

# the Quail

Mount Diablo Audubon Society

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

[www.diabloaudubon.com/index.php](http://www.diabloaudubon.com/index.php)

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December 2004 / January 2005

## December: The Anatomy of Flight • Allan Ridley

## January: Woodpecker Wonderland • Stephen Shunk



*Kestrel in flight, Courtesy R.W. Scott*

### The Anatomy of Flight

We've all marveled at the wonder of birds in flight. Yet have you considered specialized anatomy of these feathered creatures; the structure of the wing, the muscles that power flight or the precise coordination of wings, tail, vision and surface sensation involved in the flight of birds? How do raptors float in the air so effortlessly? How do Greylag Geese fly over the highest Himalayas while we humans stagger up these peaks breathing from oxygen tanks? How does a songbird fly full speed into the haven of a tree and land without crashing? What are the actual motions and positions of wing and feathers and tail as a bird lifts into the air and propels itself forward, turns, lands?

In this hands-on presentation we will examine a bird skeleton, the structure of feathers and the wings of owls, songbirds and a Laysan Albatross. We will discuss and view by computer projection some of the adaptations of avian respiratory and nervous systems that allow birds to perform these amazing feats of flight.

Allan Ridley, a lifelong birder, has taught biology and ornithology at the Urban School in San Francisco for 35 years. He

and his wife Helen have led birding trips in the U.S., Mexico, Costa Rica, Australia and New Zealand. On the first Sunday of each month, at 8:00AM, they lead a GGAS field trip through the San Francisco Botanical Gardens at Strybing Arboretum.

**December Birding Information** will be just plain fun! Rex Womack, newly retired Contra Costa County Water District microbiologist will perform on his didgeridoo. Rex directs Drumsum, a seven member band that interprets various rhythms from around the world with vocals, didgeridoos, percussion and melodic instruments. This evening he will perform solo and share his expertise on the fascinating Australian didgeridoo. He has promised some holiday tunes. Not an easy feat.

### Woodpecker Wonderland

In the heart of Oregon, on the dry side of the Cascades, 11 species of woodpecker raise their young each summer — all within a mere 30-mile swath of forest.

The region's volcanic soils and an extraordinary annual precipitation gradient provide the foundation for tremendous habitat diversity, and the proof is in the Picidae. White-headed Woodpeckers abound in the ponderosa pine

forest, while Lewis's breed to the east at the juniper-pine interface. Three-toed and Black-backed Woodpeckers reach from the subalpine lodgepole pine forest to the blackest of burns. Three different sapsuckers hold territories throughout the region, including frequently encountered hybrids. The majestic Pileated Woodpecker "spills over" from its typical West Cascades habitat into the mature forests of the eastern slope, and Hairy, Downy and Flicker occupy just about any suitable habitat throughout the region. This incredible collection of woodpeckers allows close observation of their unique habits and behaviors, from courtship and nesting to foraging and territory defense. The whole experience has appropriately dubbed the region, "Woodpecker Wonderland."

Join Oregon naturalist, Stephen Shunk, for this exciting introduction to the ecology and natural history of Central

*Continued on page 2*

### Meeting Schedule

The next MDAS general meeting will be **Thursday, December 2**, in the Camellia Room of The Gardens at Heather Farm, 1540 Marchbanks Dr., Walnut Creek (see map on page 7).

6:30 PM Doors open

7:00 PM Birding Information

7:25 PM Announcements and business

7:40 PM Social time, refreshments\*, door prize

8:05 PM—Program

The January meeting will be **Thursday, January 6, 2005**. Schedule as above.

\* Please remember to bring a cup.



*White-headed Woodpecker*

*Photo by Stephen Shunk*

## Welcome New Members

Valerie and David Hutton  
Walnut Creek

### Woodpecker Wonderland *Cont'd from Page 1*

Oregon's woodpeckers. Steve will cover identification, habitat preferences, courtship and communication, as well as current woodpecker monitoring and conservation projects in Woodpecker Wonderland.

Stephen Shunk got hooked on birding in 1989 while teaching for the Youth Science Institute in Alum Rock Park. Within three years, he was leading birding classes and short tours in the South Bay Area. Steve formally fledged his birding tour company, Paradise Birding, in 1997, and he currently leads tours in Washington, Oregon, California, Texas and Alberta. Steve co-founded the Oregon Birding Trails program in 2001 and served as project coordinator for the Oregon Cascades Birding Trail. Through the East Cascades Bird Conservancy Steve leads numerous volunteer field studies, including woodpecker surveys on the Deschutes National Forest.

**January Birding Information** will be handled by Jimm Edgar and Maury Stern. They will give their annual report on the Contra Costa County Christmas Bird Count and the East County Bird Count.



Pacific Russet-backed Thrush  
*Hylocichla ustulata ustulata*

Birds of Golden Gate Park  
Joseph Mailliard  
1930

## MDAS Makes Once-a-Year Request for Support

Dear Audubon Supporter,

Your Mt Diablo Audubon Chapter is issuing its once-a-year request for support. We only ask once each year so we can minimize the time and resources we spend fundraising. For the rest of the year we can concentrate on the things we all love: leading bird walks, helping set up homes for bluebirds and other needy nesters, teaching children about the environment, helping preserve or restoring our local creeks, wet lands and open space for wildlife and people.

For 52 years, our Chapter has contributed to education, activities and policies important to our community's health. To remain strong and healthy, our Contra Costa community must include wildlife diversity and protect natural places for reflection, rejuvenation, and as a heritage for future generations.

Please help us to fund our local programs and to increase the number of people we educate and serve. The continued success of these fine programs is assured by your support and donations. Important community programs and goals in 2004-2005 include:

- Further enhancement of the native vegetation at McNabney Marsh at Waterbird Park in partnership with Mt. View Sanitary District and East Bay Regional Park District. Establish monthly bird walks for families at McNabney Marsh and Waterbird Park.
- Continued participation in restoration projects in Heather Farm Park in Walnut Creek and in Martinez.
- Expand our environmental outreach and activities.
- Further development of MDAS website ([www.diabloaudubon.com/index.php](http://www.diabloaudubon.com/index.php)) for education, communication, and membership growth.
- Continued expansion of our school-based educational programs and outreach.
- Fifty two field trips, ten monthly meetings and ten issues of The Quail
- Two Contra Costa County Christmas Bird Counts and the Contra Costa

County Breeding Bird Atlas compilation and pre-publication planning (coming soon!).

You have received additional information in the mail You can make your donation on your credit card on our website [www.diabloaudubon.com/index.php](http://www.diabloaudubon.com/index.php), by clicking on the button "Make A Difference" on the left side of the screen and filling in the information. Or, you can mail in your donation in the envelope you received.

For more information about these and our many other programs, please check our web site or contact me at (925) 798-0303 or [wbuphca@infionline.net](mailto:wbuphca@infionline.net).

Thank you for your support and good birding,

Mike Williams, MDAS President

## Birding Festivals

**San Francisco Bay Flyway Festival.** January 21-23, Mare Island. The Flyway festival celebrates the return of over one million shorebirds and hundreds of thousands of waterfowl which migrate through or winter in San Francisco Bay. The Festival offers indoor hands-on activities for children, exhibits, slide shows, live bird demonstrations, nearby wetland and birding walks, and tours of historic sites. There are also vendors providing nature-themed items and the best variety of Birding Optics in Northern California. For more information see <http://www.sfbayflywayfestival.com/>

**Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival.** January 14-17. Halfway between the Bay Area and Los Angeles, Morro Bay is on the Pacific Flyway and is a part of the National Estuary Program. The ninth annual Winter Bird Festival will offer 87 events, including field and pelagic trips that should record more than 200 bird species from auklets to condors. There will be workshops in bird identification, sketching, digital photography, and gardening for birds, among others.

Many events will have limited space, so early registration is encouraged. After January 4, registration will be on site only. Full information and forms are available at [www.morro-bay.net/birds](http://www.morro-bay.net/birds).

## NEWS FROM WILD BIRDS UNLIMITED



### Holiday Open House

Saturday, December 4

- Free Refreshments
- Free Gift with Each Purchase
- Free Gift for the Birds
- Prize Drawings

Winter is our favorite time of the year for backyard birdfeeding. White and Golden-crowned Sparrows, Dark-eyed Juncos, Red-breasted Nuthatches are all visiting the feeders. American Goldfinch numbers are beginning to increase.

Each fall and winter we are always on the outlook for Pine Siskins. 8-9 years ago thousands of this irruptive species stayed all winter. They are back in great numbers this year. Many flocks of 50 or more are being reported. It is a lot of fun to watch these very sociable birds. If you stand with a birdfeeder in your hand, they will come and eat while you are holding the feeder! They often travel with goldfinches. Both species love thistle (niger) seed and readily come to bird feeders.

### Birding Optics Seminars

Saturday, December 11

Mike Williams, of WBU and a member of MDAS, will lead a FREE workshop on "How to Buy Birding Optics" on Saturday, December 11 at 10:30 AM at Wild Birds Unlimited. Have you seen the Eagle Rangers that close focus at under 6 feet?

There will also be many other brands of binoculars and spotting scopes on display. As seating is limited, please RSVP.

Mike & Cecil Williams  
**Wild Birds Unlimited**  
692 Contra Costa Blvd.  
Pleasant Hill, CA 94523  
925-798-0303

Visit us at [www.wbupleasanthill.com](http://www.wbupleasanthill.com)

## October Observations

By Steve Glover

At least 18 Horned Grebes along the Richmond Shoreline near Pt. Isabel on 10/11 seemed like a large concentration for such an early date (SG).

Three American White Pelicans were on San Pablo Reservoir on 9/30 (SG) and six were noted there on 10/4 (WH).

Eighteen Cattle Egrets were at Holland Tract, east of Knightsen, on 11/1. Two more were found the same day near the east end of Camino Diablo in Byron (SG, FO).

The long-lived resident male Harlequin Duck continued at Brooks Island, Richmond through at least 10/11; it was joined by a Long-tailed Duck (formerly called Oldsquaw) on that same day (SG).



Long-tailed Duck

Two immature Bald Eagles were along Camino Diablo near "old" Vasco Road near Byron on 11/1 (SG, FO). A beautiful dark-phase Ferruginous Hawk was near the Byron Airport on 11/1 (SG, FO).

A "flock" of Wild Turkeys was noted along Taylor Blvd. in northeast Lafayette on 10/30 (BE), yet another new location for this increasing species.

At least nine Sandhill Cranes were at Holland Tract, east of Knightsen, on 11/1 (SG, FO). This is an early date for the county but they may well be regular at this site by October.

Two Wandering Tattlers were reported from the northeast corner of the Albany Crescent on 9/24 (anonymous "Birdbox" report).

A female Flicker reported to be a pure "Yellow-shafted" was at the south end of S. 32nd Street in Richmond on 10/22



This bird was named in honor of a nineteenth century American naturalist whose specialty was collecting birds' eggs. Ironically, these birds are on the Audubon Watch List because they breed only on a few small islands where their eggs are sometimes poached (in two different ways?). *Answer on Page 6*

(BB). Observers should remain cautious as a large percentage of such reports pertain to hybrids or intergrades.

A Willow Flycatcher in San Ramon on 9/24 was a rare suburban find for the county (DB). Another Willow on 10/1 at Martinez Regional Shoreline (SG) was much later than most county records. A Pacific-slope Flycatcher near Marina Bay Parkway, Richmond was noted on the locally late date of 10/7 (BB).

A male Western Bluebird at Martinez Regional Shoreline 10/1 seemed out-of-place; are they regular here? (SG).

A White-throated Sparrow along Regatta Blvd. near the Richmond shoreline 10/22 provided a rare record for that area (BB).

Three male Great-tailed Grackles were at the golf course pond on East Country Club Road, just north of Balfour, in Brentwood on 10/21 (SG). A female was here early last winter.

A male Lawrence's Goldfinch 10/22 in an Antioch yard was a nice feeder find and a rarity so far east in the county (Paul?).

Bob Battagin, Dennis Braddy, Bill Espey, Steve Glover, Wen Hse, Frances Oliver

### 2005 Entertainment Books

A marvelous Christmas gift and only \$20! Buy for friends and for yourself.

Save up to 50% on restaurants, travel, entertainment, retail and much more. Three easy ways to purchase:

- (1) Pick up your great savings book at Wild Birds Unlimited, 692 Contra Costa Blvd., Pleasant Hill
- (2) Buy at the December general meeting or
- (3) Shop on line (choose from more than 150 out-of-town editions). Go to the MDAS web site [diabloaudubon.com](http://diabloaudubon.com) and use the easy link to [entertainment.com](http://entertainment.com) under "Shopping." To ensure MDAS will receive a portion of the purchase price, be sure to include our code, 175587, when ordering.

# Field Trip Schedule

By Elizabeth Dickey

## December

1 Wednesday Hidden Lakes  
4-5 Saturday-Sunday Sacramento Refuges  
8 Wednesday Niles Canyon  
11 Saturday Palo Alto (high tide)

## January

6 Thursday Tilden Regional Park  
8 Saturday Putah Creek  
12 Wednesday Lake Merritt  
15 Saturday Santa Cruz  
20 Thursday Thornton  
26 Wednesday East Contra Costa

For the full list of field trips through Summer 2005, see the October *Quail*.

Field trips are open to members and non-members, beginners and masters. Weather or other contingencies may require changes. For updates, read the *Quail*, visit the MDAS website at [www.diabloaudubon.com/index/php](http://www.diabloaudubon.com/index/php), or call the Audubon taped recording at (925) 283-8266. Trip directions and meeting times will be published in the *Quail*. Customary carpool expense is 37½ cents per mile, plus tolls and entry fees, shared among driver and riders. 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.

## December-January Field Trips

Wednesday, December 1, **Hidden Lakes**. Meet 8:00AM in parking lot at intersection of Morello Avenue and Chilpancingo Parkway, Martinez. Morning walk through oak woodland and lake shore. Trails may be muddy. This has been a productive area for winter birds. Leader: Elizabeth Dickey, 254-0486. Category 2.

Saturday-Sunday, December 4-5, **Sacramento National Wildlife Refuges**. Meet at 9AM on Saturday at the Visitor Center of the Sacramento NWR. Exit Highway 5 at the Norman exit and go north on the frontage road. Follow the signs to the Visitor Center Parking Lot. There is an entry fee of \$5.00 or so. We will visit the Sacramento NWR, Delevan NWR and Colusa NWR on Saturday then work our way over to Yuba City where several participants usually stay overnight and have dinner together if you choose. Yuba City has motels and B&B's in a wide price range such as Best Western Bonanza (530) 674-8824, Days Inn (530) 674-1711, and the Holiday Inn Express (530) 674-1650. Make your reservations now.

On Sunday meet at the first parking lot at the entry booth of Gray Lodge Wildlife Area. If you are coming for the day from the Bay Area take I-80 to SR 113. At Tudor, take US 99 north to Pennington Rd. to the refuge entrance.

We have a chance to see 80-100 species that may include Snow and Ross's



Geese, Eurasian Wigeon, White-faced Ibis, American Bittern, Bald Eagle and maybe even the rare "Blue Goose" form of the Snow Goose. If you plan to go, call the leader Joel Summerhill at (925) 753-0862. Category 1.

Wednesday, December 8, **Lower Niles Canyon**. Carpool leaves La Gonda Way 8:00 AM. From I-680 southbound, exit at El Pintado, turn right and right again. Park along open space. 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. Meet at the Vallajo Mill Park in Fremont. Take I-680 south to Niles Canyon exit. Park is at the mouth of the canyon on right hand side. We follow Alameda Creek and some of the old gravel pits which have been re-landscaped as parkland. Leader: Jimm Edgar, (510) 658-2330. Category 2.

Saturday, December 11, **Palo Alto Baylands**. Carpool leaves La Gonda Way 8:00 AM. Meet in parking lot at end of Embarcadero Road at 9:30. From 101 take Embarcadero east. This is a high tide and Clapper Rails are almost always seen in the marsh; Black Rails are an exciting possibility. Leader: Elizabeth Dickey, 254-0486. Category 1.

Thursday, January 6, **Tilden Park**. Meet 8:00 AM in parking lot at Inspiration Point. We will bird around the park depending on trail conditions. Leader: Elizabeth Dickey, 254-0486. Category 2.

Saturday, January 8, **Putah Creek**. Carpool leaves southwest corner Sun Valley parking lot at 7:45 AM. Meet at corner of Cherry Glen and Pleasants Valley Roads at 8:45. Take Cherry Glen exit from I-80. Good trip for ducks hawks, etc. Have seen both Rock and Canyon Wrens and Gnatcatcher. Leader: Fred Safier, 937-2906. Category 1.

Wednesday, January 12, **Lake Merritt**. Carpool leaves Acalanes Avenue 8:00 AM. From SR24 take Pleasant Hill Road north and turn right at the first street; park along the open space on cross street. Meet 8:30 AM in parking lot by lake. From SR 24 take Grand Avenue exit and turn left on Grand. Enter park by Childrens' Fairyland and follow road around to parking lot entrance on right. Ducks and herons, good place for Night-Heron. Leader: Elizabeth Dickey, 254-0486. Category 1.

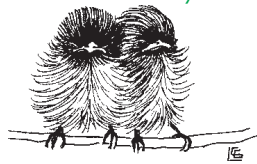
Saturday, January 15, **Santa Cruz**. (This trip has been moved forward to avoid conflict with the Mare Island Flyway Festival which has some great field trips as well as the events at headquarters.) Carpool leaves La Gonda Way 7:30 AM. Meet 9:00 AM at end of Blackburn Road. From SR 17 turn north onto SR1; turn left onto Laurel (stop light intersection) and right onto Blackburn to the end. Seabirds, ducks, some shore birds; Peregrine Falcon often seen. Also butterfly trees. Leader: Joel Summerhill, 753-0862. Category 1.

Thursday, January 20, **Thornton**. Carpool leaves Sun Valley parking lot 8:00 AM. Meet in rest area at end of Glascock Road 8:45 AM. Take SR 4 to SR160; at Rio Vista, go right onto SR12 for about 11 miles. Just after crossing second draw-bridge, turn left onto Glascock Road and follow it to the end. This is the trip for Sandhill Cranes and swans. Leader: Elizabeth Dickey, 254-0486. Category 1.

Wednesday, January 26, **East Contra Costa County**. Carpool leaves Sun Valley parking lot 8:00 AM; no east county meeting place. Call Elizabeth Dickey, 254-0486 for information.

# 105th Christmas Bird Count

By Jimm Edgar



Until the end of the nineteenth century ornithologists, lacking even a first-edition *Peterson's Guide*, made species identifications by comparing skins of birds they shot with stuffed birds in their private collection or those in a museum tray. A popular way to add to their reference skins was to participate in a Christmas Day hunt, a competition to shoot as many birds as possible. But in 1900, Frank Chapman, a naturalist at the American Museum of Natural History and editor of *Bird Lore*, forerunner to *Audubon* magazine, organized the first "Christmas Bird Census."

Now, more than 50,000 observers participate each year in this all-day count of early-winter bird populations. The results of their efforts are compiled into the longest running database in ornithology, representing over a century of unbroken data on trends of early-winter bird populations across the Americas. This database can be accessed through the BirdSource website at <http://www.birdsource.com>. Simply put, the Christmas Bird Count, or "CBC", is citizen science in action.

Anyone is welcome to participate, since field parties are set up so that inexperi-

enced observers are always out with seasoned CBC veterans. A charge of \$5 helps to cover the costs of processing and publishing the data. Those who count birds at their home feeders do not pay. As long as you live within one of the CBC circles, you are welcome to count the birds at your feeder on the designated day.

You are invited to take part in this event as MDAS will conduct two separate counts, on Saturday, December 18, and Wednesday, December 22. Rain will not stay our dedicated birders from their appointed rounds.

Every pair of eyes is helpful in this endeavor—you do not need to be an expert bird watcher. Just bring your binoculars and a sense of camaraderie and fun. You may opt for either or both days. Feeder-watchers are encouraged, as well, especially if you anticipate having an unusual species in your yard.

As darkness concludes the counts there will be a count-down dinner at Our

Savior's Lutheran church on Carol Lane in Lafayette for the central count; and the east count gathering is at Round Table Pizza in Brentwood.

Sign up by completing the form below, or call Jimm Edgar at (510) 658-2330.

## MDAS Christmas Count —2004

- I volunteer for the Central County Christmas Bird Count on December 18.
- I volunteer for the East County Christmas Bird Count on December 22.
- I volunteer for BOTH Christmas Bird Counts, December 18 and 22.
- Put me wherever you need the help.
- I would prefer a hiking area.
- I would prefer a less strenuous area.
- I will monitor a feeder or garden.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Years of birding experience: \_\_\_\_\_

Make \$5 check payable to MDAS.  
Mail to: Jimm Edgar  
4614 Jacobus Ave., Oakland, CA 94618.

Central County Bird Count • Saturday, December 18



East County Bird Count • Wednesday, December 22



# Conservation in Action

By Nancy Wenninger



• On September 18, Coastal Cleanup Day, a volunteer “human tire chain” pulled 180 discarded tires out of Alhambra Creek at the Martinez Regional Shoreline. Thanks to a grant from Mt. Diablo Audubon Society, these tires will be shredded and used as ADC (“alternative daily cover”) at the Altamont Landfill. The metal rims will also be recycled. This cleanup and disposal will speed habitat recovery in the newly enhanced marsh and tidal channel, a project completed by the East Bay Regional Park District, Caltrans and the City of Martinez.

• For many MDAS birders, the highlight of the annual Yuba Pass trip is the opportunity to see the birds of the Sierra Valley. The 130,000-acre Sierra Valley is the largest mountain valley in the Sierra Nevada. It contains a mosaic of habitats, including chaparral, sagebrush, grasslands, marsh and the headwaters of the Feather River. More than 260 bird species have been observed in the valley, and its wetlands are an internationally renowned birding destination.

Unfortunately, the Sierra Valley is also the focus of intense development pressures from the Tahoe area 25 miles to

the south, and the City of Reno, 30 miles to the southeast. The Feather River Land Trust (FRLT) is part of a coalition of land trusts working to protect the wildlife habitat, scenic vistas and working ranches of the valley. Together with The Nature Conservancy, the California Rangeland Trust, and the Sierra Business Council, FRLT has helped to protect seven properties totaling nearly 18,000 acres in the Feather River Watershed.

For the past two years, MDAS members have been able to enjoy close viewing of a number of sage species at FRLT’s 575-acre Maddalena property, located south

of Highway 70 and west of County Road A-24 in the heart of the Sierra Valley wetlands. In addition to pristine sage habitat, the property contains two tributaries of the Feather River and supports more than 100 bird species, including Sandhill Cranes, Bald Eagles, White-faced Ibis, and a variety of waterfowl and raptors. This year, birders particularly appreciated the new “comfort station” which provided welcome relief after a long morning of birding!

Most recently, FRLT partnered with The Nature Conservancy to acquire the 960-acre Heart K Ranch in the Genesee Valley in Plumas County. Extending nearly three miles along Indian Creek, the Heart K Ranch contains important habitat, spectacular scenery and Native American cultural sites. The ranch supports a diversity of breeding migratory birds, as well as river otters, black bear, beaver, mountain lions, Golden Eagles and a host of other wildlife species.

In September, your MDAS Board of Directors again voted to support FRLT’s vital work with a donation of \$500 from the MDAS Conservation Fund. Thanks to the ongoing efforts of FRLT, habitat in this very special place is being protected for future generations of birds and people.

## Field Trip Reports

**October 21, Thursday, Big Break Trail**  
Four birders enjoyed very nice weather as they observed 43 species from Eared Grebe to House Sparrow. *Chuck Groff*

**October 30, Saturday, Abbott’s Lagoon**  
Four members and guests met at the Point Reyes headquarters for the trip out to Abbott’s Lagoon on a beautiful fall day. 62 species were seen with a good sample of sparrows and other land birds, a fair number of waterfowl and a spectacular day for raptors. Ten species of raptors were seen during the day including Osprey, Golden Eagle, Prairie Falcon, Ferruginous Hawk, and Red-shouldered Hawk. Perhaps somewhat disappointing was the complete absence of shorebirds at the Lagoon. Not a single shorebird was seen! One of the people on the trip had been there two weeks ago and had seen thousands of shorebirds. A mystery to say the least. *Jimm Edgar*

### Heermann’s Gull

*Larus heermanni*

John Cassin named this gull in honor of **Dr. Adolphus Lewis Heermann** (1827-1865), one of the US Army surgeon/naturalists who traveled with the surveying parties and explorers of the nineteenth-century American West.

Heermann’s Gulls breed almost exclusively on the islands in the Gulf of California. Not only have the eggs been collected by human predators, but Yellow-footed Gulls prey on the eggs and also on the chicks. Elegant Terns guard against similar plunder of their own eggs by nesting inside Heermann’s Gull colonies.

After breeding is over in July, Heermann’s Gulls move north along the



coast as far as Vancouver Island; by December, they begin their return journey to arrive off Baja California by March.

The only North American gull with a sooty gray body and a white head, the adult Heermann’s is also distinguished by a red bill and black legs. Immature birds do not have the white head, but their black-tipped, red bills are key.

## MDAS MEMBERSHIP/RENEWAL APPLICATION

\_\_\_\_ Please enroll my family and me as a member of the Mount Diablo Audubon Society for \$25 for the year 2004-2005.

\_\_\_\_ Please enroll me as a lifetime member for \$500. Payment can be made in two annual payments of \$250 each.

\_\_\_\_ Please enroll the individual/family listed below as a gift membership for \$25 for the year 2004-2005.

\_\_\_\_ For an additional \$20 (new NAS members only) or \$35 (returning members), please enroll me in the National Audubon Society to receive four quarterly issues of the *Audubon Magazine*.

\_\_\_\_ I'm enclosing an additional donation of \$\_\_\_\_\_.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone ( \_\_\_\_ ) \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Card Number: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Visa \_\_\_\_ MasterCard \_\_\_\_ Expiration Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name on Card: \_\_\_\_\_

Please make your tax-deductible check payable to:

MT. DIABLO AUDUBON SOCIETY and mail with this application to:  
Membership Chair, 400 Oneida Court, Danville, CA 94526

## the Quail

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• a nonprofit organization dedicated to habitat conservation and environmental education •  
P.O. Box 53 • Walnut Creek, CA 94597-0053  
(925) AUD-UBON • (925) 283-8266

Mount Diablo Audubon Society general meetings are on the first Thursday of every month except July and August in the Camellia Room of the Garden Center at Heather Farms, 1540 Marchbanks Drive, Walnut Creek. Board of Directors meets at 7 PM on the second Thursday of every month in the conference room of Wild Birds Unlimited, 692 Contra Costa Boulevard, Pleasant Hill. All members are welcome and encouraged to attend.

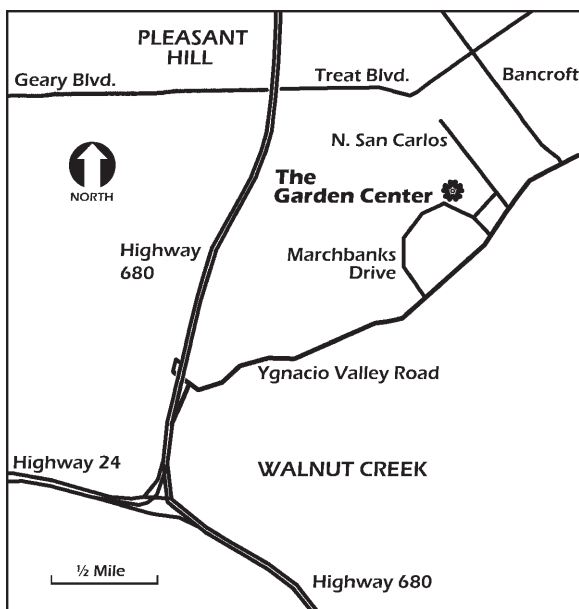
*Questions about membership or mailing addresses? Call Ann McGregor, Membership Chair, at (925) 968-1677. MDAS membership includes 10 issues of the Quail. A 1-year family membership in MDAS is \$25/year or \$500 for lifetime membership (payable in two \$250 annual payments). National Audubon Society membership includes the Audubon magazine. Introductory 1-year membership is \$20 or \$30 for 2 years; membership renewal is \$35/year. To join MDAS or NAS, send a check payable to MDAS to Ann McGregor, Membership Chair, 400 Oneida Ct., Danville, 94526. SEND ADDRESS CHANGES for both NAS and MDAS to P.O. Box 53, Walnut Creek, CA 94597-0053. Please send exchange bulletins for MDAS to the editor, 215 Calle La Mesa, Moraga, CA 94556.*

### MDAS Board of Directors

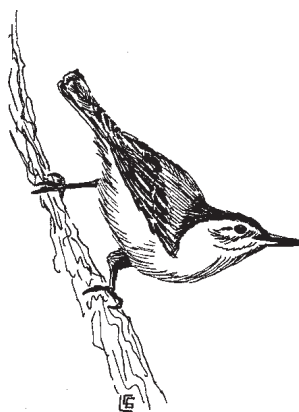
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Jimm Edgar, (510) 658-2330  
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**Deadline for the February issue is January 11.**



*Driving directions: From Walnut Creek, take Ygnacio Valley Road to signal at Marchbanks Drive. Go left and follow Marchbanks to the Garden Center opposite the Greenery Restaurant. Turn left into parking lot. From Highway 680 south, take Treat Blvd. to Bancroft. Go right to Ygnacio Valley Road, turn right and go one block past signal at N. San Carlos Dr. (Heather Farm entrance). At Marchbanks Drive turn right. The Garden Center is located on the right in the second block.*



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*Reddish Egret, South San Diego Bay*

## Quickies

Weekend birding in California

### South San Diego Bay

San Diego County, with its diversity of habitats from the coastline, bays and estuaries to the mountains, canyons and deserts, won the 2004 contest for America's Birdiest County. Among the areas of high species totals, South San Diego Bay is productive for waterfowl, shorebirds, and waders. There are two areas of note, without including the adjacent Tijuana Estuary, the Tijuana River Valley, Borderlands State Park and Smuggler's Gulch between the end of the bay and the Mexican border.

One of five refuges of the San Diego National Wildlife Refuge Complex, Sweetwater Marsh National Wildlife Refuge is located on the east side of San Diego Bay at the edge of Chula Vista and National City. The Refuge is comprised of 316 acres of salt marsh and coastal uplands along the Pacific Flyway. The Chula Vista Nature Center, operated by

the City of Chula Vista, offers visitors opportunities for education, wildlife interpretation and viewing and a 1½-mile hiking trail on the refuge. There is a walk-through aviary and tidal slough which is home to numerous species of water and shorebirds, including the endangered Light-footed Clapper Rail. The Nature Center is engaged in a captive breeding program for this species. Over the last four years as many as 100 individuals have been released in marshes from Sweetwater to Seal Beach. The Nature Center is accessed only by shuttle tram from the parking lot at the end of E Street in Chula Vista.

Lying between Sweetwater Marsh and Tijuana Slough, the South San Diego Bay Unit was dedicated in 1999 to ensure that thousands of shorebirds and waterfowl migrating along the Pacific Flyway, as well as the bay's resident species, will continue to find a place. The South Bay Unit was formed mostly from the salt evaporation ponds of the Western Salt Works. South Bay is an important wintering area for waterfowl, such as Scaup and Bufflehead, and for shorebirds, such

as Northern Phalarope and Red Knot. It is also an important breeding ground for seabirds, including hundreds of pairs of Black Skimmer, Forster's Tern and Caspian Tern. California Least Terns and Gull-billed Terns also nest at the salt ponds. In addition, there is a significant resident population of Belding's Savannah Sparrow.

In Imperial Beach to the west of the salt ponds, there is a fine vantage point and path at the end of 7th Street. Birding is best in winter. Possibilities are Red-breasted Merganser, Brant, Surf Scoter, Little-blue Heron, Common Goldeneye, and several species of loons. Reddish Egret (one was seen here in September) and Long-tailed Duck are sometimes found.

South Bay provides habitat for six species of birds protected under the Federal Endangered Species Act. South San Diego Bay was recently designated as a Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve site. All of the refuges in the San Diego Refuge Complex have been designated "Globally Important Bird Areas" by the American Bird Conservancy.