



the Quail

Mount Diablo Audubon Society

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

www.diabloaudubon.com/index.php

Volume 57, Number 7

April 2012

Snowy Plover Conservation in San Francisco Bay

◆ Caitlin Robinson-Nilsen

The Western Snowy Plover is a small shorebird that nests in open areas such as coastal sandy beaches and alkaline areas of western North America. The Pacific Coast population of Snowy Plovers has declined from habitat degradation and increased populations of both native and non-native predators. At the San Francisco Bay, plovers nest on dry salt evaporation ponds in the South Bay. For the past nine years, the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory (SFBBO) has joined biologists from the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge in monitoring this threatened species in the South San Francisco Bay.



Left: Snowy Plover at nest. Above: Nest in footprint exemplifies the need for habitat monitoring and regulation. Both photos courtesy of SFBBO.

Caitlin Robinson-Nilsen is the Waterbird Program Director at the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory, overseeing all aspects of the Waterbird Program. Caitlin has a B.A. in

Environmental Studies and American Studies from Skidmore College in New York and a M.S. in Environmental Studies from San Jose State University. Her Master's research focused on the Federally Threatened Western Snowy Plover nesting in the South Bay Salt Ponds. An authority on the Western Snowy Plover, she is the co-unit leader for the San Francisco Bay Recovery Unit.

Join Caitlin as she discusses Snowy Plover ecology and conservation issues. She will focus on the challenges plovers face in the South San Francisco Bay, including the ever-growing California Gull population and the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project. She will also describe research into ways to enhance Snowy Plover breeding habitat in order to increase nest success and nest density. She will also discuss the results of plover nest

camera installations that were designed to determine nest predators and have recorded some surprising results.

BIRDING INFORMATION

Deborah Kirschen, a longtime member of Mount Diablo Audubon, will tell the stories of a dozen different critically endangered birds. That these birds still exist she finds truly amazing. Three of the birds that she discusses will be present at the meeting.

Debby has been fascinated with birds since she was a child. She has served as president of the Contra Costa Avian Society and has supported that organization in many other capacities. Debby has spoken at local bird clubs throughout the western United States, at the American Federation of Aviculture and also at MDAS.

Meeting Schedule

The next general meeting of Mount Diablo Audubon Society will be **Thursday, April 5**, 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
- 8:05 PM Speaker:

Caitlin Robinson-Nilsen

* Please remember to bring a cup.

Thursday, May 3: Ian Austin
The Flight of the Philippine Eagle

DEDICATED TO HABITAT CONSERVATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

President's Corner

By Jimm Edgar

I would like to talk with all of you about a couple of needs the chapter has and an opportunity we hope to put together.

First the needs. We have two board positions that we need to fill; the Hospitality Chair and the Program Chair. The two people who have filled these positions have asked to step down as of September of 2012. We have a person who has indicated they will help with hospitality, but we really need a committee for that position. It would be ideal to have at least three people who could be available so that it does not always fall on the shoulders of a single individual. The same is true for the Program Chair. We would like to put a committee together of three or four and let them meet and try and put much of the program schedule together for the year. This includes our main speaker as well as our birding information time at the beginning of the meetings. Our outgoing program chair, Alice Holmes, has a binder with a lot of possible speakers so we do have resources. Both Alice and Gerry have done a wonderful job and a great deal

of why our meetings are so well attended is good programs that people want to hear and great goodies for our break time. Please consider stepping forward and giving me a call or e-mail and we can talk about it. My cell is 510-290-8006 and e-mail is ag70@value.net

The opportunity we are thinking about is to plan a couple of hands-on conservation projects. We are talking about perhaps putting some Burrowing Owl burrows at Antioch Dunes. We are also thinking about a one-day cleanup at Contra Loma Regional Park or maybe something for the Coastal Cleanup day. Our board feels we need to do some hands-on project in the county. Maybe this is something you have interest in also.

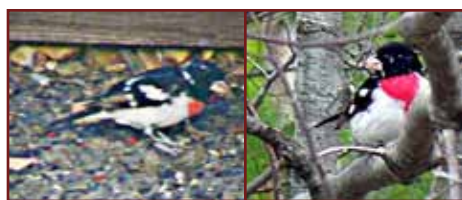
Our chapter is very fortunate to have a very active board and it translates to lots of folks at our meetings, great field trips, lots of volunteers at events and an overall healthy chapter. We always can use more help however, so think about how you can help out.

Welcome New Members

Dia DeRose	Pinole
Al & Yuko Fleischman	Oakland
Fred Glaser	Antioch
Lew and Linda Jenkins	Pleasant Hill
Eileen Kurahashi	Orinda
Virginia Moore	Walnut Creek

Silent Auction June 7

Would you like to own the *Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds*? You will be able to bid on this book as well as several other wonderful books, art prints, vacation packages, and other exciting items at a silent auction. If you have something to donate to the silent auction, please call our sales manager, Diane Malucelli, at 925-674-0920 or visit her at the April 5 meeting. We will give you more details about the auction in the May Quail.



(Left) Male Rose-breasted Grosbeak in first-fall plumage, photographed by Paul Schorr. (Above left) Recent digiscoped photo of the same bird. (Above right) Adult male bird photographed in New Hampshire in May by Ellis Myers.

Rose-Breasted Grosbeak ♦ A Rare Yard Visitor

By Paul and Nancy Schorr

On January 29, an immature Rose-breasted Grosbeak showed up in our backyard, and it has remained in or near our yard to the date of this writing. It feeds on seed that we throw on the ground or place in a tray feeder, and it has eaten berries from the overhanging cotoneaster shrub. In addition, we have enjoyed watching it occasionally drink and bathe at the bird baths.

On February 18, we participated in the Great Backyard Bird Count that was held

between February 17-22, and we submitted our yard list which included the Rose-breasted Grosbeak. Shortly after I submitted the list, I was contacted via e-mail by a gentleman who was a regional reviewer from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology/National Audubon Society, who had the responsibility of verifying reported rare sightings. To accommodate his request, I sent him some photographs of the bird that I had taken in our backyard, and subsequently the sighting was immediately verified. After the count concluded on February 22, I went to the GBBC web site, and checked for other sightings of Rose-breasted Grosbeak throughout North America. There was only *one* other sighting and that was in Virginia!

When the bird first appeared, his plumage was that of a first-fall male. Over the past weeks he has begun molting into his alternate adult plumage, showing a much rosier breast and greater black/white contrasting coloration.

Having the opportunity to watch and enjoy this Rose-breasted Grosbeak has been the highlight of many, many years of backyard birding for us and is an event that we will remember always.

Q

This is a bird that looks for its prey under the surface of streams or ponds. When the bird dives, it has the ability to change the curvature of the eye's lens to accommodate for the change in refractive index, so it can see its prey clearly.

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

ADDEEEGHMOONRRS

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Observations

By Maury Stern

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

This past month has seen the beginning of the returning migrants and some very early nesting behavior. The big event was the herring run 2/20 to 2/27, off the Point Richmond area similar to last year's at about the same time. Up to 7 different gulls plus a few other water birds were feeding on the herring roe. MS, FD, TB, MP, AD, B&MS, AK.

Eight **Cackling Geese** were at Heather Farm from 2/17 to 2/29. TF, DD, BH, AL. There were 2 at Martinez Shoreline on 3/4. LL.

A **Eurasian Wigeon** was on the shoreline from Point Molate to Richmond Landfill Loop from 2/12 to 2/27. MS, ZB, MP, JA, B&MS.

JH saw 2 **Redheads** at Clifton Court Forebay on 2/9.

There were up to 50 **Ring-necked Ducks** in Heather Farm Pond. HH, AL.

AL saw a **Tufted Duck** and a **White-winged Scoter** there on 2/10.

A **Black Scoter** was at Richmond Marina 2/16 and 2/17. BR, CL.

Hooded Mergansers were widespread, being seen in Heather Farm (up to two pair), DeVito Equestrian Center in Walnut Creek, and Blackhawk Plaza. HH, WK, ES, TE, DD, LT, EG, BH, SH, AL.

DV saw a **Bald Eagle** fly over and perch on power towers at Huckleberry Preserve on 3/3.

Ferruginous Hawks were seen in East County on 2/9, JH, and 2/14, P&NS.

Golden Eagles were at Valle Vista Staging Area in Moraga on 2/13, DW; 2/18 at Briones, MM; and Huckleberry Preserve 3/3. DV.

One or two **Black Rails** were heard at Martinez Shoreline Park on 2/11 by HH, then 3/4 to 3/9 by LL, TR, and RB.

P&NS saw 75 **Sandhill Cranes** at Holland Tract in East County on 2/14.

Two **Killdeer** were copulating at Heather Farm 2/8. FS.

A flock of over 100 **Long-billed Curlews** was along Byron Hot Springs Road 2/14. P&NS.

A **Greater Roadrunner** was at hole 14 of the Deer Valley Golf Course in Brentwood 3/5. LW.

On 3/4, a male **Rufous Hummingbird** was at Point Pinole RP. MS.

An **Allen's Hummingbird** was with the Rufous on 3/4, and at JCo's house in Moraga 2/18.

A **Tropical Kingbird** was discovered near the Richmond Bay Trail near Meeker Slough and 51st Street in Richmond on 2/11 by RC and BL, and continued until at least 3/4. JC, DQ, SL, BR, CL, RB, AKr, MR, KD, CW, TW.

Tree Swallows were investigating the bluebird boxes in Contra Loma Park on 2/22. P&NS.

SL and BR saw single **Rough-winged Swallows** on 2/15 and 2/16 near the Tropical Kingbird, and AL saw 6 at Heather Farm on 2/29.

Bushtits were gathering nesting material in El Cerrito on 3/5. AK.

On 2/8, **Bewick's Wrens** were investigating a bird house in Walnut Creek. HH.

Orange-crowned Warblers were singing 2/8 along Pinehurst Road in Canyon, JL; and P&NS saw them in Antioch at the Marina 2/17, and their backyard, 3/3.

TW saw a **Western Tanager** along the Iron Horse Trail near Ygnacio Valley Blvd. on 2/17; and TW and HH saw 2 on 2/24.

P&NS had an eight sparrow day, including a **White-throated Sparrow**, at Contra Loma Park 2/26.

The **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** stayed from 1/29 to at least 2/18 at P&NS's Antioch yard. It was one of two seen in the US for the Great Backyard Bird Count.

Large numbers of **Yellow-headed Blackbirds** were at Holland Tract 3/2. LC.

More than 20 **Great-tailed Grackles** were at the Antioch Marina 2/17, and at least 50 at Contra Loma RP on 2/25.

JA Jeff Acuff, ZB Zack Baer, TB Tony Brake, RB Richard Broadwell, LC Larry

Continued on Page 6 »

NEWS FROM WILD BIRDS UNLIMITED



Spring Is Here!

We're seeing large numbers of goldfinches, American and lesser, at our feeders. During the last two weeks, feeding has picked up substantially. The finches are beginning to show their yellow coloring, although many are still very pale or even white. In addition, we're getting large numbers of Golden and Rufous crowned Sparrows, titmice, chickadees, and House Finches, which are really showing their color now.

Dark-eyed Juncos have been coming in pairs, usually 4 to 6 at a time to feed on millet, along with a pair of Mourning Doves and a few towhees. As always, we have a bunch of White crowned Sparrows hanging out in the bottle brush tree and eating seed that falls to the ground.

Chickadees and Downy Woodpeckers are frequenting our Bark Butter and suet feeders. American Robins have been devouring the pyracantha berries and digging for bugs. Some of our employees report seeing a White-throated Sparrow hanging out in Lafayette. Customers are also reporting Pine Siskins and Cedar Waxwings.



American Robin with Cedar Waxwings

Anna's Hummingbirds have nearly disappeared, maybe because of the early blooms due to the warm weather. We have seen no chicks yet, although they should have fledged by now.

Chickadees and titmice are already starting to nest. It's not too late to put out birdhouses. Both of these species, along with woodpeckers, nuthatches, bluebirds, wrens, and others will readily use nesting boxes. Birdhouses should have drainage, ventilation, and cleanouts. These elements provide a safe, secure home for the birds. Also, depending upon the species you are trying to attract, specific hole sizes and floor dimensions are required. For a free handout on the requirements for different species, come to WBU.



Mike and Anne Eliot
Wild Birds Unlimited
692 Contra Costa Blvd.

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

Field Trip Schedule

By Hugh Harvey

April

- 4 Wednesday Orinda Connector Trail
- 7 Saturday Garin Regional Park
- 14 Saturday Pine Canyon
- 17 Tuesday North Briones
- 21 Saturday Mines Road
- 25 Wednesday Del Puerto Canyon

May

- 1 Tuesday Black Diamond Mines
- 10 Thursday Mount Diablo State Park
- 15 Tuesday Mitchell Canyon
- 17 Thursday West Briones Regional Park
- 19 Saturday East Contra Costa County

June

- 2 Saturday Outer Point Reyes
- 23-24 Sat./Sun. Yuba Pasa/Sierra Valley

② Wednesday, April 4 Orinda Connector Trail

Leader: Don Lewis, 284-5480.

Meet at 8 AM at the northeast corner of Camino Pablo and Bear Creek Road, Orinda. Exit at Orinda from SR 24, turn north on Camino Pablo and drive just over 2 miles to the intersection. We will walk towards the base of Briones Dam looking for spring birds. We will be finished by noon.

③ Saturday, April 7 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 up the hill to its end. Spring migrants will be our goal. Lunch in the park after.



*Bat house along trail.
Garin Regional Park.*

③ Saturday, April 14 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 Tuesday, April 17 North Briones Regional Park

Leader: Maury Stern, 284-5980.

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 sindicich lagoons makes this walk about 3 miles round trip. Bring liquids.

① Saturday, April 21 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's Woodpecker and Lawrence's Goldfinch and many spring migrants are possible, plus great spring wild flowers. Entry fee required for Del Valle Regional Park. Call the leader for meeting time and location.

① Wednesday, April 26 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 (Diablo Grande Parkway and Sperry Road) 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.

Trip Reports

Sunol Regional Park, February 15. 19 members enjoyed a lovely spring day in Sunol Wilderness Regional Park on Wednesday, February 15th. Highlights included at least two White-throated Sparrows near the education buildings; a pair of Varied Thrush, the male perched for several minutes up in the shadows; and a pair of Golden Eagles soaring high over the road to "Little Yosemite." A large flock of Wild Turkeys were along Calaveras Road and Hooded Mergansers and two male Wood Ducks were seen from the bridge along the creek as we left the park in the afternoon. A total of 46 species completed the day.

Eugenia Larson

Los Banos/Panoche Valley, February 25-26. A good number of participants (16) showed up for the annual Mount Diablo Audubon trip down the Central Valley to visit birding sites around Los Banos and in Panoche Valley. Temperatures initially in the 40s rose into the upper 50s as the day wore on; biggest handicap was the stiff wind that blew virtually all day. Old Santa Fe Grade Road did not disappoint on this occasion; memorable sightings included Redhead, Bald Eagle, Virginia Rail, Yellow-headed Blackbird, Great-tailed Grackle and American Bittern, among the usual mix of ducks, geese, raptors and waders. Lunch was enjoyed at the Los Banos Wildlife Complex picnic tables, but a serious challenge with all the wind that had to be contended with. The afternoon was spent birding Merced National Wildlife Refuge where we encountered thousands of Snow and Ross's Geese, good views of Great Horned Owls, and several hundred Sandhill Cranes, together with the usual assortment of ducks and waders. All enjoyed a communal dinner in the evening at the



Red-necked Grebe. David Hutton photo.

Wool Growers restaurant in Los Banos. The following day we found the Red-necked Grebe that had been reported on Fahey Road, north of Santa Nella. Moving on, we headed for Panoche Valley. Notable finds along Little Panoche Road included Great Horned Owl, Burrowing Owl, Peregrine Falcon, Greater Roadrunner and Golden Eagle. Long-eared Owls (14) were dependably observed at Mercey Hot Springs. Shot Gun Pass yielded excellent views of several uncommon Chukars. In Panoche Valley we found Mountain Bluebird, Prairie Falcon, Merlin and Ferruginous Hawk, but no Mountain Plovers. Our final tally for the two days proved to be a total of 95 species.

David Hutton

Tomales Bay State Park, March 3. Fifteen members and guests had a beautiful day at Tomales Bay SP with the temperature reaching the mid-sixties early on. (This trip had been rained out the previous two years.) The major highlight was the continual presence of 4 Ospreys going back and forth to 2 nests with fish and sticks with lots of calling. There were two other Osprey nests present not being used. We had distant views of Brant, very good looks at Pacific Loon going into breeding plumage, a well-seen couple of male Allen's Hummingbirds, and a very loud Pacific Wren.

Maury Stern

Walnut Creek City Parks, March 8. We visited four park areas in Walnut Creek and found 44 species. Starting in Heather Farm, the 20 participants all saw Ring-necked Ducks and a nesting Killdeer. Howe-Homestead was very quiet, though some had fleeting glimpses of Western Bluebirds and most saw the Northern Flickers. The Sugarloaf-Shell Ridge Trail was a highlight, with Band-tailed Pigeons, a Hermit Thrush, a Red-breasted Sapsucker and a nesting Anna's Hummingbird. Sugarloaf Open Space was also very quiet, though we did have a soaring Red-tailed Hawk, our second of the day.

Hugh B. Harvey

Mountain View Sanitary/McNabney Marsh, March 13. This trip was canceled because of rain.

Steve Taylor.

Pelagic Trip

Terry Colborn is leading a birding trip to the Monterey Bay area, October 6-7, 2012. The weekend will feature a pelagic trip on Saturday with Monterey Seabirding, and land birding on Sunday.

The pelagic trip is limited to 25 participants. The cost is \$95.00 per person. Sign-ups are being taken on a first-come, first-served basis. Don't miss out—this trip will fill up very quickly. Make your check payable to Terry Colborn and mail to: 1714 Magnolia Place, Davis, CA 95618. Include each participant's full name, address, cell phone number and e-mail. Your payment in full is your reservation. Your space will be confirmed upon receipt of your check. In the event the boat trip is cancelled by Monterey Seabirding, due to weather conditions, etc., participants will receive a full refund. Details and accommodations information will be sent to all well in advance of the weekend. For questions, contact Terry at tlcgdc@aol.com, or 916-705-8991.

Come birding with us.

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 ❶: Easy, little or no walking, smooth paths

Category ❷: Moderate, one mile +, possibly rough terrain

Category ❸: Difficult, extensive walking on rough terrain.

Carpool locations: **El Nido Ranch Road**—Exit SR 24 at St. Stephens Drive east of Orinda. **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.

Our Mount Diablo Audubon Chapter is a conservation organization. As such, we encourage members to consider meeting at the carpool point to pick up or ride with others. It is important that given the cost of gasoline, those who ride with others offer to pay some of this cost. Don't forget about any bridge tolls or park entry fees on some of our longer trips. El Nido Ranch Road is parallel to and north of the freeway. Park just east of the intersection with St. Stephens Drive.

Birds of the Beaver Dam » Continued from Page 8

rax), on the other hand, has a short neck. Its legs are short too, and with its thick bill and beady red eyes it certainly lacks the aristocratic look of its relatives the egrets and Great Blue Herons, but it is beautiful nonetheless. Night-Herons fish by night and then head for the trees and bushes to sleep, but you might see them moving around during the day. Maybe because they are mostly night birds they seem unusual, but in fact they have a bigger range than any other heron—five continents. Locally, there are throngs of them at the Mountain View Sanitary District marsh.

Back at the beaver pond, songbirds too are finding their habitat improved. A 2008 study by the Wildlife Conservation Society found that where there are more beaver dams there are more songbirds. The dams and ponds recharge water tables and improve the health of streams. Taking out pond-side trees, the beavers encourage low-growing plants; chewing willows and cottonwoods to the nubs, they stimulate new shoots on those trees. All of this creates cover for songbirds and nesting habitat for waterfowl.

In the late 1700s, after traveling fifty-five hundred miles up and down and across the continent, explorer, surveyor, mapmaker (and fur trader) David Thompson concluded that North America had once been “in the possession of two distinct races of Beings, Man and the Beaver.” By the time he said this, beavers were approaching extinction in the eastern part of the continent and soon to meet the same fate in the West. Imagine the environmental impact these determined little rodents must have



Belted Kingfisher at Martinez Beaver Dam

had—and then imagine the impact of their near-disappearance.

It is true that beavers take their toll on vegetation, but plants have obviously adapted to withstand this, and other creatures have adapted to take advantage of it. Sometimes the rising water level of a beaver pond will drown a tree—but a woodpecker might then carve a nest in it, and other birds might later use the same nesting cavity: flycatchers, Wood Ducks, owls, kestrels, and mergansers among them.

Hooded Mergansers usually head north to breed and are not often seen in Contra Costa County after April, but at least one study shows that they are expanding their breeding area into California. So who knows, maybe there’s a pair just waiting for the right opportunity to take up residence in Martinez. I will admit that I’d happily sacrifice a cottonwood or two in exchange for a view of merganser ducklings swimming up the creek.



Observations

» Continued from Page 3

Cawthorn, JC Jim Chiropoulos, RC Robert Coons, JCo Judi Cooper, AD Amy Dawson, DD Davor Desancic, FD Frances Dupont, KD Kathy Durkin, TF Tracy Farrington, EG Ellen Gierson, HH Hugh Harvey, BH Bob Hislop, JH Jeff Hoppes, SH Steve Hutchcraft, AK Alan Kaplan, AKr Alan Krakauer, WK Win Kryda, JL Johan Langewis, BL Bob Lewis, AL Albert Linkowski, SL Steve Lombardi, LL Laura Look, CL Calvin Lou, MM Michael Marchiano, MP Michael Park, DQ Dave Quady, MR Mark Rauzon, BR Bob Richmond, TR Ted Robertson, FS Fred Safer, P&NS Paul and Nancy Schorr, B&MS Bob and Martha Sikora, MS Maury Stern, ES Edgar Stiles, LT Larry Thompson, DV Debbie Viess, DW Dean Williams, CW Chris Wills, TW Teri Wills, LW Leary Wong.

SF Bay Flyway Festival



Liz Leyvas tends the Mt. Diablo Audubon table at the SF Bay Flyway Festival in February. She and all other volunteers deserve our appreciation for the hours they have given.

Hooded Merganser ♦ *Lophodytes cucullatus*

a From their breeding grounds in Alaska and Canada small groups of Hooded Mergansers arrive beginning in November and are said to be fairly common through early January, with some still here until April. They will come each year to the same location. Recent sightings in Contra Costa County have been reported from McNabney Marsh, Hidden Lakes Park, Newhall Community Park, Heather Farm and Briones Regional Park; in eastern Contra Costa County, they have been seen



at Clifton Court Forebay, Marsh Creek Reservoir, Iron Horse Sanitary District and at Brushy Peak Regional Park.

The Hooded Merganser drake in this photo has its crest raised; when not raised, the white patch forms a broad line from behind the eye to the nape of the neck. Hens are far less showy than the drakes, with a chocolate brown crest and gray-brown body. Both males and females have a long slender bill, serrated for grasping the small fishes and frogs that they eat.

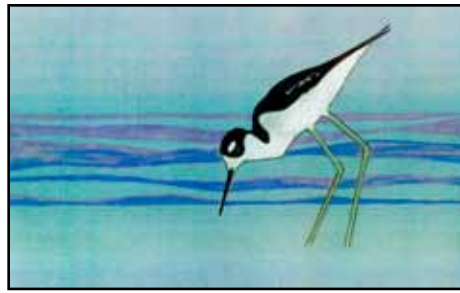
Hooded Merganser in Walnut Creek at Civic Park. Photo by Brian Murphy

Fundraiser Opportunity

As announced in the January-February issue of the Quail, Mike Eliot, owner of Wild Birds Unlimited Nature Shop in Pleasant Hill and MDAS member, has instituted a fund-raising opportunity for MDAS.

Wild Birds Unlimited will donate 2½ percent of your purchases to MDAS and another 2½ percent to Native Bird Connections. To make this work, simply take your copy of the Quail to WBU and Mike or the staff will register you as a member of MDAS. If you receive your Quail via email, please e-mail Mike at wbupleasant-hill@gmail.com and ask to register for this program; or print out a copy of the Quail to take to the store.

The MDAS Board thanks Mike and Wild Birds Unlimited for this generous and ongoing program, and thanks you for your participation.



Black-necked Stilt Meg Sandri

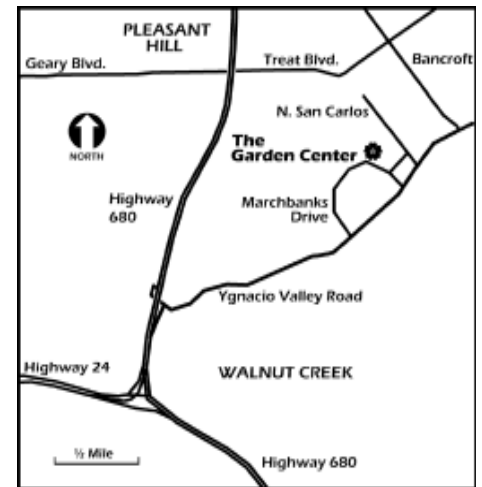
Point Reyes Birding and Nature Festival, April 27-30. Birding during the breeding and migration season at one of the best locations in North America: Western Marin and Sonoma Counties. Information, schedule and registration at www.pointreyesbirdingfestival.org. Pelagic trips to Cordell Bank, boat trips on Tomales Bay, Big Days, walking, hiking, biking and more! The Point Reyes Birding & Nature Festival is sponsored by Environmental Action Committee of West Marin. 415-663-9312, prbnfestival@gmail.com.

"There is nothing in which the birds differ more from man than the way in which they can build and yet leave a landscape as it was before."

Robert Lynd

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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Ornithology Opportunities

The week-long **17th Annual Godwit Days Festival** will be held April 19-25 in Arcata. Come celebrate the Marbled Godwit on the beautiful and lush Redwood Coast. Observe many bird species and wildlife through a selection of field trips, lectures, workshops, and boat excursions led by experienced local guides. Tour the expansive mudflats, the wild river valleys and the rocky ocean coast of this sector of the Klamath bioregion.

John Muir Birthday—Earth Day,

presented by the John Muir Association and the National Park Service, will be Saturday, April 21, at the John Muir National Historic Site in Martinez. Mount Diablo Audubon Society is an exhibitor at this festival. John Muir inspired people all over the world to “keep close to nature’s heart.” In this spirit, we celebrate John Muir’s 174th birthday at his former home, along with Earth Day, which brings us closer to knowing our planet. www.johnmuirassociation.org/

MDAS MEMBERSHIP/RENEWAL APPLICATION

- 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.
- I'm enclosing an additional tax-deductible donation of \$_____.
- For an additional \$20 (new NAS members only), please enroll me in the National Audubon Society.

Please send The Quail by: US mail E-mail _____

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Martinez Beaver

Birds of the Beaver Dam

By Jeannine Gendar

Editor's note: This article is reprinted from Martinez Patch. All photos courtesy of Worth a Dam.

My friend who lives on Alhambra Creek has a new pastime: watching for Hooded Mergansers. When he hears their guttural, froglike courtship calls, he can hang his head out the bathroom window and, if the creek is clear, watch them swimming—underwater—after their little prey. They like fish, aquatic insects, and crustaceans. He says they dart around like pinballs.

People have been seeing these spectacular little crested ducks all over the central part of the county this year, from Moraga to Martinez. Recently two pairs have been swimming around at Heather Farm Park in Walnut Creek, and half a dozen or more have been seen from time to time at the Martinez Regional Shoreline pond. I haven't yet had the luck to see them on the creek, but I have high hopes.

The people at Worth A Dam, the group that has been advocating for the Alhambra

Creek beavers since their 2006 arrival, have film of Hooded Mergansers at the beaver dam and great photos of other birds that are taking advantage of habitat improvements the beavers have made: kingfishers, cormorants, grebes, and egrets to name a few, and a couple of herons. Okay, technically egrets are herons, but I'm talking about Green Herons and Black-crowned Night-Herons.

The Green Heron (*Butorides virescens*) is a study in camouflage. When one of these birds is standing on the beaver dam it blends in perfectly with the local color. You will not see it unless it moves, and neither will the fish it is searching for. But what a flashy bird this is when it's not hiding, as you can see in the photo.

Green Herons actually fish with bait and lures: they drop anything from twigs or feathers to bread crusts on the water to attract fish, and then they grab them. Biologists identified that fish in the picture as a Sacramento splittail, a species that hadn't



Green Heron with Sacramento splittail

previously been documented in Alhambra Creek. Beaver ponds alleviate sediment and pollutants in waterways, and it's nice to think that these little fish, which have been challenged by the environmental impact of humans, are getting some help from the beavers. No doubt some of them are getting past the herons.

The green heron has an astonishingly long neck but usually keeps its head hunched up next to its body. The Black-crowned Night-Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*)

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