

*Donating prizes with a minimum value of \$500*

Discovery Voyages  
Leica Inc.

Wild Bird Center - Los Gatos

**OSPREY PRIZE SPONSORS**

*Donating prizes with a minimum value of \$100*

Cornell Ornithology Laboratory  
Guglielmo Wineries  
Scott J. Norton Wildlife Photography  
Union Square Hotel Company

**MERLIN PRIZE SPONSORS**

*Donating prizes with a minimum value of \$25*

Bell Plaza Chiropractic  
Camera Cinemas  
Gerry Ellis  
Starbucks Coffee, Milpitas  
Vicki Silvas-Young  
Willow Glen Books

**MY LAST TERN (OF EVENTS)**

*Continued from page 8*

the Observatory and pleasure to have a hand in developing the future direction of SFBBO. Mostly, it's been a real pleasure to meet and work with all the wonderful folks involved with this great organization. I hope that you feel about it like I do, and like myself, stay (or get) involved with SFBBO!

**WRITER'S NOTE:** I will be working at the Reef Environmental Education Foundation in Key Largo, Florida and can be reached through their website at [www.reef.org](http://www.reef.org). Take care!

~Bryan Dias

*Director of & Education*

*Bryan brought a variety of talents and visions to SFBBO. His innovations helped unify SFBBO's "public face" through the newsletter, e-newsletter, and website, amongst many other accomplishments. Many people don't know that he is also a professional diving instructor with years of experience and knowledge that will serve him well in his new position with R.E.E.F. in Key West. We are really sad to see him go but we wish him all the best forever. The ecosystem of the Keys has a brighter future with Bryan on board!*

**Birds that died  
in our sleep**

*Continued from page 1*

A few years ago, I met Dr. Diamond again, at of all places, on a cold foggy morning on a Palo Alto playground. His twin sons were climbing on the high bars, while my kids commandeered the swings. I told him about how his talk had affected me. And I told him about SFBBO and how proud I was of our purpose and of the people who support our work. We talked about the best parts of science, the freedom to look and report entirely objectively on what we see, and wherever we are in the world, to be awake to the changes around us.

~ Janet Hanson  
Executive Director, SFBBO

**WISH LIST**

**FOR OUTREACH AND EDUCATION**

- Lumber suitable for a deck
  - Binoculars
- Powerpoint projector
  - Slide scanner

**FOR SCIENCE**

- Subscriptions to any of our top ten journals
  - An outboard, 25hp or 15hp 4-stroke
  - Fishing vests with multiple pockets
- Frequent flyer miles for conference travel

**FOR ALL STAFF**

- Ergonomic chairs
- Computer desks
- Color laserjet or high-quality inkjet printer

# CALIFORNIA FALL CHALLENGE 2003

We are grateful to the following sponsors of this year's Fall Challenge. In addition, we welcome some of these great folks as new members of SFBBO.

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Board meetings are held monthly and are open to the Membership. Call the Observatory for dates and times.

## MY LAST TERN (OF EVENTS)

Well, it is with a bittersweet heart that I tell you this will be the last time I am able to bring you my version of the "Tern of Events." After nearly two terrific years with SFBBO, I have been afforded a wonderful opportunity in Florida (more on that later.) One thing that I can tell you is that the Outreach and Education programs will continue and will do so largely in the capable hands of Education Specialist, Sharon Miyako. Sharon brings tons of experience in local environmental education, interpretation and outreach from her stint at the Don Edwards SF Bay National Wildlife Refuge's Environmental Education Center.

Some may wonder why I make such a fuss about maintaining outreach, of which education programs are a big part, just as are newsletters, e-news, participation in International Migratory Bird Day, etc. There are numerous reasons, but one of the most important is the fact that SFBBO exists in very sophisticated environment - and I am not talking about the birds! Like the private sector found here locally, the non-profit sector is very "cutting edge" in many ways.

The numerous stakeholders SFBBO encounters through our work, such other non-profits, government and pseudo-government agencies, engaged citizens, as well as private sector groups, operate in what are very often complex relationships. Though these opportunities are rarely found elsewhere, one might point out that being unique is not necessarily cutting edge - especially if it's just more "unique" bureaucracy! Fair enough, and though I think it can easily be argued that that's not entirely true, this not where I want to illustrate the "cutting edge."

By virtue of living in the SF Bay Area, we are exposed to the realities of a pretty fast-paced business world - some of us for forty (or should I say, for seventy hours) a week! And though often one of the main reasons for getting involved with a favorite local non-profit like SFBBO is to do something constructive, fulfilling or altruistic outside of one's professional life, it seems to me that it's impossible to separate the two entirely. That's where "cutting edge" can come in - many people expect, either consciously or subconsciously, to see the non-profit of choice reflect their thinking.

Clearly, this is true of the mission or purpose of the organization, that is to say, "the cause" the group's work involves. But also, I think, in the how

the organization works - how one can get involved or how one can go about donating money, for example. Corporate sponsored volunteer events or Earth Day festivals are common in this part of the world. Further, local community foundations that provide support, traditionally in the form of grants, are now offering different ways for donors to give support and for organizations to receive it such as through "donor advised funds," donating stock, and even opportunities for donors to get together in a social setting to discuss the allocation of the grant funds into which they all paid a hefty sum in order to be a part of this process. Sounds straight out of Silicon Valley doesn't it?

For the local non-profit, this can have an effect on the reality of the organization. The T3 lines that every high-tech office has may not be found in the non-profit's office. But that's how business is done around here and non-profits are in business, too. That's why outreach is critical on many levels for SFBBO and other local organizations like it. Attracting those corporate volunteers, participating in Earth Day events, and reaching out for non-cash donations all require concerted efforts on the part of a non-profit. Like any business, SFBBO has to "keep up with the Joneses" in order to stick around and stay in business. We have to get the word out, create new and innovative ways for folks to get involved with the organization, and we have to provide various means for individuals to help support the organization financially.

We've made some good strides with our website, our e-newsletter, and the newsletter. We've been able to make numerous media appearances in print and on TV to help get the word out and we've been able to create some new ways for folks to volunteer such as with outreach and docent volunteer training. We've built a solid foundation for education at SFBBO such as our bird banding demonstration program at CCFS and we've created some new ways to bring in financial support, such as through our new Corporate Sponsorship program. But these things are just the beginning - outreach, especially here in the SF Bay Area, is an ever-changing process that's often "sink or swim" - you can't rest on your laurels!

SFBBO's outreach and future will be in good hands with Sharon, the rest of the staff, and the terrific members and volunteers - like many of you - who keep things moving forward. It has been a wonderful two years at

*Continued on page 6*



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