



the Quail

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

Volume 63, Number 4

December 2017-January 2018

December Program : Population Trends from CBC Data ♦ Nicole Michel

Birds face a variety of threats in North America, and identifying these threats in order to conserve bird populations requires detailed knowledge of population trends over a long period of time. We studied advanced statistical models to analyze 52 years of Audubon Christmas Bird Count (CBC) data from the United States and Canada.

Our results indicate that 60% of the 497 species had increasing populations within the study area during 1966–2017. Among a subset of 212 species that have ≥25% range overlap with CBC circles and do not frequent feeders, the median population was 0.3% per year at the continental level. Regional trends were variable at lower latitudes, whereas the largest increases were at higher latitudes, consistent with range shifts due to climate change.

CBC trend estimates are similar to those from the North American Breeding Bird Survey. Citizen Science efforts such as the CBC will be needed going forward to understand and predict how birds respond to climate and land cover change, giving us the information needed to take actions to conserve bird diversity for generations to come.



L: 2015 CBC; Top Center: Peregrine Falcon, a recovering species; and Bottom Center: Nicole Michel, Nicole Michel photos

Nicole Michel, PhD, is a Senior Quantitative Ecologist with the National Audubon Society's (NAS) Science Division, based in San Francisco, CA. Nicole joined NAS in December 2015, where she is responsible for developing metrics to track bird response to Audubon's conservation actions, and analyzing bird abundance, distribution, and habitat relationships.

She received her PhD in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at Tulane

University, New Orleans, LA, in 2012, where she investigated mechanisms and consequences of understory insectivorous bird population decline in Central American rainforests, and completed two postdoctoral fellowships at the University of Saskatchewan.

Prior to earning her PhD, she spent several years as a traveling field biologist working with birds from Florida to Alaska, and eight years with the Institute for Bird Populations working with the Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship program.

Nicole loves travel, live music, Broadway shows, and hanging out with her (indoor) cat.

Meeting Schedule

The next meeting of the Mount Diablo Audubon Society will be **Thursday, December 7** 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: **Population Trends from CBC Data ♦ Nicole Michel**

NEXT MONTH'S PROGRAM:
Thursday, January 4, 2018, DVD ♦
Magic of the Snowy Owl (see page 3)
LOOKING AHEAD: Thursday,
February 1, 2018, Bob Lewis ♦
Bird's Rainbow



7 PM Birding Information

Program Chair, Ariana Rickard, will share a couple of videos and an update from the July 2017 National Audubon Convention in Park City, Utah this past summer.

While in Fort Collins, CO, this past September, I read the Fort Collins Audubon Society newsletter, the *Ptarmigan*. I really enjoyed the topic that President John Stenot presented in his President's Corner: differences between local chapters and the national organization. I have adapted his message here for the *Quail*.

People often ask how many members we have in MDAS, and the answer is a little tricky because we represent and have contacts with people who are MDAS members, and people living in our area who are members of National Audubon Society (NAS).

MDAS and NAS are separate and independent organizations. Many people are confused by this distinction. In the simplest terms, and ignoring some minor details, the difference is that NAS members get the NAS magazine, but not the beautiful MDAS newsletter, the *Quail*. MDAS members get the newsletter, but not the magazine. Dues for NAS membership go almost entirely to the national organization, with only a

small portion returned to the local chapter to which the member is assigned (in this case, MDAS), while dues for MDAS stay largely within our chapter and community. Many of us see good value in being a member of both NAS and MDAS.

According to Virginia Hamrick, our Membership Chair, in 2017, 241 households (out of 391 total MDAS members) held only an MDAS membership. An additional 1,150 households who held only a NAS membership were assigned by NAS to our chapter; and 150 households were members of both MDAS and NAS.

As an organization, MDAS gets most of its revenue and all of its energy from members. We would love to expand our ranks, and we'd especially like to invite NAS members to become MDAS members, too. We hope NAS members will consider this and we hope all of you will spread the word about MDAS to your friends, neighbors, and colleagues. (Above: 2016 MDAS CBC, Maren Smith photo)



Good News For Mayo Peregrine Falcons

I was recently in the Midwest accompanying my mother to Rochester, MN for her annual physical at the Mayo Clinic. Near the cafeteria, there was a display case with photos, information, and a video screen running a short film about Peregrine Falcons who nest on the Gonda Building at the Mayo Clinic.



The Mayo Clinic has been hosting falcons (many captive-bred) since 1987. The Midwest Peregrine Society invited the Mayo Clinic to join a national effort to help the endangered birds, at risk due to the widespread use of DDT after WW II. DDT has been banned in the U.S. since 1972. Recovery efforts then really began for falcons and other threatened species.

At the Mayo Clinic, during nesting season (mid-March to late June), patients and visitors can view the resident Peregrine Falcons on an in-house "Falcon cam" on Channel 99,

observing real-time images of the falcons from nesting to fledging 24/7. Educational exhibits and live falcon presentations further conservation efforts. Baby falcons are named from public suggestions and are banded with a metal tracker at a Mayo Clinic event.



The world-class care that the Mayo Clinic provides for humans is impressive, but the Mayo Clinic's 30-year commitment to Peregrine Falcon conservation is also commendable. Their mission "to inspire hope, and contribute to health and well-being" applies to both humans and birds.

And, *that's* good news for the Mayo Clinic Peregrine Falcons. ~Maren Smith (Google Images photos)



For more information including live-action nesting coverage visit history.mayoclinic.org. To search the online database for banded Mayo Clinic Peregrine Falcons, visit midwestperegrine.umn.edu/ (click on "Search" and enter "Mayo Clinic").

Welcome New Members

- | | |
|------------------|--------------|
| Gail Wolfson | Walnut Creek |
| Sat De | Hercules |
| James McEnerney | Pleasanton |
| Leela McCullough | Walnut Creek |



Which heron populates all but two of the world's continents?

Unscramble the letters or look at page 8 for the answer.

HLETHOCNRWBIRNNAGDKOEC

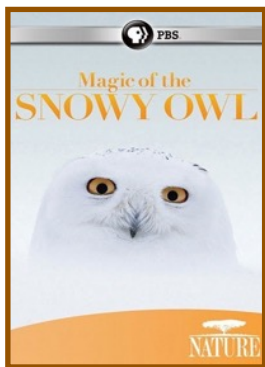
MDAS on the Web

- www.diabloaudubon.org
- www.facebook.com/mtdiabloaudubon
- www.meetup.com/Mount-Diablo-Audubon-Society/

The *Quail* is published monthly except in January and August by the Mt. Diablo Audubon Society, P.O. Box 53, Walnut Creek, CA 94597-0053. **The deadline for the February *Quail* will be January 7.**

January Program: PBS "Nature" DVD ♦ Magic of the Snowy Owl

Throughout the long months of the Arctic's frozen winter, the sun remains below the horizon. The cold is intensified by the darkness, making life difficult, if not impossible, for all but the toughest and most experienced of animals. Snowy Owls are built for the challenge, their every sense and skill honed to take on the eerie, bleak world. When the brief Arctic summer approaches, bringing light back to the tundra, Snowy Owls embark on an even more daunting challenge than keeping themselves alive. They breed and attempt to raise young in one of the harshest environments on the planet. Once summer arrives, they will have just 82 days of sunlight to successfully raise a family of helpless owlets until they are ready and able to fly. Documenting the degree of difficulty involved in those efforts, a team of filmmakers must face some challenges of their own as they set out to record the rarely observed daily lives of a breeding pair of Snowy Owls. Though "snowies" naturally stand out for their beauty, intelligence and charm, in their stark Arctic home, it is their determination and survival skills that are truly magical. (*Thirteen/PBS photos*)



The SNOWY OWL

Popularized by the Harry Potter series, snowy owls—with their striking white plumage to match their Arctic home—look perfect for a world of wizards. Although their white feathers set them apart, like all owls, they come with a set of adaptations that make them fierce birds of prey. Here are some facts and stats about *Bubo scandiavicus*.

Class: Aves
Order: Strigiformes
Family: Strigidae
Genus: *Bubo*
Species: *scandiavicus*

Facial discs, stiff feathers that surround their eyes, reflect sound waves toward their ears.

Snowy owls have ear-tufts, though they're small and often hard to spot.

Asymmetrically placed ears help pinpoint the exact location of potential prey.

Their beaks are short, curved, and hooked for gripping prey.

Owls are far-sighted and rely on bristles around their beaks to sense nearby objects.

Serrated edges on flight feathers cut noise produced by wing flapping, which helps the owls go undetected by potential prey.

Snowy owls have a wingspan between 4 and 5 feet.

Forward-facing eyes give snowy owls excellent stereoscopic vision and depth perception.

Snowy owls have big eyes—they weigh as much as our own. Their large corneas and pupils allow for a huge amount of light to enter the eye, giving them incredibly good night vision.

Owls have three eyelids: upper, lower, and a third—called a nictitating membrane—to clean and protect the eye.

Owls cannot move their eyes. To see their surroundings, snowy owls rely on their highly flexible necks which are able to turn up to 270° in either direction.

Thanks in part to thick feathers needed for insulation, snowies are the heaviest owl species in North America, typically weighing about 4 pounds.

Snowy owls swallow small prey whole. Indigestible parts of animals, like bones and fur, are compacted into pellets that the owls regurgitate up to 24 hours after eating.

Snowy owls use their talons to snatch prey.

The snowy owl was once placed in its own genus (*Nyctea scandiavica*) but recent genetic analysis revealed the species is closely related to horned owls in the *Bubo* genus.

Snowy owls eat an estimated 1,600 lemmings every year. That's about 3 to 5 each day.

Unlike most owls which are typically nocturnal, snowy owls are diurnal—they're active both during the day and at night.

HELLO MY NAME IS

The snowy owl is also known as: the snow owl, the arctic owl, the great white owl, the ghost owl, the emine owl, the tundra ghost, the oolagik, the white terror of the north, and the Scandinavian nightbird.

Snowy owls are usually silent except during breeding season.

Depictions of snowy owls have been found in cave paintings in Europe dating back 30,000 years.

SNOWY OWL RANGE
● BREEDING ● NON-BREEDING

While adult male snowy owls can be almost completely white, females and owlets have some dark scalloping on their plumage.

Female snowy owls are about 20% larger than the males.

Snowy owls are the official bird of Quebec.

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SOURCE: THE CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY, WOOD AUDUBON, OUTDOORS, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC, ORL PAGES

January Birding Information 7 PM

The Peregrine Team of Pine Canyon is a diverse group of volunteers who educate park visitors about the annual nesting closure zone for Peregrine Falcons in Mount Diablo State Park (Feb 1-July 31). One of the team members, Brian Richardson, will share information about local Peregrine Falcon history, a typical "patrol" experience, and fun facts about Pine Canyon's other natural wonders.

The Kestrel Campaign

In response to long-term population declines of American Kestrels in North America, members of the Peregrine Team of Pine Canyon (volunteers docents from area conservation groups including MDAS) have expanded their efforts to help another falcon, the American Kestrel. By building and establishing nest boxes in the Mt. Diablo region, doing annual monitoring and data collection for nationwide analysis, and using public outreach and education about the effects of rodenticides on area wildlife, we hope to help local populations recover and increase.

To date, five kestrel boxes have been installed in Walnut Creek: one in Rudgear Park, two in Arbolado Park, and two in the Pine Creek Detention Basin. Plans are firming up to place more boxes on John Muir Land Trust and Save Mount Diablo lands as well as other area locations, once permission is granted.

Historically, American Kestrel numbers are presumed to have declined due to DDT, pesticides, rodenticides and heavy metals usage; the loss of nesting cavities due to urbanization and competition with European Starlings; climate change; and predation by Cooper's Hawks and other birds of prey. However, researchers lack sufficient data to understand why these long-term, widespread population declines are occurring, so the citizen science community is vital for nest box programs, providing important data for research. **For general information: kestrelcampaign@gmail.com**

Jan. Meeting Schedule

The next meeting of the Mount Diablo Audubon Society will be **Thursday, January 4, 2018** 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: DVD ♦ Magic of the Snowy Owl

NEXT MONTH'S PROGRAM:
Thursday, February 1, 2018,
Bob Lewis ♦ The Bird's Rainbow

The Kestrel Campaign has received a grant from MDAS for \$500 to build and install American Kestrel nest boxes. Thank you MDAS!

If you'd like to get involved, please contact Kestrel Campaign Lead, Brian Richardson, at: brri2000@yahoo.com.

Trip Reports

Hawk Hill, October 14: Cancelled due to North Bay fires. ~Fred Safier

Berkeley-Emeryville Shoreline, October 25: Seventeen members and guests enjoyed nice weather along

the Emeryville and Berkeley waterfronts and marinas. Shorebirds in the area included Dunlin, Surfbirds, Western, Least and Spotted Sandpipers, one Whimbrel, Black-bellied Plover, Greater Yellowlegs, Sanderlings, and Willets. At lunch near the Berkeley Marina, we noted one Heermann's Gull sitting on a lone rock along with other gulls. Both Elegant and Forster's Terns were perched on pilings along the Berkeley waterfront. The best bird of the 56 species seen and heard were two male Eurasian



Whimbrel, Beth Branthaver photo

Wigeon behind the Sea Breeze Diner at the end of University Avenue, in with many American Wigeon. ~Eugenia K. Larson

Abbotts Lagoon in Pt. Reyes, October 28: Ten members and guests spent the better part of a gray day leisurely hiking out to the lagoon and back. Led by Juan-Carlos Solis, an outstanding birder and naturalist, we located and identified a bobcat visible through a scope, a river otter swimming near the trail, various small groups of deer, and 59 species of birds. Of special note was the flock of approximately 200 Tricolored Blackbirds swirling above a field adjacent to the parking lot and a flock of perhaps 70 Snowy Plover camouflaged in the sand as we finally approached the beach. We watched a Northern Harrier hassling a Common Raven and found a feather pile left behind by a predator. A few of us saw Wilson's Snipe as well as dowitchers and other various sandpiper species. Additionally, it was a four-plover day: Black-bellied, Snowy, Semi-Palmated, and Killdeer. Throughout the day, we identified five species of sparrow including Fox and Lincoln's. During the last hour, a few of us chased a rarity that had been spotted earlier by SF young birder, Jonah, and his mom. After much searching, a couple of Lapland Longspur rose up out of a grassy place, clearly separate from the many American Pipits in the area, and Juan-Carlos felt that we got enough information to differentiate the species to include both in our total count. Not all participants saw all species, of course, but we all had a very satisfying day. ~Elizabeth Leite

Charleston Slough and South Bay, November 4: It was raining pretty hard at the carpool location. Huddled under the car's raised tailgate to escape the rain, the trip leader, Beth Branthaver, decided to officially cancel the field trip, but four of us decided to brave the elements and continue as

planned. Yes, we had to stand under umbrellas (and still didn't see the Bittern in its usual spot) and take refuge under eaves as we walked the slough, and, yes, we spent considerable time at the Shoreline Lake Boathouse cafe drinking hot chocolate, and had to make a beeline to the MacDonald's for lunch during a downpour. But, eventually, the rain subsided and we birded the Palo Alto Baylands and Foster City shell bars with success. Despite the weather, we had eight waterfowl species, 13 shorebird species, six gull and tern species, a four-heron day and seven sparrow species. The best sightings came at the end of our day. We saw hundreds of shorebirds and 60 or so Black Skimmers flying north and south along the shell bars in Foster City, and maybe 80 Willets landed on the bay, well offshore, and were contentedly bobbing in the waves. Altogether we had 62 species. ~Hugh Harvey



Mixed flock of Marbled Godwits and Black Skimmers, Walt Duncan photo



A winter visitor, the "Audubon's" or Yellow-rumped Warbler, Isaac Aronow photo

McNabney Marsh, November 7: It was a beautiful day to be in Martinez, despite the cool temperature. Traffic snarls on I-680 kept our leader, Steve Taylor, from joining the group, but MDAS always seem to have skilled birders who take charge (or write field trip reports—thanks, Hugh!). Some new field trip participants joined us, bringing our group to 13. We birded from the observation platform, then walked the MVSD entry road for good measure. We also birded the north end of McNabney Marsh from Waterbird Park, making a stop at the famous taco truck. We ended the trip at the Martinez shoreline, and Teri Wills led us around a large circle to check out her favorite birding spots. Highlights of our 60 species include looks at both Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs; a female Hooded Merganser associating with Buffleheads and Common Mergansers; six raptors/falcons including a pair of White-tailed Kites and an American Kestrel; a Sora; Black and Say's Phoebes; and four icterids, including close-up views of vocalizing Great-tailed Grackles. ~Hugh Harvey

Observations (10/10-11/5/17) ————— by Maury Stern

The ducks and other winter residents are returning while the summer breeders have almost all gone.



A **Greater White-fronted Goose** was at Heather Farm 10/9. HH, TF, FS

Also, on 10/9 a **Cackling Goose** was with hundreds of **Canada Geese** on the Heather Farm grassy areas. HH, TF, FS

The long present **Canvasback** at Meeker Slough was joined by a companion. ES, AKr, SS, RF

RS and his class saw about 3,500 **Ruddy Ducks** in the water between Shimada Park in Richmond and Pt. Isabel on 10/5.

A **Hooded Merganser** was at Ironhouse Sanitary District 10/19, AL; and another was at Meeker Slough 11/5. KD

Thirty **Band-tailed Pigeons** were at Valle Vista Staging Area 10/30, JS, AK; and the First Friday group saw about 100 at Jewel Lake 11/3.

A single **Rufous Hummingbird** was at Sibley Volcanic Park 10/13. DY, RS, JL

HH and FS saw two **Wilson's Snipe** at Heather Farm pond 10/24.

A **Cattle Egret** was at Martinez Shoreline Park 10/22. It was probably the same one seen 9/4. LL

S&BB saw four **White-faced Ibis** near the Wildcat Marsh Landfill Loop in Richmond 11/2.

An **Osprey** was fishing at Heather Farm Pond 10/9, TF, HH, FS; and 10/11. JCS

Two **Bald Eagles** were at Briones Reservoir 10/12, D< and others were at the Seaview Trail in Tilden Park 10/23, LL; Valle Vista Staging area

Please submit your Contra Costa County sightings to mbstern2@yahoo.com or call Maury at (925) 284-5980. Or, please send them to EBB sightings@yahoogroups.com. If you report your sightings to eBird, please also send them to Maury Stern.

near the horse pasture 10/30, JS; and 10/31 at the Lafayette Reservoir in the trees near the dam. BE

Lewis's Woodpeckers continued: LL at the Seaview Trail in Tilden 10/23; RS and CM at Briones Reservoir 10/26; and C&TW at Round Valley Regional Park 10/26.

ML saw a **Red-naped Sapsucker** 10/21 at the Bear Creek Staging Area for Briones Reservoir.

A **Yellow-shafted Northern Flicker** was in Pinole 11/4. JE

KP saw a **Pileated Woodpecker** at the Moraga Ridge Open Space area 11/4.

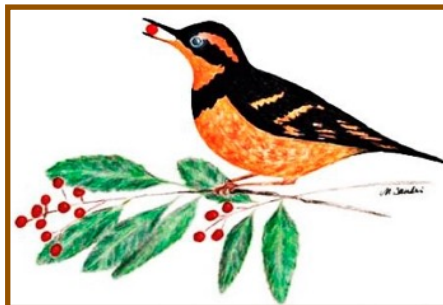
The continuing **Tropical Kingbird** was seen by many during the month. TF, HH, FS, JH, KB, DK, MS, LS, MR

AF saw a **Cassin's Vireo** in Concord 10/13; and DW saw one at Miller-Knox Regional Park in Pt. Richmond 10/24.

A **Warbling Vireo** was at JM's Kensington home 10/13.

PS saw several **Golden-crowned Kinglets** at Contra Loma Regional Park in Antioch 10/12.

Sixteen **Hermit Thrushes** were at Pt. San Pablo 10/11. LK



Varied Thrush, Megan Sandri sketch

SH saw a first-of-season (FOS) **Varied Thrush** at Oak Hill Park in Danville 10/24.

A large flock of **Cedar Waxwings** were in El Cerrito 11/5. GS

Scattered flocks of **Pine Siskins** were seen 10/13 in Sibley, RS; 10/29 in Richmond near Wildcat Canyon Regional Park, AKr; and 11/3 in Tilden Nature area. AK

A single **Lawrence's Goldfinch** was at Heather Farm 10/17. WD

A **Clay-colored Sparrow** was at the West County Waste Disposal plant (WCWD) in Richmond 10/10. LK, MP

On 10/23, LL saw a **White-throated Sparrow** in Tilden. MC and WH saw one at Jewel Lake 10/23, and AKr had one in his Richmond yard 10/29.

P&NS saw a **Slate-colored Junco** 10/29 in their Antioch yard.

A **Tricolored Blackbird** was at the WCWD 10/10. LK, MP

A **Western Meadowlark** was at Heather Farm 10/17. HH, FS This was the first in many years.



A Wilson's Warbler was spotted at Heather Farm Park on 9/28/17, Cassie Tzur photo



KB Keith Bailey, S&BB Sandra and Bruce Beyaert, MC Minder Cheng, WD Walt Duncan, KD Kathleen Durkin, JE Jack Edick, BE Bill Espey, TF Tracy Farrington, RF Robert Firehock, AF Andrew Ford, HH Hugh Harvey, JH Jack Hayden, WH Wen Hsu, SH Steve Hutchcraft, LK Logan Kahle, AK Alan Kaplan, DK Dave Kent, AKr Alan Krakauer, JL Johan Langewis, AL Albert Linkowski, LL Laura Look, ML Marty Lycan, CM Colin Meusel, JM John Myles, MP Michael Park, KP Kir Pridatko, MR Mark Rauzon, FS Fred Safier, RS Rusty Scauf, PS Paul Schorr, P&NS Paul and Nancy Schorr, JS Judi Sierra, JCS Juan-Carlos Solis, SS Sandy Steinman, LS Lucas Stephenson, MS Mark Stephenson, GS George Suennen, ES Elaine S., D< David and Linda Tiffany, DW Denise Wight, C&TW Chris and Teri Wills, and DY David Yeamans

Field Trip Schedule

By Hugh Harvey

December 2017 (Contact Leader for ?s or rain cancellations)

- 02 Saturday Sacramento/Colusa NWRs
- 09 Saturday Solano County Raptors and More
- 16 Saturday Christmas Bird Count-Central Contra Costa Co.
- 20 Wednesday Christmas Bird Count-East Contra Costa Co.

January 2018

- 06 Saturday Putah Creek
- 18 Thursday East Contra Costa County
- 27 Saturday Las Gallinas/Rush Creek/S'berger Park/Ellis Ck.
- 31 Wednesday Lake Merritt/Arrowhead Marsh @ High Tide

February 2018

- 08 Thursday Grizzly Island
- 10 Saturday Thornton/Consumnes Preserve
- 17 Saturday Bodega Bay
- 17 Saturday Great Backyard Bird Count @ John Muir House
- 21 Wednesday Sunol Regional Park
- 24-25 Sat./Sun. Los Banos/Panoche Valley
- 28 Wednesday Walnut Creek Parks

2 Saturday, December 2

Sacramento and Colusa National Wildlife Refuges

Leader: Beth Branthaver (510) 502-4869

Carpool leaves Sun Valley Mall at 7 AM. **OR** meet the group at 8:15 AM at the I-5 North Dunnigan rest area. Take I-680 north, cross the Benicia Bridge (toll), merge onto I-80E at Cordelia. At Vacaville, merge onto I-505N, follow for 34 miles and merge onto I-5N just south of Dunnigan. Continue past the town to the rest stop. This one-day field trip will include visits to scenic wildlife hotspots in the Sacramento Valley including Sacramento and Colusa NWRs, home to tens of thousands of wintering ducks, geese, and swans, but the exact itinerary will be announced the day of the trip. Bring lunch and liquids.



White-faced Ibis,
Maren Smith photo

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

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 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.

1 Saturday, December 9

Solano County Raptors and More

Leader: Gary Fregien (916) 708-0636

Carpool leaves Sun Valley Mall at 7:15 AM. **OR**, meet the leader at 8 AM at Suisun City McDonald's, Hwy 12 and Sunset Avenue. Take I-680 north, cross bridge to Benicia (toll) and merge to I-80 east at Cordelia. Then take Hwy 12 east



Northern Harrier, Maren Smith photo

toward Rio Vista for approximately four miles to Sunset Avenue, and make a left turn at the signal light into the shopping center. The McDonald's is on the right. We will bird east on Hwy 12 and Creed Rd. to the vicinity of Hwy 113 and Robinson Road,

possibly including Jepson Prairie. We will make several stops, looking for migrating waterfowl, passerines, and winter raptors, especially Flannery and McCormack Roads in search of the elusive Mountain Plover. From there, given time, we may travel to the Bird's Landing area, where we should see Tricolored Blackbirds among other passerines and to Montezuma Slough for waterfowl. Plan to spend 4-5 hours birding, plus driving time getting there and back. There will be minimal hiking, but dress for seasonal conditions. Bring hand-held radios, food, and water. Carpooling is strongly advised due to limited access at stops and the distance traveled.

Saturday, December 16, Central Contra Costa County Wednesday, December 20, East Contra Costa County 118th Annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC)

CBC Coordinator: Elizabeth Leite

eleite@diabloaodubon.org

Spaces are filling up quickly. If interested, please email Elizabeth who will attempt to pair you with a leader. At the end of each count day, a "count-down" dinner will be held where leaders will summarize the list of birds seen during the day by all surveys. There is no cost to dinner participants—this is MDAS's thanks to all of the citizen scientist volunteers who participate in this important effort.

Our chapter circles extend into two distinct geographic areas on the two days. Overall, MDAS covers varied habitats ranging from oak woodlands, to montane, and riparian habitats. Over the years, we have viewed wintering songbirds as well as migratory waterfowl and shorebirds. We are able to access some private, privately managed, and off-limits public lands due to the good will that our chapter leaders have established over the years.

Thanks in advance to all of our 24 dedicated leaders and to all participants who will be out counting, rain or shine!

1 Saturday, January 6

Putah Creek

Leader: Fred Safier (925) 937-2906

Carpool leaves Sun Valley Mall at 8 AM. **OR**, meet at 8:45 AM at the intersection of Cherry Glen and Pleasants Valley Roads, approximately one mile north of I-80, west of Vacaville. Dress warmly, in layers, as this is often a cold, windy area. Bring lunch and liquids. Possible birds we may see include Osprey, Phainopepla, Barrow's Goldeneye, and Hooded Merganser.



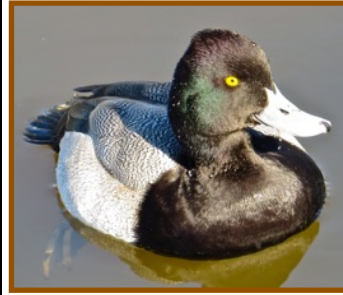
Barrow's and Common Goldeneye, Beth Branthaver photo

2 Saturday, January 27

Las Gallinas/Rush Creek/Shollenberger Park/Ellis Creek

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

Carpool leaves Sun Valley Mall parking lot at 7:30 AM. **OR**, meet at Las Gallinas at 8:30 AM. Take I-680 across the



*Lesser Scaup,
Isaac Aronow photo*

Benicia Bridge (toll). Go west on I-780 to I-80 towards Sacramento, exit to SR 37. Follow SR 37 22 miles to US 101 south and exit at Lucas Valley Road/Smith Ranch Road. Cross under the freeway to the east on Smith Ranch Road for 0.6 miles, cross the railroad tracks and turn left. Follow the road around the hill 0.7 miles until arriving at the Las Gallinas

Valley Sanitary District parking lot. Rush Creek Marsh is just north and east of the Atherton Avenue exit from US 101 in Novato. Immediately past the Park and Ride lot on Atherton, turn left onto Binford Road and go north to the marsh. Schollenberger Park is in Petaluma, east of US 101. After crossing the Petaluma River take Exit 472B East 116 Sonoma Napa, turn left at the light, then right on S. McDowell. Look for a half-right onto Cypress Drive, then enter the PRBO parking lot at 3820 Cypress. Go to the back and park near the picnic tables. Ellis Creek is just south of the PRBO offices. All four sites are good for wintering waders, shorebirds, waterfowl, and raptors. Bring lunch and liquids.



Come birding with MDAS this winter!

1 Thursday, January 18

East Contra Costa County

Leader: Paul Schorr (925) 998-0070

Carpool leaves Sun Valley Mall at 8:15 AM. **OR**, meet at Big Break Regional Shoreline Park at 9 AM. From Central Contra Costa, take Highway 4 toward Stockton/Pittsburg. After Antioch, take right Exit 30 toward CA-160/Sacramento/Rio Vista (just past Hillcrest Avenue Exit; do NOT continue straight on Highway 4). Take exit 1-A East 18th/Main Street, turn right at the bottom of the exit onto Main Street, proceed east a little over one mile, then turn left onto Big Break Road. Turn right just past the last houses on the right into Big Break Regional Shoreline Park/Delta Science Center. We will see wintering birds at Big Break, Iron House Sanitary, and several other spots in the eastern portion of our county. Bring snacks, lunch, and liquids.



*American Kestrel,
Paul Schorr photo*

1 Wednesday, January 31

Lake Merritt and Arrowhead Marsh @ High Tide

Leader: Sandy Ritchie (925) 685-8048

Carpool leaves at 8 AM from El Nido Ranch Road. **OR**, meet at 8:30 AM in parking lot by Lake Merritt. Take SR 24 to Oakland and I-980, take Grand Avenue exit and turn left on Grand. Enter park at Children's Fairyland (entry fee), and follow road around to parking lot entrance on right between boathouse and aviary. We should find a good variety of wintering ducks and gulls. We will then drive to Arrowhead Marsh for the high tide around 11:30 AM; the rising tide should flush out rails. The area is also good for shorebirds and more wintering ducks on the estuary. A visit to Garretson Point will finish our trip. Bring lunch and liquids.



Male Northern Shoveler, Cassie Tzur photo



Black-crowned Night Heron ♦ *Nycticorax nycticorax* — by Jean Halford

Black-crowned Night-Herons are common in our local marshes, rivers, ponds and canals. They are found in fresh and salt water habitats on nearly every continent except for Australia and Antarctica.

They nest in colonies and the males start the breeding process with displays to attract females. Males walk around in a crouched position, head lowered, snapping their mandibles together or grasping a twig, called the "Snap Display." Next, comes the "Advertisement Display" also called the "Song and Dance," "Snap-hiss," or "Stretch Display." Here, the male stretches out his neck and bobs his head, and when his head is level with his feet, he gives a snap-hiss vocalization. Preening and twig-shaking may occur between songs.

These displays may provide a social stimulus to other birds, prompting them to display. This stimulation in colony species may be crucial for successful reproduction. Eventually, one female will be chosen to enter his territory, accepted by the male. At this time, the legs of both sexes turn pink. Copulation occurs on or near the nest beginning the first or second day after the pair is formed.

Black-crowned Night Herons usually nest in large trees, and colonies can be found anywhere close to water. In fact, there is a colony in downtown Oakland that had a total of 41 nests in 2016. This colony was in the news a few years ago when a tree pruning service pruned some of the trees with nests in them injuring some of the chicks. The tree trimmer eventually paid for the care of the injured birds and was ultimately cleared of any charges related to the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

Nesting begins with the male building a new nest or refurbishing an old one. The male collects sticks and twigs and presents them to the female who works them into the nest. So, the male's twig ceremony contributes to the nest building process.

The eggs are laid every two days, beginning 4-5 days after the pair forms. Both adults incubate the 3-5 pale blue or

green eggs for 24-26 days, and after hatching, both parents feed the young by regurgitation.

The young leave the nest after 3-4 weeks, but they don't go far, climbing around near the nest. By 6-7 weeks of age, they can fly well enough to follow their parents to foraging areas where they beg for food. An interesting fact is that adults do not distinguish their chicks from other chicks and will brood chicks that are not their own. Young Black-crowned Night Herons will disgorge their stomach contents if they are disturbed which is convenient for biologists who study their diet.

Black-crowned Night Herons, true to their name, are most active at night, especially at dawn and dusk, hunting by standing still and waiting for their prey to appear. They may also hunt by vibrating their bills in the water luring prey by investigating the disturbance. They most often eat fish, but will ingest crustaceans, insects, frogs, snakes, birds, rodents, and carrion. (Their Latin name is derived from *nyx*, Greek for night, and the Latin *corax* for raven.)

A stocky bird with a short neck and legs, the Black-crowned Night Heron is 23-28 inches tall. It has a black crown and back, black and gray wings, and white underside. The adults (*photo above*) have red eyes and yellow legs and feet (*except in breeding season, see above*). Adults have two long plumes on their heads. Females and males look alike, but the females are smaller. Immature night herons (*photo R*) have a grey-brown head, chest, and a belly streaked with white. The young have yellow eyes and gray legs, and do not acquire adult plumage until they are about three years old.

Northern populations move south for the winter, flying to Mexico, the West Indies, and Central America. Some Pacific coast and southern U.S. populations are permanent residents. ~Jean Halford text and photos



Community Events

► Mt. Diablo SP "Mountain Talks," Tuesday, January 23, 2018, 7-9 PM

The dynamic duo of Seth Adams, Save Mount Diablo, who kicked off the reintroduction of falcons in 1989, and Jenny Papka, Native Bird Connections, will present "At Home Among Us: Peregrine Falcons in Castle Rock Park." Jenny will also bring an unreleasable male Peregrine Falcon to the talk. Ygnacio Valley Library, 2661 Oak Grove Road, WC. **For info: roejenn@aol.com**

► 15th Annual Olympic BirdFest, Sequim, Washington, April 13-15, 2018

Discover birds of the coastal Pacific Northwest and enjoy guided field trips, a boat cruise in the Strait of Juan de Fuca, and a gala banquet featuring nature guide and professional photographer, Claudio Vidal. To extend the adventure, there are pre- and post- cruises available, too. **For information: olympicbirdfest.org**

Legislative Action Committee News

On October 24, Legislative Action Committee members, Ariana Rickard, Nancy Wenninger, Heather Rosmarin, Rebecca Schwartz Lesberg and Georgette Howington attended a meeting with District 14 Assemblymember Tim Grayson in his Concord office. They discussed conservation issues of importance to Mt. Diablo Audubon Society.



From L to R: Georgette Howington, Heather Rosmarin, Assemblymember Tim Grayson, Rebecca Schwartz Lesberg, Nancy Wenninger, and Ariana Rickard, Georgette Howington photo

First, Ariana thanked Grayson for voting yes on **SB5**, the Parks bond that will be on the June 5 primary ballot. Heather brought up the importance of **AB1687**, a rodenticide bill, that did not pass, and asked for future support. **SB100** (Renewable Energy Goals for California) and **AB890** (closing the California Environmental Quality Act loophole) were two other issues discussed. Assemblymember Grayson wants to be better educated about bills MDAS is supporting and invited us to bring him information related to those subjects.

When asked how the committee can support him, Grayson mentioned three projects: the proposed Flyway Center in Fairfield, the preservation of Mare Island in Vallejo, and the Concord Naval Weapons Station. He supports the master plan for the Concord project that includes over 3,500 acres of open space. This includes the creation of a 2,537-acre Regional Park, designating 178 acres for the Mt. Diablo Creek corridor, and providing parks and greenbelts throughout the development. Ariana suggested he form a Conservation Advisory Council and he agreed. ~**Georgette Howington, Legislative Action Committee**

For information: www.concordreuseproject.org

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. The holidays are upon us. If you or your family 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. You shop. Amazon gives.

Congratulations to Ariana Rickard

Our MDAS Program Chair, Ariana Rickard, has new job responsibilities at Audubon California. The announcement from her supervisor is as follows: "I am pleased to announce



Ariana Rickard gave her remarks at the opening of the Golden Gate Audubon Society Centennial Art Exhibit at the Lindsay Wildlife Experience in October, Paul Schorr photo

that Ariana Rickard has been promoted to Associate Director, Chapter Network, and will be leading Audubon California's chapter program from this point forward. Since joining Audubon California a little less than three years ago as a Chapter Network Manager, Ariana has shown terrific leadership and creativity within our nascent chapter network program, frequently pushing it to new

heights. Working with me, Ariana will oversee a program that recently completed its first three-year strategic plan—and will play a key role in finalizing our plans for the program moving forward." Congratulations, Ariana! MDAS thanks you for all that you do for our chapter, but also for Audubon in California and beyond.

GGAS Centennial Art Exhibit

Visit the Lindsay Wildlife Experience to view the Golden Gate Audubon Society's (GGAS) traveling art exhibit celebrating the chapter's Centennial. The photo panels depicting one hundred year's of GGAS activities, conservation, and history are entitled "100 Years of Protecting Bay Area Birds!" **The exhibit will run through January 2, 2018.**

At the October opening reception for the exhibit, MDAS was represented by Paul and Nancy Schorr, Carol Pacht, Tracy Farrington, Beth Branthaver, and Ariana Rickard.

Quail Editor Position Open in 2018

After three years as *Quail* editor, I will be retiring in June. If you are interested in becoming the next editor, let me know so that I can train you, answer your questions, and show you the ropes, working side by side.

To be honest, I was a very beginning birder, and had zero experience creating a newsletter, although I had been a teacher and had writing and editing experience. My point? If you have an interest in birds, if you are creative, and if you like to write and edit, you are perfect for this job! The *Quail* also has a reliable team of regular contributors making the job easier. Please contact me to see if this position is a good fit for you. ~**Maren Smith, marensmithbkk@yahoo.com**

The Birds of "The Rock"

When you think of Alcatraz what do you think of? A prison? Hardcore prisoners? Al Capone, George "Machine Gun" Kelly, or The "Birdman," Robert Stroud (who ironically never kept birds when he was on the island)?

When I think of Alcatraz, I think of the inhabitants who were on the island prior to humans taking over the island—



A birds-eye view of Alcatraz, Google Images photo

the birds. Prior to the U.S. Army's inhabitation of the island, the only living creatures on the island until 1853, were the large populations of Western Gulls and other sea

birds. In fact, the old Spanish word *alcatrazes* means "sea bird".

While the Army controlled the island from the 1850s until the 1930s, and then the Federal Bureau of Prisons from the 1930s until 1963, there were hardly any birds living on the island. Once the prison closed in 1963, and all the humans left, the birds came back. Some of the human activity on the island has created many homes for the birds, such as the cliffs and tide pools created by the army blasting. The various gardens planted around the island also attract the birds who nest there.

Some of the common bird species you now see include Western Gull (the second largest population in California), Double-crested Cormorant, Brandt's Cormorant, Pelagic Cormorant, Black-crowned Night Heron, Snowy Egret, Pigeon Guillemot, and even some smaller birds such as



Pigeon Guillemots, National Park Service photo

White-crowned Sparrow, Anna's Hummingbird, Song Sparrow, and Black Phoebe. The best time to see these birds is from February to September during the nesting season.

As a National Park Service (NPS) volunteer, I have had many interactions with these birds. Some of my favorite experiences include the Snowy Egrets (whose calls sound like a gurgling noise), and the Western Gull chicks. I have gotten pretty close to them and I have even seen Pigeon Guillemots dive into the water to find a fish only to jump up near the dock and waddle around like penguins with that



Above: A Snowy Egret colony; and Below L: Western Gull adult and chicks, National Park Service photos



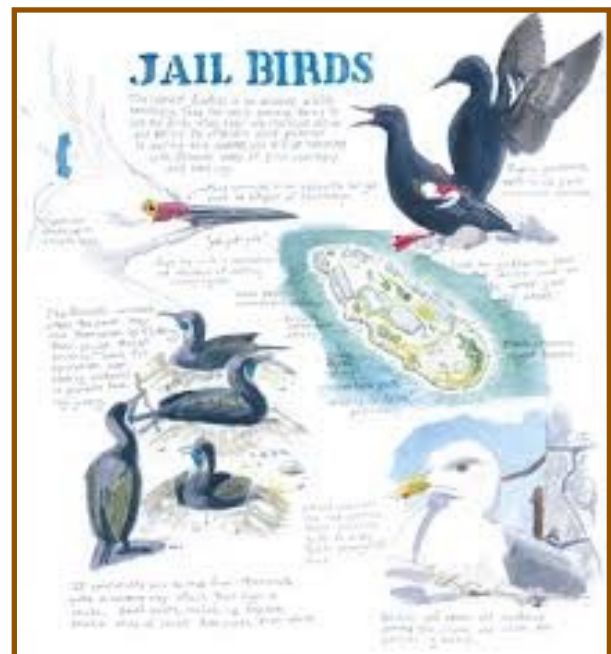
little fish in their mouths. And, I have seen, on very rare occasions, a Great Blue Heron sitting at the top of a Eucalyptus tree.

Alcatraz Island NP has a crew of bird volunteers and a staff bird ranger. Their job is to take bird counts and to respond to any bird emergencies. ~Matt Hess



(Editors note: Matt is an MDAS member and has been a NPS volunteer at the John Muir NHS and Alcatraz Island NP since 2016. He applied for the position at: volunteer.gov.)

For more information, visit the NPS Alcatraz website: www.nps.gov/alca/learn/nature/index.htm



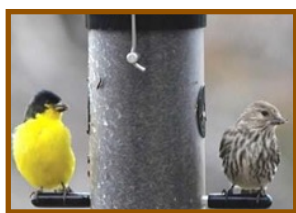
"Jail Birds" from Bay Nature Magazine, John Muir Laws sketches, Google Images photo

Irruptive Winter

Winter is a great time to attract visiting bird species. Many of them return to the exact same location each year. Juncos, White and Golden-crowned Sparrows, and wrens may be making a repeat appearance in your yard this winter. You can attract them with tray feeders or just put seed on the ground. Millet and safflower are their favorites.

When natural food supplies become scarcer in the northern states and Canada, numerous bird species “irrupt”, migrating in large numbers to more southern areas in search of food. Now is the time to keep feeders full and look for birds associated with irruptions.

In our area, the Pine Siskins are the most irruptive winter finches. They are attracted to finch feeders filled with nyjer and can also be attracted to seed



blends containing sunflower chips. Large flocks may descend on a bird

feeder, creating quite a sight as they compete for perches and seed. Increased numbers of American and Lesser Goldfinches are also seen.

Red-breasted Nuthatches, unlike their White-breasted cousins, are partial migrants prone to irruptive movements.

Though you may never see more than a few at a feeder at once, they are fun to watch



because of their tendency to climb up and down tree trunks, feeder poles, and certain types of feeders. They are typically the earliest to head south for winter, showing up as early as September and are particularly fond of suets, Bark Butter, nuts, and seed blends.

Attracting these and other winter guests can be lots of fun. Be ready, because before you know it, these out-of-towners will be just that—headed out of town. ~Mike Eliot, WBU

Mt. Diablo Audubon Society (MDAS)

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

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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
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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

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

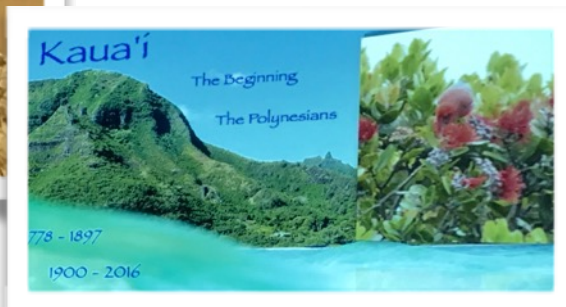
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A Raven and a Northern Red-shafted Flicker appear to be having a staring contest at Sibley Volcanic Regional Preserve, Isaac Aronow photo



In case you missed it, November's monthly meeting featured:

- John King (photo L), who talked about his Wood Duck box Eagle Scout project on Grayson Creek for Birding Information, and
- Gordon Beebe (photo bottom L) who presented "Kaua'i, the 5.1 Million Year Experiment" for the monthly program (Rosalie Howarth photos).

"Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail."
~Ralph Waldo Emerson

