



# the Quail

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

Volume 63, Number 2

October 2017

## October Program : SFBBO Waterbird Research & Conservation ♦ Max Tarjan

For thirty-five years, the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory (SFBBO) has been conducting waterbird research and conservation projects in the San Francisco Bay Area. The San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the conservation of birds and their habitats through science and outreach.

The San Francisco Bay area offers important habitat for nesting and migratory birds at the center of the Pacific Flyway. This region also supports a large human population, and, subsequently, has lost an estimated 90% of historic tidal marsh habitat to urban development, industry, and agriculture.

For more than 35 years, SFBBO has led Bay Area citizens in studying and protecting the area's remaining waterbirds and their habitats.

Max Tarjan is the Waterbird Program Director at the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory. In this program, you will learn from her about three projects that contribute to the Waterbird Program's mission of conserving waterbirds and their habitats: (1) California Gull Population Monitoring, (2) the Salt Pond Restoration Project, and (3) Colonial



Waterbird Monitoring. These projects rely on rigorous data collection, citizen science, and local partnerships to understand how bird habitat usage informs conservation actions.

Max Tarjan (*photo above*) is an ecologist with interests in animal behavior and teaching. In her pursuit of understanding diverse ecosystems, Max researched animal behavior in Bermuda, Panama, Kenya, and

Indonesia while completing a BA at Princeton University. Through her research and studies, Max has developed new methods to analyze marine mammal habitat use and earned a M.A. and Ph.D. in Ecology & Evolutionary Biology from the University of California, Santa Cruz.

She is also an instructor and offers professional development in undergraduate education through the Institute for Scientist & Engineer Educators.

**For more information: [sfbbo.org](http://sfbbo.org)**



(See page 7 to participate in field trips with SFBBO experts during the "California Fall Challenge" while raising funds to support bird conservation, and SFBBO Snowy Plover banding photos on page 12.)

### Meeting Schedule

The next meeting of the Mount Diablo Audubon Society will be **Thursday, October 5** in the Camellia Room of The Gardens at Heather Farm in Walnut Creek.

**6:30 PM Doors open**

**7:00 PM Birding Information**

**7:25 PM Announcements**

**7:40 PM Refreshments\* and raffle**

*\*please bring your own coffee mug*

**8:00 PM Program: SFBBO**

**Waterbird Research &**

**Conservation ♦ Max Tarjan,**

**Waterbird Program Director, San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory**

**NEXT MONTH'S PROGRAM:**

**Thursday, November 2**

**History of Kaua'i ♦ Gordon Beebe**

### 7 PM Birding Information

Kelly Davidson Chou, the District Biologist for the Mt. View Sanitary District, will discuss the many challenges for successfully managing for nesting bird success in McNabney Marsh including an update on the Nesting Raft Project. She will explain how these artificial floating "islands" enhance nesting habitat for shorebirds in the wetlands, review the successes and concerns of the program, and discuss ongoing wetland habitat loss in McNabney Marsh due to tide gate operations. (see page 6 for Nancy Wenninger's "Speaking of Conservation" article related to this topic)

DEDICATED TO HABITAT CONSERVATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

I am quite certain that we have all had life experiences when birds have brightened our spirits and uplifted our moods. Recently, this was made quite clear to me again.

This past July, my son-in-law, Chris, and I went fly fishing on Pacific Creek in Grand Teton National Park. It was a beautiful day with warm temperatures. After fording the creek, we decided to fish in different directions, Chris heading downstream and me upstream.

We agreed to meet in a few hours, and as it turned out, we should have met much sooner. My day did not go well. I cannot recall another outing when the fishing gods seemed to be united against me. My line tangled several times and after tediously untangling and retying flies, it seemed that I invariably snagged on some submerged unseen object.

At one point, as I sat dejectedly with a knotted mess that looked more like an oriole's nest, I pondered to myself whether I really was enjoying this sport. By this time, it was quite warm and being in waders, I decided to call it a day. When Chris joined me, he shared many accounts of his successful day's fishing—just what I expected, because he is a

very good fisherman, but not necessarily what I wanted to hear after my own dismal day.

During the return drive to Jackson, I was quietly bemoaning my forgettable day on the water when we approached the National Elk Refuge and the adjacent marsh. Suddenly, I saw a couple of large white birds. "Trumpeter Swans!" I exclaimed to Chris. He pulled the vehicle into a viewing area overlooking the marsh. Sure enough, there was a pair of Trumpeters with three cygnets (*photo L, Paul Schorr*). I was so delighted and energized by the sighting, I quickly retrieved my camera and began photographing the bird family. All thoughts of the earlier travails were gone and I was completely absorbed with the birds in front of me.



I know that most, or all of you, can recall your own personal analogous situations where birds have filled your day or time in your life with positivity and uplifted spirits. In this current political climate, in my opinion, where environmental protections are so strained and precarious, we will need to rely heavily upon the respites of our avian friends to give us reason for hope and perseverance. Happy Birding!

## Good News For Young Birders Club

For most of us birders, the doldrums of summer are typically characterized by slow birding. But, by mid-August, I had begun to receive early fall migration reports—no great numbers but activity, nevertheless, and some diversity, too.

The Young Birders Club had not been in the field since spring, so it was time, and Pine Canyon in Castle Rock/ Diablo Foothills Regional Park was selected for this outing on Saturday, August 26. Knowing the day would be shortened by predicted heat, we started early at 7:30 AM. It was already quite warm at that time and not particularly birdy, but we did find a small group of Lark Sparrows.

As it turned out, this bird was a "lifer" for a new Young Birder, 12 year-old Alex Cho, and his parents, Richard and Brenda, who recently moved to Dublin from SoCal. In addition, we were joined by another new Young Birder, Sam Rosenbaum, 14 years old, and his mom, Wendy Roth. Both families are new members of MDAS. By all appearances, Sam and Alex are becoming serious



Lark Sparrow, Young Birder Alex Cho photo

birders, actively supported and encouraged by their parents.

Later in the day, on the Castle Rocks, we were able to spot a pair of Peregrine Falcons, possibly the breeding pair or their fledglings, and there were also a few White-throated Swifts.

It was great to have additional support from Dave Kent and Dr. Ryan Janke. Thanks for joining us, supporting what we do, and serving as mentors to our Young Birders Club.

Also, I wanted to share that Kai Mills, a YBC member, has just started his freshman year at California State University at San Luis Obispo. ~Tracy Farrington, YBC Liaison

## Welcome New Members

Elberta and John Bodle, DVM  
Walnut Creek

Q

Which gull is the most widespread and numerous inland, far away from the coasts?

Unscramble the letters below or look at page 7 for the answer.

IIGGRNULLLEBD

## MDAS on the Web

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

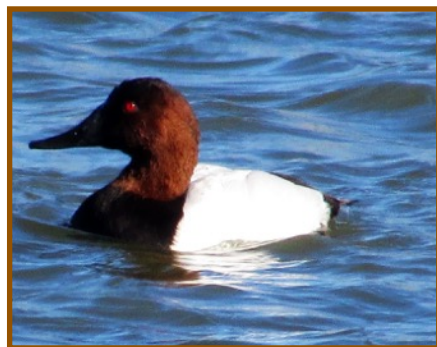
The *Quail* is published monthly except in January and August by the Mount Diablo Audubon Society, P.O. Box 53, Walnut Creek, CA 94597-0053. **The deadline for the November issue will be October 9.**

## Observations (8/3-9/10) ————— by Maury Stern

The usual migrants for the winter are arriving later than normal, with an occasional duck, or a single Ruby-crowned Kinglet, sparrow, or warbler reported. However, the shorebirds have been in profusion since late July.

An **American Wigeon** pair was at the West County Wastewater District (WCWD) in Richmond 8/31. Anon

A **Canvasback** at Meeker Slough in Richmond was seen by many from 8/5 until now. BD, ML, MRi, RP, and five others.



*Canvasback, Maren Smith photo*

LK saw **Lesser Nighthawks** at Clifton Court Forebay on 8/6. They were subsequently seen by ES, LP, FO, PB, JD, GG, and JB.

An unusual **Common Gallinule** for Heather Farm Pond was seen 8/13 by FS. P&NS saw one at Contra Loma RP in Antioch the same day.

Two **American Avocets** were at Heather Farm 8/7. FS, HH

A rare **Stilt Sandpiper** was at WCWD 8/30, AL, and later seen by JA, MR, DH, CM, and CB.

A **Baird's Sandpiper** was at WCWD 8/15. AL

A **Semi-palmated Sandpiper** was at WCWD 8/6 and 8/7. LK, MP, BT, AL

DH saw two **Wandering Tattlers** at Pt. Molate/Pt. San Pablo area 9/1.

There were two **Lesser Yellowlegs** at the WCWD 8/7, and a **Wilson's Phalarope** as well. LK

An early **Mew Gull** was seen by CM 8/25 at the Pt. Molate/Pt. San Pablo area.

Thirty-two **Caspian Terns** were seen from from the Richmond Shoreline 8/7. LK

LK saw three **Least Bitterns** at Holland Tract in East County 8/13.

A **Cattle Egret** was at Martinez Regional Shoreline 9/4 with five other herons and egrets as well. LL

JR saw a **Short-eared Owl** near the Byron grasslands 8/8.

An anonymous observer saw a **Merlin** at the Pt. Molate area 8/26.

**Willow Flycatchers** were at Pt. San Pablo 8/18, LK, Wildcat Canyon Park in Richmond 8/26, AK, and Heather Farm Pond 9/8. FS, TF, HH

Thirty **Bank Swallows** were at Bethel Island 8/7. LK

DC found a **Canyon Wren** in the Diablo Foothills Regional Park 8/12.

On 8/11, LK saw a **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** at Pt. San Pablo.

A **Red Crossbill** saw at Pt. San Pablo 8/18. LK

A **Black-and-white Warbler** was in Kensington 9/2. JM

LK saw a number of warblers at the Pt. Molate/Pt. San Pablo area: **Nashville Warbler** 8/18; **MacGillivray's Warbler** 8/7; eight **Yellow Warblers** 8/18; **Black-throated Gray Warbler** 8/7; and a **Hermit Warbler** 8/7.

Also, **Yellow Warblers** were seen in Richmond 8/22, SD, and 8/26. AK

The first local **Yellow-rumped Warbler** of the season in Contra Costa County was seen by FS, HH, and DK 9/10 at Heather Farm.

ER, JCo, and KM saw a **Townsend's Warbler** at Inspiration Point in Tilden Park 8/20.

**Hermit Warblers** were in Richmond's Wildcat Canyon Park 8/23, SD, and 8/26, AK.

The most exciting bird of the month was in Orinda near the home of JC, not far from Vollmer Peak. The **Green-tailed Towhee** was seen 9/6, JC and MP, and 9/8, ER, JCo, and DH.

**Western Tanagers** were at Seven Hills School in Walnut Creek 8/7, FS, 8/11, and 8/18 at Pt. San Pablo. LK

LK saw 21 **Yellow-headed Blackbirds** at Holland Tract 8/13.

A **Hooded Oriole** was near Meeker Slough in Richmond 8/7. LK



*Hooded Oriole, Joy Shonfeld photo*

JA Jeff Acuff, PB Pat Bacchetti, JB John Blakelock, CB Cathy Bleier, JC Jim Chiropolis, JCo John Colbert, DC David Couch, SD Sheila Dickie, JD Judith Dunham, BD Bob Dunn, TF Tracy Farrington, GG George Griffeth, HH Hugh Harvey, DH Derek Heins, LK Logan Kahle, DK David Kent, AK Alan Krakauer, AK Albert Linkowski, LL Laura Look, ML Marty Lycan, CM Colin Meusel, KM Kai Mills, JM John Myles, FO Frances Oliver, MP Michael Park, RP Ralph Pericoli, LP Linda Pittman, MR Mark Raunon, MRi Matt Ricketts, ER Erica Rutherford, JR Jennifer Rycenga, FS Fred Safier, P&NS Paul and Nancy Schorr, ES Emilie Strauss, and BT Bob Toleno

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

### Two Easy Ways to Give

1. Register at **Wild Birds Unlimited in Pleasant Hill** as an MDAS member and each time you make a purchase, 5% will be donated to MDAS and Native Bird Connections. Since 2012, Mike has made over \$3300 in donations to these two groups.

2. If you or your family members shop online at Amazon, please register MT Diablo Audubon Society as your favorite non-profit charity at **smile.amazon.com**. For every eligible purchase, MDAS receives 0.5% of your purchase. Sign up and spread the word!

## Trip Reports

**Bodega Bay, August 19:** It was a typically gray mild day for 24 birders at



Bodega Bay where we tallied 61 species. We enjoyed many of the target birds, starting with several almost-breeding-plumaged Ruddy Turnstones at the Tides. At the rail



ponds, three Virginia Rails were calling loudly more than once, and we also heard a Sora. At the Head we had good views of both Brandt's and Pelagic Cormorants, several Black Oystercatchers, Pigeon Guillemots, and two rather distant Marbled Murrelets.

Other highlight birds: both pelicans, Common and Pacific Loons, a single Elegant Tern (plus several



Caspians), Belted Kingfisher, and an Osprey feeding on the



Top to Bottom: Brandt's Cormorant, Isaac Aronow photo; Ruddy Turnstone, Beth Branthaver photo; Common Loon, Isaac Aronow photo; and Pacific Loon, Beth Branthaver photo.

ground, plus the expected Willets, Marbled Godwits, Greater Yellowlegs, Least and Western Sandpipers, and, last but not least, Red-necked

Phalaropes, which we have missed on recent August trips.

~Fred Safier

**Jewel Lake at Tilden Park, Berkeley, September 7:** Thirteen members and guests came on the trip, which was one of the quietest, least birdy of any trip in ages. Yet, we managed to find 19 species. The first Ruby-crowned Kinglet of the season for many, was seen, a Pacific Wren was in the boardwalk area, and many Wrentits were heard on the upper Packrat Trail.  
~Maury Stern

## Citizen Science: Using eBird's Species Tool

Last winter, as the new Christmas Bird Count (CBC) Compiler, I had to determine which sightings required documentation by survey party leaders. This must be done when a bird appears in an unusual place or during an unusual time and is recorded during the CBC. One of our leaders suggested I check the "Species Map" page on eBird to determine whether a particularly unusual sighting could be validated by previous reports or if it required actual written documentation.

You might wonder what this has to do with ordinary everyday birding. If you are a "lister" and would like to build your local list of species, the "Species Map" can be useful for you. Or, suppose you are new to birding and are trying to determine what you actually saw somewhere. The "Species Map" can help.

Here's how. On a beautiful fall morning you are out looking for birds at a location in our county. You believe you have seen an Orange-crowned Warbler, but you don't know if they are present at this time of year. You've heard that most warblers arrive here in the spring. Have they ever been seen by other birders in October? Or suppose you want to add this species to your list and you wonder if it is remotely possible to locate one nearby.

Open eBird and visit the "Explore Data" page. Select "Species Maps." Fill in a place name. It can be as general as Contra Costa County or as specific as Mitchell Canyon. Fill in a species name, the date range (last ten years or current year), and month range (customize your interval). Select "Set Date Range." A map will appear with your location and all the reported sightings of the species you've selected in the time frame. When you click on the icons you may discover MDAS members' sightings. I did. By the way, Orange-crowned Warblers are frequently reported during September and October in our county, but they are easier to spot in the spring when they sing!

If you plan to take advantage of eBird's massive database, remember, it depends on all of our sightings, diligently reported and reliably evaluated for likelihood by knowledgeable editors. Until recently, one of our own Young Birders Club members, Logan Kahle, was regional editor for our area. ~Elizabeth Leite, Citizen Science Chair

### eQuail Issues

I have learned that some members who receive the eQuail don't read it as often as before, and miss having the printed information available to them for important news. Might I suggest, upon receiving the eQuail in the group email, immediately print out the page or pages you would like to read later while relaxing on the couch, and make a copy of the field trips to tack up on the refrigerator for future reference. If you have problems or questions, I'm happy to help! ~Maren Smith, Quail Editor

marensmithbkk@yahoo.com or (925) 322-9477

## October 2017 (Contact Leader for ?s or rain cancellations)

14 Saturday Hawk Hill  
 25 Wednesday Berkeley-Emeryville Shoreline  
 28 Saturday Abbotts Lagoon

## November 2017

04 Saturday Charleston Slough/South Bay  
 14 Tuesday McNabney Marsh/Mt. View SD  
 18 Saturday Limantour

### 2 Saturday, October 14 Hawk Hill

Leader: Fred Safier (925) 937-2906.

Carpool leaves El Nido Ranch Road at 8 AM. **OR**, meet in parking lot by upper Rodeo Lagoon at 9:15 AM. From southbound US 101 take last Sausalito exit, Alexander Avenue, just before the Golden Gate Bridge. If driver knows SF, Fremont St./Columbus Ave./Marina/Golden Gate Bridge is an alternate



Red-tailed Hawk,  
 Joy Shonfeld photo

route on a Saturday--pass the Vista Point and take the Alexander Avenue exit. On west side of freeway, turn left toward Marin Headlands and go up the hill (Conzelman Road); at the traffic circle go right and down hill (McCullough Road). Turn left at the stop sign onto Bunker Road and continue to the parking lot on the right just before the bridge. We will bird the lagoons before going to the hawk watch site. At noon, the staff gives a talk on their work and usually demonstrates the actual banding. The walk up the hill is only a few hundred yards, but it is steep. Carry lunch and liquids.

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### 1 Wednesday, October 25 Berkeley-Emeryville Shoreline

Leader: Eugenia K. Larson (925) 806-0644

Carpool leaves at 8 AM from El Nido Ranch Road. **OR**, meet at 8:30 AM in the parking lot at the north end of the Emeryville Marina. Take SR 24 to I-580 west, turn north onto I-80. Take Powell St. exit, turn left on Powell, go out to Emeryville Marina, park in last lot near pier. May be cold and windy, so dress in layers. We will look for loons, grebes, bay ducks and shorebirds. Bring liquids and a snack.



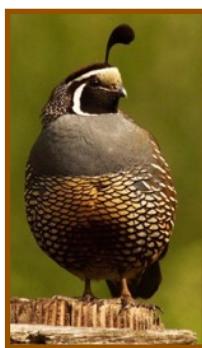
Black Oystercatcher,  
 Isaac Aronow photo

### 3 Saturday, October 28

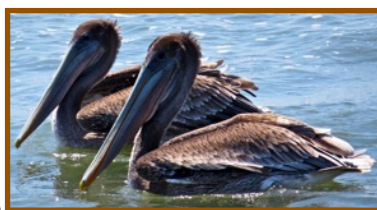
#### Abbotts Lagoon

Leader: Juan-Carlos Solis (925) 222-8573

Carpool leaves Sun Valley Mall at 7 AM. **OR**, meet at 8:30 AM at Bear Valley Visitor Center, Point Reyes National Seashore. From I-80 in Vallejo, follow SR 37 19.1 miles to Atherton Avenue, exit and turn left, cross US 101 to San Marin Drive, and continue for three miles. Turn right on Novato Blvd for six miles to stop sign, then turn left on Point Reyes-Petaluma Road for seven miles to another stop sign. Turn right across the bridge, go three miles to SR 1. Turn left into Point Reyes Station.



Above: California Quail,  
 Joy Shonfeld photo; Below: Brown Pelicans, Isaac Aronow, photo



After a stop at the Bovine Bakery for coffee and pastries, continue out of town towards Olema, then turn right onto Bear Valley Road. The Visitors Center is off Bear Valley Road. Lots of walking in sand. Be prepared to carry lunch and liquids.

JOIN US FOR A FALL  FIELD TRIP.  
 ALL ARE WELCOME!

SAVE THE DATE for the Christmas Bird Count:  
 Central County—Saturday, December 16  
 East County—Wednesday, December 20

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 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

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

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

What's up with McNabney Marsh?

If you've visited McNabney Marsh in 2017, you might have observed wide variations in the marsh's water level. These fluctuations are the result of a combination of natural events and human activities.

McNabney Marsh, named to honor long-time MDAS conservation advocate, Al McNabney, is a 138-acre wetland located east of I-680 and south of Waterfront Road. It is owned by Mt. View Sanitary District (MVSD) and East Bay Regional Park District, but solely managed by MVSD. It is part of the much larger Peyton Slough Wetlands complex, a series of wetlands which includes MVSD's Moorhen Marsh to the west of I-680, plus other wetlands extending north to the Carquinez Strait and owned by businesses including Eco Services and Plains Products Terminals. These wetlands drain a watershed covering more than 3,900 acres.



Above: River Otter at Moorhen Marsh, Joy Shonfeld photo; Upper R: American Avocet and her three chicks at McNabney Marsh, Maren Smith photo

Originally a tidal wetland, McNabney was converted to a seasonal marsh when industrial development, including the creation of a major railway line in the 1880s, cut off its connection with the Carquinez Strait. From around the 1980's, treated effluent from MVSD became the primary water source. Today, re-established tidal action is controlled via a 5-gate structure on Peyton Slough, which was first opened in June 2009 and is operated by Eco Services. When the tide gates are open, water flows in and out of McNabney; when the tide gates are closed, water only flows out.

Managing a healthy marsh environment has proven quite challenging. Insufficient drainage when the tide gates are open causes stagnation. This effect aggravates water quality issues and can cause problems with low dissolved oxygen, algae growth, and odors. Additionally, when the gates open, the tide floods most of the ground nesting habitat in the marsh which waterfowl and shorebird species have depended on for decades. This has significantly reduced the number of fledglings since the tide gates were opened in 2009.

In January 2017, MVSD began preparations for a two-year maintenance and restoration project in Moorhen Marsh. The project will create improved habitat for native wildlife species including western pond turtles. Project goals include repairing levees, excavating ponds, creating additional riparian and wetland habitat, and constructing new visitor

amenities. However, the ponds must be de-watered before work can begin, so MVSD requested that the tide gates be closed in January, allowing water to flow out of the watershed, restricting tidal inflow.

At the same time, from January through April we received nearly double our normal amount of rainfall. The resulting run-off created very high water levels in McNabney. Every year, MVSD performs nesting bird surveys every other week starting in mid-March. In 2017, the first nests were reported in early April. Five nests were discovered flooded on April 23; as a result, on May 1 the local Fish & Wildlife warden issued an order to close the tide gates for the remainder of nesting season to prevent additional nest loss.



In late spring, when rains finally subsided, the wetlands began to dry up. Lower water levels meant that large areas of the wetlands became completely desiccated. 2017 was a good year for breeding birds in McNabney, but in other areas of the wetlands reduced nesting activity was observed.

When the tide gates were reopened recently at the end of nesting season, a number of issues emerged. The absence of tidal action for seven months had caused increased siltation, a major impediment to proper drainage. Eco Services hopes that renewed tidal action will scour the channels and result in increased flushing. In the meantime, recent water quality samples in the Eco Services wetlands showed elevated levels of sulfides, suspected to be caused by decaying vegetation from tule die-off. Duckweed is also choking parts of Peyton Slough, which could result in low oxygen levels in the water—a problem for fish. And, speaking of fish, the species south of the tide gates are now mostly non-native. However, MVSD biologists noticed many dead common carp in McNabney Marsh once water levels receded, possibly reducing the population of this harmful invasive species.

The Peyton Slough Wetland Advisory Committee is a voluntary, non-regulatory group composed of federal, state and local public agencies, as well as various landowners and other stakeholders. They meet quarterly to discuss these complex management challenges. Representatives of Mt. Diablo Audubon also attend these meetings and have expressed concern about the impacts of the water management regime on bird populations.

In October, MVSD's biologist Kelly Davidson Chou will discuss water level management at McNabney Marsh. MVSD's efforts to develop a balanced and sustainable management plan will require the support and assistance of many, including Mt. Diablo Audubon. Please stay tuned as the plan unfolds.



## Ring-billed Gull ♦ *Larus delawarensis*

The Ring-billed Gull is probably the most numerous gull in North America, with an estimated 3-4 million in population. This can be attributed to its adaptive nature, especially to humans, even after being seriously depleted by humans during the late 19th century when hunters killed Ring-billed Gulls for their feathers to decorate hats.

Protection under the 1918 Migratory Bird Treaty Act and Canada's 1917 Migratory Birds Convention Act helped bring the species' numbers back. However, in the middle of the 20th century, Ring-billed Gulls around Lake Ontario proved susceptible to the pesticide DDT and PCB pollution. Environmental regulations enacted in the 70s helped reduce pollution.



Because Ring-billed Gulls are scavengers and opportunistic feeders, they will eat almost anything they find. They can be found in garbage dumps, plowed fields, parks, parking lots, beaches, and other natural areas. For many years, there was a group of Ring-billed Gulls at Disney World who would dive down on any unsuspecting tourist with an ice cream cone in hand and fly off with the ice cream! Ring-billed Gulls are so common at fast food restaurants that some nicknames for them are McGull, French-fry Gull, and Dumpster Gull.

Ring-billed Gulls are highly social, breeding in large colonies, with nearly 70% of them nesting in Canada. During courtship, both birds stretch upright and alternately face toward and away from each other.

Ring-billed Gulls are medium sized gulls with males larger than females. Their backs and shoulders are a pale bluish gray, and the head, body and tail is white. Non-breeding birds have light gray or brown flecks on their white

head. The long wings, which extend past the tail when perched, are tipped in black with evident white spots. Their legs and feet are yellowish or greenish. Their most obvious feature is a black ring around the yellow bill.

First-year birds are whitish with brownish flecks and have very dark wing tips and tails. Second-year birds are more like the adults, but have a black-tipped tail.

The nest site is on the ground where there is little vegetation. Both parents build the nest consisting of a shallow cup of twigs, grasses, and moss. Eggs laid, usually 2-4, are gray to olive in color, blotched with brown spots. Both parents incubate the eggs for 23-28 days. The semi-precocial chicks are brooded and fed by both parents. The young may wander out of the nest by the second day, but they remain in the immediate area fledging at about five weeks of age and independent 5-10 days later.

Their nesting colonies normally include a small percentage of two-female couples, especially when there is a shortage of males. Each female is fertilized by an obliging male and each female lays a clutch of eggs in the nest leading to 5-7 egg "superclutches."

Ring-billed Gulls will breed with other species of gulls, but mostly smaller, black-headed species, like Black-headed, Laughing, and Franklin's Gulls.

The gulls communicate using a variety of calls and body language. They have two alert calls: a screeching and a shrill call. A "mew" call is used during nonaggressive behavior. There is also a long call that is used during hostile displays and when landing.

These gulls are strong, graceful flyers, flying as fast as 40 miles per hour. They are adept at snatching food from the air. They can hover, soar, or poise stationary in the wind. They engage in play, dropping objects while airborne, then swooping down to catch them, perhaps honing their hunting skills. The average life span of a Ring-billed Gull is 3-10 years. The oldest recorded was at least 27 years, 6 months old when it was found in New York. ~Jean Halford article and photos

### Community Events

#### ► San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory California Fall Challenge, 9/9-10/8/17

You have one month to join a guided trip to see plovers or otters with local experts, or see a bird banding demo all while helping SFBBO raise money for outreach programs to conserve birds. **For information: [sfbbo.org](http://sfbbo.org) or contact [cfc@sfbbo.org](mailto:cfc@sfbbo.org)**

#### ► Grayson Creek Cleanup, Pleasant Hill, Saturday, September 23, 8:30 AM-1 PM

Help clean up this riparian habitat for Community Service Day! **Register: [www.ci.pleasant-hill.ca.us/forms.aspx?FID=98](http://www.ci.pleasant-hill.ca.us/forms.aspx?FID=98)**

#### ► WBU 26th Anniversary & Nature Celebration, Pleasant Hill, Saturday, October 7, 10 AM-4 PM

Join local nature, animal rescue, wildlife, and environmental organizations and meet local nature experts and artists for educational family fun. (*more details, page 11*) ♦ **To volunteer @ MDAS table, contact Brian: [b-murphy21@hotmail.com](mailto:b-murphy21@hotmail.com)**

#### ► Carr Ranch dedication and public park opening, Moraga, Saturday, October 14, 10 AM-2 PM

John Muir Land Trust, Moraga & EBMUD open 604-acre Carr Ranch with a fun celebration! **For information: [jmlt.org](http://jmlt.org)**

#### ► 21st Annual Central Valley Birding Symposium, November 16-19, Stockton

This heart-of-the-Pacific-Flyway symposium includes field trips, workshops, Bird ID Panel, and keynote by Noah Strycker, World Big Year record holder with 6,042 birds seen. Regis. open 9/8. **For information: [cvbirds.org/events/symposium/info/](http://cvbirds.org/events/symposium/info/)**

## Thank You 2016-17 Donors!

The MDAS Board would like to thank everyone who contributed during the 2016-2017 fiscal year. Your donations continue to support ongoing programs dedicated to the preservation of habitat for birds and wildlife and promote an awareness of nature among young people. We are grateful for your continued support.



### California Condor (\$1000+)

Hugh B. and Rosita O. Harvey

### California Gnatcatcher (\$250-\$999)

Jerry Britten, Steve Buffi and Anne Waters, William D. Chilson, Tracy Farrington, Kent Fickett, Ann and Donald Hughes, Lynn and Gordon Lakso, Donald W. and Susan E. Lewis, Norman and Christy Lundberg, Bruce Muirhead and Denise Pare-Muirhead, Paul and Nancy Schorr, Martin and Sandra Stuart, Joel Summerhill, and Nancy Wenninger.

### California Thrasher (\$100-\$249)

Cheryl Abel, Hanako and Paul R. Andrews, Gus and Gerry Argenal, Robert Beach, Barbara Beno, Paul Brenner, Sally Cahill, Don and Susan Couch, Linda Beers Downing, Jimm Edgar, William T. Espey, Betsy and David Gifford, Janet M. Goodman, Donald and Melinda Groom, Jean Halford, Carol and John Harkin, Claudia and Scott Hein, Richard Kleker, Bruce and Judy Kronmiller, Elizabeth and George Leite, Carol Livingston, Steve and Susan Loftin,

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Earl Alexander, Phillip Araki, Althea Bates, Deborah Beesley, Ruth Beeve, Lesley Benn, John and Diane Blackman, Beth Branthaver, James and Barbara Brunell, Theresa Cabral, Daniel Campos, Ethan and Ruth Chickering, Margaret Clark, Arthur Clarke III, Carolyn E. Cogan, Richard Compton, Martha and Roger Conant, Nahide Craig, Yolanda and Robert Cronin, Doris C. and Peter J. Daniels, Joy Dardin, Brenda Davis, William E. Davis, Jr., Moses de los Reyes, Susan Dee and Edwin F. Katibah, Sherry Derda, Maybelle M. Dore, Jon Elam, Carol Evans, Tina Fletcher, June Flowers, C. Fowler, Garrison Frost, James A. Fuller, Valerie Glass, Bill and Diana Granados, Erik Granberg, Teresa Ann Gula, Carol Haglund, Susan M. Halverson, Judith Hamberg, Cheryl Harrison, Sherri and Woody Hedman, Donald and Janet Helmholz, Rosalie Howarth, Richard Immel, Mark Janlois, Jane and James Kieran, Donna and Scott Kramer, Richard Kurovsky, Mona Lange, Herb and Randi Long, Rennette MacIntyre, J. Mann, Susan

and Mark McGowan, Robert McNutt, Barbara Minneman, Mary Muerle, Anne Murray, Darrell Murray, Andrew Naegeli, Sharon Noteboom, Richard Novak, Margaret and Christopher Panton, Nadine Peterson, Clinton Phalen, Donna Preece, Roger A. Prince and Noelle B. Schoellkopf, Austin L. and Marjorie Prindle, Charleen Raines, Donald and Daisy Ray, Suzan Requa, Tommienne Rey, Rosalie Rhodes, Ariana Rickard, Kem Robinson, William Rocha, David M. Rose, David and Linda Shinn, Frances L. Singer, Maren and Jerry Smith, Julia M. Starr, Donald and Beverly Steffen, Ann-Charlott Stenberg, R. C. Stephens, Gary Stevens, Del Stipe, F. and B. Strehlitz, Fred W. Sullivan, Marianne Tanner, Ralph Tatum, Joanne and Gaylord Thorne, Maxine and Richard Vrmeer, Bev Walker, Anne G. Ward, Carol Weldin, Idell Weydemeyer, Lou Anne Whitley, Roger Wilcox, David Williams, Blake Wu, and Christine L. Zack.

### California Towhee (to \$24)

Peter Boffey, Karen Creuseve, Richard Dennis, Elizabeth and Joseph DiPietro, Robert L. Erwin, Louise Francis, Robert and Wanella Harvey, Jill and Eric Hedgecock, Mary Jankowski, Fred Kovar, Helen Pereira, Jean Richmond, Megan Sandri, Alice E. Schofield, Marleen Stratton, Dr. and Ms. Howard Sturtz, Stephen Sullivan, Cheryl Thompson, Dave and Bev Tucker, Molly Weden, and Claudia Whitnah.

## MDAS Annual Treasurer's Report 2016-2017 Fiscal Year

Mount Diablo Audubon Society remains in an excellent position to serve our community. We had another successful year. The annual year-end fundraising drive continued to be strong and our total chapter membership is strong, too. The financial health of MDAS, due to the generosity of our members, allows us to actively pursue our mission. During the year, we funded important habitat preservation projects and continued our community education outreach efforts for young people such as the "No Child Left Inside Program" and the Young Birders Club. Your generosity supports our monthly presentation program, this newsletter, the annual Christmas Bird Count, our web site, and much more. You have read about these important community efforts in this and prior issues of the *Quail*. Each dollar you give is put to good use for the benefit of our community. The General Fund balance covers operations and reserves, the Conservation and Education balance is used towards these efforts, and the *Breeding Bird Atlas* reflects the books held for sale and the results of book sales. ~Steve Buffi, Treasurer

July 2016–June 2017

Funds:	Revenue:	Expenses:	Net:	Fund Balance 7/1/2017:
General	28,937.88	18,907.65	10,030.23	130,841.15
Conservation & Education	10.69	0	10.69	16,633.72
Breeding Bird Atlas	-23.44	14.21	-37.65	18,195.49
Total All Funds	28,925.13	18,921.86	10,003.27	165,670.36





Above: American Robin fledgling, Joy Shonfeld photo; R: California Quail adult and chick, Jean Halford photo

## Nesting Reference Chart

As the nesting season is winding down for the year we still get a lot of questions regarding eggs. How many do our backyard birds lay, how many broods do they have per year, what's the incubation period, and, in some cases, when the heck will they leave?

If you've provided the birds with food, water, and a place to call home, it's nice to see the babies fledge, and it's less worry for us careful observers who hope that all will go well for the entire brood. Males are no longer singing to declare and defend their territory (I really miss that part), and some are bulking up on food to prepare for their long migration or may have already left. So, as the breeding season comes to a close, here are some nesting facts



about our backyard birds. Keep in mind the numbers below are averages. I once rehabbed a nest of bushtits at the Lindsay Wildlife Hospital that contained eight orphans! The parents were just not following the rules. ~Joanie Smith, Owner, East Bay Nature in Walnut Creek, eastbaynature.com

Species:	Eggs:	Days Incubating:	Days Until Fledge:	Broods/Year:
American Crow	4-5	18	28-35	1-2
American Robin	3-7	12-14	14-16	2-3
Anna's Hummingbird	2	14-19	18-23	1-2
Bewick's Wren	3-8	14	14	1-3
Black Phoebe	4-5	15-18	14-21	2
Bushtit	5-7	12	14-15	1-2
California Quail	12-16	18-23	10	1-2
California Scrub-Jay	1-5	17-19	17-19	1
California Towhee	2-6	11	6-11	2-3
Chestnut-backed Chickadee	6-7	11-12	13-17	1-2
Cooper's Hawk	3-6	32-36	27-34	1
Dark-eyed Junco	3-6	12-13	9-13	1-2
Hooded Oriole	3-5	12-14	14	2-3
House Finch	2-6	12-16	11-19	1-3
Lesser Goldfinch	3-6	12-13	12-14	1
Mourning Dove	2	14-15	12-14	2-3
Nuttall's Woodpecker	3-6	14	29	1
Oak Titmouse	6-8	14-16	16-21	1-2
Western Screech Owl	2-5	21-30	28	1
White-breasted Nuthatch	3-10	12	14	1-2

### \*\*NEW CLASS\*\* Field Identification of Raptors by Bob Power

Two 1.5 hour classes and two 4-hour field trips

Class: TU, October 24 and 31, 615-745 PM, and two field trips on SUN, October 29 and November 5  
Lafayette Library and Learning Center, Oak Room (maximum of 15 participants) \*\*ONE SPACE LEFT

Cost: \$45 MDAS members, \$50 non-members

**Class Description:** Raptors hold everyone's attention. Their grace as they dominate the airways and their confidence as they survey the landscape are mesmerizing. The beauty and majesty of a raptor on a distant perch always makes a lasting impression. Identification challenges in the field will be the focus of this class including two morning field trips to some of the Bay Area's most productive raptor resource areas. Through observation and discussion, Bob will help you improve your raptor identification skills while observing these thrilling birds in the wild.

**Author Bio:** Bob Power was the lead field seminar leader for the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society for ten years, leading and co-leading both domestic and international birding eco-tours. Bob has been a day-leader for the Golden Gate Raptor Observatory's Hawkwatch program for the past thirteen years, taught Introduction to Birding at Palo Alto Adult School for seven years, and has been teaching raptor identification classes and leading raptor field seminars since 2004.

To register, contact Dolores Butkus at [doloresbutkus73@yahoo.com](mailto:doloresbutkus73@yahoo.com). (checks payable to MDAS)

## Save Lafayette Trees: a Call to Action

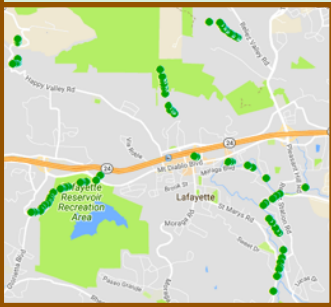
by Kent Fickett, VP MDAS

In March, without any formal public announcement, and behind closed doors, the Lafayette City Council, responding to a PG&E request to clear the area around their large natural gas pipeline, signed a Tree Cutting Agreement that gave PG&E permission to cut down 272 oaks and other mature trees along the Lafayette-Moraga Regional Trail, the Lafayette Reservoir Rim Trail, downtown, and on private property—many of them heritage oaks and redwoods—in exchange for a “mitigation” payment to the city of Lafayette amounting to \$530,000.

Lafayette has an existing Tree Ordinance that prevents the cutting of trees of a certain size or species, but PG&E claimed it was exempt from local ordinances. The city chose to ignore the ordinance in exchange for the “mitigation” payment. More importantly, the city of Lafayette and PG&E did not comply with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) to review environmentally, less-impacting alternatives.

When local citizens, including Mount Diablo Audubon members and the MDAS Board, heard about this agreement, they pressed the City Council at subsequent meetings to reverse the agreement and to look at alternatives under CEQA. After repeated attempts to urge the City Council to rescind their action, a group of local citizens formed “Save Lafayette Trees” to try and protect as many trees as possible.

Michael Dawson, President of Save Lafayette Trees, stated, “Not only did the city of Lafayette fail to notify residents of the plans to circumvent their own tree protection ordinances, both the city and PG&E bypassed very important environmental review regulations, including CEQA. These regulations are designed specifically to protect our neighborhoods and parks from expedited projects.” (L: see



an enlarged tree map of the 272 trees to be cut on [savelafayettetrees.org](http://savelafayettetrees.org) under “Important Links”)

In addition, Save Lafayette Trees says that PG&E’s claims of imminent danger posed by tree roots, the rationale behind cutting down the trees, are baseless, even by their own documentation. According to Save Lafayette Trees, tree roots have never caused a pipeline explosion in California and roots don’t corrode pipes. Trees and pipes have coexisted for decades, and tree roots may help stabilize slopes.

Save Lafayette Trees contends that, instead, PG&E should install remote shut-off valves and replace aging (60-70 years old) pipelines to help protect trees and enable modern pipeline inspections. They suggest that PG&E wants to cut trees for cost-efficient aerial monitoring, versus for valid public safety concerns, prioritizing profit over environment.



Other cities, including Santa Cruz, Palo Alto, and Danville were successful in rejecting PG&E efforts to cut down trees in their communities.

On June 28, after repeated attempts to encourage the city of Lafayette to revisit the PG&E agreement failed, Save Lafayette Trees filed a law suit in Contra Costa Superior Court against the city of Lafayette and PG&E demanding the immediate reversal of the March 27 Tree Cutting Agreement.

In July, the MDAS Board voted to make two contributions to Save Lafayette Trees to help with legal costs, a \$1,000 outright donation, and a second \$4,000 matching-fund donation that the organization reached through local fund-raisers and donations.

Save Lafayette Trees held settlement meetings in August with PG&E and the city of Lafayette. Presently, tree cutting work has stopped until the matter can be heard in the

Contra Costa Superior Court starting November 8.

Additionally, in the course of making the legal challenge, Save Lafayette Trees discovered that based upon a similar East Bay Regional Parks (EBRPD) agreement, PG&E might be allowed to cut down 200 trees in nearby Briones Regional Park.

Trees, including heritage oaks, a keystone species, provide natural beauty and shade, reduce the effects of pollution, and are an important habitat for birds insects, invertebrates, fungi, and mammals. As birders and nature lovers, it is critical to share your concerns to be sure your voice is heard.

**To learn more: [savelafayettetrees.org](http://savelafayettetrees.org)**

### Call to Action:

If you are a Lafayette resident, contact your City Council members about the PG&E Agreement (because of conflict issues only three Council members can vote on this matter). If you are concerned about the trees in Briones RP or along EBMUD rights-of-ways, email your Director to voice your concerns about Tree Cutting Agreements made without CEQA environmental impact reviews or public hearings.

**Lafayette:** [cityhall@lovelafayette.org](mailto:cityhall@lovelafayette.org) or (925) 284-1968  
Mayor Mike Anderson

Council Members Cameron Burks and Mark Mitchell

**East Bay Regional Park District:**

Dee Rosario [drosario@ebparks.org](mailto:drosario@ebparks.org)

**East Bay Municipal Utility District:**

John A. Coleman, [john.coleman@ebmud.com](mailto:john.coleman@ebmud.com)

Marguerite Young, [marguerite.young@ebmud.com](mailto:marguerite.young@ebmud.com)



The widely viewed and photographed Screech Owl on the Lafayette-Moraga Regional Trail, Maren Smith photo

## WBU Nature Event

This is our 26<sup>th</sup> year bringing you the chance to meet and learn about organizations working to protect our local wildlife and environment. Enjoy a family event even the kids will love with live birds, animals, bugs, snakes, and spiders. Nature artists and authors will showcase their wonderful creations. Everything happens from 10 AM to 4 PM at Wild Birds Unlimited (WBU) in Pleasant Hill on Saturday, October 7.



Local groups will show you how to help protect our wildlife and find the best places to view the flora and fauna of our beautiful East Bay area.

Visit with Gary Bogue, one of our most treasured naturalists, and Joan Morris, who writes the bird and animal column for the *Times* newspapers. Meet author, Chuck Todd, as well as some fine nature artists.

Mt. Diablo Audubon will be represented (to volunteer, see page 7), along with such groups as International Bird Rescue, River Otter Ecology,



Contra Costa Avian Society, Native Bird Connections, Lindsay

Wildlife Experience, Mt. Diablo Bee Keepers, Pleasant Hill Instructional Gardens, Naturalist Mike Marchiano, Mt. Diablo Interpretive Association, Martinez Beavers Organization, and Save Mount Diablo.

WBU sponsors these events twice a year to support the local groups that protect wildlife and their habitats. Our goal is to help educate the public about our natural resources, how to enjoy them, and how to preserve them for future generations. Hope to see you in October. ~Mike Eliot, Owner, Wild Birds Unlimited in Pleasant Hill

## Mt. Diablo Audubon Society (MDAS)

*Mt. Diablo Audubon Society, a Chapter of National Audubon, is committed to the sustainable balance of our community's people, birds, other wildlife, and habitat through conservation, education, and advocacy.*

### MDAS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Email Meeting Reminder:	Barbara Vaughan	.....(925) 376-8732
Honorary Advisor:	Jean Richmond	.....(925) 837-2843

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



Mt. Diablo Audubon Society thanks our Business Partners:  
**AlphaGraphics, Walnut Creek**  
**Galaxy Press, Concord**  
**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

**Mt. Diablo Audubon Society**  
P.O. Box 53  
Walnut Creek, CA 94597-0053

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A Black-bellied Plover in breeding plumage viewed in August at the Elsie Roemer Bird Sanctuary in Alameda, Isaac Aronow photo



The September meeting welcomed back over 100 members and guests after the summer break. First up was “Beauty and the Beak” author, Deborah Lee Rose, (top L) who told us a riveting story about Beauty, a badly injured Bald Eagle who received a 3-D printed, prosthetic beak, and fully recovered. For the program, wildlife biologist, teacher, and nature photographer, Jeffrey Rich (bottom L) shared photo tips and stunning photographs of birds, and his two books, the latest on wildlife photography.

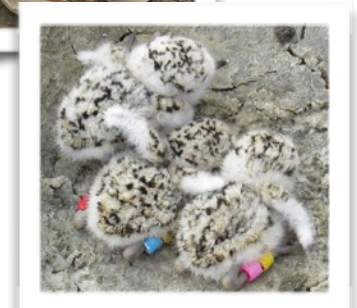
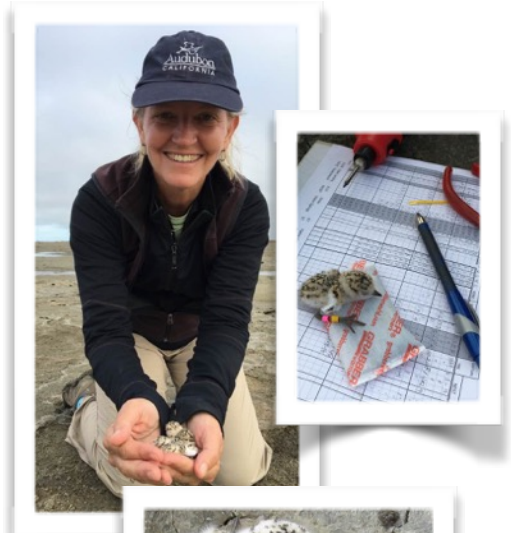
Over the summer, both Hugh Harvey and Maren Smith (photo R) joined Karine Tokatlian to observe the banding of tiny, day-old Snowy Plovers in her work with the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory. MDAS donated \$500 to this conservation project. (Maren Smith photos)

This summer, the Legislative Action Committee met with U.S. Representative, Mark DeSaulnier. Check out Ariana Rickard's blog:

[ca.audubon.org/news/ready-meet-your-congressman](http://ca.audubon.org/news/ready-meet-your-congressman)



the Quail



October 2017

“A tree has roots in the soil yet reaches to the sky. It tells us that in order to aspire we need to be grounded and that no matter how high we go it is from our roots that we draw sustenance.”  
~Wangari Maathai