



the Quail

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

Volume 62, Number 4

December 2016-January 2017

December Program: The Big Year, Napa Style ♦ Wendy Schackwitz

Inspired by books like *The Big Year* and *Kingbird Highway*, Napa residents, Mike and Wendy Schackwitz, attempted their own Big Year in 2015. Their efforts took them from San Diego to New Brunswick, from the Florida Keys to Nome, Alaska, and almost everywhere in between. Wendy will talk about the triumphs, trials, and tribulations of doing a Big Year, and what they learned along the way.

Wendy Schackwitz is President of Napa-Solano Audubon, a scientist at the Joint Genome Institute, and an avid birder with more than 700 birds on her life list. Dr. Schackwitz received her BS in Biology from Oregon State University and PhD in Genetics from the University of Washington. She has worked for the last 12 years as a scientist at the Joint Genome Institute/Lawrence Berkeley National Lab in Walnut Creek where she leads a group that studies the genetics of organisms important for bio-fuel production.

For more information about the birds seen (and not seen) including an "Academy Awards" list of birds (Most Mundane, Most Painful Miss, Most Adorable) along with stunning photos from the Schackwitz's Big Year, go to their cleverly titled blog "Birds See'd" at: birdseedblog.blogspot.com

Center top: Wendy and Mike Schackwitz;
center bottom: Northern Hawk Owl; top R:
Chiracahua, NM scenery; bottom R:
Common Parakeet, photos Wendy and
Mike Schackwitz



Meeting Schedule

The next meeting of the Mount Diablo Audubon Society will be **Thursday, December 1** 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
- 800 PM Program: **The Big Year, Napa Style ♦ Wendy Schackwitz**

NEXT MONTH'S PROGRAM:

- Thursday, January 5, 2017
- Citizen Scientist ♦ Mary Ellen Hannibal (see page 3 for details)
- LOOKING AHEAD:** Thursday, February 2, 2017, Jill Hedgecock ♦ Scottish Birds and Falconry

Birding Information 7 PM

Maury Stern will discuss the newest changes in the AOU list. He will explain the reasons for the changes, the process involved, and a bit of DNA science.

DEDICATED TO HABITAT CONSERVATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

With the election season behind us and the holiday season ahead of us, we have plenty of field trips planned to observe the migrating birds flocking in across the Pacific Flyway. See pages 5 and 6 for complete field trip information.

In addition, our chapter will participate in two Christmas Bird Counts (CBC) on Wednesday, December 14 in East Contra Costa County, and on Saturday, December 17 for Central Contra Costa County. See page 5 for more details.

We are lucky to have Elizabeth Leite helping out as the new CBC Coordinator, and co-compiler with me, as well as serving as the Coordinator of Citizen Science Projects. According to Elizabeth, the CBC may have been the first-ever citizen science project, bringing together birders across our nation whose purpose is to identify species and count all the birds that are seen, data which is then used by researchers to examine trends and promote conservation.

Elizabeth has volunteered to monitor harbor seals throughout the pupping season at Pt. Reyes National Seashore and has been a volunteer docent at the Marine

Mammal Center in the Marin Headlands. She is also an avid gardener, hiker, and birder. Thank you Elizabeth!

We also welcome our new Membership Chair, Virginia Hamrick. She worked for Bayer Pharma in Berkeley for 32 years as a Research Scientist and after retiring in 2002, moved from Lake Merritt in Oakland to Rossmoor in Walnut Creek where she is the Membership Chair for the Rossmoor Nature Association. She enjoys birds and painting watercolors. We thank Virginia for stepping up and to Pat Schneider, retiring Chair, for her service to MDAS.

There are two other Board positions for which we are seeking new volunteers. Diane Malucelli would like to train someone to take over as Sales Manager in September of 2017. (see page 9 for details). And, I am retiring in June 2017 as well. I've enjoyed serving as your President for many years. Our chapter has over 400 family memberships and we have a strong Board of Directors to support you. I'd love to talk to you about the duties of this rewarding position and how I could support you in this transition.

Good News For the California Gnatcatcher

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife's decision to turn down an attempt by southern California developers to remove the Coastal California Gnatcatcher from the protections of the Endangered Species Act was a clear win for science over profits. The Service ruled in August that the bird is a unique subspecies and warrants its listing as threatened.

"The fact that the California Gnatcatcher is a distinct subspecies worthy of protection was established in 1993, and there was nothing in this latest petition that created doubt on that determination," said Brigid McCormack, executive director of Audubon California. www.ca.audubon.org

The delisting petition relied on recent research claiming that the California Gnatcatcher is not a genetically unique subspecies, but the Service's staff of avian experts noted that the referenced study did not analyze enough genes to make that determination and that it downplayed plumage variation among the three subspecies that can only be explained by



California Gnatcatcher, Google Images photo

genetic differences.

Since the 1980s, at least, experts have considered the California Gnatcatcher rare. A survey conducted at the time of its listing in 1993 estimated the number of California Gnatcatcher pairs in the Golden State at about 2,500. The coastal sage scrub habitat upon which the bird depends has been in rapid decline for decades, due both to development and habitat conversion caused by repeated, intense fires.

Coastal sage scrub habitat is in high demand for development, as it tends to occur in low-lying areas close to the ocean. Listing of this species has led to the protection of coastal sage scrub habitat and many other associated species in southern California.

"The Service's decision isn't just a triumph for the California Gnatcatcher, but a win for all species that rely upon coastal sage scrub for survival," added McCormack. "Now future generations of Californians will have an opportunity to hear this bird's whimsical call."
~Audubon California

And, *that's* good news for the California Gnatcatcher and other coastal sage scrub species!

Welcome New and Rejoining Members

Martha Buxton	Danville
Barbara Messmore	Walnut Creek
Douglas Smith	Orinda
Edward Soares	Walnut Creek

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

What bird's name is derived from the Arabic *al-qudus* [bucket] or *al-gattas* [diver] which morphed into the

Spanish *alcatraz* and are also called the Gooney Bird by sailors?

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

AAABBCDEFKLLOORSST

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 February 2017 Quail will be January 9, 2017.**

January Program 7 PM: Citizen Scientist ♦ Mary Ellen Hannibal

Author Mary Ellen Hannibal will discuss her book, *Citizen Scientist: Searching for Heroes and Hope in an Age of Extinction*. A science writer mourning the recent loss of her father, Hannibal finds solace in citizen science, with its promise to slow and reverse another kind of loss she's been deeply grappling with—the unprecedented mass extinction of species.

Here is a wide-ranging adventure in becoming a citizen scientist by an award-winning writer and environmental thought leader. As Mary Ellen Hannibal wades into tide pools, follows hawks, and scours mountains to collect data on threatened species, she discovers the power of a heroic cast of volunteers and the makings of what may be our last, best hope in slowing an unprecedented mass extinction.

Digging deeply, Hannibal traces today's tech-enabled citizen science movement to its roots: the centuries-long tradition of amateur observation by writers and naturalists. Prompted by her novelist father's sudden death, she also examines her own past and



discovers a family legacy of looking closely at the world. With unbending zeal for protecting the planet, she then turns her gaze to the wealth of species left to fight for.

Combining original reporting, meticulous research, and memoir in impassioned prose, *Citizen Scientist* is a literary event, a blueprint for action, and the story of how one woman rescued herself from an odyssey of loss with a new kind of science.

Mary Ellen Hannibal is an award-winning writer and sought-after speaker with a gift for connecting the scientific community to the public. Her work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Esquire*, and *Elle*, among many other

outlets. She is an Alicia Patterson Foundation Fellow, a Stanford Media Fellow, and a recipient of the National Association of Science Writers' Science and Society Award.

Hannibal lives in San Francisco and has worked with the Friends of the Urban Forest as well as the San Francisco Botanical Gardens and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

After the program, books will be for sale by our program co-sponsor, Rakestraw Books. Mary Ellen will sign books at the refreshment break. www.maryellenhannibal.com

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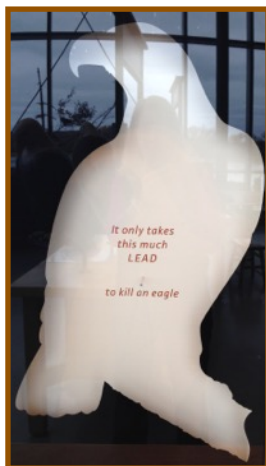
630 PM Doors open
700 PM Program: Citizen Scientist
♦ Mary Ellen Hannibal
800 PM Book sales and signing, refreshments, and raffle
820 PM Birding Information
845 PM Announcements
NEXT MONTH'S PROGRAM:
 February 2, 2017, Jill Hedgecock ♦
 Scottish Birds and Falconry

Birding Information 8:20 PM

Co-compilers Jimm Edgar and Elizabeth Leite will present the annual update of the 2016 Central and East Contra Costa County MDAS Christmas Bird Counts.

National Eagle Center

While visiting my mother in Iowa, we took a road trip to Wabasha, Minnesota and were thrilled by close encounters with four Bald and one Golden Eagle, all in the care of the Center due to various injuries. As wild eagles along the Mississippi River outside flew by the enclosure window inside, raucous eagle warning shrieks resounded throughout the two open stories full of fascinating displays and live demonstrations. Soon, over 400 migrating eagles will congregate to fish in the Mississippi. ~Maren Smith



For information:
nationaleaglecenter.org



Above: Virginia Stafford at the National Eagle Center, and L: captive eagles and display, Maren Smith photo

Trip Reports

Abbott's Lagoon, October 15: The time after or between storms can produce some of the most exciting birding, but it can also be trying and frustrating. The day of our trip was predicted to bring 40 mph winds

and rain, but was actually rain-free until late in the day. Ten birders made the trek to Abbott's Lagoon in winds that were not as strong as predicted, but still too strong for the birds to be truly active. The center of the outer lagoon showed white caps and we had heavy crashing surf at the beach, but no spray because the wind was blowing offshore. Some of the water actually washed over the top of the beach, but soaked into the sand before reaching the lagoon. No Snowy Plovers were to be found on the beach, but we did have a number of Brown Pelicans, gulls, Ring-necked Ducks and lots of Coots in the lagoon. It was too windy to eat, so we walked back to the footbridge between the inner and outer lagoons for our lunch. River otters swam under the bridge just as we were ready to walk back to the cars. Because it was only 1230 PM, the group decided to drive to the Fish Docks at Outer Point Reyes and look for some of the previously-reported rarities. We found many other birders having just seen or still looking for a Yellow-green Vireo. While our group agreed that we saw the bird considered by many to be the vireo, because of the lighting and height in the tree, sadly, none of us was able to say that the vireo we saw was indeed a Yellow-green Vireo. As we walked back to the cars and in another set of trees, we did find a beautifully handsome, male Black-throated Blue Warbler. On this glorious and invigorating day, we had a total of 46 bird species. ~Hugh Harvey

Berkeley-Emeryville Shoreline, October 19: Twenty-one members and guests enjoyed a cool morning birding along the Emeryville and Berkeley shorelines. We were pleased to have a visiting couple from Connecticut join us. Many of the wintering birds had not arrived yet, so numbers were down and we had to work hard to find the few birds we did see. However, 51 species were seen during the trip.

The best bird was probably the Pigeon Guillemot seen out in the Bay at the Berkeley Marina. There was a nice assortment of shorebirds behind the Sea Breeze Café at University Avenue in Berkeley including Willet, Whimbrel, Marbled Godwit, and Least and Western Sandpipers. ~Eugenia Larson

Outer Point Reyes, October 29: Wind, rain, and fog didn't stop a group of about 20 birders from exploring Outer Point Reyes (OP). One of the main reasons to explore the OP, one of Northern California's best known vagrant traps, is to look for migratory birds, particularly vagrants who are often easier to find along the coast during the fall. Our first stop was the Lighthouse where parking was plentiful, but birds were scarce. It was quiet and windy, but foggy enough that you couldn't see the coastline or the Pacific Ocean below. Not far into our walk we started hearing a few White-crowned Sparrows and then, just as we passed the Park Service's residence, we were suddenly treated to the sweet and

melodious song of a Fox Sparrow who came into view just long enough for most of us to see it.

To take shelter from the elements, we headed towards the Fish Docks on the other side of the peninsula. Also, this was the place where birders had seen a Black-throated Blue Warbler (BTBW) for over a week. Despite the scattered rain showers, we still had optimal "vagrant weather" with light winds from the southeast and 100% overcast skies. Just as we arrived at the Fish Docks, we spotted a group of birders and we asked if they were looking for the BTBW. A young birder named Jonah replied, "Yes, come over here, I'm on it right now!" We rushed towards him and before we knew it we were looking at two small birds hopping up and down in the Monterey cypresses—one was a Ruby-crowned Kinglet, and one was a female Black-throated Blue Warbler, a vagrant warbler from the East Coast that is seen at the OP every fall. Just like the kinglet, she was busy gleaning invertebrates from the foliage and spent a few minutes right above the group before she flew away. We were delighted by such a close



Above: Black Turnstones, and below: young elephant seals, Juan-Carlos Solis photos

encounter, definitely the highlight of the trip. But, the outing had other great sightings. We had great views of a Merlin chasing sparrows at Mendoza Ranch, an up-close and personal encounter



with a flock of Black Turnstones who called as they landed on a pier, and eye contact with young northern elephant seals hauled out on the beach. In all, just shy of 60 bird species, including a rare Eastern bird, it was another magical day at the OP. ~Juan-Carlos Solis

Field Trip Schedule

By Hugh Harvey

December 2016 (Call Leader for ?s or rain cancellations)

03 Saturday Sacramento and Colusa NWRs
08 Thursday Niles Canyon Area
14 Wednesday CBC-East County
17 Saturday CBC-Central County

January 2017

07 Saturday Putah Creek
12 Thursday Lake Merritt/Arrowhead Marsh-HT
18 Wednesday East Contra Costa County
28 Saturday Las Gallinas/Rush Ck/S'berger Park

February 2017

04 Saturday Thornton Area/Cosumnes Preserve
09 Thursday Grizzly Island
18-19 Sat./Sunday Los Banos/Panoche Valley
22 Wednesday Sunol Regional Park
25 Saturday Bodega Bay

2 Saturday, December 3

Sacramento and Colusa National Wildlife Refuges

Leader: Beth Branthaver (925) 944-1856

Carpool leaves Sun Valley Mall at 7 AM. **OR**, meet the group at 815 AM at the I-5 North Dunnigan rest area. Take I-680 N, cross the Benicia Bridge (toll), merge onto I-80 E at Cordelia.

At Vacaville, merge onto I-505 N, follow for 34 miles, and merge onto I-5 N just south of Dunnigan. Continue past the town to the rest stop. This one-day field trip will include visits to several wonderful wildlife refuges in the Sacramento Valley including the Sacramento and Colusa



Three layers of geese,
Joy Dardin photo

NWRs, but the exact itinerary is to be announced the day of the trip. Collectively, these sanctuaries are home to tens of thousands of wintering ducks, geese, and swans. Bring lunch and a beverage.

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 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: 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.

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

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. The Park and Ride lot is on the left, at the light, one block east of the freeway.

2 Thursday, December 8

Niles Canyon Area

Leader: Jimm Edgar (510) 290-8006

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

Wednesday, December 14 (East County) and Saturday, December 17 (Central County)

117th Annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC)

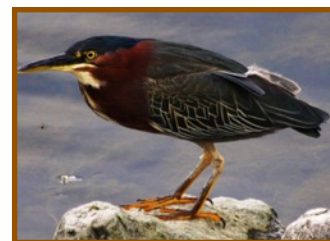
CBC Coordinator: Elizabeth Leite (925) 939-4911

Mark your calendars and plan to participate in this holiday tradition. If you want to participate in either count, please email me at e.leite@sbcglobal.net and I will attempt to pair you with a leader. At the end of each day, a "count-down" dinner will be held where leaders will summarize what the teams have seen during the day. If you'd like to attend the dinner (no cost for participants—MDAS's thanks to you for your time), your leader will provide details.

Our chapter "circles" extend into two distinct geographic areas. We used to complete only a Central County count and then, about fifteen years ago, the East County count was added to reflect our diversity.

MDAS covers unique and varied habitats ranging from the Oak woodlands of Central County to montane on Mt.

Diablo and a riparian piece of the Delta. Each habitat hosts its own species and, accordingly, over the years, wintering songbirds as well as migratory waterfowl and shorebirds have appeared on our lists. We have the good fortune of being able to access some private, privately-managed, and off-



Green Heron at Contra Loma
Reservoir, Maren Smith photo

limits public lands in our counts. Such access is due to the good will that our chapter leaders have established over the years. We can be proud of that.

I'd like to thank all of our dedicated area leaders who have worked to secure access to private land, and to participants who will be out, rain or shine, documenting what birds they see. A special thanks to Ellis Myers for creating a grid to compile our data in the new ornithological order and for helping fine-tune other forms. Finally, I'd like to thank Maury Stern for allowing me to draw on his expertise as CBC compiler for well over two decades on how to run our Christmas counts, and Jimm Edgar who will continue with me as co-compiler.

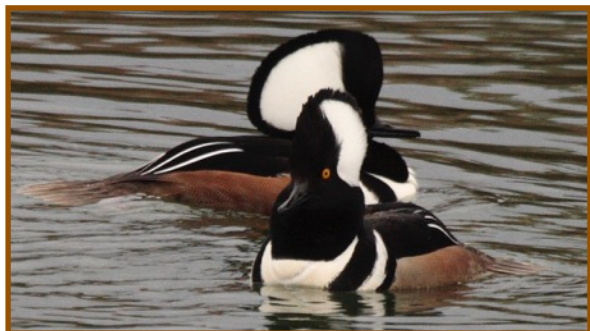
Let's hope for good weather! ~Elizabeth Leite

1 Saturday, January 7

Putah Creek

Leader: Fred Safier (925) 937-2906

Carpool leaves Sun Valley Mall at 8 AM. **OR**, meet at 845 AM at the intersection of Cherry Glen and Pleasants Valley Roads, approximately one mile north of I-80, west of Vacaville. Possible



Hooded Mergansers, Beth Branthaver photo

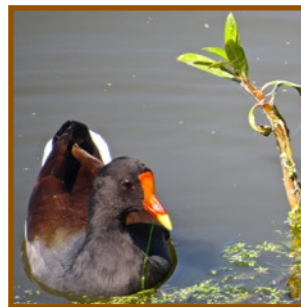
birds we hope to see include Osprey, Phainopepla, Barrow's Goldeneye, and Hooded Merganser. Dress warmly; this is a cold, windy area. Bring lunch and a beverage.

1 Wednesday, January 18

East Contra Costa County

Leader: Paul Schorr (925) 757-5107

Carpool leaves Sun Valley Mall at 815 AM. **OR**, meet at Big Break at 9 AM. From Central Contra Costa, take Highway 4 toward Stockton/Pittsburg. After Antioch, take Exit 30 right toward CA-160/Sacramento/Rio Vista (just past Hillcrest Avenue Exit; do NOT continue straight on Highway 4). Take exit 1-A East 18th/Main Street, turn right at the bottom of the exit onto Main Street, proceed east a little over one mile, then turn left onto Big Break Road. Turn right just past the last houses on the right into Big Break Regional Shoreline/Delta Science Center. We will see wintering birds at Big Break, Iron House Sanitary, and several other spots in the eastern portion of our county. Bring lunch and a beverage.



Common Gallinule, Isaac Aronow photo



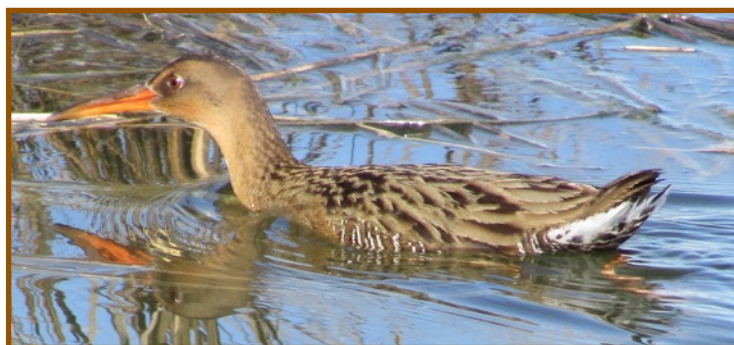
Come birding with us this winter!

1 Thursday, January 12

Lake Merritt and Arrowhead Marsh at High Tide

Leader: Sandy Ritchie (925) 685-8048

Carpool leaves at 8 AM from El Nido Ranch Road. **OR**, meet at 830 AM in the parking lot by Lake Merritt. Take SR 24 to Oakland and I-980, take Grand Avenue exit, and turn left on Grand. Enter park at Children's Fairyland (entry fee), and follow road around to parking lot entrance on right between boathouse and aviary. Birding through the many ducks and gulls, we may find a Tufted



Virginia Rail at Arrowhead Marsh, Maren Smith photo

Duck, a bird seen almost annually. We will then drive to Arrowhead Marsh for the high tide around 11:24 AM; the rising tide should flush out rails. The area is also good for shorebirds and often loons are on the estuary. A visit to Garretson Point will finish our trip. Bring lunch and a beverage.

2 Saturday, January 28

Las Gallinas, Rush Creek, and Shollenberger Park

Leader: Eugenia Larson (925) 806-0644

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



Whimbrel, Jean Halford photo

Follow the road around the hill 0.7 miles until arriving at the Las Gallinas Valley Sanitary District parking lot. Rush Creek Marsh is just north and east of the Atherton Ave. exit from US 101 in Novato. Immediately past the Park and Ride lot on Atherton, turn left onto Binford Rd. and go north to the marsh. Schollenberger Park is in Petaluma, east of US 101. After crossing the Petaluma River take Exit 472B (East 116 Sonoma Napa), turn left at the light, then right on S. McDowell. Look for a half-right onto Cypress Drive, then enter the PRBO parking lot at 3820 Cypress. Park near the picnic tables at the back. Ellis Creek is just south of the PRBO offices. All of these sites are good for wintering waders, shorebirds, waterfowl, and raptors. Bring lunch and a beverage.



Black-footed Albatross ♦ *Phoebastria nigripes*

Black-footed Albatross—known to sailors as the Gooney Bird—is the only one of its family commonly seen off the North American coastline. Primarily a bird of the Hawaiian Islands, where it nests on remote beaches during winter and spring, in its wanderings it is frequently seen from the Bering Sea to as far south as Baja. Although small, as albatrosses go, it has an impressive wingspan of six to seven feet. Long-lived, it may reach an age of 40 years.

This bird's name is derived from the Arabic *al-qudus* [bucket] or *al-gattas* [diver]. This morphed into the Spanish *alcatraz*, which once meant pelican but now means gannet. In 1775, Juan Manuel de Ayala of Spain charted San Francisco



Black-footed Albatross. Note the white ring around the heavy, dark hooked bill, MDAS Young Birder, Michael Pang, photo

Bay and was the first to document the island he noted to be covered in pelicans. He named it La Isla de Los Alcatres, the island of pelicans, better known as Alcatraz today.

Laysan Albatross and Short-tailed Albatross join Black-footed on Mount Diablo Audubon's *Checklist of Birds of Northern California*. The Black-footed Albatross is all dark colored; the other two are black and predominantly white.

Each winter until 2013, a Laysan Albatross spent each winter at Point Arena Cove in Mendocino County. The bird became a favorite of local birders and townsfolk, who gave it

the name Al (or Alice?) B. Tross. Typically Al would arrive in the area in late November and stay for two to three months. Al visited regularly starting the winter of 1994, when first observed by Todd Easterla and Jim Booker.

Black-footed and Laysan Albatrosses share breeding sites as well as certain behavior, such as

features of their mating dance. The birds mate for life. The two species sometimes hybridize. Laysan Albatrosses are more abundant than Black-footed Albatrosses.

The Black-footed Albatrosses rebuild their nest each year, a simple scrape in the sand, at or above the high-tide line in an open or sparsely vegetated area. Both parents build the nest and take turns incubating their single egg. For about three weeks after hatching, one parent broods and guards the nestling while the other forages for food, switching off every day or two. The chick is fed by regurgitation until it fledges, after four to five months.

Black-footed Albatrosses are well adapted for a life at sea; they soar aloft for hours, landing on the water only to rest or feed. Albatrosses have specialized tubular noses (as do petrels, shearwaters, and storm-petrels) that filter salt, allowing the birds to drink seawater and giving them an excellent sense of smell. This keen sense helps the albatross locate its prey over the ocean. Favored foods include flying fish (both eggs and adults), squid, crustaceans; and they often follow ships to feast on discarded fish and fish parts tossed from the ships. Along with its food, albatrosses ingest a lot of floating plastic, a growing hazard for pelagic birds.

~Ellis Myers



Laysan Albatross 50 miles off the Pacific coast of Baja California, Mexico near Isla de Cedros, Juan-Carlos Solis photo

Community Events

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

Paul Bannick, our popular November program speaker, is exhibiting 25 stunning photos of owls from his first book, *The Owl and the Woodpecker* at the Lindsay Wildlife Experience through December. Bannick is also the author of a new book, *Owl: A Year in the Lives of North American Owls*. **For information: lindsaywildlife.org**

► Olympic Peninsula Birdfest 2017, April 7-9, 2017, Sequim, Washington

Looking ahead, the Sequim Audubon Society announces its spring events, the Olympic Birdfest on April 7-9, 2017, preceded by their San Juan Islands Cruise on April 4-6, and followed by a two-day excursion to the Neah Bay area of coastal Washington on April 9-11. The Birdfest will feature guided birding trips, a bird drawing class, a photography workshop, and a gala banquet with featured speaker, Bonnie Block. **For more information and to register: www.olympicbirdfest.org, info@olympicbirdfest.org, or call (360) 691-4076.**

Most of the expected wintering songbirds have returned, but big flocks of geese and ducks are later than in average times.

A juvenile **Greater White-fronted Goose** was at Contra Loma Reservoir 10/20. AL

HH saw a lone **Cackling Goose** with 130 **Canada Geese** on a ball field lawn at Heather Farm 11/3.

On 10/21, 13 **Wood Ducks** were at Hilltop Pond in Richmond. AL

IA saw one male **Ring-necked Duck** at Hilltop Pond on 10/26.

Fourteen **Bufflehead** were in the large pond at Martinez Shoreline 11/4. EL

EL saw a **Wild Turkey** atop a large Valley Oak near her east Lafayette home 10/13.

A **Black-chinned Hummingbird** was at her San Ramon home 10/14. BM

An **Allen's Hummingbird** was seen 10/10 in Lafayette by SW.

A **Sora** was in the weeds around the Heather Farm natural pond 10/22. H&RH

Late-leaving **Caspian Terns** were seen 10/10 near the Concord Naval Weapon Station, AF; 10/21 Frank's Tract, JA; and 10/22, Richmond Harbor, DL.

LK saw a **Red-throated Loon** at Miller-Knox Park 10/12.

A **Common Loon** was seen off Richmond Marina in early and mid-October while sailing. TG

More than 100 **American White Pelicans** were soaring over Contra Loma Reservoir 11/1. PS

The continuing **Western Screech-Owl** was a few hundred feet past the Lafayette entrance of the Lafayette-Moraga Trail. H&RH

A juvenile **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** was at Miller-Knox Park 10/22. DW

A **Red-naped Sapsucker** was at Martinez Shoreline Park 9/30, CD, and possibly the same bird on 11/2. TW

A **Say's Phoebe** was seen 10/14 at Heather Farm by RH, and again 11/1, by TF.

CR saw a very late **Pacific-slope Flycatcher** at Pt. Pinole RP 11/1.

The **Tropical Kingbird**, possibly the same one seen the past five years in a row, returned to Heather Farm in early October, DK. Thirteen additional observers reported seeing the bird. Another **Tropical Kingbird** was seen at Pt. Isabel or Meeker Slough 10/15. IA, SL, CB



Tropical Kingbird at Heather Farm Park, Cassie Tzur photo

The first reported **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** was 9/30 in Kensington. W&MC

An **Orange-crowned Warbler** was feeding at a hummingbird feeder in their Antioch yard 10/10. P&NS

A **Lincoln's Sparrow** was at KB's Lafayette home 10/10.

A **Slate-colored Junco** was at the Antioch home of P&NS 11/4.

A **Western Tanager** was at the Schorr's home 10/11. P&NS

Hooded Orioles were seen 10/10 near Campolindo High School by BP, and 10/29 by IR near the Valle Vista Staging Area.

A **Bullock's Oriole** was seen 10/9 by JC at the Moraga Commons Park.

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.

JA Josh Ackerman, IA Isaac Aronow, KB Kristen Baker, CB Cathy Bleier, W&MC Wen and Minder Cheng, JC Jake Crumbaugh, CD Carla Din, TF Tracy Farrington, AF Andrew Ford, TG Tom Gourley, HH Hugh Harvey, RH Rosita Harvey, H&RH Hugh and Rosita Harvey, LK Logan Kahle, DK Dave Kent, EL Elizabeth Leite, AL Albert Linkoski, SL Steve Lombardi, DL Douglas Long, BM Bonnie Mende, BP Ben Powers, CR Carol Riddell, IR Ines Rodriguez, PS Paul Schorr, P&NS Paul and Nancy Schorr, DW Denise Wight, SW Steven Williams, and TW Teri Wills

Holiday Citizen Science

In December, many MDAS members will be participating in the annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC) by joining a survey team. Alternatively, if you can't go out for the entire day, but live within the specific count circles, you can join the fun by reporting the birds seen at your feeder on the specific days of our MDAS counts—East County on December 14 and Central County on December 17.

For example, if you see a Townsend's Warbler and you live in the Central County count circle, let me know just in case mine doesn't show up. Include the total number of each species seen at one time, the amount of time you spent observing the birds in your backyard, and email me your results at e.leite@sbcglobal.net.

To find out if you live within the two count circles, go to diabloaudubon.org. In the Birding menu, find Christmas Bird Count in the drop-down menu, and the circle links in the article on the CBC.

In addition, you may choose to participate as individuals by searching for birds during Count Week. The East County Count Week runs from December 11-17, and the Central County from December 14-20. You don't need to get exhausted (and possibly drenched) to make a citizen science contribution on the official day. Some uncommon species may not show themselves on Count Day. If you observe them and report them, they can be included as seen during Count Week. ~Elizabeth Leite

eQuail News

A reminder, for those of you who are getting the colorful, high resolution, electronic version of the *Quail*, the eQuail, if you miss holding a paper copy in your hands you can always print out all 12 pages on your home printer, and curl up under a blanket and read it at your leisure. Or, if you find that you're missing out on field trips because you don't have those printed pages, just print the page or pages that you need and stick them on the refrigerator as a reminder (like the Field Trip listings on page 5 and 6).

Also, since I was the only person enjoying the clear, crisp photos in color, we are now sending out the eQuail in the larger "best" file in high resolution. On the website at **diabloaudubon.org**, you will have the option of two files ("good" and "best" quality) while our mobile version will run the "good" smaller file.

Finally, if you are going to be out of town for more than one month, or you are a snowbird and have a temporary forwarding address, please switch your newsletter subscription to the eQuail. The Post Office will only allow a vacation hold for one month, and they will not forward the newsletter to a temporary address due to our use of bulk mail services.

Each month, MDAS incurs postage due on returned *Quail* newsletters. Receiving the eQuail allows you to access the newsletter wherever you are in the world! You can make the change at: **vhamrick8@gmail.com**.

👉 Board Position Needs in 2017

▶ After having served many years as President over two separate time periods, Jimm Edgar is ready to retire. If you'd like more information about how you can help in 2017, talk to Jimm or any MDAS Board member for information.

▶ After eight years in the position, our current Sales Manager, Diane Malucelli, would like to train someone to take over the Sales Manager Board position next year. Ideally, Diane would like to train someone who would be the Sales Manager while enlisting a committee of volunteers to take turns assisting at the sales table during monthly meetings.

She will be available at the general meetings to train interested members with the goal of handing over the Board position next September. For more information, please stop by at a general meeting or contact Diane at: **dmalucelli@att.net**.

😎 Amazon Smiles on MDAS

The holiday season is upon us, and if you're like me, you are probably shopping online. If you shop online at Amazon, please consider registering MDAS as your favorite charity on AmazonSmile. Register at **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.

✓ New MDAS Birding Checklists

We see birds in our yards and parks every day and we attend Chapter field trips throughout the year; but who decides the names of all the birds we see daily? That job is done by the American Ornithologists' Union (AOU) and their Committee on Classification and Nomenclature. This group meets and discusses papers of scientific findings submitted by ornithologists. The Committee then publishes a Supplement to the Checklist, which usually happens in July.

This year, not only were there more changes in the names of our birds, sometimes stemming from splits of a species, but a major change occurred to the order in which the birds are listed. Our MDAS Northern California Daily Field List already differed from the AOU list, but this summer it became even more so. Several members began working on how our new list should look and what names and in what order they should be listed. Ellis Myers, Fred Safier, and Dal Leite started working on this; others advised, but the final word fell to me.

While the California Bird Records Committee lists 664 species as having occurred in our state, which birds might be expected to be seen if one went to the right area at the right time of the year? At certain times, our resident species are joined by migrants. Each season brings different birds. Using the Explore Data feature of eBird, I studied maps of many species trying to determine which birds might more truly be considered "our" birds.

The list we have used for about five years on our field trips had 460 species. The new list has only 429 species--so your favorite rarity may no longer be listed. This does not mean it did or does not occur here—it may just be so rare as to not be considered "regular". The first few pages of our list are greatly changed in their order and will not look like the list you had been using. The order was decided by the AOU. Swifts and hummingbirds now come before plovers and sandpipers. Ellis formatted the list so that some sections have blank spaces at the bottom; should a rarity be found, the name can be added by hand.

The list is in pdf format on our website, available to anyone who wants it. From our MDAS homepage, go to the Birding heading, then slide down and click on Checklists. Our list was produced in two sizes, a full 8 ½ X 11 page, or a smaller "pocket" version to fit inside your field guide. Anyone may print their own copies, but because not all computers work the same, the pdf may need to be downloaded to your computer first to print it correctly.

Major thanks go to Ellis Myers for putting the list into its physical form, to Webmaster Dal Leite, and to Fred Safier, Beth Branthaver, Eugenia Larson, and Jean Richmond for advice on birds to be added or subtracted. ~Hugh Harvey

✓ Northern California Daily Checklist: **diabloaudubon.org/checkLists/MDAS_Norcal_Bird_List_1016.pdf**

✓ Alternative "Pocket" version: **diabloaudubon.org/checkLists/Norcal-Birds-pocket.pdf**

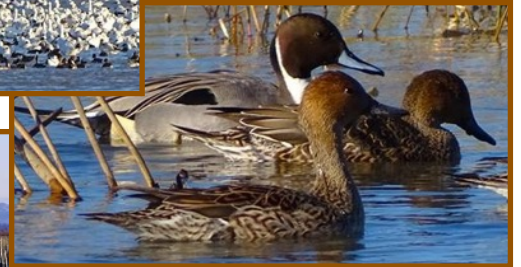
Exploring the Sacramento Valley

Last year, Steve and Joy Dardin took two trips to the Sacramento Valley, one of the most important Pacific Flyway wintering locations for waterfowl in North America. More than 350 species and 3.5 million birds find refuge in the flooded fields built by the Civilian Conservation Corps with funding from the Emergency Conservation Fund Act of 1933, created to protect migratory birds and threatened species while alleviating crop degradation.

In November 2015, the Dardins enjoyed sunrise at the 5,077-acre Colusa National Wildlife Refuge before embarking on the three-mile auto tour. Then, they observed thousands of ducks and geese on the six-mile auto tour and trails in the 10,819-acre Sacramento NWR (see page 5 for this year's MDAS field trip on December 3). The day after Christmas, they explored the Gray Lodge Wildlife Area at the base of Sutter Buttes, the world's smallest mountain range, and were not disappointed. The birds posed nicely for photographs. ~Maren Smith



Top R: Joy and Steve Dardin at Gray Lodge; Top R: female Gadwall; R: White-faced Ibis; Far R: Northern Shrike; Center: assorted ducks and Snow and White-fronted Geese at the Colusa NWR; Below L: Pied-billed Grebe in duckweed; Below R: Northern Pintails; Lower Center: Sutter Buttes; Bottom R: American Bittern, Bottom Center: Joy's favorite dabbling duck, the Northern Shoveler; and Bottom L: Snow Geese, Joy Dardin photos



🏠 Help! Birds Need You!

The seasons are changing, and so are the birds we see. Dark-eyed Juncos, mainly the "Oregon" sub-species with dark hoods, are seen in pairs foraging for millet on the ground. Other millet-loving, ground feeders, the Golden-crowned and White-crowned Sparrows, have also migrated in for the winter.

During winter, suet and other high energy foods become more important. In addition to the regular cast of visitors (chickadees, titmice, jays, and woodpeckers), Bewick's Wrens and Ruby-crowned Kinglets love suet. Yellow-rumped and Townsend's Warblers are back eating bugs, Bark Butter, and suet. Since most of these birds need extra energy to get through cold nights, keep feeders clean and full.

American and Lesser Goldfinches have begun appearing in larger numbers and will increase throughout winter. By January or February, flocks of up to 50 birds may be seen. Both enjoy nyjer (thistle) seed feeders and feeders with sunflower chips and blends.

Soon, we will see large flocks of Cedar Waxwings and American Robins searching for holly and berries that ripen in winter. They will not come to feeders, but will enjoy your bird baths.

In addition to bird feeding, you and your children can become citizen scientists by watching and counting backyard birds.

Cornell Ornithology Lab holds a nationwide survey of backyard bird populations from November to April called **Project FeederWatch**, collecting data from "feederwatchers" like you.

Participation involves counting backyard feeder birds, a fun family project, and everyone can feel proud that they are helping the birds. To register: feederwatch.org/about/how-to-participate/

The cost is \$18, the major source of funding for the project for a year. You will receive a research kit with complete instructions, their "Winter Bird Highlights" report, and the Cornell Lab newsletter. ~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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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:
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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

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: () _____ email: _____

Send check payable to Mt. Diablo Audubon Society with this application to:
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A rare, leucistic Anna's Hummingbird photographed at the UC Santa Cruz Arboretum in October, Ed Chandler photo



"Birding is hunting without killing, preying without punishing, and collecting without clogging your home."

~Mark Obmascik, The Big Year: A Tale of Man, Nature, and Fowl Obsession

It's Sandhill Crane season! Rick Saillard photographed birds at rest, in flight, and performing their spectacular "dance" at the 353-acre Woodbridge Ecological Reserve near Stockton. Listed as a threatened species in 1983, the Stockton delta wetlands provide the largest area of freshwater marsh wintering habitat in the state for cranes and other waterfowl.

For information: www.wildlife.ca.gov/Lands/Places-to-Visit/Woodbridge-ER



Welcome new Hospitality Committee members Laura Osegueda and Christina Lopez! Thank you for volunteering to help MDAS.