



the Quail

Mount Diablo Audubon Society

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

www.diabloaudubon.com/index.php

Volume 60, Number 2

October 2014

Birds of the Mono Lake Region ♦ Marie Read

Nationally known bird photographer Marie Read takes us on a journey exploring the birdlife of the Mono Lake Basin. Marie's stunning photography, now featured in her newly released book *Sierra Wings: Birds of the Mono Lake Basin*, reveals the fascinating lives of the birds that breed or migrate through this spectacular birding hotspot.

Iconic Mono Lake, in California's Eastern Sierra, is famous for bizarre tufa towers rising from its surface, and highly saline and alkaline water. Teeming brine shrimp and alkali flies attract huge numbers of breeding and migratory birds, including California Gulls, Wilson's and Red-necked Phalaropes, and Eared Grebes. The surrounding sagebrush scrub, pinyon-juniper, Jeffrey pine and conifer-aspen forests support many other species.

Delve into the hidden lives of birds such as Pinyon Jay, Violet-green Swallow, Sage Thrasher, Lewis's and Black-backed Woodpeckers, and American Dipper. Enjoy Marie's stories from the field and learn how she obtained some of the behavior and action shots in the book.

Signed books will be available for purchase.

Marie's images and articles have appeared in magazines such as *Living Bird*, *Bird Watching*, *Nature's Best*, *Birds & Blooms*, and *National Wildlife*, as well as in books, calendars, and websites. She has authored two previous books: *Secret Lives of Common Birds: Enjoying Bird Behavior Through the Seasons* (Houghton Mifflin, 2005), and *Common Birds & Their Songs* (coauthored with Lang Elliott, Houghton Mifflin, 1998).

You can see Marie's work at www.marieread.com.



California Gull feasting on alkali flies at Mono Lake. Photo by Marie Read.



BIRDING INFORMATION

Kent Fickett will discuss the life history of the Andean Condor and present photos showing an incredible sequence of a baby condor's first flight.

The Andean Condor, even larger than the California Condor, is the official bird of Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru.

Meeting Schedule

The next general meeting of Mount Diablo Audubon Society will be **Thursday, October 2**, 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: **Marie Read**

*Please remember to bring a cup.

Thursday, November 6:

Zara McDonald, Mountain Lions

President's Corner

By Jimm Edgar

We had our first general meeting of the New Year last night at Heather Farm and had a great turn out and a very interesting talk by a member of our Young Birders Club, Kai Mills. He showed slides of birds he had seen this past year. Very impressive. The main program was all about the seven National Wildlife refuges in the Bay area. All in all another great evening.

In early September National Audubon released a ground-breaking report regarding the future implications of climate change on birds in particular. It is not encouraging. Scores of species face drastic reduction and even possible extinction. On this, the 100-year anniversary of the death of the last Passenger Pigeon at the Cincinnati zoo, it is sobering news. This will be an ever-increasing issue that we all will have to work on.

On more encouraging news, the Contra Costa Times on September 3 had an article entitled "Burrowing Owl Back To Life." It tells the story about the efforts to restore habitat for this wonderful little owl in the

south bay area around Alviso. Santa Clara Audubon has been very involved in this work. The Bay Area's Burrowing Owl population in the 1980s was around 560 to 640 adult owls; three-quarters of them in the South Bay. By 2009 there were estimated 70 adults left in the South Bay. Since then with efforts to rehab the area the numbers have picked up, particularly with breeding pairs with chicks. So, a good story to hear about. These owls are so much fun to watch.

On a not so encouraging note I read an article in the New York Times entitled "The poisoning of Africa's vultures." It was a very sad story. I was totally unaware of this issue and maybe others are also. The article talks about the terrible killing of elephants for their ivory which we all know about. It then talks about one of the side stories regarding this killing. When an elephant is killed it takes about 30 minutes for vultures to locate the kill. It can take even the most skilled poacher over an hour to hack off the tusks. Vultures can locate a kill within 30 minutes and rangers can see

Good News for Greater Sage-Grouse

Greater Sage-Grouse may be about to get a helping hand. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is facing a court-ordered September 2015 deadline to decide whether or not to list the Greater Sage-Grouse under the Endangered Species Act. The effort to conserve Greater Sage-Grouse and sagebrush habitat is complex, involving several state and federal agencies, ranchers, energy interests, and others.



Greater Sage-Grouse. USFWS photo.

The various states and the Bureau of Land Management must produce sage-grouse conservation plans intent on aiding population recovery. One such resource management plan was released this summer, involving 2.4 million acres of land near Lander, Wyoming, about 100 miles southeast of Yellowstone, an area that harbors large numbers of sage-grouse. The plan is intended to conserve sage-grouse habitat while at the same time enabling renewable-energy development. The plan calls for the BLM to prioritize energy-type development away from core habitat.

The Montana Fish and Wildlife Commission approved a plan to close all or parts of 32 counties to sage-grouse hunting this year and to shorten remaining hunting seasons from two months to one. Spring breeding lek counts were the lowest since 1980. The reduction in hunting should help, but it may be too little or too late?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has opened a new Greater Sage-Grouse website at www.fws.gov/greaterSageGrouse/ with the goal of increasing public awareness of the troubles facing this remarkable species.

Welcome New Members

Maria Genova

Walnut Creek

the overhead circling of the vultures and know a kill has taken place. So what the poachers have been doing is to poison the elephants which die and then the vultures feed on the carcass and they get poisoned and die. The article said that roughly 500 vultures, laced with poison, had been killed by poachers in Namibia in one month last year. Vulture conservationists have determined that 1700 vultures had been killed in the last year or so. Of the nine species of vultures in Africa four are threatened with possible extinction. The other side story is that vulture parts have become a trade. In particular their heads are valued fetishes and are thought to be clairvoyant; businessmen spread their powder around their business to improve profits. Strange? Authorities have cracked down on the sale and distribution of pesticides. Money from the west has been pledged to elephant saving but little or none for vultures. A sad state of affairs.

Please Note

The General Meeting for January, 2015, will be on the second Thursday, January 8, and not on January 1, New Year's Day.

Q This endemic bird of California has been known to flip over rocks, logs, or cow patties in search of insects.

They also eat acorns, as their habitat is the oak savannahs and riparian areas.

Unscramble these letters, or turn to Page 6 to learn more.

ABDEEEGIILLLLMOPWY

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 November issue is October 14.**

This month's major cause of excitement was a **Northern Waterthrush** seen at the spillway of Jewel Lake in Tilden Regional Park from 8/29 to date. D&SR, and 25 others.

Three or four **Brant** continue to be seen on or near Brooks Island. TM, MP, BD, LK, JA, AA.

BH saw four **Northern Shovelers** at Heather Farm pond 8/23.

The first **California Quail** noted in 30 years at Heather Farm was seen by FS and HH on 9/3.

An **American Bittern** was in the reeds at Lafayette Reservoir. M&HW saw it from their canoe in August.

JR saw a **Golden Eagle** at Briones RP 8/12.

A **Solitary Sandpiper** was at the Dow Wetlands Reserve in Antioch. 8/29. AL and 8/31. CS

LL saw four **Surfbirds** at the Bayfront Park in Pinole 9/1.

Ten **Red Knots** were seen near the 51st Street bridge on Meeker slough 8/27. FD.

A **Pomarine Jaeger** was along the Richmond Shoreline 8/31. JA.

RM and EP saw a **Long-tailed Jaeger** from Port Costa 8/29.

One or two **Common Murres** were seen near the Richmond Marina 8/25. CL, RC.

A **Vaux's Swift** was at Heather Farm pond 9/8. FS, HH.

Willow Flycatchers were in migration near the end of August and beginning of September. LL at Newhall Community Park in Concord; FS and HH at Heather Farm.

A few **Ruby-crowned Kinglets** arrived earlier than usual in Tilden RP. RS on 8/31; AK, NB on 9/5.

Many warblers have come through in migration the past few weeks. Yellow,

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.

Black-throated Gray, Townsend's, and Hermit have been especially widespread.

Large numbers of **Western Tanagers** have also been reported.

DW saw an early **Fox Sparrow** 9/4 at Vollmer Peak in Tilden RP.

A single **Lawrence's Goldfinch** was with a flock of goldfinches at Bayfront Park in Pinole 9/1. LL.

JA Jeff Acuff, AA Anne Ardillo, NB Nel Benningshof, RC Robert Coon, BD Bob Dunn, FD F Dupont, HH Hugh Harvey, BH Bob Hislop, LK Logan Kahle, AL Albert Linkowski, LL Laura Look, CL Calvin Lou, TM Tara McIntire, RM Roger Muskat, MP Michael Park, EP Eric Pilotte, JR Jim Roethe, D&SR Diane and Steve Rose, FS Fred Safier, CS Catherine Spaulding, DW Denise Wight, M&HW MaryAnne and Hugh Winig.

State of the Birds 2014

The Good News: Conservation Efforts Work When Applied. *The Bad News:* Populations Are Down in Many Key Habitats

One hundred years after the extinction of the Passenger Pigeon, the nation's top bird science and conservation groups have come together to publish *The State of the Birds 2014*—the most comprehensive review of long-term trend data for U.S. birds ever conducted. The report finds bird populations declining across several key habitats, and it includes a "Watch List" of bird species in need of immediate conservation help. The report also reveals, that in areas where a strong conservation investment has been made, bird populations are recovering. The report can be found at stateofthebirds.org.

The State of the Birds 2014 is based on extensive reviews of population data from long-term monitoring. It looks to birds as indicators of ecosystem health by examining population trends of species dependent on one of seven habitats: grasslands, forests, wetlands, ocean, aridlands, islands and coasts. After examining the population trends of birds in desert, sagebrush and chaparral habitats of the West, the report's authors identify aridlands as the habitat with the steepest

population declines in the nation. There has been a 46 percent loss of these birds since 1968 in states such as Utah, Arizona and New Mexico. Habitat loss and fragmentation due to development are the largest threats. These are also significant threats in the nation's grasslands, where the report notes a decline in breeding birds, like the Eastern Meadowlark and the Bobolink, of nearly 40 percent since 1968. That decline, however, has leveled off since 1990—a result of the significant investments in grassland bird conservation.

While habitat loss and fragmentation are the most consistent and widespread threats across habitats, they are closely followed on the list by invasive species. Introduced species have a particularly strong impact on islands where native birds have a greater restriction on where they can live. In Hawaii, introduced animals such as mongoose, rats and domestic cats serve as unnatural predators and take a huge toll on native species, while grazing livestock degrade habitat. One-third of all U.S. federally endangered birds are Hawaiian species.

However, as with many grassland birds, species in several other key habitats have benefited from targeted conservation.

Shorebirds along the coasts are squeezed into shrinking strips of habitat due to development. But among the 49 species examined, there has been a steady rise in population of 28 percent since 1968—a direct result of the establishment of 160 national coastal wildlife refuges and nearly 600,000 acres of national seashore in 10 states.

"Because the 'state of the birds' mirrors the state of their habitats, our national wildlife refuges, national parks, national seashores, and other public lands are critical safe havens for many of these species—especially in the face of climate change—one of the biggest challenges to habitat conservation for all species in the 21st century," said Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell.

The creation and preservation of large swaths of forests through public-private partnerships in the Appalachian Mountains and the Northwest has helped declining forest-dependent species such as the Golden-winged Warbler and the Oak Titmouse. Efforts like this are essential, as forest-dependent birds have declined nearly 20 percent in the western U.S. since 1968 and 32 percent in the east.

Wetlands are one of the habitats to benefit most from conservation. The North

Continued on Page 7 »

Field Trip Schedule

By Hugh Harvey

October

- 4 Saturday.....Hawk Hill
- 7 Tuesday.....Hayward Shoreline/Winton Avenue
- 11-12 Saturday/Sunday.....Monterey Pelagic and Land Birds
- 22 Wednesday.....Berkeley-Emeryville Shoreline
- 25 Saturday.....Abbott's Lagoon

November

- 18 Tuesday.....McNabney Marsh/Mountain View Sanitary
- 22 Saturday.....Charleston Slough/South Bay
- 29 Saturday.....Limantour

December

- 6-7 Saturday/Sunday.....Sacramento Refuges
- 11 Thursday.....Niles Area
- 17 Wednesday.....Christmas Count/East Contra Costa
- 20 Saturday.....Christmas Count/Central Contra Costa
- 27 Saturday.....Solano County Raptors



August, 2015

Please note this change!

- 15 Saturday.....Bodega Bay

② Saturday, October 4 Hawk Hill

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

Carpool leaves El Nido Ranch Road at 8:00 AM. Meet in parking lot upper Rodeo Lagoon at 9:15 AM. From southbound US 101 take last Sausalito exit, Alexander Avenue, just before the Golden Gate Bridge. From San Francisco, pass the Vista Point and take the Alexander Avenue exit. On west side of freeway, turn left toward the Marin Headlands and go up the hill (Conzelman Road); at the intersection go right and down hill (McCullough Road). Turn left at the stop sign onto Bunker Road and continue to the parking lot on the right just before the bridge. We will bird the lagoons before going up to the hawk watch site. At noon the staff gives a talk on their work and usually demonstrates the actual banding. Carry lunch and liquids. The walk up the hill is only a few hundred yards, but it is steep.

② Tuesday, October 7 Hayward Regional Shoreline

Leader: Bob Richmond, (510) 427-9843.

Carpool leaves Sycamore Valley Road Park and Ride lot in Danville at 7:00 AM. Meet at 7:45 AM at Winton Avenue entrance. From I-880, exit Winton Avenue, drive west 4.5 miles. Park near the trailhead just before the parking lot gate. Because traffic is so unpredictable, if no one is there, wait a while. Shorebirds and possibly early ducks. Time permitting, we will finish at the San Leandro Marina. Bring drinks and lunch.



Long-billed Curlew.

BETH BRANTHAVER

Come Birding With Us!

② Saturday/Sunday, October 11-12 Monterey Pelagic and Land Birds

Leader: Terry Colborn, (530) 312-9947.

The weekend will feature a Saturday pelagic trip. Sunday will consist of land birding at a variety of possible locales including Carmel River State Beach, Moss Landing, Moonglow Dairy, Elkhorn Slough and others. The cost is only \$110 for the boat trip. There are a maximum of only 25 spaces; plenty of spaces are still available. Contact the leader ASAP if you are interested. Terry Colborn, TLCBirding@gmail.com, (530) 312-9947 There is a waiting list.

① Wednesday, October 22 Berkeley-Emeryville Shoreline

Leader: Eugenia Larson, (925) 806-0644.

Carpool leaves at 8:00 AM from El Nido Ranch Road. Meet at 8:30 AM in the parking lot at the north end of the Emeryville Marina. Take SR 24 to I-580 west, turn north onto I-80. Take Powell St. exit, turn left on Powell, go out to Emeryville Marina, park in last lot near pier. May be cold and windy, dress in layers. Loons, grebes, bay ducks and shorebirds.

① Saturday, October 25 Abbott's Lagoon

Leader: David Hutton, (925) 938-4485.

Carpool leaves Sun Valley at 7:00 AM. Meet at 8:30 AM at Bear Valley Visitor Center, Point Reyes National Seashore. From I-80 in Vallejo, follow SR 37 19.1 miles to Atherton Avenue, exit and turn left, cross US 101 to San Marin Drive and continue for 3 miles.



Ferruginous Hawk, Abbott's Lagoon.

BETH BRANTHAVER

Turn right on Novato Blvd for 6 miles to stop sign, then turn left on Point Reyes-Petaluma Road for 7 miles to another stop sign. Turn right across the bridge, go 3 miles to SR 1. Turn left into Point Reyes Station. After a stop at the Bovine Bakery for coffee and pastries, continue out of town towards Olema, then turn right onto Bear Valley Road. Visitor Center is off Bear Valley. Be prepared to carry lunch and liquids. Lots of walking in sand.

Trip Reports

Lassen Volcanic National Park, July 12–13. Sixteen members and two guests enjoyed a warm weekend. We hiked up to Bathtub Lake from Butte Lake Campground on Saturday morning and had good looks at all three nuthatch species, a pair of Western Bluebirds and an amazing Common Nighthawk that flew down and touched the small lake before circling around and flying off in broad daylight! At a little no-name lake along the trail we enjoyed a pair of Spotted Sandpipers with a tiny chick at the edge of the water. On the return trail Teri Wills spotted a Green-tailed Towhee and we added one Rock Wren and a Townsend's Solitaire. In the afternoon we looked for the small family group of Red Crossbills that had been seen earlier on the trail to Prospect Peak from the campground, but they were not refound. However, several members camping at Butte Lake enjoyed seeing them flying overhead several times. Sunday morning the group hiked around Manzanita Lake and Lily Pad Pond. The best birds included a male Evening Grosbeak, some Vaux's Swifts, an obliging Golden-crowned Kinglet bathing at the edge of the lake, a Hermit Warbler and a total of four American Dippers along the creek leading into Manzanita Lake. We also enjoyed seeing several zebra-striped young American Coots and some reddish-orange baby Pied-billed Grebes as well. Clark's Nutcrackers were everywhere and we had multiple sightings of Brown Creepers, Yellow-rumped Warblers, and Hairy and White-headed Woodpeckers. It was disappointing not to refind the two Gray Jays at Summit Lake or the pair of Williamson's Sapsuckers seen at Bathtub Lake while scouting earlier in the week. Tim Howe stayed over on Monday and reported six Black-backed Woodpeckers and a pair of Williamson's Sapsuckers early in the morning at Butte Lake Campground! Many thanks to Tracy Farrington who came up early in the week and helped

with the scouting for this trip. A total of 62 species was seen plus three more while scouting ahead of time. *Eugenia K. Larson*

Bodega Bay, August 16. Bodega Bay was at its best: cool and gray at first, cool and sunny by 11 AM—no wind to speak of. Ten birders saw 54 species. Highlights included Pacific and Common Loons off Campbell Cove, Wandering Tattler and Black Oystercatchers, the latter with chicks, at the Head, Osprey and Wilson's Warbler at Owl Canyon, Elegant Tern at the Tides, many Black Turnstones and one alternate plumage Ruddy Turnstone at Bodega Harbor. At the Rail Pond we played (briefly) a Virginia Rail recording—nothing. Then a Sora recording—and a Virginia Rail responded loud and clear! *Fred Safier*



Pigeon Guillemots at Bodega Bay. Beth Branthaver photo.



Hutton's Vireo at Jewel Lake. Beth Branthaver photo.

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.

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. **El Nido Ranch Road**—Exit SR 24 at St. Stephens Drive east of Orinda. El Nido Ranch Road is parallel to and north of the freeway. Park just east of the intersection with St. Stephens Drive.

Jewel Lake, September 4. Thirteen members and guests spent the morning at the Nature Center Area of Tilden Regional Park. The morning was cold and foggy, but warmed into the sixties with blue skies in an hour or so. Our focus was on finding the Northern Waterthrush which had been found a few days earlier. We didn't see it, but did see multiple mixed flocks with warblers, vireos and chickadees enjoying the insects. We saw bathing Yellow Warblers, Western Tanagers and others in the small pools of water in the spillway from Jewel Lake. We saw 33 species including Pygmy and Red-breasted Nuthatches, Brown Creepers, Ruby-crowned Kinglets and Hairy Woodpeckers. *Maury Stern*

Young Birders and the Rich Stallcup Bird-A-Thon

As mentioned at the September meeting, the Mount Diablo Audubon Young Birders will be participating as a team in the 2014 Rich Stallcup Bird-A-Thon. This 37th annual fund-raising event for Point Blue Conservation Science (formerly Point Reyes Bird Observatory) takes place between September 1 and October 15. Our Young Birders team will conduct a species count within 24 hours—a "Big Day"—spread over Saturday, October 4, and Sunday, October 5. We will raise funds for Point Blue, as the MDAS board has pledged to donate \$10.00 per species that record through our efforts.

If you want to make an additional contribution toward the team goal of \$1000, please go to <http://www.pointblue.org/help-the-environment/support-us/birda-thon/>. Then check on "Support a Team or Counter."

The very ambitious itinerary for our "Big Day" has been drawn up by Logan Kahle and, for now, looks like this: Pinehurst area, prior to dawn, for owls; then Inspiration Point and over to the Richmond area (Point Isabel, Meeker Slough, Canal Blvd., Miller/Knox and Point Molate). From there to Waterbird Regional Preserve, Mitchell Canyon (maybe Black Diamond),

Ironhouse Sanitary District, Bethel Island, Piper Slough, Holland Tract, Clifton Court Forebay, Byron Water Treatment Plant and Byron Airport Preserve...whew!

We're hoping to have about an eight-member team, overall. Participants do not have to conduct a count over all of the 24 hours but may drop in and out as their schedule permits. We've still got some logistics to work out but plan to do that at our next meeting.

If anyone would like to contact me, send a note to: tracy_farrington@yahoo.com or phone: (925) 788-6223.

Tracy Farrington

Protect the Central Flyway

The new Minnesota Vikings stadium is primed to become one of Minnesota's biggest bird killers unless quick action is taken. The Vikings and the Minnesota Sports Facilities Authority decided to use a form of glass that is extremely deadly to birds, rejecting calls to use safer types of glass that could save thousands of birds each year from fatally colliding with the stadium.

The stadium, currently under construction in downtown Minneapolis and scheduled for completion in 2016, features nearly 200,000 square feet of glass (that's 4 football fields of glass walls!) and is sited near a major bird migration pathway along the Mississippi River corridor. This decision is

a death warrant for birds. This is a billion dollar stadium, and the cost to save thousands of birds by using bird safe glass could cost about one-tenth of one percent of that.

In August, the City of Minneapolis enacted a resolution asking the Vikings to "build a bird-safe stadium, in keeping with the recommendations of the Stadium Implementation Committee, the comments of the Department of Natural Resources, and the advice of the Minnesota Audubon Society." Yet the Sports Facilities Authority remains adamant, and while accepting an increased budget of over \$46



million dollars, rejects the request to use \$1.1 million for bird-friendly glass.

It may not be too late. Voice your opinion at <http://mn.audubon.org/change-glass-save-birds>.

Yellow-Billed Magpie ♦ *Pica nuttalli*

a The Yellow-billed Magpie is one of California's most striking birds. Aside from its signature yellow bill, the bird is easily recognizable from its white, black and iridescent body and wings. Its range includes the Sacramento and San Joaquin valley floors and foothills, and valleys of the Coastal Ranges from San Francisco Bay south to Santa Barbara County. In Contra Costa County, the most promising location to find this bird is along Delta Road in Knightsen. The most recent sighting reported to eBird was by Young Birders Club members Niki Wixsom and Kai Mills, who saw 5 birds in Martinez last November.

For a variety of reasons—including habitat loss, pesticide use, and West



Yellow-billed Magpie. Audubon California photo by Brian Sullivan.

Nile Virus—the Yellow-billed Magpie population has found itself at risk in recent years, and it is now an Audubon Watchlist species. Researchers with Audu-

bon California recently identified the Yellow-billed Magpie as being particularly susceptible to climate change.

Audubon California is helping the Yellow-billed Magpie in several ways. They are working with their chapters and other organizations to promote the conservation of oak woodlands—prime habitat for this species. They also share data with researchers at UC Davis. You can add to this data bank by reporting all observations of Yellow-billed Magpies to eBird.

West Nile Virus – The Facts *By Mike Eliot*

West Nile Virus (WNV) is a seasonal epidemic that flares up in late summer and continues into the fall. It is insect borne and has been found in over 48 species of mosquitoes, 300 species of birds, and 18 species of mammals, including humans.

Symptoms in humans appear in 2 to 15 days and include:

- Less than 1% may have severe headache, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, vision loss, numbness, and paralysis. This may last several weeks and some effects can be permanent. It can also be deadly to as many as 15% of those with severe symptoms.
- About 20% have milder symptoms such as fever, headache, body aches, nausea, vomiting, swollen lymph glands, or skin rash. Symptoms last from a few days to several weeks with no residual effects.
- Nearly 80% who get infected have no symptoms at all.

Nearly all infections come from bites of infected mosquitoes, which contract WNV from biting infected birds. WNV is not contracted through touching, kissing or other casual contact with infected people or animals. There is also no evidence that cats or dogs that eat infected birds will contract the disease. There is also no evidence that birds contract the disease from other birds, feeders, or bird baths.

The risk is greatest to birds, which have high mortality rates from WNV. It has been estimated that 75% of crows east of the Mississippi have died from WNV. Some areas of the country report large reductions in backyard bird populations where WNV has been found in dead birds.

What can people do? There is little that you can do to help infected birds. There is no vaccine or preventative for wild animals. Changing your bird feeding habits will have no effect.

You can help remove the threat and avoid the disease yourself with a number of personal measures:

- When outdoors, use insect repellent containing an EPA registered active ingredient, especially from dusk to dawn.
- Wear long-sleeve shirts and long pants.
- Make sure you have good window and door screens.
- Get rid of any standing water, including pots, buckets, old tires, children's pools, and

Project FeederWatch

Project FeederWatch is a winter-long survey of birds that visit feeders at backyards, nature centers, community areas, and other locales in North America. FeederWatchers periodically count the birds they see at their feeders from November through early April and send their counts to Project FeederWatch. FeederWatch data help scientists track broadscale movements of winter bird populations and long-term trends in bird distribution and abundance. For a story on one way that FeederWatch has been of aid to the study of eye disease in House Finches, see Page 4 of the March 2006 *Quail* at www.diabloaudubon.org/newsletter/Quail_Mar_06.pdf

Anyone interested in birds can participate. FeederWatch is conducted by people of all skill levels and backgrounds, including children, families, individuals, classrooms, retired persons, youth groups, nature centers, and bird clubs. Participants watch their feeders as much or as little as they want over two consecutive days as often as every week (less often is fine). They count birds that appear in their count site because of something that they provided (plantings, food, or water).

The 28th season of Project FeederWatch begins November 8, 2014. If you haven't signed up yet, join today. To do so, go to <http://feederwatch.org/join-or-renew/> New participants are sent a Research Kit with complete instructions for participating, as well as a bird identification poster and more. You provide the feeder(s) and seed. Then each fall participants receive a 16-page, year-end report, *Winter Bird Highlights*. Participants also receive the Cornell Lab newsletter.

There is a \$18 annual participation fee for U.S. residents (\$15 for Cornell Lab members). The participation fee covers materials, staff support, web design, data analysis, and the year-end report. Project

outdoor pet water dishes. Refill daily and only as needed.

- Replace water often in bird baths and use water wigglers to keep water moving so mosquitoes cannot breed.
- Report dead or dying birds to your local Vector Control Agency.
- Put up bat houses to help increase bat populations. Bats eat as many as 600 mosquitoes a night.



This male House Finch shows obvious signs of eye disease. Cornell Lab photo by Errol Taskin

FeederWatch is supported almost entirely by participation fees. Without the support of participants, this project wouldn't be possible.

Project FeederWatch is operated by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Bird Studies Canada.

State of the Birds

» *Continued from Page 3*

American Wetlands Conservation Act has enabled strategic conservation projects covering a collective area larger than Tennessee. While wetland loss continues in some regions, the Act has helped protect and restore wetlands through public-private partnerships across the United States, thereby reversing declines in waterfowl populations such as the Mallard and Blue-winged Teal.

In addition to assessing population trends in the seven key habitats, the North American Bird Conservation Initiative members created a State of the Birds Watch List. The 230 species on the list are currently endangered or at risk of becoming endangered without significant conservation. Forty-two of them are pelagic species. Birds like the Laysan Albatross and Black-footed Albatross are facing increasing levels of oil contamination, plastic pollution and greatly reduced amounts of prey fish due to commercial fishing operations. Rising sea levels due to climate change also put their low-elevation breeding habitats in the Hawaiian and Marshall islands at risk of flooding.

One of the more dire groups on the Watch List is made up of the 33 Hawaiian forest species. The report's authors have deemed Hawaii the "bird extinction capital of the world." They point to proactive con-

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Steller's Sea Cow. Sketch by Georg Steller

from repeated storms, the exhausted crew desperately wanted to be back on Russian soil. Steller was sent to gather plants that could be used to combat the scurvy. He soon determined that the land was not Kamchatka as the local animals had no fear of man, indicating they must have never seen them before. Steller returned to the ship and quietly told his bedridden captain what he suspected. This could not be Kamchatka and they must have blundered across an undiscovered island. The island, later named Bering Island, is only about 300 airline miles from Petropavlovsk. The crew spent the winter on the island. Thirty men succumbed to scurvy and starvation on the island. Among them was the expedition leader, Captain Vitus Bering, who died on 19 December. The *St. Peter*, anchored off-shore, was wrecked by strong winds.

It took the entire following summer for the senior officer, the ship's carpenter, and the remaining crew to build a smaller, fragile craft, using parts from the wreckage of the old *St. Peter*. In this flimsy vessel they were able to sail back to the Kamchatka mainland, arriving 14 months after they had originally left port.

While the party was on Bering Island, Steller wrote *De Bestiis Marinis*, describing the fauna of the island, including the first scientific description of the sea otter. This work, in Latin, was published posthumously in 1751 in the memoirs of the Imperial Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg. Steller continued collecting and writing about the plants and animals throughout the Kamchatka Peninsula and Siberia. On his return journey overland to St. Petersburg Steller died of a fever on November 14, 1746, in Siberia at the young age of 37.

Then there is the curious case of the Steller Sea Ape. On August 10, 1741, Steller reported an encounter with an unknown creature, stating "We saw a very unusual and unknown sea animal, of which I am going to give a brief account since I observed it for two whole hours. It was about two Russian ells in length [i.e. about three feet], the head was like a dog's, with pointed ears. From the upper and lower lips on both sides whiskers hung down which made it look almost like a Chinaman, The eyes were large; the body was longish round and thick, tapering gradually towards the tail. The skin seemed thickly covered with hair, of a grey color on the back, but reddish white on the belly; in the water, however, the animal appeared equally reddish and cow colored. The tail was divided into two fins, of which the upper, as in the case of sharks, was twice as large as the lower."

Because such an animal has been seen at no other time or place, the sighting remains cryptic, and several reasonable explanations have been advanced. Few discredit the observation, recognizing Steller's eminence as a careful and knowledgeable scientist. Most commentators suggest that he was seeing a fur seal or a monk seal. But one possibility stirs the imagination. Because Steller gave the beast the name *Simia marina danica*,



St. Peter. Painting by Vladimir Emyshev.

Length 24.5 meters, width 6.7 meters, armament 14 cannons.

Danish sea ape, it suggests that Steller might have been releasing his frustration and anger with Captain Bering, whom he could not get along with. Bering was the only Dane on an otherwise mostly German crew, and the two had been at odds throughout the journey. Steller especially resented not being allowed time to conduct his explorations on shore. Was Georg Steller describing Vitus Bering?

Other species are named for Steller: The Steller's Eider, a small sea duck of Alaska's North Slope, the Bering Strait, and the Aleutian Islands; Steller's Sea Eagle; the Steller's Sea Cow, a huge type of manatee, now extinct; and Steller's Sea Lion. Also named for Georg Steller are a mountain, a bay and a river, all in Alaska, as well as several plants native to Siberia.



Steller's Eider. www.theinkednaturalist.co.uk

Kudos for a Young Birder

Logan Kahle, one of the principal members of Mount Diablo Audubon's Young Birders Club, has received one of six Pasadena Audubon/WFO Youth Scholarships awarded by the Western Field Ornithologists. Logan, age 17, from San Francisco, stated "Birding has ... helped me understand the world from an ecological perspective, allowing me to observe habitats beyond just the avifaunal perspective ... I plan to use birding in research and hopefully a career in the coming years."

The scholarship covers the registration fee for the 39th annual conference of Western Field Ornithologists in San Diego, California, October 8-12, 2014, a selection of field trips, workshops, plenary science sessions, expert panels, a banquet, and two nights lodging. Mount Diablo Audubon congratulates this young man.

State of the Birds

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ervation as the best way to recover endangered birds and keep other species off the Endangered Species List, not only in Hawaii but in all key habitats.

Another group on the Watch List will require international cooperation: neotropical migrants. These species that breed in North America but migrate south of the U.S. border in winter hold 30 spots on the Watch List. Species like the Bicknell's Thrush, a bird that breeds in the mountains in the Northeast, faces rapid deforestation of its already limited wintering grounds on the island of Hispaniola. A positive precedent, however, lies with the Cerulean Warbler, a species that breeds in forests of the eastern U.S. and winters in the tropics. While its numbers are still declining, it has benefited by international collaborations to not only create healthy breeding habitat in the U.S., but good wintering habitat in Colombian coffee-growing landscapes.

The Passenger Pigeon, once numbering in the billions, is a strong reminder that even species considered common can become extinct without careful attention, as it did September 1, 1914. Another focus for *The State of the Birds 2014* is the importance of keeping common birds common. The report identifies 33 species, like the Northern Bobwhite, Grasshopper Sparrow and Bank Swallow, that are declining rapidly in many areas. These birds have lost more than half their global population, and the 33 species combined have lost hundreds of millions of breeding individuals in just the past 40 years.

The report points, once again, to conservation as the most valuable solution to stopping these species from joining the Watch List. Addressing the conservation needs of these birds will result in healthier, more productive land and water for other wildlife, as well as for people.

The strongest finding in *The State of the Birds 2014* is simple: conservation works. Ducks fly once again in great numbers up the Mississippi River and across the Chesapeake Bay. California Condors are rebounding from just 22 birds to more than 200 today. Bald Eagles, Brown Pelicans, Peregrine Falcons are now abundant. To prevent future extinctions like the Passenger Pigeon, the report's authors point to science, technology and knowledge as the foundation of proactive partner-driven conservation.

Smithsonian Institution

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. [Note: Second Thursday, January 8, 2015.]

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Steller's Jay, Ethan Winning photo..

Georg Wilhelm Steller Naturalist ♦ Explorer

The man for whom the Steller's Jay was named, Georg Wilhelm Steller, was born in 1709 in Windsheim, Bavaria. He studied at the University of Wittenberg in the fields of medicine, theology and natural sciences. In 1734 he went to Berlin, where he earned a certificate in botany. He then joined the Russian army as a surgeon. In 1737, Steller was given an appointment at the Imperial Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, Russia. He was chosen as naturalist on Vitus Bering's Great Northern Expedition to explore the oceans east of Siberia.

The saga of this journey is filled with misfortune. In June 1741, the two ships, St. Peter and St. Paul, set out from Petropavlovsk on the Kamchatka Peninsula, sailing eastward to ascertain whether North America and Asia were connected. (Petropavlovsk was named for the two ships, which had been built there) The two ships were separated by a storm, The St. Paul headed southeast,

and in July neared the coast of Prince of Wales Island at the southern tip of Alaska's panhandle (only about 700 miles north of Seattle). Captain Chirikov sent men ashore, but they never returned. The captain decided to return to Russia and arrived in Petropavlovsk in October.

The St. Peter, under Captain Bering, sailed a more northerly route and found the Alaskan coast, probably at Kayak Island. Here, he sent men ashore in need of replenishing their water supply. Georg Steller was first to step ashore, becoming the first European of record to set foot in Alaska. But because of Bering's desire to continue his command to map the coast, Steller was allowed only ten hours to explore the island. On the island he found a jay, later named for him, which convinced him that they were indeed in America.

With supplies running low, Bering decided on 10 August to head back west.



Georg Wilhelm Steller
www.theinkednaturalist.co.uk

Blown off course by fierce winter storms and with a crew so seriously afflicted by scurvy that only three men were able to work on deck, the St. Peter finally sailed within sight of land on 4 November 1741. With their sails and rigging already tattered

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