



the Quail

Mount Diablo Audubon Society
P.O. Box 53, Walnut Creek, CA 94597-0053
www.diabloaudubon.com/index.php

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December 2006–January 2007

Do You See What I See? Do You Hear What I Hear? Diana Granados

On December 7, Diana Granados, Director of Native Bird Connections, will describe her thirty-year journey and evolution as a handler of wild creatures and interpreter of wild animal behavior. She will discuss her role and the role of the animal as she and the animal interact. Accompanying Diana will be a surprise from the Native Bird Connections' collection of non-releasable birds.



Native Bird Connections photo

As an introduction, Diana shares the following thoughts.

"We could imagine a science based on the assumption that we contact reality in two ways: First is through physical sense data...Second is through a deep 'inner knowing' in an intuitive, aesthetic, spiritual, noetic and mystical sense."
W. Harmon, founder of the Institute of Noetic Sciences.

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Birding Information

Michael DiCarlo saw his first American Bald Eagle in Vancouver and fell in love. He traveled to Homer, Alaska to photograph the Eagles which gather there in large numbers due to the Homer fish processing plants and the fact that the rivers do not freeze in this southernmost Alaskan town. Mike, staff photographer for the Rossmoor News and an avid camper and fisherman, will share his photographs and discuss the impact of the Eagles on the town of Homer.

The Future of America's Arctic Stan Senner



Balancing
Wildlife
Conservation
and Oil
Development
on Alaska's
North Slope

*Bald Eagle,
Resurrection Bay,
Seward, Alaska*

Photo by Scott Hein

We are privileged to have as our speaker for January, the Executive Director of the National

Meeting Schedule

The next general meeting of Mount Diablo Audubon Society will be **Thursday, December 7**, in the Camellia Room of The Gardens at Heather Farm, 1540 Marchbanks Drive, Walnut Creek.

(See map on page 9).

- 6:30 PM Doors open
- 7:00 PM Birding Information
- 7:25 PM Announcements
- 7:40 PM Social time, refreshments*, door prize
- 8:05 PM Speaker: Diana Granados

** Please remember to bring a cup.*

January: Stan Senner

February: Steve Blank, Chairman,
Audubon California

Audubon Society's Alaska State Office, Stan Senner. Audubon has worked for the protection of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in America's Arctic since the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act was debated in Congress in the late 1970s. That fight continues today, as each year there is pressure to open the refuge's coastal plain to oil and gas drilling. Mr. Senner will discuss the birds and other wildlife of the Arctic Refuge and place the issue of oil drilling there in the larger contexts of oil development across Alaska's

Continued on page 3

JANUARY BIRDING INFORMATION will be our annual update of the Contra Costa County and the East County Christmas Bird Counts with Jimm Edgar and Maury Stern.

Welcome New Members

Flavia Zaro

Walnut Creek

President's Corner

I want to make a few comments on the elections of November 7. Mt. Diablo Audubon had recommended a yes vote on Propositions 84 and 87. Though 87 failed, 84 did pass and we, the voters, have made a very smart investment in our state's water and land resources. The Clean Water, Parks and Coastal Protection Bond funds \$5.4 billion in bonds to provide critical investments to ensure safe drinking water, improve local water supply reliability, flood protection, preserve parks, lakes, rivers, beaches and more. This was, indeed, a great day for the environmental community. The defeat of Proposition 90 was also a wise decision by voters. They saw that this bill would have meant billions in new costs for taxpayers and very important homeowner, community, and environmental protections would be jeopardized. I also believe some voter decisions on individual candidates will be a strong plus for the environment that we have desperately needed. Now I hope we can work together and move forward.

On another note. The Concord city council will have selected the 21 members on the Community Advisory Committee by the time you read this. This committee will assist the city in the reuse plan for the Concord Naval Weapons Station. I wonder if any of you reading this were selected? *Jimm Edgar*



This bird is a raptor that breeds in the tundra and taiga of the far north, but during the winter may be found at any location in the United States except east of the Mississippi River, south of Virginia. While hunting, these birds frequently hover over marshes or grasslands as they search for voles and other small mammals.

Unscramble these letters, or turn to page 6 for the answer to this bird's identity.

ADEEGGGHHKLORUW

What You Can Do

✓ Project FeederWatch needs your help to keep track of the birds at your feeders this winter. Count birds as often as two days each week from November 11 to April 6. Your counts will help scientists monitor changes in feeder bird populations. New participants receive a research kit with easy to follow instructions, the FeederWachter's handbook, a bird-identification poster, a calendar, and a subscription to the newsletter of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. For more information or to sign up, visit www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw/ or call (800) 843-2473. A \$15 fee makes the program possible.

✓ Join in the Audubon Christmas Bird Count. Call Jimm Edgar at (510) 658-2330 to sign up for either the Central County Count Day, December 16, the East County Count on December 20, or both. If you live in Concord, Walnut Creek, or Pleasant Hill, you can count birds at your home feeders.

✓ The forests of the Sierra Nevada are being clearcut at an alarming rate threatening critical bird habitat and destroying the forest ecology of the Sierra. The majority of that wood is going to build news homes! A new campaign is underway to get the homebuilding industry to start demanding wood that does not come from clearcut Sierra Nevada forests. To help this effort, tell any homebuilding companies in your area to stop using clearcut Sierra Nevada wood and to shift to Forest Stewardship Council products! Please check www.savethesierra.org for more details or contact Josh Buswell-Charkow at sierra@forestethics.org.

✓ Sign up for eScrip. Register at www.eScrip.com using Mount Diablo Audubon Society Group Number 500003063. Then, when you shop normally at participating local merchants, they will donate as much as 4 percent of your purchase value to Mount Diablo Audubon. Call John Leggett at 685-1959 if you have questions.

✓ Call Shirley Ellis at (925) 938-3703 and volunteer to help with an activity that meets your interests, skills and schedule. Do you frequent your local library? If you do, we have a chore we'd like you to help out with.

NEWS FROM WILD BIRDS UNLIMITED



Holiday Open House

Saturday, December 2

- ◆ Free Refreshments
- ◆ Free Gift with Each Purchase
- ◆ Free Gift for the Birds
- ◆ Prizes

Many Vendors Will Be Present

In the Backyard

Winter is our favorite time of the year for backyard birdfeeding. White- and Golden-crowned Sparrows, Dark-eyed Juncos, and Red-breasted Nuthatches have all migrated into our backyards to eat at the feeders. They join our year-round resident jays, towhees, chickadees, doves and finches. Large numbers of American Goldfinches are beginning to show up for the winter.

Look for Pine Siskins. Last winter we only had a few reported. The previous year we had so many Siskins in Contra Costa County that they drove away most of the Lesser Goldfinches from the feeders. Both Siskins and Goldfinches love thistle (nyjer) seed and readily come to bird feeders.

Birding Optics Workshop

Saturday, December 9

Mike Williams, a member of MDAS, will lead a workshop on "How to Choose Birding Optics" at 10:00 AM at Wild Birds Unlimited. Come see the extensive selection of binoculars, one of the largest in Northern California. 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

My experiences and thoughts on the development of a wild bird interpreter and trainer started in 1974. I added the words 'wildlife animals' to an already very full domestic animal agenda by attending a class offered by Gary Bogue, then curator of Alexander Lindsay Junior Museum. For almost nine years I was an unpaid weekend wildlife hospital supervisor. In 1984 I left a teaching position with disabled adults and was hired part time at the museum. From 1986 to 1994 I was the pick-up person for wildlife at the Contra Costa Emergency Clinic. It was an adventure in where most nights ended after 1:00 AM and days began at 4:30 AM, getting my daughters to the ice rink for lessons before school and work. Somehow, amid family responsibilities, I was able to contribute to the growing knowledge of rehab among my peers. I served on the International Wildlife Rehabilitation Board. In 1994 the Clinic decided not to accept wildlife, both of us realizing that of the 6000 animals coming into the wildlife hospital, I was responsible for 3000, and we were providing wildlife rehab not domestic animal emergency care. This experience in rehabilitation gave me a deep respect for the wild animals thrown into a foreign world and for their ability to find ways to survive, in spite of "good intentions." I also acquired a deep feeling of responsibility to educate the public and my peers with information that would benefit the wildlife around us.

At the end of 1999 I left the position of Director of Collections and in 2000 established Native Bird Connections, a not-for-profit educational organization specializing in revering the lives of non-releasable birds by creating ways for them to serve as ambassadors for the natural world. With the financial support and friendship of past colleagues, new and old friends, family, and volunteers, in addition to the profound dedication of cofounders Jenny Papka and Heller Stanton, we continue to survive. As a professional in my field I began to use the words respect, responsibility and reverence as a guide for developing better service to our animals, our community and our selves.

I will present basic guidelines for the role taken by the handler, the interpreter and the animal when interacting.



Save the Sierra

The Sierra Nevada's famous landscapes include Yosemite, King's Canyon, and Sequoia National Parks, ancient forests, and the highest peak in the contiguous United States, Mt. Whitney. The range is rich in biodiversity, providing a home to Bald Eagles, Great Gray Owls, Black-backed Woodpeckers, and giant sequoias. The Sierra are also a tourist and recreational destination: birding, hiking, camping, skiing, and fishing are all popular pastimes in the valleys, rivers, and lakes of this ecologically varied region.

But the Sierra are not as protected as nature lovers would hope. The rich forests are heavily logged by private corporations, and the area is marked by clearcuts. The woods that were once home to native wildlife are turned into wood to feed the demands of the insatiable homebuilding industry in the US.

Worse still, your tax dollars are funding this destruction. Logging interests receive tens of millions of dollars from the government, and give hundreds of thousands of dollars to election campaigns.

There is a new campaign being launched to pressure the homebuilding industry to stop the destruction of this ecological treasure. The organization ForestEthics is encouraging potential homebuyers to take charge of their investments by asking their homebuilders if the new homes they are considering come at the price of the Sierra Nevada.

Up against a billion dollar industry, they will need lots of help to apply the needed pressure to win. You are invited to join the campaign kick-off meeting in San Francisco on December 2. Your help can indeed make the homebuilding industry stop funding the destruction of the Sierra—one of California's most breathtaking landscapes—and start playing a role in its protection.

See "What You Can Do" on page 2.

North Slope and the nation's energy needs. Audubon also is playing a lead role in efforts to conserve the most important wildlife habitats in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPR-A), such as at Teshekpuk Lake, to the west of the Prudhoe Bay oilfields. At 23.5 million acres, NPR-A is a vast area with tremendous wildlife resources. Mr. Senner will present an update on oil and gas activity in NPR-A, and will discuss the migratory birds that connect the wetland to California and the Pacific Flyway.

Mr. Senner received a M.S. degree in biology from the University of Alaska Fairbanks in 1977 and has worked as a research associate at the Institute of Arctic Biology (Fairbanks) and as an affiliate research associate at the Academy of Natural Sciences (Philadelphia). He has published more than 25 technical papers on the ecology and conservation of migratory birds, and he spent nearly eight years as executive director at Hawk Mountain Sanctuary in Pennsylvania.

In the policy arena, Stan worked as Alaska Representative for the Wilderness Society (1978-79) and as a professional staff member for the House of Representatives Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries (1979-82) and during the time of congressional action on the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act. He served as chair of the U.S. Section of the International Council for Bird Preservation and directed a Colorado-based migratory bird conservation program for the National Audubon Society. Early in his career, he worked for Friends of the Earth's Northwest Office in Seattle, Washington and for what is now the Northern Alaska Environmental Center in Fairbanks.

Following the Exxon Valdez oil spill, Stan was the State of Alaska's chief restoration planner under Governor Cowper and then Governor Hickel (1990-92) and science coordinator for the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council (1995-99). In 1993, Mr. Senner received the Alaska Bird Conference's first Pete Isleib Award for contributions to bird conservation in Alaska. In 2005 he received the Charles H. Callison Award—the highest honor awarded by Audubon to members of its professional staff. He has been executive director of Audubon Alaska since 1999.

Field Trip Schedule

By Hugh Harvey

December

- 9-10 Saturday/ Sunday
Sacramento NWR/Gray Lodge
Niles Area
- 12 Tuesday
- 16 Saturday
Central Contra Costa Christmas Count
- 20 Wednesday
East Contra Costa Christmas Count

January

- 3 Wednesday Lake Merritt/Arrowhead Marsh
- 6 Saturday Putah Creek
- 18 Thursday Sunol Regional Park
- 27 Saturday
Las Gallinas/Rush Creek/Shollenberger Park

February

- 3 Saturday Thornton/Consumnes Preserve
- 15 Thursday Grizzly Island
- 16-19 Friday-Monday Klamath Basin
- 21 Wednesday Walnut Creek Parks
- 28 Wednesday Concord Parks

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 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: **Sun Valley**—Southwest corner of the Sun Valley Mall parking lot at Willow Pass Road and Contra Costa Boulevard in Concord.

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.

El Nido Ranch Road—Take the Acalanes Road/Upper Happy Valley Road exit of SR 24, west of Lafayette. El Nido Ranch Road is parallel to and north of the freeway. Park just east of the intersection with Acalanes Road and on the north side of El Nido Ranch Road.

Customary carpool expense is \$3-5 for short trips, \$5-10 for longer trips, plus tolls and entry fees shared among driver and riders.

Saturday–Sunday, December 9–10 Wildlife Refuges of the Sacramento Valley

Leader: Terry Colborn, 530-758-0689.

Join us for this exciting two-day in-depth visit to several refuges in the northern Sacramento Valley. For thousands of years, the greater Sacramento Valley wetlands have hosted millions of wintering ducks, geese and swans. Today, less than 5% of these vital wetlands remain, magnifying the significant importance of this refuge system. On Saturday, we'll visit Sacramento NWR, a 10,783-acre complex with over 7,600 acres of seasonally managed ponds and wetlands. This is one of the premier waterfowl refuges in California, and is a critically important resting and feeding area for tens of thousands of waterfowl every winter. From late October to early March there are typically over 600,000 ducks and 200,000 geese on the seasonal ponds and adjoining uplands and open fields; numbers peak in December and January. Twenty-five percent of the world's Aleutian Canada Goose population winters at Sacramento NWR. Other rare and endangered species are also present including Bald Eagle and Peregrine

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② Tuesday, December 12 Niles Area

Leader: Jimm Edgar, 510-658-2330.

Carpool leaves Sycamore Valley Road Park and Ride at 8:15 AM. Meet at the Vallejo Mill Park in Fremont. Take I-680 south to Niles Canyon exit, turn right (west), follow SR 84 about 7 miles towards the Niles District. The park is at SR 84 and Mission Blvd. We follow Alameda Creek and visit some of the old gravel pits which have been re-landscaped as parkland.

① Wednesday, January 3 Lake Merritt/Arrowhead Marsh

Leader: Ethan Chickering, 686-9231.

Carpool leaves at 8 AM from El Nido Ranch Road. Meet at 8:30 AM in parking lot by Lake Merritt. Take SR 24 to Oakland and I-980, take Grand Avenue exit and turn left on Grand. Enter park by Children's Fairyland and follow road around to parking lot entrance on right between boat-house and aviary. After some birding here, we will catch the high tide at Arrowhead Marsh around 11 AM. Hopefully the rising tide will flush out rails. Area is good for shorebirds and often loons on the estuary.

① Saturday, January 6 Putah Creek.

Leader: Fred Safier, 937-2906.

Carpool leaves Sun Valley at 8:00 AM. Meet at 8:45 AM at the intersection of Cherry Glen and Pleasants Valley Roads, approximately 1 mile north from I-80. Park on Cherry Glen. Dress warmly; this is a cold, windy area. Possible Osprey, Phainopepla, Canyon and Rock Wrens, Barrow's Goldeneye and Hooded Merganser.

③ Thursday, January 18 Sunol Regional Park.

Leader: Hugh Harvey, 935-2979.

Carpool leaves at 8:15 AM from Sycamore Valley Road Park and Ride lot in Danville. Meet at 8:45 AM in the first parking lot on the left, Sunol Park. Go south on I-680 to Calaveras Road. Go left under I-680 and drive 4 miles south on Calaveras; turn left on Geary Road and go 2 miles to park. Entry fee required. Watch and listen for Wild Turkey along Geary Road. Golden Eagles and other raptors, Rufous-crowned Sparrows, Dipper, and Canyon and Rock Wrens are possible.

Saturday, January 27. See page 5

📅 Saturday, January 27

Las Gallinas/Rush Creek/Schollenberger Park

Leader: Cheryl Abel, 335-0176.

Carpool leaves Sun Valley at 7:30 AM. Meet at Las Gallinas at 8:30 AM. Take I-680 across the Benicia Bridge (toll). Go west on I-780 to I-80 towards Sacramento, exit to SR 37. Follow SR 37 22 miles to US 101 south, exit at Lucas Valley Road/Smith Ranch Road. Cross under the freeway to the east on Smith Ranch Road for 0.6 miles, cross the railroad tracks and turn left. Follow the road around the hill 0.7 miles until arriving at the Las Gallinas Valley Sanitary District parking lot. Rush Creek Marsh is just north and east of the Atherton Avenue exit from US 101 in Novato. Immediately past the Park and Ride lot on Atherton, turn left on Binford Road and go north to the marsh. Schollenberger Park is in Petaluma, east of US 101. Exit at Lakeville Road, go east to Cader Lane and turn right to the park entrance. All three sites are good for wintering waders, shorebirds, waterfowl and raptors.

Saturday–Sunday, December 9–10

Wildlife Refuges of the Sacramento Valley

Continued from page 4

Falcon. We'll walk the nature trail and drive the six-mile auto loop, stopping at the observation deck. In the afternoon we'll tour several other units of the Sacramento NWR Complex to the north along the Sacramento River. Other birds of interest include Sandhill Cranes, Tri-colored Blackbirds, Rough-legged Hawk, Northern Harrier, White-tailed Kite, herons, egrets and shorebirds. At day's end, we'll enjoy a group dinner, complete the checklist and spend the night in Williams.

On Sunday, our first stop will be Colusa NWR. Established in 1945, and although much smaller than Sac NWR with 4,600 acres, the refuge is no less an important haven to wildlife. We'll drive the three-mile auto loop and walk the 1-mile nature trail, looking for Barn and Great Horned Owls, and Wood Duck. In recent years, a Harris's sparrow has been found along this trail in winter.

Next we'll head to the Sutter Buttes, remnants of an ancient volcano, and the world's smallest mountain range. Although the Buttes are not accessible, we'll bird along Pass and West Butte Roads, which often have wintering Mt. Bluebirds, Prairie Falcon, shrikes and an occasional Golden Eagle. We'll spend the afternoon at Gray Lodge WMA where we expect to see great flights of Snow Geese, while picking out the Ross' Geese among them. A raised observation deck on the nature trail provides an excellent vantage point to scope from. Along the auto tour loop, we'll stop and take short walks looking and listening for Sora, Virginia's Rail and American Bittern; we'll sort through the masses of ducks looking for the rare Eurasian Wigeon. A visit to both the Harry Adamson and Betty Adamson Hides is a must; Harry and Betty were founding members of MDAS, and the Sutter Buttes/Gray Lodge areas are featured in many of his paintings. We will remain at the refuge until dusk when, as though on cue, thousands of ducks and geese take to wing and fly to nearby fields to feed during the night - truly a spectacle to behold as the sun sets over the Coast Range. Those who wish are welcomed to join the group for dinner in nearby Live Oak during which time we'll complete the checklist before heading home.

Space is limited and carpooling is essential. There are several hotels in Williams; early room reservations are recommended. This is a great trip for beginners and seasoned birders alike. For further details and/or to sign-up, call the field leader.

107th Christmas Bird Count

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 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 inexperienced 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 16, and Wednesday, December 20. 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.

Jimm Edgar

Trip Reports

Abbott's Lagoon, October 21. Perfect weather for birders to hike in, sunny and warm — too nice, perhaps, as there were many birds but few unusual ones. 7 birders saw 49 species, of which many easily seen Townsend's Warblers and an unexpected and cooperative Blue-gray Gnatcatcher were the highlights.

Fred Safier

Limantour, November 4. Six members and guests spent a wonderful day at Point Reyes. The first 1½ hours we birded around the headquarters and saw Townsend's Warblers, Golden-crowned Kinglets, Varied Thrushes and Tri-colored Blackbirds. At Muddy Hollow, we saw the bird of the day, a black Merlin, and a few minutes later a Peregrine Falcon. At Limantour beach and estero, there were Brant, a Tundra Swan, a Redhead among many Canvasbacks, and Black Scoters. We found two White-throated Sparrows on our final stop at Limantour Ridge.

Maury Stern



Virginia Rail

Rallus virginianus

Birds of Golden Gate Park

Joseph Mailliard

1930

Wintering Raptors and Waterfowl of Solano and Yolo Counties, October 28. Under clear blue skies and unseasonably mild temperatures, twenty-two MDAS members and guests headed south from Dixon to the Robinson/Flannery Roads area. At our first stop on Robinson Road we found both sexes of Northern Harrier flying low over the grasslands, and, scanning the treetops and fence lines, we saw a distant Ferruginous Hawk. At our very next stop we were rewarded with ample views of a second Ferruginous Hawk, giving us those desired better views. As we watched, one-hundred-fifty plus Long-billed Curlews were feeding and moving about. A Rough-legged Hawk soared overhead and in the scopes we could see the banded tail and the distinct underwing pattern. Our attention quickly

October Observations

By Steve Glover

Submit Contra Costa County sightings to:

Steve Glover at countylines@sbcglobal.net or 925 997 1112.

An American Bittern at Contra Loma Regional Park in Antioch on 10/13 was a noteworthy find (PS).

A Brant was near Meeker Slough north of Point Isabel, Richmond on 10/17 (AKa, BF). This locally rare bird was seen by many observers through at least 10/20 (MR). What may well have been the same Brant was just to the south on the Albany mudflats on 10/28, where it was joined by a Cackling Goose. Brants were recorded annually in the Richmond area in the 1990s, when coverage was more thorough.

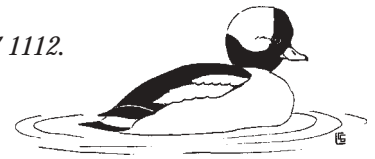
The first Eurasian Wigeon of the season was found on the Albany mudflats, Alameda and Contra Costa counties on 10/12 (JC, MDAS).

A Pacific-slope Flycatcher at San Pablo Bay Regional Shoreline near Pinole on 10/17 was about as late in the fall as they are recorded in the county, though there are a couple of known winter records (LL).

Three male Phainopeplas at the foot of the George Cardinet Trail in Clayton on 10/3 were at a site where they have bred in the past (PG).

turned to a smaller bird perched atop a transmission tower. Its overall slender shape, light tan color and very long wing projection clued us to a Prairie Falcon. Everyone got good scope views. Down the road, a pair of Loggerhead Shrikes was moving from one fence post to another. A small flock of blackbirds produced Red-wing and Brewer's, but flushed before we could find a Tricolor Blackbird, a wintering species of the area.

In the open pasture lands at our next stop, dozens of Mountain Plovers were observed as they darted, stopped and darted again in all different directions. Several were at very close range, and we were able to distinguish the adults from the juveniles. In our scopes we were treated to exceptional views of the "tail-fanning" behavior associated with their foraging activity. A count tallied 85 individuals. Along Flannery Road we had an opportunity to study the subtle field marks of a cooperative Say's Phoebe as it



A vagrant Chestnut-sided Warbler made a rare Contra Costa appearance at Canyon Trail Park, El Cerrito on 10/9 (OJ). Though there are just a handful of county records, they would undoubtedly be found annually with sufficient coverage.

The most exciting bird of the fall was one that, alas, got away. A bird that may well have been the first Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow for Contra Costa County was at Meeker Slough, Richmond on 10/18, but unfortunately, it was seen for just a few seconds (DQ). This species is long overdue in the county.

The first White-throated Sparrow reported this winter was at the Martinez Amtrak Station 10/17 (AKr). Last season, as you may recall, may have been the finest on record for this uncommon species in Contra Costa County.

Judi Cooper, Bethany Facendini, Phil Gordon, Oliver James, Alan Kaplan, Alan Krakauer, Laura Look, Dave Quady, Matt Ricketts, Paul Schorr

perched, intermittently bouncing off to catch insects on the wing.

We moved on to the Yolo Basin-Vic Fazio WA near Davis. During our lunch stop, Terry called for Sora and Virginia Rail; both responded in kind and a Sora flew into cattails directly in front of the group. Waterfowl were scarce, due in part to continued mild weather, and opening day of hunting season. A futile search for the recently reported American Tree Sparrows turned up only Song, White-crowned and Savanna. Seven Sandhill Cranes flew high overhead. At a reedy impoundment Terry again called for Virginia Rail and Sora. Within minutes, a Sora appeared from the reeds and walked cautiously along the edge. Two dozen American White Pelicans soared overhead, punctuating the crystal blue sky.

As the last participants packed up scopes and said their good-byes, an American Bittern flew directly over us. Number 58 on the day! *Terry Colborn*

Native Plants for Native Birds

By Pat Bacchetti

Ceanothus

In search of Lazuli Bunting in Sibley Regional Park this spring, I happened

upon a side trail looking east to Mount Diablo. Two pairs of Buntings were present in an oak, the males singing loudly. Unseen, California Quail scurried and sang in the chaparral. Slowly I began to notice the hillside around me. It was

largely native Coyote Brush, gooseberry, toyon, coffee berry, cow parsnip, and a shrub in full pale-blue bloom—*Ceanothus cuneatus*, or Buck-Brush. It covered the hillside with its lovely fragrant blooms. I could not think of another place that I would rather be.

Ceanothus can grace your garden in the same way that it graces our hillsides. It's one of the most diverse of the California native shrubs, having been in cultivation in Europe since the 1740s. It's known by a variety of common names, such as Buck-Brush, Mountain Lilac, and Blue Blossom. There are over 75 varieties grown for gardens, providing something for almost any condition.

Forms include large upright shrubs, medium-sized shrubs, and low-growing groundcovers. In nature, it is most often found on well-drained hillsides with low soil fertility and no water in the summer. Nitrogen-fixing bacteria in the roots allow it to tolerate such settings. An evergreen, it thrives on well-drained soil and very light watering in the garden. The blooms come in a variety of colors, from white to purple to many hues of blue. Ceanothus is usually a fast grower, but deer love young plants. It is best to provide some protection until it is large enough to thrive in spite of some browsing.



Ceanothus attracts birds by providing an abundant source of nectar for insects and thick cover for hiding. It's the favorite hangout for the sparrows and wrens in my fall and winter garden.

Of the many cultivars available, there are several that are reliable and readily available at garden centers. Ceanothus 'Ray Hartman' is probably the best-known cultivar. It has beautiful glistening green leaves and striking sky-blue

flowers in large clusters. A large shrub that can grow to 18 feet in 3–5 years, it can also be trimmed up into a tree-like shape. It does well in coastal or interior gardens. The species *Ceanothus thyrsiflorus*, or blue blossom, is another large selection. It can have flowers ranging from rich blue to the white 'Snow Flurry' selection. As a large fast-growing shrub, it can be used as a hedge or be pruned to keep it neat.

Two of the medium-height selections are Ceanothus 'Dark Star' and 'Julia Phelps.' Both are covered with cobalt-blue flowers in the spring and have deep green leaves. They can be more short-lived than other varieties, and prefer cooler coastal sites rather than inland gardens unless given some shade and water. 'Concha' is another variety that thrives reliably in many different conditions.

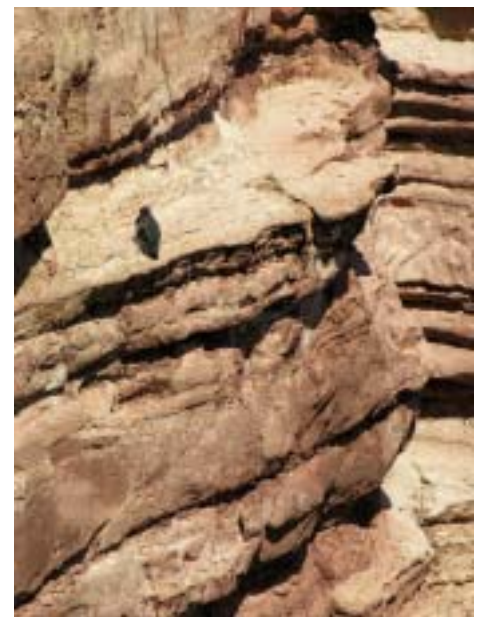
Low-growing forms are derived from Ceanothus 'Carmel Creeper.' 'Yankee Point' is probably the most common groundcover ceanothus grown in the state that stays below 3 feet. It has pale blue blooms, and can spread to 12 feet. 'Diamond Heights' is a beautiful variegated selection that does well in shady borders and contrasts beautifully with coffee berry and grasses planted under oaks.

No matter what selection you choose for your garden, Ceanothus can provide a beautiful shrub throughout the year for you and your birds.

Return of the California Condors

The Oakland Museum of California will present a compelling look at *Gymnogyps californianus* in *Bringing the Condors Home*, beginning December 16 and running through mid-April. The exhibit was organized by the Ventana Wildlife Society, whose 20-year effort to restore the endangered species, together with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, has the California Condor flying wild again.

The exhibition includes a walk-through panorama of a Condor habitat, and explains condor biology and life history. A mounted Condor and egg



Today, there are 138 California Condors in the wild, 61 in California. Number 66 was photographed over the Colorado River in Glen Canyon, Arizona. Photo by Ellis Myers.

from the Museum's collection, a video of birds in the wild, and computer games and quizzes for kids and adults combine to enhance this presentation.

On Thursday, January 18, at 12:30 pm Joe Burnett, a Ventana Wildlife Society senior biologist, will discuss field efforts to restore Condors at Big Sur and the Pinnacles National Monument in a free lecture.

Another Oakland Museum event of interest is Fungus Fair: A Celebration of Wild Mushrooms, which will be held this year on December 2–3.

More information on these exhibits can be found at www.museumca.org

west on S2 to join Highway 78 west of Tamarisk Grove. This heads past Bow Willow Campground where you might look for LeConte's Thrasher, Brewer's Sparrow and Rock Wren.

Although there may be more reliable sites in Imperial County where you might find Crissal Thrasher, there is a spot—the Borrego Sink—where this species is possible. Five miles south of town on Borrego Springs Road, turn left onto Yaqui Pass Road and travel to its dead end. Lucy's Warbler and Black-throated Sparrow also enjoy foraging in the mesquite bosque. Gray Flycatcher has also been noted in this area.

A visit to the State Park Visitor Center in the town of Borrego Springs is recommended. There are attractive exhibits, and you can get bird lists and information about road conditions, *etc.* There are birds to be seen there, too; look for Cactus Wren, Costa's Hummingbird, and Ladder-backed Woodpecker.

The Borrego Desert Nature Center on Palm Canyon Drive in Borrego Springs is also worth a visit. Each Thursday morning (8–10 AM, through March), the Anza-Borrego Desert Natural History Association leads bird walks to identify desert birds and their behavior.



All photos taken in Anza-Borrego Desert State Park by Scott Streit/www.bird-friends.com

Rough-legged Hawk • *Buteo lagopus*



Buteos have been termed the “clipper ships of the sky;” they are masters of the wind and soar to great heights and over vast distances.

Rough-legged Hawks are not easy to find in California. Of all the raptors observed at Hawk Hill in Marin County by Golden Gate Raptor Observatory in the 2005 season, only four Rough-legged Hawks were recorded. This compares with over 450 Northern Harriers and more than 7250 Red-tailed Hawks. Their

populations peak during November as they pass through in migration.


This species is quite variable with light and dark morphs, male, female, and immature plumages. The Rough-legged Hawk can be identified by looking for yellow legs that are feathered to the toes and a dark belly band that contrasts sharply with the lighter colored head. In flight, the underside of the wings have conspicuous black patches at the wrist and a broad black band at the base of the tail.

The arctic nest site of this hawk is usually on a low rock ledge or outcropping. The nest, often used for many seasons, is made of sticks and grass, even caribou bones. On the far north breeding grounds, lemmings are the main food item. But these small rodents are known to have a cyclical population, in-

creasing steadily, then crashing about every four years. In good lemming years Rough-legged Hawks may lay five to seven eggs; in poor lemming years they may lay only two or three, or not breed at all. Because of its preferential taste for rodents, it is generally considered a beneficial species to humans.

This is the only one of the buteos whose legs are fully feathered, thus its name.

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Deadline for the February issue is January 10.

Ornithological Opportunities

Broken Wings, a photography exhibition at the Lindsay Wildlife Museum in Walnut Creek tells the stories of 20 eagles, hawks, falcons, and owls that cannot be released to the wild due to their injuries. Photographer and naturalist John Perry tells each raptor's story through a portrait and text that relates each bird's known life history. The exhibit runs until December 31.

Workshops with Alvaro Jaramillo: Gulls, San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory, January 9-13, Alviso. These workshops incorporate ecology, evolutionary biology, behavioral ecology, and natural history to complement bird identification information taught in class. There are two evenings of instruction and a weekend all-

MDAS MEMBERSHIP/RENEWAL APPLICATION

___ Please enroll my family and me as a member of the Mount Diablo Audubon Society for \$25 for one year.

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

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Membership Chair, 400 Oneida Court, Danville, CA 94526



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.

From Walnut Creek, take Ygnacio Valley Road to the signal at Marchbanks Drive. Go left and follow Marchbanks to The Gardens at Heather Farm, opposite the Greenery Restaurant. Turn left into the 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 Gardens at Heather Farm is located on the right in the second block.

day fieldtrip. Classes are at Don Edwards San Francisco Bay NWR. Waterfowl workshops follow in February.

www.sfbbo.org/birdingworkshops.html.

Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival, January 12-15, 2007, Morro Bay. Morro Bay is recognized as a globally important birding area. The Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival makes it a point to offer a variety of events for all levels of birders. Both local and state-wide birding experts will lead over 35 land, ocean, and bay field trips, plus discussions and presentations, social

events and workshops focusing on everything from warblers to elephant seals.

Contact: Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival Committee, P.O. Box 1175, Morro Bay, CA 93442 800-231-0592

Snow Goose Festival of the Pacific Flyway, January 26-28, 2007, Chico. Tours of State and National wildlife areas, nature hikes, experts birders, farms visits, workshops, art show and banquet. Plus many free family attractions, an exhibit hall and a live raptor show.

www.snowgoosefestival.org/

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In the Spring *Ceanothus cyaneus* transforms San Diego County hillsides to a mirror of the sky. Banner Grade, near Anza-Borrego Desert State Park.

Quickies

Weekend Birding in California

Anza-Borrego Desert State Park

When winter fills Contra Costa skies with rain clouds, and you would rather birdwatch than ski, think about heading to Anza-Borrego Desert State Park. Here, in northeastern San Diego County is a jewel of the California State Park system; at nearly 1000 square miles, it is the largest state park in the nation. Its diverse geology includes mountains, rugged canyons, bajadas (alluvial fans), playas (alkali flats), mesquite bosques, natural groves of California Fan Palm, and riparian areas. There are many places one can go to see birds and many birds to be seen. More than 250 species of birds have been recorded in this desert locale. The area hosts more than a tenth of all California Vermilion Flycatchers and Summer Tanagers. More than one percent of the global population of Least Bell's Vireo also call this home.

Winter birding is pleasant, and you may find a lifer or two. Southwestern desert specialties, such as Verdin, Ladder-backed Woodpecker and Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, are not found in Northern California, while sightings of others, such as Scott's Oriole and Bell's Vireo, would be remarkable here. Anza-Borrego is an optimistic place for sought-after LeConte's Thrasher and Harris's Hawk.

Springtime lures not only birders, but botanists and geologists also find much to enjoy. Wildflowers can be spectacular, and there are many unusual plants. Summertime lures few, and those who visit then are advised that only early morning birding is practical.

A useful guide for birding the park can be found by going to Mary Beth Stowe's San Diego Birding Pages at www.miriameaglemon.com. She outlines eight "easy driving" birding routes, beautifully and profusely illustrated and with her personal check lists of the abundance of birds in each month of the year.

If you approach Anza-Borrego from San Diego, there are two choices of route. Highway 8 east to Highway 79 is a scenic drive through Cuyamaca State Park— itself a fine birding destination—to Julian, from where Highway 78 descends via the Banner Grade into the Borrego Valley. Then turn left onto Yaqui Pass Road (S3) and stop at Tamarisk Grove Campground. This is a spot for Long-eared Owls, which nest in the trees during February and March. The camp rangers may be able to help you locate them. Check also for Verdin, White-winged Dove and California Thrasher. Phainopeplas could be a trash bird here. From across the roadway a short, pleasant hike leads to Yaqui Well, or you can drive a short distance west and turn in to Yaqui Well Campground for a shorter walk to the spot where the little spring and its surrounding greenery attract California Quail, Greater Roadrunner, Black-tailed and Blue-gray Gnatcatchers.

From San Diego you can also travel on Highway 8 east to Ocotillo, then north-

Continued on page 8