



the Quail

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

Volume 61, Number 7

April 2016

April Program: Animal Life ♦ Joan Morris



In 2013, when the venerable Gary Bogue announced his retirement, Joan was chosen to take over his pets and wildlife column and tasked with making it her own. She says it was the most unexpected turn of her career, and the best. Her "Animal Life" column appears in the Bay Area News Group papers five days a

week. Joan will share some of the funniest and oddest questions she has received in the past three years, and will also be happy to answer questions on gardening with wildlife and how to attract critters or keep them out of your yard.

Joan said, "Writing about pets and animals affords me the best of two worlds. I get to help people better understand their pets and the creatures we come in contact with, and I get to advocate for the better treatment of animals in the wild, in our backyards, and in our homes."

Born in Texas, raised in New Mexico, Joan Morris has been a semi-native Californian for 28 years. She graduated from the University of New Mexico in 1978 with a degree in Journalism and a minor in Russian Studies. She worked at

the *Artesia Daily Press* (New Mexico) and the *El Paso Times* (Texas) before joining the *Contra Costa Times* in 1988 as a general assignment reporter.

During her years at the *Times*, she has written on varied subjects such as death and dying, weight loss, and two Super Bowls. Her reporting on a missing Concord woman spurred the police to reopen the case, reclassifying it as a homicide, however no one has ever been charged with the woman's murder.

In 2006, she became the Home and Garden editor and founded Our Garden, a demonstration garden run by the Contra Costa Master Gardeners. Free classes are taught there every Wednesday from April-October, and all produce is donated to the Monument Crisis Center. The garden provides more than 10,000 pounds of fresh food to the center every year. Last year, the garden added an owl box and five bluebird boxes.



Male Western Bluebird, Cassie Tzur photo

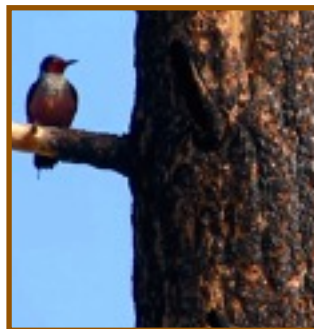
Joan shares her home in Antioch with her sister and Bailey, her Chihuahua.

Birding Information

Mixed intensity fires and native beetles create some of the most productive and critical habitats for California birds and wildlife, comparable or even better than "old growth" forests. Christy Sherr will explain why so many wildlife species benefit from conditions created by beetles and fire, including Black-backed Woodpeckers and threatened and endangered species such as Spotted Owls and Pacific Fishers.

Christy is a retired National and State Park Ranger currently working as a field biologist and Education Coordinator for the John Muir Project of the Earth Island Institute. She was a past president of the Sierra Foothills Audubon Chapter and watched her ten year-old daughter become a birder in a burned forest.

For more information: www.johnmuirproject.org or christysherr@johnmuirproject.org



Lewis's Woodpecker perched on a tree limb burned by fire, Maya Khosla photo

Meeting Schedule

The next general meeting of the Mt. Diablo Audubon Society will be **Thursday, April 7** in the Camellia Room of The Gardens at Heather Farm in Walnut Creek.

630 PM Doors open
700 PM Birding Information
725 PM Announcements
740 PM Refreshments* and raffle
805 PM Program: **Joan Morris**
*Go Green-bring your own cup for tea/coffee

NEXT MONTH:
Thursday, May 5
Birds of Ecuador ♦ Gordon Beebe

I hope all of you have had a chance to read the “We Love Cats” brochure that Conservation Chair, Nancy Wenninger, put together. It covers many issues, but really addresses the topics of feral cats and domestic cats let outside. It’s one of the best things our chapter has done.

The issues in that brochure were brought home to me in a way I would never have thought about before. Tom Stienstra, who writes about the outdoors in the *SF Chronicle*, wrote an interesting article on February 14 about recent research on the mountain lions’ diet. The study analyzed the stomach contents of 83 mountain lions that had been killed under predation permits. Of those examined, 52% had eaten cats, dogs, or domestic animals while only 5% had eaten deer, their traditional prey. Coyotes exhibit a similar pattern. The Department of Fish and Wildlife has warned pet owners to keep their cats inside and their dogs leashed when outside, especially in parks or in open space.

Another interesting article noted that for the first time since all of the California Condors were captured for captive breeding, the number of baby condors being hatched and fledged is greater than dead adult condors—good news.

More positive news includes the comeback of Monarch butterflies breeding in the mountains of Mexico. A number of factors are involved, including the Mexican government cracking down on illegal logging in the wintering grounds of the butterflies, reduced use of pesticides in breeding grounds, more milkweed being planted, and a couple of years of good weather.

In May, our chapter will hold our annual elections. If you would like to run for office or be a part of the Board, please contact Brian Murphy or Hugh Harvey (see page 11 for contact info).

The MDAS Board has been reviewing a number of budget issues recently. Our newsletter editor, Maren Smith, has examined the costs of printing and mailing the *Quail*, our monthly newsletter. It costs over \$17 a year per newsletter to print, label, and mail. With our yearly chapter dues at \$25, this is a big expense. At our last general meeting we made an appeal for members to consider getting the *Quail* by email. Nearly 30 people signed up! The *Quail* by email is in color and would save our chapter money. Please consider this option.

Good News For California Condors

A California Condor hatched at the San Diego Zoo Safari Park on February 10, 2016, the first baby of this season, and the earliest birth ever recorded for the species. Currently, the only known baby condor in the world, it was named Swayin, “winter” in the Chumash Indian



Immature California Condor, Beth Branthaver photo

language. The baby joins the zoo’s long list of successes: 188 chicks and over 130 birds released into the wild since the San Diego Zoo’s captive breeding program began in 1982.

According to a report by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, for the first time in years, more California Condors have hatched and fledged babies in the

wild than wild adults have died, a slight net gain, the first time in two decades this turning point has been achieved.

Last year, 14 condors fledged while 12 died. Scientists are cautiously optimistic that wild condors will continue to successfully fledge babies in the wild, fueling hope that the wild condor population could one day sustain itself without captive breeding programs.

Started in the early 1980s with the last 22 wild condors, captive breeding programs have so far saved the species from extinction, primarily from lead poisoning. Breeding programs, along with conservation foresight and federal protection, have helped North America’s largest bird survive.

The Peregrine Fund’s World Center for Birds of Prey in Boise, Idaho is the number one egg-producing center, with six eggs laid so far this year and the possibility of nine more. Other U.S. breeding facilities include the Oregon Zoo and the Los Angeles Zoo.

In addition, 2015 statistics indicate that there are more condors in the wild population than in captive breeding programs: 268 versus 167. Scientists have also observed 27 wild condor nests, nineteen of them in California, giving the species a glimmer of hope.

And, *that’s* good news for California Condors! ~Maren Smith

Welcome New Members

Donna DuBois	Pleasanton
Det and Chris Kutzscher	Lafayette
Ed LaHay	Concord
Irene Meginnis	Concord
Janie Nelson	Walnut Creek
Linda Policarpio	Pleasant Hill
Christine Schwinn	Orinda

MDAS on the Web

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

Q Although these birds feed primarily on insects, earthworms, and caterpillars, they are particularly fond of mistletoe berries, which, with poison oak berries, and other small fruits, make up about 10% of their diet.

Unscramble these letters, or turn to Page 7 to learn more.

BBDEEEILNRRSTUW

The *Quail* is published monthly except in January and August by the Mt. Diablo Audubon Society, P.O. Box 53, Walnut Creek, CA 94597-0053. **The deadline for May is April 11.**

Breeding bird songs have returned earlier than usual, a lovely sound for spring. Winter migrants, ducks, geese, shorebirds, mountain, and northern birds are staying put.

Wood Ducks continued at Upper San Leandro Creek Reservoir 2/14. RS

HH saw two **Blue-winged Teal** at the Moorhen Marsh at Mt. View Sanitary District in Pacheco 2/29.

The male **Redhead** continued at Lafayette Reservoir 2/14. EL

A female **Long-tailed Duck** was with a large flock of **Scaup** at Miller/Knox RP Shoreline 2/9 and 2/10. SM, EK, AL

Hooded Mergansers were at Upper San Leandro Reservoir 2/14 and 2/16. RS, EL

On 2/29, BE and KH saw a **Green Heron** on the docks near the Lafayette Reservoir boats (for three years a pair has fledged up to three young near the dam). They also saw an adult **Bald Eagle** circling on 2/29.

RS saw a fly-over **Golden Eagle** at the Valle Vista Staging Area 2/13 and LL at her home in Lafayette 2/25.

A **Heermann's Gull**, usually a summer gull, was at Miller/Knox RP 2/10. AL

An early **Caspian Tern** was seen by RP at Pt. Pinole 2/29. LaL, BG, DL, and MaK saw some on Brooks Island from the Canal Blvd. platform in the Pt. Richmond area.

A **Western Screech Owl** in its tree hole was found by IA along the beginning of the Lafayette-Moraga Trail 2/18; also seen by BiE and CS.

A **Northern Pygmy Owl** was along Pinehurst in Canyon 2/10, JA, and 2/22, AL.

Three **Burrowing Owls** were near Minnesota and Grant in Brentwood 2/17. RB

A first of season **Rufous Hummingbird** was at the Morgan Territory home of JB 2/19.

Red-breasted Nuthatches were at the Valle Vista Staging area (expected) 2/16, EL, and the Contra Costa Canal Trail near Cherry Lane in Walnut Creek (unexpected) FS, 2/16.

P&NS had a **Rock Wren** at Black Diamond Mines RP 2/13 and FS saw an unusual **House Wren** at Heather Farm 2/16.

Merlins were seen by P&NS at Black Diamond Mines RP 2/13 and at Contra Loma RP in Antioch 3/5.

LL had two **Allen's Hummingbirds** at her feeder in Lafayette 2/25 and KB had one bathing in her Lafayette yard 2/28.

A **Yellow-breasted Sapsucker** was at the Blake Garden in Kensington 2/29 M&MC, WH, and also seen 3/2 by AL and CS.

A surprising **Red-naped Sapsucker** was in Walnut Creek 2/27 near Homestead Ave. and Cherry Lane FS; also seen by DK 3/1.

The **Tropical Kingbird** remains near the Heather Farm Pond. It was seen by RY, DA, FS, and MS.

AR heard and saw an early singing **Warbling Vireo** near the entrance to Briones RP 2/26, weeks earlier than normal.

Many swallow species appeared a few weeks early—a **Violet-green Swallows** 2/13 at Heather Farm Pond FS, five **Northern Rough-winged Swallow** at Heather Farm 2/18 HH, FS, and DK, **Cliff Swallows** at Big Break Regional Shoreline Fishing Pier RB, and a **Barn Swallow** at the Iron House Pond 2/19, RB.

On 2/26, AR heard and saw 20 **Orange-crowned Warblers** singing at Briones RP. P&NS saw one in Antioch flashing the orange on the top of its head.

Several **Rufous-crowned Sparrows** were seen. DW and SJ had one at Black Diamond Mines RP 2/6. On 2/11, EK and BM saw one at Big Break RP. CM saw one in the Shell Ridge Open Space on 2/14.

Chipping Sparrows have been along the Marsh Creek Regional Trail-Delta Road Access. RB, DH, CS, EK, DW, MK 2/20 and 2/24. One has continued since December at Wendell Park in Richmond JH, 2/22.

A **Fox Sparrow Red Subspecies** has been at the Bear Creek Staging

Area at Briones Reservoir for a month CuS, 2/25.

KM saw the continuing **Swamp Sparrow** at the Lafayette Reservoir 2/27 near the kayak rack by the office.

Two **White-throated Sparrows** were at the Bear Valley Staging Area 2/26. CuS

Slate-colored Juncos were in P&NS's Antioch backyard 2/27 and on the Marsh Creek Regional Trail the same day. RB

A probable overwintering **Western Tanager** was at the Creekside Park in Brentwood 2/17. RB

Red Crossbills continued to be widespread. They were seen 2/9 by BH at Grizzly Peak Rd. and Redwood Trail Loop; 2/9 by DW on the Sibley Round Top Trail Loop; RS, ER and JC saw a flock in the pines at the Valle Vista staging area 2/14; MP saw 14 at the Redwood RP Stream Trail 2/20; and WH saw a flock at Tilden Bot. Garden.

An **Evening Grosbeak** was at the Blake Garden in Kensington 3/2. AL

~ ~

JA Jeff Acuff, IA Isaac Aronow, DA David Assmann, KB Kristen Baker, RB Russ Bright, JB Jerry Britten, M&MC Marjorie and Minder Cheng, JC John Colbert, BE Blake Edgar, BiE Bill Espey, BG Bingham Gibbs, BH Beverly Halberg, HH Hugh Harvey, DH Derek Heins, KH Kate Hoffmann, JH Jeff Hoppes, WH Wen Hsu, SJ Sharon J., DK Dave Kent, MK Marilyn Kinch, MaK Mary Krentz, EK Elizabeth Kroll, LL Lynn Lasko, EL Elizabeth Leite, DL Don Lewis, AL Albert Linkowski, LaL Laura Look, BM Bonnie Marker, CM Chris Marker, KM Kai Mills, SM Sue Morgan, MP Michael Pang, AR Andrew Rush, ED Erica Rutherford, MS Maria Sabatini, FS Fred Safier, RS Rusty Scalf, P&NS Paul and Nancy Schorr, CS Catherine Spaulding, CuS Cuyler Stapelmann, DW Denise Wight, RY RM Yoshihara

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

Trip Reports

Grizzly Island Wildlife Area,

February 11: Thirty members and guests visited a week after hunting season had ended on a day that was in the 60s with minimal clouds, blue skies, and no wind. We had

good looks at some of the Tule Elk who live in the Refuge and saw 70 total bird species for the day. A few highlights included American Bittern, Violet-green Swallow, Virginia Rail, Ferruginous Hawk, Merlin, a Barn Owl at Rush Ranch, and Burrowing Owls. ~**Maury Stern**

Los Banos/Panoche Valley, February 20-21: Nineteen participants joined the annual weekend trip. Starting near Gustine, we headed south on Santa Fe Grade Road west of the San Luis National Wildlife Refuge and saw numerous waterbirds including all the ducks that frequent the Sacramento/San Joaquin Valley, Greater White-fronted Geese, and groups of shorebirds including Dunlins, Dowitchers, Killdeer, and Least Sandpipers. We had good looks at large flocks of American Pipets, several sightings of Great-horned Owls (on and off nests), and a few Bald Eagles, one sitting right in front of us on the road. After lunch we headed to Merced NWR where we found 27 Wilson's Snipes



Common Yellowthroat,
Isaac Aronow photo

next to the observation platform. There was also a large flock of Lesser Sandhill Cranes in the fields. As we drove around the ponds we saw Snow and Ross's Geese, including a few dark morphs. At the viewing platform on the far side we observed a male Common Yellowthroat busily hunting for food. As we drove off, the cranes and geese lifted in mass and settled into the nearby fields, a

spectacular sight with its own amazing sound track.

Sunday morning was cool with bright sun. We headed south from Los Banos passing blooming orchards towards the mostly treeless habitat of Little Panoche Road. After a brief stop at the reservoir, we drove through a long, winding valley, bright green from recent rains and splashed with color—bright yellows, pinks, and lavenders. Along the fence lines we saw Lark Sparrows and near a barn we spotted not one, but two Greater Roadrunners on the hillside. We followed the BLM Road to the top and couldn't find any Mountain Bluebirds, but we did find Horned Larks and American Pipits, and had marvelous vistas of the Central Valley along



Rock Wren,
Beth Branthaver photo

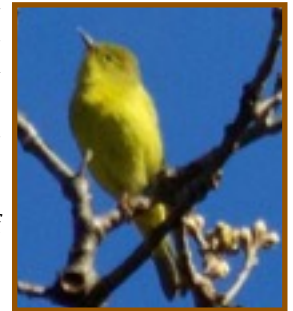
with views of the snow-covered Sierra Nevadas. Below the parking area we had a singing Rock Wren posing atop a rock, singing its buzzy *chi-ching* song. Ready for lunch, we drove downhill to the Mercey Hot Springs property where prior arrangements allowed us to have lunch and views of their Long-eared Owls; we saw at least 12. Continuing into the Panoche



Long-eared Owl, Isaac Aronow, photo

Valley, we enjoyed wide expanses of open grassland, all the while trying to picture the future solar panel installation slated to cover 5,000 acres, an area equal to half the size of Merced NWR. After finding a previously reported Cassin's Kingbird at the Panoche School, we headed for the Panoche Inn for cold drinks while we completed our checklist. Just before finishing, a large Ferruginous Hawk flew over across the highway from us only to be chased away by a Red-tailed Hawk. We tallied a total of 88 species seen or heard. ~**Beth Branthaver and Hugh Harvey**

Sunol Regional Park, February 24: Fifteen members and a guest spent a sunny day birding in the green hills. Along the creek, the birds were quiet due to construction. Eventually, we were able to see and hear three Varied Thrush high in the trees. Other highlights included a bright yellow Orange-crowned Warbler, two soaring Golden Eagles, and small groups of Band-tailed Pigeons. Several people found five Red Crossbills in the leafless trees at the end of the bridge. Bob Dunn's group walked another half mile above Little Yosemite to discover the Western Screech-Owl hot-lined the previous week. For the day, we heard and saw 47 species.



Orange-crowned Warbler,
Joy Shonfeld photo

~**Eugenia Larson**

Walnut Creek City Parks, March 2: Twenty birders enjoyed a glorious day with 55 species seen or heard. As we walked around Heather Farm Park's large pond a Merlin was seen in a tree near the wooden railing. Around the corner, a Myrtle's Warbler was noticed, quickly followed by a Red-breasted Sapsucker. On the western side we watched 85 Ring-necked Ducks and the long-present Tropical Kingbird was spotted near the equestrian area. A Pine Siskin was seen near the water's edge, followed by the sighting of a female Purple Finch. Just west of the Contra Costa Canal, we searched for a previously reported Red-naped Sapsucker; we did not find it. We did, however, find a Bushtit nest, saw Chickadees inspecting a tree knot hole, and viewed an Anna's Hummingbird nesting.

Many continued to Borges Ranch where we walked uphill past the Bob Wisecarver Quail Habitat. Now deceased, Bob was an MDAS member, who also built and installed Barn Owl and bat houses. Near the top of the gully, we watched a Rufous-crowned Sparrow. High up a bright green hills we also saw many brilliant blooming California Poppies.

~**Hugh Harvey**

>>> *Trip Reports continued on page 6*



Rufous-crowned Sparrow,
Beth Branthaver photo

the Quail

Field Trip Schedule

By Hugh Harvey

April 2016 (Call Leader for questions or rain cancellations)

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

May 2016

04	Wednesday	Mt. Diablo State Park
07	Saturday	East Contra Costa County
12	Thursday	West Briones Regional Park
17	Tuesday	No Child Left Inside
19	Thursday	No Child Left Inside
28	Saturday	Outer Point Reyes

3 Saturday, April 2

Garin Regional Park

Leader: Fred Safer (925) 937-2906

Carpool leaves 715 AM from Sycamore Valley Road Park and Ride. **OR**, meet at 8 AM in the parking lot at the end of Garin Road. Take I-680 S to I-580 W. Take Castro Valley exit and continue west. Turn left onto Crow Canyon Road and go under the freeway. Crow Canyon Road becomes Grove Way, then A Street. At A Street and Mission Blvd. turn left; stay left to continue south on Mission Blvd. which becomes SR 238. Go south about three miles to Garin Road, turn left, and drive up the hill to its end. Spring migrants will be our goal. Bring a beverage and lunch. We'll eat lunch in the park afterwards.

2 Wednesday, April 6

Orinda Connector Trail

Leader: Don Lewis (925) 284-5480

Meet at 8 AM at the northeast corner of Camino Pablo Road and Bear Creek Roads, Orinda. Exit at Orinda from SR 24, turn north on Camino Pablo, and drive about two miles to the intersection. We'll walk towards the base of Briones Dam looking for spring birds. Bring a beverage and snack. We will finish by noon.

3 Saturday, April 9

Pine Canyon

Leader: Nancy Wenninger (925) 938-7987

Meet at 8 AM in the parking lot at the end of Castle Rock Road. From Ygnacio Valley Rd. in WC, turn south on Walnut Avenue, right at traffic circle, and continue on Castle Rock, past NHS to the parking lot for Castle Rock Rec. Area and Diablo Foothills RP. We'll hike into Pine Canyon to Castle Rocks, crossing Pine Creek several times looking for spring migrants and Peregrine Falcons. Bring water.



Peregrine Falcon,
Beth Branthaver photo

3 Thursday, April 14

North Briones Regional Park

Leader: Maury Stern (925) 284-5980

Meet at 8 AM in the parking area at the north entrance of Briones Regional Park. Take Briones Road off Alhambra Valley Road, drive up the narrow winding road, and park at the end. Wildflowers, spring birds, and poison oak are along shaded trails. A continuation through grasslands to Sindicich Lagoons makes this walk about three miles round trip. Bring a beverage and snack.

1 Saturday, April 16

Mines Road

Leader: Leader: Hugh Harvey (925) 935-2979

Due to limited parking along Mines Road, carpooling is essential. Phainopepla, Lewis's Woodpecker, Lawrence's Goldfinch, spring migrants, and wild flowers are possible. An entry fee is required for Del Valle Regional Park. Call the leader for meeting time and location. This is an all-day trip and is often quite hot! Bring a beverage and lunch.

3 Thursday, April 21

Black Diamond Mines Regional Park

Leaders: Paul Schorr (925)-998-0070

or call Donna Kramer (925) 482-4847

Carpool leaves Sun Valley Mall at 730 AM. **OR**, meet



Female Phainopepla,
Paul Schorr photo

the leader at 8 AM in the parking lot at the end of Somersville Road. Go east on Ygnacio Valley/Kirker Pass Roads, in Pittsburg turn right/east on Buchanan Road to Somersville Road (Antioch) and turn right. Alternate route, exit Highway 4 at Somersville Road (south), follow to the entry gate, (fee required), and proceed to the last parking lot. Expect woodland, chaparral, and some grassland birds. Bring a beverage and lunch.

More Field Trip listings on page 6

Field trips are open to members and non-members, beginners to advanced birders, but no dogs. **Contact Leader for questions or rain cancellations.** Our MDAS Chapter is a conservation organization. As such, we encourage carpooling (riders should help with gas, tolls, or park entry fees). Bring sunscreen, water, snacks, and lunch if indicated.

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

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.

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

>>> Trip Reports continued from page 4

Contra Loma Reservoir, March 9: Eleven MDAS members and a guest saw 53 species on a pleasant day of birding during a respite from the storms. The group was “welcomed” by howls and yips of distant coyotes. The area burned by a 533 acre wildfire in June 2015 was showing signs of recovery, the landscape now blanketed by lush growth. Birding highlights included: Common Gallinules; Sora; Common Yellowthroats; stunning Western Bluebirds; displaying male Red-winged Blackbirds; Hutton’s Vireo; Yellow-rumped Warblers nearing breeding plumage; American White Pelicans in breeding plumage with the flattened “breeding horn” that occurs on the upper bill of both sexes during breeding season and then disappears afterward; many Northern Flickers; Downy and Nuttall’s Woodpeckers; Killdeer in courtship behavior and one nest scrape; raptors including White-tailed Kite, Red-tailed Hawk, Northern Harrier, American Kestrel, nesting Cooper’s Hawks, and Red-shouldered Hawks nesting in a burned tree; and six sparrow species including Lark, Savannah, and Song Sparrows. ~Paul Schorr



American White Pelicans, Isaac Aronow photo

Mt. View SD/McNabney Marsh, March 15: It was a beautiful sunny day and fourteen birders joined the field trip. At almost the start of the outing we watched two Canada Geese battle over what looked to be something to eat. They had each other by the beak and were batting at each other with their wings. We weren’t positive what they were fighting over, but they splashed all around, jumped up and down, and would not let go of each other’s beaks. This lasted for a good five to ten minutes. Finally, one must have had enough and they separated, the victor following after the one in retreat for about fifteen feet. The marsh then returned to a more quiet mode for the rest of our visit and 56 different species were observed during the morning visit. There were hardly any ducks to be seen this time. However, a few of the highlight birds included the target birds of Green Heron and Great-tailed Grackle. Also spotted were many Black-crowned Night Herons, a Belted Kingfisher, and Mute Swan, Cooper’s Hawk, American White Pelican, some chattering Marsh Wrens, and an Osprey. During our visit, an Osprey nest perch was installed in McNabney Marsh. ~Steve Taylor

Happy Birthday to John Muir!
born April 21, 1838

“When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything in the Universe.” ~John Muir

>>> Field Trip Schedule continued from page 5

**1 Tuesday, April 26
Del Puerto Canyon**

Leader: Beth Branthaver (925) 944-1856

Carpool leaves at 730 AM from Sycamore Valley Road Park and Ride. **OR**, take I-580 E to I-5 S, take the Patterson Pass exit, and meet on Del Puerto Canyon Road west of I-5 at 9 AM. (Diablo Grande Parkway and Sperry Road off I-5 is 56 miles from Sycamore Valley Road P&R). We will stop at the Larry Combs Rest Area near Westley, as there are no facilities on the trip until our lunch stop. Expect Canyon Wren, Costa’s Hummingbird, Greater Roadrunner, and other gems. It is frequently very warm! Bring a beverage and lunch.

**3 Thursday, April 28
Mitchell Canyon**

Leader: Maury Stern (925) 284-5980

Meet at 8 AM in the Mitchell Canyon parking lot (\$6.00 parking fee). From I-680 take Ygnacio Valley Road, turn right on Clayton Road, and right on Mitchell Canyon Road to the end. We expect to see Gnatcatchers, spring migrants, residents, and an abundance of wildflowers.

It is usually very hot! Bring plenty of water and a lunch.



Northern Flicker, Joy Shonfeld photo

👁👁 LOOKING AHEAD

Saturday/Sunday, June 18-19, Yuba Pass

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

This is always a productive and fun weekend trip to the northern Sierras which requires driving and walking, some of it over rough terrain. Saturday we will be in the Sierra Valley looking for basin birds and Sunday we will bird in the Yuba Pass area for mountain birds.

Make motel reservations now! Meet at the parking lot at the top of the pass at 7 AM Saturday. Closest motels are in Sierra City, 11 miles west on Highway 49. Herrington’s Sierra Pines (530) 862-1151/(800) 682-9848 is popular; or Yuba River Inn (530) 862-1122 with cabins and kitchenettes (cash/check only). Bassett’s Station (530) 862-1297 at Highway 49 and Gold Lake Road has accommodations/meals. High Country Inn (530) 862-1530/(800) 862-1530 is across from Bassett’s. Check Sierra Valley Lodge (530) 994-3367/(800) 858-0322. **For more options: www.sierracity.com/Stay/LodgingCamp.html.** Campgrounds are at Yuba Pass and Chapman Creek downhill to the west with first-come, first-served sites for three days. Longer term reservations can be made at (877) 444-6777 for an additional \$10. After June 13, call Wild Birds Unlimited at (925) 798-0303 for information.

Save the Date: Saturday/Sunday, July 9-10, Lassen NP Manzanita Lake. Contact the Leader, Eugenia Larson, at: (925) 806-0644 or eklarson@comcast.net if you plan to attend. **To avoid disappointment, make motel or camping reservations now!** More details in the May Quail.



Western Bluebird ♦ *Sialia mexicana*

Western Bluebirds are fairly common in the grasslands and oak woodlands of Contra Costa County and are a favorite of birders for their perky appearance. Western Bluebird numbers were declining in California and other parts of their range over the last several decades. This decrease in population was due to several factors, including competition for nesting cavities with House Sparrows and European Starlings, decline in the number of natural cavities, and regional climate changes.

The good news is that in 1994, Don Yoder, a member of Mt. Diablo Audubon Society, now deceased, formed a group of volunteers, the California Bluebird Recovery Project (CBRP), to combat this decline. Volunteers build bluebird nest boxes, determine appropriate locations for them, and erect them in the semi-rural areas throughout the state.

CBRP monitors check the nest boxes every 7-10 days during nesting season, record data, and clean the boxes after nesting season.

If you would like to help in this commendable endeavor, visit www.CBRP.org, or contact MDAS member, Georgette Howington, State Assistant Program Director for CBRP at: georgette@birdscape.net (see more on pages 8 and 10).

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology now lists the Western Bluebird population status as "Least Concern." Certainly, the nest box program has made a difference in the once languishing population's slow return. Nesting cavities, food, water, and good weather have all been contributors.

Western bluebirds often sit on fence posts, signs, or low tree limbs from which they can swoop down to capture beetles, grasshoppers, wasps, ants, and spiders. They feed by gathering insects from foliage or from the ground, and they are able to hover briefly to hawk insects from the air. Their



Western Bluebird; male (L) and female (R), Isaac Aronow photos, and Western Bluebird reflections (below), Joy Shonfeld photo

diet of insects makes these delightful birds a plus for home gardeners. Western Bluebirds prefer open space, but recently, more people are spotting the birds in neighborhoods. They often become very tame in backyards where people offer up mealworms, suet, and water. ~Ellis Myers



Rossmoor Earth Day, Friday, April 15, 12-5 PM

Sustainable Rossmoor invites residents and their guests to enjoy speakers, exhibits and Native Bird Connections who will share their non-releasable live raptors with attendees. ►Volunteers are needed to staff the MDAS exhibit table from 12-5 PM.

Earth Day @ Pleasant Hill Instructional Garden, 1 Santa Barbara Road, Sunday, April 17, 1-4 PM

Enjoy free exhibits, games, 2 PM garden tour (pre-register), and Master Gardener information on drought-tolerant, native plants, and pollinator habitats. **For information:** phigarden@gmail.com ►MDAS volunteers needed from 1-4 PM.

Los Medanos College Earth Day, Wednesday, April 20, 10 AM-2 PM

Celebrate Earth Day at the Pittsburg campus Quad while exploring sustainable actions and supporting environmental organizations. **For information:** [Briana McCarthy \(925\)-473-7779](tel:925-473-7779) ►MDAS volunteers needed from 9:30 AM-2 PM.

Point Reyes Birding & Nature Festival, Friday-Sunday, April 22-24

Get Your Bird On! Bird the diverse habitats of the Marin County during the height of spring migration. **For information:** www.PointReyesBirdingFestival.org

John Muir Birthday-Earth Day Celebration, Saturday, April 23, 10 AM-4 PM

Celebrate Muir's 178th birthday and Earth Day! The free family event at the Muir National Historic Site will have booths, tours, bagpipers, and cake. **For information:** www.johnmuirassociation.org ►MDAS volunteers needed from 10 AM-4 PM.

Annual "We Love Mother Nature" Event @ Wild Birds Unlimited, Saturday, April 30, 10 AM-4 PM

This event features family fun, live birds and animals, local nature, rescue, and environmental group booths, and big savings in the store. **For information:** (925) 798-0303 ►MDAS volunteers needed from 10 AM-4 PM (lunch/snacks provided by WBU)

►To volunteer for a shift please contact Brian Murphy at: b-murphy21@hotmail.com or call (925) 937-8835.

Backyard Birder

FeederWatch season extends from early November to early April, the migratory period across most of the United States. Since program data entry is now thoroughly computerized it is possible to know when to expect various species to arrive in full force to visit and munch.

Thus, while informing future research, the data I enter informs me as well. I know exactly when to watch for some of my favorite seasonal visitors. Of course, many serious birders keep daily records and have decades-old journals. They know what's coming and when. The sophistication that the FeederWatch data offers includes species appearances over time in a graph format, a help for many of us who, for whatever reason, never developed the habit of saving our seasonal counts on paper.

Recently, I looked at my online record to see when the Cedar Waxwings should arrive in my yard. The FeederWatch graph revealed that from late January to early April I can expect to see these favorites perched in my Chinese pistache



Cedar Waxwings congregate at the bird bath, Elizabeth Leite photo

tree, eagerly drinking at my fountain or bird bath, or fluttering hungrily and eagerly in the 25-foot privet, at one time planted as innocent hedges in my neighborhood, now morphed into trees.

Unfortunately, over the years my neighbors, and even I, have removed many of these "bushes" in order to plant more floriferous or less invasive or, better yet, native shrubs throughout the area. The waxwings have amazing memory. Every year they return. They know where to find a food source. When they arrive they spend as much time as necessary stripping the berries from these bountiful exotics (non-native species). It is clear that privet berries and occasionally cotoneaster and female pistache (both Chinese in origin) are an early spring

Thumbs Up For Bluebirds

While we (and the media) were all worked up about the drought last year, bluebirds were busy making babies. The accumulated data of the California Bluebird Recovery Project (CBRP) is only a sampling of the population trends of the secondary-cavity nesters that use the bluebird nest boxes. With 160 monitors and 307 trails in 24 counties, the final count of 18,051 total fledges is remarkable. Western Bluebirds accounted for 12,018 and the rest were the other 19 cavity nesting species.

In 2015 the monitors in Contra Costa County reported a total of 822 successful fledges of which 502 were Western Bluebirds. In Walnut Creek alone, monitors reported 112 Western Bluebirds in 2010; 115 in 2011; 152 in 2012; 152 in 2013; 190 in 2014; and a whopping 276 in 2015! If trends continue, the number of birds fledged will be impressive.

resource of food for Cedar Waxwings. Every year, due to disappearing habitat, however, there is less fruit waiting because there are fewer and fewer privets.

On FeederWatch days I've watched and recorded



An American Robin feasts on Toyon berries in December, Maren Smith photo

Northern Flickers eating privet berries, a surprise to me. I've counted American Robins gorging in old cotoneaster bushes. And I've also watched Anna's Hummingbirds sipping nectar from Flowering Quince, an older non-native that flowers in January. And while I believe in the value of gardening with natives for landscape purposes, I am

also aware of the value of an existing food source for the wildlife, whatever its origin.

I am fortunate to have half-century old Valley Oaks and several Coast Redwoods in my yard. These native trees provide food and shelter for Band-tailed Pigeons, four kinds of woodpeckers, and a variety of our local songbirds. I firmly believe in planting native plants because of their value in maintaining critical habitat. (See www.audubon.org/content/why-native-plants-matter and richardsonbay.audubon.org/why-native-plants.)

When the Cedar Waxwings arrive, I am happy to know that there will be berries waiting, maybe not the native California Toyon, which is what it would have been in times past, but berries nevertheless. And, ultimately, isn't the goal of a backyard birder to provide habitat for birds? Whether through purchased food, native plants hosting native insects and nectar, or exotic species loaded with berries, feed them and they will come. ~Elizabeth Leite



For information on gardening with natives check the California Native Plant Society web page at www.cps.org.

Total fledges, including Oak Titmouse, House Wren, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Tree Swallow, White-breasted Nuthatch, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, and the Violet-green Swallow (in decline), totaled 349 in 2015. The numbers have grown annually—in 2010 the total was just 211.

There are many nest boxes on trails or in backyard habitats on which CBRP does not receive data. We encourage individuals to turn in their data at the end of the nesting season (species, egg count, hatches, fledges) to CBRP for the annual final count and to Nest Watch at nestwatch.org.

Also, on Saturday, April 9 at 1030 AM I am giving a presentation at Wild Birds Unlimited in Pleasant Hill called "Setting up Your Nest Box Trail (or a Few in Your Garden)." For questions, contact me at: georgette@birdscape.net or call (925) 768-9428. Bluebird Blessings! ~Georgette Howington, State Assistant Program Director for CBRP

Clean and Healthy Bay Ballot Measure

In a move that seeks to breathe new life into one of the Western Hemisphere's most important natural places, the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority recently voted to place the San Francisco Bay Clean Water, Pollution Prevention, and Habitat Restoration Program, known as the "Clean and Healthy Bay Ballot Measure," on the June 7, 2016 ballot in all nine Bay Area counties. The San Francisco Bay ballot, Measure AA, would restore vital bird habitat, provide clean water, and ensure flood protection due to climate change.

Audubon California immediately threw its support behind the measure, which will raise approximately \$500 million for tidal marsh restoration throughout San Francisco Bay. The Clean and Healthy Bay ballot measure will create a \$12 per parcel tax for the next twenty years. It is expected that these monies will leverage additional state and federal funding for bay restoration.

"In a state that offers so many natural treasures, San Francisco Bay stands apart for both its beauty and its importance to birds and wildlife," said Brigid McCormack, Executive Director of Audubon California. "This ballot measure offers residents the opportunity to not only restore what has been lost over time, but to also invest in the future."

"Restored wetlands and cleaner water will support shorebirds and waterfowl that use the bay, which is one of the anchors of the Pacific Flyway," said McCormack. "Increased public access to the bay shoreline will also provide recreational and educational opportunities."

Save the Bay, the Bay Area Council, and the Silicon Valley Leadership Group—along with Audubon California—are part of a broad coalition of environmental and business groups supporting the measure. A number of Bay Area Audubon chapters including Mt. Diablo Audubon Society (see below) have also stated their support for the measure.

More than a million shorebirds and waterfowl use the San Francisco Bay habitat at the height of migration, and the area includes twelve spots designated as Important Bird Areas due to the high number of rare and endangered bird species

as well as the sheer number of birds supported by the bay and surrounding wetlands.

Perhaps the most numerous of these birds are the Greater and Lesser Scaup, along with Bufflehead and Ruddy Ducks. Surf Scoters—with their white, red, yellow and black bills—



Surf Scoter in SF Bay, Joy Dardin photo

were once plentiful in San Francisco Bay, but have been in decline in recent years. Wetlands restoration will also help the recovery of the endangered Ridgway's Rail, and help other birds,

including Western and Clark's Grebes, Wigeon, Pintails, Coots, Cormorants, and Loons.

In 2013 San Francisco Bay was designated a "Wetland of International Importance" under the Convention on Wetlands, also known as the Ramsar Convention. It has also been recognized by the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network, which ranks it as being of "Hemispheric Importance" to shorebirds.

Tidal marsh restoration funded by the measure would improve water quality and control pollution by reducing the trash and other toxins that flow into the San Francisco Bay and ocean. It would also increase natural habitat for hundreds of species of wildlife beyond birds, including Pacific salmon, Dungeness crab, porpoises, and sea lions.

Restoring San Francisco Bay's wetlands will protect shoreline communities from rising waters attributable to climate change. More than \$60 billion in homes, businesses, and crucial infrastructure is at risk, including ports, airports, roads, office buildings, and neighborhoods at or below sea level. A 2015 report commissioned by the Bay Area Council found that an extreme storm event could cost our region \$10.4 billion, almost as much as the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake. ~Audubon California

MDAS Supports Measure AA

At the March MDAS Board meeting, the Board voted to support Measure AA. The resolution is as follows:

RESOLVED, that the Mt. Diablo Audubon Society recognizes the unique and critical role of San Francisco Bay in providing wetland habitat for birds, fish and other wildlife, the dramatic reduction of those wetlands over 150 years, and the continuing challenges to the Bay from pollution, climate change and other threats.

RESOLVED FURTHER, that the Mt. Diablo Audubon Society publicly endorses the Clean and Healthy Bay Measure, also called Measure AA, that the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority has placed on the June 7, 2016 ballot, to create a new funding stream for restoration of those wetlands; and

RESOLVED FURTHER, that the Mt. Diablo Audubon Society shall encourage its members and friends to vote in favor of the Measure.

the Quail

Nesting Peregrines Need Our Help

Peregrine Falcons breeding in Pine Canyon near Castle Rock face increasing encroachment on their nesting sites from rock-climbing humans. In years past, this pressure has caused them to abandon their nests. In response, East Bay Regional Park District and Mt. Diablo State Park have partnered to close the area seasonally; however, in February alone, 300 people were caught on camera violating the closure.

Several volunteer groups are working together to provide monitoring and public education in an attempt to reduce the problem. If you are interested in helping with this effort, please contact Conservation Chair, Nancy Wenninger, at: nwenninger@aol.com or (925) 938-7987. Orientation will be provided by the Diablo Foothills Park Supervisor.

The Allure of Blue

“Would you like to put up a bluebird box or two? You'll get insectivore-power, color, and entertainment for very little effort.” So goes my pitch to every likely listener.

Why is blue in nature so alluring? Because it's rare except in the sky and its reflection?

As a volunteer nest box monitor for the California Bluebird Recovery Project (CBRP), I've been watching them, thinking about them, and talking about them—bluebirds and their royal blue color, their habits, and my observations of them.

Western Bluebirds and I cross paths at the Valle Vista staging area in Moraga. There are 12 nest boxes there, and I'm in my second year of monitoring them. Georgette Howington's article in the November 2014 *Quail* informed me of the need for monitors. I was employed part-time then and I thought I'd get some



practical, accountable field observation and recording skills by volunteering.

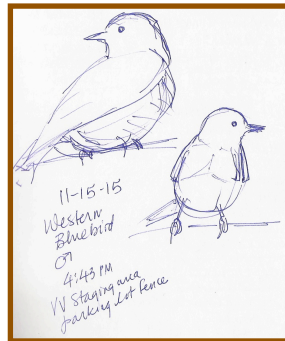
And so, in early 2015, I spent my free hours on zealous walks in my newfound bluebird territory. Hillside grassland descends to riparian bottomland that opens out to pastureland and the dry lakebed of upper San Leandro Reservoir. I saw Western Bluebirds and 20 or more other bird species every week. The shallow creek flowed unassertively until late April when the East Bay Municipal Utility District started pumping green water from the Sacramento River down to Oakland.

By then I was working full-time, and bluebird watching—and sketching—was for weekends and evenings. The trail I monitor has four separate

the Quail

groups of boxes. Last year, tree swallows nested in five boxes, and I loved getting to know these iridescent, elegant flyers. Two boxes were unused; one hosted a family of mice.

Western Bluebirds used four of the boxes, one in each group. I find



Western Bluebird sketches by Julia M. Starr

not noisy; a demure “churr” in flight as they forage is what I've heard. A pair attends their nest box closely when I approach to open it, and they staunchly occupy their space when other birds trespass.

At least nine bluebirds fledged in 2015. I'm already looking forward to another season. ~Julia M. Starr

🌍 Earth Day April 22

Earth Day, a worldwide event, is celebrated annually on April 22, a day promoting global environmental protection, and considered the birth of the modern environmental movement.

After observing the devastating 1969 Santa Barbara Oil Spill, U.S. Senator Gaylord Nelson (WI), Earth Day Founder, recruited friends in Congress to promote his cause, starting with an environmental “teach-in” and Earth Day events in the U.S.

On April 22, 1970, 20 million people rallied to protest environmental disasters, leading to the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the passage of the Clean Air, Clean Water, and Endangered Species Acts. (see page 7 for events)

✓ Take Action

The CDFW seeks public comment on a proposal to list the Tricolored Blackbird as threatened or endangered. Check the www.diabloaudubon.org Conservation page for details.

Silent Auction Request

Diane Malucelli, MDAS Sales Manager, is planning a Silent Auction at the annual June general meeting and potluck dinner on Thursday, June 2 at 630 PM. Members and guests will be able to bid on one-of-a-kind items including signed Harry Adamson prints donated by his estate, and must-haves including a large lithograph of goldfinches, two volumes of original John James Audubon watercolor paintings for the 1966 *Birds of America*, and a large book, *Rails of the World* with paintings by Lansdowne.

In the past, we've had a weekend at a vacation home and birding scopes donated. If you'd like to donate Silent Auction items, please contact Diane at: dmalucelli@att.net.

♻️ Go Green in 2016!

The *Quail* by email will save MDAS money, is in color, you'll receive it earlier, you can print just the pages you need, and it is good for the environment. Interested? Contact patinococo@gmail.com

Get Involved in MDAS

April is a great month to jump in and volunteer! See page 7 for five opportunities to help staff the MDAS table at Earth Day community events. Maybe you'd like to help educate the public on Peregrine Falcons? See page 9. If you'd like to run for an MDAS office or join a committee (the Christmas Bird Count could use your expertise), your time and talents would be greatly appreciated. Elections are in May. See Jimm's column on page 2. Cookies are always needed for the refreshment break at meetings. See Hospitality to share a dessert. Volunteering is the perfect way to meet new people, get involved in conservation issues, talk about birding, give back to the chapter, and have fun.

Happy Birthday
to John James Audubon!
born April 26, 1785
“A true conservationist is a
man who knows that the world
is not given by his fathers, but
borrowed from his children.”
~John James Audubon

April 2016

News From the Pacific Flyway

On the Pacific Flyway, the main western route through the U.S. for over 350 species of migrating birds, things are perking up with birds migrating north, beginning in March, and others heading south as early as August.

Some of our favorite hummingbirds including Rufous, Allen's, Black-chinned, and Costa's (left) are making their way north right now. In winter some of them are found as far south as Peru, then summering in Alaska or the Bering Straits, over 4,500 miles north. They often travel at night, covering as much as 500 miles without stopping. Many will stop off in the Bay Area and are being seen at feeders now.



then summering in Alaska or the Bering Straits, over 4,500 miles north. They often travel at night, covering as much as 500 miles without stopping. Many will stop off in the Bay Area and are being seen at feeders now.

The Flyway extends over much of Northern California from the Pacific Coast to the Central Valley (www.audubon.org/birds/flyways).

Estuaries, where ocean and fresh water meet, are favorite resting spots for shore birds due to plentiful food sources in the shallows. These American Avocets (above) have a great view of San Francisco from the Alameda shore.



Seasonal marshes along the Flyway in wildlife refuges north of Sacramento are the winter home to over 1.5 million ducks and over 750,000 geese (www.fws.gov/refuge/sacramento). These birds feed and build up strength to continue their trek north to the Arctic Circle and above. Nothing compares to the breathtaking sound and view of 50,000 Snow Geese taking off and circling together, a regular event here.

For some relaxing fun, take a day to visit one of the many hot spots within 75 miles of Mt. Diablo. The Yolo Bypass near Sacramento (yolobasin.org), one of the least known, is a favorite wintering spot for over 200 species of migratory birds.

~Mike Eliot, Wild Birds Unlimited

Mt. Diablo Audubon Society (MDAS)

Mt. 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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Wild Birds Unlimited, Pleasant Hill

Mt. 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.

MDAS MEMBERSHIP/RENEWAL APPLICATION

- Please enroll me/my family in the Mt. 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

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: () _____ email: _____

Send check payable to Mt. Diablo Audubon Society with this application to:
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A sleepy Western Screech-Owl on the Lafayette-Moraga Trail, Maren Smith photo

Under clear blue skies, the February 27 “Walk and Talk” with Assemblywoman Catharine Baker, co-sponsored by MDAS and the Sierra Club, brought together community members to enjoy a short hike with their California representative. MDAS Board members, Ariana Rickard, Rosalie Howarth, and Maren Smith welcomed hikers and shared MDAS brochures, birding information, and loaner binoculars. Around thirty people heard Baker’s remarks and asked questions, then hiked the two-mile trail, and learned about local wildflowers and natural history from Sierra Club members.

Hugh Harvey, Field Trip Chair, set up a scope so that everyone could view the birds that included Red-winged Blackbirds showing off their red epaulets, a flashy Acorn Woodpecker, a handsome Western Bluebird spotted by Assemblywoman Baker, a pair of vocal Red-tailed Hawks, some hummingbirds, doves, and pigeons, one White-breasted Nuthatch, noisy Western Scrub Jays, and a spectacular Cooper’s Hawk.

Two members, Randi and Herb Long, shared a story about their involvement in the citizen committee who rallied to stave off development in Shell Ridge and other Walnut Creek parks in the early 1970s, leading to a referendum and bond that helped purchase and protect 2,726 acres of open space for everyone to enjoy. ~**Ariana Rickard**



Rosalie Howarth, baby Dimitri, and Ariana Rickard welcome hikers (far L); Assemblywoman Baker fields questions (L); hike site (top R), Maren Smith photos; Hugh Harvey with Baker and guests (bottom R), Pierre Bull photo.

