

# the Quail

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

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March 2017

## March Program: Plovers in a Changing Environment ♦ Karine Tokatlian

In the South San Francisco Bay, Western Snowy Plovers nest on former salt evaporation ponds. Since 2003, the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory has monitored these cryptic, federally threatened shorebirds. Unfortunately, their population continues to struggle in the South Bay with mounting predator pressure and habitat loss due to tidal marsh restoration. The San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory is investigating the method of using oyster shell habitat enhancement to maximize



breeding success in the wake of their changing environment.

Karine Tokatlian manages the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory's Plover Program and oversees plover-related research and monitoring activities. Karine has a B.S. in Field and Wildlife Biology from California Polytechnic State University and is currently working toward an M.S. in Environmental Studies at San Jose State University. She has nine years of professional experience monitoring protected breeding bird populations along the California coast, including the Western Snowy Plover and California Least Tern. As a California

native, Karine has a profound respect for the conservation of coastal and bay ecosystems and is grateful for the opportunity to nurture her interests through the Bird Observatory efforts. (L: Karine, Savannah Robinson photo; Above: Plover chicks, K. Tokatlian photo)

### Meeting Schedule

The next meeting of the Mount Diablo Audubon Society will be **Thursday, March 2** 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**  
*\*please bring your own coffee mug*

**800 PM Program: Karine**

**Tokatlian ♦ Plovers**

**NEXT MONTH'S PROGRAM:**

Thursday, April 6, **JD Bergeron ♦**

**International Bird Rescue**

### Birding Information 7 PM

Kelly Davidson Chou, the District Biologist for the Mt. View Sanitary District, will provide an update on the McNabney Marsh Nesting Raft Program. She will explain how these artificial floating "islands" enhance nesting habitat for shorebirds in the wetlands, review some of the successes and concerns of the program, and discuss ongoing wetland habitat loss issues in McNabney Marsh.

DEDICATED TO HABITAT CONSERVATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

MDAS produced a "Cats Indoors" information brochure as a means of keeping cats healthy and safe while protecting wildlife and birds. The online brochure, in pdf format, is found in the Conservation menu on the MDAS website: [diabloaudubon.org](http://diabloaudubon.org). Along these lines, the book *Cat Wars*, reviewed below, may be of interest to our members.

**Book Review:** In 1894, a lighthouse keeper named David Lyall arrived on Stephens Island off New Zealand with a cat named Tibbles. In just over a year, the Stephens Island Wren, a rare bird endemic to the island, was rendered extinct. Mounting scientific evidence confirms what many conservationists have suspected for some time—that in the United States alone, free-ranging cats (as many as 150 million) are killing birds and other animals by the billions; and have contributed significantly to at least 63 extinctions worldwide.

Equally alarming are the little-known, but potentially devastating, public health consequences of rabies and parasitic *Toxoplasma* passing from cats to humans at rising rates. *Cat Wars* tells the story of the threats free-ranging cats pose to biodiversity and public health throughout the world,

and sheds new light on the controversies surrounding the management of these exploding cat populations.

*Cat Wars: The Devastating Consequences of a Cuddly Killer*, by Dr. Peter Marra and Chris Santella, traces the historical and cultural ties between humans and cats from early domestication to the current boom in pet ownership, along the way clearly explaining the science of extinction, population modeling, and feline diseases. It charts the developments that have led to our present impasse—from Stan Temple's breakthrough studies on cat predation in Wisconsin to cat-eradication programs underway in Australia today. It describes how a small but vocal minority of cat advocates has campaigned successfully to obstruct any action in much the same way that special interest groups have stymied attempts to curtail smoking and climate change...even though evidence would suggest that allowing cats to roam freely is inhumane for cats.

*Cat Wars* paints a revealing picture of a complex global problem—and proposes solutions that foresee a time when wildlife and humans are no longer vulnerable to the impacts of free-ranging cats. ~*Cat Wars* author, Chris Santella

## Good News For SC Mountains Wildlife

If you've ever driven Highway 17 on your way to the beaches of Santa Cruz, you may have white-knuckled your way along the dangerous, curvy road. Imagine the dangers that wildlife face as they attempt to cross this commuter highway that divides their mountainous habitat.

Thankfully, concerned citizens are intervening to give wildlife a fighting chance to avoid vehicles and stay alive. Caltrans will construct two tunnels, one near the Lexington Reservoir in Santa Clara County, and one near Laurel Curve in Santa Cruz providing a vital link connecting both sides of the Santa Cruz Mountains wilderness adjacent to the highway.

The \$32 million cost of constructing the tunnels will be funded by private, county, and state resources. They will be built in two "hot spots" identified by wildlife ecology consultants, Pathways for Wildlife, based in Los Gatos, who got involved after the death of a cougar was witnessed on southbound Highway 17.

The tunnels will protect not only wildlife, but humans. According to the Western Transportation Institute, each year, nearly 200 Americans are killed in

two million collisions between wildlife and vehicles.

According to Pathways for Wildlife's website, in the past eight years, over 350 animals have been hit by vehicles on Highway 17. Thirteen of the animals hit were mountain lions.

By creating connectivity culverts and using fencing intended to guide the animals towards them, wildlife will be able to navigate the road more easily.

There are other benefits to the tunnels besides reducing accidents. "Isolation of wildlife populations can result in genetic isolation and population fragmentation leading to local species endangerment." ~Maren Smith

And, *that's* good news for wildlife!



Black-necked Stilt, Megan Sandri sketch

## Welcome New and Rejoining Members

Sharon Anduri	Lafayette
Maureen & Bill Clark	Lafayette
Nahide Craig	Lafayette
Diane Kavanagh	Concord
Matthew Tarlach	Walnut Creek

## 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/](http://www.meetup.com/Mount-Diablo-Audubon-Society/)

Q

Which American game bird was successfully introduced to New Zealand?

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

**ICFAILURQNOAILA**

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 April Quail will be March 6.**

This month had fewer observations, but interesting ones.

DWe found two **Eurasian Wigeons** at Miller-Knox RP 1/19.

A few **Blue-winged Teals** were at the Pt. Isabel mudflats 1/11. LF

A male **Tufted Duck** and female **White-winged Scoters** were seen by KS from the Jersey Island shore 1/30. BD, AL, KM saw them two days later.

The continuing **Black Scoter** was at the Richmond Marina. 1/1 CS, EK; and 1/9 by BS.

JR saw a male **Long-tailed Duck** off Bradford Island in the Delta 1/27.

Two **Hooded Mergansers** were at a pond off Hercules Refugio Valley Road 1/10. DWe



Hooded Merganser, Isaac Aronow photo

An **Allen's Hummingbird** was seen at Tilden Nature area 2/3. AKA

AL had a quick look at a **Yellow Rail** in the Martinez Regional Shoreline 1/9. It was not seen again.

A **Wandering Tattler** was at Ferry Point in Pt. Richmond 1/27. DB

Very late **Caspian Terns** continued at Clifton Court Forebay 1/6 and 1/9. MK, BD, and PB saw one at the Valle Vista Staging Area 1/27.

BD saw a **Pacific Loon** at Vincent Park in Richmond 1/31.

The confusing Sapsucker at Martinez Shoreline seen on and off for months has been thoughtfully identified as a **Yellow-bellied and Red-naped hybrid** by Logan Kahle. It was also seen 1/31 by MM.

A second-hand report of a **Pileated Woodpecker** near the Park Avenue entrance to Wildcat Canyon Park was submitted by AK on 1/17.

AN reported an **Olive-sided Flycatcher** 1/5 at Tilden Nature Center.

A well-photographed **Hammond's Flycatcher** was a very rare winter find at the Tilden Nature Center boardwalk area 1/28. CM

At least 15 observers saw the **Tropical Kingbird** in the past month at Heather Farm.

SD saw a **Merlin** in central Richmond 2/1.

A quite early or quite late **Violet-green Swallow** was seen 1/21 at Valle Vista Staging Area 1/21. BL

A very rare winter **Barn Swallow** was seen by C&TW 1/6 at Contra Loma RP.

A **Western Tanager** was feeding at sapsucker holes on Brook and East Streets in Lafayette 1/31. DW

A flock of about 1,500 **Yellow-headed Blackbirds** and some **Tricolored Blackbirds** was seen near Holland Tract 1/29, CM, and seen again 2/1 by P&NS.



Yellow-headed Blackbird, Joy Shonfeld photo

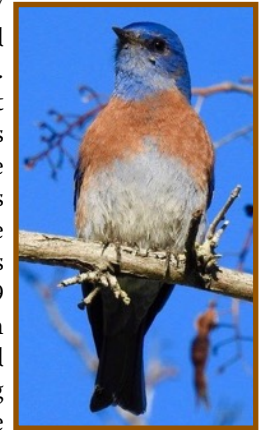
Submit Contra Costa County sightings to [mbstern2@yahoo.com](mailto:mbstern2@yahoo.com), call (925) 284-5980, or send to [EBB\\_sightings@yahoo.com](mailto:EBB_sightings@yahoo.com). If you report sightings to eBird, please also send them to Maury Stern.

PB Peter Banks, DB David Bridges, SD Sheila Dickie, BD Bob Dunn, LF Lee Friedman, MK Marilyn Kinch, AKA Alan Kaplan, AK Alan Krakauer, EK Elizabeth Kroll, AL Albert Linkowski, BL Bob Lewis, MM Mike Marchiano, CM Colin Meusel, KM Kurt Mize, AN Annie Novak, JR Jim Rowoth, BS Ben Sandstrom, P&NS Paul and Nancy Schorr, CS Catherine Spaulding, KS Kirk Swenson, DWe Dave Weber, DW Denise Wight, and C&TW Chris and Teri Wills

## 2016 Monitoring Success

According to *Bluebirds Fly!*, the California Bluebird Recovery Program (CBRP) Newsletter, Western Bluebird populations have shown a slight increase in all areas of measurement in the past year relative to 2015 data.

"Reports were received from 21 counties, 177 monitors and 325 trails. These show that 5793 boxes installed on the reported trails yielded some 19,873 fledges of which 11,969 were Western Bluebirds and the remaining 7904 were distributed among other cavity nesting species."



Monitoring a bluebird box trail



Top R: Male Western Bluebird, Paul Schorr photo; Above: WBB egg and three near-fledglings inside a nesting box on the Moraga Trail, Maren Smith photo

is extremely rewarding. If you would like to get involved as a nesting box monitor, please contact, M D A S Member Georgette Howington, the Contra Costa County Coordinator for the CBRP at: [ghbirdscape@gmail.com](mailto:ghbirdscape@gmail.com).

## Trip Reports

**Lake Merritt/Arrowhead Marsh (High Tide), January 12:** The forecast was for possible rain, but we were fortunate in only having to contend with 50 degree temperatures and a slight breeze.

Our group of eleven participants started at Lake Merritt where several expected species were absent and the number of birds on the water were down. We



*Barrow's and Common Goldeneye, Beth Branthaver photo*

did see Barrow's Goldeneyes and were treated to a pair of Red-breasted Mergansers. We adjourned to Arrowhead Marsh where we experienced an even higher tide than usual. Driving in, we had no luck in finding Burrowing Owls at the artificial mounds built for them,

but took the time to scope the many gulls that had accumulated at the edge of the marsh. The tide was so high that we saw quite a few Ridgway's Rails swimming in the marsh before the final parking area. At the main viewing area, we saw many Ridgway's Rails; Soras were also seen, but they were a little more challenging. We finished at Garretson Point where we saw the three species of teals; Blue-winged Teal numbers seem to be on the rise. In addition to seeing them in the rainwater pond at Garretson Point, we also saw about five on the water at Arrowhead, and a few in the marshy area on the way to the main parking lot. Our final species count of 69, seven fewer than last year, was impacted due to high tides.

~Sandy Ritchie

**Eastern Contra Costa County, January 18:** Eleven members and one guest endured rain and cold, but persevered to find 46 species while birding at Big Break, Marsh Creek Trail, Iron House Sanitary District, and Cypress Grove Park in Oakley. Notable sightings included: Sora, Virginia Rail, Bonaparte's Gull, Wilson's Snipe, White-tailed Kite, Horned Grebe, House Wren, Lincoln's Sparrow, and Common Yellowthroat. However, the highlight for everyone was an American Bittern spotted at Iron House Sanitary, and proved to be a "Year Bird" for most of the group. Additionally, the group experienced a highly unusual encounter along Marsh Creek Trail when an opossum came onto the trail and proceeded to run directly at the group. Then, when it was a short distance away, it turned and ran back at us, then made a second "false charge," but did not approach as closely. Some members could not decide whether to run or "play dead."



*The charging opossum, Eugenia K. Larson photo*

~Paul Schorr

**Las Gallinas/Rush Creek/Shollenberger Park, January 28:** Twenty-one birders enjoyed a sunny day birding beginning at Las Gallinas Water Treatment Plant in San Rafael and finishing up at Shollenberger Park and Ellis Creek in Petaluma. Among the best birds were the large group of Cackling Geese and the single male Eurasian Wigeon found at Las Gallinas. Both Soras and Common Gallinules were out in the open for all to see as well as four active Mute Swans. Fifteen species of ducks were seen, a treat for all. Two Tricolored Blackbirds were among the more numerous Red-winged and there were many vocal Marsh Wrens around each of the ponds. The park adjacent to the treatment plant, where we ate lunch, had the usual



*Sora, Isaac Aronow photo*

Western Bluebirds eating pyracantha berries near the picnic tables. Shollenberger produced the only shorebirds of the day, which included two Killdeer, some Least Sandpipers, a few Dunlin, Dowitchers, and Willets, plus many Black-necked Stilts and American Avocets. A Peregrine Falcon was also perched out in the marsh here. A total of 78 species were seen or heard. ~Eugenia K. Larson

**Thornton Area/Cosumnes Preserve, February 4:** With the threat of rain looming, 12 birders including Karen from Ohlone Audubon, and Barbara from the Atlanta, GA Audubon, traveled to the Central Valley to view the Sand Hill Cranes at the Eisenberg Wildlife Refuge near Lodi. On the way, it was evident how wet this winter has been. Many of the fields were under water and there was a distinct possibility that the Sandhill Cranes would be flooded out. Our first stop was the Sand Hill Crane Refuge where we did see the cranes, although not as many as in years past, and flocks of Greater White-Fronted Geese. We also saw Northern Shovelers, Black-necked Stilts, Green-winged Teal along with the usual Audubon's Warblers, Meadowlarks, an unusual number of Great Egrets, and some Snowy Egrets. The best birds were two highly camouflaged Great Horned Owls nesting in the trees just beyond the viewing area. Afterwards, we went to the Cosumnes River Preserve to bird and have lunch. There were no Sandhill Cranes, due to high water, but we had many other birds to keep us interested. We saw Cinnamon Teal, Snow Geese, many raptors including Red-tailed Hawks and Kestrels, and both Say's and Black Phoebe. The ducks included Mallards, Gadwalls, Northern Shovelers, Pintails and a few stray Buffleheads. Among the waders, we saw Black-Necked Stilts and Long-Billed Dowitchers, with the usual large numbers of Coots. The ponds behind the preserve had large numbers of Western and Least Sandpipers, many Dowitchers, and a few Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs. It was a great trip—we spotted 79(!) species and really lucked out with the weather as the rain held off until the afternoon, and then, only light sprinkles. ~Chick Chickering

# Field Trip Schedule

By Hugh Harvey

## March 2017 (Call Leader for ?s or rain cancellations)

01	Wednesday	Walnut Creek Parks
08	Wednesday	Contra Loma Reservoir
14	Tuesday	McNabney Marsh/Mt. View SD
23	Thursday	Valle Vista
25	Saturday	Tomales Bay State Park
29	Wednesday	Lake Lagunitas

## April 2017

01	Saturday	Garin Regional Park
04	Tuesday	Orinda Connector Trail
13	Thursday	North Briones
15	Saturday	Pine Canyon
20	Thursday	Black Diamond Mines
22	Saturday	Mines Road
25	Tuesday	Del Puerto Canyon
27	Thursday	Mitchell Canyon

### 1 Wednesday, March 1 Walnut Creek Parks

Leader: Hugh Harvey (925) 935-2979

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

### 1 Wednesday, March 8 Contra Loma Reservoir

Leader: Paul Schorr (925) 998-0070

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

### 2 Tuesday, March 14 McNabney Marsh/Mt. View Sanitary District

Leaders: 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. Exit I-680 northbound at Pacheco Blvd, turn right onto Arthur Road and go under the freeway. Arthur Road will turn left. At 0.4 miles turn sharp left onto Mt. View Sanitary's private road. Follow the road through the entry 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 around the ponds we will drive back through the tunnel to the viewing platform on the left to observe more birds and to complete a check list of the birds seen at the ponds. If you wish, bring a lunch and explore Martinez shoreline in the afternoon on your own.

### 2 Thursday, March 23 Valle Vista

Leader: Don Lewis (925) 284-5480

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

### 2 Saturday, March 25 Tomales Bay State Park

Leader: Maury Stern (925) 284-5980

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

### 3 Wednesday, March 29 Lake Lagunitas

Leader: Hugh Harvey (925) 935-2979

This very popular birding trip to Marin passes through varied terrain in the beautiful area of the northern slopes of Mount Tamalpais. Carpool leaves from Sun Valley Mall at 730 AM. **OR**, meet at 9 AM. Cross the San Rafael Bridge to US 101 north. Take the first San Rafael exit, go left on 3<sup>rd</sup> Street. In San Anselmo turn right onto Sir Francis Drake Blvd, continue to Fairfax. Go left on Fairfax Bolinas Road, follow to left turn on Sky Oaks Road and continue to kiosk. Entry fee required (\$8 last year). Drive to parking lot near foot of Lagunitas Dam. After birding the nearby area, we will hike around Lake Lagunitas. We often find Pileated Woodpeckers here. Bring lunch and 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). **Drivers who carpool for our field trips should have proof of liability insurance in their cars.**

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

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

**El Nido Ranch Road carpool location:** Exit SR 24 at St. Stephens Dr., E of Orinda. Park on El Nido.

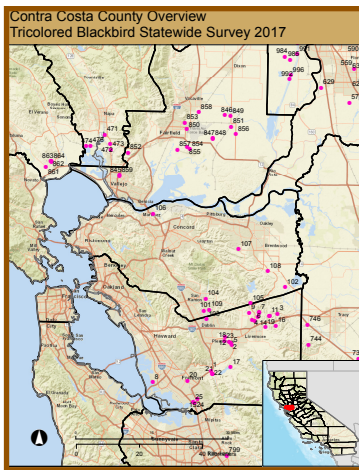
## Wanted! Volunteers for Tricolored Blackbird Statewide Survey

Audubon California is working with researchers at UC Davis and staff at the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to design and implement the 2017 Tricolored Blackbird Statewide Survey. During the survey, volunteers blanket the state to visit known, historic breeding colony locations. The survey is scheduled for April 7-9 with April 21-23 being held as a backup date in case of extreme weather.



As with the past three statewide surveys, volunteers are needed to help with field work to survey the entire range of the species in the state. No prior experience is necessary. Behavior is key to distinguishing between Tricolored Blackbirds and Red-winged Blackbirds. There will be two training sessions in March: one on March 4 in Merced County at San Luis National Wildlife Refuge, and another the following week on March 11 in either Sacramento or Davis. Training materials will also be posted online and linked to the 2017 Statewide Survey page. Volunteers will be estimating the number of birds at occupied sites and noting the absence of birds at other sites.

This year's statewide survey is especially important because the results will be used by the Department of Fish and Wildlife to inform their recommendation to the California Fish and Game Commission on whether to list the Tricolored Blackbird under the California Endangered Species Act. Statewide surveys from 2008, 2011, and 2014 showed a steep population decline.



There are nine locations in Contra Costa County that need coverage. Please contact Ariana Rickard at [arickard@audubon.org](mailto:arickard@audubon.org) if you are interested in volunteering for the Tricolored Blackbird survey and check the "Take Action!" alert on the website at: [www.diabloaudubon.org/index.php](http://www.diabloaudubon.org/index.php). ~Ariana Rickard (CA Audubon photos)

### eQuail News

If you prefer to receive the e-Quail in PDF format, in color, please email your request to: [vhamrick8@gmail.com](mailto:vhamrick8@gmail.com).

### Merlin Bird ID App New and Improved

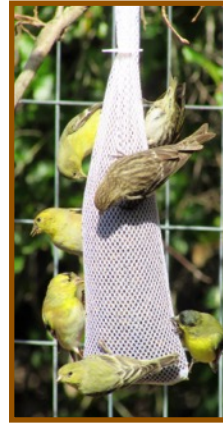
The new version of the Cornell app for your smart phone now analyzes photos taken by your phone. Update now!

the Quail

## Effects of Bird Feeding on the Health of Wild Birds

This past fall I attended a Wild Bird Expo mainly to scope out new bird products, but also to sit in on a few presentations that sounded interesting. Being a store owner I don't get out much and this was almost like a mini-vacation (woohoo, three days in Missouri!).

One of the presentations I attended was about a study done to determine the effects of bird feeding on the health of wild birds. Feeding wild birds is a popular and understudied wildlife conservation issue with limited regulations in the USA. This study was conducted by researchers from the Biology Department of Millikin University in Decatur, Illinois and the Natural Resources Conservation Service, USDA. Study sites were set up at six forested sites in central Illinois. From spring 2011 to spring 2014, they compared three forested sites where supplemental food was provided to three forested sites where no supplemental food was provided. The researchers monitored changes in the individual health of birds and whether or not any changes in bird health occurred after feeders had been removed from sites ten months prior to the study.



Goldfinches feeding on nyjer seed, Maren Smith photo

Overall, the health of birds improved with supplemental feeding, including increased antioxidant levels, reduced stress, and more rapid feather growth. Some species showed improved body condition index scores and a greater immune defense. The difference among sites was not present ten months after feeders were removed which suggests that the impact on health was definitely related to supplemental feeding. Potential negative effects were also found, including a slight increase in infectious disease that could be mitigated by hobbyists engaging in safer bird feeding practices. In general, however, birds that had access to supplemental food were in better physiological condition. This study was, of course, way more detailed than I could address here. Complete information can be found at [www.conphys.oxfordjournals.org](http://www.conphys.oxfordjournals.org) (search for "bird feeding").



A trio of White-breasted Nuthatches at the feeder, Maren Smith photo

I think I'll plan to attend this year's Expo as well. It was fun visiting with other store owners, checking out the latest wild bird products, and the presentations were especially interesting, packed with good information to pass along. Maybe this time I'll take an extra day to sightsee and visit... somewhere in Missouri. ~Joanie Smith, East Bay Nature

March 2017



## California Quail ♦ *Callipepla californica*

This time of year we find California Quail in large groups called coveys, groups that can number up to 200 birds, with the males providing sentry duty throughout the year. In the spring, quail divide into couples—in Contra Costa County, pairs have been found as early as March 3—and males start calling loudly to advertise their territory. In courtship, the male will posture with his wings drooped, tail spread; he bobs his head and may rush the female.

Nests are most often found on the ground under shrubs or logs, but can occasionally be found in shrubs or trees up to ten feet above the ground. The nest consists of a shallow depression lined with leaves and grass. Females lay between 12-16 eggs, and it takes 18-23 days for the eggs to hatch.

Downy young leave the nest shortly after hatching. Both parents tend the young, the female often brooding them when they are small, while the male acts as a sentinel. Fledgling occurs about 10 days after hatching, and at 3-4 weeks, the young are reasonably independent. Quail roost in dense trees or shrubs; chicks stay on the ground for about a month, then join the flock and roost in trees. The average life span of California Quail is only 2-3 years, although the oldest known California Quail was 6 years, 11 months.

The California Quail, designated California's State bird in 1931, is a plump, handsome bird from 10-12 inches in length with a forward curving crest or topknot on its head. The topknot consists of six overlapping plumes, not a single feather. The male has a dark brown cap with a black face,

white stripe on the forehead and circling his throat. Females are muted with gray and brown plumage. Juveniles are similar to females, but are heavily mottled.



*A female California Quail and her chick, Jean Halford photo*

California Quail eat a variety of seeds, vegetation, and insects, and they get help with their digestion from protozoans in their intestines. Chicks acquire the protozoans by pecking at the feces of adults.

As an adaptation to living in arid environments, California Quail can often get by without water, acquiring the moisture they need from succulent vegetation and insects. During times of prolonged heat, they must find drinking water to survive.

A resident from sea level to 6000 feet in elevation, California Quail live in woodland edges, chaparral, coastal scrub, open oak woodland, and stream-side growth. They usually live their entire lives within a 40-acre radius.

They would rather walk on the ground than fly, but can explode into flight at a speed of up to 40 mph, but they cannot endure long flight.

California Quail are quite popular with game hunters. Due to this, they have been introduced worldwide including in Hawaii, Europe, South America, and New Zealand.

According to the *North American Bird Survey*, from 1966-2015 there has been a slight increase in the population. But the species is decreasing in suburban settings, most likely due to habitat destruction (clearing of undergrowth) and predation by domestic cats. ~Jean Halford

### Community Events

#### ► 15th Annual "Wings Over Winter NW Birding Festival", Blaine, WA, March 10-11

Observe a spectacular variety of birds along the northwest coast of the Pacific Flyway on guided wildlife and geology field trips and birding cruises, and enjoy kids' activities, live raptor presentations, photography workshops, and featured speaker, photographer Paul Bannick. **For information:** [www.wingsoverwaterbirdingfestival.com](http://www.wingsoverwaterbirdingfestival.com) or call 360-332-4544

#### ► Mount Diablo SP "Mountain Talk" Speaker Series, Thursday, March 16, 7-830 PM

Heath Bartosh, a rare plant expert, lead botany researcher in the post-2013 Morgan Fire, and co-discoverer of the critically endangered endemic wildflower, Mount Diablo Buckwheat, at Black Diamond Mines, thought to be extinct, will speak about spring wildflowers at the Ygnacio Valley Library, 2661 Oak Grove Road in Walnut Creek. **For information:** [roejenn@aol.com](mailto:roejenn@aol.com)

#### ► Olympic Peninsula "BirdFest", Sequim, WA, April 7-9

Enjoy guided birding trips, boat tours, drawing and photography classes, and featured speaker, noted nature photographer Bonnie Block. In addition: pre-trip, 3D/2N, birding/sightseeing cruise of the San Juan Islands, April 4-6. Or, extend the festival with the Neah Bay post-trip April 9-11. **For information:** [www.olympicbirdfest.org](http://www.olympicbirdfest.org)

#### ► Doc Quack "Bird-A-Thon" on the SF Bay, Saturday, April 22, Sunrise to Sunset

Participate in an exciting, renewing, and rewarding birding adventure while helping to generate funds to support the Wildlife Volunteer Program whose mission is protecting and enhancing California Least Tern and Western Snowy Plover nesting habitat. During this dawn to dusk fund-raising quest, you'll get "nose to beak" with birds at active bird research and restorations sites. Space is limited and registration must be received by April 7. **For information:** [docquack@ebparks.org](mailto:docquack@ebparks.org) or 510-544-2319

## Aldo Leopold

### Conservationist ♦ Ornithologist ♦ Educator

Aldo Leopold is respected as a founding father of wildlife ecology. He was a well-known forester, environmentalist, scientist, and author.

- The Aldo Leopold Foundation and the Aldo Leopold Legacy Center in Baraboo, Wisconsin continue Leopold's quest for the advancement of his concept of conservation.

- The Aldo Leopold Audubon Society in Stevens Point, Wisconsin is named for this distinguished environmentalist.

- The 12,000-acre Leopold-Pine Island IBA (Important Bird Area) was established in 2005. It is a haven for Sandhill Cranes and geese. Declining populations of Red-headed Woodpecker, Bobolink, and Meadowlark are benefiting from management of prairie habitats.

- The 316-square-mile Aldo Leopold Wilderness in the Gila National Forest near Mimbres, New Mexico is a fitting memorial to the man who advocated for wilderness as crucial to our well-being.

Born in Burlington, Iowa, on January 11, 1887, Aldo Leopold was a keen observer of nature and learned woodcraft and hunting from his father.



Aldo Leopold, Library of Congress photo

During his childhood, he spent countless hours on adventures in the prairies, woods, and backwaters of rural Iowa near the Mississippi River taking a special interest in the birds. His boyhood experiences in the natural world, and his skill for both observation and writing, led him to pursue a degree in forestry.

In 1904, he enrolled at the Lawrenceville School, a college preparatory school in New Jersey, in

the Quail

order to enter Yale University. During his year there, he spent most of his time observing wildlife. In 1905, he began his studies at Yale, first at Sheffield Scientific School and then at Yale Forestry School. In 1909 he received his Master's Degree in Forestry.

Leopold then accepted a position as a forest assistant at the Apache National Forest in the Arizona Territory. In 1911, he moved to the Carson National Forest in northern New Mexico as deputy supervisor.

Until the mid-1920s, his experiences in game management in the arid southwest, observing the deleterious effects of grazing on the land—widespread erosion, gullying, and deterioration of stream courses and riparian zones, in contrast to the wetter farmlands of Iowa—led Leopold to formulate his concepts of what he called a "land ethic", thinking of soils, water, plants, and animals as one entity, the "land". In his singular book, *A Sand County Almanac*, (published shortly after his death by his son Luna) Leopold succinctly summed this up: "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."

Leopold further claimed that, "A land ethic, then, reflects the existence of an ecological conscience, and this in turn reflects a conviction of individual responsibility for the health of the land. Health is the capacity of the land for self-renewal. Conservation is our effort to understand and preserve this capacity."

As early as 1924, Leopold had been instrumental in designating three-quarters of a million acres of mountains, rivers, and desert in New Mexico as the Gila Wilderness, the first area in the world to be managed as a wilderness area. His new "ecological ethic" stressed the importance of predators in the balance of nature. It helped in the return of

bears and mountain lions to New Mexico wilderness.

In 1924, he became associate director of the U.S. Forest Products Laboratory in Madison, Wisconsin, and served until 1928. Later, he conducted game surveys of nine Midwestern states.

The mid-1930s were pivotal for Leopold. It was in 1935 that Leopold put his principles into action by purchasing a dilapidated 80-acre farm near Baraboo, Wisconsin, in an area known as the sand counties. The farm had been over-logged, burned by several major fires, and grazed so heavily by cattle that virtually no crop was considered feasible.



The Shack, hub of the Leopold family's great experiment, Library of Congress photo

With his wife Estella and children Starker, Luna, Nina, Carl and Estella, Leopold made the farm into a new kind of laboratory, where he developed methods for restoring health to this woebegone land, eventually transforming the property into a thriving landscape of hardwoods, conifers, and open prairie.

In 1939, the University of Wisconsin appointed him as the chairman of a new Department of Wildlife Management. In 1935, he was a Director of the Audubon Society. In 1937, he was a co-founder of the Wilderness Society, serving as president from 1939-1940.

On April 21, 1948, Leopold was helping fight a grass fire on a neighbor's farm. When he did not return, he was found to have been stricken with a heart attack. Aldo Leopold, the dominant figure in the development of scientific wildlife management and a pioneer in the establishment of wilderness areas on public lands was 61 years old.

March 2017



## Eagle Scout Helps Wood Ducks

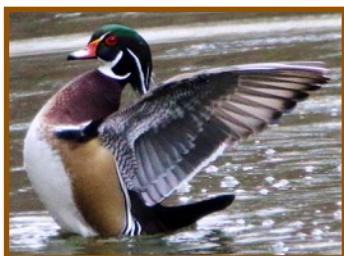
Wood Ducks typically nest in natural tree cavities, but due to development and removal of old trees along creeks, nesting boxes provide a good substitute for lost habitat.

John King, a 14-year-old Boy Scout from Troop 405 in Pleasant Hill (pictured left), chose construction, placement, and monitoring of 12 Wood Duck nesting boxes along Grayson Creek for his Eagle Scout Project. John said, "Wood ducks deserve a second chance. The fact that I'm impacting the environment in such a huge way, it's humbling." He got the idea for his project from his father, an MDAS member and past Treasurer. It is a project that MDAS has successfully implemented in Walnut Creek, so John decided to try it in Pleasant Hill.



Not only did John help build and install the boxes, but he is also monitoring them with the help of his Boy Scout Troop and neighbors. John's project is registered with the California Wood Duck Association, a group that has been working for 26 years to protect Wood Ducks and the habitats in which they live. Without their support, it's unlikely that Wood Ducks would exist in Contra Costa County today.

Spreading awareness is important to John. "My main goal is to inspire others to want to help Wood Ducks," John explains. "I want people to understand the cause they are helping, and show them that their efforts will pay off by bringing Wood Ducks back to Pleasant Hill." In addition, John is applying for the William T. Hornaday Conservation Award. If you'd like to help John with his project costs, go to his "Go Fund Me" page: [www.gofundme.com/john-kings-boy-scout-projects](http://www.gofundme.com/john-kings-boy-scout-projects).



Wood Duck, Rick Saillard photo

Support for John's project came from his family, Troop 405, The California Wood Duck Association, and Brian Murphy, MDAS Volunteer Coordinator.



Brian Murphy and John King with a completed Wood Duck nesting box, King family photos

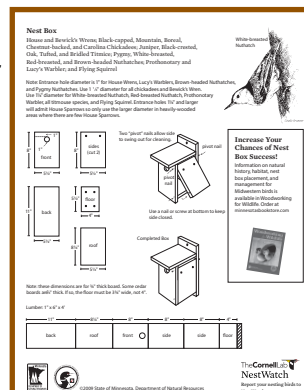
The MDAS "Connecting People With Nature" projects help Eagle Scouts find projects of great value to the community. Brian was impressed with John's planning, leadership and follow-through on this project. John organized his Grayson Creek neighbors to help monitor the boxes, and set up an email notification system with dates for monitoring boxes. ~John King and Brian Murphy

## Consider NestWatching

Participation in NestWatch offers a way to contribute individually to the conservation of local species. NestWatch is a joint project between the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center. According to Cornell's Citizen Science Central, "NestWatch teaches people about bird breeding biology and engages them in collecting and submitting nest records." These records include nest site location, habitat, species, number of eggs, young, and fledglings. Participants find and check active nests every three or four days and report their data online, much like FeederWatch or eBird. The goal of compiling the data is "to better understand and manage the impacts of environmental change on bird populations." The bottom line is whether there is success or failure in nesting attempts.

NestWatch is a perfectly designed citizen science project. Ornithologists can't be everywhere locating nests and examining the outcomes. They need our eyes. To help us help them best, the website [NestWatch.org](http://NestWatch.org) is a compendium of data about nesting. It includes a list of birds across the country that ornithologists are studying. Many of these are in decline and are being followed to determine the cause. A tool shows what birds would be best for you to focus on in your location and habitat. For example, I typed in "California" and "open woodland" and was given a list of twenty birds I might choose to follow, birds as diverse as Great Horned Owl and Bewick's Wren.

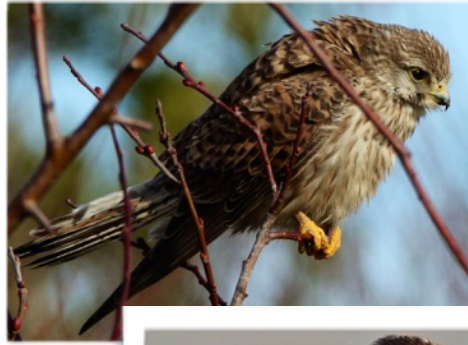
Of particular sophistication is the sub-section "All About Birdhouses" within the "Learn" menu. After determining what your target bird could be, there are plans for building birdhouses and instructions on placement, features, competitors, predators, and other aspects of where and how to put up a successful nest box. If you aren't handy you can use the plans and information to guide a purchase. In addition, you can find information about nesting—the cycle, timing, landscaping for nesting, and other topics. There is also information on how to collect and report your data.



In researching this citizen science project, I learned that the Oak Titmouse is in decline. In 2015, the species had a 27% drop in nesting success and less people reported observing nests. Ornithologists are seeking data to understand the decline in this and other local declining species such as Mourning Dove and Violet-green Swallow.

Since the Oak Titmouse is a regular inhabitant of my backyard and has nested here in past years, I hope to participate in the project this year. The Oak Titmouse nests from mid-March to July.

Take a good look at [NestWatch.org](http://NestWatch.org) and see if this project is right for you, too. ~Elizabeth Leite, Citizen Science Coordinator



MDAS has a pool of incredibly generous and talented photographers, as evidenced by the beautiful photos on this page and throughout the Quail. If you have photographs that you'd like to share, please send them to Maren Smith, Quail Editor, along with the bird id to: [marensmithbkk@yahoo.com](mailto:marensmithbkk@yahoo.com). If you'd like to share them on the MDAS Facebook page, please also send them to Rosalie Howarth at: [barhowarth@msn.com](mailto:barhowarth@msn.com).

On this page: Top L: Burrowing Owl, Walt Duncan photo; Top Center: Eurasian Kestrel (rarity), Humboldt County, Walt Duncan photo; Top R: Emperor Goose (rarity), Paul Schorr photo; Center: Lesser Scaup, Isaac Aronow; Center Far R: Loggerhead Shrike, Joy Shonfeld photo; Center R: Tropical Kingbird, Heather Farm Park, Cassie Tzur photo; Lower R: Great Gray Owl, Humboldt County, Walt Duncan photo; Bottom R: Black Oystercatcher, Emeryville, Pam Lorenz photo.

### Conservation & Legislative Committee Updates

✓“Take Action!” Current Conservation Committee campaigns supported by MDAS can be found on the MDAS website at: [www.diabloaudubon.org/action.php#Valleybirds](http://www.diabloaudubon.org/action.php#Valleybirds). The page includes information about conservation concerns from Central Valley water restoration to preserving the Black-backed Woodpecker habitat. In addition, you can subscribe to occasional “Take Action!” email alerts on the Home page at: [diabloaudubon.org](http://diabloaudubon.org).

✓For information on how to communicate with your U.S. Senators and Congressperson, the specific contact information can be found on the home page, right side at: [diabloaudubon.org](http://diabloaudubon.org).

- Senator Dianne Feinstein: Washington D.C. (202) 224-3841, San Francisco (415) 393-0707, [feinstein.senate.gov](http://feinstein.senate.gov)
- Senator Kamala Harris: Washington D.C. (202) 224-3553, San Francisco (415) 355-9041, [harris.senate.gov](http://harris.senate.gov)
- Rep. Mark DeSaulnier, 11th Congressional District (WC area): Washington D.C. (202) 225-2095, Walnut Creek (925) 933-2660, [desaulnier.house.gov](http://desaulnier.house.gov)

## The "Right" Nesting Box

Nesting season will begin soon for many backyard birds, so now is the time to put up nest boxes. When providing places to nest, consider what's best for both you and the birds. There are lots of crafty boxes out there that are mainly designed for decoration and are not appropriate for cavity nesters.



Depending on the size of the chicks before fledging and number of chicks in a brood, the size of the box can vary substantially. The front opening needs to be high enough to protect young birds, but low enough to allow them to leave when ready to fledge. Some boxes need ladders inside for the chicks to climb. Birds will choose nest boxes with the smallest opening appropriate for their size. The opening should be protected either by thick strong walls or added metal rings to prevent predators from chewing and enlarging the opening. And, there should not be a perch near the opening on which predators can land or cling.

Good nest boxes are thick enough, at least 3/4", to keep heat and cold from penetrating. They provide openings for cross ventilation under the roof while preventing water seepage. There should be roof overhangs and roofs should be slanted to help keep out the elements. There should be drainage holes in the bottom corners smaller than 1/4".

Nest boxes should be removed and cleaned after every nesting season to remove waste, insects, and mites, and then dried before re-hanging. They should be firmly mounted or hung to prevent eggs from rolling around and should be durable enough to last through years of sun and rain. They should not be painted, stained, or pressure-treated with anything that may be toxic to birds. Dark paint or stain can also cause a box to retain heat, which could kill eggs or nestlings.

If you need help with a nesting box, see me or our staff for expert free advice and a Housing Guide. We can show you the scientifically designed features of boxes to meet the needs of particular breeds. ~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.*

### MDAS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

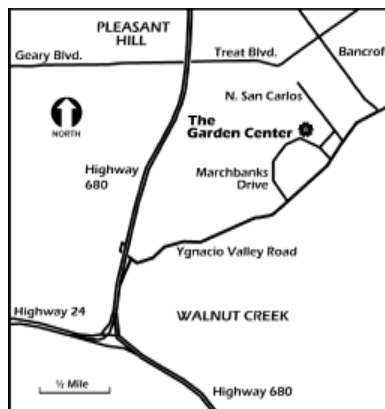
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**The MDAS Board meets at 645 PM at WBU on the second Thursday except for July and August.**



Mount Diablo Audubon Society thanks our Business Partners:  
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**Native Bird Connections**  
**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**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: ( ) \_\_\_\_\_ email: \_\_\_\_\_

Send check payable to Mt. Diablo Audubon Society with this application to:  
 Membership Chair, P.O.B. 2094, Walnut Creek, CA 94595

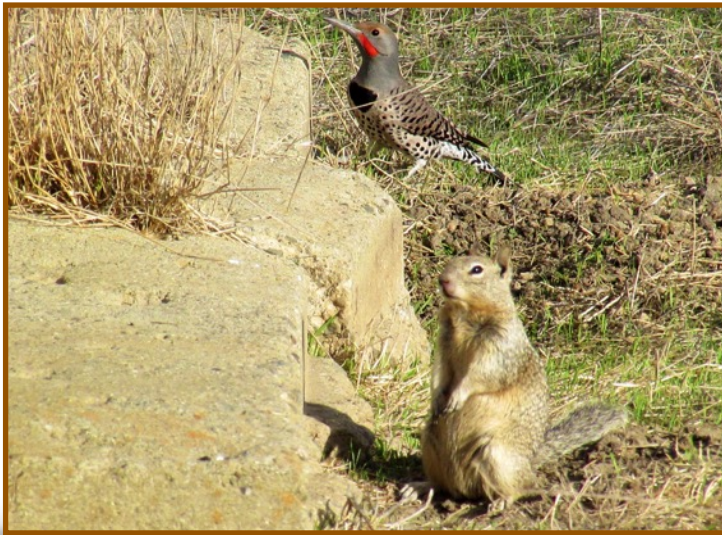
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*A Red-Shafted Northern Flicker seems unfazed by the nearby ground squirrel at Brushy Peak EBRP, Maren Smith photo*



*"We abuse land because we see it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect." ~Aldo Leopold*

*At the February meeting...Top L: Paul Schorr and Jimm Edgar thanked Young Birder, Kai Mills for helping with the CBC and for his leadership (Michael Pang and Forest Chapman, not present, were also thanked for CBC participation); Top R: Staci Hobbet, MDIA, gave an informative talk about the Peregrine Patrol in Pine Canyon. For more information: [anastasiahobbet@gmail.com](mailto:anastasiahobbet@gmail.com); R: Jill Hedgecock shared her birding and falconry adventures in Scotland for the main program. Maren Smith photos*

