



the Quail

Mount Diablo Audubon Society
P. O. Box 53, Walnut Creek, CA 94597-0053
www.diabloaudubon.com

Volume 61, Number 4

December 2015/January 2016

December Program: SF Bay Waterbird Program ♦ Kerry Wilcox

Every winter, migrating waterbirds, including a variety of ducks, grebes, coots, and loons, arrive by the thousands to the California coast, estuaries, and interior wetlands. They may seem plentiful, but alarmingly, nearly one-third of waterbird populations including the Surf Scoter and Lesser Scaup are declining in North America.

Audubon California recently initiated the Waterbird Program housed at the Richardson Bay Audubon Center & Sanctuary in Tiburon with the goal of protecting and enhancing populations of waterbirds found on San Francisco Bay such as Surf Scoter, Greater and Lesser

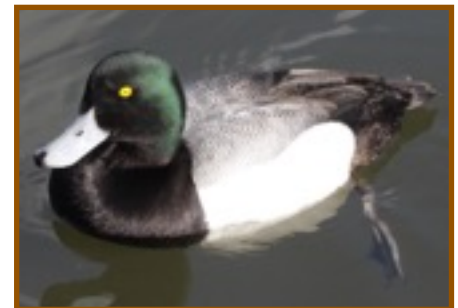
boat disturbance, as well as a long history of educating the public, and advocating for subtidal habitats such as eelgrass, are all essential to the program goals. Moving forward, we would also like to scale conservation actions up to the San Francisco Bay and the Pacific Flyway in order to positively affect these remarkable birds during their entire life cycle.

The presentation will describe the Waterbird Program goals, what it has accomplished so far, and what it hopes to accomplish in the future.

Kerry Wilcox is the Waterbird Program Manager at the Richardson Bay Audubon Center & Sanctuary in Tiburon, California. He has been working with California Audubon since 2006. From 1999 to 2004, he was a biologist with the Institute for Bird Populations (IBP) at Point Reyes Station. He has also studied Snowy Plovers on Owens Lake for Point Blue (PRBO), banded birds in Oaxaca and Tamaulipas, Mexico for IBP's MoSI program, and spent nearly five months volunteering with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service on Tern Island in the remote Northwestern Hawaiian Islands chain.



Above: Migrating waterbirds at Richardson Bay, Kerry Wilcox photo; below: Greater Scaup, Beth Branthaver photo



Clark's Grebe, Beth Branthaver photo

Scaup, and Western and Clark's Grebes.

The Center's annual closure of its 900-acre subtidal Sanctuary to prevent

Birding Information

We will view two short videos. First, we will see a KQED report on the Altamont Pass and efforts to remove older, deadly wind turbines, replacing them with new designs that are less lethal to birds, like Golden Eagles. The second video is a charming short history of Audubon's Christmas Bird Count told by Chan Robbins who, at age 94, has participated in 412 Christmas Counts.

Meeting Schedule

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

700 PM Birding Information
725 PM Announcements
740 PM Refreshments* and raffle
805 PM Speaker: **Kerry Wilcox**
**Please bring your own cup for tea/coffee.*

NEXT MONTH: Thursday, January 7, 2016, PBS documentary ♦ *The Sagebrush Sea*

LOOKING AHEAD: Thursday, February 4, Tony Brake ♦ *Osprey*

One of the unexpected positive side effects of the drought has been the planting of more native plants in people's yards. One of those plants is milkweed, the plant exclusively used by the Monarch Butterfly, thus leading to an observable increase in eggs.



Jimm viewing Monarchs in Mexico, Jimm Edgar photo

One article I read said the number of Monarchs has dropped from over one billion to just 60,000 butterflies. I have written in this column about my visit some years ago to the wintering grounds of the Monarchs near Mexico City. It was truly one of the most spectacular sights I have seen. Monarchs were everywhere!

I also read a somewhat disturbing article in the *New York Times* (10/20/15). It talked about the rapid increase in recreational drones that have become hazardous to birds and other wildlife. As often happens with new technology, we think it will be helpful, but lo and behold, low-flying drones have become a problem. The FAA has yet to establish regulations for recreational drone users.

As you know, our two MDAS annual Christmas Bird Counts are coming up on December 16 and 19. See the Field Trip page for contact information if you would like to help.

Every month I plan to share something surprising to me that I have read in one of my many bird-related magazines. In the December issue of *Birdwatching* I learned something new. The female Bushtit has yellow eyes while the male's eyes are black. Who would have known?

Good News For NYC Bald Eagles

A pair of Bald Eagles has built a nest in New York City, the first nesting pair there in one hundred years. The birds were spotted by a tugboat captain who observed the pair bringing nesting material to a small island near Staten Island. The exact location of the Big Apple Bald Eagle nest has been kept quiet to discourage poachers and noisy crowds.

Other young eagles practicing nest-making have been observed in the same vicinity in recent years, but this mature pair shows promise.

In 1967, Bald Eagles were declared an endangered species in the United States, affording them protections under The Endangered Species Act. On a national level they had been severely impacted by habitat loss and DDT before the pesticide was banned in 1972. In New York, their comeback has been attributed to additional efforts to clean up the Hudson River and to improve New York Bay's water quality, resulting in increased wildlife. Even harbor seals and humpback whales have returned.

Just one breeding pair existed in the state of New York in 1960. Today, there are some 173 breeding pairs nesting, representing two percent of the United States population. However, winter numbers tend to



Bald Eagles, Joy Dardin photo

increase when birds from Canada or Alaska fly south in search of fish in the Hudson River. Most of these eagle pairs had been brought in from other states in an effort to reintroduce the Bald Eagle to the state of New York.

As their numbers increase, eagles will need to expand their range in search of food, so urban centers will likely see more Bald Eagles in residence. Other birds, including American Kestrels, Peregrine Falcons, and Red-tailed Hawks, have been found nesting on skyscrapers in Manhattan, perhaps due to the steady supply of rats and pigeons. Breeding Osprey, Cooper Hawks, and owl species have also been observed in the boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens.

In 2007, after years of Herculean efforts nationwide, the Bald Eagle was removed from the endangered list and nearly 10,000 breeding pairs now span our nation. The Bald Eagle is not only a symbol of our nation, but a symbol of what concerted conservation efforts can do for a species.

And, *that's* good news for Bald Eagles.

From Long-time Member to Lifetime Member:

Stephen Taylor, Jean Richmond, and Ellis Myers

Welcome New Members:

Richard Saillard Walnut Creek
David Stein Danville

MDAS on the Web

www.diabloaudubon.com
www.diabloaudubon.org/mobile
(mobile only)
www.facebook.com/mtdiabloaudubon
www.meetup.com/Mount-Diablo-Audubon-Society/

Q

This bird's population in the San Francisco Bay Area began to rise rapidly around 1871, but started to fall again in the early twentieth century as automobiles replaced horses.

Unscramble these letters, or turn to Page 8 to learn more.

AEHOOPRRSSUW

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January Program: PBS Documentary ♦ *The Sagebrush Sea*



A male Greater Sage-Grouse struts his stuff, Pacific Southwest Region U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service photo

We will view the PBS Nature documentary *The Sagebrush Sea*. This film tracks the Greater Sage-Grouse and other wildlife through the seasons as they struggle to survive in this rugged and changing landscape.

It's been called "The Big Empty"—an immense sea of sagebrush that once stretched 500,000 square miles across North America, exasperating thousands of westward-bound travelers as an endless place through which they had to pass to reach their destinations.

Yet, it's far from empty, as those who look closely will discover. In this ecosystem anchored by the sage, eagles, antelope, badgers, lizards, rabbits, wrens, owls, prairie dogs, songbirds, hawks, and migrating birds of all description make their homes here.

For one bird, however, it is a year-round home, as it has been for thousands of years. The Greater Sage-Grouse relies on the sage for everything and is found no place else. But, their numbers are in decline. Two hundred years ago, there were as many as 16 million sage grouse; today, there may be fewer than 200,000.

In early spring, male sage grouse move to open spaces, gathering in clearings known as "leks" to establish mating rights. For weeks, they practice their elaborate display and square off with other arriving males, battling to establish dominance and territory. The criteria are a mystery to all but the females, nearly all of which select only one or two males on the lek each year. In the summer, the grouse head to wetlands, often populated by farms and ranches, in search of water, only to return to the sage in the fall. Shrinking wetlands that once supported thousands of grouse still manage to provide for hundreds.

Sage survives in this arid environment through deep roots that reach to the water below. Like water, however, many key resources are locked below ground in the high desert, bringing an increasing presence of wells, pipelines, and housing. As development proliferates, the sage sea is becoming more and more fragmented, impacting habitats and migratory corridors. And, of the 500,000 square miles of sagebrush steppe that once stretched across North America, only half now remains. For the sage and the grouse, the future is uncertain. ~Ariana Rickard

Birding Information

In January, co-compilers Jimm Edgar and Maury Stern will present our annual MDAS update of the 2015 Central and East Contra Costa County Christmas Bird Counts.

Book Review: Humboldt's Legacy



The Invention of Nature: Alexander von Humboldt's New World by Andrea Wulf (Knopf, \$30).

Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859) was among the most celebrated scientists—an explorer and naturalist—of his day. His books were bestsellers and his expeditions eagerly reported in the press. Born a Prussian aristocrat, he became an intellectual hero in the nascent United States where his name still graces towns, lakes, and mountains.

Yet, this extraordinary man has been largely forgotten.

In an extraordinary new biography, historian Andrea Wulf brings both the man and his many achievements back to us. Rigorously educated during the European Enlightenment, early on Humboldt began to escape the schoolroom for the woods and fields near his family home outside Berlin. These youthful forays would become expeditions that he took across much of the known world. Wulf depicts not only the intrepid derring-do of these

journeys, but also Humboldt's discovery of the connections between climate and vegetation zones on different continents.

Humboldt's discoveries—fueled by his passionate drive for knowledge, his powerful memory, and his ability to make connections—led him to understand the natural world as an interconnected sequence of planet-wide phenomena. Wulf makes a compelling case that von Humboldt's early understanding that man could have a devastating effect in both the short and long-term on the life of the planet makes him the father of modern environmentalism.

Wulf's writing is graceful, intelligent, and rigorous. *The Invention of Nature* belongs on the shelf next to your worn copies of Thoreau's *Walden* and the works of John Muir. ~Michael Barnard, Owner of Rakestraw Books, an MDAS Business Partner, rakestrawbooks.com

For a 10% discount on this book, bring your *Quail* or print this page from your email *Quail* to show proof of MDAS membership. Rakestraw: 3 Railroad Avenue, Danville, CA 94526 (925) 837-7337

MDAS Board members Rosalie Howarth, Nancy Wenninger, Ariana Rickard, and Maren Smith met in November with Assemblywoman Catharine Baker (center) to discuss conservation issues, Maren Smith photo



December 2015

10	Thursday	Niles Canyon
12	Saturday	Sacramento/Colusa NWR
16	Wednesday	Christmas Count East County
19	Saturday	Christmas Count Central County
26	Saturday	Solano County Raptors and More

January 2016

09	Saturday	Putah Creek
13	Wednesday	East Contra Costa County
23	Saturday	Bodega Bay
30	Saturday	Las Gallinas/Rush Creek/ Shollenberger Park/Ellis Creek

February 2016

06	Saturday	Thornton Area/Cosumnes Preserve
08	Monday	Lake Merritt/Arrowhead Marsh
11	Thursday	Grizzly Island
20-21	Sat./Sun.	Los Banos/Panoche Valley
24	Wednesday	Sunol Regional Park

2 Thursday, December 10

Niles Canyon

Leader: Jimm Edgar (510) 658-2330



Belted Kingfisher,
Joy Dardin photo

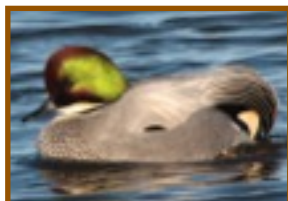
Carpool leaves Sycamore Valley Road Park and Ride at 815 AM. **OR**, meet at the Vallejo Mill Park in Fremont at 9 AM. Take I-680 south to the Niles Canyon exit, turn right (west), and follow SR 84 about seven miles towards the Niles District. The park is at SR 84 and Mission Blvd. We will follow Alameda Creek and visit some of the old gravel pits that have been re-landscaped as park land.

2 Saturday, December 12

Sacramento/Colusa National Wildlife Refuge

Leader: Beth Branthaver (925) 944-1856

Carpool leaves Sun Valley Mall at 7 AM. **OR**, meet at the I-5 North Dunnigan rest area at 815 AM. Take I-680 north, cross the Benicia Bridge (toll), merge onto I-80E at Cordelia. At Vacaville, merge onto I-505N and drive 34 miles. Merge onto I-5N just south of Dunnigan. Continue past the town to the rest stop. This one-day field trip will include visits to the Sacramento and Colusa National Wildlife Refuges in the Sacramento Valley. These sanctuaries are home to tens of thousands of wintering ducks, geese, and swans. The exact itinerary will be announced the day of the trip.



Falcated Duck, Beth
Branthaver photo

Join the 116th Annual Christmas Count 12/16 in East Contra Costa County and/or 12/19 in Central Contra Costa County. Contact Jimm Edgar at ag70@value.net, or call (510) 658-2330.

1 Saturday, December 26

Solano County Raptors and More

Leader: Gary Fregien (916) 708-0636

Carpool leaves Sun Valley Mall at 715 AM. **OR**, meet the leader at the Suisun City McDonald's, Hwy 12 and Sunset Avenue at 8 AM. Take I-680 north, cross the Benicia Bridge (toll), and merge to I-80 east at Cordelia. Take Hwy 12 east toward Rio Vista for about four miles to Sunset Avenue, and turn left at the signal light into the shopping center. McDonald's is on the right.



Red-tailed Hawk,
Maren Smith photo

We will bird east on Hwy 12 and Creed Rd. to the vicinity of Hwy 113 and Robinson Road, possibly including Jepson Prairie. We'll make several stops looking for migrating waterfowl, passerines, and winter raptors, including stops on Flannery and McCormack Roads in search of the elusive Mountain Plover. If we have time, we may travel to the Bird's Landing area, where we should see Tricolored Blackbirds, and to Montezuma Slough for waterfowl. Plan for 4-5 hours birding, plus driving time there and back. There will be minimal hiking, but dress for seasonal conditions. Bring hand-held radios, food, and water. Carpooling is advised, due to limited access at stops. Please call the leader in advance if you plan to carpool from Sun Valley Mall as he is driving from Sacramento to meet the group in Suisun City.

Field trips are open to members and non-members, beginners to advanced birders, but no dogs. Contact trip leader for questions or weather updates.

Our MDAS Chapter is a conservation organization. As such, we encourage carpooling. Carpool locations are listed by field trip. Those who share a ride should offer to help with gas, bridge tolls, or park entry fees.

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

Sun Valley Mall parking lot carpool location: Southwest corner of Mall parking lot at Willow Pass Road and Contra Costa Blvd. in Concord.

Sycamore Valley Road Park and Ride carpool location: Exit I-680 at Sycamore Valley Road East in Danville. Park and Ride lot is on the left, one block east of the freeway.

1 Saturday, January 9

Putah Creek

Leader: Fred Safier (925) 937-2906

Carpool leaves Sun Valley Mall at 800 AM. **OR**, meet at the intersection of Cherry Glen and Pleasants Valley Roads, approximately 1 mile north of I-80, west of Vacaville at 845 AM. Dress warmly—this can be a cold and windy area. Bring your lunch and a beverage.

We hope to see Osprey, Phainopepla, Barrow's Goldeneye, and Hooded Merganser.



*Male Phainopepla,
Joy Shonfeld photo*

1 Wednesday, January 13

East Contra Costa County

Leader: Paul Schorr ((925) 757-5107

Carpool leaves Sun Valley Mall at 815 AM. **OR**, meet at Big Break at 900 AM. Take Highway 4 toward Stockton/Pittsburg. After Antioch, take Exit 30 (right) toward CA-160/Sacramento/

Rio Vista, just past Hillcrest Avenue Exit. Do NOT continue straight on Highway 4. Take exit 1-A East 18th/Main Street, turn right at the bottom of the exit onto Main Street, proceed east a little over one mile, then turn left onto Big Break Road. Turn right just past the last houses on the right into Big Break Regional Shoreline/Delta Science Center in Oakley.



*American Bittern,
Paul Schorr photo*

We will see wintering birds at Big Break, Iron House Sanitary, and at several other spots in the eastern portion of the county. Bring a snack and water.

Free Birding Apps

► If you own a smart phone, you can now download the Audubon Bird Guide app for free. This award-winning app instantly turns your mobile device into one of the most trusted field guides in North America. It includes 821 species profiles; more than 3200 bird photos; quick bird IDs with filters by shape, region, and color; seasonal and migratory range maps; recent local bird sighting through eBird; and sightings posted by Audubon NatureShare friends and followers.

► Another free app is the Merlin Bird ID from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. The app asks you five simple questions about your mystery bird, then gives you a list of best possible matches based upon your location, specific for the time of year. It also features recorded bird vocalizations and range maps. Merlin draws upon more than seven million observations from the eBird citizen-science project to help you identify your bird.

1 Saturday, January 23

Bodega Bay

Leader: Hugh Harvey (925) 935-2979

Carpool leaves Sun Valley Mall at 730 AM. **OR**, meet at the Tides Restaurant on the water side of Highway 1 in Bodega at 915 AM. Take I-680N across the Benicia Bridge (toll). Go west on I-780 to I-80 towards Sacramento, and exit to SR 37. Follow SR 37 to Lakeville Road and turn right. In Petaluma, turn left on E. Washington Street. Continue on Bodega Road, Valley Ford Road, and SR 1 to Bodega Bay. Walk through or around The Tides to find the group viewing the harbor birds from the outdoor seating.



*Marbled Godwit,
Joy Dardin photo*

Possible bird sightings at Bodega Bay may include wintering shorebirds including the Black Oystercatcher, Wandering Tattler, Marbled Godwit, as well as terns, gulls, cormorants, and waterfowl.

Dress in layers and bring a snack, your lunch, liquids, and sunscreen.

2 Saturday, January 30

Las Gallinas/Rush Creek/Shollenberger Park/Ellis Creek

Leader: Eugenia Larson (925) 806-0644

Carpool leaves Sun Valley Mall parking lot at 730 AM. **OR**, meet at Las Gallinas at 830 AM. Take I-680N across the Benicia Bridge (toll). Go west on I-780 to I-80 towards Sacramento, and exit to SR 37. Follow SR 37 22 miles to US 101 south and exit at Lucas Valley Road/Smith Ranch Road. Cross under the freeway and drive east on Smith Ranch Road for 0.6 miles, then, cross the railroad tracks and turn left. Follow the road around the hill 0.7 miles to the Las Gallinas Valley Sanitary District parking lot.

Rush Creek Marsh is just north and east of the Atherton Avenue exit from US 101 in Novato. Immediately past the Park and Ride lot on Atherton, turn left onto Binford Road and go north to the marsh. Schollenberger Park is in Petaluma, east of US 101. Exit at Lakeville Highway, go east to S. McDowell and turn right.

Turn a slight right onto Cypress Drive, then enter the PRBO parking lot at 3820 Cypress. Go to the back and park near the picnic tables. Ellis Creek is just south of the PRBO offices. All four sites are good for wintering waders, shorebirds, waterfowl, and raptors. Bring your lunch and a beverage.



*Whimbrel,
Isaac Aronow photo*

Trip Reports

Berkeley and Emeryville Shoreline,

October 21: Nineteen birders enjoyed a cool day along the waterfront.

Among the surprises were close-up views of a Common Murre swimming and fishing just off the edge of the Bay and a Black Oystercatcher perched on a rock below the walkway. A Common Loon, still showing some of its breeding plumage, was feeding nearby and both Forster's and Elegant Terns were flying over the water. At Point Emery were several Black Turnstone, a large flock of Sanderling, and a Pelagic Cormorant. In the corner of the Bay behind the diner at the foot of University Avenue in Berkeley, we spotted the earlier reported male Eurasian Wigeon among the American Wigeon, several Black-bellied Plover, a Whimbrel, more Black Turnstone, some Dunlin and the usual Marbled Godwit, Willet, and Dowitcher. A Hermit Thrush, at least one Red-breasted Nuthatch, and a Belted Kingfisher were near the picnic area at the Berkeley Marina. All together a total of



From top to bottom: Common Murre, Isaac Aronow photo; Black Oystercatcher, Beth Branthaver photo; Common Loon, Isaac Aronow photo

68 species were seen throughout the half-day trip.

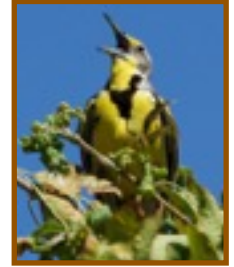
~Eugenia Larson

Abbott's Lagoon, October 24:

Why do birders get up so early? One reason—Abbott's Lagoon is one of Point Reyes' prime birding locations. We were greeted by the melodious songs of the White and Golden-crowned Sparrows and walking down the trail, peppered with the white fussy seeds of coyote bush and black lupine seedpods, we encountered Black and Say's Phoebe, Savannah Sparrow, American Pipit, Western Meadowlark, and a flock of California Quail serenading us with their characteristic assembly call: Chi-ca-go! Near the freshwater wetland, at least two Marsh Wren began singing accompanied by a Common Yellowthroat, but no American Bittern was seen this time. Little did we know the trip's best surprise was waiting for us just a few steps away.

As we walked towards the beach and sand dunes, the coastal habitat provided views of more American Pipits, Horned and Eared Grebes, and shorebirds like Dunlin, Willet and Marbled Godwit. Just as we sat down on a comfortable log to eat lunch, a flock of at least 45 Snowy Plover flew over the group several times before landing and disappearing in the sand a few feet from us, an incredible sight! It's clear to us that Snowy Plovers and people can coexist as long as we keep our distance and our pets away from them. Just another incredible day at Abbott's Lagoon.

~Juan-Carlos Solis



Western Meadowlark, Joy Shanfeld photo

Flashback Moment:

On January 3, 1954, MDAS held its first Christmas Bird Count with 22 birders participating. They recorded a total of 89 different species and 6222 individuals including 1500 Brewer's Blackbird. ~from the October 2002 Quail

Safeguarding Contra Costa County's Native Birds and Other Wildlife Species

Dear Editor:

As Contra Costa County welcomes Sarah Beth Ward, the new Director of Animal Services, it is extremely important that concerned citizens and citizen groups convey to Director Ward the importance of balancing humane treatment of domestic animals with the safeguarding of native birds and other wildlife in Contra Costa County.

In this regard, Director Ward is going to be pressured by certain groups and individuals to incorporate a TNR (trap-neuter-return) policy regarding feral cats in Contra Costa County.

Scientific studies sponsored in 2013 by the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute and the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service have shown that outdoor cats kill between 1.4-3.7 billion birds and 6.9-20.7 billion mammals annually in the U. S. This study, which offered the most comprehensive analysis of information on the issue of outdoor cat predation, was published in the online research journal *Nature Communications*. Most of these mortalities are inflicted by feral cats, and native species make up the majority of their prey.

Cat predation is an increasingly persistent threat to Contra Costa's wildlife. Every time a species is lost or its population numbers are suppressed, the very ecosystems that surround us are altered. Neutering or spaying a trapped cat does absolutely nothing to change its predatory instincts. Cats are hardwired to hunt. Consequently, cats that are trapped on public lands where native birds and other wildlife live should never be returned to those locations to hunt again.

With climate change, drought and loss of habitat, all birds need our protection. In order to protect Contra Costa County's native birds and other wildlife species from feral cat predation, a message of concern and alarm from citizens and citizen organizations needs to be communicated to Director Ward and the Board of Supervisors.

Signed, Jimm Edgar, MDAS President, Paul Schorr, Vice-President, and Nancy Wenninger, Conservation Chairperson
(this letter was submitted to *The Contra Costa Times Newspaper* by MDAS Board Members)

Exciting birds this month included Red Crossbill, Pine Siskin, and an Evening Grosbeak.

A **Brant** was at Brooks Island 10/22. SD

A **Cackling Goose** was at the Martinez Shoreline 10/23. CM

Wood Ducks were at Heather Farm Pond 10/16, HH, and Valle Vista Staging Area 11/7. RS

AL saw a **Blue-winged Teal** at McNabney Marsh 10/28.

Ring-necked Ducks returned to Lake Anza 10/30. AL

Bufflehead came to Lafayette Reservoir 10/30, KB, and to Oak Hill Park in Danville 11/4. SH

A **Common Merganser** was at Heather Farm Pond 11/4. DK

RB saw a **White-faced Ibis** at the Byron Water Treatment Plant 10/24.

Golden Eagles were over her Moraga home 10/13, CSte, and Mt. Olympia in Mt. Diablo SP 10/16. JC

A **Sora** was heard at the Martinez Shoreline Park 10/22. CM

Four **Snowy Plovers** were at the Pt. Pinole Park shoreline 10/28. AL

A **Spotted Sandpiper** was at Lafayette Reservoir 11/4. EL, BP

AL saw three **Lesser Yellowlegs** near Waterfront Road/Marina Vista in Martinez 10/28.

A late **Willow Flycatcher** was at Wildcat Marsh 10/19. AL

Four **Surfbirds** were at Brooks Island 10/22. SD

A **Merlin** returned to her Lafayette home 10/20 where it has lived for several winters. KB

DG had a **Ruff** at the West County Water Treatment Plant 10/23.

Up to 70 **Elegant Terns** were along Meeker Slough 10/26, SG, and 11/8. GC

A **Yellow-shafted Flicker** was at Vollmer Peak in Tilden 10/18. RC

A **Chipping Sparrow** was near the Marsh Creek Trail and Delta Road. 10/25 RB

Hundreds of **Western Bluebirds** and **Cedar Waxwings** were feeding on berries at Mt. Olympia in Mt. Diablo SP 10/16. JC

Tropical Kingbirds were at Heather Farm, HH, FS, DK; along the Bay Trail near Richmond, SZ; and at the West County Treatment Plant. AL, MP, JS

GZ saw a **Swamp Sparrow** in the Tilden Botanical Garden 10/31.

Late-leaving **Barn Swallows** were at Clifton Court Forebay 11/3, AH, and Lafayette, 11/4. LW

A **Palm Warbler** was near the 51st Street Trail to the Bay Trail in Richmond 10/29 and 11/1. JH, GC

Clay-collared Sparrows were seen 10/15 at Valle Vista staging Area, MB, HB; Grayson Road in Pleasant Hill 10/16, CS; and at West County Water Treatment Plant 10/21. AL

White-Throated Sparrows were seen 10/21 by CS at the Springhill entrance to Briones Park; JR's Alamo home; CM near Redwood Regional Park; and FS on Cherry Lane in Walnut Creek 11/1.

There were at least 40 reports of **Red Crossbills**, mostly from the Tilden Nature area Redwoods and Douglas Firs. AF first saw them 10/28 and MP identified them as Type 3, Western Hemlock type, of the nine possible types.

There were also about 40 sightings by AKr of **Pine Siskins** from 10/16 on, clearly an irruption year.

An **Evening Grosbeak** was seen by FS on the Contra Costa Canal Trail near the Walnut Creek crossing area 10/30, and another at Valle Vista Staging Area by RS 11/7.

~

KB Kristen Baker, HB Holly Bern, MB Martin Bern, RB Russ Bright, JC Jim Chiropoulos, GC Graham Chisholm, RC Robert Coon, SD Shirley Doell, AF Anthony Fisher, DG Don Gesualdo, SG Susan Greef, AH Aaron Haiman, JH John Harris, HH Hugh Harvey, SH Steve Hutchcraft, DK Dave Kent, AKr Alan Krakauer, EL Elizabeth Leite, AL Albert Linkowski, CM Colin Meusel, MP Michael Park, BP Brent Pettersson, JR Jean Richmond, FS Fred Safier, RS Rusty Scalf, CS Catherine Spaulding, CSt Cuyler Stapelmann,

CSte Christine Steck, JS John Sterling, LW Leon Wagner, GZ Gena Zolotow, SZ Sam Zuckerman

~

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

Young Birder Bio: Meet Forrest



When I was three, I liked looking at pictures of birds in my mom's bird books and taking nature walks with my mom, a bird lover. We have tons of bird feeders, so it was natural for me to get into birds.

Over the years, I began to be even more interested in birds. When I was eight I started studying bird books trying to remember facts about the individual birds. Now that I'm 11, I currently have a life list of 205 birds.

Birds fascinate me. It's cool to see a new bird that I've never seen before. I love their songs, their calls, their looks, learning what they eat, and observing the way they fly. Sometimes I wish that I was a bird.

My favorite bird is the Yellow-billed Cuckoo, endangered in California. I finally got to see them in North Carolina and Georgia when I visited family there this past summer. I was excited because there were two of them together and I heard their loud song almost every day!

Traveling to England to see birds is my dream because from what I've studied, the birds there seem very interesting. I have other interests in addition to birding. I'm really creative and like to build things out of recyclable materials like boxes and plastic bottles. I put them altogether with duct tape. People usually think that they are cool. I also love scootering, biking, tree climbing, drawing, inventing things, and reading.

When I grow up I'd like to help endangered birds because I don't want them to go extinct. I'll always have a love of birds. ~Forrest Chapman



House Sparrow ♦ *Passer domesticus*

The House Sparrow (also known as the English Sparrow) is not a sparrow, but a weaver finch, one of two similar species, classified as Old World sparrows, introduced from Europe in the late nineteenth century in the hopes of controlling insect infestations. While the Tree Sparrow was imported from Germany to Saint Louis, House Sparrows were brought from England to Brooklyn to combat cankerworm at the Greenwood Cemetery.

Generally considered to be an obnoxious bully, the House Sparrow sometimes shows itself not to be so bird-brained as one might expect, as this story reported in Bent's *Life Histories of North American Birds* documents: "A male bird brought to his box a large, fine goose feather, which is a great find for a sparrow and much coveted. After he had deposited his prize and chattered his congratulations over it, he went away in quest of his mate. His next-door neighbor, a female bird, seeing her chance, quickly slipped in and seized the feather, and here the wit of the bird came out, for instead of carrying it into her own box, she flew with it to a near tree and hid it in a fork of the branches, then went home, and when her neighbor returned with his mate, was innocently employed about her own affairs. The proud mate, finding his feather gone, came out of his box in a high state of excitement, and, with wrath in his manner and accusation on his tongue, rushed into the cote of the female. Not finding his goods and chattels there as he expected, he stormed around a while, abusing everybody in general and his neighbor in particular, and then went away

as if to repair the loss. As soon as he was out of sight, the shrewd thief went and brought the feather home and lined her own domicile with it."

In Ralph Hoffmann's 1927 field guide, *Birds of the Pacific*, he described the sparrow as follows: "The English Sparrow, like other tramps, used empty freight cars in its journey westward. . . . The city streets, where the motor car has so largely superseded the horse, no longer offers the English Sparrow abundant and easy pickings of grain, but its coarse, insistent *cheep* is nevertheless a too familiar sound from the cornices of city buildings where the male with drooping wings and tail spread hops about the indifferent female."

In yet another description by William Dawson (*The Birds of Ohio, 1903*), he said, "Without question the most deplorable event in the history of American ornithology was the introduction of the English Sparrow."

Despite the derogatory descriptions, a recent scientific study [*Intl. J. Behavioural Biol., 2013*] reported findings that the more feathers a male House Sparrow carries to the nest, the more eggs the female will lay. As one observer commented, "Who can hate on a guy who just wants to make the lady of the nest happy?" ~Ellis Myers



Male House Sparrow, Glen Tepke photo

The Sandhill Cranes Have Arrived

Each year, the Sandhill Cranes start arriving in late September to spend their fall and winter in the Delta and Central Valley. Several locations perfect for observing the cranes (and many other bird species) include Woodbridge Ecological Reserve, Cosumnes River Preserve, and Staten Island. Gary Ivey, a "craniac," has created a comprehensive "Crane Self-Tour Map" at sharetheroad.us

Contra Costa County Creek and Watershed Symposium, 12/3/15

Every four years local watershed groups, community members, and representatives from the public and private sectors interested in creeks and watershed health gather at the Pleasant Hill Community Center to learn, get inspired, and to network. Special guest host is Doug McConnell of NBC's *OpenRoad*. (9 AM-4:30 PM) **For information: symposium2015@fomcw.org**

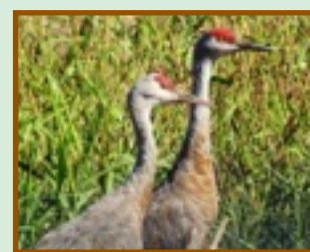
SF Bay Bird Observatory Colonial Waterbird Monitor Training, January 2016

When MDAS member Jean Halford was in the 6th grade, a beautiful bird caught her eye. Her mother, an amateur botanist, identified it as the Western Meadowlark. For Jean, it was the beginning of a lifetime of birding adventures that would span decades and continents. For the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory (SFBBO), it was the birth of a future citizen scientist.

SFBBO is a nonprofit in Milpitas with the mission to conserve birds and their habitats through science and outreach. For more than 30 years, SFBBO has studied waterbirds and landbirds that live in and migrate through the Bay Area and has shared its data with land managers, universities, and organizations like Audubon to help inform management decisions. SFBBO also offers bird walks, workshops, and family programs to build community awareness about the status and importance of birds.

With a staff of only 10 scientists and outreach specialists, SFBBO relies on more than 100 volunteers and citizen scientists each year to help collect scientific data, educate the community, and raise money for the organization's work. For the past five years, Jean has been one of these important volunteers.

After going through a half-day training to learn about bird identification, breeding behavior, and research protocols, each spring Jean has spent one or two mornings a month monitoring waterbird colonies. Jean's skills became so keen that she even discovered a new colony of Great Blue Herons nesting at Bacon Island that she now monitors. **For information or to sign up for the Colonial Waterbird Training: sfbbo.org or outreach@sfbbo.org.** ~Kristin Butler, SFBBO Outreach Director



Sandhill Crane on Staten Island, Maren Smith photo

Birding Bhutan

By Jean Halford

In April of 2015, I spent three weeks in the Himalayan Mountain Kingdom of Bhutan, the “Land of the Thunder Dragon,” with the birding group, Tropical Birding. There were only four of us in the group which made for comfortable birding. Bhutan opened up to foreign tourism in the 1970s, so their tourism infrastructure is not well developed, which meant that we camped almost half the time we were in the country while the other half was spent in some good to excellent accommodations. We camped on the side of the road since there are no developed campgrounds in Bhutan.

Bhutan is a Buddhist country where monasteries and ancient temples called *dzongs* cling to hillsides. We toured a number of the *dzongs* where the buildings were split between religious and administrative government offices. The well-being of the citizens is important and is measured not by their GNP but by their GNH-Gross National Happiness. Maybe, because of this philosophy, I felt safe and even pampered while there.

Seventy percent of the country is comprised of pristine forests, with few trails throughout, so we did most of our birding from the road. Bhutan is sparsely populated, the citizens are warm and friendly, the air pure, the mountains magnificent, the forests dense, and the temple architecture imposing. We met many locals along the roads including a very friendly 69 year-old Bhutanese man walking along the road looking for his lost yak. We also saw a variety of critters including pigs, goats, yaks, cows, monkeys, and plentiful dogs.

My birding trip was extremely busy. Most days we birded as we traveled to a new campsite or hotel. We saw a total of 437 bird species, plus 21 mammals, a few reptiles, as well as butterflies. The varied number of birds we observed made it all worthwhile from the cute Yuhinas to the stunning four species of Pheasants. My favorites included the acrobatic Parrotbill, Fulvetta, Laughingthrush, and the secretive Cupwing.



Top right: Black-throated Tit; top left: Scarlet Minivet; above: Blue-capped Rock-thrush; right, top to bottom: Blood Pheasant, Stripe-throated Yuhina, and a White-Breasted Parrotbill, Jean Halford photos



Clackwise from top left: Bhutanese yak herder; a yak and her calf; a Golden langur mother and baby in southern Bhutan; campsite dining tent; typical lunch stop with ever-present dogs; Punakha dzong; Buddhist monks in maroon robes; Tamala Pass chorten and prayer flags, Jean Halford photos



the Quail

Ralph Hoffmann

Educator ♦ Naturalist ♦ Writer

By Ellis Myers

One of the best books that every birder in California should add to their library is *Birds of the Pacific States* written by Ralph Hoffmann and published in 1927. In the introduction, the author states "one cannot have too many good bird books." Surely, no one book can offer all the information a birder may wish to learn, but Hoffmann may have come close.

Ralph Hoffmann was born in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. Growing



Ralph Hoffmann, American Museum of Natural History photo

up in the Berkshire Hills near the Housatonic River, Ralph became a keen observer of nature, particularly of birds and their behavior. In 1883, when the celebrated English poet and critic Matthew Arnold toured New England and asked for a bird-watching guide to accompany him on walks, thirteen year-old Ralph Hoffmann was the best choice.

He graduated from Harvard (class of 1890) when he was twenty, and began a career as a teacher of Latin at Browne and Nichols School, a boarding school for boys in Cambridge.

In 1898, one of a series of school "readers" titled *Bird World, a Bird Book for Children* by J. H. Stickley, assisted by

Ralph Hoffman, was published. This was a collection of stories about the common birds of New England, and was illustrated with drawings by wildlife artist Ernest Seton Thompson, the man whose work inspired Roger Tory Peterson's technique. In 1901, he co-wrote another book *Bird Portraits* by Thompson and Hoffmann, a small book featuring 20 of Seton Thompson's delightful plates with Hoffmann's descriptions.

Next, Hoffmann turned his efforts to one of the very first field guides. Its full title is *A Guide to the Birds of New England and Eastern New York Containing a Key for Each Season and Short Descriptions of Over Two Hundred and Fifty Species with Particular Reference to Their Appearance in the Field*. The book was published in 1904. Hoffmann's writing style is charming, as in this example from his description of the English Sparrow: "The chunkiness of the Sparrow, the unstreaked dingy-white breast of the female, and the black throat of the male, will serve to identify it to any one who is so fortunate to be unacquainted with it."

In 1909, Hoffmann accepted an offer to become headmaster of a small school for boys, the Country Day School in Kansas City, Missouri. Each summer, Hoffmann returned to the Berkshires to search for native plants and to visit friends and family, and in 1922 he published the book *Flora of Berkshire County, Massachusetts*.

In 1919 he moved to Santa Barbara, California to teach natural history at the Cate School for Boys. Two years later, he began work on a new guide: *Birds of the Pacific States*. Hoffmann travelled throughout the western states—much of it with little more than his field journal, his Model T, and a tire pump—to gain the first-hand observations of the birds he wrote about.

In 1925, Hoffmann was chosen to succeed William Dawson as director of the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural

History, which had been founded as the Museum of Comparative Oölogy by Dawson. *Birds of the Pacific States* was published during this time, in 1927, and won broad acclaim. Hoffmann then turned his attention to his interests in the native plants of California, particularly those of the Channel Islands. In fact, one of the plants, found only on Santa Rosa and Santa Cruz Islands, is the endangered Hoffmann's rockcress, *Arabis hoffmannii*.

Hoffmann had made frequent collecting trips to the northern islands, and when an opportunity arose in July of 1932, he joined a group of paleontologists going to the small westernmost island of San Miguel searching for fossils such as the Pygmy Mammoth. Opting to collect some buckwheat specimens, he set off on his own. He did not return.

Following a lengthy search, his companions found his body at the base of a vertical cliff. The handle of his trowel, apparently used as a climbing aid, had snapped off, causing his fall.

Ralph Hoffmann is remembered at the Ralph Hoffmann Environmental Center at Berkshire Community College in Pittsfield, MA; and at the

>>continued on Page 12



Plate from *Birds of the Pacific States*, illustration by Major Allan Brooks

Winter Backyard Birds

By Mike Eliot, Wild Birds Unlimited

Spelling the arrival of winter, a changing of the guard is taking place in area backyards. Dark-eyed Junco, mainly the Oregon sub-species with dark hoods, are being seen in pairs foraging for millet on the ground. Sometimes it's possible to find a Slate-colored Junco with a dark body and white belly. Look for the white outer tail feathers on both of these when in flight.

The Golden-crowned Sparrow with their plaintive, whistled three-note song ("oh-dear-me") can be heard all day long, but especially early in the morning. White-crowned Sparrow have also migrated in for the winter. They often flock with the Golden-crowned Sparrow. Both are ground or tray feeding birds that love white millet seed and will also eat suet.

American and Lesser Goldfinch have begun appearing in larger numbers. Their differences are easy to spot. The male Lesser Goldfinch have black over the entire head and dark green backs, while only half of the head is black on the American Goldfinch, with more yellow on the back. The female Lesser Goldfinch has narrow wing bars and a dark bill, while the American has wide white wing bars and an orange to yellow bill. Their numbers will continue to increase all through the winter. By January or February many people see flocks of up to 50 birds. Both will readily come to nyjer (thistle) seed feeders and feeders with sunflower chips and blends.

Recently, we have seen an irruption of Pine Siskin who arrive in large groups taking over the nyjer or sunflower feeders from goldfinches for a while each day.



A Pine Siskin irruption results in the birds taking over feeders, WBU photo

Mount Diablo Audubon Society (MDAS)

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

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Mount Diablo Audubon Society meets at 7 PM 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, CA 94598.

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Anna's Hummingbird, Maren Smith photo

Ralph Hoffmann ————— >>continued from Page 10

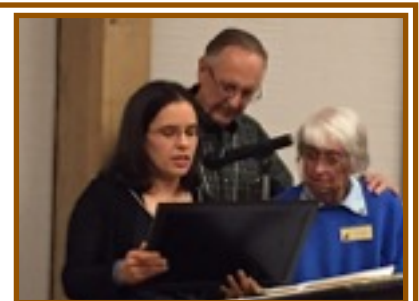
Hoffmann Loggia at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, where a plaque in his honor reads: "... a student of flowers and birds who welcomed the children and made the museum a center of inspiration for all lovers of life and beauty."



Hoffmann's Nightshade, Las Pilitas Nursery photo

In addition to the rockcress, several other California native plants carry Hoffmann's name: Hoffmann's sanicula or blacksnakeroot, a rare plant on the Channel Islands and Southern California coastal habitats; Hoffmann's cryptantha in Inyo, Mono and San Bernardino counties; Hoffmann's nightshade; and Hoffmann's cactus.

FYI: Inez Brocco, MDAS member, donated her late husband Mark's collection of over one hundred birding books to the Lafayette Library where they are for sale through the Friends Corner BookShop.



In November, MDAS honored Board members with the Audubon Great Egret Award for significant long-term contributions to Audubon and its conservation mission. Top left: Jimm Edgar, Paul Schorr, Honoree Diana Granados (Rec. Secretary), and Ariana Rickard; top right: Ariana Rickard, Paul Schorr,, and Honoree Jean Richmond; bottom right: Jimm Edgar, Ariana Rickard, Honoree Ellis Myers (Quail Editor), and Paul Schorr, Rosalie Howarth photos



*Thank you
 Diana, Jean, and Ellis
 for your dedicated service to
 Mt. Diablo Audubon Society!*