



the Quail

Mount Diablo Audubon Society

P.O. Box 53, Walnut Creek, CA 94597-0053

www.diabloaudubon.com/index.php

Volume 56, Number 7

April 2011

The Pacific Flyway in the Delta and Central Valley

◆ Mike Moran

Dusk at Gray Lodge Wildlife Area, Butte County



While few places on earth can rival California's wild riches, we often perceive our state's biological abundance to be well past its prime, something that disappeared with the arrival of Europeans, gold miners, and the millions who followed. We are graced, however, with a bold reminder of past and present vigor and the future promise of our state's natural heritage: the annual Pacific Flyway waterfowl migration in the great

Central Valley and California Delta. Each fall and winter, millions of birds of myriad species descend upon the Valley's wetlands, farm fields, stream sides, and open spaces. The Valley of today is certainly not the Valley of generations past; it has been reclaimed and peopled, and its rivers rerouted and water flows profoundly rescheduled. Despite all of this, and in some cases because of it,

we still can catch a glimpse of California's wild pride as we look to winter skies over the Central Valley.

In this presentation, Mike Moran will discuss the phenomenon of avian migration and how it has been impacted by—and impacts—human behavior here on terra firma. He will explore how avian biology, hydrology, water policy, land use, conservation, and restoration all converge in the Central Valley and Delta, and will illustrate what has brought us to our current status, and how we may see these sometimes disconnected subjects connect in the future.

Mike Moran has been a naturalist for over 25 years, the past 16 years with East Bay Regional Park District at Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve. He is fascinated by the morning (east) side of Mount Diablo—from the Delta to the flanks of the mountain and everything in between. His areas of interest are California water, birds, and local history. Mike has worked with the

National Park Service, California State Parks, the National Marine Sanctuary System, and Yosemite Institute (now Nature Bridge). He has led natural history and whale watch programs in Alaska, Canada, New England, Washington, and California. He attended San Francisco State University (BA Recreation and Leisure Studies, BA Geography and Human Environmental Studies), and the University of California, Berkeley (MS, Wildland Resource Science).

BIRDING INFORMATION

Recently, our MDAS President, Jimm Edgar, visited the Mariposa Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve in Mexico. Millions, even billions of Monarch Butterflies overwinter and breed in this World Heritage Site. The monarchs have migrated up to 4,000 miles using the magnetic pull of the earth and the position of the sun to guide them. Jimm will share his journey to see these amazing insects.

Meeting Schedule

The next general meeting of Mount Diablo Audubon Society will be **Thursday, April 7**, in the Camellia Room of The Gardens at Heather Farm, Walnut Creek.

7:00 PM Birding Information

7:25 PM Announcements

7:40 PM Refreshments,* raffle prize

8:05 PM Speaker: **Mike Moran**

* Please remember to bring a cup.

Thursday, May 5: **Stephanie Ellis**

DEDICATED TO HABITAT CONSERVATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

President's Corner

By Jimm Edgar

New record for birds seen on island of Maui in a single day!

On March 8, two other members of Mount Diablo Audubon and I along with Maui resident, Sonny Gamponia, broke the existing record for number of bird species seen in a single day on Maui; a "Big Day" record as the American Bird Association calls it. The old record of 43 species was set in 2005. We saw 45 species on our Big Day. Kent Fickett and Bill Chilson were the other two MDAS members.



Nene, State bird of Hawaii. Photographed at Haleakala National Park by Ellis Myers.

The idea started when Kent was in Maui this past Christmas and did the Maui Christmas Bird Count with Sonny. They began to talk about how we might break the record and Sonny mapped out the day almost minute by minute and bird by bird. It seemed like the best time of year was early March in order to get the wintering migrant waterfowl and shorebirds. They begin to leave around mid-March. Unfortunately the seven or eight duck species that were on the Christmas count had all left by mid-February so we began the day with a bit of disappointment, but hoped for the best. It meant we had to just about see all we hoped for and get a couple of lucky finds also.

Sonny met us at 5 AM at our hotel and we headed up the mountain to Haleakala National Park. We had hoped to see either Barn Owl or Short-eared Owl on the road up, but saw neither. The road ends at about 9,000 ft. elevation. We found Chukar and Nene or Hawaiian Goose (the state bird of Hawaii) near the summit, then came down to Hosmer Grove at about 7000 ft. to look

for possibly four of the endemic birds of the Island. I'iwi, Apapane, Amakihi and Maui Creeper. We found all four in about an hour and headed down the mountain. A few stops along the way produced almost all the target species. The birds at lower elevations on Maui are almost all introduced species: Cardinal, House Finch, Mockingbird, Skylark, *etc.* Back to sea level we went to a large wetland area called Kanaha. We saw Hawaiian Coot, Mallard, Night Heron, and a few expected shorebirds. We got a couple of lucky finds with Black-bellied Plover and Dowitchers there. Then about noon we went to the Kealia National Wildlife Refuge for more shorebirds. We added about five species there including a totally unexpected Killdeer. We left there and went to a spot to see Black Francolin and another spot for Japanese Bush Warbler, and quickly added them. We were at 42 species, just one shy of tying the record. It was almost 2 PM by now and we had to make a decision. We could go back and search other areas near where we were and look for species missed or drive more than two hours to the other end of the island to Hana. We had gone almost to Hana the day before and had seen one Frigatebird and what we thought were Black Noddies, but we were looking at them through a scope over two miles away and could not get enough detail. We decided to drive to Hana. We got there just after 5 PM with about 45 minutes of daylight left. There is a small island just about a half mile off shore and as we drove down to the coast line we could see hundreds of Great Frigatebirds flying. That tied the record. We got the scopes set up and found Black Noddy. New record! As we looked more we began to see Red-footed Boobies flying in from the sea. Our 45th species was not even on the list as possible to be seen. It was a really fun experience. We hope to try it again in the future.

We will submit an official report to the ABA along with a write-up for the day. It will be published in the next ABA Big Day Report.

The Quail is published monthly except January and August by Mount Diablo Audubon Society, P.O. Box 53, Walnut Creek, CA 94597-0053. *The Quail* is printed on 30% post-consumer waste recycled paper. **The deadline for the May issue is April 12.**

Welcome New Members

David Merrill

Danville

Julie Roessig

Pleasant Hill

50 Years Ago

Excerpts from The Quail for April 1961:

An effort is to be made at this session of the State Legislature to have \$100,000 allocated to Mount Diablo State Park for expansion, particularly to the south and east. Chopping of trees is coming very near Barbecue Terrace boundary to the east, and subdividing is planned south on part of the Blackhawk holdings. Subdividing for money, so why not State money invested to extend the park!

Ferd Ruth brought back glad tidings [from the Biennial Convention at Asilomar] to R. S. "Dick" Beitzel who was awarded a prize for his picture of Manley Beacon taken in Death Valley two years ago.

The Peterson lecture must have been as gratifying to him as it was to the room filled with intent listeners and viewers. More and more chairs were brought in from other buildings until capacity was nearly reached.

Score one for Mount Diablo! He was much interested in the Society mast head, The Quail, and pleased to chat with the artist Harry C. Adamson.

[Roger Tory Peterson spoke at Diablo Valley College on March 14, 1961 as part of the National Audubon Screen Tour.]

Q

This is a bird of wetlands and shores, where it gorges on fish, and of agricultural fields, where it devours snakes, voles and other small mammals. In the southeastern United States this species likes to nest in trees such as cypress, where alligators in the waters below are not friendly to potential predators.

Unscramble these letters, or turn to Page 6 to learn more.

ABEEEGHLONRRTU

Observations

By Maury Stern

Submit Contra Costa County sightings to mbstern2@yahoo.com or (925) 284-5980 or send to EBB Sightings@yahoo.com.

The highlight of the month occurred from February 4 to February 14 when the best herring run in 10 years was at Point Richmond and the Miller/Knox Regional Shoreline beach. It attracted tens of thousands of gulls and ducks. The highlight bird was a **Slaty-backed Gull** seen by NA, TE, JL, and DS. At least 30 **Thayer's Gulls** were seen at one time, as well as **Glaucous, Glaucous-winged**, hybrids, but very few **Herring Gulls**. One white gull remains unidentified to date.

A very unusual sighting of a **Fork-tailed Storm Petrel** off Point Isabel was well seen on 2/25 by ES. This is very rare inside the bay.

HH saw a continuing **Greater White-fronted Goose** at Heather Farm on 2/3.

There was a lone **Aleutian Cackling Goose** with a large flock of **Canada Geese** at the Lone Tree Golf course in Antioch on 3/10. PS.

A **Ross's Goose** was at Point Richmond on 2/8, DS, and 2/12, JL.

SH saw 3 **Tundra Swans** at Pacheco Marsh in Martinez. (This is an unopened area near the Benicia Bridge being evaluated as a future park and not open to the public.)

EL, JP, DS, and ET saw **Eurasian Wigeon** at Miller/Knox RS in early February.

Numerous observers saw the **Harlequin Duck** near Point Richmond from 2/12 to 3/2. TB, SD, TE, JK, JL, LL, M&HM, and HS.

Black Scoters were seen during the herring run by JL, TE.

LL saw 3 **Hooded Mergansers** in Pinole Creek on 3/1.

An **Osprey** and an adult **Bald Eagle** were seen flying over Castle Rock in Pine Canyon near Mount Diablo SP on 3/12 by DW and her class.

PS had a visit from a juvenile **Red-shouldered Hawk** on 2/23, for a new yard bird.

On 2/5, MM saw a mature and an immature **Golden Eagle** at Briones RP.

LE, SH, and TR heard 3 **Black Rails** at Pacheco Marsh on 2/7 and 2/24.

A **Wilson's Snipe** was in Pinole Creek 2/10. LL.

TB saw a **Caspian Tern** flying between Brooks Island and Pt. Richmond on 3/11.

JC had the return of the **Greater Roadrunner** to her house near St. Andrews and Mountain View Dr. in Antioch on 3/14.

MS has been hearing a **Western Screech Owl** calling frequently in his yard in Lafayette the past 3 weeks.

An **Allen's Hummingbird** was at the Alvarado area of Wildcat RP in El Sobrante on 2/3. AL.



Allen's Hummingbird

AK saw 3 **Hairy Woodpeckers** at Tilden RP on 2/7.

A **Say's Phoebe** was at the end of Marina Bay Parkway in Richmond on 3/10. JD

A **Red-breasted Nuthatch** was several miles east of its usual location in her Walnut Creek yard on 3/4. L-MH.

DW saw and heard **Rock Wren** singing at Castle Rock on 3/12. as did PS on 3/5 at Black Diamond Mines RP.

Golden-crowned Kinglets were in the redwoods just beyond Wildcat Creek spillway in Tilden RP on 3/4.

A **Varied Thrush** was at Tilden on 3/4. DW.

A rare **Brown Thrasher** made its second appearance this winter in the Point Richmond area. (It was at Pinole RP about 3 months ago.) It was seen from 2/5-2/21. EL, LL, DQ, ES, AK, M&HM, KE, RC, JL, MK, JS.

PS saw 3 **Phainopepla** at Black Diamond on 3/5, as well as **Rufous-crowned Sparrow** in a 7 sparrow day. 3/5

Small numbers of **Cedar Waxwings** continue to be seen through the area. L-MH, MS.

Continued on Page 9 »

NEWS FROM WILD BIRDS UNLIMITED



• Both Hooded and Bullocks Orioles will be arriving soon to nest in Contra Costa County. These spectacular birds are nectar feeders, like the hummingbirds. There are specially designed feeders for these birds that are too large to use hummingbird feeders.



• Chickadees, wrens and titmice are nesting now. These birds will often have two broods each year and will readily make use of birdhouses



• Looking for a new set of binoculars? Come in and see the new Eagle Optics Ranger and the Ranger HD (High-density glass) and the new Vortex Optics.



Ranger

Viper

Both have close focus of less than 6 feet and fully multi-coated lenses to provide great contrast and sharp images. They have unconditional, lifetime warranty. The Viper HDs are most impressive with High Density extra-low dispersion glass for increased resolution and color fidelity.

Optics Workshop

Saturday, April 30 · 10:00 AM

Learn about birding optics, both binoculars and spotting scopes. Bring your binoculars to compare. RSVP 925-798-0303



Mike and Cecil Williams
Wild Birds Unlimited

692 Contra Costa Blvd.

Pleasant Hill, CA 94523, 925-798-0303
Visit us at www.wbupleasanthill.com

April

- 2 Saturday Garin Regional Park
- 6 Wednesday Orinda Connector Trail
- 9 Saturday Pine Canyon
- 13 Wednesday Mount Diablo State Park
- 18 Monday North Briones
- 21 Thursday Del Puerto Canyon
- 23 Saturday Mines Road
- 28 Thursday Mitchell Canyon

May

- 3 Tuesday Fernandez Ranch
- 12 Thursday West Briones Regional Park
- 14 Saturday East Contra Costa County
- 19 Thursday Sycamore Grove/Shadow Cliffs

③ Saturday, April 2 Garin Regional Park

Leader: Fred Safier, 937-2906.

Carpool leaves 7:15 AM from Sycamore Valley Road Park and Ride. Meet in parking lot at the end of Garin Road at 8:00 AM. Take I-680 south and I-580 west. Take Castro Valley exit and continue west. Turn left onto Crow Canyon Road and go under the freeway. Crow Canyon Road becomes Grove Way and then A Street. At A Street and SR 238 (Foothill Blvd.), turn left. Foothill Blvd./SR 238 becomes Mission Blvd. Go south about 3 miles to Garin Road, turn left, and follow to its end. Spring migrants will be our goal. Lunch in the park after.



Western Screech-Owl
Garin Regional Park

Field trips are open to members and non-members, beginners and advanced birders. Weather or other contingencies may require changes. For updates, visit the MDAS website at www.diabloaudubon.com/index/php.

Because most trips do not return until late afternoon, bring a lunch and drink and join us during our midday break.

- Category ①: Easy, little or no walking, smooth paths
- Category ②: Moderate, one mile or more, possibly rough terrain
- Category ③: Difficult, extensive walking on rough terrain.

Carpool locations: **La Gonda**—From I-680 southbound, exit at El Pintado, turn right and right again; park along open space on left. From I-680 northbound, exit El Cerro, turn left, then right at second light onto La Gonda; carpool point is about one-half mile north. **Sycamore Valley Road Park and Ride Lot**—Just south of Danville, exit I-680 at Sycamore Valley Road to the east; the Park and Ride lot is on the left.

② Wednesday, April 6 Orinda Connector Trail

Leader: Don Lewis, 284-5480.

Meet at 8 AM at the northeast corner of Camino Pablo and Bear Creek Road, Orinda. We will walk towards the base of Briones Dam looking for spring birds. We will be finished by noon.

③ Saturday, April 9 Pine Canyon

Leader: Nancy Wenninger, 938-7987.

Meet in parking lot at end of Castle Rock Road at 8 AM. Turn south on Walnut Avenue from the intersection with Ygnacio Valley Road in Walnut Creek. At the traffic circle, turn right and continue on Castle Rock Road past the high school to the end, which is the parking lot for Castle Rock Recreation Area and Diablo Foothills Regional Park. We will hike into Pine Canyon at least as far as the Castle Rocks. The trail crosses Pine Creek several times. Be prepared to carry lunch and liquids. Spring migrants and Peregrine Falcons.

② Wednesday, April 13 Mount Diablo State Park

Leader: Jimm Edgar, 510-658-2330.

MDSP is a treasure trove for birders. Although every season in the park has its special qualities, April on the mountain is especially beautiful because wildflowers add brilliant color to the vistas. Carpool leaves at 8 AM from LaGonda. Meet at 8:45 AM at the South Gate entrance after birding South Gate Road. Usually hot! Bring lunch and drinks. Entry fee required. Many migrant and nesting species are possible including Sage Sparrows, California Thrashers, woodpeckers, raptors and warblers.



Wind Poppy
Mt. Diablo State Park
Scott Hein Photo

③ Monday, April 18 North Briones

Leader: Cheryl Abel, 335-0176.

Meet 8 AM in the parking area at the north entrance of Briones Regional Park. Take Briones Road off Alhambra Valley Road and drive up this narrow winding road, park at the end. Wildflowers, spring birds and poison oak are along shaded trails. A continuation through grasslands to Sincich Lagoons makes this walk about 3 miles round trip. Bring liquids.

**① Thursday, April 21
Del Puerto Canyon**

Leader: David Hutton, 938-4485.

Carpool leaves at 7:30 AM from Sycamore Valley Road Park and Ride. Meet on Del Puerto Canyon Road west of I-5 at 9 AM at Patterson Exit off I-5 (56 miles from Sycamore Valley Road). Take I-580 east to I-5 south. We will stop at the Westley Rest Area, as there are no facilities on trip until our lunch stop. Canyon Wren, Costa's Hummingbird, Greater Roadrunner and other goodies. Usually very warm! Bring lunch and drinks.

**① Saturday, April 23
Mines Road**

Leader: Hugh Harvey, 935-2979.

Because of limited parking along Mines Road, carpooling is essential. This is an all-day trip and often hot! Bring lunch and liquids. Wild Turkey, Lewis' Woodpecker and Lawrence's Goldfinch and many spring migrants are possible, plus great spring wildflowers. Entry fee required for Del Valle Regional Park. Call the leader for meeting time and location.

**① Thursday, April 28
Mitchell Canyon**

Leader: Maury Stern, 284-5980.

Meet at 8 AM in Mitchell Canyon parking lot. There is a \$5.00 parking fee. From I-680 in Walnut Creek, take Ygnacio Valley Road to Clayton Road. Turn right on Clayton Road and right on Mitchell Canyon Road to the end. Gnatcatchers, spring migrants and residents, lots of wildflowers. Usually hot! Bring liquids and lunch.



*Chaparral Broomrape
Mitchell Canyon
Scott Hein Photo*

Trip Reports

Thornton Area, February 5. Fourteen birders enjoyed a beautiful, sunny day of winter birding in the Thornton area, Woodbridge Road, and the Cosumnes River Preserve. We had hundreds of Sandhill Cranes, and Greater White-fronted and Snow Geese but no Tundra Swans. We finished with a total count of 69 species.

Joel Summerhill

Sunol Regional Park, February 17. Not a single member of MDAS showed up to join the leader at the carpool or at the park; however, a guest from Seattle was made of sterner stuff, and together we had a pleasant hike through rain showers, varied by occasional hail and by dry periods, with even an occasional hint of sun. In all we saw plenty of individuals, especially Juncos and Acorn woodpeckers, as well as the two highlight birds, a very bright Red-breasted Sapsucker and an immature Golden Eagle (being harassed by a Red-tail as two Turkey Vultures observed the proceedings). Our species total was 25.

Fred Safier

Walnut Creek Parks, March 2. We dodged the rain and found a few birds at four locations in Walnut Creek. The White-throated Sparrow and female Common Goldeneye were still in Heather Farm Park, Western Bluebirds were at Howe-Homestead Park and at Sugarloaf Open Space, and many Cedar Waxwings and 5 Band-tailed Pigeons were at the Sugarloaf-Shell Ridge Trail off Dapplegray Lane in Rudgear Estates. Altogether the 6 participants saw 45 species, not bad for what sometimes seemed a poor birding day!

Hugh B. Harvey

Tomales Bay State Park, March 5. Perhaps it was the calm before the storm, but the forest seemed unusually quiet as we walked from Heart's Desire Beach to Indian Beach, then skirted the adjacent marsh. Despite the quietness, we tallied 48 species seen or heard for our check list. Ospreys were particularly active in the area and a male Allen's Hummingbird gave us a great show. The highlight of the day was probably several thousands of Scaups flying left to right as we stood on the beach before our walk. Whether scared by a motor boat or just a natural feeding movement, they came from beyond Indian Beach and disappeared beyond our view to the right, flying low over the water. It seemed to take the longest time for the entire flock to pass.

Hugh B. Harvey

Loss of a Friend

George Finger passed away on February 14th at age 89. Many members of the chapter will remember George:

From Steve Glover: George was truly one of a kind. He was one of my first birding mentors when I started birding back in college. I always enjoyed the fact that he had a great sense of humor yet, at the same time, he didn't at all mind telling you what he really thought about something. If you knew George, you probably know what I mean. George was also the one responsible for convincing me that I needed to start the Breeding Bird Atlas. And he tried to convince me every time he saw me. For about

ten years. In truth, knowing that George was getting older was one of my motivations for finally getting it done. He and his great friend Marjorie Plant spent hundreds of hours atlasing on Mount Diablo. In the "donors" section of the atlas I thanked two generous but anonymous donors—George was one of them.

From Maury Stern: He was my mentor as well. He was very active in the 1980s with the chapter and led the Christmas Bird Count for several years, and then I co-compiled with him as well. We used to go out together several times a month for many years when I started birding in 1981, and I learned a great deal from him. Unfortunately, WWII wiped out a lot of his

hearing that could not be helped by aids, and the last five years he had macular degeneration which responded to treatment enough that he could continue to read. He had a good friend, John Marsh, who used to take him birding every month or so the last 10 years. For many years, Marjorie Plant was his birding buddy, as well as Jean Richmond.

From Hugh Harvey: The first time I met George was also the first time Rosita and I attended the Yuba Pass field trip. He and Marjorie were married to non-birders and nearly inseparable in the field until health issues prevented their outings together. I was so happy to bring George's signed Breeding Bird Atlas to him. I miss him already.

Clear Lake State Park

» Continued from Page 10

yellow. Incidentally, although it is widely thought that the name of this species derives from William Clark of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, it was first described as a bird of northern Mexico by John Henry Clark, an astronomer and surveyor with the United States and Mexico Boundary Survey of 1848-1855.

From the lake's edge you will be able to see Pied-billed Grebes and Mallards, while Red-shouldered Hawks, Turkey Vultures and Osprey patrol overhead. Pileated Woodpeckers can be seen in the woodlands or riparian areas where there are willows, cottonwoods and oaks. One of the best spots to see the Pileated Woodpecker is the Visitor Center parking lot. Normally you can hear them calling and then it is just a matter of following the calls until you can see them. They actually like to pound on the Visitor Center's wood trim and siding.

There are a number of hiking trails that wind through the park and lead you to glimpses of Bushtits, Wrentits, Western Bluebirds, California Quail, Acorn Woodpeckers, and more. The Dorn Nature Trail circles amidst oaks and manzanita and shows off a variety of native wildflowers. Another trail is the self-guided Indian Nature Trail, a moderate half-mile walk



A bird you might discover along Clear Lake trails is the Pileated Woodpecker. Photo by Brad Barnwell, Redbud Audubon Society.

dedicated to explaining the local Pomo uses of native plants. There are exhibits of Pomo culture and history in the Visitor Center of the park, as well. The Visitor Center is also your opportunity to learn about the distinctive and complex geology of the lake and the surrounding region.

If you visit this largest freshwater lake within California—Lake Tahoe is partly in Nevada—you should also stop by

Anderson Marsh State Historic Park, 17 miles southeast of Clear Lake State Park. See *The Quail* issue of July-August 2010 for a description.

The extended Clear Lake area is one of the Important Bird Areas of California. This IBA hosts 14 sensitive species, including Purple Martin, Yellow-headed Blackbird and Tricolored Blackbird. Grasslands and chamise chaparral east of the lake are home or host to Burrowing Owl, Prairie Falcon, Lewis's Woodpecker and Loggerhead Shrike. Anderson Marsh supports Short-eared Owls and Bald Eagles, and is a breeding area for rails and other wetland birds.

Clear Lake singularly connects people with nature. The lake was formed by a natural landslide, creating an ideal habitat for wildlife and natives alike. And it draws birders, archaeologists and others for education as well as recreation.

Marilyn Waits, President of Redbud Audubon Society and Brad Barnwell, also of Redbud Audubon, contributed to this article.



Sketch: Megan Sandri

a Great Blue Heron ♦ *Ardea herodias*

This magnificent bird, standing four feet tall and with a six-foot wingspan, is distinctive with its bluish-gray coloring, white crown stripe, and elegant black plumes extending from behind the eye on to the back. A patient hunter, often waiting motionless for long periods, it stabs prey with a quick lunge of its long, dagger-like bill. Although this species is primarily a fish eater, rails and the young of other water birds need to be wary. The Great Blue Heron is capable of swallowing a fish much wider than its narrow neck. They eat a wide variety of prey other than fish, such as frogs, salamanders, turtles, snakes, insects, rodents, and small birds. You will frequently observe Great Blue Herons as they stalk fields and meadows for voles and small mammals. They can be seen searching for food anytime during the day, sometimes even at night. John J. Audubon wrote that they were expert

flycatchers, "striking at moths, butterflies, and libellulae, [dragonflies] whether on the wing or when alighted." These herons usually nest in colonies, and usually place their platform nests high in a tree, such as a eucalyptus. The birds keep adding sticks to their nests every year for re-use. The male heron brings sticks and the female works them into the nest. The Great Blue Heron is a long-lived bird with a life span up to 23 years.

The Audubon Canyon Ranch in Marin County is perhaps the most significant and most studied nesting site of Great Egrets and Great Blue Herons on the West Coast. It is open to the public for the nesting season from mid-March through mid-July. Hike to Henderson Overlook for a bird's-eye view looking down from above the nesting birds.

Great Blue Herons, important members of healthy, freshwater ecosystems, are a pleasure to watch.



Great Blue Heron at Hoffman Marsh, Eastshore State Park

First Binoculars

If you are new to the pastime of bird-watching you will soon learn that to identify and study birds, a quality binocular is the crucial tool that enables you to delight in all that's there to see.

In selecting a binocular, however, the word "quality" means something different to each of us. To analyze your own meaning, you need to understand just what a binocular is, because there are many variables. The two basic properties are magnification and objective lens size. These are represented by two numbers separated by the x sign. The first, magnification, or power, of the lenses—how much closer to you the image will appear. The second, objective size, is the diameter of the lenses expressed in millimeters. Likely, the most preferred number combination for birders is 8x42. Magnification isn't everything, nor is size, for the following reasons.

Binoculars with magnification beyond 8x will be harder to hold steady, and will give you a less bright image. With higher magnification, the field of view is less, and so a bird would be harder to find and its movement and flight harder to follow. Objective size is irrelevant to the quality of binoculars. Larger lenses require larger, heavier, costlier construction.

A measure of brightness is given by dividing the second number by the first (42/8=5.2). This is called the exit pupil and you want an exit pupil reading of at least 4, preferably 5. Without sufficient brightness, you will not be able to discern the true colors and textures of a bird in a shaded

canopy or at dawn or dusk. Brightness is also greatly affected by the quality of the glass and coatings, which is closely associated with price. Higher priced optics will have better glass and much better coatings on all the lenses. The brighter the image the more contrast you have. With more contrast, the image will appear sharper.

Other features that need to be considered are close focus and eye relief. Birders should find a model that will allow focus to within 6-8 feet. If you use your binocular with eyeglasses or sunglasses, eye relief of 15mm or more is recommended.

Two types of binocular design are offered: roof prism and Porro prism. Either is quite suitable, but roof prism binoculars are somewhat more difficult to manufacture and so are somewhat more costly.

Optics with glass, lens and prism coatings of high quality will allow you to see more vivid colors and a sharper image. Models with code letters ED or HD indicate superior quality glass. These binoculars will usually also have superior coatings on the lenses.

It makes sense to spend as much as you can afford. Good quality binoculars can last you a lifetime. Be sure to check the warranty. Some companies (Eagle and Vortex for example) offer lifetime warranties.

One caveat of importance: Please do not buy binoculars where the store will not let you try them outside the store in natural light. They must feel right in your own hands so you will be happy with your purchase and with your many hours of enjoyable birdwatching.

By Ellis Myers



Wild Birds Unlimited photo

Flyway Festival

Mount Diablo Audubon's participation in the annual SF Bay Flyway Festival on Mare Island was a gratifying event for the many volunteers who greeted visitors and explained our goals of conservation and birding opportunities. Kudos are due to these members: Cheryl Abel, Michelle De Los Reyes, Moses De Los Reyes, Diane Johnson, Donna Kramer, Diane Malucelli, Brian Murphy, Carol Pachl, Mike Robertson, Mike Tischler, Bev Walker, Nina and Larry Wong. The exhibit *Just for Ducks*, prepared by Brian Murphy, explained the project for installing Wood Duck nesting boxes along local streams.

Mount Diablo Audubon was also the sponsor of presentations by Scott Artis, of Burrowing Owl Conservation Network. Our partners, Native Bird Connections, also hosted a table, as well as presenting their always popular live-bird raptor show.



Mike Tischler and Diane Johnson



Carolyn Lie and Snowy Owl



Scott Artis

<i>Examples:</i>	<i>Size</i>	<i>Eye Relief mm</i>	<i>Close Focus, ft.</i>	<i>Weight oz.</i>	<i>Roof/ Porro</i>	<i>Field of View, ft.</i>	<i>Price</i>
Vortex Viper HD	8x42	16.5	5.1	24.6	R	319	\$590
Eagle Denali	8x42	18.0	7.0	21.9	R	408	\$180
Eagle Ranger	8x42	19.5	5.2	21.8	R	341	\$300
Eagle Ranger ED	8x42	18.0	6.0	27.4	R	341	\$440
Nikon Monarch	8x42	19.6	8.2	21.5	R	330	\$269
Bushnell Natureview	8x42	19.0	13.0	26.0	P	412	\$105
Swift Ultra Lite	8x42	19.5	6.0	22.0	R	341	\$310
Swarovski Swarovision	8½x42	20.0	4.9	28.0	R	399	\$2349

To Chase or Not to Chase

[Editor's note: A few weeks ago on the East Bay Birders Sighting board there was a report of a Slaty-backed Gull at Miller/Knox Regional Shoreline. My wife and I hopped in the car and headed for what would have been a life bird. Disappointed in our fruitless search, I remembered an article, written by our San Diego birding friends Herb Young and Mary Mosher, published in Bird Watcher's Digest. With the authors' permission, the article is reprinted here.

Not all rare bird reports are equal. Some lead to a happy experience, others only to frustration and failure.

On the last Monday of December, 1993, we left San Diego before daybreak and drove to the Salton Sea to find a Little Gull (*Larus minutus*). For several days the San Diego Rare Bird Alert had reported that a Little Gull was present at a freshwater pond at the edge of the sea. The bird had been there for three weeks. Following directions, we found the dirt road described on the tape and the tank bearing the numbers 108, and we drove straight down to the pond on the right. The drainage ditch separating the road from the pond had not been mentioned, but as we were preparing to take off our shoes and wade, we spotted a plank upstream that spanned the ditch perfectly. We marched across and, at 9:00 AM set up our folding stools on a gravel strip separating the pond from the Salton Sea.

For the next hour, we watched the activities of what was easily the bird of the year for both of us. And on the way home, thanks to directions obtained from the tape editor, we also found a Le Conte's Thrasher at Clark Dry Lake in the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park.

The following Sunday morning, we spent a couple of hours at a local (San Diego) birding hot spot, a series of filtration ponds known as Santee Lakes. After lunch, again following directions from the Rare Bird tape, we drove to Kit Carson Peak, about 25 miles north of San Diego, to look for Chestnut-sided Warblers. The result was a frustrating, time-wasting failure. At the park, the directions didn't seem to make sense. After an hour of wandering about,

we got new directions at the scene, but by then, it was too late. Along with four other birders, we missed the warblers.

There are an increasing number of serious birders who are willing to go long distances to spend an hour or less to see a bird that is a first state record or a rare vagrant. Many of these birders act on reports from Rare Bird Alerts like the one in San Diego. There are also so-called "power" birders, who receive special reports of rare bird sightings on their pagers, drop everything, jump on a plane to a distant city, rent a car, and race to the spot. They see the bird,

fore answering a siren call again. The result was the Young-Mosher Rare Bird Index.

The Y-M Index assigns one point to each of ten factors in the decision to "chase" a rare bird, for a possible total of ten points under ideal conditions. Before applying the index to a rare bird report, however, a birder must first answer at least two preliminary questions, namely, which birds to chase and how many points constitutes a "Go." In our case, we decided to apply the index to any bird that would be a life bird for either of us and to chase only bird reports that score five points or more on the index. Birders using the index must also factor in the total traveling distance, either by an arbitrary limit or by charging negative points for longer distances. It is our practice to charge one point against a rare bird report for every 100 miles over 150 (the distance from San Diego to any point on the Salton Sea).

Remember that the standards of the index are ideal conditions—for instance, a stormy day on the coast might be the best condition for bringing in seabirds that otherwise remain offshore, but this is a single-minded index; only calm, sunny days score a point. So a perfect 10 bird for us would be an adult jabiru that has been browsing on the lawn next to the parking lot in a local park for three weeks, that has been confirmed by visiting birders from all over the country, and that can be seen from the car on any sunny day.

Now, let us use our Little Gull and Chestnut-sided Warbler experiences as illustrations. The gull report rated an 8, one point for each of the first seven factors, and one for—did we forget to mention?—a sunny day. It constituted a "Go," using our personal threshold of 5. The warbler report, on the other hand, rated only a 4, one point for confirmed identification, one for easy access, one for distance of less than 30 miles, and one for good weather. Now we know that we should have gone to Mission Bay.

Your personal Y-M threshold will depend on your individual circumstances: what life birds you need and your ability to get up and go after birds. If your chase list is short, and if you have the ability to go birding on short notice, your Y-M threshold should be low, maybe a 4 or even a 2. It is a little like a golf handicap, with the lower the better.

Young-Mosher Rare Bird Index		
Factors	Comments	Points
1) Species is a rare bird	As indicated in the County Field Checklist	1
2) Species is easy to identify	E.g., White Ibis vs. Winter Wren	1
3) Species is easy to locate	Bird is Robin size or larger	1
4) Identification is confirmed	Not a "possible"	1
5) Species is stationary	In place for a week or more	1
6) Precise directions are available	Or bird is at a known location	1
7) Access is easy	No long hikes	1
8) Driving distance	Less than 30 miles	1
9) Driving distance	Less than 10 miles	1
10) Driving distance	For each 100 miles over 150	-1
11) Good weather	For people	1

check it off, and return home. Power birding sounds exciting even to modest listers, but most of us, constrained by jobs, family, money and good sense, are forced to make choices, even in our own counties.

Driving back from Kit Carson Peak—slightly subdued—we discussed the risks of failure in rare bird chasing, comparing the day's experience with that of the previous week. We decided one thing for a sure: Instead of spending time on high-risk chases, we would be better off looking over flocks of birds nearer home in Mission Bay or in the San Diego River Flood Control Channel. Maybe we could find a rare bird of our own, or at least, something interesting. On the other hand, we couldn't give up bird chasing altogether; after all, we did find the Little Gull.

The solution to our dilemma soon appeared. Instead of acting on hunches, we needed to quantify the factors that figure in our decision to "chase" a rare bird and then adopt a personal "Go/No Go" threshold be-

Scrapbooks

I have eleven MDAS chapter scrapbooks in my collection, starting with 1961 to the end of 2010. I have been compiling these books for 20 years and am no longer doing this. This subject has been discussed with our president, Jimm Edgar. I will feed information from the books for him to share with the members at our monthly meetings.

If anyone wants to look through the books, I would be happy to have you do this. I will continue to store them at my place.

Shirley Ellis

Ornithology Opportunities

The **2011 Point Reyes Birding and Nature Festival** April 29–May 2 will feature walks, instruction, fun events, great speakers and a silent auction. Registration opened in mid-February. Last year, nearly every walk and outing sold out well before the Festival weekend, so, before you forget, go online to www.pointreyesbirdingfestival.org to sign up now!

Audubon California's Kern River Preserve in Weldon, hosts the 17th Annual **Kern River Valley Spring Nature Festival** on Saturday, April 23. Numerous free events include bird walks led by Kerncrest Audubon Society volunteers, and information booths and exhibits located at the Preserve's headquarters. <http://kern.audubon.org/KRVSNE.htm>.

The annual **Heron Festival** will be held April 30–May 1 at Clear Lake State Park. »

Observations

» *Continued from Page 8*

A red race **Fox Sparrow** from far northern Canada visited JR's yard on 2/12 and 2/13.

White-throated Sparrows are still around. HH on 2/3 at Heather Farm, SD and RB at Meeker Slough, 3/5, and 3/7, and 3/13 at Contra Loma RP, MM.

Slate-colored Juncos were seen in Tilden RP by DW, and JR had one 2/7–3/5 as well as a Pink-sided Junco on 2/24.

At least a dozen **Evening Grosbeaks** were seen by FS at Heather Farm on 2/10.

LA Lou Argyres, NA Noah Arthur, TB Tony Brake, RB Richard Broadwell, JC Jane Chinn, RC Rich Cimino, SD Sheila Dickie, JD Judith Dunham, TE Todd Easterla, LE Linus Eukel, KF Kathy Francone, L-MH Liede-Marie Haitsma, HH Hugh Harvey, SH Steve Hutchcraft, AK Alan Kaplan, JK Jeff Kosoff, MK Mary Krentz, EL Eric Lichtwardt, LL Laura Look, JL John Luther, MM Mike Marchiano, M&HM Mona & Horacio Mena, JP John Poole, DQ Dave Quady, JR Jean Richmond, TR Ted Robertson, PR Phila Rogers, FS Fred Safier, PS Paul Schorr, JS Judi Sierra, DS Dan Singer, HS Harjeet Singh, ES Emily Stauss, ET Ed Tanovitz.

» The festival is hosted by Redbud Audubon Society. A feature of this festival is the pontoon boat trips to view Western Grebes on the lake and heron rookeries along the shoreline. The Heron Festival also features a Wildflower brunch as well as bird walks, nature speakers, exhibit booths, and children's activities. www.heronfestival.org.

Who will deny that birds are a conspicuous manifestation of beauty in nature?

Ralph Hoffmann

Mount Diablo Audubon Society

meets on the first Thursday of each month, except July and August, in the Camellia Room of The Gardens at Heather Farms, 1540 Marchbanks Drive, Walnut Creek. Everyone is invited.



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Please enroll my family and me as a member of Mount Diablo Audubon Society for \$25 for one year. Your membership dues are tax deductible.

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Western Grebes on Clear Lake

Clear Lake State Park

Birding at Clear Lake can be fine at any season, but it is particularly satisfying in the spring. For “In the Spring a young man’s fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love.” So, too, the grebes are courting with their amazing dance on the lake waters, Male Great Blue Herons, dressed in their mating plumage, bring sticks to repair and add to last year’s nest. And, as Alfred Lord Tennyson says in the lines just preceding those above, “In the Spring a fuller crimson comes upon the robin’s breast; In the Spring the wanton lapwing gets himself another crest; In the Spring a livelier iris changes on the burnish’d dove.”

Clear Lake State Park is a nesting place for Wood Ducks and other waterfowl. And you will also find Osprey, American White Pelicans, Belted Kingfishers and Green Herons. American Bitterns may also be seen.

Since 1994 the local Redbud Audubon Society has hosted the Heron Festival as a way to celebrate the springtime nesting of

the plentiful Great Blue Herons in treetops along the shores of Clear Lake. This year the festival with its celebrated Wildflower Brunch will be on April 30 and May 1. It’s an event that is well worth the drive. Jenny Papka of Native Bird Connections will present “Raptor Speak” with live birds on Sunday afternoon. Don’t miss the pontoon boat excursions along the shoreline of Clear Lake to view nesting herons, egrets, grebes, and other shorebirds. Experienced Audubon birding guides will accompany each boat to share information about the birds and wildlife seen on each trip. (It would be best to sign up early for reservations at www.heronfestival.org. The cost is \$15; the trip is 90 minutes long.) Except for the boat rides and brunch, all other festival activities are free. Camping sites are available through the State Park reservation system.

Clear Lake is a perfect location to study the differences between Western and Clark’s Grebes. Both are present here. The species



Great Blue Heron on a nest at Clear Lake

differ in appearance only slightly. Note that the black crown of Western Grebe extends down to the eye, while Clark’s Grebe shows white surrounding the eyes. The bill of the Western Grebe is described as greenish-yellow; that of the Clark’s Grebe as orange-

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