



the Quail

Mount Diablo Audubon Society

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

www.diabloaudubon.com/index.php

Volume 59, Number 8

May 2014

The Amphibian Extinction Crisis ♦ Michael Starkey

Current threats facing amphibian populations, and what you can do about it!

Amphibian populations around the world are declining at an alarming rate and nearly one-third of the world's amphibian species are on the verge of extinction. Up to 200 species have completely disappeared since 1979. This is not normal! Why is this happening? What is causing this Amphibian Extinction Crisis? How can you help? *Save The Frogs!* Advisory Committee Chairman Michael Starkey will answer these questions by explaining what is causing the Amphibian Extinction Crisis and he will tell us how we as a society can help out amphibians around the globe.



Michael Starkey with European Tree Frog.



California Red-legged Frog, Point Reyes National Seashore. Photo by Gary Fellers/USGS.

Founded in 2008, *Save The Frogs!* is America's first and only public charity dedicated to amphibian conservation. Its mission is to protect amphibian populations and to promote a society that respects and appreciates nature and wildlife. The presentation features many of Mr. Starkey's photos of amphibians from around the world, and there will be a question and answer session following the presentation.

Michael Starkey serves as Chairman of the *Save The Frogs!* Advisory Committee. In this position, he rallies together scientists, volunteers, and others in order to help broaden *Save The Frogs!* mission of conservation. Mr. Starkey regularly gives lectures on amphibian conservation at universities, schools, and to public interest groups.

Mr. Starkey has worked as an ecological consultant for environmental consulting firms and government agencies such as the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the

California Department of Fish & Wildlife. He has worked with a wide diversity of California wildlife, including California Tiger Salamanders, San Francisco Garter Snakes, Giant Garter Snakes, bats, and ringtails. He has also worked at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute in Panama, studying larval development and parental behavior of the neo-tropical frog, *Leptodactylus insularum*. After witnessing the result of widespread extinction of amphibians in the Panamanian rainforest, Mr. Starkey became dedicated to conserving amphibian species around the world. Mr. Starkey began working with *Save The Frogs!* in 2010 to inform the public about the threats facing amphibians and to help nurture a society that respects and cherishes all forms of wildlife. He has given presentations on frog conservation in the USA, Canada and Belize.

The June program at our annual dinner meeting will be a presentation on birding in Costa Rica by Ian Austin.

BIRDING INFORMATION

Stella McMillin of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife Investigations Laboratory will discuss the tests conducted in this state laboratory for anticoagulant rodenticide poisoning. When illegal use of pesticides is found, enforcement action may be taken by CDFW and the County Agricultural Commissioner's Office.

Meeting Schedule

The next general meeting of Mount Diablo Audubon Society will be **Thursday, May 1**, 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: **Michael Starkey**

* Please remember to bring a cup.

Thursday, June 5: . Ian Austin
Birding in Costa Rica

President's Corner

By Jimm Edgar

At our general meeting in April, Megan Hertel, the associate director of public policy for Audubon California was scheduled to be speaking on the restoration of the San Joaquin River. When she was introduced she explained that an issue had come up in the last 24 hours that was important for us to hear about: the status of the Tricolored Blackbird in California. The Tricolored breeds almost exclusively in California. This bird at one time darkened the skies of California, but the numbers have dropped alarmingly. Some say that if action is not taken we could see what happened to the Passenger Pigeon. One of the main reason for the birds' decline is that they tend to nest in the grain fields of farms in the Central Valley of California, and these grain fields are often harvested before the Tricolored young hatch; hence no young birds. Megan gave us a detailed update on a remarkable event that happened during that week that she spoke to us. The issue was that a particu-

lar farm in the valley was about to harvest their fields in order to feed their cattle. The harvesting would take out all the Tricolored Blackbird nests and no young birds would be hatched. California Audubon asked the farmer if we would buy enough grain to feed his cattle, would he stop the harvest. He said he would. The cost would be \$40,000. California Audubon put out an urgent e-mail asking for donations and within 24 hours \$100,000 had come in. The colony has been saved at least for this year. A great story but, of course, not the end of the story.

After Megan spoke we had our main program which was on the California Condor. It was obviously a very popular subject. I think I counted over 130 people in the audience. Our meetings are really well attended primarily because of the great programs that our Program Chair, Ariana Rickard, has arranged.

Our chapter continues to be quite involved in the big issue of feral cats. The conservation committee has tried to work

with different communities on this issue. The city of Antioch recently passed an ordinance that outlaws the feeding of feral cats except on private land. We attended the council meeting to express our support. This will be an ongoing issue and, for some of our members, not a popular one. So keep tuned.

Our long time MDAS board member, Brian Murphy, has agreed to take on the role of Volunteer Coordinator for the chapter. Thanks, Brian. We set up a MDAS table at a number of events throughout the year and this is a great way for us to get the message out about our chapter and what we are involved in.

By the time you read this, the April 22 event we co-sponsored with Rakestraw Books will have happened. David Sibley, author and bird expert, is to speak at Heather Farm about his revised book, *The Sibley Guide to Birds*. It is a real honor to be a part of this event.

Good News for Kirtland's Warbler

Last summer, population of the endangered Kirtland's Warbler reached an astonishing high of more than 2000 nesting pairs. While that may not seem a large number, this is a species that was once believed to be headed for certain extinction. Having exceeded the numbers established by the US Fish and Wildlife Service when it was listed, this beautiful bird is now ready to be removed from the Endangered Species list. However, since this is a conservation-reliant species (meaning it will always need the care of humans), it won't simply be cut loose to fend for itself. The Kirtland's Warbler Alliance is a nonprofit group working to establish the manner in which the bird will continue to receive the protection it deserves.

It might seem strange that a conservation group wants to remove a species from the endangered species list and the protections and resources it affords. Why is delisting Kirtland's Warbler a good thing? In the case of Kirtland's Warbler there is a strong, successful history of a variety of partners working together to help the population return from the brink of extinction. That work has paid off. Population numbers have been above the recovery goal of 1,000 breeding pairs for over a decade.

Delisting is the right next step for the species, for the partners who have been



The Kirtland's warbler is a songbird that nests in young jack pine stands. Until 1995 Kirtland's Warblers had only been known to nest in the northern part of Michigan's Lower Peninsula. Today, they also nest in the Upper Peninsula, and since 2007 have nested in Wisconsin and Canada. They migrate from their nesting grounds to the southeastern coast of the United States on their way to wintering grounds in the Bahamas. USF&WS photo by Joel Trick.

working on the species' recovery, and for conservation. By transitioning the species from recovery to long-term survival the objective of the Endangered Species Act is fully achieved. And while Kirtland's Warbler continues its adventure away from the Act's protections, another species whose future is still uncertain can benefit from the funding once dedicated to the warbler.

Welcome New Members

Ximena Borquez	Walnut Creek
Jannie Dresser	Crockett
Stanley Goodman	Lafayette
Renate Johnson	Dublin
Monique Looney	Clayton
Terry Mead	Orinda
Barbara Messmore	Walnut Creek
Merle Norman	Richmond



This is one of the most widespread of all birds. It can be found on all continents except Antarctica.

Unscramble these letters, or turn to Page 7 to learn more.

ABLNORW

The Quail is published monthly except January and August by Mount Diablo Audubon Society, P.O. Box 53, Walnut Creek, CA 94597-0053. *The Quail* is printed on 30% post-consumer waste recycled paper. **The deadline for the June issue is May 13.**

Observations

By Maury Stern

More migrants are coming to stay as well as passing through. It seemed for a while that many birds were quite early but nothing record-setting. Hugh Harvey has already seen fledgling Chestnut-backed Chickadees at his Walnut Creek home and Titmice at Heather Farm Park.

A **Cackling Goose** was at Marina Park in Richmond 3/15. LL.

LL also saw a **Black Scoter** near the Bay trail in Richmond on the same date.

JL saw an adult **Bald Eagle** flying at the Alameda-Contra Costa county line from the Oakland hills 4/2. Another was over Nimitz Way in Wildcat Canyon RP 4/7. ES, MM.

A **Snowy Plover** was at Clifton Court Forebay in east Contra Costa county 4/4. One was last seen in 1995 at that site. AL.

On 3/15 **Caspian Terns** were flying along the Bay Trail in Richmond. LL. There were 16 on Bay Farm island 3/15. KE. HH and BH saw some at Heather Farm pond around that time also.

A **Common Murre** was near the Bay Trail 3/15. LL.

EK, KM, TF, and NW heard **Great Horned Owls** at Lafayette Reservoir 3/16. They also heard a **Northern Saw-whet Owl** there. A nesting **Great Horned Owl** was at Contra Loma RP with one owlet on 3/28. PS and granddaughter. HH heard **Great Horned Owls** from his house in the nearby redwoods in Walnut Creek 4/3.

A single **Short-eared Owl** was at Pacheco March off Waterfront Road in Martinez 3/26. JB. This is the area where there were three last year.

Rufous Hummingbirds visited various yards the past month. 3/12 and 3/29 in Antioch. P&NS; 3/20 in Walnut Creek. DH; JBo in Martinez 3/20; and CH in Martinez 4/3.

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

Lewis's Woodpeckers continued to be seen by many at Clayton Community Park from 3/15 to 3/21. LL, JEL, BG, TF, L&NW, MR, JRo, AH.

Two **Merlins** flew over Jewel Lake in Tilden 3/30. JD.

At Castle Rock along the Pine Canyon trail on 3/16, two **Peregrine Falcons** were seen by TF, EK, KM, NW.

The **Tropical Kingbird** has been at Heather Farm pond since 1/16. SH. Others seeing it are HH, SL, RH, TF, JE. Another was at West County Wastewater Treatment Plant in Richmond on 3/23 and 4/3. WB.

Three **Western Kingbirds** were at Clayton Community Park 3/31. AH.

Warbling Vireos were at Pine Canyon 3/16. TF.

Cassin's Vireos were seen there on 3/30. TF.

HH saw three **Barn Swallows** 3/21 along the Contra Costa Canal near Heather Farm. Four active nests were at the gazebo at Lake Anza in Tilden RP 4/3. PY.

ES and MM saw a **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher** along Nimitz Way in Wildcat Canyon RP 4/7.

Orange-crowned Warblers were at Castle Rock Regional Park 3/16, TF, EK, KM, NW, and Jewel Lake in Tilden RP 3/20. JD, as well as Walnut Creek home 3/20. DH.

SG saw **Wilson's Warblers** 3/18 at Inspiration Point, Tilden RP, and Jewel Lake 3/20. JD.

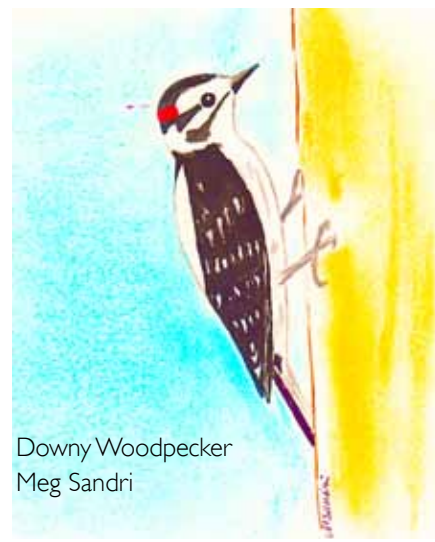
On 3/25, JR had four **White-throated Sparrows** (2 white stripe and 2 tan stripe) and 3 sub-species of **Fox Sparrow** in her Alamo yard.

DW saw a **Black-headed Grosbeak** 3/30 at Valle Vista Staging Area, Moraga. There was one at Tilden Nature Center 4/4. AK.

PH had a **Hooded Oriole** at her Walnut Creek yard 3/8. BL and JE saw one at Heather Farm 3/20. Others were seen by JR, PS, AL.

Bullock's Orioles were at Castle Rock Park where they usually nest 3/16. TF, EK, KM, NW.

WB Wendy Beers, JB John Blakelock, JBo Jackie Bobrosky, JD Jay Dodge, JE Jimm Edgar, JEL Janet Ellis, TF Tracy Ferrington, KF Kathy Francone, SG Susan Greef, BG Bob Gunderson, BH Bob Hislop, CH Carol Haglund, HH Hugh Harvey, PH Pat Heagy, AH Alan Hirsch, RH Randy Hogan, SH Susan Houck, DH David Hutton, AK Alan Kaplan, EK Erica Kawata, AL Albert Linkowski, SL Stephen Long, LL Laura Look, JL John Luther, MM Mike McClaskey, KM Kai Mills, MR Mark Rauzon, JR Jean Richmond, JRo Jim Roethe, PS Paul Schorr, P&NS Paul and Nancy Schorr, ES Emilie Strauss, DW Denise Wight, NW Niki Wixson, L&NW Leary and Nina Wong, PY Pam Young



Downy Woodpecker
Meg Sandri

Mount Lassen † July 12-13

If you are planning on participating in the MDAS birding trip to Lassen Volcanic National Park the weekend of July 12 and 13, please let the leader know ahead of time that you are coming. Gary and I will be camping in Loop B of the Butte Lake Campground which allows reservations ahead of time. If you prefer not to camp, I can give you names and phone numbers of several small motels and B & B's outside the park, but you should make your reservations soon as they fill up quickly. There are also a few sleep-only cabins at Manzanita Lake with a nearby communal bathhouse and a private lodge in the south central part of the park which serves meals and has a pool. Please contact me for details and more information at 925-806-0644 or e-mail me at: eklarson@comcast.net.
Eugenia Larson

Field Trip Schedule

By Hugh Harvey

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
- 14-15 Saturday-Sunday Yuba Pass/Sierra Valley

July

- 12-13 Sat/Sun Mount Lassen
- 19 Saturday San Mateo Coast

August

- 16 Saturday Bodega Bay

③ Thursday, May 1 Mitchell Canyon

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

Meet at 8 AM in Mitchell Canyon parking lot. There is a \$6.00 parking fee. From I-680 in Walnut Creek, take Ygnacio Valley Road to Clayton Road. Turn right on Clayton Road and right on Mitchell Canyon Road to the end. Gnatcatchers, spring migrants and residents, lots of wildflowers. Usually hot! Bring liquids and lunch.



Mount Diablo
Fairy Lantern,
Calochortus pulchellus
Mitchell Canyon.

② Thursday, May 8 Mount Diablo State Park

Leader: Jimm Edgar, (510) 658-2330.

MDSP is a treasure trove for birders. Although every season in the park has its special qualities, early May on the mountain has its own beauty. Wildflowers add color to the vistas. Carpool leaves at 8 AM from La Gonda. Meet at 8:45 AM at the South Gate entrance after birding South Gate Road. Usually hot! Bring lunch and drinks. Entry fee required. Many migrant and nesting species are possible including Sage Sparrows, California Thrashers, woodpeckers, raptors and warblers.

② Thursday, May 15

West Briones Regional Park

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

Meet at 8 AM in parking lot on the right hand side of the west entrance road, off Bear Creek Road. From SR 24 in Orinda, drive north on Camino Pablo about 2.25 miles, turn right on Bear Creek Road, continue for 4.5 miles to park entrance. Wildflowers, spring birds; Lazuli Buntings are usually abundant. Poison oak along shaded trails. Bring lunch and liquids.



POISON OAK CLIMBING PINE TREE

② Saturday, May 17

East Contra Costa County

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

Carpool leaves Sun Valley at 6:15 AM. Or meet the leader at 7 AM on Cypress Road at the Marsh Creek Trailhead parking lot just east of O'Reilly's Auto Parts in Oakley. Go north on I-680, east on SR 4 through Oakley, left onto Cypress Road. May be hot! Bring lunch and liquids. Target birds include: Blue Grosbeak, Great-tailed Grackle, Burrowing Owl, Black-chinned Hummingbird, Swainson's Hawk, Yellow-billed Magpie and Yellow-breasted Chat.

Come birding with us!

Field trips are open to members and non-members, beginners and advanced birders, but not dogs. Weather or other contingencies may require changes. For updates, visit the MDAS website at 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 ①: Easy, little or no walking, smooth paths

Category ②: Moderate, one mile +, possibly rough terrain

Category ③: 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: **La Gonda**—From I-680 southbound, exit at El Pintado, turn right and right again; park along open space on left. From I-680 northbound, exit El Cerro, turn left, then right at second light onto La Gonda; carpool point is about one-half mile north. **Sun Valley**—Southwest corner of the Sun Valley Mall parking lot at Willow Pass Road and Contra Costa Boulevard in Concord.

Young Birder's Big Year

By Logan Kahle

Over the past four months I have been obsessed with a ridiculous and crazy plan—a Big Year—a mad jaunt around California, trying to track down as many bird species as possible. My year has been quite a lot like what you saw in the movie *The Big Year*.

In mid-February the word came from afar: a Gyrfalcon and a King Eider were being seen in Humboldt County. So, I arrived on a wet winter's day at dawn at the mouth of Redwood Creek in Orick. Not exactly sure where the bird had been found, I was lucky to run into a local birder who was heading the same way. We hiked north along the coast, stopping occasionally to scan the waters. After about a mile, there was a large rocky overhang. We hiked up the feature and had a good view of the ocean. Among several Black Scoters, a large brown duck went in and out of view. It was the King Eider! But the day was long from over. At Patrick's Point I discovered a group of Gray Jays, a local specialty. From there it was on to the North Spit Jetty. This spot is well known by local birders for one species: Rock Sandpiper. I walked out on the jetty. Sure enough, five Rock Sandpipers were perched obligingly on the rocks! Offshore, a few Black-legged Kittiwakes flew by, another nice Humboldt specialty.

On my first jaunt to Los Angeles I had the excuse of going to southern California to look at colleges. I chased many incredible rarities down there, including Dusky-capped Flycatcher, Inca Dove, and Hepatic Tanager. It was my last day and I had seen most of the rarities I wanted to find. So, I decided to head to a nearby beach to try to add terns and loons to my Los Angeles County list. I was flying out of LAX, so I chose a random beach near there. I pulled up and scanned the ocean. A few Royal Terns were scattered about, as were Western Grebes and other common nearshore birds. In the distance along the beach, I saw a group of gulls and terns and decided to check them out. I walked down the beach and looked at the terns. They were all Elegants and Royals. Then I looked at the gulls. It was a hodgepodge of Westerns, Californias, Heermann's, Ring-billed, and Herring Gulls. An immature gull caught my attention. It reminded me very much of a Lesser Black-backed Gull I had seen at the Salton Sea days previously. I walked over to the bird, photographing it constantly. It flew, showing a characteristic white rump and black tail band. This was just Los Angeles County's fifth Lesser Black-backed Gull! Not a bad find considering over 500 species have been found in that county! As my plane arrived in SFO that evening, and the word of my gull had spread throughout the birding community, I received a text message from one of the state's great birders that read something like this: "Great find with the gull. There is a Varied Bunting in LA right now." I read this message stupefied and annoyed, since I knew I would have to go right back down to Los Angeles...

On the next Sunday I drove down to LA. I left home at 3:00 AM and arrived three hours after sunrise at the indicated bunting spot. Birders had seen the bird at dawn, but not since. Reassured, I looked for a couple hours before I decided I'd check on some other rarities and come back. I went to a spot where a Prairie Warbler had been reported. But no sooner had I arrived at the spot than a phone call came in that my friend was looking at the bunting. I ran to my car and headed back. When I arrived half an hour later, I was told that the bird had not been seen since my friend's sighting. I was discouraged but remained persistent, and

Trip Reports

Tomales Bay State Park, March 15. Thirteen members spent another beautiful day at Tomales State Park. 45 species were seen on the water and in the forest. Highlight birds were: Brant, Common Loon, Osprey, Allen's Hummingbird, Red-breasted Sapsucker, Pygmy Nuthatch, Golden-crowned Kinglet, and Purple Finch.

Maury Stern

Mountain View Sanitary/McNabney Marsh, March 18. Fourteen MDAS birders took part in the field trip on a nice clear dry day. While this year, probably due to the lack of rain, there were not a lot of ducks present, we did see thirty-four different species of birds. Highlights included American Bittern, several Green Herons, lots of Red-winged Blackbirds, Black-necked Stilts, Great-tailed Grackle and Marsh Wrens. Thanks everyone who joined me in making it a successful outing.

Steve Taylor

Valle Vista, March 20. Twenty birders, including two guests from Pennsylvania, were treated to a beautiful morning walk in the scenic and green Valle Vista, outside Moraga. We saw mainly the resident birds and some lingering waterbirds, the former highlighted by at least three California Thrashers well seen, first at scope distance and later nearby on the ground. A Merlin posing on a sunny treetop was nice. A few swallows, Allen's Hummingbirds, and a heard Pacific Slope Flycatcher were early spring arrivals. We enjoyed seeing a Red-shouldered Hawk sitting on its nest and an active Bushtit nest. Sparrows seemed to be missing; only one White-crowned was seen, just one Song Sparrow heard and no Fox Sparrows. A total of 60 species were seen and another three heard.

Don Lewis

Lake Lagunitas, March 26. After several phone calls to Marin County birders, the Lake Lagunitas trip was cancelled due to inclement weather.

Hugh Harvey

Garin Regional Park, April 5. Garin park was at its greenest on a warm sunny day after several rains had fed the creek—and caused a little bit of mud. Most of the expected spring birds were there to greet us, including Allen's Hummingbird, Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Warbling Vireo, four kinds of swallows, House Wren, Orange-crowned Warbler, Black-headed Grosbeak, and at least three Bullock's Orioles. There were also many remaining winterers such as Golden-crowned Sparrow and Ruby-crowned Kinglet. The Grasshopper Sparrows did not put on a great show, but they were heard in two places by two of the birders. Totals: 8 birders, 55 species.

Fred Safier



Varied Bunting

continued to walk around the bushes it seemed to favor. I decided to play a tape to see if the bird would respond. Almost instantly the bird called back. I stood motionless for several seconds. Then, the purple and crimson bird came blasting into view, and I enjoyed a color-saturated study of it. With that, I had a fun ride home, one species richer.

To date, I have seen around 315 species this year in California, but my grand goal of 460 lies in the far distance. I look forward to many all-night drives in search of lone, wayward, eastern birds amidst watered grass lawns, at desert vagrant traps, or in tall pines in the urban complex of San Diego.

Birding Guides ♦ An Historical Comparison

Color Key to North American Birds
Frank M. Chapman, 1912



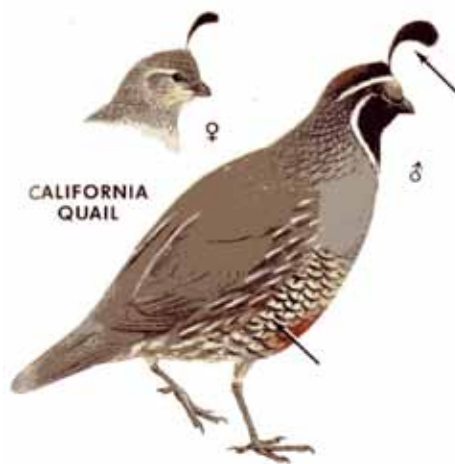
294. California Partridge (*Lophortyx californica*).
L. 10. Ad. ♂. Above olive-brown; belly patch chestnut. Ad. ♀. Plumes shorter; throat whitish streaked with dusky; no distinct chestnut patch on belly. Notes. Song, a pheasant like crow and a crowing, emphatic *sit-right-down*, *sit-right-down*; calls, a sharp *pit-pit pit*, and a note like that of a young Robin.
Range.—"Coast region of California south to Monterey, introduced in Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia." (A. O. U.)

A Field Guide to Western Birds
Roger Tory Peterson, First Edition 1941



CALIFORNIA QUAIL

A Field Guide to Western Birds
Roger Tory Peterson, Fourth Edition 1990



CALIFORNIA QUAIL

A Field Guide to the
Birds of North America
National Geographic Society
First Edition 1983



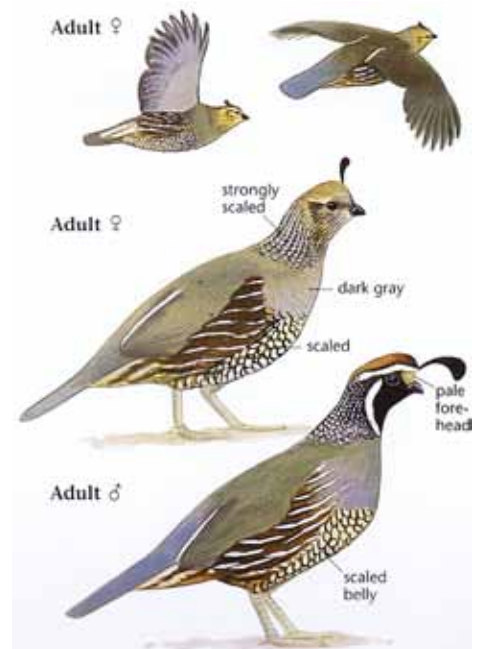
California Quail

The Sibley Guide to Birds
David Allen Sibley,
First Edition, Tenth Printing, 2013

California Quail *Callipepla californica*

L 10" ws 14" wt 6 oz (180 g)

Common in coastal chaparral-type habitat. Often seen along roadsides or field edges in small coveys. Very similar to Gambel's Quail, but range barely overlaps. Distinguished by darker overall color, strongly scaled nape and belly, and lack of blackish patch on belly. Voice: Male gives a repeated nasal *put way doo* similar to Gambel's, but with final note longer and descending; much individual variation. Variety of other calls, most similar to Gambel's, including a sharp spitting *spik wik wiw*.



Adult ♀

Adult ♀

Adult ♂

János Xántus

» Continued from Page 10

was sent to the American consulate in the port of Manzanillo in southern Mexico, where he continued to collect specimens for the Smithsonian. However, because of his error in judgment bordering on insubordination, Xántus was dismissed and he decided to return to Hungary.

In 1866, Xántus was one of a group who organized the Budapest Zoo and Botanical Garden, and he became its first director. He also acted as a consultant and curator for the Hungarian National Museum. During these years, Xántus was able to undertake several collecting trips through Asia, where he found and named still more organisms previously unknown to western science. He died in 1894 and was buried in Budapest.

In 1857 *Letters from North America* and in 1859 *Travels in Southern California* were published, both in Hungarian. In these books and in letters to his fam-



Xántus's Hummingbird.

Photo courtesy of Glenn Jensen, Baja Photographer.com.

ily, Xántus used both exaggeration and falsehood for self-promotion. Xántus was, according to one biographer, a "professional complainer, poseur, holder of grudges, irritant to almost everyone whom he came in contact."

János Xántus is honored in the names of Xántus's Murrelet (*Synthliboramphus hypoleucus*); Xántus's Hummingbird (*Hylocharis Xántusii*); and Xántus Jay, a subspecies of the Western Scrub-Jay that is found in the Cabo San Lucas area (*Aphelocoma californica hypoleuca*). Other organisms named for Xántus: Largemouth Blenny (*Labrisomus xanti*); Golden Croaker (*Umbrina xanti*); Leaf-toed Gecko (*Phyllodactylus xanti*); Xántus' swimming crab (*Portunus Xántusii*); Gunsight Fairyfan (*Clarkia xantiana*); Shrubby euphorbia (*Euphorbia xantii*); Mojave pincushion (*Chaenactis xantiana*); Riverside Spineflower (*Chorizanthe xantii*).

Enigma though he was, János Xántus was an important figure in the annals of the natural history of America.

a Barn Owl *Tyto alba*

Owls, when they roost by day, are vulnerable to predator attack. Camouflage is an important asset, helping them to hide in plain sight while they sleep. Many owls choose roost sites in very dense vegetation, such as an evergreen tree. Screech-Owls prefer a tree-hole roost. Barn Owls like the concealing fronds of palm trees.

A perched owl that perceives danger will assume a concealing, or "cryptic" posture. As if it's mother told it to "Sit up straight", the owl stands erect like a palace guard and may seem to look like a broken tree branch. Or the bird may press up against the trunk of the tree, its mottled feathers blending with the bark.

The Barn Owl pictured was at home on a cliffside in Modoc Lava Beds National Monument. The photo demonstrates the advantages of camouflage. If you receive your *Quail* by mail, please view the picture in color at our website www.diabloaoudubon.org/newsletter/Quail_201404.pdf; or, better, sign up for e-mail delivery with a request to the editor, ellis.myers@earthlink.net.



Barn Owl. Photo by Ellis Myers

Camouflage is used by most animals and exists in two basic forms: crypsis and mimesis. Cryptic camouflage makes animals hard to see, while mimesis, or mimetic camouflage, disguises them as something else.

Owls, being nocturnal hunters, have excellent hearing in general, but Barn Owl hearing exceeds even that of most owls. These birds have two specific anatomical features that contribute in a

remarkable way: their facial disk and asymmetric ears. No other owls possess the pronounced concave facial disk that Barn Owls have. This facial disk, created by the feathers to form a hollow disk around the entire face, works like a satellite dish—capturing and locating sound vibrations. On either side of the disk are the two ear openings which, as in other owls, are positioned slightly asymmetrically. The facial disk collects sound vibrations and send them to the ears. Because of the asymmetry, the brain receives the signals at slightly different times, enabling the owl to determine the source of the sound with extreme accuracy.

The Barn Owl is in a family of its own. Not only does the Barn Owl look different from other owls, with its heart-shaped face, it is actually classified in a different group than all other North American owls, which are grouped together in a family called *Strigidae*—the "typical owls". Barn Owls, however, belong to a family called *Tytonidae*, which comes from the Greek word *tuto*, which means, "night owl". The Barn Owl is one of our most beneficial avian allies. Arthur Cleveland Bent called it "A most efficient living mousetrap."

Birding Mount Lassen

By David C. Rice

Ryan D. Burnett and Jon R. King write in their *Birds of Lassen Volcanic National Park: An Annotated Checklist* (2004), that Lassen Volcanic National Park (LVNP) “lies at the junction of four major bioregions: the Cascades to the north, the Central Valley to the west, the Sierra Nevada to the south, and the Great Basin to the east.” Their checklist includes 206 species, 94 confirmed as breeders, and 11 others unconfirmed but “suspected of breeding.”

Golden Gate Audubon Society (GGAS) has a long history of sponsoring bird tips to LVNP. In the Audubon Society of the

flats to the red-fir forest and montane meadows leading to Mt. Lassen’s north slopes. Some of California’s most desired mountain birds occur here, including Williamson’s Sapsucker, Black-backed Woodpecker, Goshawk, Townsend’s Solitaire and Cassin’s Finch. This is a fairly strenuous hike. Most birds can be seen by the time the trail crosses Manzanita Creek, which is about 1.5 miles from the campground and seven hundred feet higher. Carry water and wear a hat.”

Beyond the immediate vicinity of Manzanita Lake, he said that “birding along the park road can be productive. Going south from Manzanita Lake,” he suggested trying “the Craggs and Lost Creek Campgrounds, Hat Lake (now a meadow), the recently burned forest at Dersch Meadow, the Summit Lake Campgrounds, and the King’s Creek Picnic Area. In June, the picnic area and campground on the north side of Summit lake can be good for finding nesting Black-backed Woodpecker.” However, he said “the Lassen Peak Trailhead isn’t productive. Although Gray-crowned Rosy Finches occur on Lassen’s slopes above tree line, finding them requires a great deal of luck.”

On the east side of LVNP, I have co-led, with Robin Pulich, a GGAS backpack-birding trip to Snag Lake for many years. The trailhead is at Juniper Lake, about 13 miles north from the town of Chester. (There is also a trailhead for Snag Lake at the Butte Lake campground, which is in the northeastern part of the park.) Our Friday-Monday trip list in mid-late August is usually between 65 and 80 species, and our cumulative trip list is over 160 species. Snag Lake can be reached by a day hike, too. Car camp at Juniper Lake. The easy trail (three miles) goes up a ridge and then gradually down to the lake. It can be hiked in about 1.5 hours without a backpack. The best birding at Snag Lake is in the meadow at the south end of the lake before 10:00 AM. The willows often have warblers at eye level, including the Golden Pileolated (aka Wilson’s), and sparrows. Aside from passerines, raptors and woodpeckers are common, Bald Eagle and Osprey regular. The lake usually has a few Farallon (aka Double-crested) Cormorants, gulls and terns, plus migrating ducks in late summer. Canada (aka Hutchins) Geese still nest, as do Common Merganser and Spotted Sandpiper. If there is a mud flat between the edge of the lake and the meadow, migrating shorebirds can be found in small numbers. During a heavy snow year, though, the meadow floods and the birding is not as good. Although I have not done a scientific survey, I doubt there are many places in the California mountains where such a variety of birds can be found in such a small area as at Snag Lake.

If you haven’t birded LVNP yet, you’re in for a birding treat when you make the trip. Some of the birds have different names than they did eighty years ago, but they are still there, and since we have better binoculars and field guides now, you’ll see more species than our Audubon predecessors did. As Elliott Coues wrote in 1874, “How then can you, with so much before you, keep out of the woods another minute?”

♣ David Rice is the author of *Why We Bird*, available from www.whywebird.com and from Amazon.



MOUNT LASSEN NATIONAL PARK, NPS PHOTO.

Pacific’s (aka GGAS) monthly bulletin, *The Gull*, January 1931, the article “Some Birds of Mt. Lassen Volcanic National Park” reported that “from August 7 to August 24 [1930] “Western Wood Pewee, Blue-fronted Jay, Mountain Chickadee, Robin, Golden Pileolated Warbler, Fox Sparrow, [and] Sierra Junco were daily records.” That trip also found “Farallon Cormorants, Great Blue Heron, Black-crowned Night Heron, Hutchins Geese, Lesser Scaup, Mountain Quail, Desert Sparrow Hawk, Pacific Night-hawk, Rock Wren, and Chipping Sparrow.”

Dan Murphy, who has led a GGAS trip to LVNP for more than thirty years, said that “for the day visitor or car camping birder, Lassen Volcanic National Park’s Manzanita Lake (elevation 5959’) may be among the most accessible and rich montane birding spots in Northern California. There is a full service National Park campground. To bird the area, he suggested “hiking the perimeter trail and continuing around Reflection Lake and the Lily Pond (about 2.5 miles), allowing 2-3 hours. The area is dominated by yellow pine and white fir, with significant areas of green leaf manzanita, willow, and alder. An early morning bird walk may yield thirty-five or more species between mid-June and late-August, including woodpeckers, flycatchers, swallows, warblers, and sparrows.”

He also said that “the Manzanita Creek Trail is good for birding. It leaves from Loop D in the campground and goes from the yellow pine forest there through green leaf manzanita and pumice

Birds and Binoculars

By Mike Eliot

Both Hooded and Bullocks Orioles have arrived to nest in Contra Costa County. These spectacular birds are nectar feeders, like hummingbirds. There are specially designed feeders for these birds that are too large to use hummingbird feeders. The nectar you make for them should also be weaker than hummingbird nectar. If you feed both, just dilute the hummingbird nectar by adding ¼ cup water to 1 cup nectar. They also are attracted to fresh fruit, such as oranges, and to grape jelly. Some oriole feeders will accommodate all three.



Chickadees, wrens and titmice are nesting now. These birds will often have two broods each year and will readily make use of birdhouses. You should be seeing the fledglings at bird feeders now or very soon.

Looking for a new set of birding binoculars? Consider some important features. Field of view, i.e., how wide you can see at a distance of 1000 yards, is important in following birds in flight. A rule of thumb for good bird watching binoculars is 300-350 feet width at 1000 yards. Close focus, how close you can be to an object and still focus clearly, is important for close viewing. 6-10 feet is average. Diameter of the objective lens, the one at the far end away from the eyes, is important in determining how much light reaches your eyes. The larger the objective lens diameter, the more light. This becomes important in low-light situations such as early morning, dusk, or in dense woods. The more light, the clearer and more colorful the view. 42 mm is the most common diameter.

Finally, consider magnification. Birding binoculars are commonly 8 or 10 power, meaning they magnify the object 8 or 10 times. Most birders use 8 power because they are easier to hold steady. 10 power binocs also generally reduce the field of view by a small amount. Some other features to consider are the number and types of lens coatings, the feel of the binoculars in your hands, and the manufacturer's warranty.

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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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.

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

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Xántus' Murrelet. Glen Tepke photo..

János Xántus de Vesey Army Surgeon • Collector • Curmudgeon

János Xántus was born in 1825 of a well-to-do Hungarian family. During the revolution of 1848, he fought with the rebels against the Austro-Hungarian government. Taken prisoner and forced to serve in the army, he escaped and fled by way of Amsterdam to London.

In 1851 he sailed to the United States, arriving in New York with just seven dollars. For several years he taught piano and worked as a clerk and as a pharmacist. He drifted around, living at times in New Orleans, at times in Iowa with a Hungarian settlement. Feeling despair, he assumed the name Louis de Vesey and enlisted as a private in the U.S. army as a medical corpsman. While in the military at Fort Riley, Kansas, he met a surgeon, William Alexander Hammond. Hammond was an amateur ornithologist who was collecting for Spencer Fullerton Baird, the Assistant Secretary (Director) of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. With

Hammond's friendship Xántus became an assistant surgeon, developed an interest in natural history, and also found specimens of birds and animals for Baird.

Through Baird's influence, Xántus was transferred to Fort Tejon, California, where he collected many specimens for the Smithsonian. In 1859, again through Baird's influence, he joined the U.S. Coast Survey to observe the tides at Cape San Lucas, Baja California. He traveled to his station by Butterfield Stage from Fort Tejon to San Francisco, then by ship to Bahia Tortugas on the Pacific, from there overland to La Paz on the Gulf of California, and by ship on to Cabo San Lucas. On his overland trip and later in the vicinity of Cabo San Lucas, he had a good opportunity to observe animal and plant life, and to collect various species, including many fishes, which were presented to the Smithsonian Institution.

Baird stated that during his stay in Mexico Xántus made "the addition of a



János Xántus in the uniform of a full U.S. Navy captain. Xántus was never in the navy.

larger number of new animals to our fauna than has been made by one person in any single region of North America before."

After his return from Baja in 1861, Xántus went to work for the U.S. Department of State and in the following year

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