



the Quail

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

Volume 63, Number 5

February 2018

February 8 PM Program : A Bird's Rainbow ♦ Bob Lewis

Many birds are brightly colored while others use patterned feathers for camouflage. How do these colors originate? What's the difference between colors from pigments and physical colors?



of brightly colored slides.

Bob trained as a chemist and worked for Chevron for 33 years. He has taught birding classes in the Bay Area for over 25 years and served as chair of the Golden Gate Audubon Society's Adult Education Committee, for which he is currently teaching "Birds of the Bay Area" with Rusty Scalf. Next month he will begin the fifth class of "Master Birding" at the California Academy of Science.

He loves to travel and photograph birds, and last year chased brightly colored birds in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Colombia.

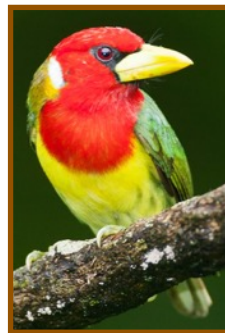


From Yellow Warblers to Anna's Hummingbirds and from Snow Geese to Brewer's Blackbirds, each species makes unique use of the feather colors it possesses. What do the colors indicate to other birds? And, do birds see the same colors we do?

In his presentation, "A Bird's Rainbow," Bob Lewis will unravel some of the mysteries of color in birds with a little chemistry, a bit of physics, and a lot



Above: The pigment that creates the yellow color in King Penguins is still undefined; L: Bob Lewis; Above R: Saffron Toucanet's yellow feathers are colored by carotenes in the food it eats; R: The Red-headed Barbet operates a chemical plant in its body to convert yellow carotenes to red pigments, Bob Lewis photos



Meeting Schedule

The next meeting of the Mount Diablo Audubon Society will be **Thursday, February 1** 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: A Bird's Rainbow ♦ Bob Lewis
NEXT MONTH'S PROGRAM:
Thursday, March 1
Norman Kikuchi ♦ Birds of Alaska

7 PM Birding Information

Thousands of houses currently proposed for development over four square miles (about 2,800 acres) of south Antioch would impact beautiful hills, the Sand Creek riparian corridor, and endangered species habitat. Save Mount Diablo Land Use Manager, Juan Pablo Galván, will talk about what's happening and how Mt. Diablo Audubon members can be part of grassroots advocacy efforts that will protect this important area.

DEDICATED TO HABITAT CONSERVATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

During the holidays, I purchased the January 2018 issue of *National Geographic Magazine* because of the much acclaimed article, "Why Birds Matter," by Jonathan Franzen. Finally, the frenzy of holiday activities subsided and I settled into my cozy reading chair with the magazine and my binoculars in my lap. The bird bath and surrounding rose bushes are within close view from the chair, hence the accessibility of the binos.

As I was reading Franzen's article with much interest, the corner of my eye caught the twitching of leaves in the nearby rose bushes. I focused my binoculars, and a Ruby-crowned Kinglet came into view, all of its field marks vivid. It appeared to be gleaning aphids or other insects from the roses.

Watching the fluttering movements of the kinglet was a typical special moment for a long-time birder and I wondered how I could possibly share and convey the personal connection of this soulful occasion with a "non-birder." The task seemed challenging until my focus centered



Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Jean Halford photo

on children. I don't mean to imply that I won't continue to work hard to "share the joy" with any non-birder adult I encounter, but it seems our best hope is with young people.

So, upon completing Franzen's article, I felt even more compelled to convey to others "Why Birds Matter." I must be prepared to offer spontaneous, well-articulated responses that include, beyond the joyful interactions and amazement of bird watching, the many ways that birds help humankind: alerting us to harmful environmental circumstances, including climate change, and the threats of toxic chemicals and pollutants in our shared environments; and the beneficial roles that birds play in the dispersal of seeds, pollination, and in the control of harmful insects and rodents.

I look forward to a year ahead that focuses on "Why Birds Matter" and my column will continue to address that theme. As Thomas Lovejoy said so poignantly, "If you take care of the birds, you take care of most of the big problems in the world." Now, if only our elected officials were to incorporate this philosophy!

We are Given the Most Beautiful Gift

Book Review: *The California Field Atlas* by Obi Kaufmann (Heyday Books, \$45)

Several years ago, Obi Kaufmann, a lifelong hiker, outdoorsman, and artist, experienced an epiphany. One afternoon, looking down across a river valley towards the ocean, he suddenly understood California as a "single, integrative being composed of living patterns and ancient processes." Inspired by this extraordinary insight, he has written and illustrated a beautiful volume called *The California Field Atlas*. In the book he describes how California's core systems of geology, ecology, and topography intermingle and combine to produce a whole that is vastly greater than the simple sum of many parts.

In each of *The California Field Atlas's* ten chapters – among them "Of Earth and Mountains," "Of Wildlife and Wild Gardens," and "Of Parks and Protection" – Kaufmann presents a richly detailed understanding of the different natural and occasional



human systems which organize the state. He brings a poet's sensibility as well as a scientist's understanding to his writing, "as the fabric of the Earth's crust, floating on its molten mantle, pushes California's mountains around like so many piles of sand, the state's topography is revealed as a temporary layout." These different frames of understanding blend into a whole that is not only as complex, but also as unified as California itself.

As fine as Kaufmann's writing is it is his illustrations that most readers will find the most extraordinary. The rich detail of the maps was, for the most part, painted outside. Kaufmann advises us early on not to "get frustrated by a smudge here or a drip there; these maps live in an expressive world and, given that most were painted outside in the places they depict, that's okay." The richness of the maps is >>>*continued on page 8*

Welcome New & Rejoining Members

Rochelle Fortier, Walnut Creek; Karin Deas, Walnut Creek; Regine Perrotti, Benicia; Mark Murphy, Diablo; Corrine Warren, Concord; Daniel Fitzgerald, Lafayette; Nadine Hitchcock, Walnut Creek; Mary Salmon, Lafayette; Lynn Larrow, Walnut Creek; Lou Ann Maihofer, Walnut Creek; Juan Pablo Galván; Christina Madlener, Concord

Q

What North American songbird lays the largest clutch for its size? Unscramble the letters or see page 7 for the answer.

YKERGWLBTCNUREIDON

MDAS on the Web

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

Submit Contra Costa County sightings to mbstern2@yahoo.com, call Maury at (925) 284-5980, or send them to EBB_sightings@yahoo.com. If you report sightings to eBird, please also send them to Maury Stern. (see Observations page 3)

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Observations (11/17/17-1/5/18) — by Maury Stern

Most of the typical migratory birds wintering here have returned.

A **Greater White-fronted Goose** was with 150 **Canada Geese** at Heather Farm on 11/15. HH

An unusual **Snow Goose** was at the Lafayette Reservoir dam on 12/8, EL; ER saw it two days later. Another was at Heather Farm Pond 12/16. TF

SH saw four **Cackling Geese** at Oak Hill Park 11/14 and 11/19; three were at Contra Loma RP 11/17, P&NS; and one at Heather Farm 12/7. HH

A **Barrow's Goldeneye** was offshore the Martinez Regional Shoreline on 11/17. DW

Over 100 **Band-tailed Pigeons** were at Tilden Nature 12/1, AK; and 50 at Upper San Leandro Res. 1/2. MS

A **Black Rail** walked in front of MM at the Martinez Shoreline 12/2.

LF had three **Ridgway's Rails** and two **Sora** at Meeker Slough @ HT 1/2.

On 12/1, KH saw 24 **Common Gallinules** at Contra Loma RP.

P&NS saw 50 **Sandhill Cranes** at Holland Tract 11/8 and 30 on 11/22.

Wilson's Snipes were at Meeker Slough during high tides on 11/19, SG (3); 12/4, SS (13); and 1/2, LF (9).

A **Wandering Tattler** was on the rocks at Pt. Isabel shoreline 1/1. OC

HF saw a **Pigeon Guillemot** 11/11 from an Amtrak train in Hercules.

A **Caspian Tern** was at Clifton Court Forebay 1/5. C&TW

JD saw a **Brandt's Cormorant** offshore of the Richmond Marina 1/1. LK saw one there 1/2 and another near Pt. Molate on that same day.

P&NS saw an **American Bittern** at Holland Tract 11/8.

Two **Cattle Egrets** were at the West County Wastewater Treatment Plant 11/13. MR

MC saw some **White-faced Ibises** at the WCWT 11/6. Forty were there 11/13. DB, MR

An immature **Bald Eagle** was at the Lafayette Reservoir 12/24. BE

Scattered **Ferruginous Hawks** were seen by P&NS at Holland Tract 11/8, and Delta Road in Knightsen 11/22; two at Wildcat Canyon Park, Richmond 12/20, AKr; one at Clayton

Community Park 12/26, DL; and one near Sincich Lagoon, Briones Regional Park 12/28. KH

HH saw a **Golden Eagle** at Heather Farm 12/17, and PS saw one on Heidon Ranch Road, Antioch 12/22.

JB had three **Long-eared Owls** in Black Diamond Mine RP 12/17.

JA saw a juvenile **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** 11/13 on the Blue Oak Trail in Briones Park.

A **Yellow-shafted Flicker** was at Hilltop Park, Richmond 12/13. C&TW

A **Pileated Woodpecker** was reported by BE 12/24 from the Upper Rim Trail at the Lafayette Reservoir.

A **Peregrine Falcon** was at Pt. Pinole 11/5 and 11/19, SD; and LF saw one at Pt. Isabel 11/16.

Merlins were seen locally by many from November to January.

C&TW saw a **Prairie Falcon** at Martinez Shoreline Park 11/22.

Thirteen observers reported the **Tropical Kingbird** at Heather Farm.

A **Yellow-billed Magpie** was seen 12/9 by P&NS in Knightsen.

Violet-green Swallows were in East County on Orwood Road 12/20. RF, LK, JL, RL

KV saw two **Barn Swallows** on Delta Road Brentwood 12/20; others were at Holland Tract 12/20. TR, DM

MRO had an unusual **Red-breasted Nuthatch** at his eastern Concord home 11/7.

A **House Wren** and **Marsh Wren** were at Heather Farm 11/24. HH, FS

BP, GL, DW, SP, PL, and KO saw a **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher** at Tilden Nature Area 11/18; and TR saw one at Holland Tract 12/20.

A flock of **Varied Thrushes** was at Sibley Park 11/10, TH; and four were on South Gate Road near the Wildcat Canyon Gate at Tilden Park 12/30. PY

EL saw **Phainopepla** at Clayton Community Park 11/12; JB saw two there 12/22; and DL on 12/26.

HH and FS saw a **Purple Finch** at Heather Farm 12/7; JB, DL at Clayton Community Park 12/22 and 12/26; and P&NS (4) at their Antioch home 12/29.

Red Crossbills were at Redwood RP and 10 at Tilden 11/19. MK

Pine Siskins were seen associating with **Lesser Goldfinches**. TF saw 15 in his WC backyard; EL had two at her SR home 11/13; CM saw 20 at Redwood RP 11/19; and two more were at Heather Farm 12/7. HH, FS

An **Orange-crowned Warbler** was at Holland Tract 11/20. DM

KH discovered two **Vesper Sparrows** near Sincich Lagoon in Briones Park 12/28; and thereafter by JC, KP, LK, and MR the next four days.

A **Swamp Sparrow** was at Martinez Shoreline 11/17. DW, SG, MK, KV, C&TW, and MR saw it over the next week. KM refound it 12/23 at Lafayette Reservoir where one had been the previous two years; and GS saw it there on 12/25.

White-throated Sparrows were at Briones 11/8, C&TW; Rossmoor 12/8, TL; and 12/21 at P&NS's home.

Slate-colored Juncos were seen by an anonymous birder in Briones 11/9; 11/13 EM had one at his Alamo home; EL at her San Ramon home; and M&SS at their Lafayette home 11/26.

On 12/21, KH saw 50 **Great-tailed Grackles** at the Antioch Marina.

~

JA Jeff Acuff, DB Dan Bernstein, JB Jerry Britten, OC Ore Carmi, MC Mike Carnall, JC Jim Chiropolis, SD Sheila Dickie, JD Judith Dunham, BE Bill Espey, TF Tracy Farrington, LF Lee Friedman, HF Harry Fuller, RF Robert Furrow, SG Susan Greef, HH Hugh Harvey, KH Kevin Hints, TH Tim Howe, SH Steve Hutchcraft, LK Logan Kahle, AK Alan Kaplan, MK Marilyn Kinch, AKr Alan Krakauer, EL Eugenia Larson, GL Garrett Lau, TL Tom Lee, EL Elizabeth Leite, DL Don Lewis, JL Jason Liu, RL Rachel Liu, PL Patricia Lynch, MM Mike Marchiano, CM Colin Meusel, KM Kai Mills, EM Ethan Monk, DM Dominik Mosur, KO Kitty O'Neil, BP Bill Pelletier, SP Sergio Perez, KP Kir Pridatko, MR Mark Robertson, TR Ted Robertson, FS Fred Safer, PS Paul Schorr, P&NS Paul and Nancy Schorr, SS Sandy Steinman, MS Maury Stern, M&SS Maury and Susan Stern, GS Gerald Sylvester, KV Krista Vossekul, DW Denise Wight, C&TW Chris and Teri Wills, and PY Pam Young

Trip Reports

Limantour, November 18: It was cold at Bear Valley when the 11 participants met. Some early highlights were a Varied Thrush and a Lincoln's Sparrow along the Earthquake Trail, and a

Sharp-shinned Hawk flying into some dense brush which really upset the California Quails hiding inside. As we later drove downhill to the ocean, we were treated to one of the most spectacular vistas we had ever seen—the entire Limantour Spit surrounded by water, the white bluffs along Drake's Bay, and the Farallon Islands on the horizon of the dark Pacific, all under crystal clear blue skies. The tidal marsh along the trail to Muddy Hollow had seven duck species, Song, Savannah, White- and Golden-crowned Sparrows, a Northern Harrier, American Kestrel, and a flyby Peregrine Falcon. After lunch in the sun, we walked across

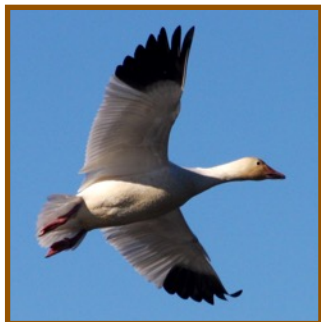


Above: Lincoln's Sparrow;
Below: Sanderlings,
Beth Branthaver photos

the beach to the shore, where we added Surf Scoters, a couple grebe species, and watched hundreds of Sanderlings run into and out of the surf. They were accompanied by a few Dunlins, and Western Sandpipers. A small herd of Tule Elk watched us from a ridge above the beach. A total of 62 species was seen. ~Hugh Harvey



Sacramento/Colusa National Wildlife Refuges, December 2: Ten participants headed north early Saturday to spend the day at the Sacramento Valley Refuges. Our first Refuge was Colusa NWR where we stopped at the viewing platform and found a wide range of ducks including Northern Pintails, American Wigeon, Northern Shoveler, Gadwalls, Green-winged Teal, Bufflehead, Ruddy Duck, and a couple of Eurasian Wigeons.



Snow Goose in flight,
Maren Smith photo

We also had lots of Ross's Geese, Greater White-fronted Geese, and some Snow Geese. We then drove the auto tour where we got views of White-faced Ibis, a couple of Common Gallinule, a Belted Kingfisher, and a huge Black-crowned Night-Heron rookery. Along the loop we found an American Pipit, Loggerhead Shrike, Marsh Wren, and Common Goldeneye. From Colusa we drove north to Llano Seco where we found Tundra Swans and Sandhill Cranes in the fields. We also found shorebirds including dowitchers,

stilts, and a few Long-billed Curlews. Across the pond was a lone Bald Eagle. Heading southwest, we toured the Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge, where we saw a couple more Bald Eagles, two Peregrine Falcons, and a large group



Above: hybrid blue-morph Ross's X Snow Goose seen 11/25/17, Beth Branthaver photo; Below L: Ring-necked Pheasant, Pam Lorenz



of Ring-necked Ducks. Here, we saw impressive numbers of both Ross's and Snow Geese, and were able to find a blue morph Snow Goose, a Ring-necked

Pheasant, and a very cooperative Downy Woodpecker, too. For the day, we had a total of 73 species. ~Beth Branthaver

Solano County Raptors, December 9: A cold morning it was, but 19 participants had a great time driving parts of southeast Solano County. Raptors we saw included White-tailed Kite, Northern Harrier, Red-shouldered, Red-tailed and Ferruginous Hawk, Burrowing Owl, American Kestrel, and Prairie Falcon. One of our trip goals was to find Mountain Plovers and we were successful this year, though they were quite distant and not easily photographed. The trip ended somewhat abruptly when the road



Above: Burrowing Owl, Susana de Trapaga photo; R: Ferruginous Hawk, Paul Schorr photo

south of Birds Landing was closed, but we still totaled 49 species for the trip. ~Hugh Harvey

Putah Creek/Lake Solano, January 6: It was a glorious day, sunny and seasonably warm. Wood Ducks, Hooded and Common Mergansers, Green Heron, more than one Osprey, several White Pelicans, Greater Yellowlegs, Kingfishers, several Phainopepla, Rock Wren, Fox and Lincoln's Sparrows were among the expected highlights, along with Western Bluebirds, Acorn, Nuttall's, and Downy Woodpecker, as well as Red-Breasted Sapsucker, and Northern Flicker. The unexpected highlight, and, for many of us, the Bird of the Day, was a Golden-crowned Kinglet pair near the Yolo/Solano Bridge, well seen by everyone, foraging with a couple of Ruby-crowns. The numbers for the day: 21 birders, 70 species. ~Fred Safier



Field Trip Schedule

By Hugh Harvey

February 2018 (Contact Leader for ?s or rain cancellations)

08 Thursday Grizzly Island
10 Saturday Thornton Area/Cosumnes River Preserve
17 Saturday Bodega Bay
21 Wednesday Sunol Regional Park
24-25 Sat/Sun Los Banos/Panoche Valley
28 Wednesday Walnut Creek City Parks

March 2018

07 Wednesday Contra Loma Reservoir
13 Tuesday McNabney Marsh
22 Thursday Valle Vista
24 Saturday Tomales Bay State Park
28 Wednesday Lake Lagunitas

1 Thursday, February 8 Grizzly Island

Leader: Maury Stern (925) 284-5980

Carpool leaves at 7 AM from Sun Valley Mall. **OR**, meet at 8:30 AM at the Refuge headquarters. Take I-680 north, then I-80 east to SR12. Follow SR12 through Fairfield, watch for sign to Grizzly Island on right, and follow road to headquarters (entry fee). Watch for raptors and Short-eared Owls along road. The California Dept. of Fish and Game's Grizzly Island Wildlife Area is in the heart of the 84,000-acre Suisun Marsh, the largest contiguous estuarine marsh in the United States. Grizzly Island provides habitat for more than 200 species of birds and is home to a variety of threatened or endangered wildlife and plants. We may see the herd of Tule Elk, and we may also bird at Rush Ranch if time permits after finishing at Grizzly Island. Bring lunch and liquids.

1 Saturday, February 10

Thornton Area/Cosumnes River Preserve

Leader: Ethan "Chick" Chickering (925) 686-9231

Carpool leaves Sun Valley Mall at 8 AM. **OR**, meet at 8:45 AM in Westgate Landing Park at end of Glascock Rd. Take SR 4 to Antioch Bridge (toll), go N on SR 160 along river to Rio Vista bridge, and turn right on SR 12 for 11.5 miles. East of Terminous, turn right onto the exit to Glascock Rd. and go under the bridge. Turn left onto Glascock Rd. proper and continue to the park at the end. We hope to see swans, Sandhill Cranes, hawks, and grassland birds. Trip will go in light rain. Bring lunch and liquids.



American Pipit,
Maren Smith photo

1 Saturday, February 17

Bodega Bay

Leader: Hugh Harvey (925) 935-2979

Carpool leaves Sun Valley at 7:30 AM. **OR**, meet at the Tides Restaurant on water side of Highway 1 in Bodega at 9:15 AM. Take I-680 across the Benicia Bridge (toll). Go west on I-780 to I-80 towards Sacramento, exit to SR 37. Follow SR 37 to Lakeville Road, turn right. In Petaluma turn left on E Washington Street and continue on Bodega Road, Valley Ford Road, and SR 1 to Bodega Bay. Walk through or around The Tides Restaurant to find the group viewing the harbor birds from outdoor seating. Possibilities include wintering shorebirds, Black Oystercatcher, Wandering Tattler, Marbled Godwit, as well as terns, gulls, cormorants, and waterfowl. Bring lunch, liquids, and sunscreen.

3 Wednesday, February 21

Sunol Regional Park

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

Carpool leaves at 7:30 AM from Sycamore Valley Road Park and Ride lot in Danville. **OR**, meet at 8 AM in the first parking lot on the left, Sunol Regional Park. Go south on I-680 to Calaveras Road. Go left under I-680 and drive four miles south on Calaveras; turn left on Geary Road and go two miles to park (possible entry fee). Watch and listen for Wild Turkey along Geary Road; Golden Eagles, other raptors, Rufous-crowned Sparrows, American Dipper, and Canyon and Rock Wrens are possible. Bring lunch and liquids.

1 Saturday-Sunday, February 24-25

Los Banos/Panoche Valley

Leaders: Beth Branthaver (510) 502-4869

and Hugh Harvey (925) 935-2979

On Saturday we will leave from Sycamore Valley Road Park & Ride at 6:30 AM. **OR**, meet at MacDonald's in Gustine at 8 AM. We will bird Santa Fe Grade Road, together with the San Luis and Merced Wildlife Refuges and should see a full range of waterfowl and raptors. On Sunday we will bird Little Panoche Road and Panoche Valley. Target birds include Mountain Bluebird, Mountain Plover, and Long-eared Owl. **See motel options in Los Banos on page 6.** Participants need to bring lunch for both days. A communal (optional) dinner is being planned for Saturday evening. A fee is charged at Mercey Hot Springs. **If you plan to attend, please call the leaders for possible last minute changes!**

>>>Field trips continued on page 6

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.

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

Motel options in the Los Banos area continued from Los Banos/Panoche Valley field trip, February 24-25, page 5:

- Best Western Executive Inn (209) 827-0954
- Los Banos Days Inn (209) 826-9690
- Vagabond Inn Executive Los Banos (209) 827-4677
- Santa Nella, Holiday Inn Express (209) 826-8282.

1 Wednesday, February 28

Walnut Creek City Parks

Leader: Hugh Harvey (925) 935-2979

Meet at 8:30 AM at the wooden railing at the natural pond, just past the community center in Heather Farm Park, down the hill from where our monthly meetings are held. We will continue birding at Borges Ranch. Bring snacks, liquids.

Yellow-crowned Night Herons in Walnut Creek? Well, no, not yet.

Last October, Central Coast birders were all atwitter over a sighting of two juvenile Yellow-crowns on the edge of Morro Bay’s State Park Marina. It was the first ever sighting of these rare-to-California birds in San Luis Obispo County—and the first time my wife Donna and I had ever seen one.

For many years now Morro Bay has been our go-to getaway spot. As one of several dozen “classic” estuaries on the West Coast (i.e., estuaries influenced mainly by river, tide, and wave action), Morro Bay is a rich natural habitat for all things aquatic and, of course, birds, birds, birds.

Even before we checked into our hotel we checked out Morro Rock and its two resident pairs of Peregrine Falcons. Next stop was State Park Marina across town, adjacent to the estuary’s salt marsh. It was October 12, and just as we were about to start out on the marina boardwalk, we came upon a couple intently photographing something at the edge of the marina. It was a pair of juvenile Yellow-crown Night Herons which, they told us, were extremely rare in California.

On our own we wouldn’t have recognized them as Yellow-crowns because juveniles look a lot like Black-crowned Night Herons. Young Yellow-crowns have a slightly thicker bill, are more slender with a longer neck, and have smaller white spots on the back and wings. They don’t get their eponymous coloring for two to three years. After the couple had finished their photos I took a couple of shots of the bird that was clenching a freshly caught rock crab in its beak before it flew onto the stern of a nearby sailboat to finish its meal.



Yellow-crowned Night Herons may be rare in California, but in other habitats they are not uncommon birds, nor are they endangered. Ornithologists divide them into five subspecies with a combined range that extends mainly from the southeastern Atlantic seaboard and Gulf Coast southward into the Caribbean, Baja Mexico, Central America, and northern South America. In North America some even breed as far north as Wisconsin, Michigan, and lower Canada.

Although they are similar in many ways to their Black-crowned cousins, Yellow-crowns feed almost exclusively on

crustaceans. Their presence correlates directly with their food supply: inland it’s crayfish, but in the coastal wetlands, their food of choice is crab. The birds’ breeding season kicks in when crab is plentiful, and although they are called night herons, it’s the tidal cycle that rings their dinner bell. They feed during the two to three hours surrounding low tide, night or day, hunting for marsh crabs, fiddler crabs, ghost crabs, mole crabs, mud crabs, blue crabs, lady crabs, green crabs, rock crabs, and toad crabs. You could say it’s all crab, all the time. Indeed, Yellow-



L and Above: immature Yellow-crown Night Herons, A. Richard Immel photos; Below: Adult Yellow-crown Night Heron, Google Images photo

crowns are such connoisseurs of crab, in the late 1970s they were introduced to Bermuda in a successful effort to eradicate a plague of land crabs.

In the West, their habitat is mainly Baja California, with occasional spillover into the San Diego area. Juveniles, like the Morro pair we saw, tend to wander northward, later returning to their home turf. However, over the years, there have been isolated sightings north of San Diego, so the likelihood of a Contra Costa sighting may not be as far-fetched as it seems; back in the 1970s, Yellow-crowns were sighted for six consecutive years in San Rafael, and in 2005, one was sighted in Inverness near Tomales Bay, the northernmost sighting in California.

So, where are the two Morro birds now? One left a

month or so after we first saw them, but the other remained in the Marina area over the Christmas holidays. It was seen roosting with Black-crowns in a grove of eucalyptus trees next to the marina and it turned up on the Central Coast Audubon Christmas Bird Count (a first). A week later it was seen crawling out from under a tarpaulin on one of the marina boats—no doubt on its way to pick up some crab. ~A. Richard “Dick” Immel





Ruby-crowned Kinglet ♦ *Regulus calendula*

by Jean Halford

This cute little bird is found in our area in the fall and winter when these tiny birds hang out with mixed flocks of chickadees, titmice, nuthatches, and some warblers. They tend to spend time in a wide variety of habitats, including deciduous woodland, stream side thickets, and suburban yards. Occasionally, I find a Ruby-crowned Kinglet with mixed flocks in my own yard. One found his reflection in my kitchen window fascinating and kept coming to sit at the window sill—tapping at his image or fluttering at his “rival”—oh, so adorable!



Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Jean Halford photo

Kinglets head north in March-April to nest in subalpine coniferous forests at 4-10,000 feet. Each year, Ruby-crowned Kinglets find a new mate. The male begins courtship by approaching a female, hopping from branch to branch, tail raised, red crown visible, and singing. In response, the female flutters her wings; then the pair will mate.

They nest high up in evergreen trees, up to 100 feet high. A female chooses a nesting site in dense foliage and it takes her about five days to build her deep-hanging cup nest of twigs, moss, lichens, and leaves. A unique feature of kinglets

is the size “hierarchy” among eggs, with early-laid eggs smaller than later-laid ones. The female incubates 5-12 eggs—the largest clutch for a bird that small—for 12-14 days. The male feeds the female while she incubates the eggs and helps feed the hatchlings that fledge about 16 days after hatching.

This tiny songbird has a relatively large head, a thin pointed bill, almost no neck, pale toes, and a thin tail. It is a plain, gray-green bird, with a broken eye-ring, and a white wing bar. The male’s ruby crown is not always visible, only when he is agitated, courting a female, or defending his territory.

Ruby-crowned Kinglets have a habit of flicking their wings constantly, key in identifying them.

The Ruby-crowned Kinglet’s genus, *Regulus*, means “little king” in Latin. Thus, a group of kinglets can be called a castle, a court, a principedom, or a dynasty. This bird is common and its status is listed as one of “least concern” in the conservation community; although a resident subspecies on Isla Guadalupe off Baja, CA is extinct, not having been seen for 60 years. Kinglets are the shortest living of all altricial birds; the oldest living Ruby-crowned Kinglet was 5 years 7 months.

How many birds will you find?



21st Annual Great Backyard Bird Count
February 16-19, 2018

Yellow-throated Warbler
Photo: Judy Lytle/GBBC

Attention Citizen Scientists, the GBBC is Coming!

Mark your calendar for the 21st Annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC), a worldwide, 4-day event, February 16-19. A collaborative effort from the GBBC team at the National Audubon Society, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and Bird Studies Canada, this valuable data, logged on ebird.org, informs climate change, population trends, and scientific research. In 2017, 181,556 checklists were submitted, 6,249 total species were observed, and nearly three million birds were counted. Join the fun! **For information:** gbbc.birdcount.org (R: Anna’s Hummingbird, Megan Sandri sketch)



Community Events

► Save Mount Diablo’s 2018 Public Hikes Announced

Explore Save Mount Diablo private lands and public trails (RSVP required). **Info:** bit.ly/Discover-Diablo-Hikes-Calendar

► Mt. Diablo State Park’s “Mountain Talks,” Walnut Creek Th., Feb. 8, 7-9 PM

Eminent wildlife biologist, James (Doc) Hale, returns to talk about cougars in the Bay Area in the Briones, Las Trampas, and Mount Diablo regions. Doc’s wildlife cameras have provided images that clarify numbers, health, and behaviors of this big cat. Doc draws SRO crowds, so arrive early. YV Library, 2661 Oak Grove Road, WC **For information:** roejenn@aol.com

► 22nd Annual SF Bay Flyway Festival, Vallejo, February 10-11, 9 AM-4 PM

Join the family-friendly, wildlife exploration and birding expo on Mare Island for hikes, tours, and activities all around the San Francisco Bay. **For information:** sfbayflywayfestival.com

► Peregrine Team Training, Friday, February 23, 10 AM-1 PM

If you are interested in joining the Peregrine Team to learn about the protocol for monitoring the Castle Rock six-month closure for Peregrine Falcon nesting season, come to the training presentation at the Diablo Foothills RP/Castle Rock Park at the Ranger HQ, 1700 Castle Rock Road, WC 94598. **For information:** anastasiahobbet@gmail.com

Speaking of Conservation: Rodenticides—No Good News

Rat poison products designed to kill rodents are also killing raptors and other wildlife, including some endangered species, as well as domestic pets. These products have also poisoned children, even when the products were used in accordance with the directions on the packages.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, between 1999 and 2003, more than 25,000 children under the age of six had poisoning symptoms after exposure to rodenticides. Most had been exposed to brodifacoum, a second-generation anticoagulant rodenticide (SGAR).



Above and R: Google Images photos

SGARs interfere with blood clotting, causing uncontrollable bleeding, leading to death. They are especially hazardous, persisting for a long time in body tissues. These chemicals

work slowly; rodents often continue to ingest the poison over days, causing the toxins to accumulate at many times the lethal dose.

Predators such as hawks, owls, foxes, bobcats, and mountain lions—as well as family pets—which feed on dead or dying rodents are also poisoned. SGAR victims include nestlings which consume poisoned food their parents bring to them, often dying a gruesome and painful death.

Several years ago, Mt. Diablo Audubon joined with Raptors Are the Solution (RATS) and other organizations in a campaign to urge the California Department of Pesticide Regulation (CDPR) to outlaw SGARS. Regulations enacted by CDPR in 2014 that removed SGARS from retail shelves have proven ineffective in reducing wildlife poisonings, primarily

>>>Book Review continued from page 2

matched by the glory of Kaufmann's landscape and wildlife paintings. Whether in watercolor roundels depicting each of



Photo page 2 and above, Obi Kaufmann photos

the state's most significant mountains or quick sketches of the state's birds, Kaufmann captures the essence of each subject. He does remind that this is not a proper field guide, so the plumage of

birds is accurately depicted, but the occasional purple tree or red coyote is to be understood as artistic license!

because their use by licensed pest control applicators was not restricted.

First-generation rodenticides kill wildlife too, and they are still being sold over the counter. They contain active ingredients such as bromethalin (nerve toxin), or diphacinone, chlorophacinone and Warfarin (first generation anticoagulants), all poisons known to kill wildlife.

Necropsy data from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and other scientists have demonstrated that unnecessary poisonings continue to threaten wildlife and pets. The problem is severe. A CDPR study showed that over 70% of wildlife tested in California had been exposed to rodenticides. In recent tests conducted by WildCare, a wildlife rehab center in San Rafael, the percentage was even higher. From January 2015 to date, 91% of tested patients had those deadly poisons in their systems.

The AB1687 bill sponsored by Assemblymember Richard Bloom is slowly moving through the legislature to address the situation. AB1687 seeks to take stronger measures to protect children, pets, and wildlife from accidental rodenticide poisoning. The bill still allows for rodenticides to be used to address rodent infestations affecting agriculture, or in the case of public health or environmental emergencies. MDAS urges our legislators to act promptly to approve this measure.

In the meantime, we should all practice viable, cost-effective alternatives for rodent control. Sealing buildings and eliminating food and water sources are a necessary first step. For more information about rodent control, check the websites below. ~Nancy Wenninger, Conservation Chair

- SafeRodentControl.org
- raptorsarethesolution.org
- diabloaudubon.org (Conservation drop-down menu)



The California Field Atlas belongs in the collection of every reader who loves the state, its natural wonders, and hopes to know both better. While it has been designed to be carried in a pack, most readers will find that they are able to explore its glories best in the comfort of a comfortable chair with a good light next to it. It is perhaps in that comfortable chair that we will be best positioned to absorb the lessons of the book's final chapter "A Rewilded Future" in which Kaufmann eloquently lays out a way forward out of the conflicts that have arisen from human use and misuse of the environment. "What a joy it is to begin to understand the workings of this, our most and cherished home: our California." ~Michael Barnard, Owner of Rakestraw Books, rakestrawbooks.com

For a 10% discount on this book, show your Quail or print this page to show proof of MDAS membership. Due to high demand, *The California Field Atlas* is currently on back order, but copies are expected any day. Sign up for the email newsletter to receive notice of author events including, hopefully, Obi Kaufmann, this spring. Rakestraw Books, 3 Railroad Avenue, Danville (925) 837-7337

118th CBC Results

The 2017 Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is finished and most of the data has been processed and entered. It will be another ten months before MDAS members and friends assemble again early in the morning at various locations throughout Contra Costa County on two separate days to assess the state of our birds.



Pat Gordon's team at rancher John Ginochio's property on Mt. Diablo during the Central County CBC, Maren Smith photo

Each year the results differ. In 2016, Central County Circle participants experienced extreme early morning chill, but the birds eventually woke up and sang. This year we encountered winds of over twenty miles per hour and gusts that were even stronger. Birds tend to shelter from the wind and accordingly, our species numbers suffered a little. Those of us who bird-by-ear didn't hear the usual contact calls or tones.

Despite it all, 69 participants in the Central County CBC encountered 147 species. Of special note, a Caspian Tern was spotted on CNWS land for the first time on the Central Count, and the Black Diamond Mines team tallied three Long-eared Owls. A few not-so-common sparrows showed themselves including Rufous-crowned, Bell's, and White-throated. Although raptor counts were generally low, our surveying birders located a Bald Eagle and a Ferruginous Hawk. Soras and Virginia Rails appeared in fairly large numbers in the marshes.



Above: Long-eared Owl at Black Diamond Mines RP, only the 7th record on the MDAS CBC in 25 years, Jerry Britten photo; R: Sora, Paul Schorr photo



On the East County Count, 50 participants located 148 species, nine more than last year. Perhaps these additional species reflect the fact that ten additional people were out looking for them this year, and on that day, the weather conditions were perfect. Unusually large numbers of Snow Geese, Greater White-fronted Geese, and Turkey Vultures were spotted. One of the groups at Holland Tract encountered a kettle of fourteen Swainson's Hawks. Many other raptor species were seen including all four local falcons, Bald Eagles, Golden Eagles, and Ferruginous Hawks. Both Tricolored and Yellow-headed Blackbirds were scarce this year. Of special note, Chestnut-backed Chickadees were

the Quail

spotted for the first time on the CBC. This common backyard bird hasn't seemed to be present in our East County woodland until now.

Thank you to all who weathered the elements and participated in the CBC this year, especially the team leaders. Special thanks goes out to Teri Wills and Russ Bright for establishing new surveys within the two circles, to Mike Mecham who stepped up to help with whatever was needed, and to Jerry Britten who completed much of the checklist development, number crunching, data entry, and shared decision making with me throughout the process. ~Elizabeth Leite, CBC Chair

Young Birders Club CBC Report

For the fifth consecutive year since forming in June of 2013, the Mt. Diablo Audubon Young Birders Club made another significant contribution to the Mt. Diablo Central County CBC. Young Birders covered Heather Farm Park and Howe Homestead Park, both in Walnut Creek. During the 2016 count, we recorded a combined 50 species for both parks. For 2017, we tallied 52 species. Notable sightings included the "Heather Farm" Tropical Kingbird (spending its fourth winter with us); a Say's Phoebe which has been hanging around for a couple of months; a Snow Goose, to my knowledge, a first for the park; and a bird often seen inland



YBC member, Kai Mills, stalks the Snow Goose, Diane Walsh photos



but extremely rare for Heather Farm, the Glaucous-winged gull. Additionally, a Marsh Wren was heard. This species has not been seen with any regularity since the late 80's or early 90's. While we expected to find a Red-breasted Sapsucker at Howe Homestead, the bird was a no-show. We did, however, have a group of Wild Turkeys, a bird not unexpected, but not seen in past years. ~Tracy Farrington, Young Birders Club Liaison

For more details on the Young Birders Club CBC, see MDAS member, Jill Hedgecock's story and more photos in the *Diablo Gazette*:

www.diablogazette.com/community/fewer-bird-species-found-in-contra-costa/



Above: Jerry Britten's team with EBRP Ranger at Vasco Caves on the East County CBC; Below: a non-birding bonus, the California Red-legged Frog, Maren Smith photos



New classes in 2018—reserve your spot today!

Spring Avian Treasure Hunt by Juan-Carlos Solis

Two 1.5-hour classes and two 5.5-hour field trips

Classes: Wednesday, April 11 and 18, 6:15-7:45 PM

Field Trips: Saturday, April 14 and 21 (location TBD), 8:30 AM-2 PM

Lafayette Library and Learning Center, Oak Room (maximum 15 participants)

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

Class Description: Prepare for the migrant treasure hunt and sharpen your birding skills by better understanding local bird distribution patterns in time and space during the spring. We'll review how seasonal changes in various Bay Area habitats influence the birds you'll expect to find in the field, with a strong emphasis on birdsong and behavior. You'll get practical birding tips on what to look for throughout the seasons when "hunting" for migratory birds. At the end of this course you'll be better prepared to find local migrant and vagrant birds with confidence. Moreover, the principles you will learn regarding bird distribution in relation to seasonal changes and habitats will apply to any place you may explore around the world.

Teacher Bio: Quetzal Adventures founder Juan-Carlos Solis is passionate about connecting people to nature and designing programs to experience our planet first-hand. He's a seasoned expedition leader and naturalist with 20 years of experience managing and leading local trips in California and in all of the world's seven continents. While working as Public Programs Manager for the California Academy of Sciences for nine years and Field Associate for the Ornithology and Mammalogy Research Department, he led several local and international natural history programs including Academy Travel Expeditions to Antarctica, Baja California, Mexico, and Canada's West Coast. He continues to lead trips for other organizations and has lectured on environmental education topics in India, Australia, Panama, Chile, Argentina, Mexico, and most recently, in Sweden. www.quetzaladventures.com

To register, please contact Dal Leite at registrar@diabloaudubon.org and pay by check or go to the MDAS website to pay via safe and secure Paypal at: diabloaudubon.org/education.php

Spring Birds Sounds Workshop: Birding By Ear by Denise Wight

Four 1.5-hour classes and two 4-hour field trips

Classes: Wednesday, April 25, May 2, 9 and 16, 6:15-7:45 PM

Field Trips: Sunday, April 29 (Vollmer Peak, Tilden) and Sunday, May 13 (Mitchell Canyon), 8 AM-Noon

Lafayette Library and Learning Center, Oak Room (maximum of 16 participants)

Cost: \$55 MDAS members/\$60 non-members

Class Description: Spring is one of the best times to enjoy birding, so why not add to your enjoyment by learning some of the songs and sounds of our local birds. You will learn various techniques for learning bird sounds and focus on the common and special bird species we hope to hear during the two field trips to Vollmer Peak in Tilden Regional Park and Mitchell Canyon in Mount Diablo State Park.

Teacher Bio: Since 1996, Orinda native, Denise Wight, has taught birding classes at the Orinda Community Center, Wild Birds Unlimited in Pleasant Hill, was a co-leader on Shearwater Journeys pelagic boat trips, and has led classes and field trips for the Lindsay Museum, Point Reyes Bird Observatory, Mount Diablo Interpretive Association, Golden Gate Audubon Society, and Mt. Diablo Audubon Society, as well as for private groups. Denise has taught Birding By Ear at Albany Adult School for seven years and continues to teach BBE classes for Golden Gate Audubon at the Ed Roberts Campus in Berkeley. She was the Program Chair for MDAS from 1992-2000. www.denisewightbirds.com

To register, please contact Maren Smith at marensmithbkk@yahoo.com and pay by check or go to the MDAS website to pay via safe and secure Paypal at: diabloaudubon.org/education.php

☛ The Education Committee is looking for volunteers interested in helping set up classes, contacting instructors, brainstorming ideas, collaborating with area conservation groups to provide birding expertise on hikes, and/or working with youth and classroom teachers to further the MDAS mission. **If interested, please contact Maren Smith at: marensmithbkk@yahoo.com or (925) 322-8477.**

Tips to Help Winter Birds

Local birds increase their activity at feeders throughout the winter. People are seeing more birds on feeders because they need the extra energy to survive during the cold, wet winter, often expending 10% of their body weight each night staying warm.

This is why it is important to keep bird feeders full of fresh, high energy seed this time of year. Sunflower, nyjer,



safflower, millet, and fruit all have roles to play. In addition, you can provide high energy foods such as suet and nuts.

It is also important to keep feeders clean, especially after rains. Mold and bacteria grow rapidly on many types of bird food when wet or damp.

This time of year, hummingbirds have few natural sources of nectar from flowers, which they need to maintain their high energy levels. So, consider putting up one or more nectar feeders.

A good source of water for drinking and bathing is critical. Wild birds bathe regularly, even in the cold, because clean feathers insulate their bodies. It's good to provide a full, clean bird bath available throughout the year.

In addition, avoid grease, oil, or Vaseline on poles or feeders to prevent ants. If it gets on birds' feathers, they can not clean it off, and it can be a death sentence, ruining the insulating capability of feathers and down.

Finally, consider putting up a nesting box or two. Birds use them to roost in during storms and high winds, even when they are not nesting. Also, if nesting boxes are out throughout winter, birds may be more likely to use them when nesting season starts. You can also put out nesting material to provide comfortable places for nestlings in the spring. However, avoid dryer lint, which often contains toxic materials and fibers that can tangle in birds' feet.

~Mike Eliot, Wild Birds Unlimited

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 6:45 PM at WBU on the 2nd Thursday except for July and August. Please check the MDAS website diabloaudubon.org for cancelled or rescheduled Board meetings.



Mt. Diablo Audubon Society thanks our Business Partners:
AlphaGraphics, Walnut Creek
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Wild Birds Unlimited, Pleasant Hill

The Mount Diablo Audubon Society meets at 7 PM the first Thursday of each month except in July and August in the Camellia Room of The Gardens at Heather Farm, 1540 Marchbanks Drive, Walnut Creek, CA 94598.

MDAS MEMBERSHIP/RENEWAL APPLICATION

- Please enroll me/my family in the Mt. Diablo Audubon Society for \$25 for one year. (MDAS dues are tax-deductible)
- For an additional \$20 please enroll me as a first-time member in the National Audubon Society (NAS). (includes 6 bi-monthly issues of Audubon Magazine)
- Please enroll me as a lifetime member for \$500. (or 2 annual \$250 payments)
- I am enclosing an additional tax-deductible donation of \$_____.

Please send the Quail by "Go Green" email US Mail

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: () _____ email: _____

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

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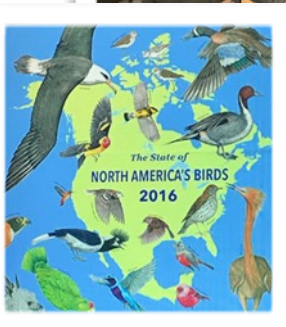
Loggerhead Shrike at Contra Loma Regional Park, Paul Schorr photo



In case you missed it, the **December** meeting program featured Nicole Michel, top left, speaking about CBC trends and Ariana Rickard, middle left, highlighting her experiences at the National Audubon Convention this past July in Park City, Utah. Rosalie Howarth photos

And, in **January**, the new year started off with Birding Information by Brian Richardson, below, who explained the wonders of Pine Canyon and the ins and out of the Peregrine Team. For more information on the upcoming Peregrine Team training, see page 7. The main program featured a breathtaking PBS video on the resilient Snowy Owls. Maren Smith photo

“We still need conservationists who will attempt the impossible, achieving it because they aren’t aware how impossible it is.” ~David R. Brower



the Quail

