



# 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)

Volume 60, Number 5

February 2015

## Birds of Colombia ✦ Bob Lewis

Photographer and birding instructor Bob Lewis will present knockout images of birds seen during two trips to Colombia. One focus of these trips was hummingbirds, with the Bearded Helmetcrest being a primary target. Part of the challenge was its habitat: over 13,000 feet in the Andes. Colombia has 147 species of hummingbirds, affording many opportunities to photograph these delightful creatures. Most of the time was spent in the three ranges of the Andes, where habitats change with altitude, and the bird species are many and local. Colombia has more species of birds than any other country, with over 1,850. In addition to hummers, Bob will show images of ovenbirds, tanagers, flycatchers, and other brightly colored denizens of the Colombian mountains. He'll explore the unique mountain range in the northeast, Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, which reaches 18,700 feet, the highest summit in Colombia. He'll also take a brief side tour for a cup of Colombian coffee.

Bob Lewis is a board member of Golden Gate Audubon Society, birding instructor, and chair of the Adult Education Committee, as well as president of the Farallon Islands Foundation. Bob is currently teaching Bay Area Birds with friend Rusty Scalf, which they have done for more than 20 years, and is also teaching Master Birding, offered at the California Academy of Sciences.

Bob spent 33 years at Chevron Corp. as a scientist and manager, overseeing a 60-person staff and \$15 million budget. He is one of the Bay Area's leading birding instructors, teaching classes on Bay Area Birds, Bird Migration, and Birds of the Sierra. Bob is a coordinator of the Oakland Christmas Bird Count, in which he has been a participant for over 25 years. He is



Keel-billed Toucan. Photographed in Colombia by Bob Lewis.

a GGAS field trip leader and has taken part in several county breeding bird surveys, including Contra Costa County's. He is an expert bird and wildlife photographer. Bob received a B.S. in chemistry from Carnegie Institute of Technology and a PhD from Princeton University.



Bearded  
Helmetcrest

### Meeting Schedule

The next general meeting of Mount Diablo Audubon Society will be **Thursday, February 5**, 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: **Bob Lewis**

\* Please remember to bring a cup.

Thursday, March 5: Spiders

Tim Manolis

### BIRDING INFORMATION

Maury Stern will present our annual update of the 115th Christmas Bird Counts. Learn how this year's counts compare with last year's when 61 participants recorded 148 species in Central Contra Costa County and 37 birders counted 151 species in East County.

DEDICATED TO HABITAT CONSERVATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

# President's Corner Welcome New Members

By Pat Schneider, Membership Chair

As many of you know, Jimm Edgar was hospitalized on the afternoon of January 8 and remains in the hospital at the time of this writing. We do not have details regarding his hospitalization, but we do know that his recuperation may last up to about 60 days. In the interim, I will serve as Acting President, and the Board of Directors will continue to do their work for the Chapter. Please keep Jimm in your thoughts and prayers.

Paul Schorr

## Good News for Ridgway's Rail



Light-footed Ridgway's Rail. American Association of Zoo Keepers photo.

Six Light-footed Ridgway's Rails (previously known as Light-footed Clapper Rails) were released into the Batiqitos Lagoon Ecological Reserve in San Diego County in November. The release consisted of five males and one female that will contribute genetic diversity to this highly endangered marsh bird population. The state-owned Batiqitos Lagoon is managed by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and is one of the few remaining tidal wetlands on the Southern California coast. Located in the city of Carlsbad, the 543-acre preserve is home to several threatened and endangered birds, insects, plants, fish and mammals and is also designated a State Marine Conservation Area.

The captive bred birds were introduced to the lagoon after being raised at breeding centers at SeaWorld San Diego and San Diego Zoo Safari Park, in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The Ridgway's Rail is a grayish-brown, chicken-sized bird with a long, downward

Continued on Page 8 »

- |                           |               |
|---------------------------|---------------|
| Linda Adams               | San Ramon     |
| John and Carrie Alexander | Brentwood     |
| Martha Alexanderson       | Walnut Creek  |
| Patricia Alfieri          | Danville      |
| Phillip Araki             | Pinole        |
| Althea Bates              | Pleasant Hill |
| Janet Battisfini          | Walnut Creek  |
| Don Bauman                | Toledo, OH    |
| Kathleen Becker           | Walnut Creek  |
| Thomas Bishop             | Lafayette     |
| Bernadette Bitton         | Pleasant Hill |
| Duan Bjerke               | Danville      |
| Emily Blanck              | Moraga        |
| Beverly Bortin            | Walnut Creek  |
| Craig and Pat Bradshaw    | Pacheco       |
| Jerry Britten             | Clayton       |
| Mark and Inez Brocco      | Pleasant Hill |
| Madelaine Burgess         | Concord       |
| Daniel Campos             | Concord       |
| Harvey and Phyllis Ceaser | Concord       |
| Roger and Martha Conant   | Pinole        |
| Jan Cooper                | Walnut Creek  |
| Brenda Davis              | Danville      |
| Denise Desalernos         | Concord       |
| Maybelle Dore             | Walnut Creek  |
| William Espey             | Lafayette     |
| Margaret Edwards          | Lafayette     |
| Doug Elliott              | Concord       |
| Robert Evans              | Walnut Creek  |
| Janet Frenzel             | Pittsburg     |
| Phillip Galu              | Danville      |
| William Galvin            | Walnut Creek  |
| David and Betsy Gifford   | Lafayette     |
| Thomas Goedewaagen        | Walnut Creek  |
| George Goerl              | Lafayette     |
| John Gravell              | Pleasant Hill |
| G. Richard Gruner         | Bay Point     |
| Michael and Melissa Grupp | Walnut Creek  |
| Bob and Wanella Harvey    | Pittsburg     |
| Susan Harvey              | Brentwood     |
| Barry and Rosalie Howarth | Walnut Creek  |
| Diane Karkiewicz          | Walnut Creek  |
| Dean Kelch                | Crockett      |
| Sandra King               | Lafayette     |
| Rich Kurovsky             | Pleasant Hill |
| Steve Loftin              | Walnut Creek  |
| John and Marti Masek      | Danville      |
| Jean Matuska              | Concord       |
| Wendy Murphy              | Concord       |
| Mark and Susan McGowan    | Martinez      |
| Mike Mecham               | Pleasant Hill |

- |                               |               |
|-------------------------------|---------------|
| F. Michael Melewicz           | Lafayette     |
| Geoffrey and Valerie Meredith | Lafayette     |
| Mary Muerle                   | Walnut Creek  |
| Nancy Norris                  | Walnut Creek  |
| William and Phyllis O'Neil    | Walnut Creek  |
| Jordan Pitta                  | Brentwood     |
| Roger Prince                  | Danville      |
| Sergio and Carmen Raya        | Martinez      |
| Carolin Robinson              | Martinez      |
| Kem Robinson                  | Walnut Creek  |
| Sonia Rodriguez               | Walnut Creek  |
| Bernard Rose                  | San Ramon     |
| Sylvie Shapley                | Pleasant Hill |
| Noelle Schoellekopf           | Danville      |
| Cindy Siegel                  | Concord       |
| Dee Simmons                   | Concord       |
| Joseph Smith                  | Fremont       |
| William Smith                 | Walnut Creek  |
| Edward Stanislawsky           | Alamo         |
| Christine Steck               | Moraga        |
| R C Stephens                  | Walnut Creek  |
| Frank Strehlitz               | Concord       |
| Susan Sullivan                | Pleasant Hill |
| Helen Sweet                   | Lafayette     |
| Garry Theroux                 | Danville      |
| Bill and Claire Toasperm      | Walnut Creek  |
| Nancy Verrier                 | Lafayette     |
| Linda Vida                    | Martinez      |
| Josephine Ward                | Walnut Creek  |
| Mashuri and Rahima Warren     | Lafayette     |
| Daniel Weiss                  | Moraga        |



The name of this bird comes from the guttural call note of the species. This species has a salt gland that allows it to drink salt water

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

ABNRT

*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 March issue is February 10.**

# Observations

By Maury Stern

The past two and a half months have been highlighted by the influx of **Lewis's Woodpeckers**, western movement of **Acorn Woodpeckers**, larger than normal numbers of **Varied Thrushes**, and an irruption of **Pine Siskins**.

MR saw a **Greater White-fronted Goose** at Heather Farm 11/4. 7,000 were at Holland Tract 11/21. P&NS.

P&NS also saw about 2000 **Snow Geese** at Holland Tract on 11/28 as well as some **Ross's Geese**. There was a single **Snow Goose** at Oak Hill Park in Danville 12/31. SH, JR.

Two **Cackling Geese** were at Heather Farm 11/1. KH About 500 were at Holland Tract 11/28, PS. A few **Tundra Swans** were seen as well.

JH saw 6 **Brant** were west of Ferry Point pier 1/8.

LK saw a **Eurasian Wigeon** and a **Blue-winged Teal** at Meeker Slough in Richmond 11/15.

There were two **White-winged Scoters** at Ferry Point in Point Richmond 1/8. JH.

A single **Black Scoter** was at Richmond Marina from 11/21 to at least 12/7. SD, IC, BP, ES, DW

On 1/1 MM and C&TW saw a **Long-tailed Duck** off the Martinez Regional Shoreline.

A **Barrow's Goldeneye** was in Cypress Grove Park in Oakley 12/8. P&NS.

**Hooded Mergansers** were widespread where there was sufficient water. JuCo, MK, SG, JD, BR.

A **Red-throated Loon** was in the tidal pond at Martinez Shoreline 12/30 to 1/5. LG, JB, DS, C&TW, MM, BF.

An immature **Common Loon** was calling at Briones Reservoir 11/28. RS

An **Osprey** was harassed by two **American White Pelicans** at San Pablo Reservoir and gave up its fish. PY.

A **Bald Eagle** was at Briones Reservoir 11/11 MR. An immature was there 12/29. RS, JW

Two **Golden Eagles** were at Briones RP 11/21. MM

PS saw 100 **Sandhill Cranes** on 11/28 at Holland Tract.

Golden-crowned Kinglet  
Meg Sandri sketch



Flocks of about 500 **Band-tailed Pigeons** were around the Briones Reservoir 12/29. RS, JW

HH saw two **Short-eared Owls** in the area east of Waterfront Road just south of McNabney Marsh 1/6.

ZD saw a **Common Poorwill** in north Wildcat Canyon park 11/4.

An albino hummingbird picture was reported to PS from Antioch.

**Lewis's Woodpeckers** were in numerous locations. JR, IA, GT, MR, SL, CD, DM.

DH had two **Red-breasted Sapsuckers** at his home in Walnut Creek after Christmas.

A yellow-shafted **Northern Flicker** was in P&NS's yard in Antioch 11/23.

The Heather Farm **Tropical Kingbird** continued to be seen by many through the period.

**Merlins** were seen throughout the county. Briones Reservoir 11/11. MR; Near Heather Farm 11/14 HH; 11/18 on the Oursan Trail of Briones Reservoir. IA. 12/13 at Contra Loma. RP, PS. SD near her Richmond home 1/3.

Three **Peregrine Falcons** were at Fernandez Ranch 12/22. CD, DM. MP reported one over his Orinda home 12/31.

A very late **Cassin's Vireo** was at Baldwin Park in Concord 11/28. AL.

At Heather Farm Pond, late-leaving **Northern Rough-winged Swallows** were seen 11/4. MR, HH; and 11/9. PB. Another was seen where Monument Blvd. crosses Walnut Creek 1/11. JA.

**Pacific Wrens** were at Briones Reservoir 12/29. MR, JW.

**Golden-crowned Kinglets** were at Tilden RP near Jewel Lake 11/8. S&CL, RS; and at Hidden Lakes Park in Martinez 11/9. MM.

MK saw a **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher** along Nimitz Way in Tilden 11/8.

A **Sage Thrasher** was in Pinole Shores Park 11/7. LL. It was not seen again.

**Phainopeplas** were eating mistletoe berries in Black Diamond Mines RP 1/6. P&NS

MW had two **Black-throated Gray Warblers** in her back yard in Concord 11/4.

A **Palm Warbler** was at the 51st Street entrance to Meeker Slough 11/23. DW.

The long-staying **Black-and-White Warbler** continues at Heather Farm. RC, JCS.

A **Bell's Sage Sparrow** was at Meridian Ridge, Mt. Diablo SP, 12/25. JC, AG.

A few **White-throated Sparrows** were reported. AK, JR, KM.

About 1,000 male **Yellow-headed Blackbirds** were at Holland Tract 12/1. DW

Very few reports of **Purple Finches** were listed. 11/6 in Richmond, AK; one at Heather Farm, TF; and two at JR's Alamo home.

Numerous **Pine Siskins** were seen in the area with flocks up to 50, but usually about 15 to 25.

JA Jeff Acuff, IA Isaac Aranow, PB Pat Bacchetti, JB Jackie Bobrowsky, JC Jim Chiropolos, IC Inger Coble, JuCo Judy Cooper, RC Roy Corlson, CD Carla Din, ZD Zach Dautrich, JD Jay Dodge, TF Tracy Farrington, BF Becky Flanigan, LG Lisa Gorrell, SG Susan Greeg, AG Ann Griffith, HH Hugh Harvey, KH Kevin Hintsa, JH Jeff Hoppes, SH Steve Hutchcraft, DH David Hutton, LK Lucy Kihlstrom, MK Marilyn Kinch, AK Alan Krakauer, AL Albert Linkowski, S&CL Steve and Carol Lombardi, SL Stephen Long, LL Laura Look, MM Mike Marchiano, KM Kai Mills, DM Doug Mosher, MP Michael Pang, BP Blob Power, MR Mark Rauzon, JR Jean Richmond, JiRo Jim Roethe, BR Brad Rumble, DS Dan Sandri, RS Rusty Scalf, PS Paul Schorr, P&NS Paul and Nancy Schorr, JCS Juan-Carlos Solis, ES Emilie Strauss, GT Glen Tepke, JW Joanne Wallin, DaWe Dave Weber, DW Denise Wight, C&TW Chris and Teri Wills, MW Marilyn Wojcik, PY Pam Young.

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

# Field Trip Schedule

By Hugh Harvey

## February

- 7 Saturday . . . . . Thornton Area/Cosumnes Preserve
- 12 Thursday . . . . . Grizzly Island
- 14–15 Saturday/Sunday . . . . . Los Banos/Panoche Valley
- 25 Wednesday . . . . . Sunol Regional Park

## March

- 4 Wednesday . . . . . Walnut Creek Parks
- 11 Wednesday . . . . . Contra Loma Reservoir
- 17 Tuesday . . . . . Mountain View Sanitary/McNabney Marsh
- 19 Thursday . . . . . Valle Vista
- 21 Saturday . . . . . Tomales Bay State Park
- 25 Wednesday . . . . . Lake Lagunitas

## April

- 4 Saturday . . . . . Garin Regional Park
- 8 Wednesday . . . . . Orinda Connector Trail
- 11 Saturday . . . . . Pine Canyon
- 16 Thursday . . . . . North Briones Regional Park
- 18 Saturday . . . . . Mines Road
- 23 Thursday . . . . . Black Diamond Mines
- 28 Tuesday . . . . . Del Puerto Canyon
- 30 Thursday . . . . . Mitchell Canyon

### ❶ Saturday, February 7

#### Thornton Area/Cosumnes Preserve

Leader: Ethan Chickering, (925) 686-9231.

Carpool leaves Sun Valley at 8 AM. Meet at 8:45 AM in Westgate Landing Park off of Glasscock Road. Take SR 4 to Antioch Bridge (toll), go north on SR 160 along river to Rio Vista bridge. Turn right on SR 12 for 11.5 miles. East of Terminus, turn right onto the exit to Glasscock Road. The road will loop under the bridge. Turn left onto Glasscock Road proper and continue about 0.7 miles to the park entrance on the left. Tundra Swans, Sandhill Cranes, hawks and grassland birds. Trip will go in light rain. Bring lunch and a beverage. If any questions, call the leader.

### ❶ Thursday, February 12

#### Grizzly Island

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

Carpool leaves at 7 AM from Sun Valley. Meet at 8:30 AM at Refuge headquarters. Take I-680 north, then I-80 east to SR 12. Follow SR 12 through Fairfield, watch for sign to Grizzly Island Refuge on right and follow road to headquarters. Entry fee for refuge. Watch for raptors and Short-eared Owls along road. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife's Grizzly Island Wildlife Area is in the heart of the 84,000-acre Suisun Marsh, the largest contiguous estuarine marsh in the United States. Grizzly Island provides habitat for more than 200 species of birds and is home to a variety of threatened or endangered wildlife and plants. We may see the herd of Tule Elk. We may also bird at the Rush Ranch if time permits after finishing at Grizzly Island. Bring lunch and a beverage.

### ❶ Saturday/Sunday, February 14–15

#### Los Banos/Panoche Valley

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

On Saturday we will leave from Sycamore Valley Road Park & Ride at 6:30 AM to bird Santa Fe Grade Road, together with the San Luis and Merced Wildlife Refuges; we should see a full range of waterfowl and raptors. On Sunday we will bird Mercey Hot Springs and Panoche Valley. Target birds include Mountain Bluebird, Mountain Plover and Long-eared Owl. Motel options in Los Banos include Best Western Executive Inn (209) 827-0954, Los Banos Days Inn (209) 826,9690, Vagabond Inn Executive Los Banos (209) 827-4677; and in Santa Nella, Holiday Inn Express (209) 826-8282. Participants need to bring lunch for both days. A communal (optional) dinner is being planned for Saturday evening. A fee is charged at Mercey Hot Springs. If you plan to go on the trip, please call the leader as soon as possible for likely last minute detail changes!

### ❸ Wednesday, February 25

#### Sunol Regional Park

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

Carpool leaves at 7:30 AM from Sycamore Valley Road Park and Ride lot in Danville. Meet at 8:00 AM in the first parking lot on the left, Sunol Regional Park. Go south on I-680 to Calaveras Road. Go left under I-680 and drive 4 miles south on Calaveras; turn left on Geary Road and go 2 miles to park. Possible entry fee. Watch and listen for Wild Turkey along Geary Road. Golden Eagles and other raptors, Rufous-crowned Sparrows, American Dipper, and Canyon and Rock Wrens are possible. Bring lunch and a beverage.

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



Brown Pelican. Photo by Dana Slauson.

**Charleston Slough/South Bay, November 22.** Five birders braved the threat of rain to bird at Charleston Slough, Palo Alto Baylands, and Foster City. Fifteen species of ducks and geese were seen along with three Common Gallinules and one Sora at the Slough in Mountain View. We encountered a small feeding frenzy of Brown Pelicans diving for food which was fun to observe. We did not go to Radio Pond in Redwood Shores, as it has not been refilled following the discovery of avian cholera



American Avocet. Photo by Cassie Tzur.

there last January and its subsequent draining. After lunch at the picnic area at Palo Alto Baylands, we were sorry to see that



Black Skimmers and friends. Photo by Eugenia Larson.

the boardwalk behind the Visitor Center has been closed due to rotting conditions and needs to be rebuilt. Thus we were not able to search for Ridgway's Rail which is often seen from the boardwalk during high tides. There was a large group of 25+ Bonaparte's Gulls in winter plumage resting and flying behind the Environmental Educational Building. The surprise of the day was seeing a group of 22 Black Skimmers in with many Marbled Godwits, Willets, Forster's Terns and a few Dowitchers just over the edge of Beach Park Blvd. in Foster City as the high tide subsided. A total of 69 species were seen.

*Eugenia K. Larson*

**McNabney Marsh/Mountain View Sanitary, November 18.** The fall outing started as a somewhat overcast windy and cold day with twelve birders present. It did not seem like we would see many birds due to the weather. In previous wet years more ducks were seen but at the count of birds seen at the end of the day a total of forty-six different species of ducks and birds were seen. Highlights included Great Blue Heron, Black-crowned Night-Heron and Green Heron, White-tailed Kite, Red-shouldered and Red-tailed Hawks, Killdeer, Black-necked Stilt, American White Pelicans, Great-tailed Grackle, lots of Cedar Waxwings and of course a Turkey Vulture and Black Phoebe to make the trip a success.

*Steve Taylor*

**Limantour, November 29.** This trip was cancelled because of rain.

*Maury Stern*

**Sacramento Refuges, December 6-7.**



Falcated Duck (center).



Golden Eagle and Burrowing Owl at Sacramento Refuges. Cooper's Hawk in Solano County  
All photos by Beth Branthaver



**Niles Area, December 11.** This trip was cancelled because of rain.

*Jimm Edgar*

**Solano County Raptors, December 27.** The day started clear and cold, but gradually warmed to pleasant winter temperatures. Again this year, the birding location and route lived up to its reputation as a raptor run. The number of raptor species seen was nine, exceeding last year's count of seven, but with a variation in species. Red-tailed Hawks were still the most numerous raptor seen; being observed frequently throughout the day. One

*Continued on Page 6 »*

# Trip Reports

of the target winter raptor species was seen early in the day, with two Ferruginous Hawks being observed. A Merlin was seen at the Montezuma Slough fishing access southwest of Birds Landing. It is believed that this is the same bird we've seen fairly regularly over the last several years here. Rounding out the raptor count, we also observed White-tailed Kite, Northern Harrier, Cooper's Hawk, American Kestrel, Great Horned and Burrowing Owl, but no eagles this year. Loggerhead Shrike was also seen regularly. With more standing water this year, the count of waterfowl and shorebirds was much higher than in the previous several years. We saw a large flock of Long-billed Curlews land in a far-off field. We also saw a flock of 50-60 plovers, although at a considerable distance. Still, the group consensus was that they were Mountain Plovers. We could never get close enough for a confirming view and identification. Our group of 8 birders tallied 76 species on the day, excluding the probable Mountain Plovers. This count is significantly higher than the last few years

Gary Fregian.

**Putah Creek, January 3.** Coming as it did at the tail-end of a very cold spell, the weather at Putah Creek/Lake Solano seemed quite balmy. Birds were abundant everywhere. One of the most (comparatively) abundant, and much appreciated, was Lewis's Woodpecker—there were several along Pleasants Valley Road and a dozen or so in Lake Solano Park. Target species that were seen: Barrow's Goldeneye, Common and Hooded Merganser, Wood Duck, Green Heron, Osprey, Peregrine Falcon, and Phainopepla. Pleasant surprises: Golden-crowned Kinglet, White-throated Sparrow, and Purple Finch in Lake Solano Park, Rufous-crowned Sparrow at Monticello Dam, and Sora (one seen, one heard) at Lake Solano in the afternoon. Numbers: 19 birders, 81 species.

Fred Safier

**Panoche Valley, January 10.** In previous years the visit to Panoche Valley has been paired with our birding trip to the wetlands area around Los Banos in the Central Valley. However since for several years now it has been increasingly problematical that we would get to find Mountain Plovers, a key target bird for the event, we decided to move up the date for our annual visit into early January to maximize chances of observing them.

The trip started off with a great find—a Ferruginous Hawk—in the pasture area behind the Larry Combs rest stop on Interstate 5 near Westley. We stopped at the Panoche Reservoir dam where we found Green-winged Teal, Common Goldeneye and Ruddy Duck on the water, together with a Rock Wren on the dam itself. Orange-crowned Warbler and Merlin were found along the road while stopping to admire many White-crowned and Savannah Sparrows. A visit up the BLM road to the top of the overlooking hills proved disappointing—no Mountain Bluebirds, unlike in past years. Lunch at Mercey Hot Springs resort gave great views of the roosting Long-eared Owls were enjoyed by all. Passing into Panoche Valley, we missed sightings of Mountain Plovers, though two members of the group did observe briefly what appeared to be a small group of the birds in flight, but these could not be confirmed. However we did find a large gathering of Tricolored Blackbirds at one of the ranches enroute to Silver Creek Ranch, as well as Kestrel and Horned Lark. On tallying our sightings we found we had observed a total of 40 species, including six at the rest stop near Westley. David Hutton

## Duck Stamps

The Federal Duck Stamp Act of 2014 will increase the price of the stamp from \$15 to \$25. Even at \$25, purchasing the stamp is a tremendous value, and is the easiest thing anyone can do to protect crucial wetland and grassland habitat in the National Wildlife Refuge System. Beyond waterfowl, the program helps shorebirds, long-legged waders, raptors, songbirds, and plenty of other wildlife.



Mount Diablo Audubon Society annually buys a number of Duck Stamps for resale to members at cost to make it easier for you to invest in the future of wildlife habitat preservation.

The next Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation [Duck] Stamp will be officially available across the country at the beginning of July. It will show the fine contest-winning artwork by Jennifer Miller, her pair of Ruddy Ducks.



## Brant ♦ *Branta bernicla*



Brant.  
Beth  
Branthaver  
photo.

There are five members of the *Branta* genus: Brant, Barnacle Goose, Cackling Goose, Canada Goose, and Hawaiian Goose (Nēnē). The Brant that are found on the Pacific Coast are also called Black Brant. (Atlantic Coast birds have gray—rather than black—bellies.)

About the size of a Mallard, these small geese, when they are swimming, may be mistaken as ducks.

Black Brant may tip up to feed on eelgrass and aquatic vegetation such as algae. They also forage for invertebrates by wading. They are never found very far away from salt water. They are often found with Surf Scoters. Black Brant fly with rapid wing beats low over the water strung out in jumbled lines instead of the usual V-shaped flight of other geese. They are usually silent but when the flocks are together, they make low, soft, muttering calls of “cronk”. They can be found wintering together in flocks and feeding on the mudflats.

## Flyway Festival



ducks, geese, hawks, songbirds and other wildlife at the peak of migration. February 13-15, 2015. Mount Diablo Audubon will be an exhibitor again this year. On Mare Island, Vallejo, at 500 Connelly Street; 9 AM to 4 PM Saturday and Sunday. Wildlife Expo and Art Show, guided birdwatching outings, Mare Island history tours, and more. See [www.sbflywayfestival.com](http://www.sbflywayfestival.com) for details.



Marco Conci of Troop 36 in Danville, completed his Eagle service project to benefit the California Waterfowl Association and the Danville Wood Duck project. His work on this project will also earn him the Hornaday Award. Dr. William T. Hornaday, an ardent conservationist, established this awards program to recognize Scouts who undertook and completed a truly exceptional conservation project. Marco presented and assisted in placing six of the 21 Wood Duck nesting boxes he donated along the Sycamore Creek.

## Great Backyard Bird Count

February 13-16 is the weekend for the Great Backyard Bird Count. This is a citizen-science project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society. The Great Backyard Bird Count is made possible in part by sponsor Wild Birds Unlimited.

Everyone is invited to participate. From Afghanistan to Zimbabwe, bird watchers from more than 100 countries are expected to participate in the 18th annual Great Backyard Bird Count. Anyone anywhere in the world can count birds for at least 15 minutes on one or more days of the count and enter their sightings at [www.BirdCount.org](http://www.BirdCount.org). The information gathered by tens of thousands of volunteers helps track the health of bird populations at a scale that would not otherwise be possible.

In North America, GBBC participants will add their data to help define the magnitude of a dramatic irruption of magnificent Snowy Owls. Bird watchers will also be on the lookout for the invasive Eurasian Collared-Dove to see if it has expanded its range again. GBBC observations may help show whether or not numbers of American Crows will continue to rebound after being hit hard by the West Nile virus and whether more insect-eating species are showing up in new areas, possibly because of changing climate.

The Great Backyard Bird Count is a great way for people of all ages and backgrounds to connect with nature and make a difference for birds. It's free and easy. To learn more about how to join the count visit [www.birdcount.org](http://www.birdcount.org).



Life Scout Ben Borglin, Troop 202 Walnut Creek, worked with his dad, Ned Borglin, and Brian Murphy to build Barn Owl display boxes showing rodent skulls collected from nest boxes. The project fulfills a requirement for the Citizen of the Community merit badge. This requirement is to complete eight hours of volunteer work for a non-scouting organization that directly benefits his community.

# Meriwether Lewis

» Continued from Page 10

147 gallons of whiskey. Young Meriwether's maternal uncle became his guardian, while his paternal uncle oversaw the estate and later looked after Jefferson's affairs while the President-to-be was Minister to France. By the age of 8, Lewis was described as hunting alone at night in the nearby woodlands and mountains. When his mother remarried in 1784, the new family moved to the Georgia wilderness as part of a colonizing

*"I saw a black woodpecker today about the size of the lark woodpecker as black as a crow. I indevoured to get a shoot at it but could not. it is a distinct species of woodpecker; it has a long tail and flies a good deel like the jay bird.—"*

*Meriwether Lewis, on the discovery of the Lewis's Woodpecker, Montana, July 20, 1805*

expedition. Here he became, in Jefferson's phrase, fully "habituated to the woods".

At 13, Lewis returned to Virginia for schooling at the homes of respected tutors, and began learning to manage the estate he had been left. He had a long, continuous correspondence with his mother, covering all aspects of daily life, including his concerns for his younger brother's education and complaints about his sister's husband. When his stepfather died in 1792, Lewis's mother returned to Virginia, and the 18-year-old Meriwether came of age to take over control of the family holdings.

Already involved in Jefferson's dreams of a western expedition, Lewis volunteered to take part in a proposed Corps of Discovery to be led by Andre Michaux, an eminent botanist and sponsored by the American Philosophical Society of Philadelphia. Refused, and the expedition abandoned, Lewis joined the Virginia Militia and later went on the Ohio Indian Campaign, serving in the Army under Lieutenant William Clark. Although Clark resigned his commission and returned to his family's plantation in Kentucky, Lewis continued his service, becoming a Lieutenant in 1799.

In 1797, Jefferson had become not only Vice President of the US, but also President of the Philosophical Society, which he counted the higher honor. When Jefferson became the US President in 1801, he appointed the 27-year-old Meriwether as his Personal Secretary and gave him



Bitterroot, *Lewisia rediviva*. State flower of Montana. Photo by Ellis Myers.

residence in the White House. Hoping to carry through on his western expedition plans, Jefferson once again organized a Corps of Discovery, and simultaneously negotiated with France for the purchase of the Louisiana Territory through which it would travel. He selected his secretary to lead the exploration, and invited the renowned Pennsylvania naturalist William Bartram to direct the scientific investigations. When Bartram declined due to age, Jefferson designated Lewis as the naturalist for the company.

Lewis was promptly elected a member of the Philosophical Society and given a rapid preparation at the University of Pennsylvania for his new task. He studied botany, natural history, medicine, mineralogy and celestial navigation under the greatest experts of the day, several of them active in the Society. Jefferson directed him to gather scientific data about every aspect of the land he was to pass through, and specified that Lewis was to "write legibly" and collect nothing "already known." To aid him in his surveys, he was given several natural history texts to carry on the trek, and most likely visited the Philadelphia Museum of Charles Willson Peale at Independence Hall where many of his specimens would eventually be displayed. Along with botanical and archeological holdings, the museum also included many stuffed and mounted birds, which Peale had not only collected but even prepared specimens himself.

At the same time as he pursued his hasty studies, Lewis was responsible for gathering all the supplies needed for the trip, including clothing, tents, medical and surgical necessities, tools, cooking equipment, tobacco, and "presents" for the na-

tives. Not satisfied with the guns he could get at the Harper's Ferry US Arsenal, as the expedition was officially under the Department of War, he went to Lancaster and ordered 15 long-barreled, muzzle-loading Pennsylvania rifles. These would prove to be quite useful in collecting rapidly moving mammals and birds, with Lewis's woods-honed marksmanship proven regularly.

Realizing that he could not fulfill the roles of directing both the practical aspects of managing the journey as well as the extensive scientific investigations Jefferson sought, Lewis turned to his previous superior officer, and convinced Clark to join. Although Clark was never to be given the commission as Captain as had been promised, Meriwether insisted that they serve as equals, and that both be addressed by that title. Their notes, daily records, and journals reflect their consistent sharing of command.

The mutual respect and deep trust which the two men felt for each other was to stand them well in the dangerous, uncertain, and grandly ambitious journey which lay ahead.

*To be continued next month*

## Ridgway's Rail

» Continued from Page 2

curving bill and a conspicuous whitish rump. The bird will only forage on mudflats or very shallow water (wetland habitat) where there is taller plant material nearby to provide protection at high tide. They rely on marsh plants such as cordgrass and pickleweed for breeding and feeding. They will also eat mussels, clams, snails, worms, frogs and small fish, which they retrieve by probing and scavenging the water's surface.

Once abundant in the Southern California wetlands, the Light-footed Ridgway's Rail fell to near extinction in the 1980s as wetlands were altered or developed. The rail population has now reached a record of 528 pairs in the wild.

Ridgway's Rail includes three subspecies: California Ridgway's Rail in the San Francisco Bay Area; the Light-footed Ridgway's Rail on the Los Angeles, Orange and San Diego County coasts; and the Yuma Ridgway's Rail in Arizona, Nevada and eastern California. All three subspecies are endangered.





# Help Winter Birds

By Mike Eliot

Last year many native plant species did not produce flowers, while others died off due to the drought. This has led to a scarcity of bird food sources, such as insects, berries,



and seeds. Many people are seeing more birds on feeders this winter because the birds depend more on feeders to provide extra energy they need during the cold and wet of winter. Birds often expend 10% of their body weight each night staying warm in cold weather. This is why it is important to keep feeders full of fresh, high energy seed this time of year. Sunflower, nyjer, safflower, millet, and fruit all have roles to play. You can add to the food sources by providing high energy foods such as suet and nuts. It is also important to keep feeders clean, especially after rains. Mold and bacteria grow rapidly on many types of bird food when it is wet or damp.

Hummingbirds this year have few natural sources of nectar from flowers, which they need to maintain their high energy levels. So, consider putting up one or more nectar feeders.

Keeping a good source of water for drinking and bathing is critical. Wild birds bathe regularly, even in the cold, because clean feathers insulate their bodies. So it's always good to have a full, clean bird bath available throughout the year. Avoid using grease, oil, or Vaseline on poles or feeders. If birds get any of this on their feathers, it can be a death sentence. They cannot clean it off and it will ruin the insulating capability of feathers and down, preventing birds from staying warm enough to survive.

Also, consider putting up a nesting box. Nesting boxes in winter serve two purposes. First, birds can roost in them during storms and high winds, even when they are not nesting. Also if nesting boxes are out throughout winter, birds will get used to them and will be more likely to use them when nesting season starts. You can also put out nesting material that birds can use to line nests. This product will help with warmth and make comfortable places for nestlings in the spring. However, avoid using dryer lint, which often contains fibers that can tangle in birds' feet.

# 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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Lewis's Woodpecker: Beth Branthaver photo..

## Meriwether Lewis Soldier ♦ Explorer ♦ Collector

### **PART I**

We might know the name of Meriwether Lewis even if he hadn't been Personal Secretary to President Thomas Jefferson. Even if he hadn't become the Governor of the newly acquired Territory of Louisiana. Perhaps even if he had not been the leader of one of the most celebrated expeditions in American history. It might have been enough that he was the first discoverer, collector, and eventual namesake of the Lewis's Woodpecker (*Melanerpes lewis*). And that he made his pioneering natural history observations, records, and documentation with only the briefest of academic preparation.

His qualifications for his achievements did not lie solely in being a member of two prominent families from Jefferson's neighborhood in Virginia, nor from his military service in the suppression of the anti-tax Whiskey Rebellion. Neither did

his presence at Jefferson's dinner parties and Sunday services, or even his political vetting of standing Army officers for the President, prepare him to personally participate in the description on his epic travels of perhaps 175 birds with reasonable certainty, and to collect at least 50 birds either wholly new to science or significantly beyond their known range. And nothing could have made it likely that he would succeed in bringing a western Black-billed Magpie back to Washington, D.C., alive.

Lewis was born on August 18, 1774 on his family's plantation in Virginia, which had come down through the family from his great-great grandfather, the largest landholder in the county where Jefferson's Monticello estate was located. The house was stone and log construction, filled with valuable things including much table silver. His mother and father were not only cousins but stepbrother and stepsister,



and they were related by marriage to Jefferson. Lewis's mother was a well-known local herbalist, following a family tradition, and Jefferson preferred the hams from her kitchen more than those from his own.

Lewis's father died while a soldier in the Revolutionary War, leaving him a 2000-acre estate which included 24 slaves and

*Continued on Page 8 »*