

the Quail

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

Volume 61, Number 6

March 2016

March Program: Renewable Energy and Birds ♦ Garry George

California became the epicenter of renewable energy upon the passage of AB32 in 2006. The CA Global Warming



Above: Garry George (right) speaks with Secretary of the Interior, Sally Jewell (center), and California Energy Commissioner, Karen Douglas (left); Right: Garry adds to his birding Life List, Garry George photos

Solutions Act ramped up the transformation of an energy sector that had contributed 60-80% of the emissions that cause climate change. Wind, solar, and geothermal projects had already been operating in California, but due to AB32 and our aggressive Renewable Portfolio Standard legislation, requiring utilities to procure at least 33% of their energy from renewable sources by 2020, now escalated to

50% by 2050 through SB350, we have seen wave after wave of projects incentivized by tax credits, and political support for California's natural resources in the Central, Imperial, and Antelope Valleys, Mojave Desert, and Salton Sea.

But, as we have learned from Altamont and the initial big solar projects in the desert, not all clean energy is "green." Wind transmission, and now solar, has taken a significant toll on our birds.

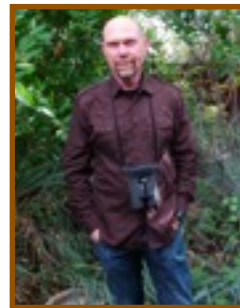
How do we guide the development of utility-scale renewable projects to areas of least conflict closer to transmission and nearer to the energy demand? Audubon California's Chapter Network and Renewable Energy Director, Garry George, will host a presentation and dialogue on Audubon California's work on federal, state, and local renewable siting policies, and he will report on projects in California in which Audubon is engaged.

Birding Information

Many birds in Europe migrate north in the spring from wintering grounds in Africa to breeding grounds in the Arctic. Bill and Linda Maddaus will show these migration routes and give a snapshot view of some of the birds they saw while traveling in Northern Europe last summer, visiting Latvia and Finland.

Garry represents Audubon on many committees including the California Desert Renewable Energy Working Group, the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan stakeholder process, and the Avian/Solar Working Group. He is a Board member of the American Wind and Wildlife Institute and co-chair of their Research Committee.

He started his career at Audubon as a volunteer for Los Angeles Audubon after enjoying several field trips hosted by the chapter. He soon joined the Board and was instrumental, with other Board members, in transforming the organization from a bird club with investments to a conservation and education powerhouse in LA. The Board asked him to become the first Executive Director in 2003. He was soon elected by the Southern California chapters to represent them on the Audubon California Board from 2004-2008, and he began working for Audubon California in 2008.



Prior to Audubon, he had a career in the music industry as manager and marketing director for some of your favorite artists. When not working in LA, he travels the world to see birds with his partner of 23 years, Joseph Brooks, accumulating a Life List of over 7,000 birds. Their three year-old grandson, Matteo Finch Trask, gives them hope for the future.

Meeting Schedule

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

700 PM Birding Information

725 PM Announcements

740 PM Refreshments* and raffle

805 PM Speaker: **Garry George**

**Go Green-bring your own cup for tea/coffee*

NEXT MONTH: Thursday, April 7,
Animal Life ♦ Joan Morris, Contra
Costa Times columnist

Every year since 1955 MDAS members have participated in the National Audubon Christmas Bird Count (CBC). That first year there were 18 participants. This past December, our 56th CBC, 35 birders surveyed East County on December 16, and over 50 birders, many participating in both counts, searched for species in Central County on December 19, including a delegation of young birders led by Logan Kahle. Totals for the separate species counts were 155 for East and 150 for Central Contra Costa County.

On each count there were surprises. This year's East County segment provided two rarities: a White-winged Dove that had only been seen in West Marin County in September, and a Brown-crested Flycatcher that had been seen only once in the Farallon Islands in the 1980s. In both cases, Logan spotted these birds in Holland Tract. Fortunately, descriptive documentation occurred and, in the case of the dove, photos were taken. Central County had its flock of Lawrence's Goldfinches in Clayton which delighted birders before and after the official count day.

The count protocol follows National Audubon procedures for compiling information. Our chapter's two

counts are broken up into area surveys led by dedicated, knowledgeable leaders, many of whom have been taking on this responsibility for years. Some of the surveys occur on private or restricted governmental lands requiring advance permission. Others occur in parklands and on bodies of water. Many take all day to complete thoroughly, a large commitment put forth by leaders and participants.

Thank you to all who participated this year. Special thanks goes to Kathy Robertson who has led the Clifton Court Forebay count for 15 years and to Albert Linkowski for picking up this new responsibility.

Maury and Jimm have been involved with the CBC for 25 years as team leaders and co-compilers. They are ready to retire and hand off the baton. Elizabeth responded to their request for help this year, matching volunteers with team leaders and helping with logistics through email and phone calls. We are hopeful a few of you will join Elizabeth on the CBC Committee with Jimm and Maury acting as supportive advisors.

To join the team, please contact Jimm at: ag70@value.net or call (510) 290-8006

Good News For Rescued Birds

Last September, a San Pablo resident spotted what she thought was a turkey sitting on her compost container underneath some thick vines, only to discover that it was a Cooper's Hawk. Suspecting it was injured, she used rubber kitchen gloves and a sweater to capture the hawk while her sister called WildCare in San Rafael. After delivery of the bird to the center, they were given updates on the rehabilitation of the hawk's fractured wing. When the hawk healed, the sisters were present on Thanksgiving Day when WildCare released the bird at Point Pinole.

WildCare also treats and cares for nearly 4,000 sick or injured animals a year including 800 orphaned baby birds.

Another WildCare project, the Baby Bird Nest campaign, relies on area knitters and crocheters to craft bird nests for the orphaned baby birds, mostly songbirds, each spring. Apparently, the fostered chicks had become bruised from

hard-surfaced bowls previously used as substitute nests. The new knitted nests have become a more comfortable place to be raised until their feathers replace the down, allowing the young birds to control their body temperature.



Anna's Hummingbird babies safe in their nest, sketch by Megan Sandri

Last year, knitters and crocheters created 5503 soft, washable, knitted "nests" after a request by WildCare was posted on their website, filling the need for that organization and dozens of other U.S. wildlife hospitals with whom they have shared the yarn-crafted bounty.

The 2015 campaign ended on August 15, but will resume again this spring. For more information about the 2016 knitted nest patterns and WildCare's need, please contact: www.babybirdnest.org

And, *that's* good news for rescued birds!

Welcome New Members

Ann Bishop	Martinez
Louis & Amy Eber	Walnut Creek
Winnie & Kinny Lin	Concord
Marianne McCraney	Walnut Creek
Pamela Newacheck	Concord
Judith Palmieri	Pleasant Hill

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 is the provincial bird of Manitoba, Canada.

Unscramble these letters, or turn to Page

6 to learn more.

AAEGLLORRTWY

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"Go Green" and get the *Quail* by email. It's good for the environment, will save MDAS money, you receive it sooner, you may print the pages you need, and it's in **color**. **Contact:** patincococo@gmail.com

The highlight of the month was the herring run along the Ferry Point area of Miller/Knox Regional Park starting 1/15 that lasted a week, MC, TB, GC, AK, followed by a second run close to the Richmond Marina 2/5. TE During the runs there were thousands of gulls including **Slaty-backed**, NA and 10 observers, and **Heermann's Gulls**, SS and 16 observers.

ES found four **Greater White-fronted Geese** at Richmond Marina and Shimada Friendship Park 2/7.

ToG saw a **Snow Goose** on 2/6 at the Richmond Harbor.

On 2/3, ES saw eight **Brant** at Ferry Point.

There were up to two **Eurasian Wigeons** at the Miller/Knox RP Ferry Point area from 1/18 to 2/3. AK, TG, ES, and HH saw one at McNabney Marsh 1/25.

B&WS saw an **American Wigeon** in the canal on the west side of Boundary Oaks Country Club 1/16.

A male **Redhead** was at the dam at the Lafayette Reservoir 2/1. DaW

A female **Long-tailed Duck** was in a raft of hundreds of **Greater Scaup** and **Surf Scoters** off the shore of Miller/Knox RP 2/9. HB, MS&T4B

PL saw two pair of **Hooded Mergansers** in Sycamore Valley Creek in Danville 1/21. Also, on 1/21 ST saw three in San Ramon Creek along the Iron Horse Trail. EL saw one in the Upper San Leandro Reservoir, and WP saw a pair under the bridge near the Valle Vista Staging Area 2/7.

JM had flyover **White-faced Ibis** at Bethel Island 1/23.

Adult **Bald Eagles** were at Los Vaqueros Reservoir 1/16, JA; near Los Vaqueros 2/7, SL; by Big Break Pier 1/30, RB; at Lafayette Reservoir 1/25, ST; and at her granddaughter's home in Lafayette 1/25, RuB.

CS saw a probable **Rough-legged Hawk** fly Across Vasco Road near the county line 1/31.

A **Stilt Sandpiper** was discovered by LK and AL on Bethel Island in a flooded field near the end of the road 1/18. JS, GG, BD, and FO also saw it.

On 2/7 SL saw many and T&JR saw 1,000 **Sandhill Cranes** at Holland Tract.

Ten more observers saw the **White-winged Dove** in Holland Tract.

The first locally reported **Allen's Hummingbird** was at Point Pinole Regional Park 1/24, SD, and AK's Friday group saw it at Tilden RP 2/5.

A **Lewis's Woodpecker** was at the Big Break Pier 1/30. RB There were two along the northern entrance road to Los Vaqueros on 2/7. SL

A **Red-naped Sapsucker** was seen at Round Valley Regional Park from 1/15-31 by RB, BD, AM, SH, CS, EK, BM, GC, AL, and BoM.

A **Say's Phoebe** was at Point Pinole RP 1/24. SD

The **Tropical Kingbird** continued at Heather Farm Pond. FS, HH, BM, KS, KB, DK, KM, GC, and AL

Either a very early, or a very late **Cliff Swallow** was at Holland Tract 1/31. CS

A **Brown Creeper** was along the Contra Costa Canal Trail near the Walnut Creek crossing 1/14. FS

Mountain Bluebirds were seen in Antioch on Frederickson Lane and in Contra Loma RP 1/12-18. PS, JR, GZ, RB, CL, JA, AM, GC, JS, KB, KS

A male **Phainopepla** was a treat to see at Hidden Lakes Park in Martinez 2/1. MM

JH found a **Chipping Sparrow** at Wendell Park in Richmond 1/18.

A **Fox Sparrow Red subspecies** was found AL along Lydia Lane Trail in Clayton 1/14, and CS saw one at the Briones Reservoir Bear Creek Staging Area 1/28.

The Lafayette Reservoir **Swamp Sparrow** continued in the reeds near the visitor center on 1/21. CM

AL found a **Dark-eyed Junco** of the *cismontanus* subspecies or "**Cassiar**" sub-type 1/23 at Dave Brubeck Park in Concord.

CS found a single **Yellow-headed Blackbird** in a flock of hundreds of mixed blackbirds at Holland Tract 1/31.

A **Ruff** continued at the Richmond Wastewater Treatment Plant on 1/20. AM

Red Crossbills were in a small flock of males and females and joined by Pine Siskins in the Redwood Trees near the Steam Trains at Tilden RP from 1/27 to 2/7. DW and 15 more observers

A female **Evening Grosbeak** was photographed in Rossmoor by DB 2/6.

~

JA Jeff Acuff, NA Noah Arthur, KB Keith Bailey, RuB Ruth Barcelon, DB Don Bauman, HB Holly Bern, TB Tony Brake, RB Russ Bright, MC Michael Carnell, GC Graham Chisholm, SD Sheila Dickie, BD Bob Dunn, TE Todd Easterla, TG Ted Gilliland, ToG Tom Gourley, GG George Griffeth, HH Hugh Harvey, JH Jeff Hoppes, SH Steve Huckabone, LK Logan Kahle, AK Alan Kaplan, DK Dave Kent, EK Elizabeth Kroll, EL Elizabeth Leite, AL Albert Linkowski, SL Stephen Long, PL Pam Lorenz, CL Calvin Lou, CM Colin M., AM Aaron Maizlich, MM Mike Marchiano, BM Bruce Mast, BoM Bonnie Mende, JM Jeff Miller, KM Kai Mills, FO Frances Oliver, WP Wendy Palfrey, T&JR Ted and Jan Robertson, JR James Roethe, FS Fred Safier, B&WS Bonnie and Walter Schmidt, PS Paul Schorr, CS Catherine Spaulding, ES Elaine Stammen, SS Sandy Steinman, JS John Sterling, MS&T4B Maury Stern and the Tuesday for the Birds Group, KS Kirk Swenson, ST Steve Taylor, DaW Dave Weber, DW Denise Wright, GZ Gena Zolatar

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.

The ongoing MDAS Phenology Study needs a few citizen scientists for the pilot project teams. Observations are once a month in Martinez at MVSD and McNabney Marsh. If you are interested in this project, please contact Dave Kent at: dkent@ggu.edu

Trip Reports

East Contra Costa County, January

13: Five members ignored weather forecasts of rain and high winds, and ultimately spent a pleasant day birding in East County. We visited Big Break Regional Shoreline, Iron

House Sanitary, Cypress Grove Park, the Knightsen area, and Holland Tract. Highlights included excellent views of both sexes of Common Merganser, Virginia Rail, male Common Yellowthroat, six sparrow species (Savannah, Fox, Song, Lincoln's, White-crowned, Golden-crowned), Bonaparte's Gull, American Pipit, Loggerhead Shrike, and Red-



Greater White-fronted Geese,
Joy Shonfeld photo

shouldered Hawk. The trip concluded with flyovers of Sandhill Cranes and Tundra Swans. In a distant area of considerable standing water were large numbers of Greater White-fronted Geese and

dozens of Sandhill Cranes. We totaled 54 species, some participants adding to their bird Life Lists. ~**Paul Schorr**

Bodega Bay, January 23:

Undeterred by tempestuous weather conditions, ten members and two guests made the first MDAS winter visit to Bodega Bay in six years. The arcing rainbows we saw as we drove towards the coast were the first glimpse of what an exhilarating day we would experience. The extreme high water at The Tides Wharf was covered with countless Brant, the winter goose of the coast. Numerous Common Loons dotted the water along with Buffleheads, Common Goldeneyes, Lesser Scaups, Surf Scoters, and a male Red-breasted Merganser. Knowing the wind would be even stronger later, we hurried to Bodega Head where, in fact, we couldn't use our scopes, but had Brandt's and Pelagic Cormorants, Black Oystercatchers, and side-by-side comparisons of Western and Glaucous-winged Gulls, all perched below us on rocks relentlessly pounded by the crashing surf.



Common Goldeneye,
Jean Halford photo

After stopping at Campbell Cove and Owl Canyon, where we saw a Great Horned Owl, we drove to the outer tip of Doran Park for lunch. We had wonderful views of a cooperative Surf-bird and an offshore Red-necked Grebe. We also had both Pelican and Turnstone species, Willets, Godwits, Whimbrels, Sanderlings, Forster's Terns, an Osprey, Northern Harrier, and Belted Kingfishers. Though we endured rain and strong winds, we also gloried in blue skies and rainbows, identifying 66 bird species. ~**Hugh Harvey**

Petaluma: Las Gallinas to Ellis Creek, January 30:

Twenty-three members and guests enjoyed a partly sunny day in the 50s birding in Petaluma. Among the best sightings at Las Gallinas SD were a Sora, one Virginia Rail,

several Common Gallinules, eight Mute Swans, a few Cackling Geese, and several Common Mergansers. Flying overhead were several Tree Swallows, an early single Violet-green Swallow, and some vocal White-throated Swifts. A few in the group were able to see the fast flying Merlin, Peregrine Falcon, and Sharp-shinned Hawk, which, unfortunately, did not hang around long. Rush Creek added Avocets, Stilts, Least Sandpipers, and a Greater Yellowlegs. A single Long-billed Curlew was at Shollenberger Park, and a small group of White-faced Ibis continue to be seen at Ellis Creek along with a Mute Swan and two American Pipits. Total species for the day was 86. ~**Eugenia Larson**

Woodbridge/Cosumnes Wildlife Reserves, February 6:

There are times that we know why we live in this beautiful state. The weather was perfect—partly cloudy, light winds, a fog that lifted, and temperatures in the 60s—all in all, a great day for our group of 22 birders. Another treat was seeing the snow-covered Sierra Nevadas in the distance and realizing that the snow melt would eventually make its way to the valley to help maintain the wonderful bird habitats that we often take for granted here in the Golden State.

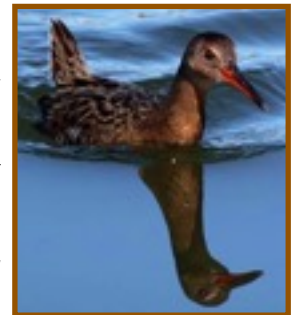
There weren't a lot of Sandhill Cranes (many farmers' fields have been converted to vineyards), but enough to make the trip worthwhile. We saw Tundra Swans and lots of Snow Geese including large V-shaped flocks flying overhead.

Our group saw many "Audubon" Yellow-rumped Warblers, Western Meadowlarks, and Brewers and Red-winged Blackbirds. Among the water birds, we saw Greater White-fronted Geese, American Widgeons, Mallards, Double-crested Cormorants, Coots, and many Great Egrets. By far, the best birds were two Great Horned Owls nesting.

After lunch at Cosumnes, we walked the Wetlands Trail and added a dozen birds to the list including the Green-winged Teal, Song Sparrow, a White-breasted Nuthatch, and Anna's Hummingbirds at the Visitor Center's feeder making 62 species our total. Earlier in the day, we also saw a "super covey" of California Quail, at least 20 in the group, a first for me. ~**Ethan "Chick" Chickering**

Lake Merritt/Arrowhead Marsh, February 8:

The weather for our day was a record-breaking 79 degrees! Starting at Lake Merritt, 17 participants saw an assortment of ducks including five grebe species. Sadly, this is the second year in a row that the Tufted Duck was not seen, nor were there any Ring-necked Ducks. The Barrow's Goldeneyes made it easy for us by putting in an appearance near the Nature Center. Next, we headed to Arrowhead Marsh for the high tide rail show. It took patience before very good looks were had of a few Ridgway's Rails and Soras. Ending at Garretson Point we found all three teal species in the rainwater pond. We were treated to sightings of 76 species and a truly beautiful day. ~**Sandy Ritchie**



Ridgway's Rail,
Beth Branthaver photo

Field Trip Schedule

By Hugh Harvey

March 2016 (Call Leader for questions/rain cancellations)

02	Wednesday	Walnut Creek City Parks
09	Wednesday	Contra Loma RP Reservoir
15	Tuesday	McNabney Marsh/Mt. View SD
19	Saturday	Tomales Bay State Park
24	Thursday	Valle Vista
30	Wednesday	Lake Lagunitas

April 2016

02	Saturday	Garin Regional Park
06	Wednesday	Orinda Connector Trail
09	Saturday	Pine Canyon
14	Thursday	North Briones
16	Saturday	Mines Road
21	Thursday	Black Diamond Mines
26	Tuesday	Del Puerto Canyon
28	Thursday	Mitchell Canyon

1 Wednesday, March 2 Walnut Creek City Parks

Leader: Hugh Harvey (925) 935-2979

Meet at 830 AM at the natural pond at wooden railing, just past the community center in Heather Farm Park on N San Carlos Drive. This is down the hill from where our monthly meetings are held. We will continue our birding at Borges Ranch off Castle Rock Road. Bring a snack and beverage.

1 Wednesday, March 9

Contra Loma Regional Park Reservoir

Leader: Paul Schorr (925) 757-5107

Carpool leaves Sun Valley Mall at 745 AM. **OR**, meet the leader at 830 AM at the Channel Point Parking Lot in Contra Loma RP. Go east on Highway 4 and exit at Lone Tree Way in Antioch. Continue south, turn right on Golf Course Road, right on Frederickson Lane, and continue into the park to the entrance kiosk (fee required). Turn left and continue to first lot, Channel Point Parking Lot on the right. Expected species: waterfowl and woodland, riparian/marsh, shore, and grassland birds. Bring lunch and beverage.



White-tailed Kite,
Maren Smith photo

Field trips are open to members and non-members, beginners to advanced birders, but no dogs. **Contact Leader for questions/rain cancellations.** Our MDAS Chapter is a conservation organization. As such, we encourage carpooling (riders should help with gas, 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.

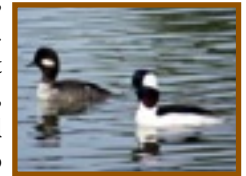
El Nido Ranch Road carpool location: Exit SR 24 at St. Stephens Drive east of Orinda. El Nido Ranch Road is parallel to and north of the freeway. Park just east of intersection with St. Stephens Drive.

2 Tuesday, March 15

McNabney Marsh/Mt. View Sanitary District

Leader: Steve Taylor (925) 828-8810

Meet at 9 AM at the Mt. View SD Visitor Center. From I-680 southbound, exit at Arthur Road, turn left, and go under the freeway. From I-680 northbound, exit at Pacheco Blvd, right onto Arthur Road, go under the freeway, and Arthur Road will turn left. At 0.4 miles, turn sharp left onto Mt. View SD's private road, through entry gate, alongside the freeway, and through the tunnel under I-680. Sign-in at the Visitor Center. Trails may be muddy. Close-up looks at dabbling ducks as we walk around the ponds; possibly bitterns and herons. Observe more birds at viewing platform. If you like, bring lunch and explore Martinez shoreline in the afternoon on your own.



F and M Buffleheads,
Isaac Aronow photo

2 Saturday, March 19

Tomales Bay State Park

Leader: Maury Stern (925) 284-5980

Carpool leaves 7 AM from El Nido Ranch Road. **OR**, meet at 830 AM in the parking lot at Heart's Desire Beach in Tomales Bay State Park. After crossing the Richmond Bridge (toll), follow US 101 North and take the first San Rafael exit. Go two blocks, turn left onto 3rd Street. In San Anselmo turn right onto Sir Francis Drake Blvd. through Inverness. Over the ridge, turn right onto Pierce Point Road. Park entrance is on the right. Entry fee required. Bring lunch and a beverage.

2 Thursday, March 24

Valle Vista

Leader: Don Lewis (925) 284-5480

Meet at 8 AM at Valle Vista staging area off Canyon Road, Moraga. From SR 24 in Orinda, take Moraga Way to Moraga. From Mt. Diablo Blvd in Lafayette, take Moraga Road south to Moraga. At the Chevron, go south one mile on Canyon Road to Valle Vista. Expect 55-60 species; finished by noon. Bring a snack and beverage.

3 Wednesday, March 30

Lake Lagunitas

Leader: Hugh Harvey (925) 935-2979

This very popular birding trip to Marin passes through beautiful varied terrain on the northern slopes of Mount Tamalpais. Carpool leaves from Sun Valley Mall at 730 AM. **OR**, Cross the San Rafael Bridge to US 101 North, take the first San Rafael exit, and turn left on 3rd Street. In San Anselmo, turn right onto Sir Francis Drake Blvd. towards Fairfax. Go left on Fairfax Road, follow to left turn on Sky Oaks Road, and continue to kiosk. Entry fee required (\$8). Drive to parking lot near foot of Lagunitas Dam. Approximate meeting time is 9 AM. After birding the nearby area, we will hike around Lake Lagunitas. We often find Pileated Woodpeckers here. Bring lunch and beverage.



Great Gray Owl ♦ *Strix nebulosa*

In North America, the Great Gray Owl—surely one of our most majestic raptors—is found from Sequoia and Yosemite National Parks northward to Alaska and across Canada, in the Northern Rocky Mountains, and in Northern Minnesota and Northern New England. They also live in Scandinavia. Earlier this year, sightings in Prairie Creek Redwood State Park, Humboldt County, were reported, the first time since 1974.

In the Sierra Nevada these owls breed in mixed conifer and red fir forests, often where there are stands of aspens. They forage in open areas such as bogs and meadows where scattered trees and shrubs can be used as perches.

The Great Gray Owl is a large gray to grayish brown owl with long wings and tail and a large head. The size of the head and the prominent facial disk make the yellow eyes appear small. The owl is incredibly large; still, it is silent when flying. Also called the Great Gray Ghost, it has slow, deep, wing beats that allow it to fly without a sound.

If you are a vole or a gopher, be careful, for their diet consists of small rodents, with voles being the primary food in Alaska, Canada, and Oregon. Pocket gophers are the most important food in California. Owls will eat rats, mice, shrews, squirrels, rabbits, chipmunks, moles, and weasels. They will sometimes capture birds such as crows, robins, ducks, and grouse. In years when prey, especially voles, are particularly abundant in areas south of their normal range, owl populations will follow.

Like most owls, Great Gray Owls have exceptional hearing. Their ears are asymmetrical on their heads, one ear higher on one side than the other. This helps them pinpoint sound much better. Using only their hearing, they are able to locate and track a rodent moving beneath the snow. When

the time is right, the owls pounce into the snow feet-first and then, grab the unsuspecting prey quickly from under the snow at a depth of up to 15 inches, without ever once laying eyes on it.

The Great Grey Owl hunts mainly during early morning and late afternoon, especially during winter, but will also hunt day or night if hungry. They are often seen perched on fenceposts along roads, waiting for a meal to come by.

Great Gray Owls breed once a year, but will readily lay a replacement clutch if the first brood is lost. Males and females aggressively defend nests and have been known to drive off predators as large as black bears. Among other threats, Common Ravens, Great Horned Owls, marten, and wolverines also prey on eggs, nestlings, and juveniles.

They are long-lived birds, with captive owls living up to 40 years of age.

The Great Gray Owl is the largest owl in North America with a length of 24–33 inches and a wingspan of up to 60 inches. Although one of the world’s largest owls, its actual body weight is at least 15% less than that of the Great Horned Owl, but its fluffy plumage, long tail, and large head give it a much larger appearance.

~Ellis Myers



Great Gray Owl, Wawona Meadow, Yosemite NP, Kai Mills, MDAS Young Birder, photo

Olympic Peninsula BirdFest, April 15-17

The Olympic Peninsula Audubon Society invites you to enjoy guided birding trips, boat tours, speaker Tony Angell, a gala banquet, pre- and post-trip birding cruises, and more. **For more information: www.olympicbirdfest.org**

Point Reyes Birding & Nature Festival, April 22-24

Get Your Bird On! Bird the diverse habitats of the San Francisco Bay Area’s Marin County at the height of spring migration. **For more information: www.PointReyesBirdingFestival.org**

John Muir Birthday-Earth Day Celebration, Saturday, April 23

This free, family event takes place at the John Muir National Historic Site in Martinez from 10 AM-4 PM. It will feature over 50 environmental awareness exhibitors (including MDAS—to volunteer, see Page 7) and Earth Day activities, Scottish bagpipers, historic home tours, speakers, and birthday cake. **For more information: www.johnmuirassociation.org**

“Bird-A-Thon” – Fund-Raising Event, Saturday, April 30

Interested in participating in a rewarding birding adventure while helping to generate funds to support the Wildlife Volunteer Program? During this dawn-to-dusk “Quest For More Than 146 Birds in a Day” you will get nose-to-beak with birds while visiting several active bird research and restoration sites, generating tax-deductible donations to protect California Least Tern and Western Snowy Plover nesting habitats. **For more information: docquack@ebparks.org, or call (510) 544-2319**

California Brown Pelican Roost and Coastal Access Point Survey, Saturday, May 7

Audubon California, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, *eBird*, and state wildlife agencies are sponsoring a one-day, statewide Brown Pelican survey from 5-7 PM. Volunteers are needed as coordinators or observers. This iconic bird was removed from the Endangered Species List in 2009, however, this subspecies is now experiencing poor breeding success and unusual mortality events raising questions about its conservation status. **For more information contact Ariana Rickard: arickard@audubon.org**

Volunteer News

Recently, Brian Murphy, Tim Ory, and Hugh Harvey relocated four Wood



Tim Ory (above) and Hugh Harvey (below right) relocate Wood Duck boxes, Brian Murphy photos

boxes hidden amongst growing reeds on the west side of Heather Farm pond to more unobstructed locations on the east side where female Wood Ducks will have easier flight access to entrance holes.

To keep the boxes free of fox squirrels, cayenne pepper will be sprinkled inside as a deterrent. An old Wood Duck box had raised generations of fox squirrels, so the goal is to retrain the squirrels to make nests in trees.



Soon, Wood Duck hens should start showing up looking for a place to nest.

Save The Date

Volunteers are needed for the John Muir Birthday-Earth Day Celebration (see page 6 for more details). If you can volunteer at the MDAS exhibit table for a few hours between 10 AM and 4 PM during this event on Saturday, April 23, please contact Brian Murphy at: b-murphy21@hotmail.com

Birding Holland Tract, a Young Birders Club Field Trip

In December of 2015, Logan Kahle spotted a Brown-crested Flycatcher as well as two White-winged Doves on the CBC for MDAS at Holland Tract. His long Cornell University winter break allowed me and 14 other birders the opportunity to bird with him January 9 as he lead our Young Birders Club field trip to Holland Tract.

My grandmother from Seattle came along, spending her last day in the Bay Area walking through howling winds with us. Tracy, Erica, my grandmother and I got there early and decided to drive towards the end of the road where Logan had found the rarities. We had no luck as we searched through many Mourning Doves and Eurasian Collared-Doves. We did, however, have good looks at a flock of Yellow-headed, Red-winged, and some Tricolored Blackbirds.

After meeting up with everyone else, we began our walk north on Holland Tract Road. As we walked, Logan was excited that some of the fields were flooded, and at different depths. The migration of many Snow, Ross's, Greater White-fronted Geese, Tundra Swans, and Sandhill Cranes was spectacular, while many of us learned how to easily identify these species in flight. We had a Peregrine Falcon flyover, and soon thereafter, a Swainson's Hawk just east of us. Logan explained that this was one of the few Swainson's Hawks (of perhaps about 80 in the Central



On a cool, breezy morning, the Young Birders Club and friends enjoyed birding Holland Tract with leader, Logan Kahle, Joy Dardin photo



Logan Kahle shows Forrest Chapman a Barrow's Golden Eye in the scope, Joy Dardin photo

Valley) that winter in the United States. Some of us also had a glimpse of a distant Ferruginous Hawk.

There were many more flocks of blackbirds, with large numbers of Yellow-headed and Tricolored mixed amongst Brewer's and Red-winged. Ducks were more numerous than usual, due to recent rains. We picked out three Barrow's Goldeneye, two males and one female, out of a large waterfowl flock, and we made sure everybody had a look at them in the scope. We also had six Lesser Yellowlegs and about a dozen Long-billed Dowitchers fly-by.

Later, we met local, Russ Bright, but missed out on an American Bittern that he had seen half an hour earlier. Logan said that he also had a possible Eurasian Wigeon fly up with a flock of a couple hundred American Wigeon.

Overall, it was a great day despite hard winds and a little sprinkle toward the end of the trip. Altogether, our Young Birders Club field trip yielded 76 species.

~Kai Mills

Eagle Scout Kestrel Box Project

Brian Murphy, Volunteer Coordinator, Ben Borglin, and Ben's dad, Ned, recently took part in the kestrel box-making class offered by the Mt. View Sanitary District. Ben's Eagle Scout project will focus on building Kestrel boxes for placement in Walnut Creek Parks and Open Space (once the city stops using rodenticides with Diphacinone). Ben's Eagle Scout project is timely as Kestrels are experiencing a steep long-term decline in our area due to loss of natural nesting habitat.

Ben (right) with his completed Kestrel box, Brian Murphy photo, and (left) an American Kestrel perched in a natural cavity, Paul Schorr photo



Remaking Nature in Novato

It took the U.S. War Department three years to create Hamilton Army Airfield in the mid-1930s and it will probably take 50 years or more to recreate the freshwater and tidal wetlands that nature provided before the shoreline of San Pablo Bay south of Novato was first dredged for farmland.

But the hard part has been done and the birds are coming back. A strong push by Marin Audubon and others



Hamilton Field's restoration includes land inundated by seasonal flooding, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers photo

concerned about restoring San Francisco Bay means that the runway part of Hamilton Field, which was decommissioned in 1974, is returning as wetlands. The Hamilton Field Wetlands Restoration Project (HFWRP) is a

partnership of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the California Coastal Commission.

It was the Corps that hauled 5.8 million cubic yards of dredge scoured from the Port of Oakland and then sculpted it on the old runway site beginning in 2008. The project's nearly 750 acres of seasonal and tidal wetlands are now counted among the 18,500 acres that have been restored in San Francisco Bay since 1970, according to the Bay Conservation and Development Commission. In April 2014, the Corps breached the levee that held back bay waters from the old airfield and with the flowing waters came new habitat for fish, birds, and plants. By one recent count, 25 species of fish are now in residence—and so are Clark's and Western Grebes that are diving for them.

In the project's first full year of monitoring—from July 2014 to June 2015—90,726 birds were recorded. Least Sandpiper lead the numbers with 17,844 and peeps as a whole accounted for two-thirds of the 94 total species counted. Besides Least, Dunlin (14,194) and Western (8,903) were the most prominent of the sandpipers, but there were also 19,486 that were “unspecified” because they were too far away to designate.

The highest day count was November 14, 2014 with 18,630 birds present.

In the shorebird count that includes Greater Yellowlegs, Willits, and Whimbrels, there were 8,626 American Avocets, 1,162 Marbled Godwits, and 517 Black-bellied Plovers. Encouragingly, spotters identified 106 Western Snowy Plovers scurrying across Hamilton's exposed pan.

With a count of 5,654, Ruddy Ducks led the duck/geese totals of 14,240. Other top species included Northern Shovelers (2,662), Northern Pintails (2,375), Canada Geese (1,009), Gadwalls (602), and American Wigeons (601).

A more recent snapshot, from early October to the first of December 2015, showed that the sandpiper count has more than doubled, from 25,535 to 53,516 compared to 2014. Included in that surge were 114 Snowy Plovers compared to just 12 in 2014's two-month period.



A view of the wetlands at high tide, Christina McWhorter, photo

A broad brush look at this season shows duck counts down, while Yellowlegs, Willets and Marbled Godwits are about the same. But Pipits went from zero in 2014 to 43 in 2015. One theory about the ducks is that they have spread out due to the availability of more standing water.

Multiple groups monitor birds at Hamilton, focusing on slightly different objectives. These numbers come from project volunteers taken on alternate Fridays from central spots in three specified seasonal and six tidal wetlands.

“The purpose of the birding is to determine habitat use,” HFWRP nursery manager Christina McWhorter says of this count. To recreate that natural habitat she has led the project's native plant restoration efforts. It relies on



AmeriCorps volunteers plant native plants to restore wetlands, Christina McWhorter photo

volunteers—everyone from school kids, working folk, and retirees like me—to help with everything, from seed gathering and propagation to out-planting. Since the tidal flows resumed in April 2014, AmeriCorps teams and the nursery's volunteers have planted more than 21,000 of the nursery's native plants in the wetlands. I started

volunteering two years ago because I'm interested in birds and you can't have birds without habitat.

One focus is on a region called the wildlife corridor, a mostly dry strip that skirts the wetlands and is bordered by the Bay Trail, which gives joggers a great way to track the project's progress. In the corridor and adjacent North Seasonal Wetlands, the HFWRP's plantings—especially of pickle weed and bullrushes—will promote abundant and persistent invertebrate food sources. Over time, the plantings and tidal flows will create a mosaic of shallow ponds, pans, and barren zones as homes for birds and other wildlife.

~Michael Mecham



For more information: hamiltonwetlands.scc.ca.gov/public-access/

Birds Need the “Right” Nesting Box

March is a great time to put up backyard nesting boxes for cavity dwelling birds. There are many crafty boxes in stores, mainly designed for decoration, that are not appropriate for cavity nesters. Consider what’s best for both you and the birds.



If you want particular birds to accept a box, then size is important. Depending upon the size of the chick before fledging and the average number of chicks in a brood, this can vary substantially.

The front opening hole needs to be high enough to protect the young birds inside the box, but low enough to allow them to leave when ready to

fledge. Some boxes need ladders inside for the chicks to climb out.

Front openings must be suited to the breed as well. Birds will choose nesting boxes with the smallest opening appropriate for their size. The opening should be protected by thick strong walls or by added metal rings to prevent predators from chewing and enlarging the opening. There should not be a perch or other protrusion near the opening on which predators can land or cling.

Also, insulation and ventilation are important considerations. Good nesting boxes should be at least 3/4” thick to keep heat and cold from penetrating. Boxes should provide openings for cross ventilation under the roof without allowing for a lot of water seepage. Additionally, there should be a slanted roof and roof overhangs to help keep out the elements. Drainage holes in the bottom corners smaller than 1/4” will help keep nests dry.

Nesting boxes should be easy to clean. After every nesting season, they should be removed and thoroughly cleaned to remove bird waste, insects, and mites that may inhabit the old nest. They should be dry before rehousing.



Boxes should be firmly mounted or hung to prevent eggs from rolling around and should be durable enough to last through years of sun and rain. They should not be painted, stained, or pressure treated with anything that might be toxic to birds. Dark paint or stain can also cause a box to retain heat which could kill eggs or nestlings.

If you need help deciding on a nesting box, drop in for free expert advice and a Housing Guide. We can show you the features of boxes that have been scientifically designed to meet the needs of specific breeds.

~Mike Eliot, Wild Birds Unlimited

Speaking of Conservation: Grants Fund New Marsh Habitat

This year Mount Diablo Audubon is partnering with Mt. View Sanitary District (MVSD) to provide new habitat for ground-nesting birds in the 138-acre McNabney Marsh. A \$2,500 grant from Audubon California, along with \$500 from MDAS, provided funding for the project which will protect migratory bird nests, eggs, and chicks from flooding.

Originally a tidal wetland, the marsh was converted to a seasonal marsh when 20th century development cut off its connection with the Carquinez Strait. Managed by MVSD, McNabney Marsh was named to honor Al McNabney, former MDAS Conservation Chair who worked tirelessly to restore and protect the marsh after a disastrous oil spill in 1988.

Since the early 1990s, treated effluent from MVSD was the marsh’s primary water source. Species observed nesting there included Canada Goose, Mallard, Cinnamon Teal, Gadwall, Killdeer, Black-necked Stilt, American Avocet, Marsh Wren, Black Phoebe, San Francisco Common Yellowthroat, and Suisun Song Sparrow. California Black Rail and Ridgway’s Rail have also been observed.

In June 2009, downstream tide gates were opened to allow water from the Carquinez Strait to flow into the marsh for the first time in more than a century. MVSD was hopeful that reintroduced tidal action would resolve several habitat quality issues: low oxygen and pH levels in the water, the relentless spread of cattails, and a plethora of non-native fish.

However, since 2009 managing the marsh has proven to be problematic. Much of the shoreline and island habitat has been lost. MVSD has discovered that when the tide gates are

open, the marsh fills up during high tides, but does not drain during low tides. This is due to a number of factors including the site’s hydrology, significant subsidence (sinking of the marsh plain), constriction at the Union Pacific Railroad Bridge culvert, and lack of any control over the tide gates which are operated on a downstream private property.

Wide swings in water levels create difficult challenges for ground-nesting shorebirds and waterfowl which have depended upon McNabney Marsh for decades. During high water events, nests are flooded and eggs and nestlings are lost.

In an experimental effort to increase benefits to breeding birds, MVSD constructed and deployed rafts to attract nesting waterfowl and shorebirds, with the idea that these floating structures would be immune to tide gate operations and fluctuating water levels. A variety of substrates



American Avocets on a man-made raft,
Nancy Wenninger photo

(vegetation and sand) were added to the rafts. Last year, biologists confirmed that Black-Necked Stilts and American Avocets were using the rafts successfully.

This project allowed MVSD to double the number of nesting rafts. In early February, under the supervision of MVSD wildlife biologists, volunteers from MDAS and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife Natural Resources Volunteer Program built eight new rafts which will be installed in time for the 2016 nesting season.

~Nancy Wenninger, Conservation Chair

Johann Reinhold Forster

Philosopher ♦ Scientist ♦ Collector

By Ellis Myers

Johann Reinhold Forster, for whom Forster's Tern was named, was an eighteenth-century naturalist whose life was one of much interest and accomplishment, though perhaps a life not to be aspired to. Evidently, the definition of a true curmudgeon, he was, as one writer wrote, "an outstanding scholar, prodigiously well read, courageous and of strong physique, but a man who was his own worst enemy—suspicious, stubborn, difficult, tactless and quarrelsome, frequently in debt and forever borrowing money from friends and being sought by bailiffs."

He was a contributor to the early ornithology of Europe and North America, but he is best remembered as the naturalist on the second Pacific voyage of James Cook, 1772–1775, a voyage he took with his son, Georg.

Of Scottish descent, Johann Reinhold Forster was born in the Prussian city of Tczew near Gdansk on October 22, 1729. At the Joachimsthal Gymnasium in Berlin, he studied languages and natural history, and theology at the University of Halle (southwest of Berlin). He then became a Protestant pastor in Nassenhuben (now Mokry Dwór, near Warsaw, Poland). He married his cousin, Elisabeth Nikolai.

Forster's wide scientific correspondence included such men as Linnaeus and the renowned Joseph Banks, botanist and naturalist on Captain James Cook's historic cruise on *HMS Endeavour*.

In 1765, he was commissioned by the Russian government to undertake a survey of the Saratov-Tsaritsyn region on the Volga River about 500 miles south of Moscow. Problems with the Russian government, brought on by his testy temper, shortened his assignment, and in the following year he went with Georg (eldest of his eight children) to England where he spent three years teaching at the Dissenting Warrington Academy, succeeding

Joseph Priestley. Again, his temper led to his resignation and Forster then moved with his son to London where he earned a living by doing translations. He became known as a natural historian.

Forster was asked by the Royal Society of London to describe a collection presented by the Hudson's Bay Company. One of these specimens Forster described for the first time—a Great Gray Owl collected by Andrew Graham in Ontario, Canada. His papers on zoology, ornithology, and ichthyology were published in the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* (1772, 1773) establishing him as one of the earliest authorities on North American zoology.

Forster published many books including *An Introduction to Mineralogy* in 1768, two years later, *A Catalogue of British Insects*, and in 1771 his works on American flora and entomology.

When Joseph Banks withdrew as the naturalist on Cook's Second Voyage at the last moment, Linnaeus recommended Forster as an outstanding man to fill the vacant position. Forster insisted on having Georg as his assistant and in July 1772 they set sail on the *HMS Resolution*, under Captain James Cook, to search



HMS Resolution and HMS Adventure in Tahiti, detail from 1776 painting by William Hodges, wikimedia photo credit

for the hoped-for southern continent, to test a version of John Harrison's marine chronometer, and to explore the southern seas. The expedition did not return to England until July 1775.



Johann Forster and son, Georg Forster, in Tahiti, painting by John Francis Rigaud, Google Images photo credit

The irascible Forster didn't like his cabin on the ship and complained that Cook wasn't interested in the "study of nature." Still, he amassed large collections and made careful observations in such places as Tahiti, Easter Island, New Caledonia, Vanuatu, and New Zealand.

Accomplishments of Cook's Second Voyage included the discovery of South Georgia Island and the South Sandwich Islands. The *HMS Resolution* became the first ship ever to cross the Antarctic Circle.

Today, two geographic locations have been named in honor of Forster: Mount Forster and Forster's Burn, on New Zealand's south island.

Both the Forsters kept detailed diaries of everything they saw on the voyage and made extensive collections of both natural history specimens and artifacts. Georg made many fine paintings of birds and other subjects. On their return, Forster published the journal *Observations made during a voyage round the world* (1778). Later, Forster published monographs on penguins (1780) and albatrosses (1785) from the Second Voyage.

In 1779 Forster was appointed Professor of Natural History and Mineralogy at the University of Halle, and director of the Botanische Garten der Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg, where he continued until his death in 1798 at the age of 69.

There's No Place Like Home...

This is the time of year to get those nest boxes out if you haven't already. Actually, it's a good idea to leave them up year-round. Once they've been cleaned out in the fall you can put them back up; birds will use them as roosting boxes to get out of rough weather.

Not all birds will use a nest box. Goldfinches build grassy nests in shrubs or trees. House Finches and Mourning Doves prefer to build on platforms often under porches beams. Dark-eyed Juncos frequently build their nests on the ground tucked away under low growing shrubs although I had a pair nest in a platform-type box I had installed under the eaves of my house last year. I had intended for the box to be used by House Finches, but you never know with birds. They don't always follow the rules.

Cavity dwellers such as chickadees, titmice, and wrens are fairly easy to entice to your nest box. If your intention is to attract a certain species of bird there are some general guidelines you can follow to increase the likelihood of attracting a renter.

For chickadees and titmice, the box should be about 12" high x 6" deep x 6" wide. The entrance hole should be located 2/3 of the way up from the base. If you want to attract chickadees, but not titmice, the hole should be 1 1/8" in diameter. Titmice require a slightly larger hole at 1 1/4" and house wrens at 1". Wren boxes are generally smaller overall.



Bewick's Wren, Joy Shonfeld photo

You can use unpainted cedar to keep things simple. Drill a few ventilation holes at the top and a few drainage holes in the bottom. Install the box 7-10 feet high on either a tree, pole, or under the house eaves.

Birds prefer that the entrance hole faces east; north and south are okay, too, but avoid facing the nesting box west due to the hot afternoon sun.

Put out some nesting material and be patient. Remember—if you build it, they will come.

~Joanie Smith, East Bay Nature

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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- Please enroll me/my family in Mount Diablo Audubon Society for \$25 for one year. (MDAS dues are tax-deductible)
- For an additional \$20 please enroll me as a first-time member in the National Audubon Society (NAS). (includes 6 bi-monthly issues of Audubon Magazine)
- Please enroll me as a lifetime member for \$500. (or 2 annual \$250 payments)
- I am enclosing an additional tax-deductible donation of \$_____.

Please send the Quail by US Mail, or "Go Green" email

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Forster's Tern (Sterna forsteri) photographed at Elsie Roemer Bird Sanctuary, Isaac Aronow photo



Kudos to MDAS volunteers (left) who recently built nesting rafts at MVSD: Donna Kramer, Michael Mecham, Mike Robertson, Richard Saillard, Dave Shinn, and Christine Steck, Nancy Wenninger photo



With over 100 in attendance at the February 4 meeting, Assemblywoman Catharine Baker (above and left) shared her prepared remarks, discussed her environmental goals, and answered questions from the audience; President, Jimm Edgar, (above right) thanked our "Birding Information" speaker, Maren Smith photos

FYI

✓ Last year, California passed a law banning cosmetic products that contain plastic microbeads found in some brands of facial scrub, soap, and toothpaste. Indicated by the words polyethylene or polypropylene on the label, the tiny plastic balls don't dissolve, nor can they be broken down by sewage treatment plants. They end up in the water, a danger to fish, birds, wildlife, and the environment. Though the law does not take effect until 2020, you can safely dispose of these products at Martinez Hazard Waste, 4797 Imhoff Place, 9 AM-4 PM from Monday-Saturday.

✓ "Take Action" on www.diabloaudubon.com

