



# the Quail

Mount Diablo Audubon Society  
P.O. Box 53, Walnut Creek, CA 94597-0053  
[www.diabloaudubon.org](http://www.diabloaudubon.org)

Volume 62, Number 3

November 2016

## Nov. Program: Owl: A Year in the Lives of North American Owls ♦ Paul Bannick

Award-winning wildlife photographer, and author, Paul Bannick will present a program featuring video, sound, stories from the field and several dozen new images from his brand new book *Owl: A Year in the Lives of North American Owls*. Paul uses intimate, yet dramatic, images to follow one year through the course of one year in their distinct habitats.



Above: Owl book cover; above R: Burrowing Owl family, Paul Bannick photos

You will witness the four seasons as each stage in an owl's life is chronicled through rare images: courtship, mating, and nesting in spring; fledging and feeding of young in summer; dispersal and gaining independence in fall; and, finally, winter's migrations and competitions for food. Bannick's program shows how owls use the unique resources



available to them in each habitat to face those challenges. All 19 species found in Canada and the United States are featured in photos, video and narrative, with a special focus on the Northern Pygmy-Owl, Great Gray Owl, Burrowing Owl, and Snowy Owl.

After graduating from the University of Washington, Paul worked for 15 years in the computer software industry at Aldus Corporation, as a Director for Adobe Systems, and as a senior manager at Microsoft. Wishing to combine his passion for wilderness conservation with his career, Paul turned his attention to non-profit work, currently serving as the Director of Major Gifts for Conservation Northwest.

Paul's work has won prestigious awards from *Audubon Magazine* and the International Conservation Photography Awards. His photography can be found in bird guides from Audubon to Peterson and in several volumes of the *Handbook of the Birds of*

*the World*. His work has been featured in numerous publications including *The New York Times*, *Sunset*, *Nature's Best Photography Magazine*, and *Birds and Blooms*, and he has been featured on NPR programs including "Travels with Rick Steves" and "BirdNote."

After the program Paul will sign copies of his new book *Owl*. If you'd like to purchase a book, please bring cash (\$38) or a check.

Listed on page 8 you will find Bannick's November photography workshops, lecture, and exhibit information at the Lindsay Wildlife Experience. [paulbannick.com](http://paulbannick.com)

### Meeting Schedule

The next meeting of the Mount Diablo Audubon Society will be **Thursday, November 3** 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: Paul Bannick**

**NEXT MONTH'S PROGRAM:**  
Thursday, December 1, 2016  
Big Year ♦ Mike Schackwitz

### Birding Information 7 PM

Our birding information program will be an overview of the MDAS volunteer phenology monitoring program, Bird Seasons California, which provides data to Audubon California and the National Phenology Network on changes in bird presence and behavior at local wetlands. All chapter members who have participated in this citizen science phenology program are encouraged to attend.

DEDICATED TO HABITAT CONSERVATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

It seems like many of the items I write about in this column come from newspaper or magazine articles I have read during the month. I never know each month if the news will be positive or negative—much of what I read this month was the latter.

I think the most disturbing article was “A Plague of House Cats” by Abigail Tucker in the October 2016 issue of *Smithsonian* magazine. ([www.smithsonianmag.com/issue/october-2016/](http://www.smithsonianmag.com/issue/october-2016/)) Let me first say that I love cats; we have a wonderful cat named Frida. But this article paints a grim picture when it comes to Florida house cats and a rare, highly endangered rodent, the Key Largo Woodrat.

The indigenous woodrat is close to extinction because it is being killed by house cats. According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature, house cats are one the 100 worst invasive species. It is estimated that there are between 600 million to one billion house cats in the world. The article

detailed places all over the world, especially island nations, where roaming house cats cause great damage, even extinctions.

Another sad article was about the Northern Spotted Owl being added to the endangered species list. I have only seen them once, but it was memorable. Like so many species that are struggling, it would be a shame to lose them.

A more cheerful article of interest to me was the August 30, 2016 “Animal Life” column by Joan Morris in the *East Bay Times*. She talked about the Western Scrub-Jay that is no more. In fact, the AOU has split it into two species—the California Scrub-Jay and Woodhouse Scrub-Jay (see page 6). Genetic research continues to refine our data.

Once again we have some great programs lined up and more than 50 field trips are on the calendar. Hugh Harvey, our Field Trip Coordinator, told me that last year we had 666 people who attended one or more of our field trips. Wow!

## Good News For Whistling-Ducks

In early September, the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission approved expenditures of \$11.7 million from the “Duck Stamp Fund,” adding more than 13,000 acres at four National Wildlife Refuges.

The biggest expenditure was for McFadden National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) on the Texas coast near the Louisiana border, for acquisition of the Sabine Ranch, including a large portion of the Willow Slough Marsh, the largest remaining coastal freshwater marsh on the Texas coast. This was facilitated by The Conservation Fund which is purchasing the property directly from the Sabine Ranch and Cattle Company for over \$30 million and will transfer it to the USFWS for less than \$10 million. The 12,376 acre addition will especially benefit Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, Fulvous Whistling-Ducks, Mottled Ducks, Wood Ducks, and Blue-winged Teal, among other species.

At a cost of \$610,000, an additional 206 acres was approved for the Turnbull NWR in eastern Washington, south of

Spokane. These wetlands provide habitat for multiple species of waterfowl, as well as providing habitat for wading birds, shorebirds, neotropical migrants, and other wildlife.

Felsenthal National Wildlife Refuge, in southern Arkansas, lies within the Mississippi Flyway. This route is used by large numbers of migrating shorebirds, songbirds, and raptors. Red-Cockaded Woodpeckers have flourished under special protection provided by this refuge. Felsenthal NWR will receive an additional 282 acres at a cost of \$474,000.

At Lower Hatchie NWR, along the Mississippi River north of Memphis, Tennessee, a parcel consisting of 164 acres was approved at a cost of \$641,000. It supports large concentrations of wintering waterfowl and provides stopover habitat for migrating Wood Ducks and Hooded Mergansers.

The Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation “Duck Stamps” you have purchased are an investment in wetland conservation manifested by these recent Refuge System acquisitions.

And, *that's* good news for Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, other waterfowl, wildlife, birding enthusiasts, and nature lovers. ~Ellis Myers



Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks on McAllen, Texas Sewage Ponds on the Texas Coast Birding Trail, Ellis Myers photo

## Welcome New MDAS Members

Karen Driscoll Walnut Creek  
Walt Duncan Danbury, CT

## MDAS on the Web

[www.diabloaudubon.org](http://www.diabloaudubon.org)  
[www.diabloaudubon.org/mobile](http://www.diabloaudubon.org/mobile)  
(mobile only)  
[www.facebook.com/mtdiabloaudubon](https://www.facebook.com/mtdiabloaudubon)  
[www.meetup.com/Mount-Diablo-Audubon-Society/](https://www.meetup.com/Mount-Diablo-Audubon-Society/)

Q

What is the only large shorebird, the second largest in North America, that feeds in a flock?

Unscramble these letters or turn to page 7 to learn more.

WBIAMRGTEODDL

The *Quail* is published monthly except in January and August by the Mount Diablo Audubon Society, P.O. Box 53, Walnut Creek, CA 94597-0053. **The deadline for the December 2016-January 2017 Quail is November 7.**

Migration is underway. More wintering Bay Area birds and others continue to pass through. The big surprise of the month was a **Sabine's Gull** in Piper Slough on Bethel Island.

~

A flock of **Greater White-fronted Geese** flew over Concord 9/21. AF

ES saw a **Blue-winged Teal** at the Richmond Sewage Ponds 10/4.

**Canvasbacks** were at Clifton Court Forebay 9/23, DW, ES; Bethel Island, Piper Slough 9/25, AL, MP; and on 9/26, BD.

MP saw a well-described **Black Swift** at Inspiration Point in Tilden Regional Park 9/20.

A **Calliope Hummingbird** was in Alamo near Stone Valley Rd. 9/24. JBe

Several **Sandhill Cranes** flew by Piper Slough off Bethel Island 9/24. MP, AL

On 9/28, there was a **Red-necked Phalarope** at Shell Pond near Bay Point. AL

A **Parasitic Jaeger** was harassing gulls at Piper Slough 9/24. MP, AL

A very rare inland Contra Costa County sighting was an immature **Sabine's Gull** at Piper Slough discovered by DW and ES on 9/23. JH saw it the same day. MP and AL saw it 9/24, BD saw it 9/26, and BB 9/27.

Late **Caspian Terns** were at Piper Slough 9/25 MP; 9/26 BD; 9/28 JA; and 10/4 AL.

Fourteen **Swainson's Hawks** were seen by JT in a field near Kelso Road in Byron 9/21. He also saw a juvenile **Ferruginous Hawk** there that day.

The long-present **Western Screech Owl** remained on the Lafayette-Moraga Bike Trail seen by HH on 9/24.

*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.*

JW heard a **Long-eared Owl** near the Canyon-Pinehurst intersection in Canyon 10/4.

A **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** was at the Lafayette home of NL on 9/18 for about two weeks.

A first-of-season **Red-breasted Sapsucker** was at Heather Farm Pond 9/23. FS

EL saw a **Hairy Woodpecker** in the pines across from the Concert Platform at the Lafayette Reservoir 10/3.

A **Northern Flicker** was at the northeast Lafayette home of WE, 10/3.

AL saw a **Merlin** at Piper Slough on Bethel Island 10/5.

A **Say's Phoebe** returned to Heather Farm 9/30. RH

DW had two **Canyon Wrens** 9/21 near the spillway at Diablo Foothills Regional Park adjacent to Castle Rock Park.

Two first-of-season **Hermit Thrushes** were at the Bear Creek Staging Area 9/15. DW

A leucistic **House Finch** was at JR's Orinda home 10/2.

DW saw an **American Redstart** at Castle Rock parking lot 9/21 along with MP, SG, ME, and MK.

**Black-throated Grey Warblers** were at KB's Lafayette yard 9/17; DW saw one at CastleRock 9/21; and HH and FS saw one at Heather Farm pond 9/24.

KB saw a **Townsend's Warbler** in her bird bath 9/17.

An unusual **Common Yellowthroat** was in reeds at the NE corner of Heather Farm pond 9/25. DK

A **Chipping Sparrow** was at Castle Rock parking lot 9/21. DW

**White-crowned Sparrows** returned to the area 9/15 seen by DW at Bear Creek, and by AK in El Cerrito on 9/28.

**Golden-crowned Sparrows** were about two weeks early. KB had one at her Lafayette home 9/17; DW saw them at Castle Rock Park 9/21; and JB saw six in her Martinez yard 9/29.



JA Josh Ackerman, KB Kristen Baker, JBe J.D. Bergeron, JB Jackie Bobrosky, BB Bob Brandriff, BD Bob Dunn, BE Bill Espey, MF Marjorie Fletcher, SG Susan Greef, HH Hugh Harvey, RH Rosita Harvey, JH Jeff Hoppes, AK Alan Kaplan, DK Dave Kent, MK Marilyn Kinch, EL Elizabeth Leite, AL Albert Linkowski, NL Norman Lustig, MP Michael Park, JR Jim Roethe, FS Fred Safier, ES Emilie Strauss, JT Jerry Ting, DW Denise Wight, RW Ray Witbeck

## MDAS Christmas Bird Count (CBC)

The National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count, in its 117th year, is the longest-running citizen science project in America. It "fuels Audubon science throughout the year" giving ornithologists and conservation biologists a large pool of information for scientists to study to determine how birds in North America are faring, and you can be a part of this important study.

Each registered count is coordinated by a count compiler. It takes place within a set 15-mile wide diameter circle between December 14 and January 5 of each year.

Our chapter has two counts. Mark your calendar now! The East County Count will be held on Wednesday, December 14, and the Central County Count will take place on Saturday, December 17.

Dinner will be provided for participants after the count, our thanks to you for volunteering your time for this important bird census. Results of the day's count will also be shared. Detailed information about each dinner will be forthcoming.

Previous years' participants, please let your leaders know if you plan to help out again this year.

If you are new to MDAS or have any questions about the CBC, please feel free to contact me at: [e.leite@sbcglobal.net](mailto:e.leite@sbcglobal.net).

For more information about the National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count see: [audubon.org](http://audubon.org).

## Trip Reports

**Vaux's Swifts at Rio Lindo Academy, Healdsburg, September 17:** None of us will ever again see the plains filled horizon-to-horizon with herds of bison, nor will we ever again see the skies darkened by giant flocks

of Passenger Pigeons. But, it is still possible to see the skies filled with some birds, and the Vaux's Swift is one of those species. Six MDAS members traveled to Rio Lindo Adventist Academy in Healdsburg to watch the Swifts fly into a chimney after the sun had set. They do indeed fill the sky with their bodies and their voices. What a spectacle it is to see slightly more than 6,000 birds fly into the chimney which has not been used since 1989. We six observers were not alone; Ohlone Audubon Society had nine members and altogether there were about 180 people present to witness this event. One woman brought her Red-tailed Boa, which actually fell asleep as the evening progressed. In addition to the Swifts, we also saw a Sharp-shinned Hawk, Turkey Vultures, and some fly-by Cedar Waxwings and Starlings. ~Hugh Harvey

**Hayward Regional Shoreline, September 28:** After navigating the morning commute traffic, 15 participants arrived at the Hayward Regional Shoreline to enjoy a beautiful, bright and sunny, seasonably cool day. A Palm Warbler had been spotted earlier in the trees near the parking lot, so we started there where we found a Willow and Pacific-slope Flycatcher, but could not spot the Warbler. Led by Bob Richmond, we then walked down to the shoreline and spotted Black Oystercatchers, Black



Greater Yellowlegs in the pickleweed, Isaac Aronow photo

Turnstones, diving Forster's Terns, Greater Yellowlegs in the colorful pickleweed, and had a fly-by by an Osprey. Walking up to Frank's Dump, we spotted lots of shorebirds including Western and Least Sandpipers, Dunlin, Dowitchers, Avocets, Willets, Marbled Godwits, Black-bellied Plovers and one Semi-palmated Plover. In the fennel patch near the cars, Clay-colored Sparrows and a Grasshopper Sparrow were reported. For the entire day we had 70 species. ~Beth Branthaver

**Outer Point Reyes Rarity Chase, September 29:** The reports for some migrating rarities looked good on

Wednesday, so four of us drove to Outer Point Reyes hoping for some good birds. The birds we expected to see were a Yellow-green Vireo, an American Redstart, a Pectoral Sandpiper, and a Red-throated Pipit. The weather was cold, it was windy, and we saw none of those birds. But we met some others near the lighthouse who were also looking, so we were not alone. We did see a Willow Flycatcher in the vireo location, and in the trees beyond the Fish Docks residence, we were told to look for a Chestnut-sided Warbler. We finally found it and then retreated to the car for lunch. We stopped at the Mendoza Ranch and were skunked, then took a walk at Drake's Beach and found no



Chestnut-sided Warbler, Beth Branthaver photo

small birds there, either. The pipit and sandpiper were at the northeast corner of Nicassio Reservoir, so we stopped there on the way home. While we did not see them, we had at least five Killdeers and a dozen Greater Yellowlegs. That's the way it is with chases—sometimes you win, sometimes you lose. Still, we had 38 species total. ~Hugh Harvey

**Hawk Hill, October 1:** The day dawned bright and clear with no fog all the way to the coast. The trip started off with an excellent view of a very cooperative Virginia Rail, and a good view of a Marsh Wren; birding at the lagoon continued fine with Orange-crowned,

Townsend's, and abundant Yellow-rumped Warblers, and a Common Yellowthroat. Hutton's Vireos and Wrentits posed for the photographers, and the usual sparrows included one Fox Sparrow. However, despite the beautiful weather and the marvelous views over the Bay and the City, the raptors were not inspired to move, so we left early, but not before counting several Turkey Vultures and Red-tailed Hawks, as well as seeing one each of Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawk, and a Northern Harrier putting up a good show of attacking a Red-tail. The most surprising bird atop the hill was a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher that several of us glimpsed. The numbers: 11 birders, 34 species. ~Fred Safier



Wrentit, Beth Branthaver photo

# Field Trip Schedule

By Hugh Harvey

## November 2016 (Call Leader for ?s or rain cancellations)

05	Saturday	Charleston Slough and South Bay
15	Tuesday	McNabney Marsh/Mt. View SD
19	Saturday	Limantour Beach
29	Saturday	Solano County Raptors and More

## December 2016

03	Saturday	Sacramento/Colusa NWRs
08	Thursday	Niles Area
14	Wednesday	Christmas Bird Count-East County
17	Saturday	Christmas Bird Count-Cent. County

### 2 Saturday, November 5

#### Charleston Slough and South Bay

Leader: Eugenia Larson (925) 806-0644

Carpool leaves at 730 AM from Sycamore Valley Road Park and Ride. **OR**, meet at Terminal Road in Mountain View at 830 AM. Take I-680, exit Mission Boulevard west. Continue through two traffic lights and take I-880 ramp south. Exit to SR 237, connect to US 101 north at Moffett Field. Exit at San Antonio Road, turn right (north) to Terminal Road, turn right and park. Entrance is on left. Other areas of interest in the South Bay are Palo Alto Baylands, Alviso, and Redwood Shores. Shorebirds and waterfowl should be plentiful. Bring lunch and a beverage.

### 2 Tuesday, November 15

#### McNabney Marsh and Mt. View Sanitary District

Leader: Steve Taylor (925) 828-8810

Meet at 9 AM at the Mt. View Sanitary Visitor Center. Exit from I-680 southbound at Arthur Road, turn left and go under the freeway or Exit I-680 northbound at Pacheco Blvd., turn right on Arthur Road, and go under the freeway. At 0.4 mile turn left onto MVSD private road, through the gate, alongside the freeway and through the tunnel under I-680. Park and sign in at the Visitor Center. Trails may be muddy. Close-up looks at dabbling ducks, possibly bitterns, and herons. After walking the ponds we'll drive back to the viewing platform to observe more birds and complete the bird checklist. If you wish, bring a lunch and beverage, and explore the Martinez shoreline later on your own.



Least Bittern,  
Isaac Aronow photo

### 2 Saturday, November 19

#### Limantour Beach

Leader: Maury Stern (925) 284-5980

Carpool leaves at 700 AM from El Nido Ranch Road. **OR**, meet at 830 AM at the Bear Valley Visitor Center, Point Reyes National Seashore. Take SR 24 to Oakland, then I-580 west to Richmond, and the San Rafael Bridge (toll). From US 101 north, take Central San Rafael exit. Go two blocks, turn left on 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, and continue west to Sir Francis Drake Blvd. Turn right on Sir Francis Drake. At SR 1 at Olema, turn right for 0.25 miles, then turn left on Bear Valley Road. Visitor Center is off Bear Valley Road. This trip includes forest birds on the ridge and ducks, shorebirds, and, often, loons and grebes on the bay. Bring snack, lunch, and a beverage and dress in layers.

### 1 Saturday, November 29

#### Solano County Raptors and More

Leader: Gary Fregien (916) 708-0636

Carpool leaves Sun Valley Mall at 715 AM. **OR**, meet Gary at 8 AM at Suisun City McDonald's, Hwy 12 and Sunset Avenue. Take I-680 north, cross bridge to Benicia (toll) and merge to I-80 east at Cordelia. Take Hwy 12 E toward Rio Vista for four miles to Sunset Avenue. Turn left at the light into the shopping center. McDonald's is on the right. We will bird east on Hwy 12 and Creed Rd. to the vicinity of Hwy 113 and Robinson Road, possibly including Jepson Prairie. We will make several stops looking for migrating waterfowl, passerines and winter raptors, especially Flannery and McCormack Roads in search of the elusive Mountain Plover. From there, we may travel to the Bird's Landing area to see Tricolored Blackbirds and possibly to Montezuma Slough for waterfowl. Plan to spend 4-5 hours birding plus driving time getting there and back. There will be minimal hiking, but dress for seasonal conditions. Bring snacks, lunch, and a beverage. Carpooling is advised due to limited access at stops and the distance traveled.



Tricolored Blackbird,  
Beth Branthaver photo

Field trips are open to members and non-members, beginners to advanced birders, but no dogs. **Contact Leader for ?s or rain cancellations.** MDAS is a conservation organization; as such, we encourage carpooling (riders should help with gas, tolls, or entry fees).

**1**: Easy, little walking, smooth paths **2**: Moderate, one mile+, possibly rough terrain **3**: Difficult, many miles, rough terrain

**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 the intersection with St. Stephens Drive.

**Sycamore Valley Road Park and Ride carpool location:** For I-680 S, exit at Sycamore Valley Road East in Danville and for I-680 N, exit at Sycamore Valley Road. Park and Ride lot is on the left, at the light, one block east of the freeway.

**Sun Valley Mall parking lot carpool location:** SW corner of mall parking lot at Willow Pass Road and Contra Costa Boulevard in Concord.

## Volunteers Needed

Our MDAS chapter has over 400 household memberships full of wonderful people with diverse skill sets, interests, and expertise. Please consider volunteering your time and talents for one of the MDAS Board positions posted below.



*A Green-winged Teal forages on the mudflats of the Bay, Cassie Tzur photo*

## Two MDAS Board Position Openings

►Pat Schneider, Membership Chair, would like to find a replacement after serving four years in this Board position. The job requires computer literacy and some familiarity with database concepts, but Pat will happily provide training if you are able to help. If you have questions, please contact Pat at: [patincococo@gmail.com](mailto:patincococo@gmail.com).

►Our current Sales Manager, Diane Malucelli, would like to train someone to take over the Sales Manager Board position next September 2017. She has served in this position for eight years and would like to find a replacement.

Ideally, Diane would like to train someone who could then enlist a committee of volunteers to assist. Diane says, "It is an interesting volunteer job because you can be creative with the raffle gifts and you get to meet many of the people who attend the meetings. Many people stop by to see what is available and to chat."

Diane would be available this entire year at the general meetings to train interested members who would help set up the sales table and sell raffle tickets or duck stamps, with the goal of handing over the Board

the Quail

position next September. For more information, please stop by at a general meeting or contact Diane at: [dmalucelli@att.net](mailto:dmalucelli@att.net).

## Get Involved

Piggybacking on the message above, a great way to get involved in any organization is to join a committee or serve on the Board. See page 11 for a list of MDAS committees and contact information for Education, Hospitality, CBC, Volunteers, or Legislative Outreach. Interested? Contact any Board member to see how you can get involved in our chapter.

## Calling All Young Birders

Do you have children or grandchildren who enjoy nature? Do you know young people in your neighborhood, places of worship, schools, or have co-workers with youngsters who might enjoy learning more about birds on monthly YBC field trips? MDAS is interested in growing our Young Birders Club. If you would like more information about our YBC program, please contact Tracy Farrington, Young Birders Club Liaison, at: [tracy\\_farrington@yahoo.com](mailto:tracy_farrington@yahoo.com), or call (925) 788-6223.



*An Acorn Woodpecker seen in Hidden Hills Park in Martinez, Isaac Aronow photo*

## Amazon Smiles on MDAS

If you shop online at Amazon, please consider registering MDAS as your favorite charity on AmazonSmile. Register at [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com) and choose **MT Diablo Audubon Society**

as your non-profit charity. For every eligible purchase, AmazonSmile will donate 0.5% of the purchase price to MDAS. Please spread the word to family and friends who shop on Amazon. You shop. Amazon gives.

## Project FeederWatch

A rewarding opportunity to provide valuable citizen science data while observing bird life in your own back yard starts in November. You must pre-register for the FeederWatch program to input your bird count data. The count, in its 30th year, runs from November 12 to April 7, 2017. It's the perfect activity to become a keen observer and over the years, to track trends, all while providing important citizen science data for research. To register: [feederwatch@cornell.edu](mailto:feederwatch@cornell.edu).



*An Anna's Hummingbird fuels up in Joy's Danville yard, Joy Shonfeld photo*

## One Bird Becomes Two—The Western Scrub-Jay Split

As announced in Cornell Lab's 2016 issue of *Winter Bird Highlights* and on their blog, the American Ornithologists' Union (AOU) recently split the Western Scrub-Jay into two species: California Scrub-Jay, which resides in Oregon, Washington, and most of California, and Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay, which resides in Nevada, Arizona, Utah, Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas.

If you are participating in FeederWatch in one of these states, you will find the new species name on your count list when you submit data this season.

For birders, this means TWO new birds for your Life List!

November 2016



## Marbled Godwit ♦ *Limosa fedoa*

The Marbled Godwit is a large shorebird that spends the winter in salt marshes, sandy beaches, and mudflats poking its long, slightly upturned bill into the mud to extract invertebrates to eat. It finds most food by touch and may feed day or night. It will eat insects, roots, and seeds of aquatic plants.

Marbled Godwits nest on the ground in loose colonies in marshes and grasslands of the northern Great Plains of North America and in coastal western Alaska. Males display over the breeding territory by flying over the area in circles, with slow wing beats, calling loudly, then gliding on stiff wings to the ground.

The nesting birds are very secretive, so nests are difficult to find. Incubating adults are so difficult to flush from the eggs that the adults have been known to be picked up from their nest! The eggs (usually four to a brood) are greenish olive-buff and lightly spotted with brown.

Incubation is done by both parents and lasts from 21-23 days.

Shortly after hatching, the young leave the nest. Both parents care for the young, but the chicks start feeding themselves immediately, fledging in approximately 30 days. The young take at least two years to mature to breeding age.

The adults are buffy-brown over all with black mottling above and fine barring below. The wings have a cinnamon

colored lining. Winter birds and juveniles are paler, with less barring below. The long, upturned bill has a pink base and a dark tip. The male's bill is a bit brighter than the female's bill, while the females are slightly larger and longer-billed than males.



Marbled Godwit, Jean Halford photo

Marbled Godwit numbers have remained relatively stable since 1966. Canada's population is experiencing the greatest decline due to nesting habitat being converted to agricultural use. In the 1800's, Marbled Godwits, along with other shorebirds, were hunted as this quote from *North American Shore Birds* (published in 1895) by Daniel Girard Elliot attests to: "Like all waders, however, they are met with on our eastern coast yearly in diminished numbers; improved firearms and the constantly increasing army of gunners serving to reduce their ranks, until they have been entirely driven away from many localities where they were formerly abundant."

When describing a group of godwits, they are collectively called an "omniscience," a "pantheon," or a "prayer of godwits."

These birds may be seen at the Berkeley-Emeryville Shoreline, Abbott's Lagoon, and Charleston Slough (see page 5 for details) field trips this month and next. And in Arcata, California the Godwit Festival occurs every year in April.

~Jean Halford

## Salton Sea Update

At our October general meeting, Andrea Jones, Director of Bird Conservation for Audubon California, spoke to MDAS about current concerns for the Salton Sea. The salinity is increasing, preventing the tilapia fish (a favorite food for birds) from laying eggs, and the water level is decreasing, shrinking an important habitat for resident populations and for millions of migrating birds who rely upon the Pacific Flyway stopover to feed and rest as they make their long migrations from North to South America. More than 400 bird species make use of this fragile habitat.

For more information about the Salton Sea, there is a detailed article on the Audubon California website titled "Securing a Home for Birds at the Salton Sea" at: [ca.audubon.org](http://ca.audubon.org)

However, it's not all gloom and doom. After our October program, it was announced that Governor Jerry Brown has approved \$80 million for projects to create habitat and to reduce toxic dust pollution, an asthma risk for California residents, at the Salton Sea.

If you'd like to join Audubon California in thanking Governor Brown for addressing conservation concerns, you can Take Action by sending a pre-written or an original message to Governor Brown.

✓ Take Action at: [action.audubon.org](http://action.audubon.org)



October program speaker, Andrea Jones, provided a detailed history of the Salton Sea and past efforts to restore it, along with a new vision for the Salton Sea, one beneficial to both birds and people, Maren Smith photo

## Bluebirds Thank Clif Bar, John Muir Land Trust, and V-O-Cal

As luck would have it, good fortune landed in our nest of possibilities! This summer, Clif Bar made the John Muir Land Trust (JMLT) the recipient of their annual employee volunteer day. JMLT's Development and Communications Manager, Krista Jordan, was interested in constructing nesting boxes, so she contacted Maren Smith, who then contacted me.

Krista and her JMLT colleagues agreed that installing nest box trails would complement the oak woodlands at JMLT's permanently protected, 702-acre Fernandez Ranch in Martinez because Western Bluebirds, as well as other secondary-cavity nesters, live there. JMLT's Jay Dean, Marketing Director (aka wood craftsman extraordinaire), cut and assembled 150 nest box kits following a plan approved by the North American Bluebird Society.

On June 8, 2016, the Clif Bar organization showed up at Fernandez Ranch with nearly 400 employee volunteers. Then,



Volunteers for Outdoor California (V-O-Cal), divided everyone into work parties. The nest box crew consisted of about 50 people. Jay Dean, along with V-O-Cal Executive Director, Cathy Moyer, and members of her

wonderful organization, coordinated the entire project, lining



*Clif Bar volunteers (L and above) assembled 150 nesting boxes for the California Bluebird Recovery Program in one generous day of volunteering, Larry Rosa photos*

up long tables with power tools, hammers, the nest box kits, and hardware cloth to make predator guards. The team worked nonstop all day, except for a lunch break, and completed the nest boxes for the birds.

The final step will be to create the trails. Installing a nest box trail would be a wonderful Eagle Scout project—please send interested Scouts our way!

A big thank you and a rainbow of bluebird happiness to Clif Bar, John Muir Land Trust, and V-O-Cal for giving CBRP this priceless gift, and to Maren for connecting us. Bluebird Blessings! ~Georgette Howington, State Assistant Program Director California Bluebird Recovery Program; For more information: [ghbirdscape@gmail.com](mailto:ghbirdscape@gmail.com)

## Community Events

### ► Owl Photo Exhibit, October 5-December 31, Lindsay Wildlife Experience

Paul Bannick will exhibit 25 stunning photos of owls from his new book *Owl* (see page 1). In addition, on Thursday, November 3, from 2-4 PM, Bannick will lead a gallery walk through his exhibit and answer questions about photo techniques and owl habitat conservation. It is free to members (\$10 non-members). **Pre-registration is required at: [lindsaywildlife.org](http://lindsaywildlife.org)**

### ► Paul Bannick Photography Courses and Lecture, November 3-5, Lindsay Wildlife Experience

Looking for a hands-on, in-the-field, or lecture format to hone your photography skills? Bring your own camera and register for one of three courses taught by photographer and author, Paul Bannick: Friday, November 4 from 9-11 AM, or 12-2 PM, or Saturday, November 5 from 9-11 AM (\$30 member/\$45 non-member). Photograph the Lindsay Ambassador animals and birds outdoors to create compelling images. Or, participate in an indoor lecture on Friday, November 4 from 3-5 PM (\$20 member/\$35 non-member) to learn tips for becoming a better photographer. **For information and to register: [lindsaywildlife.org](http://lindsaywildlife.org)**

### ► Sandhill Crane Festival, Lodi, November 4-6, 2016

The Lodi Sandhill Crane Associations invites you to celebrate the return of the magnificent cranes and enjoy wildlife tours, workshops and presentations, live animal displays, family activities, an art show, and an exhibit hall with vendors and displays. **For information: [www.cranefestival.com](http://www.cranefestival.com), [info@cranefestival.com](mailto:info@cranefestival.com), or (800) 581-6150.**

### ► California Swan Festival, Marysville, November 11-13, 2016

The only festival of its kind on the West Coast, the three-day Swan Festival is timed to honor the return of the Tundra Swans to their winter home. Arriving in the tens of thousands and in close-knit family groups, they make a spectacular show for bird watchers and photographers. Celebrate the abundant local and migratory wildfowl of the Northern Sacramento Valley and enjoy workshops, presentations, over 35 guided tours, educational programs, and the free Junior Naturalist program, led by a team of Shady Creek Outdoor School naturalists. Children of all ages will enjoy hands-on learning experiences sure to inspire the budding birdwatcher. Activities will include crafts, games, and live animal presentations. **For information: [www.caswanfestival.com](http://www.caswanfestival.com).**



# Where the Birds Know Their Names: Five Days at the Edge of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

By Susan Culliney

As the Policy Associate for Audubon Alaska, I recently spent five days in remote Arctic Village at the biannual Gwich'in Gathering. The Gwich'in are a First Nation of aboriginal people from the Yukon River flats of northwestern Alaska, and in Canada's Yukon and Northwest territories. They gather every other year to maintain ties with family and friends; to keep their traditional food, dance, and language alive and thriving; and to tend to the governance and resolutions of their Native nation.



In 1988, the Gwich'in Nation resolved to stand strong against drilling in the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. The coastal plain is the calving grounds for the Porcupine Caribou Herd, which the Gwich'in rely on for their food security and cultural identity. Drilling activities in the coastal plain would interrupt caribou migration patterns, as well as impact denning polar bears and thousands of migratory birds. I attended this year's gathering, initially to represent Audubon's support in this important campaign; but I also came away with an enriched understanding of the ties that bind these people so intimately to their birds, wildlife, and landscape.

Arctic Village, called Vashraii Koo by the people who live there, is nestled in the embrace of the foothills of the Brooks Range. The village is hugged on three sides by the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, which spreads to the north, west, and east, in huge swaths of wilderness, dramatic terrain, and lakes and streams dotted with waterbirds. A few houses and buildings congregate here on high ground, surrounded by the tundra and the East Fork of the Chandalar River.

Is the land empty or is it full? It depends on how you value the resounding silence, the unapologetic open space, and the timeless wildlife dramas

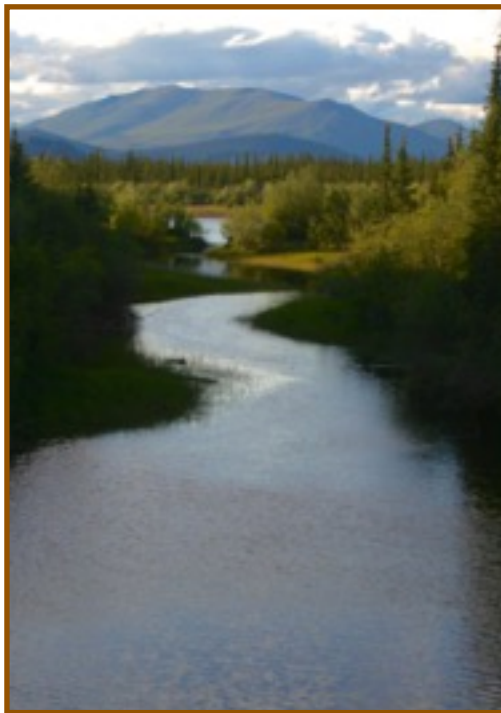
that play out against a beautiful backdrop of unrestrained freedom. Though the land appears motionless, caribou move in giant patterns across the tundra. Though the land appears quiet, a White-crowned Sparrow "chip!" marks



the ebb and flow of the epic bird migrations that pour in and out of the Arctic, already beginning to trickle out as the summer quickly draws to a close. The Refuge is life. The Refuge is connections. This is ever more true for the people who live within this remarkable landscape.

My journey started with an early morning taxi to the Anchorage airport, where I purchased coffee and a paperback in the shops, and boarded an average commercial airline. Upon landing in Fairbanks, my trip took a distinct turn toward something more rugged and exhilarating. At the tiny airline office that services much of interior Alaska, I was weighed along with my luggage; pilots called out the first names of passengers on their flight; the plane seats may be removed or added depending on the ratio of humans to cargo; and the safety briefing went lightning fast, while differing markedly from the one we have all long since memorized and regularly tune out on most airlines. What did he say about the fire extinguisher? And was there something about a ladder? At least I gathered that we should exit out the back in case of emergency. I had a clear view of the cockpit dials and instruments, and watched the radar map depict the increasingly rough terrain below.

As Fairbanks quickly fell away below us, the lines on the landscape changed. Straight lines, drawn by roads and infrastructure, gave way to organic lines, drawn by the elements and animals: the claw marks of melting ice and snow; the soft touch of wildlife trails; rivers painted the landscape with strokes of genius. A passenger pointed out white dots on blue ponds: Tundra Swans, staging for their remarkable trans-continental migration. The pilot pointed to four-legged shapes on the ridgeline: caribou, auspiciously drawing near our destination, in time for the village gathering. As we touched down, a fleet of ATVs awaited to ferry the new arrivals the half mile to the community center. (Alaska scenes, Susan Culliney photos) >>>continued on page 10



>>> continued from page 9

As a birder who works for Audubon, I immediately keyed into the birds in the area. Young White-crowned Sparrows with brown heads tumbled around the low tundra brush. Boreal Chickadees bubbled among the short spruce trees. A Pacific Loon called hauntingly in the feeble twilight that persists through the Arctic summer nights. Early one morning I ventured out to find some early birds. It turned out, the mosquitoes are also early risers in the Arctic. I felt a bite on my hand, but resisted lowering my binoculars. I had



Northern Shrike, Megan Sandri sketch

encountered some upset redpolls, and, looking for a predator in the area, I noticed a larger bird, reminiscent of a Gray Jay or Northern Mockingbird. But the species identification wasn't quite clicking for me. As I stared through the magnified glass, this enigmatic bird gave me his profile and I took in the hooked passerine's beak—a young Northern Shrike, a lifer for me!

The redpolls' displeasure suddenly made sense. I could understand the small finches' concern, given the presence of this honorary raptor. I continued to study his fluffy brownish plumage, with the faint hint of markings around his eyes that would darken into a robber's mask upon adulthood.

With my obvious interest in the local birdlife, I quickly struck up conversations with the people who live with these birds all summer. I learned that the Gwich'in have recently compiled a Gwich'in language bird book, complete with descriptions of bird songs. English speakers know that Barred Owls are curious about "who cooks for whom," and Song Sparrows make requests of "maids and tea kettles." But the Arctic Refuge birds around the village speak Gwich'in. The Fox Sparrow soothes troubled hearts by singing "don't worry my friend, it will be okay" and the White-crowned Sparrow appeals to the local Gwich'in to "come pray in church on Sundays."

We truly are all connected to each other by the birds that we often think of as "ours." The same sparrows, beloved in backyards and at bird feeders in the Lower 48 during winter, are also loved and named by local people in the long Arctic summer days. The next time you see a White-crowned Sparrow, think



White-crowned Sparrow, Jean Halford photo

of a person in the high Arctic singing out a phrase in Gwich'in that, while you may not understand the language, you would instantly identify the melody as the sparrow's song. If a Northern Shrike appears in your neighborhood, think about how it may have come from Arctic Village, at the edge of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, where the caribou roam and where even the mosquitoes can't keep a visiting birder from being interested in the abundant bird life that thrives in this special place.

And realize, too, that the people who care for "your" birds all summer rely on wild places such as the coastal plain of the Arctic Refuge for their food security and cultural identity. Arctic bird songs, translated into any language, collectively tell us that now is the time to permanently set aside the coastal plain of the Arctic Refuge from oil and gas development, once and for all, forever protected.

**Susan Culliney is the Policy Associate for Audubon Alaska. Susan spent her early career as a bird biologist, banding raptors in California and tracking honeycreepers in Hawaii. She now uses her science and legal training to work on public policy and land management issues in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, western Alaska, the Arctic Ocean, and the Tongass National Forest in SE Alaska.**

### ✓ Take Action

Oil and gas interests continue to press for driving on the coastal plain of the Arctic Refuge. Ask your U.S. Representatives and Senators to support the Arctic Refuge Wilderness bills pending in Congress (HR 239/S 2341). This legislation would permanently protect the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge as wilderness, in recognition of its extraordinary natural values and for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans. **Take Action now at: [www.AudubonAction.org](http://www.AudubonAction.org)**

### Eagle Scout Project Helps Owls

Jacob Lizano (*in the center of the photo below, Cynthia Lizano photo*) an Eagle Scout candidate from Troop 23 said, "I am happy to announce that my Eagle Scout project, building barn owl boxes, was a huge success. I have made eight owl boxes with the input and advice of Brian Murphy, MDAS Volunteer Coordinator, and they are complete and ready for drop off." The boxes will be sold at Wild Birds Unlimited in Pleasant Hill to raise money for Native Bird Connections. Jacob added, "This was such a fun project, a great learning experience for all involved."



## Who's Back For Fall?

Fall is here and we're beginning to see birds we missed over the summer including Lesser and American Goldfinches. Some look sleek and spry, while others are ragged. Young fledglings are establishing their territories and older birds are molting over a period of days to several weeks. While molting, birds need extra protein and energy to stay warm and develop new feathers. Keep feeders clean and full of nutrient-rich foods like Nyjer, nuts, suet, Bark Butter, and mealworms.

White and Golden-crowned Sparrows have also returned en masse; we may see an irruption year. Other ground feeders, like juncos, will arrive along with flocks of Mourning and Eurasian Collared-Doves. Millet and safflower seeds are their favorites.

Yellow-rumped and Townsend's Warblers, seeking plentiful feeders, have been sighted. They will be followed by Northern Flickers, so you should see more activity at your suet, Bark Butter, and woodpecker feeders.

Caching birds—chickadees, titmice, and nuthatches—will look to replace dried-up natural food supplies. They are attracted to seed blends with nuts, sunflower, and safflower. Watch them grab seeds, fly off, return, and repeat several times a day. They store food in holes, under leaves, in tree bark and even under shingles. Amazing memories allow them to find hundreds of seeds and nuts they've stored. Scrub-Jays also cache food, storing nuts in the shell. Check your roof gutters before the winter rains—you may find stashed peanuts there.



Migratory Rufous and Allen's Hummingbirds are stopping by favorite nectar feeders on their 2500-mile journey south. Clean and refresh nectar in feeders about every three days.

Discard seed over three months old or more than two weeks in the feeder. Our help will ensure that the birds will remain healthy as they migrate or prepare for winter. ~Mike Eliot, WBU

## 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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ADVISORY COMMITTEES			
Webmaster:	Dal Leite	.....updates@diabloaudubon.org	
Observations Editor:	Maury Stern	.....mbstern2@yahoo.com..	(925) 284-5980
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The MDAS Board meets at 645 PM at WBU on the second Thursday except for July and August.



Mount Diablo Audubon Society thanks our Business Partners:  
**AlphaGraphics, Walnut Creek**  
**Galaxy Press, Concord**  
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**Rakestraw Books, Danville**  
**Wild Birds Unlimited, Pleasant Hill**

The Mount Diablo Audubon Society meets at 7 PM the first Thursday of each month except in 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  "Go Green" email  US Mail

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Great-horned Owl, Beth Branthaver photo



*"I think the most important quality in a birdwatcher is a willingness to stand quietly and see what comes. Our everyday lives obscure a truth about existence—that at the heart of everything there lies a stillness and a light." ~Lynn Thomson, Birding With Yeats: A Memoir*

**October Meeting Update**  
For Birding Information, State Senator Steve Glazer (above center), with MDAS President Jimm Edgar (L), and MDAS VP Paul Schorr (R), answered questions and provided an overview of the legislative year with an emphasis on the outcome of conservation bills of interest to Audubon; Above R: Andrea Jones, Director of Bird Conservation for Audubon California, presented a program on the Salton Sea including current efforts to preserve this Important Bird Area (see more on page 7); R: Ariana Rickard, MDAS Program Chair, brought her son Nico to his first MDAS meeting, Maren Smith photos

