



# the Quail

Mount Diablo Audubon Society

P.O. Box 53, Walnut Creek, CA 94597-0053

[www.diabloaudubon.com/index.php](http://www.diabloaudubon.com/index.php)

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## California Condors ♦ David Moen

California Condors, North America's largest flying land bird (by wingspan, 9.5 feet), are scavengers which feed exclusively on carcasses, and they can be poisoned by contaminants in those carcasses. Lead poisoning, as a result of lead bullet fragments in game carcasses or waste piles, remains foremost among threats, despite the recent ban on lead bullets in the condor's range.

How does lead poisoning happen in condors and other scavenging birds? Scavengers eat many different types of animals, some of which are shot with lead projectiles. Animals either left behind in the field, such as ground squirrels and coyotes, or animals shot and unable to be recovered, contain lead fragments left behind in the shot animal. Condors and other wildlife often ingest large chunks of flesh and sometimes bone and cannot distinguish between a tiny lead fragment from a bullet versus a pebble, for example. Once ingested, the digestive system interacts with the lead bullet which leaches the lead into the bloodstream of the animal that ingested it. Lead in blood rises dramatically after ingestion of a lead object and within days the animals feels the effects. Every individual condor lost to lead poisoning greatly affects the population recovery program.

In 1987, the California Condor was extinct in the wild and there were only 26 condors left in captivity. Because of the efforts of the Ventana Wildlife Society and the staff at Pinnacles National Park, the California Condor population in central California now exceeds 50 birds. The overall wild population approaches 200 birds. The goals for the California Condor Recovery Program are two self-sustaining wild populations (California and Arizona) and one captive population, each with at least 150 birds, and 15 breeding pairs. Be-



cause wild populations in both California and Arizona are still below this target, and require management assistance to sustain growth in the population, there is still much work to be done.

David Moen has worked in avian monitoring and environmental education since 1998. David has been actively engaged in California Condor research and management since 2002, when he joined Ventana Wildlife Society. His interest in condors developed into a graduate degree program at Portland State University focusing on condor restoration. He conducted the first California Condor habitat assessments in the Pacific Northwest and designed research methods to search for former nesting sites in Oregon. During that time, David partnered with the Oregon Zoo, providing tours of the condor breeding facility and outreach presentations to over 2,500 people. David rejoined Ventana Wildlife Society's Species Recovery Program in 2011 after assisting with nest entries, field observations, and condor trap-ups at the Santa Barbara Zoo.

### BIRDING INFORMATION

Meghan Hertel, Audubon California's Associate Director of Public Policy, will discuss the steps being taken to restore the second largest river in California, the San Joaquin River. This presentation will take viewers on a photographic journey that highlights the river's history, its importance to birds, wildlife and humans, and efforts to save this river.

### Meeting Schedule

The next general meeting of Mount Diablo Audubon Society will be **Thursday, April 3**, in the Camellia Room of The Gardens at Heather Farm, Walnut Creek.

7:00 PM Birding Information

7:25 PM Announcements

7:40 PM Refreshments,\* raffle

8:05 PM Speaker: **David Moen**

*Please remember to bring a cup.*

Thursday, May 1: Michael Starkey

Save the Frogs!

DEDICATED TO HABITAT CONSERVATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

## President's Corner

By Jimm Edgar

Spring is upon us. Perhaps it is starting a little too early for a lot of us and we also are seeing our migrating birds arriving a bit earlier. Some of our members who keep pretty close tabs on arrivals and departures have told me of many early arrivals. We don't know much yet of what all of this means, but we do know some and it will affect many species of birds. I know all of us will want to keep abreast of findings.

I was flying home a few days ago and had brought the current issue of *Audubon* magazine with me to read. The cover shows a picture of a Snowy Owl and has a great article about these amazing birds. I saw my first SNOW (the shorthand code for Snowy Owl) just east of Spokane, Washington on a cold winter day some 25 years ago. Anyway, this has been a banner year for Snowy Owls coming south. A little town in Newfoundland which hosted a few every year had 18 on November 22, 2013 and by December 8 had 206! These birds have been recorded as far south as Florida and one was in Bermuda. It is great article with a lot of new information about these beautiful birds. More will follow as the winter progresses. Be sure to read the article.

## Clean-up

Join our Mount Diablo Audubon Society Conservation Committee on Saturday, May 10 from 9 AM until noon for the annual Walnut Creek clean-up. Help remove trash and improve wildlife habitat in downtown creeks with Friends of the Creeks and the City of Walnut Creek. We will meet at the Gazebo in Civic Park in Walnut Creek; free continental breakfast at 8:45 AM for all participants. Wear old sneakers, bring gloves, and plan to get wet! If you do not want to walk in the creek, you can help weed in the butterfly garden near the Iron Horse Trail. More information and required waiver forms are available at [www.FriendsoftheCreeks.org](http://www.FriendsoftheCreeks.org). Please contact Ariana Rickard ([rickard@post.harvard.edu](mailto:rickard@post.harvard.edu)); (347) 754-0143 if you are interested in participating.

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As most of you know we have been taking a fairly firm stand on the feeding of feral cats. Our conservation committee has put together a great brochure that states the problems very well. One of the items in the brochure concerns cat colonies and how well-meaning people tend them. It talks about how this seems humane but in fact creates greater problems. On March 25 the Antioch city council will decide whether to adopt a new ordinance that would allow the feeding of feral cats only on one's own property. We plan to be there and speak for the ordinance. We will have our brochures there to distribute.



Lange's Metalmark butterfly is found in no place in the world except in Contra Costa County at Antioch Dunes National Wildlife Refuge, the only NWR created to save an endangered insect.

Our March general meeting was again well attended and an excellent program was provided by MDAS member Michael Marchiano on butterflies of Contra Costa County. Our scheduled program speaker had a family emergency and had to cancel. Mike stepped in at the last minute.

What a great chapter we have! I hope you can get to one of our general meetings at Heather Farm.

Good birding,

# Q

Every year adults of this largest American waterfowl go through a flightless period in which they molt all their feathers at once thus making them flightless for a 1-2 month period of time. This typically occurs during the warmest months, namely July and August.

Unscramble these letters, or turn to Page 8

to learn more.

AEEMNPRRSTTUW

## Welcome New Members

Rochelle Fortier	Walnut Creek
Kevin Lin	San Ramon
Carol Livingston	Walnut Creek
David & Janet Rose	Pleasant Hill

## Code of Birding Ethics

1. Promote the welfare of birds and their environment. Support the protection of important bird habitat. To avoid stressing birds or exposing them to danger, exercise restraint and caution during observation, photography, sound recording, or filming.

Limit the use of recordings and other methods of attracting birds, and never use such methods in heavily birded areas, or for attracting any species that is Threatened, Endangered, or of Special Concern, or is rare in your local area;

Keep well back from nests and nesting colonies, roosts, display areas, and important feeding sites. In such sensitive areas, if there is a need for extended observation, photography, filming, or recording, try to use a blind or hide, and take advantage of natural cover.

Use artificial light sparingly for filming or photography, especially for close-ups.

Before advertising the presence of a rare bird, evaluate the potential for disturbance to the bird, its surroundings, and other people in the area, and proceed only if access can be controlled, disturbance minimized, and permission has been obtained from private land-owners. The sites of rare nesting birds should be divulged only to the proper conservation authorities.

Stay on roads, trails, and paths where they exist; otherwise keep habitat disturbance to a minimum.

2. Respect the law, and the rights of others. Do not enter private property without the owner's explicit permission.

Follow all laws, rules, and regulations governing use of roads and public areas, both at home and abroad.

Practice common courtesy in contacts with other people. Your exemplary behavior will generate goodwill with birders and non-birders alike.

3. Ensure that feeders, nest structures, and other artificial bird environments are safe.

*Continued on Page 3 »*

# Observations

By Maury Stern

There was a quick end to a short her-  
ring run in February. The arrival of mi-  
grants began a few days to a few weeks  
early for many birds.

A **Ross's Goose** was with a large flock  
of **Canada Geese** at Bishop Ranch in San  
Ramon 2/20, SH.

On 2/14, Two **Eusasian Wigeons** were  
at Miller-Knox Regional Park, SD. Anoth-  
er was on a pond off Waterfront Road in  
Martinez, JB.

BH saw a pair of **Hooded Mergan-  
sers** in the creek behind Trader Joe's in  
Walnut Creek 3/4. On 3/7, there were two  
pair of **Hooded Mergansers** in Las Tramp-  
pas Creek near Olympic and Pleasant Hill  
Road in Lafayette, ST and CM.

An adult **Bald Eagle** flew over Lafay-  
ette Reservoir 2/22, KM.

There were three **Black Rails** heard at  
the Martinez Shoreline on 2/19 by STu.

KM saw a **Common Gallinule** (for-  
merly Common Moorhen) on 2/22 at La-  
fayette Reservoir.



Common Gallinule. Beth Branthaver photo.

Fifty **Sandhill Cranes** were at Holland  
Tract 3/1, BC.

LL saw a juvenile **Glaucous Gull** at  
Los Vaqueros Reservoir 2/18.

A **Merlin** continues to roost in her La-  
fayette yard, KB.

A **Pileated Woodpecker** was well-  
observed by RW in Orinda 2/23. It did not  
stay long.

**Lewis's Woodpeckers** continued in  
larger than normal numbers with six seen  
at Los Vaqueros Reservoir 2/18, LL; two at  
Black Diamond Mines 2/23, C&TW; and  
another 3/9 at Los Vaqueros Reservoir, AS.

The **Tropical Kingbird**, first seen  
1/16, continued through to date. It was  
seen by JA, BM, H&RH, GT, RW, and EC.

An early **Warbling Vireo** was in Mora-  
ga 3/9, ES.

On 2/15, **Tree Swallows** were investi-  
gating nesting cavities at Heather Farm. BM.

HH saw six **Rough-winged Swallows**  
at Heather Farm Pond 2/21.

LLa saw **Cliff Swallows** at Big Break  
Regional Park and **Barn Swallows** at Big  
Break and Contra Loma RP 3/6. **Barn  
Swallows** were seen by AK at Tilden Na-  
ture Center 3/7.

J-CS saw both singing **Rock Wrens**  
and **Canyon Wrens** near Castle Rock in  
the Diablo Foothills Park 3/11.

A **Townsend's Solitaire** was at Mt.  
Olympia Road in Mt. Diablo SP 2/20, RF,  
BT, JC.

Submit Contra Costa County sightings to  
[mbstern2@yahoo.com](mailto:mbstern2@yahoo.com) or (925) 284-5980 or  
send to [EBB Sightings@yahoo.com](mailto:EBB Sightings@yahoo.com). If  
you report sightings to eBird, please also  
send to Maury Stern.

A **Sage Thrasher** was found at Contra  
Loma RP in Antioch by C&TW 2/23. The  
bird was seen by P&NS, LLa, LG, JF, RW, DS.

A **Phainopepla** was at Donner  
Canyon, MDSP 2/20, RF, BT, JC.

An early **Orange-crowned Warbler**  
was at the Antioch City Reservoir 3/2,  
P&NS. Subsequent sightings have been at  
Redwood RP, SS; and Tilden Nature Area,  
AK.

A quite early **MacGillivray's Warbler**  
was in Kensington, AK.

The **Swamp Sparrow** continued at La-  
fayette Reservoir 2/22, KM.

EL has had a partially leucistic **White-  
crowned Sparrow** in her San Ramon yard.

The first **Bullock's Oriole** of the sea-  
son was in LLa's Lafayette yard 3/11.

JA James Arth, KB Kristen Baker, JB  
John Blakelock, BC Beth Carver, EC Ethan  
Chickering, JC Josiah Clark, SD Sheila  
Dickie, JF Jeff Fairclough, RF Rob Furrow,  
LG Laurie Graham, HH Hugh Harvey,  
H&RH Hugh and Rosita Harvey, BH Bob  
Hislop, SH Steve Hutchcraft, AK Alan Ka-  
plan, LLa Lynn Lakso, EL Eugenia Larson,  
LL Laura Look, BM Bruce Mast, CM Carol  
Mathews, KM Kai Mills, DS Dan Sandri,  
ES Ed Schoenberger, P&NS Paul and Nan-  
cy Schorr, AS Akiro So, J-CS Juan-Carlos  
Solis, SS Sylvia Sykora, ST Steve Taylor,  
GT Gary Thompson, STu Steve Tucker, BT  
Brian Turner, C&TW Chris and Teri Wills,  
RW Ray Witbeck.

## Birding Ethics

Keep dispensers, water, and food clean,  
and free of decay or disease. It is important to  
feed birds continually during harsh weather.  
Maintain and clean nest structures regularly.

If you are attracting birds to an area,  
ensure the birds are not exposed to preda-  
tion from cats and other domestic animals,  
or dangers posed by artificial hazards.

4. Group birding, whether organized or  
impromptu, requires special care.

Each individual in the group, in addition  
to the obligations spelled out above, has  
responsibilities as a Group Member.

Respect the interests, rights, and  
skills of fellow birders, as well as people

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participating in other legitimate outdoor  
activities. Freely share your knowledge and  
experience, except location of rare birds  
(see above). Be especially helpful to begin-  
ning birders.

If you witness unethical birding be-  
havior, assess the situation, and intervene  
if you think it prudent. When interceding,  
inform the person(s) of the inappropriate  
action, and attempt, within reason, to have  
it stopped. If the behavior continues, docu-  
ment it, and notify appropriate authorities.

Group Leader Responsibilities: Be an  
exemplary ethical role model for the group.

Teach through word and example.

Keep groups to a size that limits impact  
on the environment, and does not interfere  
with others using the same area.

Ensure that everyone in the group  
knows of and practices this code.

Learn and inform the group of any spe-  
cial circumstances applicable to the areas  
being visited.

Acknowledge that professional tour  
companies bear a special responsibil-  
ity to place the welfare of birds and the  
benefits of public knowledge ahead of the  
company's commercial interests. Ideally,  
leaders should keep track of tour sightings,  
document unusual occurrences, and submit  
records to appropriate organizations.

# Field Trip Schedule

By Hugh Harvey

## April

- 5 Saturday..... Garin Regional Park
- 12 Saturday..... Pine Canyon
- 15 Tuesday..... Orinda Connector Trail
- 17 Thursday..... North Briones Regional Park
- 19 Saturday..... Mines Road
- 29 Tuesday..... Del Puerto Canyon
- 24 Thursday..... Black Diamond Mines

## May

- 1 Thursday..... Mitchell Canyon
- 8 Thursday..... Mount Diablo State Park
- 15 Thursday..... West Briones Regional Park
- 17 Saturday..... East Contra Costa County

## June

- 7 Saturday..... Outer Point Reyes
- 21-22 Saturday-Sunday..... Yuba Pass/Sierra Valley

### ③ Saturday, April 5 Garin Regional Park

Leader: Fred Safier, (925) 937-2906.

Carpool leaves 7:15 AM from Sycamore Valley Road Park and Ride. Meet in parking lot at the end of Garin Road at 8:00 AM. Take I-680 south and I-580 west. Take Castro Valley exit and continue west. Turn left onto Crow Canyon Road and go under the freeway. Crow Canyon Road becomes Grove Way and then A Street. At A Street and Mission Blvd. turn left; stay left to continue south on Mission Blvd., which becomes SR 238. Go south about 3 miles to Garin Road, turn left, and follow up the hill to its end. Spring migrants will be our goal. Lunch in the park after.

### ③ Saturday, April 12 Pine Canyon

Leader: Nancy Wenninger, (925) 938-7987.

Meet in parking lot at end of Castle Rock Road at 8 AM. Turn south on Walnut Avenue from the intersection with Ygnacio Valley Road in Walnut Creek. At the traffic circle, turn right and continue on Castle Rock Road past the high school to the end, which is the parking lot for Castle Rock Recreation Area and Diablo Foothills Regional Park. We will hike into Pine Canyon at least as far as the Castle Rocks. The trail crosses Pine Creek several times. Be prepared to carry lunch and liquids. Spring migrants and Peregrine Falcons.

### ② Tuesday, April 15 Orinda Connector Trail

Leader: Don Lewis, (925) 284-5480.

Meet at 8 AM at the northeast corner of Camino Pablo and Bear Creek Road, Orinda. Exit at Orinda from SR 24, turn north on Camino Pablo and drive just over 2 miles to the intersection. We will walk towards the base of Briones Dam looking for spring birds. We will be finished by noon.

### ③ Thursday, April 17

#### North Briones Regional Park

Leader: Maury Stern, (925) 284-5980..

Meet 8 AM in the parking area at the north entrance of Briones Regional Park. Take Briones Road off Alhambra Valley Road and drive up this narrow winding road, park at the end. Wildflowers, spring birds and poison oak are along shaded trails. A continuation through grasslands to Sincich Lagoons makes this walk about 3 miles round trip. Bring liquids.

### ① Saturday, April 19 Mines Road

Leader: Gary Fregien, (916) 708-0636.

Because of limited parking along Mines Road, carpooling is essential. This is an all-day trip and often hot! Bring lunch and liquids. Wild Turkey, Lewis's Woodpecker and Lawrence's Goldfinch and many spring migrants are possible, plus great spring wild flowers. Entry fee required for Del Valle Regional Park. Call the leader for meeting time and location.



Lake Del Valle

### ③ Thursday, April 24 Black Diamond Mines

Leader: Paul Schorr, (925) 757-5107.

Carpool leaves Sun Valley at 7:30 AM. Or meet the leader at 8 AM at the parking lot at the end of Somersville Road. Go east on Ygnacio Valley/Kirker Pass Roads, in Pittsburg turn right on Buchanan Road. Go east on Buchanan to Somersville Road (Antioch) and turn right. Alternate route, exit Highway 4 at Somersville Road (south). Follow Somersville to the entry gate, entry fee required, proceed to the last parking lot. Woodland, chaparral and some grassland birds. Bring lunch and a beverage.

### ① Tuesday, April 29 Del Puerto Canyon

Leader: David Hutton, (925) 938-4485

Carpool leaves at 7:30 AM from Sycamore Valley Road Park and Ride. Meet on Del Puerto Canyon Road west of I-5 at 9 AM at Patterson Exit (Diablo Grande Parkway and Sperry Road) off I-5 (56 miles from Sycamore Valley Road). Take I-580 east to I-5 south. We will stop at the Westley Rest Area, as there are no facilities on trip until our lunch stop. Canyon Wren, Costa's Hummingbird, Greater Roadrunner and other goodies. Usually very warm! Bring lunch and drinks.

# Trip Reports

**Las Gallinas/Rush Creek/Shollenberger Park, January 25.** Seventeen members and guests enjoyed a warm, sunny day birding at Las Gallinas Water Treatment Plant in San Rafael Saturday, January 25th in the morning. Following lunch at the adjacent park, we birded at Shollenberger Park and the nearby Ellis Creek marsh in Petaluma. Highlights included a Green Heron, a cooperative Common Gallinule, and several singing Marsh Wrens at Las Gallinas; a perched Red-shouldered Hawk during lunch time; plus two Mute Swans and a male Ring-necked Duck at Ellis Creek. Even though water levels were down due to the drought, thirteen species of ducks and nine species of shorebirds were sighted for a total of 76 species for the day.

*Eugenia K. Larson*

**Grizzly Island, February 13.** Twenty-five members and guests spent a beautiful day at Grizzly Island Refuge followed by another stop at Rush Ranch. We were all in shirtsleeves by 10 AM. In addition to excellent views of Tule Elk and numerous River Otters we saw many ducks in the ponds. Raptor numbers were down from previous years except for Northern Harriers which were numerous as well as White-tailed Kites, but no Rough-legged or Ferruginous Hawks.

We were greeted at the entry station by a Merlin which allowed all with good looks. Other highlights included good looks at a Sora swimming across a channel, Allen's Hummingbird, Eurasian Wigeon, Violet-green Swallow among the numerous Tree Swallows, a Great-horned Owl. At Rush Ranch the Barn Owl was at its usual location in the barn.

*Maury Stern*

**Sunol Regional Park, February 26.** Six birders plus one guest from Ohlone Audubon braved the rain on Wednesday, February 26th to walk the trails in Sunol Wilderness Regional Park. Among the highlights were hearing several Varied Thrushes singing and seeing one male fairly close, a Brown Creeper along Alameda



Mountain Bluebird



Long-eared Owl.  
Both photos by  
Beth Branthaver.

Creek, a large flock of over 80 Band-tailed Pigeons resting in a leafless deciduous tree and flying around, a Fox Sparrow, and one Rufous-crowned Sparrow along the road to Little Yosemite. We looked for the hotlined Red-naped Sapsucker in the oak trees near the new bridge without success. A total of 42 species were seen.

*Eugenia Larson*

**Los Banos/Panoche Valley, February 15-16.** The annual MDAS trip to the Los Banos area and Panoche Valley again proved a big attraction—18 participants took part. While rain was expected in the Bay Area, after a somewhat cloudy start on the Saturday, Sunday proved clear and sunny. Notable sightings on Santa Fe Grade Road included Wilson's Snipe, Belted Kingfisher, Peregrine Falcon, Bald Eagle, American Bittern, Virginia Rail and several Northern Harriers. Waterfowl were observed in good numbers, though Redhead was not found. Arguably best bird however was a male Vermilion Flycatcher at the junction of Wilson Road and Santa Fe Grade Rd.; this spot has seen a Vermilion Flycatcher returning now for the past 7 years. Lunch was enjoyed at the new Visitor Center at the San Luis National Wildlife Refuge. The afternoon was spent birding the Merced National Wildlife Refuge. Snow Geese, White-fronted Geese and Sandhill Cranes made a good showing; 'blue' morphs of both Snow and Ross's Geese were found. Several Great-horned Owls were observed in the leafless trees. A communal dinner was enjoyed at Espana's Mexican restaurant. Sunday morning was spent birding Little Panoche Road. Good sightings of Horned Lark, Rock Wren, Lark Sparrow and Sage Thrasher were obtained. The BLM Panoche Hills road yielded a group of more

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## Come birding with us!

Field trips are open to members and non-members, beginners and advanced birders, but please do leave your dogs at home. Weather or other contingencies may require changes. For updates, visit the MDAS website at [www.diabloaudubon.com/index.php](http://www.diabloaudubon.com/index.php). Phone area codes are 925 unless specified otherwise. Because most trips do not return until late afternoon, bring a lunch and drink and join us during our midday break.

Category ❶: Easy, little or no walking, smooth paths

Category ❷: Moderate, one mile +, possibly rough terrain

Category ❸: Difficult, extensive walking on rough terrain.

Our Mount Diablo Audubon Chapter is a conservation organization. As such, we encourage members to consider meeting at the carpool point to pick up or ride with others. It is important that given the cost of gasoline, those who ride with others offer to pay some of this cost. Don't forget about any bridge tolls or park entry fees on some of our longer trips. Carpool locations: **Sycamore Valley Road Park and Ride Lot**—Just south of Danville, exit I-680 at Sycamore Valley Road to the east; the Park and Ride lot is on the left. **Sun Valley**—Southwest corner of the Sun Valley Mall parking lot at Willow Pass Road and Contra Costa Boulevard in Concord.

# Trip Reports

» *Continued from Page 5*

than 10 Mountain Bluebirds. Mercey Hot Springs resort did not disappoint and more than 8 Long-eared Owls were seen in the usual roosting tree. A Golden Eagle was sighted close to Shot Gun Pass on the way into Panoche Valley. In Panoche Valley while no Mountain Plovers could be found, Ferruginous Hawk, Merlin and Kestrel were seen. Wrapping up the day we encountered a singing California Thrasher in the lower canyon along New Idria Road. After compiling our sightings, we found we had tallied 100 species.

*David Hutton*

**Walnut Creek City Parks, March 5.** It was a very nice day for the 15 or more participants who started their birding in Heather Farm Park. While we did not see the famous Tropical Kingbird during our morning visit, five of us returned after 1 PM and watched that bird hawking insects over the southwest corner of the large pond. We also had a 4-heron day, including Great and Snowy Egret, Black-crowned Night-Heron and Green Heron. A handful of the over-wintering ducks was still present; among them were Ring-necked Ducks, Lesser Scaups and Buffleheads. But amazingly, we had an apparent Northern Harrier fly south over the park, roughly in the direction of Mt. Diablo. It was flapping its wings the whole time, but had an obvious white rump-patch, even as it flew away at a distance. Howe-Homestead was quiet, but one participant did spot a Northern Flicker and the group watched two Red-shouldered Hawks, one of which was harassed by an American Crow. The paved section of the Sugar Loaf-Shell Ridge hiking trail off Rudgear Road had a number of small birds, but also had a Spotted Towhee. Some Band-tailed Pigeons were at a backyard feeder. Finally, at Sugar Loaf Open Space we found a Lincoln's Sparrow, our first American Robin of the day, some Acorn Woodpeckers, and three Western Bluebirds staking claim to a nest hole. A Chestnut-backed Chickadee also wanted the same nest hole. We might have to check this site in mid-April to see who won. 49 species were identified during the trip. *Hugh Harvey*

**Grizzly Island, Young Birders Club, March 9.** The Mount Diablo Audubon Society Young Birders club had a great day at Grizzly Island Wildlife Sanctuary. Five eager members, several parents, some adult visitors and Tracy Farrington, the club coordinator, scoured this endless expanse of marshland for ducks, rails, and bitterns for the better part of the morning. We met in a large parking lot and were treated to a pair of Great-tailed Grackles. It's a good sign when you start to see good birds even before leaving the parking lot!

We drove down Grizzly Island Road, flushing several Ring-necked Pheasants along the way. Swallows had arrived over the weekend, en masse, with several very large flocks of Cliff Swallows seen circling overhead for the duration of the trip as well as a few solitary Barn Swallows scattered about.

We entered the refuge and drove to the allegedly duck-filled pond near parking lot 6. Though it was unfortunately not jammed with waterfowl, we were treated to two Mute Swans.

We then backtracked to parking lot 4 and its adjacent pond which proved much more diverse. Among the Coot-clogged channels was a good sized raft of Common Goldeneye. With a little prompting we got a Virginia Rail and two Sora to start calling, and while walking down one of the levies, a beautiful American Bittern flew out from the reeds below.

All in all, we tallied better than 72 species including a beautiful male Merlin observed by Heather Finchly and Tracy as it devoured its small rodent meal while perched roadside on a fence post.

New members and interested guests are always welcome to join us on our field trips. You can always find information in the calendar page of the MDAS web site. Those seeking further information about the Mt. Diablo Audubon Young Birders Club should contact Tracy Farrington at: [tracy\\_farrington@yahoo.com](mailto:tracy_farrington@yahoo.com), or (925) 788-6223.

*Logan Kahle*

**Contra Loma Regional Park/Reservoir, March 12.** Twenty MDAS members and one guest enjoyed birding on a beautiful spring day at Contra Loma Regional Park and Reservoir in Antioch. This was a new field trip for MDAS and the group was not to be disappointed as they tallied 57 species. The target bird was the Sage Thrasher that had been continually seen there since February 23, and after initially missing the bird it eventually showed in the same area that it had been previously reported. The group had excellent opportunities to watch it forage on the ground as well as perch in a nearby small tree, and it was a *life bird* for several in the group. Other highlights included a Great Horned Owl on its nest; an Osprey successfully catching a fish and subsequently being harassed by several gulls as it flew away; a pair of cooperative Lincoln's Sparrows; several Common Gallinules; Sora (heard); Virginia Rail (heard); Green Heron; American White Pelican; and Red-shouldered Hawk. Birdsong was everywhere and we enjoyed the vocalizations of Northern Mockingbirds, House Finches, Common Yellowthroats, Red-winged Blackbirds, Song Sparrows, Western Meadowlarks and the mysterious call of the Common Gallinule. The trip ended with a fly-by, calling Belted Kingfisher. As the group departed, several participants had views of a small covey of California Quail and a Red-tailed Hawk being harassed by a White-tailed Kite. *Paul Schorr*

Sage Thrasher.  
Paul Schorr photo.



Mark your calendars for the upcoming weekend field trip to Lassen Volcanic National Park set for Saturday and Sunday, July 12th and 13th. Contact the leader for details and more information if you plan to attend: Eugenia Larson at 925-806-0644 or by email at: [eklarson@comcast.net](mailto:eklarson@comcast.net)

More information will be in the May Quail..

# Nesting Material

By Joanie Smith

ETHAN WINNING



I nearly forgot to put out nesting material for the birds this season until I saw an Oak Titmouse

going in and out of one of my nest boxes. I got out an old wire suet feeder, stuffed it with llama fur and hung it from an oak tree, hoping I wasn't too late. The following day I saw the suet feeder bobbing up and down and, sure enough, the Oak Titmouse was perched on the top of the feeder pulling and pulling. The titmouse must have struggled for at least five minutes before he was satisfied. Then, just as he took off, the whole ball of fur in his beak fell to the ground. He didn't hesitate for a moment. He immediately flew to the ground, retrieved his ball of fur and headed straight for the nest box.

Nesting material can be as simple as using cat or dog hair or as exotic as camel, bison or llama fur. Or, just plain wool from sheep. The birds seem to love it. It's soft, easy to shape, warm, water resistant, and dries quickly. Birds, such as chickadees and titmice, use it for the very top layer of their very cushy nests. Their nests are works of art, in my opinion. Using shredded tree bark and moss as the foundation, they can be up to 4-6 inches high. The final layer is fur and lint, depending on what's available. I've also seen goldfinches taking the fur, and once, an Anna's Hummingbird. The hummer was interesting to watch. She struggled for the longest time, only to get just a few strands of hair. Her persistence should have won an award.

You can also put out cotton, one by six inch strips of cloth, feathers, pine needles and short lengths of string or yarn (no longer than four inches). Dryer lint can contain harmful residues from laundry detergent or fabric softeners and is not recommended. Pet fur is okay as long as no flea or tick treatment was used. Put your material in an old suet feeder, plastic or string mesh bag, plastic berry basket, or you can just ball it up and place it in some shrubbery. I've even seen birds taking fibers from my door mat. Squirrels seem to avoid animal fur. They probably don't like the scent of another animal in their nest (stuffing from your patio furniture is *much* better). Anyway, take a few minutes, sit back and enjoy the show!

# Good News for Hummingbirds

American Bird Conservancy, Tucson Audubon, and Victor Emanuel Nature Tours teamed up recently to raise over \$300,000 to purchase Paton's Birder Haven—the Patagonia, home of Wally and Marion Paton that has welcomed so many birders through the years. The response of birders, bird lovers, and conservationists affirmed the importance of this unique property. As reported in the October 2013 *Quail*, Mount Diablo Audubon is among those donors.

The property had passed on to the Paton's children, who wanted to ensure it would be preserved as a memorable, welcoming stop for birders. Now, through this successful collaboration and the generosity of thousands, their parents' labor of love has been immortalized.

Paton's Birder Haven is a special place—a must-visit locale for all birders who travel to southeast Arizona. In 1974, Wally and Marion—life-long bird-lovers—began to plant flowers and install water features on their property. They put up hummingbird feeders and had great success, attracting Violet-crowned Hummingbirds along with even rarer species like the Cinnamon Hummingbird and Plain-Capped Starthroat. When the couple realized birders were crowding outside their fence to get a better view, the Patons opened the gate and welcomed them inside.

They installed benches for visiting birders and provided bird guides. A chalkboard was set up in the yard so daily sightings could be noted. On the gate, they installed a tin can called the "sugar fund" for donations to help defray the cost of bird food and nectar.

With the help of hundreds, the property has now been acquired by American Bird Conservancy and turned over to Tucson Audubon, who will maintain it in perpetuity for birders and birds—a fitting tribute to the legendary generosity of the Patons.

And you will be able to visit to see the birds, too! Among the birds reported to eBird by one visitor in mid-March were Violet-crowned Hummingbird, Broad-billed Hummingbird, White-winged Dove, Gila Woodpecker, Green-tailed Towhee, Abert's Towhee, Northern Cardinal, Pyrrhuloxia.

## Celebrate Earth Day and John Muir's 176th Birthday Saturday, April 26 10 AM - 4 PM John Muir National Historic Site, Martinez

John Muir inspired people all over the world to "keep close to nature's heart."

In this spirit, the John Muir Association invites you to celebrate John Muir's birthday (April 21, 1838, Dunbar, Scotland) at his former home, along with Earth Day, which brings us closer to knowing our planet and practical ways to help it thrive.

- Free entry • Free parking
- Your family will enjoy fun-filled activities and entertainment
- Exhibitors with activities for everyone
- "John Muir" shares stories and birthday cake
- Live music • Silent auctions
- Mount Diablo Audubon Society will be there! • Drop by and say Hello!
- Self-guided tours of the 1882 historic home and the drought-tolerant California Native Plant Garden
- Junior ranger projects with National Park Service rangers
- Food and beverages will be available for purchase
- <http://www.johnmuirassociation.org/php/bday-earthday/bday-earthday.php>



Windmill at John Muir National Historic Site, Martinez

# Elliott Coues

» Continued from Page 8

tions on how to use and care for your double-barrelled shotgun, and ending on Page 535 with a description of a Rose-throated Becard. Coues identified for the first time many unknown bird species and introduced the trinomial nomenclature, adding a third Latin name for subspecies following those for genus and species names. Coues made many sketches for this work, but they were unremarkable. He subsequently found the young Louis Agassiz Fuertes to add many new illustrations for later editions, including the frontispiece—and only colored plate—for the fifth edition, which was published in 1903 after Coues's death.

Coues was also important in mammalogy, publishing *North American Fur Bearing Animals* in 1877

By 1890, his myriad commitments to scientific writings completed, Dr. Coues turned his attention to other work in which for a long time he had had a deep interest—the early explorations west of the Mississippi River. As early as 1876 he had published *An Account of the various Publications relating to the Travels of Lewis and*



Starlings, frontispiece to the fifth edition of Elliott Coues' *A Key to North American Birds*. Louis Agassiz Fuertes.

*Clark, with a Commentary on the Zoological Results of their Expedition*. In 1893 he wrote his *History of the Expedition of Lewis*



Grace's Warbler. Photo by Beth Branthaver and Clark. This was followed in 1895 by *Expeditions of Zebulon Montgomery Pike*, and later by several other volumes dedicated to these historical ventures. Undertaking an arduous journey to the southwest in search of documents about the missionary and explorer Francisco Garcés, Coues fell ill. He returned to Washington, D.C., but weakened further, and died on December 25, 1899, at the age of 57.

## Trumpeter Swan ♦ *Cygnus buccinator*

**a** Once a common sight in the northern part of the state and in the Central Valley, Trumpeter Swans were nearly wiped out in most of North America by the early 1900s. By 1933, fewer than 70 wild Trumpeters were believed to exist, and ornithologists expected their ultimate extinction. All were winter residents of remote spring-fed areas in and around Yellowstone National Park. Inhospitable in winter, at times with frigid air temperatures below  $-50$  degrees F, this habitat offered refuge to the swans. They survived because thermal springs kept open water available throughout the year in areas so isolated that hunters couldn't find them.



Trumpeter Swans, Lagoon Valley. Photo by Paul Schorr.

A variety of protective measures have brought the Trumpeters back from the brink to number nearly 20,000 worldwide today. Among those efforts are the projects funded by your purchase of Federal Duck Stamps: for example, the Grasslands Wildlife

Management Area in the Central Valley is high on the priority list for distribution of those funds. That the Trumpeter Swans are on the trail to recovery in California is shown by recent sightings, and by the fact that they were removed from the California Bird Records Committee Review List in January, 2012. Most recently, six Trumpeter Swans were in Solano County at Lagoon Valley/Peña Adobe Regional Park near Vacaville in late December and early January.

Weighing up to 35 pounds and with an eight-foot wingspan, Trumpeter Swans are magnificent birds. They and the somewhat smaller Tundra Swans are North America's only native swans. [Mute Swans have been introduced.] The two species look alike, with pure white feathers and black bills and feet, and often travel together. Experts can pick out subtle differences in their bill shape, or the red lipstick-like line on the lower bill of most Trumpeters. Almost all adult Tundras have a yellow spot in front of each eye. The Trumpeter Swan's call is usually the easiest way to identify it. It has a deep, resonant, trumpet-like voice whereas the voice of the Tundra Swan is soft and melodious.



Trumpeter Swans, Crex Meadows, Wisconsin.

ELLIS MYERS PHOTO



# The Pacific Flyway

By Mike Eliot

The Pacific flyway is the main western route through the US for over 350 species of migrating birds. Migration south begins as early as August, while the return trip begins around March.



Some of our favorite hummingbirds including Rufous, Allen's, Black-chinned, and Costa's (shown) are making their way north right now. In winter

some can be found as far south as Peru while summering in Alaska or the Bering Straits, over 4500 miles north. They often travel at night, covering as much as 500 miles without stopping. Many will stop off in the Bay area and may be seen at your feeders soon.

Migrating birds visit most of Northern California from the Pacific Coast to the Central Valley. Estuaries, where ocean and fresh water meet, are favorite resting spots for shore birds due to plentiful food in the shallows. These American Avocets have a great view of San Francisco.



Several seasonal marshes in wildlife refuges north of Sacramento are winter homes to over 1.5 million ducks and 0.75 million geese. Nothing compares to the breathtaking view and sound of 50,000 Snow Geese taking off and circling together, a regular event at the refuges.

For some relaxing fun, take a day this spring and visit one of the many hot spots within 75 miles of San Francisco.

Here are some informative websites:

<http://sanfrancisco.about.com/library/bayareamaps/blsfbaybirding2.htm>

[www.localgetaways.com/2010/09/bird-watching-getaways/](http://www.localgetaways.com/2010/09/bird-watching-getaways/)

<http://www.diabloaudubon.org/bird-ingnocal.php>

# Mount Diablo Audubon Society

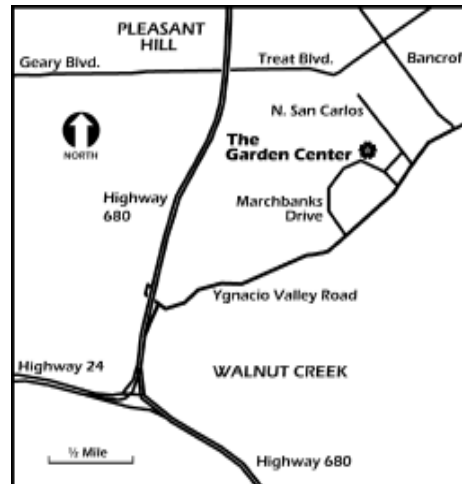
Mount Diablo Audubon Society, a Chapter of National Audubon, is committed to the sustainable balance of our community's people, birds, other wildlife, and habitat through conservation, education, and advocacy.

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Quail Editor



Mount Diablo Audubon Society meets at 7:00 PM on the first Thursday of each month, except July and August, in the Camellia Room of The Gardens at Heather Farm, 1540 Marchbanks Drive, Walnut Creek. Everyone is invited.

Mount Diablo Audubon Society thanks our Business Partners for their generous support:

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**Native Bird Connections**

## MDAS MEMBERSHIP/RENEWAL APPLICATION

Please enroll my family and me as a member of Mount Diablo Audubon Society for \$25 for one year. Membership dues are tax deductible.

I'm enclosing an additional tax-deductible donation of \$\_\_\_\_\_.

For an additional \$20 (new NAS members only), please enroll me in the National Audubon Society. NAS dues are separate from Mount Diablo Audubon dues.

Please send *The Quail* by:  US mail  E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone ( \_\_\_\_ ) \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Please make your check payable to:

MOUNT DIABLO AUDUBON SOCIETY and mail with this application to:

Membership Chair, 282 Firestone Court, Walnut Creek, CA 94598

Mount Diablo Audubon Society,  
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*Greater Pewee, formerly Coues's Flycatcher*

## Elliott Coues Ornithologist ♦ Surgeon ♦ Historian

Elliott Coues was born in 1842 in New Hampshire. As a child Coues (pronounced "cows") was fascinated by animals. When Elliott was 11, the family moved to Washington, D.C., and he became enamored of the Smithsonian. There he met its first curator, the naturalist Spencer Baird, who would be his mentor [See *The Quail*, March, 2013]. He published his first technical paper, a monograph on North American sandpipers, at the age of 19. He attended Columbian College (which later would be renamed George Washington University) in Washington, D.C. While still at college, Coues traveled to Labrador to collect birds for Baird, and on his return published *Notes on the Ornithology of Labrador*. Coues enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1862 as a medical cadet and was awarded his M.D. the following year. In 1864 he had attained the rank of assistant surgeon.

Coues's military career took him first to Fort Whipple, the capital of the new Arizona Territory at the time. During his assignment to Fort Whipple he made a

military journey to San Pedro, in southern California, via Fort Yuma and Fort Mojave. He continued studying the bird life in each new area, and found new species. In Arizona he collected a new species of warbler and asked Spencer Baird to name it Grace's Warbler for his sister Grace.

Other Army postings followed, and he got the chance to join expeditions that explored the west, serving as both naturalist and surgeon on the United States Northern Boundary Commission from 1873-1876. From 1876 to 1880 he served as secretary and naturalist to the United States Geological and Geographical Survey of the Territories. While in the army he authored 300 works and papers. He resigned from the army in 1881 to devote himself more fully to literary and scientific pursuits. He was appointed professor of anatomy at the National Medical College at Columbian and that same year he was elected to the National Academy of Sciences. He was one of the founders of the American Ornitholo-



*Elliott Coues*

gists Union and helped write the first *AOU Checklist of North American Birds*.

Coues was a prolific writer and wrote many works on ornithology and natural history. Coues's book *A Key to North American Birds*, published in 1872, was at the time a unique work of ornithology, an exhaustive treatise beginning on Page 1 with instruc-

*Continued on Page 8*