Our Mission

The Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society promotes the enjoyment, understanding, and protection of birds and other wildlife by engaging people of all ages in birding, education, and conservation.

Dear Friends,

Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society is at a remarkable place in its history. For 95 years, the Chapter has faithfully pursued its three-pillared mission with a small staff and the help of an incredible team of dedicated volunteers. At no other time in its history has that been more true than it is today.

Our membership is growing steadily and our financial situation has improved to the point where we can now breathe and make a few plans. Diane Hart, after serving a full term of three spectacular years as Board President, has stepped aside from that role but leaves behind a legacy which Barry Langdon-Lassagne now continues. He and Matthew Dodder, the Executive Director, have proven they work well together and share many of the same bold ideas. Neither one of them shies from questioning assumptions or exploring new ideas. Together they hope to grow our Chapter and its relevance, in part, by engaging with other organizations such as Saved By Nature and Latino Outdoors to better serve and learn from ALL members of our community.

And then, the coronavirus. Normal operations were disrupted and had to be completely reimagined. The Birdathon, scores of field trips, our busy calendar of class visits, the Nature Shop—nothing was untouched by the widespread need for change. SCVAS embraced the dark unfamiliar however, and learned to bend it toward some light. From our Education and Field Trips to our Outreach and Development committees, our volunteers have worked tirelessly to rethink how we do things—how to reach new audiences—but more, how we could improve the Chapter’s offerings. We found an amazing pool of creative thinking from which sprang a fountain of new ideas like “distributed Birdathon teams”, “virtual field trips”, “Zoom Speakers” and our very own YouTube channel overflowing with exciting video content for people to engage with. We also explored rebuilding our school programs so they will be effective with or without in-person instruction. It seems we are socially distancing only in the physical sense—we are still very much together!

We are more optimistic now, despite the disruption—despite everything. It seems SCVAS excels under pressure, and for that we are grateful to all of you—our donors, volunteers, and staff. Thank you everyone for the best possible year in this strangest of years.

Matthew Dodder
Executive Director

Barry Langdon-Lassagne
President of the Board
Our History

On the evening of January 8, 1925 a group of forty-five or so people “interested in the preservation and protection of bird life” gathered at the Saratoga Inn and began the creation of a local Audubon Society.

In our earliest years we were concerned about “the growing scarcity of the Condor and the Pelican” and signed a petition to protect them. We organized field trips and met regularly. In a 1927 meeting, we debated “Are English Sparrows more Harmful than Beneficial?” In a meeting in 1928 it was reported that “Palo Alto owned a tract of marshland suitable for a bird sanctuary,” which lead to us to work with local governments, corporations, the Fish & Game Commission, the Sierra Club and other local Audubon Societies to push for the creation of a wildlife refuge in our bay. In 1929 we published our first newsletter, called The Wren-Tit, which was filled with natural history articles, field trip reports and meeting minutes. We also started the San Jose Christmas Bird Count in 1929.

Over the years, the chapter slowly expanded to over 100 members. We conducted more frequent field trips, created a second Christmas Bird Count in Palo Alto in 1949, renamed the newsletter The Avocet in 1954, engaged in more conservation projects and met in various locations throughout the south bay such as San Jose State College, the lodge at Alum Rock and the Palo Alto Junior Museum.

The issues around conservation of wild lands and protection of threatened bird species that brought us together 95 years ago sound so familiar because we continue to tackle them today. We now have four Christmas Bird Counts, hundreds of field trips per year, education programs that reach thousands of schoolchildren and a long-term lease with the City of Cupertino to use the historic McClellan Ranch as our headquarters. We’re more dedicated than ever to environmental advocacy, supported by staff and volunteers. We’ve grown to 1,175 members. As we approach our hundredth anniversary, those core values, interests and causes upon which we were founded continue, and we will strive to bring appreciation and concern for birds and their habitats to a wider community and to new generations. We are so grateful for the support of our members and donors and look forward to the work ahead.

For more of our history and the archive of our newsletters going back to 1929, visit scvas.org/the-avocet-archive.


Diversity is a Strength

Just as biodiversity strengthens natural systems, a diverse membership strengthens our efforts to protect birds and their habitats. We are committed to accept all ethnicities, lifestyles and gender identities among our staff, members, donors and partners. We ask you to join us in building a more inclusive community.
For more than 30 years, the Wetlands Discovery Program has been our signature educational offering. In that time, it has introduced an estimated 24,000 school children to the wonders of our local wetland habitat and wildlife, and inspired them to take an active role in conservation. From the classroom to the field, the SCVAS Ed Program, led by Carolyn Knight and her team of passionate volunteer educators, has worked to share its knowledge of our flora and fauna with students throughout the county. The Wetlands Discovery Program has always been free of charge for Title 1 schools, and our catalog of programs and staggered fee schedule have made additional programs accessible to other underserved schools as well. Additionally, we are working to create bilingual materials for all our programs to continue this trend. Yes, the pandemic put a halt to our in-class work, and many field trips were cancelled. Carolyn and the Ed Committee have used the open schedule to develop materials for effective distance learning. SCVAS is ready to take on more classrooms both in-person and on-screen.

- “The Wetlands Discovery Program is a unique experience. Children learn about our local environment and wildlife habitats, how human activity impacts these natural systems and what they can do in the present and future to better take care of our local natural systems—the best kinds of learning experiences for kids.”
  
  Lawrence Volpe
  6th grade teacher
  Lairon College Prep

- “I joined three years ago and the experience has been wonderful. I only wish I could do more! The people in this group have an amazing amount of knowledge to share.”
  
  Tess Stahl
  Volunteer at SCVAS

- “This was the most awesome field trip in the world! There were so so so MANY different types of birds!! ... The sparrows were the smallest and cutest birds I have ever seen in my whole life!”
  
  Uipanchi, 4th grade student, Ponderosa Elementary

### Education Volunteers
(Includes both EdCom and WDP)

- Dwight Agan
- Mike Arroyo
- Jack Carter
- Craige Edgerton
- Allison Fetty
- Elaine Gould
- Diane Hart
- Linda Johnson
- Genny Kamrasi
- Ginger Langston-Lassagne
- Garrett Lau
- Jim Lakowicz
- Joan Loney
- Kira McKeever
- Jim Melkert
- Barbara Miller
- Mary Ann Robertson
- Allen Roper
- Liz Salzer

### Programs

- Wetlands Discovery
- Bird ID & Adaptation
- Bird Beak Investigators
- Bird Walks
- Nest Box Building
- Owl Pellet Dissection
- Owls of Santa Clara County
- Adult Education Presentations

NOTE: We are working on making all our programs bilingual and effective for distance learning and in-person instruction.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>EAC volunteers (Environmental Action Committee)</th>
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<td>advocacy letters</td>
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**Conservation our passion to action**

On issues ranging from urban parks to wide open spaces, from individual birds and their nests to entire bird populations, from endangered species to common ones, our Environmental Advocate Shani Kleinhaus’s voice has been strong and effective. With the 20 dedicated members of SCVAS’s Environmental Action Committee (EAC), Shani has worked on planning processes and bird conservation efforts in almost every city and jurisdiction in our County.

With patience, perseverance, and a sharp focus on the welfare of birds and wildlife, we continue to promote a sustainable future that does not leave birds and nature behind. Last year we participated in 50 public meetings and composed or collaborated on 63 Advocacy letters, 12 comment letters on California Environmental Quality Act reviews and eight letters in support of state and federal legislation that is critical to birds, birders, parks and nature education programs. These efforts resulted in increased awareness and protection of birds and their habitats, leading to better policies, improved development of projects and master plans, and more thoughtful design of urban landscapes, parks and open space by such government agencies as:

- Santa Clara County,
- Santa Clara Valley Water District,
- Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority,
- Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District,
- the cities of San Jose, Cupertino, Palo Alto, Mountain View, Sunnyvale, Campbell, Los Altos, Saratoga and Morgan Hill.

We have continued to work with companies to promote nature and California native plantings on their campuses, including the Facebook Green Roof and the urban Egret and Heron rookery on Google’s Mountain View campus.

To further leverage our influence, we collaborated with a constellation of environmental groups and research institutions to preserve critical open space areas in the region. Already, almost 1,000 acres have been purchased for permanent protection in Coyote Valley. We are working there and elsewhere to regenerate habitat for Burrowing Owls and Tricolored Blackbirds, among other threatened species.

We are actively seeking a solution to the massive mortality of Pacific Newts as they cross a road during their annual migration to and from Lexington Reservoir. And we are continuing to promote bird-safe building design guidelines in cities throughout Santa Clara County and beyond.

Our Environmental Action Committee and Shani’s advocacy on behalf of birds and nature continue to inspire businesses, government agencies, and cities to make better decisions affecting all of us who call the Santa Clara Valley home.

**Egret Nesting Colony on Google Campus**

*Photo: Matthew Dodder*

**Facebook Green Roof**

*Photo: Matthew Dodder*
“We saw the Egret Nesting Colony on the Google Campus. For the first time, I saw the Snowy and Great Egrets nesting in the trees and taking care of their cute babies. After that experience, I was hooked.”  Ruchi Verma Gupta

“We enjoy going into the field with birders of all levels. Regardless of experience, each individual offers a learning experience for us. Our reward comes from getting others excited about the beauty and biology of birds.”  Dave and Floy Zittin

“The Santa Clara Valley is such a special place. It is home to so many plants and animals that are absolutely fascinating and ecologically amazing! I love leading field trips. It gives me a chance to help others discover something new in our wonderful home: a new favorite trail, a new bird, a new appreciation for a common species, and ultimately a passion for conserving the open spaces of Santa Clara Valley.”  Dani Christensen

On its surface, birding is a simple concept—go outside, and look at the birds around you. If, on the other hand, you are sheltering in place during the pandemic, you can look through your window at the birds in your yard. Record your sightings if you wish and challenge yourself to find more species. That’s it. Perhaps now more than ever though, we are realizing that birding is not necessarily a solitary activity, and it is far from a simple concept. Eve Meier and our incredible volunteer Field Trip Leaders are each educators and advocates in their own right. As such, the birding arm of SCVAS, one of the three pillars of our mission, is a perfect hybrid of the other two. Covid, as expected, changed everything. We quickly generated virtual birding tours on YouTube, live broadcasts on Facebook, and a selection of “Birding Locations,” which guided birders to local hotspots where they could observe social distancing while birding at their own pace.

When field trips resume again, SCVAS will continue to explore these new online opportunities to share our love of nature with anyone who prefers, or is unable, to join in person.

Field Trip Volunteers

Julie Amato  Mike Ambrose  Jay Anderson  Raminder Bajwa  Dan Blich  Adam Burnett  Robin Chen  Danielle Christensen  Laura Coastney  Ritu Dutta  Ali Elser  Tom Greer  Michael Hawk  Diane Hart  Ann Hapanstal  Rick Harder  Bob Hirt  Kirsten Holmgren  Chris Johnson  Jim Johnson  Clay Kempf

Photo: Dave Zittin

Photo: Eve Meier

Photo: Ed Reed

Field Trips 2019-2020

489 people enjoyed our field trips (prior to COVID-19 and SIP)

40+ leaders  50+ locations

1,700 RSVPs  121 events
SCVAS ended the 2019/2020 fiscal year, which ended May 31, in the black despite the significant challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. More remarkable, in April we were able to conduct a very successful socially-distanced Birdathon fundraiser while sheltering in place, raising over $45,000 and exceeding our budget estimates and prior year numbers. Our contributions rose as well, indicating that our members, donors and community are pleased with our programs, conservation activities and member services. Our ratio of program expenditures to total spending is nearly 80 percent, while our fundraising expenses remain low at 10 percent. Our investment portfolio increased from 2019 to 2020 by nearly 10 percent despite the economic downturn early this year. Our conservative investment policy certainly has helped us in these tough times. We look forward to 2021 with cautious optimism, lots of energy, and a very sound Balance Sheet.

The condensed financial statements listed here are a representation of the full set of financial statements which can be found at scvas.org/financial.

Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society is headquartered in Cupertino, CA, has an EIN of 94-6081420, and is a 501(c)(3) organization. Donations may qualify as a charitable deduction for federal income tax purposes. Consult with your tax advisers or the IRS to determine whether your contribution is deductible. SCVAS is classified by the IRS as a Charitable Organization, with a ruling year of 1977.

(Source: IRS Business Master File and Form 990)
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