

The QUAIL

Mt Diablo Audubon Society
P.O. Box 53, Walnut Creek, CA
94597-0053
www.diabloaudubon.com

March 2003

Vol. 49, No. 6

Next Deadline: March 8

Beautiful, Bountiful Buteos To Enliven March Meeting

“As a scientist, I have learned most profoundly that science does not always have the capacity to address some of life’s most important wonders. I find solace in the knowledge that I am not simply a scientist. I cannot dismiss the very personal nature of my interactions with these incredibly lovely beings. I cannot, and will not, put aside what my senses tell me is rare and wonderful. How ironic that it is from being in the presence of another species that I have learned how to be more ‘human.’”—Toni Frohoff

At our March general meeting, two special people from Native Bird Connections, Jenny Papka and Marilyn Ellis, will provide us more insight into the beautiful, bountiful buteos in our midst. There will be live buteos on hand to enhance the boisterous banter. Jenny Papka and Marilyn Ellis will dispel the

Book Sale at March Meeting

The March general meeting will feature a sale of books from the collection of Florence Bennett. The books include field guides past and present, sight guides, and other volumes, such as *The Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds* by John K. Terres. All proceeds will be used as an additional source of funding for the Chapter. Our appreciation for their book donation go to Donna and Janice, Florence’s sisters.

Meeting Schedule

The next MDAS general meeting will be **Thursday, March 6**, in the Camellia Room of The Gardens at Heather Farm, 1540 Marchbanks Dr., Walnut Creek (see map on p. 8).

6:30 p.m.—Doors open

7 p.m.—Birding Information

7:25 p.m.—Business meeting

7:40 p.m.—Social time, refreshments and door prize drawing

8:05 p.m.—Program

Remember your cup! We’re serving Natural Origins Tea too!

idea that “if you’ve seen one raptor, you’ve seen them all,” and guarantee that these wondrous raptors will lift your spirits and your appreciation.

Buteos make up the largest population of raptors that we see in the wild. Who are they? What are they to us? Why should we care about them? Raptors have an ancient history both biologically and culturally. If we broaden our knowledge to incorporate what they meant in our cultural “mythology,” we would value the privilege of having them within our sight even more. For instance, the Pueblos see the Red-tailed Hawk as an eagle in cultural status.

During this time of leafless landscape, raptors have a harder time blending in and disappearing from our eyes. Because of their migratory patterns and spectacular courtship displays, we have an opportunity in February to April to see buteos against stark backdrops. Jenny and Marilyn will try to give you insight and tips for being able to catch this action.

We all know the names of the buteos that make their home with us in this county, but because science has just begun to scratch the surface of what we know biologically about birds, experts still have a hard time keeping up with

classification. What will a bird be called this year? Will it be a “White-tailed Kite” or a “Black-shouldered Kite”? Identification becomes more difficult when there seem to be more exceptions than rules.

The really wonderful observations of birds as you get past names and identification is their behavior.

Bird behavior can make the most jaded among us get a jolt of wonder.

Jenny and Marilyn have a family of buteos in their care, and they will offer us insight into what these birds are and will share glimpses of personality with you. They will also have some great artifacts, posters, and information as well to share.

Diana Granados of Native Bird Connection will join Jenny and Marilyn for the **Birding Information** portion of the program.



Connections

One Step Forward

Despite the state's budget woes, the state Wildlife Conservation Board plans to spend \$74 million to help buy 16,500 acres of salt ponds along the San Francisco Bay. This land, known as the Cargill Salt Ponds, will be turned into wetlands. Total cost of the project will be shared by the state, the federal government, and several private foundations. Most of the land, which could take decades to restore, will become part of the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge. The lands will provide much needed habitat for the California Clapper Rail and the Salt Marsh Harvest Mouse.

One Step Back

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has denied endangered species status to the California Spotted Owl. Like its cousins, the Northern and Mexican Spotted Owls, the California Spotted Owl lives in old-growth forests that have been decimated by over a century of logging, roadbuilding, and development. Found throughout the Sierra Nevada and the southern coast ranges, the California Spotted Owl has been declining by as much as 10% annually throughout the 1990's, placing it in serious danger of extinction.

In the year 2000, USFWS had issued positive 90-day finding that "presented substantial information," indicating listing of the species may be warranted. However, USFWS has now basically changed course. With the Bush administration planning to increase logging in national forests, California Spotted Owl habitat will be further decimated.

Feds to Review Spotted Owl, Murrelet Protections

This USFWS decision not to list the California Spotted Owl follows on the heels of a January agreement between the timber industry and the federal government that could overturn protections for Northern Spotted Owls and Marbled Murrelets in the Pacific Northwest. Conservation groups, who have intervened in lawsuits challenging the

protected status of the rare birds, say they were excluded from the settlement talks.

"It was a knock down, drag out fight to get protections for owls, murrelets, and our ancient forests, and now the Bush Administration is giving away special deals right and left," said Kristen Boyles, an attorney with Earthjustice. "Apparently the administration no longer defends environmental lawsuits brought by its friends in the timber industry."

Represented by Earthjustice, the groups in the court cases are Audubon Society of Portland, Seattle Audubon Society, Biodiversity Northwest, Environmental Protection Information Center, Gifford Pinchot Task Force, Northwest Ecosystem Alliance, Oregon Natural Resources Council, Sierra Club, and The Wilderness Society. (Environmental News Service, 1/16/2003)

Doomed Po'ouli Is Three Birds Away from Extinction

In an attempt to save the vanishing Po'ouli, a Hawaiian songbird, biologists are attempting to catch the only three remaining birds known to exist for a captive breeding project.

The stocky little bird with a black mask is part of the Hawaiian honeycreeper family, but it is so unique that it occupies its own genus. It is the only Hawaiian forest bird to rely on native tree snails as its food.

Despite extensive searches, only three birds—a male and two females—have been found in recent years, and all are in separate home ranges. Last year, biologists moved one of the females into remaining male's territory, but no nesting was observed.

Now state and federal biologists agree that bringing the birds into captivity offers the best remaining opportunity to establish a breeding pair.

"Saving the Po'ouli is without a doubt a tremendous challenge," said Paul Henson, field supervisor for the USFWS. "We have no guarantees we can save the species, but we have to try."

"We had hope these birds could be recovered in the wild," one biologist commented. "But now we're running out of time, and we're committed to management measures to prevent their extinction."

The elusive Po'ouli was not discovered by modern scientists until 1973, when a group of University of Hawaii students conducting research on the east slope of Haleakala sighted a bird they had never seen before. It was named Po'ouli, which means black head in Hawaiian. It has a quiet song "like dripping water" according to biologists, making it much more difficult to hear and find in the forest.

The Quail

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Field Trip Reports

Richmond Shoreline, Wednesday,

October 2—Four birders enjoyed a walk along the Bay on a clear fall day. Yellow-rumped Warblers and Golden-Crowned Sparrows had arrived for the winter. A young Black-crowned Night Heron sat very close to the trail, providing an excellent look. A total of 34 species were seen.—*Elizabeth Dickey*

Lafayette Reservoir, Wednesday, October 16

—The busy trail around the lake provided three birders with a good mixture of land and water birds. An early Red-breasted Sapsucker was the most interesting of the 46 species seen or heard.—*Elizabeth Dickey*

Wildcat Gorge, Thursday, October 24

—Five birders hiked up the trail that goes along the far side of Lake Anza. The Golden-crowned Kinglets and Varied Thrushes were interesting, but the highlight of the trip was the Winter Wren popping in and out of the ivy groundcover and remaining visible long enough for everyone to have good looks. A total of 29 species were seen or heard.—*Elizabeth Dickey*

Big Break, Thursday, October 31—Ten birders spent a sunny morning along this Delta trail. Best sighting was the four Caspian Terns, still in almost full alternate plumage, among a large group of gulls. A large flock of Tree Swallows was circling about. A total of 38 species were seen or heard.—*Elizabeth Dickey*

Baylands, Saturday, November 2—Four birders spent the day along the southwestern shore of the Bay. The tide was not high enough to bring out the rails, but a large variety of waterbirds and waders were present, both at Baylands and at Charleston Slough. We saw 56 species.—*Elizabeth Dickey*

Arrowhead, Thursday, November 7—Rain, no trip.—*Elizabeth Dickey*

San Francisco Bay Refuge, Wednesday, November 13—On this quiet day, five birders saw only 30 species.—*Elizabeth Dickey*

Mt. View Sanitary District, Thursday, November 21—The weather was warm, but very hazy. Twelve birders visited the sanitary ponds and the southern end of McNabney Marsh. As usual, there was a Green Heron at the ponds, and also a group of white Pelicans in the Marsh. Some of our group drove around to the newly opened Waterbird Preserve for lunch. A total of 53 species were seen or heard.—*Elizabeth Dickey*

Hidden Lakes Park, Thursday, December 5—It was a very hazy, overcast day; Robins, Cedar Waxwings and American Goldfinches were feeding on catkins and berries. We had a good look at a Lark Sparrow. In two and a half hours four birders saw 33 species.—*Elizabeth Dickey*

Putah Creek, Saturday, January 11—Fog, fog everywhere! We thought we had really bad birding conditions, but, after all, we eight intrepid birders did see 61 species in this lovely area. Highlights included pairs of Barrow's Goldeneye and Hooded Merganser, an Osprey, and a huge flock of Lark Sparrows like Christmas ornaments on a tree.—*Fred Safier*

Bolinas Lagoon, Thursday, January 16—Two members birded the Bolinas Lagoon. Highlights included five species of grebes, Common Loon, Eurasian Wigeon, and Red-breasted Merganser, for a total of 56 species.—*Ann McGregor*

Santa Cruz, Saturday, January 25—Eight birders enjoyed a beautiful day in Santa Cruz. We saw a total of 57 species with three pairs of Wood Ducks at Neary Lagoon being the highlight birds. The number of Monarch butterflies had noticeably declined at Natural Bridges SP. —*Joel Summerhill*

Sunol Regional Park, Thursday, January 30—Eight members and guests visited Sunol Regional Park on an unseasonably pleasant day. On our walk to Little Yosemite and back, we saw a total of 30 species. All were expected for the area, but highlights included many Acorn Woodpeckers, Western Bluebirds, Cedar Waxwings, and a very cooperative Rufous-crowned Sparrow. Also seen by only one of the group was a Dipper in the

creek near the bridge just off the parking lot.—*Hugh Harvey*

Thornton, Saturday, February 1—Eighteen members and guest arrived for a day that promised to be foggy and showery but turned into a beautiful 55-degree, sun-drenched day with blue skies and wonderful cloud formations. We birded at Westgate Park off Glascock Rd., Woodbridge Rd., and the Cosumnes Nature Area. 63 species were seen. Highlights included American White Pelican, many Tundra Swans, and hundreds of Sandhill Cranes.—*Maury Stern*

Grizzly Island Wildlife Management Area, Thursday, February 6—We had another beautiful day with 60-degree weather and blue skies. Eleven members and guests birded at Grizzly Island and Rush Ranch. Highlights were 12 duck species, large numbers of Northern Harriers, four different Rough-legged Hawks—one of which was a spectacular female dark phase, Barn Owl (one at headquarters, four at Rush Ranch), Great Horned Owl, and Burrowing Owl, Tule Elk, and River Otters.—*Maury Stern*



Birding Class Offered

Alice Hoch is continuing her birding field classes through the Fremont Adult School. In these classes you will observe and learn about the field identification, life styles, and ecology of local birds. Each Tuesday morning the class will visit a different birding spot. The class is designed for both beginning and experienced birders. The class will meet on six Tuesdays from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. The next session begins March 4 and ends on April 8. Class size is limited, so register early. Register by Thursday February 27. Be prepared to bird watch at the first class meeting. For more information call the adult school at 791-5841 or Alice at 657-0475.

March Field Trips

Elizabeth Dickey, Field Trip Chair

Field trips are open to MDAS members and nonmembers alike. You do not have to be a birding expert; only one who enjoys nature. Bring binoculars, field guides, and lunch. Weather or the availability of leaders may require changes. Trips go in light rain or drizzle. If in doubt, call leader up to 1/2 hour before departure. Carpool time is the departure time. Carpool expense: 20 cents per mile shared among driver and riders; tolls and entry fees are shared equally by driver and riders. MDAS has a limited number of loaner binoculars available. Call the leader at least one week in advance if you want to borrow a pair.

March 6, Thursday—Skyline Park, Napa. Carpool leaves Sun Valley at 8 a.m. Take I-680 to Benica Bridge; then take I-780 to Vallejo. Go north on SR 29 to SR 121. Turn right on Imola to park entrance. Parking fee \$5. Meet at 8:45 a.m. in first parking lot. New area. Expect Brown Creepers and White-breasted Nuthatch. Bring lunch. Leader: Elizabeth Dickey 254-0486 Category 2

March 8, Saturday—Tomaes Bay State Park. Carpool leaves 7 a.m., Acalanes Ave., off Pleasant Hill Rd., just north of SR 24. Meet at 8:30 a.m. in the parking lot at Heart's Desire Beach at Tomaes SP (\$5 entrance fee). Cross the San Rafael Bridge. From I-101 north, take Central San Rafael exit. Go 2 blocks, turn left on 3rd St., and continue west to Sir Francis Drake Blvd. Turn right on Sir Francis Drake. Follow Sir Francis Drake Blvd. through Inverness. Just over the ridge, turn right onto Pierce Point Rd. The park entrance is on the right. Bring lunch. Leader: Maury Stern, 284-5980 Category 2

March 12, Wednesday—San Leandro. Meet at 8 a.m. at Valle Vista staging area off Canyon Rd. From Hwy 24 west, take the Orinda exit south. In Moraga, turn right onto Canyon Road. Leader: Maury Stern, 284-5980 Category 3

March 20, Thursday—Shadow Cliffs Regional Park. Carpool leaves LaGonda Way in Danville at 8 a.m. From I-680 southbound, exit on El Pintado, turn right, and right again onto LaGonda. From I-680 northbound, exit at El Cerro Blvd., Danville, turn left, then right on LaGonda, and drive about 1/4 m north to El Pintado. We can bypass freeway traffic by going east on El Cerro and making a sharp right turn onto Diablo Road. From Diablo Road, turn left onto Tassajara, which becomes Santa Rita south of I-580. From Santa Rita, turn left onto Valley

Avenue and left onto Stanley Blvd. Entrance is on the right; park near the Information Kiosk. Great-tailed Grackles possible. Bring lunch. Leader: Elizabeth Dickey, 254-0486 Category 2

Saturday, March 22—Black Diamond Mines Regional Park. Carpool leaves 7:30 a.m. from Acalanes Ave., off Pleasant Hill Rd., north of Hwy. 24. Meet at 8:15 a.m. in the parking lot at park. Go east on Ygnacio Valley and Kirker Pass Roads turn right on Buchanan Rd. Go east on Buchanan Rd to Somersville Rd. and turn right. Follow the road to the parking lot at the end. Woodland, chaparral, and some grassland birds. Leader: Pat MacEachern, 934-3041 Category 3

March 26, Wednesday—Huckleberry Reserve. Meet at 8 a.m. at parking lot on Skyline Blvd. From Hwy 24 westbound take Fish Ranch Rd, turn left onto Grizzly Peak and left again onto Skyline. Parking is on left just past Sibley Preserve. Leader: Elizabeth Dickey, 254-0486 Category 2

Difficulty of field trip:

Category 1: Easy, little or no walking, smooth paths.

Category 2: Moderate, 1 mile or more, possibly rough terrain.

Member News

Don't Miss This Exhibit

The exhibit of some of Harry Adamson's paintings continues through March 30 at the Oakland Museum. Harry is one of the founding members of MDAS and one of America's most well-known wildlife painters. The exhibit is located in the Natural History section on the lower level of the museum. This is an opportunity to see many of Harry's works that are in private collections. The paintings are awesome!

Elections Coming

Next month, the MDAS Board will name a Nominations Committee to seek candidates for four officer positions: Chapter president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer. If you are interested in serving on the Nominations Committee, call Mike Williams at 925-798-0303.

Thank You, Volunteers!

MDAS thanks our wonderful volunteers who represented us at the Pacific Flyway Festival on January 25, including Alice

Holmes, Rita Tischler, Rosita and Hugh Harvey, Gene Fletcher, Lita Marie Haitsma, Don and Helen Holm, and John and Pam Leggett.

Rosita Harvey

Rosita Harvey is at home recuperating from surgery. Hugh and Rosita are among our most active volunteers in addition to being all-round good people. *Best Wishes for a Speedy Recovery, Rosita!*

Wild on Wetlands

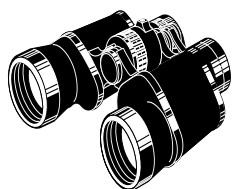
Los Banos is sponsoring the fourth annual Wild on Wetlands (WOW) Festival March 8 and 9. You can download the program from the website at <<http://www.losbanos.com/wow.htm>>. The festival celebrates the 180,000-acre Grassland Ecological Area located in the Central Valley. A stopover for millions of migratory waterfowl, the Grasslands has been recognized as a Globally Important Bird Area by the National Audubon Society. Registration for both days is only \$15 for adults. Headquarters for the event is Los Banos Junior High School, 1750 San Luis St., Los Banos.

Observations

by Steve Glover

A modest flock of five **American White Pelicans** made a brief appearance at Heather Farms Park in Walnut Creek on 1/20 (RH), but they weren't noted there on subsequent dates. Even more interesting was a report of "several" **Brown Pelicans** at McNabney Marsh near Martinez on 1/20 (DB).

On 1/20 there were two **Ross's Geese** at McNabney Marsh near Martinez, and one was still there with the ever-present Canada Geese on 1/31 (D&PB). Strangely, this may have been the first record for this location. Four to six Greater **White-fronted Geese** were also



there on 1/17 (D&PB).

A male **Blue-winged Teal** was at McNabney

Marsh near Martinez on 1/20 (DB) while a male **Eurasian Wigeon** was there on 1/3 and has been present sporadically all winter (NW).

A male duck at the Martinez Regional Shoreline on 1/1 was thought to have possibly been a hybrid between a Greater Scaup and a Tufted Duck (DW). Such hybrid combinations can be extremely difficult to sort out. Ring-necked Ducks are also often suspected in birds of questionable parentage. A male **Long-tailed Duck** at the Martinez Shoreline on 2/2 was a nice find for the county, particularly away from the Richmond area (DW). It is interesting that another, or possibly the same, bird was reported during the same time from the Benicia side of the Carquinez Straits. The Moraga Country Club has been one of the most reliable places in the county for **Hooded Mergansers** in recent years. In January, there were one male and six females on the 15th, two females on the 18th, a male and four females on the 21st (JC).

An **Osprey** was an unusual find at McNabney Marsh on 1/31 (DB). The wintering Bald Eagle at San Pablo Reservoir near Orinda was present through at least 1/11 (LT). A **Rough-legged Hawk** at McNabney Marsh near Martinez on 1/3 was a nice find for that location (NW).

On 1/7 several **Burrowing Owls** were found in parts of Antioch that are rapidly being built upon (JB).

A **Red-breasted Sapsucker** at McNabney Marsh near Martinez on 1/31 may have been a first for that locale (DB). A "**Yellow-shafted Northern Flicker**" was at Hidden Lakes Open Space on 1/5 (DW), and another was reported from the Old Borges Ranch on the flanks of Mt. Diablo on 1/14 (MT). Caution is advised as most local flickers with yellow wing linings are actually intergrades rather than pure birds.

A **Say's Phoebe** at Heather Farms Park in Walnut Creek in early January was still present as recently as 2/4 (R&HH). This would seem to be an unusual location for this species.

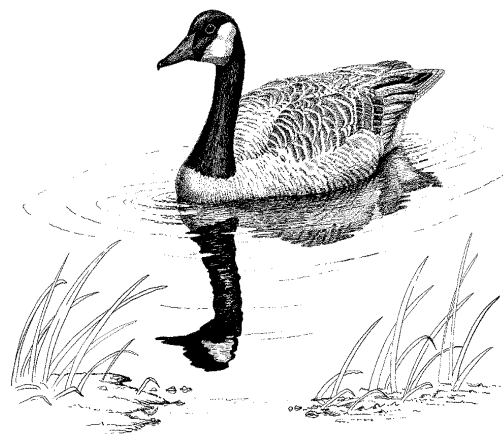
A **Cliff Swallow** at McNabney Marsh near Martinez on 1/20 may have been the first ever recorded during the winter in the county (D&PB). Reports of swallows other than the expected Trees and Violet-greens have increased markedly in recent years along the west coast north of Mexico.

A **Townsend's Solitaire** was in residential Moraga on 1/4 (NW). In some "invasion" years, solitaires are found in residential settings and city parks, but this winter has not been one of those years.

At least one and possibly two of the wintering **Chipping Sparrows** was present at Hidden Lakes Open Space in Martinez through at least 1/5 (DW).

Observers: Jeanne Bonner, Dennis Brady, Patricia Brady, Judi Cooper, Hugh Harvey, Rosita Harvey, Marilyn Trabert, Larry Turnstall, Nat Weber, and Denise Wight

Please send observations to Steve Glover, 6526 Conestoga Lane, Dublin 94568, or call (925) 828-7793. Please include your phone number with your observation.
Northern CA Bird Box:
(415) 681-7422



How to Purchase Natural Origins' Tea and Help MDAS

Natural Origins' provides 20% of its sales to MDAS when customers designate MDAS as their donation recipient. How do you find the tea and make the designation?

- Direct from Natural Origins'. Call toll free 1-877-448-3832 and request that MDAS receive donation benefits when you order.
- Order online at <www.naturalorigins.com>. At checkout, indicate MDAS as the donation recipient.
- Purchase Natural Origins' tea at Wild Birds Unlimited, 692 Contra Costa Blvd, Pleasant Hill (925-798-0303). MDAS receives an automatic credit of 20% of all tea sales. Note: WBU is the only retail outlet whose sales benefit MDAS!
- At MDAS general meetings, The Gardens at Heather Farm. Purchase at the meeting or pick up an order form.

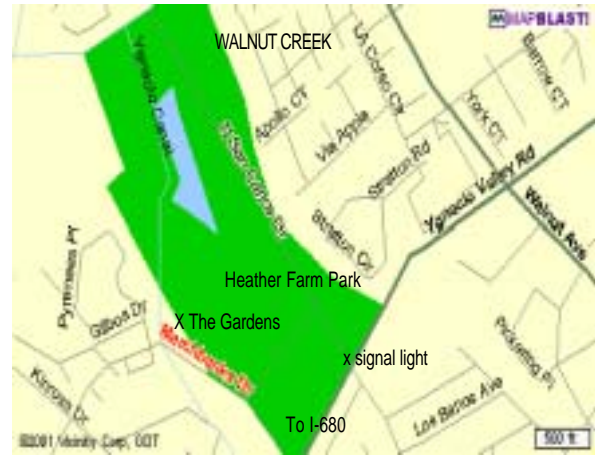
CALENDAR

MDAS holds its general meetings on the first Thursday of every month. Our next meeting is Thursday, March 6. Meetings for the rest of the 2002-03 year are April 3, May 1, and June 5. There are no meetings in July or August.

If you are a new member or new to the area, let us know. We want to welcome you and tell you about our activities. All new members and visitors receive a free door prize ticket.

The MDAS Board meets at 7 p.m. on the second Thursday evening of the month at the conference room of Wild Birds Unlimited, 692 Contra Costa Blvd., PH. All members are welcome to attend.

Visit our website for the latest birding information:
<www.diabloaudubon.com>



Driving directions: Take Ygnacio Valley Rd. to signal light at N. San Carlos Dr. (Heather Farm entrance). Go 1 block and turn left on Heather. At Marchbanks Dr. turn right. The Garden Center is located about 200 ft. on the right.

Questions about membership or mailing addresses? Call Ann McGregor, Membership Chair, at (925) 968-1677. MDAS membership includes 10 issues of the Quail. A 1-year family membership in MDAS is \$25/year or \$500 for lifetime membership (payable in two \$250 annual payments). National Audubon Society membership includes the Audubon magazine. Introductory 1-year membership is \$20 or \$30 for 2 years; membership renewal is \$35/year. To join MDAS or NAS, send a check payable to MDAS to Ann McGregor, Membership Chair, 400 Oneida Ct., Danville, 94526. SEND ADDRESS CHANGES for both NAS and MDAS to P.O. Box 53, Walnut Creek, CA 94597-0053. Please end exchange bulletins for MDAS to the editor, 4801 Shavano Peak Ct., Antioch, CA 94531.

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