



THE QUAIL

Mt. Diablo Audubon Society | www.diabloaudubon.org

8 pm Program: Bald Eagles

America's official bird since 1782, the Bald Eagle became a symbol of freedom and patriotism for good reason: this majestic bird has a fierce beauty. Once on the brink of extinction, the Bald Eagle is now a protected species enjoying a comeback.

Photonaturalist **Jeffrey Rich** has chronicled the daily lives of America's favorite bird, and he'll use these images to share insights into their habitat, feeding, mating and care of their young. He will also share stories of people who have helped eagles and been inspired by them.

The author of *Bald Eagles in the Wild*, Jeff regularly works with scientists to document their work. His photos and



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articles have appeared in *Audubon*, *National Wildlife*, *Ranger Rick*, and on the National Geographic website. With degrees in life science and wildlife biology, he teaches science to middle and high school students in Redding. He also leads photo tours, where clients capture intimate and beautiful moments in nature. See jeffrichphoto.com.

7 pm: Bat Boxes

Joshua Gamez will report on his Mt. Diablo Audubon-supported Eagle Scout project, installing bat boxes at Big Break Regional Shoreline in Oakley.

Next Meeting: FEBRUARY 7

The Mt. Diablo Audubon Society will meet **Thursday, Feb. 7**, in the Camellia Room of The Gardens at Heather Farm in Walnut Creek.

6:30 pm Doors open

7:00 pm Birding Info

7:25 pm News

7:40 pm Snacks & Raffle

8:00 pm Main Program

"Bald Eagles in the Wild"

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Plus: Grayson Creek birders complete a year of surveys. p. 6



Our “Patch”

Only 10 minutes from our Antioch home is the entrance to Contra Loma Regional Park, an area of 776 acres, where my wife, Nancy, and I most often set out to do some local birding. The park includes a variety of habitats: the reservoir itself; the shoreline of exposed muddy areas, cattail/tule marshes, and riparian woodlands; and the surrounding hillsides of open grasslands and California savanna. With such a mix of habitats, it is no surprise that our species total for this suburban park is currently 148.



**PRESIDENT'S
CORNER**

As we approach the park from Frederickson Lane, we begin to anticipate the frequently encountered birds that seem to welcome us along this birdy route. Along the fence-lined road, we often find Say's and Black Phoebes, American Kestrels and Western Bluebirds. Depending on the season, sometimes the list includes Loggerhead Shrike, blackbird species including Tri-colored, Western Kingbird, Burrowing Owl, Western Meadowlark and recently a Rock Wren.

After checking in at the kiosk, we usually proceed to the Channel Point parking lot, which provides close access to views of the reservoir, Loma Island and surrounding areas. If we are there during the morning, we often have coffee and a breakfast sandwich while scanning the reservoir for possible new arrivals. Occasionally, we will park in the large open gravel parking lot south of Channel Point parking lot and check out the nearby trees, quail brush and open grasslands for birds frequenting those areas.

Our birding itinerary almost always includes a visit to Loma Island where we have encountered some rarities, the most notable being a Northern Waterthrush in 2011. In past winters, the flocks of crowned sparrows have occasionally included White-throated Sparrows also. Near the island, a wooded area comprised of cottonwoods, willows, and Raywood ash trees has yielded surprises such as Golden-crowned Kinglet, MacGillivray's Warbler, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Yellow Warbler, Pacific-slope Flycatcher and Red-breasted Sapsucker.

Springtime affords opportunities to see nestlings and fledglings of Bullock's Orioles, Barn Owls, Great Horned Owls, Red-shouldered Hawks, Cooper's Hawks, Anna's Hummingbirds, American Robins, Bushtits, Western Bluebirds, Tree Swallows, Lesser Goldfinches, Killdeer, Black Phoebes, Common Gallinules, Pied-billed Grebes, Mallards and Canada Geese.

Sometimes fellow birders alert us to newly found species, such as the Sage Thrasher that was discovered by Teri and Chris Wills in 2014. The bird remained long enough for many others, including us, to see.

The reservoir itself has afforded excellent views of many species of waterfowl, including geese, ducks, grebes, pelicans and cormorants, as well as wading birds and fish predators such as Osprey and Bald Eagles.

With such outstanding birding opportunities, it is not surprising that Contra Loma serves as the destination for the springtime MDAS-sponsored No Child Left Inside field trips.

I know that many of you hold dearly to your local “patches,” and I hope that you will feel free to share them with me sometime.

Happy Birding in 2019.—*Paul Schorr*

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The MDAS Board meets at 6:45 pm at Wild Birds Unlimited in Pleasant Hill on the second Thursday of every month except July and August.

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Special Earth Day Event. Mt. Diablo Audubon will team up with Contra Costa Resource Conservation and Mt. View Sanitary District for a new event, Sat. April 13, at McNabney Marsh. MDAS will sponsor birdwatching 7-9 am, to be followed by a group cleanup 9:30-noon. Meet at Waterbird Regional Preserve Staging Area in Martinez to help improve the marsh for birds and birders. RSVP hpetty@ccrcd.org ...

Join **The Great Backyard Bird Count** Feb. 15-18. A joint project of National Audubon and the Cornell Lab, the count provides a snapshot of birds on our continent just before Spring migration. See the Citizen Science page on diabloaudubon.org or visit gbbc.birdcount.org. ...

The Peregrine Team in Pine Canyon will host its annual training day for new volunteers in Walnut Creek, Sat. Feb. 2, 10 am-1 pm. The natural history education group informs visitors about the Castle Rock Peregrines, the nesting closure zone, and the ecology of Pine Canyon. A short program will feature raptor educator Jenny Papka and a Peregrine Falcon, followed by a training hike. Space is limited; reservations required. To register, contact Staci Hobbet, anastasiahobbet@gmail.com. ...

Education Chair Maren Smith seeks volunteers to represent MDAS at the 23rd **San Francisco Flyway Festival** on Mare Island, Vallejo, Feb. 9-10, 9 am-4 pm. Write marensmithbkk@yahoo.com.

Naming that Song

Imagine being able to point a cell phone at a singing bird and have an app immediately identify it. Maybe even tell you if it's male or female. And have it ignore familiar birds nearby, the chatter of other birders, even an airplane flying overhead. App developers have imagined this, but their efforts are not considered universally successful. Given the progress made in image recognition of bird photos, we can expect that better song recognition will come soon.



The Bird Wide Web

Meanwhile, there are interesting possibilities to explore, both with apps and online archives. First the mobile applications. None are free, and none offer a money-back guarantee, which is not surprising given the challenges involved in detecting, recording, isolating, analyzing, and comparing a "song" sample with a database. Even the best wouldn't identify the Eastern Yellow Wagtail that showed up in Marin County

last Fall - it wouldn't be in the data set! But, if the task is to differentiate between a White-breasted or a Red-breasted Nuthatch, and your phone picked up a clean record, you might get some help. Hoping to determine whether that was a Red-tailed Hawk or clever mimicry by a Stellar's Jay? Good luck.

The **LifeHacker** site tested three fairly effective apps--Song Sleuth, ChirpOMatic and Bird Song Id--and concluded that while each got some IDs right, they got different ones wrong. Even if you used all three on the same bird, you wouldn't know which was right unless someone told you. And if you had a human expert, why would you need an ID tool? For added help, each app offers pictures to illustrate their guesses, and some even play back pre-recorded songs for comparison. Bottom line is that while these apps might be fun, they are no substitute for knowledgeable birdwatching buddies.

One way people can improve song recognition is through online recording archives. Many major birding sites offer sound samples paired with photos. Cornell Lab's **All About Birds** gives a "Listen" button on each search result and also provides songs through a "Sounds" link at the top of the page. Other sites with excellent audio resources include the **Smithsonian Institution's National Zoo**, which utilizes a bare-bones, ID key-style interface, and **Bird Sounds**, the amazing work of Danish freelancer Torben Weiland. But no list of bird sound archives would be complete without the **Macaulay Library**, the ultimate global reference and repository, searchable by any parameter. Want to compare songs of the Holarctic Raven above the 50th parallel? That's where you go. --MDAS Webmaster Dal Leite

For live links and past columns, see www.birdwideweb.com.

Upcoming Field Trips

Thursday, Jan. 31, Martinez

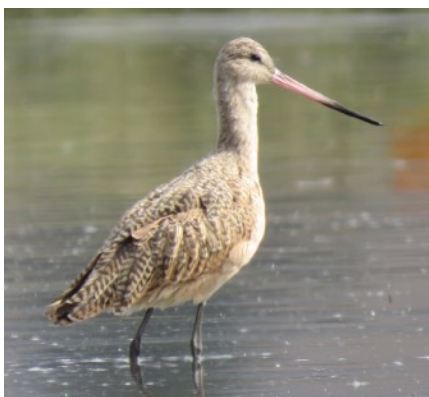
Waterfront. Meet at 9 am in the Waterbird Regional Preserve parking lot. We will visit several areas along the Martinez shoreline. Bring lunch and a beverage. For information, call Hugh Harvey: (925) 935-2979. Leader: Albert Linkowski. Category 2.

Saturday, Feb. 9, Thornton Area/Cosumnes Preserve.

Tundra Swans, Sandhill Cranes, hawks and grassland birds. Carpool leaves Sun Valley at 8 am, or meet at 8:45 am in Westgate Landing Park at end of Glasscock Rd. Trip will go in light rain. Bring lunch and a beverage. *Lands Pass required for Woodbridge stop.* Leader: Ethan Chickering, (925) 686-9231. Category 1.

Thursday, Feb. 14, Grizzly Island.

Lands Pass required. The California Department 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. We may also bird at the Rush Ranch if time permits after finishing at Grizzly Island. Carpool leaves at 7 am from Sun Valley, or meet at 8:30 am at Refuge headquarters. Watch for raptors and Short-eared Owls along road. Entry fee for refuge.



Bring lunch and a beverage. Leader: Maury Stern, (925) 284-5980. Category 1.

Saturday, Feb. 16, Bodega Bay.

Possibilities include wintering shorebirds such as Black Oystercatcher, Wandering Tattler, Marbled Godwit, *(photo Maren Smith)* as well as terns, gulls, cormorants and waterfowl. Carpool leaves Sun Valley at 7:30 am, or meet at the Tides Restaurant on water side of Hwy 1 in Bodega at 9:15 am. Walk through or around The Tides to find the group viewing the harbor birds from the outdoor seating. Bring lunch, liquids and sunscreen. Leader: Hugh Harvey, (925) 935-2979. Category 1.

GRAYSON CREEK BIRDERS

Sunday, Feb. 17: Citizen science survey of the creek, in partnership with Friends of Pleasant Hill Creeks. Departs every third Sunday of the month, 8 am from the parking lot of the Pleasant Hill Library. RSVP Leader Alan Bade at alanbade@jps.net or (925) 330-1870.

Wednesday, Feb. 20, Sunol

Regional Park. Golden Eagles and other raptors, Rufous-crowned Sparrows, Dipper, and Canyon and Rock Wrens are possible. Carpool leaves at 7:30 am from Sycamore Valley Rd Park and Ride lot in Danville., or meet at 8 am in the first parking lot on the left, Sunol Regional Park. Watch and listen for Wild Turkey along Geary Rd. Possible entry fee. Bring lunch and a beverage. Leader: Steve Taylor, (925) 828-8810. Category 3.

YOUNG BIRDERS CLUB

Saturday, Feb. 23, Cosumnes River Preserve: YBC

Coordinator Juan Pablo Galván will lead this outing for birders age 10-20 and accompanying adults. For details, search Facebook for Mount Diablo Audubon Society Young Birders Club, or write jpgalvan9@gmail.com.

Sat./Sun., Feb. 23-24, Los Banos/Panoche Valley. Target birds include Mountain Bluebird, Mountain Plover and Long-eared Owl. On Saturday, we will leave from Sycamore Valley Rd Park & Ride at 6:30 am or meet at McDonald's in Gustine at 8 am. We will bird Santa Fe Grade Rd, 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 Rd and Panoche Valley. Participants need to bring lunch for both days. An optional communal dinner is being planned for Saturday evening. A fee is charged at Mercey Hot Springs. If you plan to go on the trip, please call the leaders as soon as possible for likely last minute detail changes! Leaders: Beth Branthaver, (510) 502-4869, Hugh Harvey, (925) 935-2979. Category 1.

Wednesday, Feb. 27, Walnut Creek

Parks. Meet 8:30 am at wooden railing at the natural pond, just past the community center in Heather Farm Park. This is down the hill from where our monthly meetings are held. We will continue our birding at the Borges Ranch off Castle Rock Rd. Leader: Hugh Harvey, (925) 935-2979. Category 1.

For full details and directions, see www.diabloaudubon.org.

- 1 Easy. Little walking, smooth paths
- 2 Moderate, more than one mile, possibly rougher terrain
- 3 Difficult. Many miles, rough terrain

Carpool Meeting Spots

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

•**Sycamore Valley Rd Park and Ride:** One block east of I-680, off the Sycamore Valley Rd exit in Danville.

Trip Coordinator Hugh Harvey (925) 935-2979.

Trip Reports

Hawk Hill, Oct. 13: Though the fog blew away any chance of interesting raptors atop Hawk Hill, the 5 of us had already enjoyed a pleasant walk on the trail by Rodeo Lagoon. We heard a Sora, and saw Brown Pelicans, both Egrets, Great Blue Heron, Ring-necked Duck, Surf Scoters, and Pintail on the lagoon itself. Chickadees, Towhees, Sparrows, very cooperative Wrentits, both Kinglets, a large flight of Swallows (some, perhaps all, Violet-Green) and four warbler species (Palm, Townsend's, Yellow-rumped and Common Yellowthroat) were the land highlights. We counted 38 species for the day.—*Fred Safier*

Lafayette Community Center, Nov. 13: Seven birders joined the field trip on this smoky day. There were not a lot of birds to be seen, and all the smoke in the air may have been a contributing factor. Normally, this is a great location with many birds, and the count can reach well up into the 60s, but not this time. We did manage to find and identify 26 different birds. Highlights included great looks at a really pretty Spotted Towhee, a Varied Thrush, Northern Flicker, Ruby Crowned Kinglet, Hermit Warbler, White-breasted Nuthatch and a Cooper's Hawk seen by some.—*Steve Taylor*

Sacramento/Colusa NWR, Dec. 1: Thirteen of us set off for the Sacramento Valley in dreary, wet conditions. As we headed north, the clouds cleared and we had mostly sunny skies the rest of the day. We drove first to Colusa NWR where we found all the major wintering goose species – Ross's, Snow (including one blue morph) and Greater White-fronted – and most of the ducks – Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal and American Wigeon. We also saw a Eurasian Wigeon. There were a few American Pipits near the auto tour route. We also saw several raptors,

including Northern Harrier, Red-tailed and Red-shouldered Hawks. The Black-crowned Night-Heron rookery was full of immature and adult herons. From Colusa, we traveled North to Llano Seco Wildlife

Management Area. On the way, we spotted Tundra Swans (*photo Beth Brantbauer*) and Sandhill Cranes in the fields. At Llano Seco, there were another 30 or so cranes feeding across the pond. After lunch, we traveled to Sacramento NWR. Here we found many of the same birds, but added a Prairie Falcon, accipiter species, Kingfisher, Ring-necked Duck and Great Horned Owl to our list. For the day we had a total of 73 species.—*Beth Brantbauer*

American Canyon Wetlands, Dec. 5: Seven birders braved the threatening weather to bird the ponds and Napa River at the American Canyon Wetlands. They were amply rewarded with 81 species of birds, including large numbers of waterfowl and several rarities. Most notable were all three species of

Scoter, Long-tailed Duck and Barrow's Goldeneye. Other good birds included Burrowing Owl, Bald Eagle, as well as three teal species. Even better, the weather cooperated, and the group stayed mostly dry. This new location for Mt. Diablo Audubon may have earned itself a place on the calendar for future years.

—*Chris and Teri Wills*

Solano County Raptors, Dec. 8: Thirteen birders left the Suisun City area with fair skies and the promise of mild seasonal temperatures. The SE Solano County area continues to live up to its billing as a “Raptor Run” trip for birders. Among the buteos, we had numerous Red-Tailed Hawk, to the point of losing count, and a couple of different morphs of Ferruginous Hawk, along with Northern Harrier, White-tailed Kite and at the end of the day a perched Golden Eagle. Owls were also in the spotlight, with 4 Burrowing, 3 Great Horned and 1 Barn seen; the Barn Owl was quite cryptic in the shadows of a eucalyptus. There was a grand slam of Falco, including

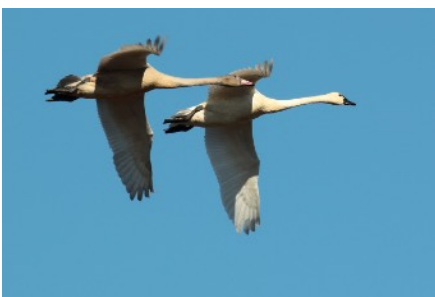
numerous American Kestrel, Merlin, Peregrine and Prairie. Loggerhead Shrike rivaled the kestrels in number. Shorebirds put on a good show, with Long-billed Curlew, Dunlin,



Long-billed Dowitcher, Killdeer and Greater Yellowlegs all observed. Waterfowl included Greater White-fronted Goose, Canada Goose, Mallard and Northern Shoveler. The most numerous of all birds were the blackbirds, in mixed flocks of Red-winged, Tricolored, Brewer's and Brown-headed Cowbird seen together along with European Starling and Western Meadowlark (*photo Isaac Aronow*). Great-tailed Grackle was also seen. Other large flocks included Savannah Sparrow, House Finch and American Goldfinch. Other notable species were Yellow-billed Magpie, Common Raven, Tree Swallow, Black and Say's Phoebe, and large kettles of Turkey Vulture. (Also seen: a red fox, *photo Isaac Aronow*). The trip tally was 59 species, in line with the numbers for previous years on this route.—*Gary Fregien*



Putah Creek, Jan. 5: Eight intrepid birders ignored predictions of storm and the actuality of some rain showers to enjoy a cold, beautiful morning of birding. By 9:30 all rain had passed through, and we had excellent views of Hooded Merganser, Osprey, Phainopepla, Western Bluebird, Spotted Towhee, and Fox Sparrow, among many others. We heard (and one participant saw) Sora and Common Gallinule. A covey of at least 30 Quail enlivened our lunch. The highlight bird was just about the smallest: We watched a Rock Wren quite prominently foraging on the rocks at the edge of Monticello Dam. Final tally: 55 species.—*Fred Safier*



Counting Birds to Preserve Grayson Creek

Despite occasional signs of urban stress—dumped shopping carts, tossed tires and trash—more than 60 species of native birds continue to find habitat in Grayson Creek in Pleasant Hill, a monthly survey by MDAS birders and Friends of Pleasant Hill Creeks has shown.

Birders know that birds can be persistent despite threats to their habitat, but you need data to assess how they are faring. About a year ago, Friends of Pleasant Hill Creeks recognized the need for a bird survey of Grayson Creek.

“Since more than 90 percent of California’s original riparian habitat has been destroyed or degraded, we hope to use this data to help protect and restore remaining riparian habitat,”

says Heather Rosmarin, co-founder of the creeks group. The Friends reached out to MDAS, and

volunteers from both groups have been meeting over the past year to assess the condition of the creek and its wildlife.

While much of Grayson Creek is inaccessible to the public,

Rosmarin and MDAS’ Tracy Farrington identified two areas that could be monitored. Site A, which stretches from the library on

Oak Park Boulevard north to Beatrice Road, includes the location of the city’s new library project. (Input from Grayson Creek birders helped persuade planners to include birdwatching opportunities in preliminary plans for that project). Site B, across town, follows the creek from Chilpancingo Parkway to Viking Drive. That environment, which includes a mix of educational, recreational and commercial facilities, is experiencing a lot of construction.

Any birder who has walked the Grayson Creek corridor knows that careful spotting will reveal a variety of



species. The year’s total bird count for both sites topped 2,900. At Site A, which is quieter, leafier and more residential, the team recorded the year’s highs of 31 species on its first day of counting (Nov. 17, 2017) and again last Jan. 26.

Not surprisingly, the one-day species record was set by 76 House Finches in September. Other single-day highs were recorded for Mourning Doves (52), Mallards (54), White-crowned Sparrows (57), Canada Geese (59), Yellow-rumped Warblers (43), Bushtits (27) and Killdeer (25).

The survey team had good raptor sightings, including Cooper’s and Red-tailed hawks, American Kestrels and Merlins. But the stars of the show were a pair of nesting Red-shouldered Hawks. (The team was unable to record whether their young fledged.)



Hooded Mergansers — including eight in one day! — are regular winter visitors at Site B, which also hosts the predictable Mallards. Michael Eliot even spotted a Wood Duck there last December. Black-crowned Night Herons, Great Blue and Green Herons and Great and Snowy Egrets frequent the creek, as do Red-breasted Sapsuckers, Nuttall’s and Downy Woodpeckers, and Northern Flickers. Belted Kingfishers have been spotted at both sites.

While some sections of the creek appear to be in remarkably good condition with beautiful native oaks and willows, in others trash mars the scene. During cleanups coordinated by the city’s Civic Action Commission and Friends of Pleasant Hill Creeks, volunteers removed more than 4,000 items of trash from Site A and Site B.

The surveys are developing a valuable database and will be continued. New volunteers are warmly invited to join. The team starts from the library parking lot at 8 am on the third Sunday of the month. For more info, contact team leader Alan Bade at (925) 330-1780 or alanbade@jps.net.



From bottom: Within Site A, the creekside turns leafy and lush; a Great Egret captures a fish; and a survey team prepares to depart (photos Heather Rosmarin). Winter brings Hooded Mergansers to Site B (photo Alan Bade).

Helping Hummingbirds

Hummingbird season never ends in this area. These birds are less afraid of humans than most and can be some of the most enjoyable to interact with and watch.

Costa's, Black-chinned, and Broad-tailed hummers may stop at feeders as they move south. Anna's hummers, which do not generally migrate, come often to feeders in winter. January is also the hatching time for their first brood. Be ready to see new and young hummers at your feeders. *(Photo Michael Eliot)*



Due to the dry and cold weather, hummers have few natural sources of nectar, which they use to maintain their high energy levels. They are known to visit feeders as often as every 10 minutes during the day and consume as much as 30 percent of their body weight daily. To conserve energy, hummers go into a state called torpor at night, which is like suspended animation, so they are only at feeders after sun-up.



Wild Birds

Keep nectar in good supply, and wash feeders at least weekly to prevent mold. On very cold nights, bring feeders inside to prevent freezing. Use premix nectar packages, or make your own nectar using 4 parts water to one part plain white sugar, without food coloring. Boil the water first, and then add sugar after it cools. Put out only as much as the birds can drink in 3-4 days. Extra can be stored in the refrigerator for up to two weeks.

Because Anna's hummingbirds can be very territorial, you can use multiple feeders spread apart 15 feet or so, allowing more birds to eat.

You can also put out nesting material that hummers will use to line their nests. Never use dryer lint or man-made fibers. Short animal hair, down, small feathers, or commercially made nesting material work well.

To promote heat retention and help with their intricate flight patterns, hummingbirds need water sources to keep their feathers clean. Misterters can be used and fountains run during the day when the birds are out.

Help our hummers, and they will provide you with hours of enjoyment throughout winter.—*Member at Large Michael Eliot*

Citizen Science Workshop: iNaturalist

Two 2-hour classes and one 4-hour field trip
Classes: Wednesday, Feb. 13 and 20, 7-9 pm
Save Mt. Diablo office in Walnut Creek
Trip: Sunday, Feb. 17 (Mitchell Canyon) 8 am-noon
Cost: \$30 MDAS members/\$40 non-members

Naturalist and videographer **Kendall Oei** will convert you into an active—and interactive—citizen scientist in 90 minutes. An early adaptor to the revolutionary app iNaturalist, Kendall will walk us through the phone app and website, showing how we can each become a resource to science. Bring your phone or laptop, along with recent photos. He'll show you how to post and annotate them. In advance, create an iNaturalist account by going to www.inaturalist.org/, and download the app in your phone's app store. It's fun, easy and free.

Spring Birds Sounds Workshop

Two 2-hour classes and two 4-hour field trips
Classes: Tuesday, March 5 and 12, 7-9 pm
Lafayette Library and Learning Ctr, Oak Room
Trips: Sunday, March 10 and 17 (TBD) 8 am-noon
Cost: \$40 MDAS members/\$50 non-members

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? We 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. Taught by veteran birding instructor **Denise Wight**. See www.denisewightbirds.com.

Spring "Avian Treasure Hunt"

Three 2-hour classes and three 5.5-hour field trips
Classes: Thursday, April 11, 18 and 25, 7-9 pm
Lafayette Library and Learning Ctr, Oak Room
Trips: Saturday, April 13, 20 and 27 (TBD) 8:30 am-2 pm
Cost: \$75 MDAS members/\$80 non-members

Prepare for the migrant treasure hunt and sharpen your birding skills by better understanding how seasonal changes impact local bird distribution patterns. Expect broad migratory principles as well as practical birding tips. Naturalist **Juan-Carlos Solis** has over 20 years experience leading trips. See www.quetzaladventures.com.

To register for classes: Contact Maren Smith at education@diabloaudubon.org.

A juvenile **Northern Shrike** continued making appearances in East County. Many ducks and geese were seen, along with increasing flocks of shorebirds.—*Maury Stern*

Observations

(Nov. 5, 2018 — Jan. 5, 2019)

Four **Greater White-fronted Geese** were at Heather Farm ball fields 12/3, ELL, and 8 at the Richmond Marina 1/2/19. SD

There was also a **Snow Goose** at the Richmond Marina 1/2. SD

ELL saw 2 **Cackling Geese** with **Canada Geese** at Heather Farm 12/3. HH saw them 12/4 at Heather Farm, and HH and FS saw them 1/2 at the pond by Seven Hills School.

An **Aleutian Cackling Goose** was at Antioch City Reservoir 12/31. PS

KB saw a pair of **Wood Ducks** on Las Trampas Creek at the Lafayette-Moraga Trail staging area 12/2. There were 6 at Heather Farm natural pond 12/4. HH On 12/7, RS and JE saw 2 at the north end of Briones Reservoir.

PG spotted **Gadwalls** at the Sindicich Lagoons in Briones Park 12/8, while MS saw 6 at Lafayette Reservoir 12/31.

WD and HH saw 4 **Blue-winged Teal** at McNabney Marsh.

Seventy-five **Ring-necked Ducks** were at Heather Farm pond 11/19. HH

C&TW saw a **Black Scoter** near Vincent Park in Richmond 1/2.

On 12/3 and 12/31, PS saw a **Barrow's Goldeneye** at Antioch City Reservoir.

There were scattered sightings of **Hooded Mergansers**: FS, 11/13, in a channel west of Heather Farm: 12/2, PS and GH on Grayson Creek 12/2; 2 at Jewel Lake 12/30. PY

The **White-winged Dove** at Holland Tract was seen by EM, MB, JoB, MSt, LS, LC, OM, DT, and BM during the past 2 months.

PS had a **Virginia Rail** and a **Sora** at Contra Loma Regional Park 11/25.

A **Common Gallinule** was at the Heather Farm Pond boat ramp 12/26. MS

LK and JoB saw 106,000 **American Coots** at Frank's Tract off Bethel Island 12/15.

A **Solitary Sandpiper** was at Los Vaqueros 11/25. CD

HH and WD saw a **Bonaparte's Gull** at Central Sanitary District 1/5.

A **Heermann's Gull** was at Richmond Marina 12/23, JK, and nearby on 12/26 at Miller/Knox Shoreline. LC, LS, MaS

An unusual **Lesser Black-backed Gull** was at Clifton Court Forebay 12/6, NA, and seen by JL and AL the next day.

Mew Gulls were with **Ring-billed Gulls** at Heather Farm 1/2. HH

An **Iceland (Thayer's) Gull** was at Los Vaqueros 11/13. NA

NA and KP saw a **Glaucous Gull** at Clifton Court Forebay 12/6 and 12/8.

A **Caspian Tern** was in Oakley 11/29. AF

A **Pacific Loon** was at Miller/Knox Regional Shoreline 12/20. EM, MSt, LS

Also on 12/20 at Miller/Knox, there were a number of **Brandt's Cormorants**. EM, MSt, LS, PB

PS spotted **American White Pelicans** at Antioch City Reservoir 12/3, and at Contra Loma 12/26. MS saw up to 20 at Lafayette Reservoir in the last month.

An **Osprey** was at Los Vaqueros 11/25, CD, and at Contra Loma, 1/1. PS

Seventeen **White-tailed Kites** flew over Waterway Pond near Waterfront Road in Martinez at sunset 11/16. EM

Single **Bald Eagles** were near the Carquinez Strait 12/3, LL, and 12/8, LQ. Another was at Contra Loma 1/1. PS

A **Ferruginous Hawk** was in Hercules 11/8. Anonymous birder

PS saw a **Golden Eagle** over Contra Loma 11/25.

A **Northern Pygmy-Owl** was at the Tilden Nature Area 12/23. RR

PS saw a **Burrowing Owl** at Contra Loma Park 1/1.

EM found **Short-eared Owls** near Waterfront Road in Martinez 11/26.

A **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** was at RW's Orinda home 12/13.

ML saw a **Red-naped Sapsucker** 12/19 at the Skyline Gate area of Redwood Regional Park.

A **Red-breasted Sapsucker** was an unusual bird for East County at Bethel Island 12/21. LK

A **Hairy Woodpecker** was at Wildcat Creek Marsh off Richmond Parkway 12/21. LK

JaE saw a **Northern Yellow-shafted Flicker** near his Pinole home 11/28.

Q: Which North American game bird was hunted almost to extinction? *Answer on page 11.*

On 11/27 and 11/29, HH, FS, and DK saw a **Merlin** near the Heather Farm Dog Park.

SD saw a **Peregrine Falcon** on the pilings near the new pier at Pt. Pinole Regional Park 1/4.

Say's Phoebes were at Contra Loma 11/25, and 11/26, PS; Grayson Creek 11/30. AB

A very rare **Ash-throated Flycatcher** was in Dougherty Valley 11/29. GP

The Heather Farm **Tropical Kingbird** was seen by many. FS, HH, EK, JPG, KM, DK, DV, JP, RH, IW, GW, JoB, DT, DQ, BoB, BB, LHC, PS, SL, JT

The **Northern Shrike** on Orwood Road near the Cruiser Haven Marina was spotted by many. SC, BR, JeH, EM, GC, JE, ML, JS, AM, ES, JanE, MaL

Nine **Horned Larks** were on the Mott Trail at Briones 12/8. PG

A **Violet-green Swallow** was seen by MSt and LS near Holland Tract 12/19.

A rare Eastern-type **Winter Wren** was at Pt. San Pablo/Pt. San Molate during the period. LC, LS, MSt, ST, LT, OM, JoB, DT, BA, ES, KO, EO

Blue-gray Gnatcatchers were in good numbers. 11/20 DW Valle Vista; 11/23 VP and KP Valle Vista; 12/3 JT Lafayette Reservoir; 12/13 JeH Tilden Park; 12/13 EB Valle Vista; 12/15 TR Concord Naval Weapons Station; 12/16 AA at Tilden Park; MSt Pt. San Pablo 12/20; MK Valle Vista.

Two **Western Bluebirds** were at the Antioch home of PS.

A **Townsend's Solitaire** was at Round Valley Preserve 11/8. JB

EIL saw a first-of-season **Hermit Thrush** at her home on the border of Lafayette and Walnut Creek 11/5.

RS and JE saw **Varied Thrush** 12/7 at the north end of Briones Reservoir.

A rare **Sage Thrasher** was at Sincich Lagoons at Briones 12/12. KH

Four **Purple Finches** and 2 **Pine Siskins** were at the Briones Lagoons 12/8. PG

Many **American Goldfinches** were at the Saranap home of EIL 11/5.

Orange-crowned Warblers were at Heather Farm, HH; PS's bird bath 12/10; and Wildcat Creek Marsh, LK.

Black-throated Gray Warblers were at the Orinda Connector Trail 11/12, DW, and the Walnut Creek home of LW.

KB had a **Townsend's Warbler** at her bird bath in Lafayette for many weeks. LK saw one 12/21 at Wildcat Creek Marsh.

AL had a **Chipping Sparrow** at the Martinez Shoreline Park 11/28, and LH saw one in San Ramon 1/1.

On 12/17, KD saw a **Grasshopper Sparrow** at Black Diamond.

RM saw a **Nelson's Sparrow** at Meeker Slough near 51st Street in Richmond 12/22. In following days, it was seen by EB, JeH, JC, LK, MSt, LS, LC, MaS.

A **Fox Sparrow** was at the San Ramon home of EL 11/6. JC had a "Red" subspecies in Orinda 12/1, while a "Slate-colored" subspecies was at Pt. Richmond 12/26. LS, MSt, LC, MaS.

PS had a FOS **Lincoln Sparrow** in Antioch 12/10.

A **Swamp Sparrow** was at the Dow Wetlands Preserve 11/6, RL, and another was at Meeker Slough 12/8, BD. JH and WB saw it subsequently.

Slate-colored Juncos were in Walnut Creek, HH; Lafayette, MS; Orinda, JC; Siesta Valley, SJ; and Antioch, PS.



A well-photographed **Black-headed Grosbeak** was at the Walnut Creek home of DS from mid-November to date.

LK and JoB saw 164 **Yellow-headed Blackbirds** with a flock of **Red-winged Blackbirds** at Bradford Island in the delta 12/21.

To submit sightings, write Maury Stern at mbstern2@yahoo.com or call (925) 284-5980.

BA Bilal Al, NA Noah Arthur, AA Anne Ardillo, AB Alan Bade, KB Kristen Baker, EB Eddie Bartley, WB Wendy Beers, BoB Bob Brandriff, BB Barbara Brandriff, JoB Jonah Benningfield, MB Max Benningfield, PB Phred Bonham, JB Jerry Britten, LHC Lee-Hong Chang, SC Srikant Char, JC Jim Chiropoulos, LC Lucas Corneliusen, GC Graham Chisholm, SD Sheila Dickie, CD Carla Din, KD Kevin Dixon, WD Walt Duncan, BD Bob Dunn, JE Joe Eaton, JaE Jack Edick, JanE Janet Ellis, AF Andrew Ford, JPG Juan Pablo Galvan, PG Philip Georgakakos, JH John Harris, HH Hugh Harvey, KH Kevin Hints, RH Randy Hogan, JeH Jeff Hoppes, GH Glenn Hori, LH Lanny Hsu, SJ Sharon J, LK Logan Kahle, EK Erica Kawata, JK John Kenny, DK Dave Kent, MK Melani Kent, EL Eugenia Larson, ML Max Laubstein, EIL Elizabeth Leite, RL Robert Lewis, AL Albert Linkowski, LL Laura Look, JL John Luther, MaL Marty Lycan, SL Sarah Lynch, AM Aaron Maizlich, BM Bruce Mast, RM Rebecca Matsubara, KM Kai Mills, EM Ethan Monk, OM Oscar Moss, EO Eric Ongman, KO Kurt Ongman, GP Grace Pan, JP John Poole, KP Kir Pridatko, VP Vasy Pridatko, DQ Dave Quady, LQ Louie Quintana, RR Robert Raffel, BR Bob Richmond, TR Ted Robertson, FS Fred Safier, RS Rusty Scalf, PS Paul Schorr, MaS Mark Schulist, DS Dorothy Slauson, LS Lucas Stephenson, MSt Mark Stephenson, JS John Sterling, MS Maury Stern, ES Emilie Strauss, LT Linda Terrill, ST Scott Terrill, JT John Toldi, DT David Tomb, DV Doug Vaughan, LW L Weiss, IW Isaac Wesson, GW Gail West, DW Denise Wight, C&TW Chris and Teri Wills, RW Ray Witbeck, PY Pam Young

Art by Megan Sandri

Would you like to know where birds in Contra Costa and Alameda County are currently located? Join the MDAS East Bay Birding - Sightings Yahoo Group. See diabloaudubon.org for details.

Young Birders Club Back in Action

After many years of great work managing the Young Birders Club, Tracy Farrington is going to have a well-deserved rest. As the new YBC Coordinator, I wanted to introduce myself and ask all you *Quail* readers to spread the word that we're looking for YBC recruits! I'm Juan Pablo Galván, and I look forward to getting the program active and helping young people have fun with birds, nature and anything else we come across!

The YBC is for young people (about 10-20 yrs old, but not a hard limit) who want to get outside, see new places, have fun, meet others their age who share similar interests, and of course, see birds! We do monthly field trips. All you need is an interest in birds and nature, and (if you're under 18) a parent/known adult to come with you. Contact jpgalvan9@gmail.com or look for us on Facebook (search Mount Diablo Audubon Society Young Birders Club) for more info. We hope you can join us!

We already had a handful of YBCers participate in last month's Christmas Bird Count at Heather Farm and Howe Homestead Park (*photo Juan Pablo Galván*). I was impressed by the incredible birding skills they had, and so happy to see their strong interest in birding and wildlife. Many thanks to them and their parents/accompanying adults for making it possible for them to participate! After a local field trip Jan. 12 in Diablo Foothills Regional Park, we will be going Feb. 23 to Cosumnes River Preserve.



Just a little about me: I'm the Land Use Manager at Save Mount Diablo, where I respond to development proposals that could affect important habitats on and around the mountain, and help with everything from managing coalitions to grassroots advocacy. I lived in the East Bay until high school, then lived, worked and went to school in southern California, México, Costa Rica, the East Coast and lots of other places, usually all related to my passion for wildlife, ecology and conservation.

I'd like to think that heading up the YBC will contribute to conservation, even in just a small way, by helping more young people make a connection with nature. Thanks for spreading the word.—*Juan Pablo Galván*



119th Christmas Bird Count

Our Central Count occurred in good weather this year. Sixty-five participants located 145 species during the mild day. Most waterfowl and shorebirds were down, perhaps due to the draining of ponds at Mt. View Sanitary District and our restricted entry from the shoreline area of Concord Naval Weapons Station. However, an unusual sighting of White-faced Ibis occurred at Mallard Reservoir. If accepted by the regional editor, it will be only the second sighting of this species in over 50 years. In addition, a large flock of Snowy Egrets presented themselves at McNabney Marsh. An out-of-season Blue-gray Gnatcatcher was spotted at CNWS, and our Young Birders found the Tropical Kingbird at Heather Farm Park. More hummingbirds, waxwings and gulls were counted compared to last year, probably due to the calm sky.

By contrast, our East Count was hampered by fog. Nevertheless, 47 participants identified 150 species during the gray, chilly day. Waterfowl and geese in particular were way off of last year's highs, possibly due to illness that occurred in Northern California refuges in early fall. Of note, both a Violet-green Swallow and Black-bellied Plover were found by the Holland Tract survey party. These species have been seen only twice before on this Count. The Vasco Cave party (*photo Maren Smith*) spotted a Canyon Wren for only the second time. Of particular interest and awaiting acceptance by the regional editor was the flyover of 50 Band-tailed Pigeons observed by the Marsh Creek survey and also seen only once before on the East Count.

—*Citizen Science Chair Elizabeth Leite*

Action Alert: Pittsburg's Hills

Pittsburg's beautiful Southwest hills separate East County from Central County. You see them above the Concord Naval Weapons Station as you drive Hwy 4 east, or above the San Marcos project and BART as you drive west. They're an open space corridor from Mount Diablo to Black Diamond Mines across Willow Pass to the shoreline. But the hills are now under serious threat.

Discovery Builders has released a proposal to annex more than 600 acres of the hills between Concord and Pittsburg to the City of Pittsburg. The company is owned by the Seeno family, local developers who donate heavily to local political races and have drawn FBI scrutiny for their business practices. For example, in 2016, Albert Seeno III pleaded guilty to bank fraud on behalf of one of his companies, Discovery Sales, and was ordered to pay \$11 million. Discovery Builders wants to build 1,500 houses above the San Marco and Vista Del Mar neighborhoods. This project, first proposed more than a decade ago, has been withdrawn and come back a few times. Now, the threat is immediate. The Faria/Southwest Hills annexation would impact the hills, wildlife and scenic views, degrade the new Concord Hills Regional Park and create over 12,500 added car trips a day. A golden eagle nest is right next to this project, and breeding and dispersal habitat for rare amphibians would be destroyed and disturbed.

Save Mount Diablo, which is leading the fight against Faria, has created a "Save Pittsburg's Hills" Facebook page and emailed Pittsburg residents to inform them about what's going on. SMD, Mt. Diablo Audubon Society, other organizations and more than 100 Pittsburg residents submitted formal comments to the City on Faria's negative impacts and inadequate environmental review. To join the fight, follow the Facebook page for updates and find out how you can take action going forward. —*Juan Pablo Galván, MDAS board member and land use manager at Save Mount Diablo*

Q: Which North American Western game bird was hunted almost to extinction?

A: Band-tailed Pigeon

Band-tailed Pigeons are found in the coastal range and Sierra foothills of Northern California, and because acorns are one of their favorite foods, nearly always in oak woodlands—at least when acorns are ripe. In our area, Band-tailed Pigeons nest in the Berkeley hills and east to Briones Regional Park. (Photo *Jean Halford*)



These pigeons typically build their nest on the fork of a horizontal tree branch about 15 to 40 feet above the ground. The male brings material to the female to build a loosely constructed stick nest. The female will lay one and sometimes two white eggs, and both parents will incubate the eggs for 18-20 days. Both parents feed the young "crop milk". This milk is unique to pigeons, penguins and flamingos. Most birds that are mostly vegetarian will feed their nestlings insects to provide protein, but pigeons and doves produce a substance in their crop (the muscular pouch near the throat) that is rich in protein and fat. This "milk" is fed to the young for the first few days after hatching. Partially digested seeds and fruit are introduced to their diet slowly, until at around two weeks they are no longer fed crop milk. The young may stay in the nest until they are 25-30 days old, and tended by the parents for sometime after that. A pair can have up to 2-3 broods in a year.

Another unusual characteristic of the pigeon family is the ability to drink by suction, sticking their bills into water and drinking continuously. Most other birds take one bill full at a time and then tilt their head back to swallow.

In the 19th and early 20th century, *Patagioenas fasciata* declined in many areas due to hunting. In fact W. Lee Chambers, an avid birder of the early 20th century, remarked in an ornithological journal of the time that a single hunter from Paso Robles had shipped 2,000 birds to San Francisco and Los Angeles hotels. Many others joined the hunt. Chambers wrote, "The morning train from San Luis Obispo to Los Olives on Sundays averaged 100 passengers who came to hunt pigeons. A prominent hunter told me that these passengers averaged 30 birds apiece per day. This would make this one day's excursion over 3,000 pigeons. Now!—this is only one train and one day's hunting. One can hardly calculate the number of birds killed by hunters in automobiles and those that started from Los Angeles, San Francisco, Santa Barbara, Ventura, Santa Maria, Paso Robles, Lompoc and other small towns." Chambers' article, written in 1913, helped lead to a ban on hunting that lasted until the early 1930s.

Today, the Pacific Coast population of the Band-tailed Pigeon has experienced long term population declines. This may be partly due to loss of habitat. Forest management practices emphasize conifer production, and while these pigeons will nest in conifers, they need fruit and nut bearing trees and shrubs for food. At the same time, oak woodlands have shrunk considerably due to agriculture and urban sprawl. Another concern for these pigeons is the disease Avian Trichomonas. The protozoan parasites *T. gallinae* and *T. stableri* cause large numbers of deaths of these birds periodically in the winter.—*Jean Halford*

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An Acorn Woodpecker checks the pantry. (Photo Isaac Aronow)



Clockwise from Left: Hugh Harvey sells books donated by the family of Norah Bain; Elizabeth Leite reports on the most recent Christmas Bird Count, which saw a spike in woodpeckers; Juan Pablo Galván introduces himself as the new coordinator of the Young Birders Club; Jerry Britten shares data on 25 years of CBCs; Rachel Levin reads from her book on animal encounters, and a group of CBC volunteers surveys Borges Ranch and Walnut Creek Open Space. (Photos Maren Smith and Lori Patel)