



the Quail

Mount Diablo Audubon Society

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

www.diabloaudubon.com/index.php

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May 2015

Birds of Baja and the Sea of Cortez ✦ Juan-Carlos Solis

Stretching for 775 miles south from San Diego to just beyond the Tropic of Cancer, Baja California is one of the world's longest and driest peninsulas on earth. Most of Baja's 55,400 square miles, including its islands, are an extension of the Sonoran Desert from Mexico's mainland.

Despite its harsh geography and lack of fresh water, the Baja region is a hotspot for birds and wildlife. To the east, the Gulf of California has its own endemic gull, the Yellow-footed Gull, and is a place where one can often find flocks of seabirds, such as petrels and boobies, feeding along Blue Whales and pods of Pilot Whales and Common Dolphins.

On Baja's Pacific side, Laysan and Black-footed Albatrosses from the Hawaiian archipelago mingle with Sooty Shearwaters from New Zealand and Baja's own Black-vented Shearwaters among other seabirds.

Wildlife on land is not less exciting; Baja is home to the beautiful and endemic Xantus's Hummingbird and Gray Thrasher, while the islands of the Gulf of California are home to some amazing wildlife, including Verdins, Black-throated Sparrows and the endemic Rattleless Rattlesnake (*Crotalus catalinensis*).

Join naturalist Juan-Carlos Solis on an armchair adventure along the Baja peninsula and meet some of the region's most amazing birds and wildlife.

Juan-Carlos, a Mexican native and an oceanographer by training, has worked as an education program manager and naturalist for 20 years in California. He is the founder of Quetzal Adventures (quetzaladventures.com), a new eco-travel company.

He is a former Education Director for WildCare in San Rafael and Public Programs Manager for the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco where he currently serves as a Field Associate for the Ornithology and Mammalogy Research Department. He has led natural history expeditions and lectured in North, Central, and South America, Antarctica, Australia and most recently in Sweden. Juan-Carlos is passionate about environmental education and wildlife. He has worked in the development of curriculum and award-winning museum exhibits that has inspired thousands of Bay Area schoolchildren and families to connect with nature.



Above: Laysan Albatross

Below: Blue Whale

Meeting Schedule

The next general meeting of Mount Diablo Audubon Society will be **Thursday, May 7**, 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: **Juan-Carlos Solis**

* Please remember to bring a cup.

Thursday, June 4: Logan Kahle
California Big Year

BIRDING INFORMATION

Yuba Pass and Sierra Valley are always a favorite destination for mountain birding. Using photos taken by members during some of our MDAS field trips, Hugh Harvey will present a short introduction to the area. Included will be some of the birds and flowers one could expect to see.

DEDICATED TO HABITAT CONSERVATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

President's Corner

By Jimm Edgar

This column is about a bunch of things I have read this month. I am reading a book by British author Helen Macdonald. The title is *H is for Hawk*. It is about the author's owning a Goshawk, and it is absolutely fascinating. I would not have known this but Goshawks are fiercely independent and do not make good candidates for being trained. It is just a wonderful story. One of the comments on the book's cover from the *Financial Times* says, "I will be surprised if a better book is written this year." I would highly recommend it to you.

You may have seen the article in the paper about the boy in El Cerrito who is working on his Eagle Scout badge and has teamed with the city on a conservation project of putting up Barn Owl boxes in the city's parks to help control rodents. The article also talks about the reduction of the use of rodenticides as a result of the project. This is, of course, something our chapter has been strongly in favor of. We also, thanks to one of our board members Brian Murphy, have done the same thing with many Eagle Scout candidates in Contra

Costa County. Anyway it was an encouraging article to read.

Some bad news came last month when the Alameda County supervisors voted to allow the continuation of the older generation of wind turbines in the Altamont pass. Some of board members spoke at the hearing. Nancy Wenninger has an article in this issue to give you more information. Not a good thing, to say the least.

On a lighter note there was an interesting article in the Science section of the *New York Times* recently about Blackpoll Warblers. It said that it was recently documented that tiny warblers that weigh only about half an ounce fly nonstop over 1500 miles! The documentation was achieved by researchers by placing miniature geolocators on the backs of 40 of the warblers to confirm their migration route. Pretty amazing.

Our young birders club continues to meet and go on field trips thanks to the great efforts of MDAS board member Tracy Farrington.

Just for Ducks Update

By Brian Murphy

Turtle Creek Homeowners Association asked us to install Wood Duck boxes along Galindo creek, which runs through the neighborhood. The creek flows through a couple of man-made ponds. As



we were installing a Wood Duck box on one of the ponds, a pair of Hooded Mergansers, comfortable with people, watched us install the box. Downstream at another pond, the "hoodies" showed up to watch us install another Wood Duck box. Hooded Mergansers have used Wood Duck boxes for nesting, so it will be interesting to see if this happens in this Concord subdivision.

At an Cactus Court Barn Owl box in Rossmoor, Barn Owls usually lay four eggs. This year there are six eggs in the box, and it requires an abundance of rodents to feed all of those hungry owlets. Do the Barn

Owls know something about the rodent population this year that we do not—laying six eggs in anticipation of a large rodent population this year?

In Rossmoor Gardens, around the hill from Cactus Court where three Barn Owl boxes were installed, there is a huge food base for Barn Owls with all of the gopher mounds in open areas. They have food and housing yet there are no Barn Owls in the boxes yet. Or do the Cactus Court Barn Owls plan to use that food base to feed their six owlets and teach them how to hunt in that area?

Welcome New Members

Gail De Lalla	Solana Beach
Ruth Kitchin	Walnut Creek
Darrell Murray	Walnut Creek
John Sherrill	Danville
Kim Trupiano	Clayton

MDAS Now on Meetup and Facebook

We now have a *Meetup* group and *Facebook* page for Mount Diablo Audubon! The *Meetup* group will provide information about our field trips, educational programs, and volunteer activities. The *Facebook* page will post event details and allow our members to share photos, action alerts, and to host discussions about conservation and birding issues. It's easy and free to join *Facebook* and *Meetup*, so encourage your friends and family members to sign up too! After you sign up with *Meetup*, you will automatically receive announcements about our upcoming events: <http://www.meetup.com/Mount-Diablo-Audubon-Society/>

Here is the link for our *Facebook* page: <https://www.facebook.com/mtdiabloaudubon>. Like us and help us reach our first milestone of 100 likes!

Q

Nearly half of California's population of these birds are at the Salton Sea, with a peak abundance in the tens of thousands.

Unscramble these letters, or turn to Page 10 to learn more.

ABCDEEFHIIISTW

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Observations

By Maury Stern

The migration season is really on with ducks, shorebirds, kinglets, Hermit Thrushes, Yellow-rumped Warblers, and Pine Siskins getting ready to leave for other areas. On the other hand, the return or passing through of migrants is just underway.

Multiple **Brant** continue in the Miller/Knox park area and the Richmond Bay Trail. AA, LK.

Eight pairs of **Clark's** and **Western Grebes** were dancing and doing courtship displays in the water off Albany Bulb 3/10. G?

A **Bald Eagle** flew over the Orinda Connector Trail near San Pablo Reservoir 4/9. JS.

LK saw a juvenile **Golden Eagle** at Ironhouse Sanitary District 4/11; and FS saw an adult 4/12 in Pine Canyon.

There were **Black Rails** at Martinez Shoreline park and Ironhouse Sanitary District 3/29 and 4/11. JM, TF, LK, GC.

A **Sora** was at Heather Farm pond 3/24 MH; Contra Loma RP 3/25, P&NS; two at Ironhouse Sanitary District 4/9, GC, and 4/11, LK; and in the reeds along Pine Canyon 4/12. FS. Two **Lesser Yellowlegs** were at Ironhouse Sanitary 4/9. GC.

There were six **Caspian Terns** offshore at Miller/Knox Regional Shoreline 3/18. AA. Several reports of **Eurasian Collared Doves** came from the Richmond, El Cerrito, and Point Richmond areas the past month. They are continuing to spread. GS, PY, KE.

A **Black-chinned Hummingbird** was on Bethel Island 3/29. CS, AL.

LK saw 10 **Rufous Hummingbirds** in a bottlebrush plant on Bethel Island 4/11.

On 4/4 MK saw a **Calliope Hummingbird** at her Point Richmond home.

Two **Lewis's Woodpeckers** continued at Fernandez Ranch 4/13. WM.

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.

A **Pileated Woodpecker** was on Toyon Trail in Briones Regional Park 4/14. KH.

Peregrine Falcons were incubating eggs at Castle Rock. TF, IA. PY had a flyover at Sibley Volcanic preserve 4/6. Two were at Holland Tract 4/9. GC.

LK had a flyover **Prairie Falcon** in Pine Canyon 4/11.

LK also saw two **Hammond's Flycatchers** in Pine Canyon 4/11 and five in White Canyon off of Mitchell Canyon at Mount Diablo State Park.

SM saw an **Ash-throated Flycatcher** at Carquinez Strait Regional Shoreline 4/10. On 4/11 LK saw one at Pine Canyon, five at Mitchell Canyon, and BE saw one at Briones Regional Park 4/12.

The **Tropical Kingbird** at Heather Farm was last seen 4/24 by MH, FS, and HH.

Western Kingbirds were at Mt. Diablo park 3/26. MR.

JP saw a **Cassin's Vireo** in Tilden RP 3/18, and AR saw one in Mitchell Canyon 3/23.

A **Warbling Vireo** was at Mitchell Canyon 3/23. AR.

A **Rock Wren** was near the swimming pool at Castle Rock Park 3/26. TF.

TF saw a **Canyon Wren** near Castle Rock 3/26.

There were also 12 **House Wrens** along Pine Canyon 3/26. TF.

A **Pacific Wren** was heard and seen at Jewel Lake in Tilden 3/14. KM, TF.

Golden-crowned Kinglets were near Jewel Lake 3/14, KM, TF; and at the Mount Diablo Junction Campground 3/26. MR.

On 3/17 many **Blue-gray Gnatcatchers** were in the chaparral near the Globe Lily Trail at Mount Diablo. SG.

LK saw **Nashville Warblers** at Ironhouse Sanitary District, Pine Canyon and Mitchell Canyon 4/11.

A **Hermit Warbler** was along the Donner Canyon Road in Clayton 3/29. MH.

LK saw a **MacGillivray's Warbler** on the Nimitz Trail at Tilden Park 4/3. There was another at Mitchell Canyon 4/11. LK.



MM saw four **Rufous-crowned Sparrows** near the Blue Oak Picnic area on Mount Diablo 3/26.

A **Chipping Sparrow** in breeding plumage was near the Oakhurst Golf Club on Lydia Lane in Clayton 3/17. AL.

On 3/21, DG found a singing **Bell's Sparrow** (formerly Sage Sparrow) off Sutherland in the Shell Ridge area. On 4/4 JC and DH found one in Mitchell Canyon about a half-mile past White Canyon.

Grasshopper Sparrows were at Concord Hills 3/18, DW; Belgum Trail of Wildcat Canyon Park 4/5, NB; and Briones Regional Park near the Sindich Lagoons 4/7. BP.

A **Lincoln's Sparrow** remained in KB's backyard in Lafayette for the third winter.

A **White-throated Sparrow** was at JR's house at least to the 24th of March.

HH saw a **Western Tanager** 3/24 in Walnut Creek near Cherry Lane and Walden.

Black-headed Grosbeaks returned 4/3 to Tilden Park, AK; and San Pablo Reservoir, LK.

A **Great-tailed Grackle** male visited Heather Farm pond again 3/18. HH, FS.

MW saw four **Brown-headed Cowbirds** in Concord 3/15.

A **Hooded Oriole** arrived 3/18 at the Lafayette home of LL.

Bullock's Oriole was at Castle Rock Park 3/13. SMK.

A **Lawrence's Goldfinch** was in the Lime Ridge Open Space Area 4/1. AL.

IA Isaac Aronow, AA Anne Ardillo, KB Kristen Baker, NB Nel Bellingshof, JC Jim Chiropolis, GC Graham Chisholm, BE Bill Espey, TF Tracy Farrington, KF Kathy Farrington, SG Susan Greef, DG Doug Greenberg, MH Mike Hall, HH Hugh Harvey, DH Derek Heins, KH Kevin Hintsma, MaH Matt Huber, LK Logan Kahle, AK Alan Kaplan, MK Melani King, LL Lynn Lakso, AL Albert Linkowski, WM Wanda Mar, MM Mike Marchiano, SM Soham Mehta, KM Kai Mills, SMK Sarah Miracle-Kyte, JM Julio Mulero, BP Ben Pettersson, JP John Poole, MR Mark Rauzon, JR Jean Richmond, AR Andrew Rush, FS Fred Safier, P&NS Paul and Nancy Schorr, JS Judi Sierra, CS Catherine Spaulding, GS George Suennen, DW Denise Wight, MW Marilyn Wojcik, PY Pam Young.

Come Birding With Us!

May

- 2 Saturday East Contra Costa County
- 6 Wednesday Mount Diablo State Park
- 14 Thursday West Briones Regional Park
- 19 Tuesday No Child Left Inside
- 21 Thursday No Child Left Inside
- 30-31 Saturday/Sunday Yuba Pass/Sierra Valley

June

- 6 Saturday Outer Point Reyes

July

- 11-12 Saturday/Sunday Mount Lassen
- 18 Saturday San Mateo Coast

August

- 15 Saturday Bodega Bay

② Saturday, May 2

East Contra Costa County

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

Carpool leaves Sun Valley at 6:15 AM, southwest corner of Sun Valley Mall parking lot at Willow Pass Road and Contra Costa Boulevard in Concord. Or meet the leader at 7:00 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.



Canada Geese over Big Break. Photo by Ellis Myers.

② Wednesday, May 6

Mount Diablo State Park

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

Mount Diablo State Park 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 8:00 AM from La Gonda. From I-680 southbound, exit at El Pintado, turn right and right again; park along the 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. 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 14

West Briones Regional Park

Leader: Beth Branthaver, (925) 944-1856.

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.

Saturday/Sunday, May 30-31

Yuba Pass/Sierra Valley

Leaders: Rosita and Hugh Harvey, (925) 935-2979.

This is always a productive and well-favored weekend trip to the northern Sierra which requires driving and walking, some of it over rough terrain. Saturday we will bird in the Sierra Valley for basin birds. Sunday we will be birding in the Yuba Pass area for mountain birds. Meet at the parking lot at the top of the pass at 7:00 AM Saturday morning. Make motel reservations now! Closest motels are in Sierra City, 11 miles down Highway 49 to the west. Herrington's Sierra Pines (530) 862-1151 or (800) 682-9848 is one of the most popular; or try Yuba River Inn (530) 862-1122 with cabins and kitchenettes (cash or check only). Bassett's Station (530) 862-1297 at Highway 49 and Gold Lake Road has some accommodations and meals, High Country Inn (530) 862-1530 or (800) 862-1530 is across Hwy. 49 from Bassett's. Also, in Calpine is Sierra Valley Lodge (530) 994-3367 or (800) 858-0322. More listings are at www.sierracity.com/Stay/LodgingCamp.html. Campgrounds are located at Yuba Pass and Chapman Creek downhill to the west. Sites are available first come/first serve for only three days at a time. Longer term reservations can be made at (877) 444-6777, but there is an additional \$10 charge for this service. After May 27 call Wild Birds Unlimited (925) 798-0303 for information.

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. 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.

Trip Reports



American White Pelican at Contra Loma. Photo by Beth Branthaver.

Contra Loma Regional Park/Reservoir, March 11: Seven MDAS members and one guest began birding in light rain, but later enjoyed clearing skies. Highlights included an Osprey with a fish; Common Gallinules; nice views of a Sora; Virginia Rail (heard); Common Yellowthroats; American White Pelicans in breeding plumage; Red-breasted Sapsucker; Northern Flickers, including a Red-shafted/Yellow-shafted intergrade individual; Violet-green Swallows; and nesting Tree Swallows and Western Bluebirds. Birdsong was abundant and we enjoyed the vocalizations of Common Yellowthroats, Red-winged Blackbirds, Song Sparrows, Western Meadowlarks, the rattling call of a Belted Kingfisher and the mysterious call of the Common Gallinule. During our observations of the American White Pelicans, we had excellent views of the flattened “breeding horn” on the upper bill, and discussions regarding its importance ensued. Post-trip research confirmed our belief that the function of the “breeding horn” is not understood. Furthermore, we did learn that both sexes develop them and they may be involved in courtship and often are a target of beak jabs by other adults during pair selection and nest establishment. The horns disappear after the breeding season. A total of 50 species was seen or heard during the trip; however, as the group departed, several participants had views of a pair of Say’s Phoebes and a Greater Yellowlegs.

Paul Schorr

Young Birders Club, March 14. The Mount Diablo Audubon Young Birders Club conducted another very successful and productive field trip, first visiting Inspiration Point and then moving on to Jewel Lake in Tilden Park.

A group led by Tracy Farrington and myself, set off with 12 other birders to Inspiration Point and Jewel Lake, both in Tilden Regional Park. Inspiration Point was a little slow, but we did get all three nuthatches; White-breasted (heard only), Red-Breasted (two heard), and Pygmy Nuthatch (two seen). Many Wrentits were calling and we heard a single Orange-crowned Warbler. There were a couple of Varied Thrush scattered in the woodland and we were able to get a short but good look at a White-Tailed Kite as it flew over, in the distance.

Jewel Lake was pretty birdy. Singing Wilson’s Warblers (FOS) seemed like they were almost everywhere. Orange-crowned Warblers were also calling and one gave us great looks. At the northwestern corner of the lake, there was a small flock of Golden-Crowned Kinglets (FOS) working the pines along with a group of Chestnut-backed Chickadees, A single Hutton’s Vireo and Bushtits, some with nesting material. The Upper Packrat Trail seemed the most birdy with Wilson’s Warblers, Orange-crowned Warblers, a single Pine Siskin, a small flock of Lesser Goldfinch, and a couple of buzzing Allen’s Hummingbirds. Buffleheads were doing courtship displays on the lake. The last but certainly not the least bird, by the creek at the end of the parking lot, was a singing Pacific Wren (FOS) that we were able to observe, up close, for at least a full minute. Great day with the Mount Diablo Young Birders Club!

Kai Mills, 15 Years Old

The birding field trip was a lot of fun. I especially enjoyed the Upper Packrat Trail and Jewel Lake. My fav birds that we saw were the Song Sparrows and the nuthatches. The Wilson’s Warblers, and stuff, were also really cool. I liked hearing all the birdsong. The Anna’s Hummingbird’s courtship whistle was totally awesome. That birding trip was the best! p.s.: When Is The Next One?

Grace Pang, 10 Years Old

I was very excited about all the birds we might see and all the new people I expected to meet on my first field trip with the Young Birders Club. With more people, we spotted more birds than I could by myself. Everyone was nice and somebody let me look through their scope. We saw a White-tailed Kite, either heard or saw all three nuthatches, and much more. Then we headed to Jewel Lake and we watched birds that were on the lake. I added Golden-crowned Kinglets that we saw in the nearby pines to my life list. There were Wilson’s Warblers (FOS) and Allen’s Hummingbirds on the Upper Packrat Trail. We stopped and observed birds for a long time at a very birdy part of the trail. There were Goldfinches, Orange-crowned Warblers, and a Pine Siskin. I was sad when we had to leave and I hope to attend another field trip soon.

Michael Pang, 12 Years Old

“I was so excited to add two new birds to my life list on the Young Birder’s trip to Jewel Lake: The Golden crowned Kinglet, and the Pacific Wren. I also don’t think I have seen so many warbler’s in my life. There were three different species that I saw: the Orange crowned Warbler; the Wilson’s Warbler; and I think the Townsend’s Warbler. We also saw some Buffleheads paddling and diving. I think that they are very showy. There were also many cool turtles sunning themselves on logs at the lake. At Inspiration Point I was the first one to spot some Wild Turkeys. My mom came with me and she likes wildflowers, and she spotted several trillium on the trail.

Forest Chapman, 10 Years Old

Mt. View Sanitary/McNabney Marsh, March 17. Eleven birders came on the field trip. The day was nice but a little windy in spots. While ducks were scarce, we did manage to see forty-two different species plus one otter. Some of the birds observed were the Green Heron, Great-tailed Grackle, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Black-crowned Night-Heron, American Avocet, Black-necked Stilt, Common Yellow-throat, and Marsh Wren.

Steve Taylor

Continued on Page 6 »

Trip Reports

» *Continued from Page 5*

Valle Vista March 19. 23 members and guests visited Valle Vista Staging Area and Upper San Leandro Reservoir on March 19. It was another gorgeous day with temperature in the 60s and no clouds. The water was lower than anyone had ever seen it, but there was a small trickle in the creek under the bridge that supported a pair of Wood Ducks. California Quail were heard and seen in the brush and a lone Wild Turkey was on a nearby hillside. Acorn Woodpeckers were common. We all had excellent looks at a Merlin in the area near the corral. Several Pacific-slope Flycatchers were calling near the bridge and multiple Orange-crowned Warblers were there as well. Several California Thrashers were singing in the brush near the entrance area. Two House Wrens were heard and Purple Finches were singing. One Lincoln's Sparrow was near the staging area with a mixed flock of White- and Golden-crowned Sparrows. 58 species were seen.

Maury Stern

Tomales Bay State Park, March 21. 16 members and guests were at Tomales Bay State Park on another very fine day with temperatures in the mid to high 60s. 50 species were seen. There were Greater and Lesser Scaups in the bay along with many Surf Scoters and several Red-breasted Mergansers. Three Common Loons were easily seen. American White and Brown Pelicans were seen across the bay. Four Ospreys were busy with catching fish and tending to nests. A Pileated Woodpecker flew across the parking lot and was the highlight of the day for most of us. A Peregrine Falcon was a flyover as well. A Say's Phoebe perched on an Indian structure at Indian Beach was a surprise. A number of Brown Creepers were seen by the group as well as Varied Thrushes. The most common bird was Wrentit. They were singing everywhere we went and we saw one or two. Orange-crowned and Wilson's Warblers were very vocal as well as many Purple Finch.

Maury Stern

Lake Lagunitas, March 25. Despite the slow traffic that delayed our arrival, the day was beautiful as we walked around various areas at Lake Lagunitas on the north slope of Mount Tamalpais. Eight members and a guest identified 52 species, though our most desired bird, the Pileated Woodpecker, was heard only. A number of other species which have recently arrived were also heard often, but offered limited or no visual identification. These would include Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Hutton's and Warbling Vireos, as well as Orange-crowned and Wilson's Warblers. Great views were had of the resident Ospreys and Red-shouldered Hawks, Common Mergansers and many Acorn Woodpeckers. Some of the wildflowers were quite colorful.

Hugh Harvey

Garin Regional Park, April 4. Eight birders counted 50 species on an enjoyable hike through still mostly green Garin Park. Heard only: Hutton's Vireo, Orange-crowned Warbler. At least some of us had fairly good glimpses of a Grasshopper Sparrow and a Western Kingbird and decent looks at two Bullock's Orioles. Excellent views of Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Warbling Vireo, House Wren, Wilson's Warbler, and Black-headed Grosbeak were the highlights of a fine spring day.

Fred Safier

Orinda Connector Trail, April 8. Seven birders enjoyed a mainly cloudy and cool morning along the pleasant Orinda Connector and Oursan trails to the base of the Briones dam. The birding started slowly perhaps because of the cool and shady habitat along San Pablo Creek but improved as we got to the edge of the main riparian

area. We saw five woodpecker species, all the nuthatches, Brown Creeper and the like. Newly arrived migrants included Wilson's Warbler, Pacific Slope Flycatcher, lots of singing Warbling Vireos (although it took a long time before we actually saw one), and two handsome male Western Tanagers. We got peeks at two Virginia Rails although not everyone was looking at the exact right spots at the exact right time. The creek was lower than usual and we missed seeing the usual Wood Ducks. Biggest miss, believe it or not, was not a single Starling! A total of 60 species were seen or heard.

Don Lewis

Pine Canyon, April 11.

Twenty-three birders enjoyed fair but cool weather in our trek through Pine Canyon. Due to the lack of rainfall, creek crossings were much drier than in years past. The highlight of this annual trip is the opportunity to view nesting Peregrine Falcons which make the canyon their home. For several years they have failed to fledge due to pressure from rock climbers. This year the State Park and East Bay Regional Park District have partnered to close the trails used to access the rocks during the nesting season. We



Bullock's Oriole, photographed by Isaac Aranow during the Pine Canyon field trip.

were able to observe the falcon pair in flight and near their traditional nest site; hopefully they will be more successful this year. Other highlights of the trip included Bullock's Oriole, Lark Sparrow, Warbling Vireo, and Brown Creeper. Species not commonly found included a Varied Thrush, Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, and a pair of Canyon Wrens heard duetting just inside the gate to Mount Diablo State Park. Altogether, we saw and/or heard 55 species.

Nancy Wenninger



House Wren bringing nesting material to a bird house, photographed by Isaac Aranow during the Pine Canyon field trip.



You Dirty Rat!

By Mike Eliot

People often ask me how to prevent rats from being in their yards and houses. There are three basic premises to consider: (1) Keep rats off your bird feeders, (2) Keep food off the ground, (3) Don't give rats a place to hide.

The native pest rats found in our area are roof rats. Weighing 5-9 ounces, 13" to 18" long, they breed about 5 times per year with litters of 4-8 pups. Lifespan is about 9-12 months. They nest in trees, vines, stacked lumber or wood piles, overgrown landscaping, attics and wall spaces, sewers and drains, and even in burrows if necessary. They stay within 150 feet of their nest, are omnivorous, and eat about an ounce of food and ½ fl ounce of water per day.

Though rats generally feed from dusk to dawn, they are easily detected by their pellet shaped droppings, about 1/2" long, found wherever they travel and eat. Fresh droppings are soft, while old droppings crumble easily.

Rats are not attracted by bird feeders, but rather by the smell of rotting food, pet waste, or un-harvested fruits and nuts. They will also come to any open source of standing water.

Steps to prevent rats at bird feeders include: using squirrel-proof bird feeders, baffles that prevent rats from getting to the feeders, bird food that doesn't generally leave waste on the ground, and trays on feeders to catch what may end up on the ground. Good bird food does not contain fillers that birds discard. Black oil sunflower or pure sunflower chips will be completely eaten by birds on feeders. If you provide seed or nuts for ground feeding birds or squirrels, use trays to limit the spread, limit the amount so that all foods are eaten completely each day, or sweep up any excess.

Steps for sanitation include removing water and ground food sources at night, such as outdoor pet bowls. Clean barbecues after use, pick excess fruit and nuts from plants and the ground, keep compost bins closed, and store bird food and food waste in metal containers or indoors.

Steps to prevent nesting include removing any stacked wood or wood piles, yard equipment, pots, or other protective coverings, pruning overgrown shrubs, trellises, fences, and trees. Also close off any openings large enough for rats to enter buildings.

And please avoid rodenticides, which can kill animals that eat poisoned rats, including raptors, dogs, and cats. Instead use traps or put up a Barn Owl box.

EDUCATION OUTREACH PROGRAM

No Child Left Inside

By Paul Schorr

The purposes of this program, which was begun in 2007, are to acquaint students with a variety of local birds and other wildlife, and to promote and develop within the students an interest, understanding and appreciation of their surrounding natural environment. Hopefully, it will be a significant step in reducing "Nature Deficit Disorder" for them.

☛ Session 1: Classroom presentations are conducted by Native Bird Connections during which a staff member introduces and discusses birds, using one or more live raptors. The emphasis is on morphology, adaptations, feeding mechanisms, habitat, behavior, etc.

☛ Session 2: Classroom presentations that include the following activities:

- 1) Introduction and instruction on the use of binoculars which are provided by MDAS for the students to use.
- 2) Introduction to bird checklists.
- 3) Introduction and orientation to the use of the book *Bird Songs*. During subsequent classroom group activities using the books, the students research a selected number of species and become familiar with the bird's appearance as well as its song.

☛ Session 3: Field trip to Contra Loma Regional Park where the purposes of the outdoor activities are:

- 1) To enable the students to observe and identify as many bird species as possible, as well as other wildlife species that may be encountered. During these activities the purposes are to have the students understand the bird's morphology, adaptations, feeding mechanisms, behavior and habitat needs.
- 2) To accomplish these goals the students are divided into groups and assigned to



observation stations that are facilitated by MDAS volunteers with spotting scopes. These stations are located so that the students will sample a variety of habitats and associated bird species. The students are issued MDAS-provided binoculars and *Bird Song* books to use during the activities and will rotate through all of the stations in a timely manner.

3) The students walk to areas near the reservoir to become acquainted with surrounding land forms and the associated vegetation habitats, i.e. grassland, savanna, oak woodland, etc. During this activity the students also develop an understanding and appreciation of conservation efforts to protect birds such as the California Quail and Western Bluebird.

4) At the conclusion of the activities, each student is presented with a bird-identification book entitled *Backyard Birds of California*. These books are provided by MDAS.

Volunteers are always welcome to assist in facilitating the field trip activities. If you are interested, please contact Paul Schorr. He may be contacted by phone (757-5107) or email: pkschorr@comcast.net.

If you are planning on attending the MDAS birding trip to Lassen Volcanic National Park the weekend of July 11 and 12, please let the leader know ahead of time that you are coming. If you choose to camp, reservations should be made soon; Gary and I will be camping at Manzanita Lake Campground in the park this year. If you prefer not to camp, I can give you referrals to 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 by email only at: eklarson@comcast.net. Eugenia Larson

SPEAKING OF CONSERVATION

Tilting at Windmills

By Nancy Wenninger



Decrepit turbines owned by Altamont Winds, Inc., showing streaks of oil, leaking from the generators, on the vanes. Photo: Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Report 2018 CUP Extension.

Despite some progress, the battle continues to make the Altamont Pass Wind Resource Area (APWRA) safer for birds. At a public hearing on March 24, despite objections by Audubon, the Sierra Club and others, the Alameda County Board of Supervisors voted 3-2 to allow Altamont Winds, Inc. to continue to operate its 828 dangerous, old-style wind turbines until the end of 2018.

For decades, the 5,000+ turbines in the APWRA have been killing raptors and other birds at an alarming rate. The turbines were built during the 1980s without any environmental review or consideration of wildlife impacts. When the 25-year leases came up for renewal, the two counties took divergent paths: Contra Costa required full EIRs for the renewals and mitigation measures for any unavoidable environmental impacts; Alameda County, on the other hand, rubber-stamped the lease renewals without any scrutiny whatsoever.

MDAS joined with Golden Gate Audubon, several other chapters and the State Attorney General in a lawsuit to force Alameda County and the wind industry to take action to reduce avian mortality in the APWRA. The suit was settled in 2005 with an agreement among the parties to “repower” the Altamont, removing the old turbines and replacing them with far fewer, larger, more efficient turbines which are also more bird-friendly.

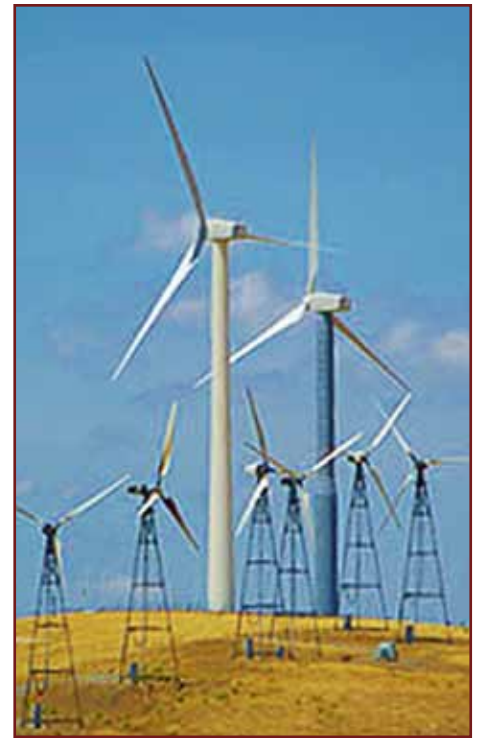
Four wind companies are the major

players in the APWRA; three of them have begun the repowering process and shut down their old turbines. They are also consulting with experts to site new turbines in locations which will be less dangerous for raptors.

AWI is the sole exception, having withdrawn from the settlement and negotiated a separate agreement with Alameda County for a gradual shutdown of its old turbines, to be completed by October 2015. In the interim, they have made no substantive progress toward repowering.

Since 2005, according to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service records, wind turbines owned and operated by AWI have been associated with the fatality and/or injury of an estimated 67 Golden Eagles, including at least seven during 2014. A USFWS analysis concluded that the current “take” rate in the APWRA for Golden Eagles is 12% of the local-area population, which is not sustainable. In addition, they have killed 80 American Kestrels, 57 Burrowing Owls, and 172 Red-tailed Hawks

AWI’s request for an extension of its permits until 2018 was initially denied by the East County Zoning Administrator. However, the company appealed to the Board of Supervisors, arguing that wind energy’s environmental and economic benefits outweigh any possible environmental impacts. It didn’t hurt that AWI had made significant campaign donations to the three supervisors who supported them. AWI also



New turbines at Altamont Pass each replace 23 of the older ones. Rotors have a diameter of 331 feet and turn at a rate of 6 to 16 revolutions per minute. The tips of the blades travel at speeds of 78 to 300 miles per hour.

mobilized labor unions to meet privately with supervisors prior to the hearing to exert their influence, asserting that local jobs would be lost if the permits were not extended. The Boilermaker-Blacksmith National Pension Trust is also heavily invested in AWI, according to the company’s president.

Their ploy worked. Union members showed up in full force, dressed in orange T-shirts and filling the Board chamber. After hearing two hours of testimony from attorneys, environmental groups, AWI, labor organizers and private citizens, the Board in a split vote extended the permits.

So, we lost this battle but have not yet lost the war. Discussion continues at all levels of Audubon regarding next steps. Further litigation is a possibility but will be costly. Participation and funding would have to be approved by the MDAS Board of Directors. AWI is already under federal investigation by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, so perhaps additional regulatory pressure can be applied. Stay tuned for further developments in this important issue.



Good News for Salton Sea Birds



Yellow-footed Gull at Salton Sea. Photo by Ellis Myers.

Good news! Audubon California has decided to step up its efforts to protect the Salton Sea.

In the spring, the diversity of species at the Salton Sea makes it a hot spot for birders; in the summer—not so hot. Wait! Well, you know what I mean! The sea and its surroundings are a critical habitat on which the survival of a number of species depend. Up to 90% of North America's Eared Grebes winter on the Salton Sea, feeding on the abundant fish and invertebrate life. And the farmland of the Imperial Valley is home to the largest population of Burrowing Owls in the world.

Unfortunately, this habitat—and its birds—are under severe threat. The sea depends on agricultural runoff of water provided by the Imperial Irrigation District. But the District has been required to transfer 300,000 acre-feet of its supply to urban users in San Diego County. Less water for the farmers will mean less water flowing into the sea.

Over the past few years, reduced water flows have resulted in a dramatic lowering of the water level of the sea, up to eight feet so far. This lowered water level has resulted in an unwelcome retreat of the shoreline, which has exposed vast acreage of former sea floor.

This is exactly what happened when southern California took water that otherwise would have flowed into Owens Lake. That lake dried up completely. The sediments on the exposed lakebed blew away in the desert wind, creating the worst air pollution in America. Many experts predict that the same things will happen at the Salton Sea should it dry up.

At a March meeting of the board of directors of Audubon California, held at the Salton Sea, the board recognized the need for action to save habitat for the millions of birds that use the sea and for the life of the sea itself. It will be expensive—hundreds of millions, possibly even billions of dollars. But the successful passage last November of Proposition One, the state water bond, will provide a substantial amount toward the work that needs to

be done. Audubon played a key role in the passage of the bond and will play a key role in seeing that these funds are expended wisely, protecting both human life and bird life at the same time.

In a letter dated March 12, California Audubon joined with Defenders of Wildlife, the Pacific Institute, and Sierra Club California urging the State Water Resources Control Board to fulfill its promise to fund restoration of the sea.

Maintaining that "The Salton Sea Is Important to California," the letter claims that "The Salton Sea provides immense ecological and public health benefits to Californians. The Sea has been designated an Important Bird Area of Global Significance by BirdLife International and the National Audubon Society because it hosts vast numbers of waterbirds and shorebirds throughout the year. It also provides vital public health benefits by covering the playa, which, if exposed will significantly worsen the air quality in the region. Ultimately, the

state of the Salton Sea ecosystem will reflect the value of the State's promises to protect public and ecosystem health as it promotes water transfers as a means to improve statewide water supply reliability."

The state's obligation was part of a landmark deal in 2003 that transferred up to 90 billion gallons of water per year from fallowed farms near the Salton Sea to San Diego County.

As part of that deal, known as the Quantification Settlement Agreement, the irrigation district was required to add water to the sea for 15 years while a plan was developed to deal with its decline.

In 2017, Imperial Irrigation District will deliver 150,000 acre-feet of mitigation water to the Salton Sea, and nothing in 2018, which will cause the sea to quickly decline.

Blowing dust from the exposed shoreline will drive up asthma rates and other health problems in communities around the lake, according to a scientific report issued by the Pacific Institute. Habitat will be lost for fish, wildlife and more than 400 species of birds.

There is still a lot of research and planning to do. At the moment Audubon California is getting involved at the legislative level while also getting up to speed on the various conservation issues and political actors.

The Sea is too important not to save. And, if left without action, ultimately too costly. A compromise plan that does what the law requires—provide quality wildlife and fish habitat and protect air and water quality—and creates recreational and economic opportunities must be agreed upon for the Salton Sea.

[Editor's note: This article is based, in part, on an article by Vic Leipzig in the Sea & Sage Audubon newsletter *Wandering Tattler*, March 2015.]



George N. Lawrence

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periodicals, confining himself nearly always to describing new forms which had been collected, or in preparing exhaustive lists of species for a given locality. He joined the Lyceum of Natural History of New York, and in the eight years from 1846–1858 he presented 18 papers to his fellow members.

Lawrence initially concentrated on the birds of the United States, ever eager for new discoveries by those who went out into the field and gathered skins for his examination. Rather than attempting bold, theoretical reorganizations of systematic ornithology, he concentrated on what was immediately before him. His great gift lay in being able to see those distinctions which did make a difference, those variations on color, plumage, size and other qualities which were the mark of true species. His ability to recognize when length of tail feathers or shape of wing showed more than merely age, or individual characteristics, of a preserved specimen enabled him to describe over 300 new species of birds with a precision that remains recognized by successive American Ornithological Union checklists. New science may reassign his species to different genera or even families, but his perception of how those species differ from other related ones is most often accepted as sound.

Lawrence's output was prodigious, including over 120 papers in a 50-year career undiminished by age or health until his death in 1895. He remained active and interested in the researches of others as he was in his own. It was this aspect of collaboration and cooperation in a field often marked by self-seeking and competition that most reveals George Newbold Lawrence as a "rara avis," a remarkably collegial man who mainly sought to advance his beloved avocation. From the beginning, when his articles appeared in the same journals as John Cassin's, the new honorary curator of the Philadelphia Academy of Science, he revealed his willingness to share not only his studies but his specimens with ornithologists near and far. Working with Cassin and Baird, then Assistant Secretary of the Smithsonian, he helped write the ninth volume of Pacific Railroad Survey Reports in 1858, completing the assessment of the newest discoveries of the western expeditions.

Over the years, while he also worked with J. G. Bell, William Brewer and Elliott

Coues on numerous projects, it is with the eminent professionals Cassin and Baird that he, an amateur, was considered part of the triumvirate of American ornithology. He was not only an honorary member of the AOU, but also one of its founders and a member of its Council. Joining every relevant learned society, including the British Ornithological Union, the Natural History Society of Boston, the Linnaean Society of New York, the Zoological Society of London, and many more, he took part in the advancement of scientific understanding of the natural world with zeal and a modesty about his own achievements.

After the Railroad Survey work was finished, Lawrence turned his attention to the birds of Mexico and Central America, routinely receiving samples of the newest finds by researchers in the field. Crates of bird skins flooded into his Manhattan offices, just as the shipments of chemicals and pharmaceuticals from overseas came to his business establishment on the same venerable street. Carefully wrapped packages of collected birds went out, too, heading to professionals and other amateurs alike, with extra specimens being given away and rare ones loaned for inspection at home and abroad. It was his passion.

Lawrence's collection of over 8000 bird skins, mostly of tropical species, were given to the American Museum in New York.

He maintained an extensive correspondence in English, Spanish, French and German, and in recognition of his contributions twenty species and one genus were given his name though he had discovered none of them. His correspondence with Baird reveals his absolute commitment to the collaborative efforts he participated in. It details the ebb and flow of materials, ideas, and analyses of ornithological importance. It also shows how important his relations were with other researchers, from nurturing the careers of younger men like Robert Ridgway to chiding the equally youthful British ornithologists Osbert Salvin and fellow amateur Philip Sclater for untimely publication of their results. But it is his relationship with the work itself that stands out the most. As Baird wrote Lawrence while Ridgway was busily "smashing species" established by earlier systematizers, that while some of Lawrence's naming might be abandoned in the process, "You



Well known to local birders is Lawrence's Goldfinch. Lesser known to birders of eastern states is the rare hybrid of Golden-winged and Blue-winged Warblers named Lawrence's Warbler. Photo courtesy Greenwich Audubon Center. © John Schwarz.

have described so many new birds, and are likely to have so many more, that it is not a matter of much consequence whether you lose a species or not."

Presently, much of professional field ornithology is coming to rely upon data provided by "citizen scientists" on websites like eBird, projects like FeederWatch, and local bulletin boards such as our own East Bay Birding. Dedicated, knowledgeable hobbyists participate in the furtherance of the grand scientific endeavor. But unlike those of us who today contribute primarily as "listers" in one form or another, the amateur ornithologist George Newbold Lawrence actually wrote part of the list. In his patient, careful, accurate perceptions of new and unfamiliar specimens, he was truly more a bird see-er than a bird watcher. So when, after an Audubon field trip, we check the box on our card for a California Gull (*Larus californicus* Lawrence, 1854) or a Western Grebe (*Aechmophorus occidentalis* Lawrence, 1858), we know whom to thank.

a White-faced Ibis ♦ *Plegadis chihi*

White-faced Ibis is a dark bird about the size of a Snowy Egret, showing a green or bronze iridescent sheen on the feathers in good light. This species is not easily distinguished from its relatives, Glossy Ibis, and indeed, the birds that frequent the Salton Sea were formerly known as White-faced Glossy Ibis. The two species differ

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White-faced Ibis

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White-faced Ibis. at the Salton Sea
Photo by Ellis Myers.

only by slight differences in coloring of the face and legs. The White-faced Ibis has a narrow border of white feathers all around its bare facial skin at the base of the bill during breeding season only.

The White-faced Ibis frequents marshes, swamps, ponds and rivers, but seems to prefer freshwater marshes, where it can find insects, newts, leeches, earthworms, snails and especially crayfish, frogs and fish. Ibises often forage in association with taller wading birds such as herons or Great Egrets. The repetitive probing of the Ibis's bill may scare up prey for the heron that is out of the Ibis's reach. In return the Ibis receives extra warning of predators such as Peregrine Falcons or Red-tailed Hawks by taking advantage of the taller bird's wariness and larger field of view. When feeding in irrigated rice, barley, and hay fields they are often seen with flocks of gulls. This association is unlikely to benefit the Ibis as gulls are apt to steal their prey before they can swallow it.

White-faced Ibis range over much of the western United States, and south into Baja and south central Mexico. Glossy Ibis are found along the Atlantic Coast and the Gulf of Mexico. The two species may overlap along the Texas and Louisiana Coasts. There are also populations in Bolivia, Argentina and Chile. Likely the largest grouping of White-faced Ibis is in the wetlands surrounding the Great Salt Lake in Utah.

Ibis nests are usually placed on top of emergent aquatic vegetation or in a low shrub or tree over the water. Locating the nests in or over water helps protect the eggs and nestlings from mammalian predators such as skunks and raccoons. Nests are also preyed on by gulls, magpies, ravens, crows, owls, and grackles.

Mount Diablo Audubon Society

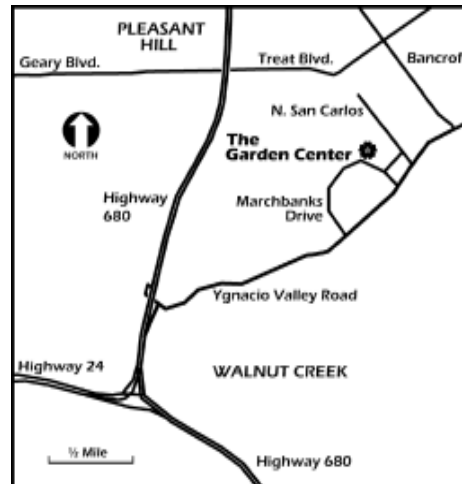
Mount Diablo Audubon Society, a Chapter of National Audubon, is committed to the sustainable balance of our community's people, birds, other wildlife, and habitat through conservation, education, and advocacy.

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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.]

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

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MDAS MEMBERSHIP/RENEWAL APPLICATION

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

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

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

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Lawrence's Goldfinch.

George Newbold Lawrence Businessman ♦ Classifier ♦ Collaborator

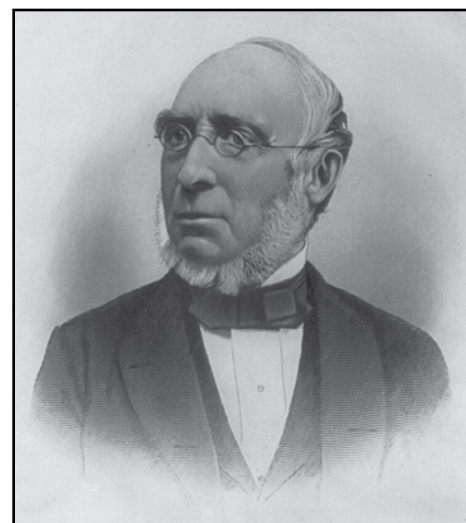
Member Contributed

It's hard to imagine that just 200 years ago the island of Manhattan was largely covered with wild forests, an unbroken woodland between the Hudson and East Rivers. It was here on the highest point of bare schist that General Washington had built his fort, and within this primeval landscape that a commercially successful John James Audubon would eventually settle and raise a family. Here, too, was Forest Hill, the family holdings where George Newbold Lawrence was born in 1806. Flocks of Passenger Pigeons flew through in season, and Meadowlarks would pause where 40th and Broadway is today, Lawrence would later recall. And all this not too distant from where the American Museum of Natural History now stands.

At the age of 16, Lawrence began working as a clerk in his family's wholesale

pharmaceutical import business, located on Pearl Street on the original New York waterfront. Generations of Lawrences had been in Manhattan since the beginnings of settlement, serving as judges, mayors, and supporting three family burial grounds. George became a partner in the firm when he was 20, dealing in not only druggists' supplies, but later with his brother Alfred handling a much broader line of imported goods. One of the newer products was then called carbolic acid, used not only as an important antiseptic but as an essential part of the taxidermy of birds and other animals.

Lawrence's childhood interest in birds had remained only a pastime until he was 35, when local taxidermist J. G. Ball introduced him to Spencer Baird, younger and much more enthusiastically committed to ornithology. Ball later went on to become Audubon's taxidermist, while Lawrence commenced from that date to devote nearly



George Newbold Lawrence.
Library of Congress photo.

all his spare time to the study, analysis, and description of avian specimens. Within a year, he had published his first technical paper, a treatment of the Black Brant goose. His scientific name for it, *Branta bernicla nigricans* (Lawrence, 1842), stands to this day. He began to write for multiple

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