



the Quail

Mount Diablo Audubon Society

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

www.diabloaudubon.com/index.php

Volume 54, Number 4

December 2008–January 2009

Stingers, Fangs, and Venom • Mike Marchiano

As we birders wander the woods looking and listening for birds, we may also encounter other creatures, both large and small. Michael Marchiano will bring us the often feared and often maligned “dangerous” venomous creatures of Contra Costa County, the tarantula, the scorpion, the black widow, and the rattlesnake.

He will discuss and dispel many myths about these creatures and provide hints as to how to live in harmony with them as well as with ticks, wasps, bees, mosquitoes, and fleas, the true threats to our well being.

Michael was born and raised in central Contra Costa County and attended St. Mary’s College. At a very young age he showed a great love of the outdoors and all of the critters, great and small that lived there. He was the young boy who came home with a snake in his hands, frogs in his pocket, and a lizard crawling on his shirt. He grew up hiking the slopes of Mt. Diablo and exploring Briones, Shell Ridge, and Black Diamond before they were part



of the East Bay Regional Park District. After college Michael taught school and eventually went into a career in law enforcement. He never lost touch with his love of nature. He shared his expertise with Scout, 4-H, and school groups and led hikes and rehabbed animals for Lindsey Jr. Museum. His original Tarantula hike and Newt walk are still being presented today. Presently, he does regular presentations for the Contra Costa Water District at the Los Vaqueros Interpretive Center, and presentations and hikes for Wild Birds Unlimited.

it harrowing, humorous, difficult, unexpected, exotic or just plain lovely?
For TUESDAY, January 6, 2009: Because the first Thursday of January occurs on NEW YEARS DAY, we will meet the FOLLOWING TUESDAY, JANUARY 6, same time, same place. Jimm Edgar and Maury Stern will present our annual update of the Contra Costa County and the East County Christmas Bird Counts.

Tarantula on Mount Diablo. Photo courtesy of Ray Mengel.

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BIRDING INFORMATION

For December 4: Because of a program that will occur in the Camellia Room of the Gardens at Heather Farm on Friday morning, December 5, we will be sitting at tables instead of in our usual rows. Your Board would like to take advantage of this change and provide some fun for all.

All birders have really memorable experiences. Please think about a bird sighting that would be fun to share. Was

JANUARY MEETING TUESDAY, JANUARY 6, 2009 Halfway Around the World • Peter & Michelle Kappes

Researching Albatrosses and Other Adventures in the Indian Ocean

Peter and Michelle Kappes will present as a team their travels to French sub-Antarctic Territories in the Indian Ocean. They traveled there during the winter of 2006-2007 where Peter assisted Michelle in her thesis research on Yellow-nosed Albatrosses on Amsterdam Island. Michelle spoke to MDAS about that research in May of 2007. As part of the journey to Amsterdam Island, Michelle and Peter spent four weeks

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Meeting Schedule

The next general meeting of Mount Diablo Audubon Society will be **Thursday, December 4**, 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,* door prize,

8:05 PM Speaker: **Mike Marchiano**

* Please remember to bring a cup.

Tuesday, January 6:

Peter and Michelle Kappes

February 5: **Denise Wight**

Welcome New Members

Kathryn Blake	Oakland
Leslie Jordan	Brentwood
Rosemarie and Walter Krovoza	Walnut Creek
Carolyn Lie	Alameda
Diane Niemi	Clayton
Betts Sanderson	San Ramon
Barbara Smith	Walnut Creek
Heller Stanton	Martinez
Diane Vervoor	Martinez

President's Corner

Holiday greetings to all of you. The month of December is when our annual Christmas Bird Counts take place. We have two counts that our chapter sponsors. One in the central county and one in the east county. There were over 1500 counts in the United States last year and about 60,000 people participated. There is information in this issue of the Quail about the counts. I hope you will sign up and join us for one of the counts.

Also, in this issue is a story about our recent event at the Moraga library. It is a very exciting program Cecil Williams and others did over four weeks with a large group of parents and children. The library allowed us to set up a bird feeder a few weeks in advance of the sessions and as the birds became familiar with the feeder we used it as a teaching tool to see and learn about local birds. It was very well received and could very well be a model we will use with other groups of children.

Mount Diablo Audubon has a number of projects throughout the year. We recently sent out our once-a-year appeal to you, our members, for a donation. I hope you will respond generously to this appeal. We depend on you to do the things we do in the community. We have a very active group of volunteers that are willing to give of their time and energy also. Thank you ahead of time for being a part of this chapter.

Jimm Edgar

Announcement:

Need a gift? A number of bird books from several private collections will be offered for sale during the December meeting. All proceeds will go to the chapter.

Christmas Bird Counts

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 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 across the Americas. This database can be accessed through the Bird-Source website at www.birdsource.com. Simply put, the Christmas Bird Count, or "CBC", is citizen science in action.

You are invited to take part in this event as MDAS will conduct two separate counts, on Wednesday, December 17, and Saturday, 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, provided you live within one of the count circles, and especially if you anticipate having an unusual species in your yard. Maps are shown in the December, 2005 issue of the Quail at www.diabloaudubon.com/newsletter/Quail_Dec_05.pdf.

As darkness concludes the counts, there's still fun to come as we congregate for a count-down dinner. Once again, dinner will be provided at the Diablo Creek Golf Course at 4050 Port Chicago Highway in Concord. Everyone is invited to the dinner, whether or not you're an active participant that day.

To sign up for the count or for the dinner, just call Jimm Edgar at (510) 658-2330, or Maury Stern at (925) 284-5980.



Observations By Steve Glover

Submit Contra Costa County sightings to Steve Glover at countylinelines@sbcglobal.net or (925) 997-1112.

A nice flock of 63 **Cackling Geese** flew north over Key Route in Albany on 10/16 and soon thereafter pierced Contra Costa County airspace (DW). Five Cacklers were at the north end of the Albany Crescent near Point Isabel on 10/23 (WH) and a single Cackler was at Contra Loma Regional Park, Antioch 10/29 (PS). A single Cackler was at Heather Farm Park, Walnut Creek 10/28-31 and was joined by a second individual on 11/6 (H&RH). A **Greater White-fronted Goose** was at Heather Farm Park on 11/6 (H&RH).

A male **Eurasian Wigeon** was on the Albany mudflats near Point Isabel on 10/13 (JD). Three males, a nice concentration for the county, were at the north end of the mudflats on 10/31 (BB).

A **Long-tailed Duck** was at the mouth of the Richmond Marina on 10/31 (BB).

Approximately 100 **Sandhill Cranes** were at Holland Tract on 11/2 (FO).

Fifty **Long-billed Curlews** were near the Byron Airport on 11/2 and another 25 were along Cypress Road, Oakley the same day (FO).

A **Burrowing Owl** was near the entrance kiosk at the north end of Los Vaqueros Reservoir on 10/30 (DL).

At least 8 **Lewis's Woodpeckers** were at the Walnut Staging Area at Los Vaqueros Reservoir on 10/30 (DL). This has traditionally been the most reliable wintering spot for them in the county. At least two were still there on 11/2 (JH). Single Lewis's were at Marsh Creek Reservoir and at the intersection of Marsh Creek Road and Camino Diablo on 11/2 (FO).

A **Townsend's Solitaire** was a wonderful yard bird in Lafayette, just east of Briones Regional Park 10/19-23 (JA).

A single **Vesper Sparrow**, generally quite hard to find in the county, was near the end of Byron Hot Springs Road on 11/2 (FO). Single White-throated Sparrows were in Moraga 10/24 (MM), and Martinez 10/27 (CA).

Cheryl Abel, Jeff Acuff, Bob Battagin, Joyce Brandt, Hugh and Rosita Harvey, Jeff Hoppes, Wen Hse, Don Lewis, Mimi Myers, Frances Oliver, Paul Schorr, Denise Wight



Moraga Library and Urban Birds

By Cecil Williams

MDAS, in connection with Wild Birds Unlimited and the Moraga Library, put together a children's program on October 16 designed to teach the basics of bird watching and bird identification. Each child was given a Cornell University Urban Birds Packet. After the program, the children could post their findings on the Cornell website, using the packet materials. Each child also went home with a poster, a local bird checklist, a bag of birdseed, a Junior Naturalist form from WBU (entitles child to a free feeder and seed), and a Bird Buddy bracelet.

Cecil Williams gave the introductory part of the program. After a brief discussion on the concept of habitat and a few hints on bird identification, the children were shown pictures of the birds they might be about to see. Brian Murphy presented the library with a bluebird nesting box, which he will install on the library grounds. In the spring, this box can be used in conjunction with another program for children. Hugh Harvey told the class about the life lists birder's use. The children were then taken outside to watch for birds at a temporary feeding station (set up two weeks prior to the event) and to record their sightings. There were seven MDAS volunteers to assist the children in their observations. The chapter's binoculars were used for this outing. Hugh

and Rosita Harvey were there with their scope. Brian also manned a scope. Sandy Ritchie offered her skills to spot incoming birds and to identify them. Bev Hawley assisted with checklists. Bev Walker was the official event photographer. With 15 kids, three teens and 12 adults attending the event, our MDAS volunteers were very busy! Twenty different bird species were identified in less than twenty minutes. It was wonderful to observe the visitors discovering everything from three different woodpecker species to an elegant Red Tail Hawk. The children were so excited! And the volunteers had so much fun they stayed to watch the feeding station long after the attendees were gone.

The Moraga Library staff was very grateful to MDAS, and they want to continue developing the bird theme. Two additional programs are scheduled for 2008, and in the spring, Native Bird Connections will also participate in the project. MDAS will develop further programs—nesting being one focus—which can be adapted for use at other Contra Costa libraries. If you are interested in participating in future library events for children and families, give Cecil Williams a call at (925-798-0303). Watching children interact with nature is irresistible!

Trip Reports

Abbott's Lagoon, October 18. Eight intrepid birders gathered at the Bear Valley Visitor Center at Point Reyes before setting out for the trailhead at Abbott's Lagoon. It was a very gray start with fog hanging just above the treetops; visibility at the trailhead was at times down to 100 yards. The small pond on the left of the trail going out to the beach was considerably smaller than on previous visits, appeared heavily used by local cattle, and showed no signs of bird life. As we walked the path to the Lagoon, several White-tailed Kites were very obvious, hunting the first meal of the day. A few American Widgeon, Northern Shoveller and Ruddy Ducks were present at the Lagoon. The Lagoon closest to the beach yielded lots of gulls (Western and California mostly), Brown Pelicans as well as a White-winged Scoter, several Black-bellied Plovers and a solitary Red-necked Phalarope. Perhaps highlight of the trip was managing to find four Snowy Plovers, one of which appeared doubly banded (one red and one green band on each leg) on the beach. By the time we settled in the dunes for lunch we were enjoying a clear blue sky. All told we recorded 43 species.

David Hutton



Northern Phalarope

Lobipes lobatus

Birds of Golden Gate Park
Joseph Mailliard • 1930

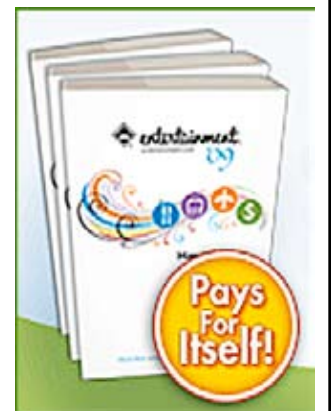
Q

Numenius, the genus name for these birds, derives from Greek meaning "new moon" suggesting the shape of the bill. The common name for this species comes from its cry, which might be likened to that of a whimpering puppy.

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

BEHILMRW

ENTERTAINMENT BOOKS, SUPPORT MDAS AND SAVE MONEY FOR YOURSELF, TOO! Each book you buy for \$25 returns \$5 to MDAS. Each book contains coupons worth \$20 at Longs Drugs and \$20 at Safeway. So buy 2 books and double your profit! Buy another for a Christmas gift for your neighbor. Buy one to keep in the car. Two-for-one coupons at restaurants and local merchants. Save on hotels and travel. Discounts on movie tickets, sports venues and lots more., When registering your book at www.entertainment.com/support, please use group ID code 175587.



• Books will be on sale at MDAS meetings and at Wild Birds Unlimited •

Field Trip Schedule

By Hugh Harvey

December

- 11 Thursday Niles Area
- 12 Friday Arrowhead Marsh-High Tide
- 17 Wednesday Christmas Count/East Contra Costa
- 20 Saturday Christmas Count/Central Contra Costa

January

- 3 Saturday Christmas Count/Rarity Chase
- 10 Saturday Putah Creek
- 17-18 Saturday/Sunday Bodega Bay
- 24 Saturday Las Gallinas/Rush Creek/Shollenberger Park
- 31 Saturday Thornton Area/Cosumnes Preserve

February

- 8 Sunday Lake Merritt/Arrowhead Marsh
- To be determined Grizzly Island
- 19 Thursday Sunol Regional Park
- 21 Saturday Tomales Bay State Park
- 25 Wednesday Mt. View Sanitary/McNabney Marsh

② Thursday, December 11 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 at 9 AM. 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 Friday, December 12 Arrowhead Marsh-High Tide

Leader: Hugh Harvey, 935-2979

This is a special trip to see an extra-high tide and possibly have good views of rails. Last January a Yellow Rail was seen on a slightly lower tide. We may also visit other local shorelines. Carpool leaves El Nido Ranch Road at 9 AM. Meet at the Arrowhead Marsh parking lot at 9:30 AM. From the Hegenberger Road approach to the Oakland Airport, turn right onto Doolittle Drive, then another right onto Swan Way. Turn left into Martin Luther King Jr. Regional Shoreline and drive to the last parking lot for Arrowhead Marsh.

② Wednesday, December 17 Christmas Count/East Contra Costa

② Saturday, December 20 Christmas Count/Central Contra Costa

Please see story on Page 2

② Saturday, January 3

Christmas Count/Rarity Chase

Leaders: Denise Wight and Steve Glover, 997-1112

This trip will attempt to find as many of the unusual birds found on the Christmas Counts as possible. Call leader for meeting place and time.

① Saturday, January 10

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.

① Saturday, January 17-18

Bodega Bay Weekend and Owl Prowl

Leader: Terry Colborn, 530-758-0689, tlcgdc@aol.com

Winter birding in Bodega Bay is always a treat. The Sonoma Coast hosts thousands of shorebirds, a nice variety of loons, grebes, rafts of sea birds, waterfowl and raptors. The plethora of gulls affords close study of this challenging group, while several pelagic species can frequently be viewed from Bodega Head. There is often a "surprise" species or two in the area as well. As an added bonus, we'll do an "Owl Prowl" on Saturday evening. Regularly occurring owl species include Pygmy, Northern Saw-whet, Western Screech, Spotted, Barn and Great Horned. Our chances of hearing and/or seeing several species are good, weather permitting. The extended format of this field trip will enable us to visit some birding spots in the area that are often bypassed on one-day trips.

We have made special arrangements for a very limited number of overnight accommodations at the UC Davis Bodega Marine Lab. We'll have access to bird this area, which is not open to visitors without a permit. The Friday/Saturday night accommodations include three meals on Saturday and two on Sunday. A Saturday night only option is also available, which includes two meals on Sunday. Rates begin at \$85 per person, double occupancy for one night; \$160 per person double occupancy for two nights. Single occupancy is slightly higher. Spending the night will allow us to "be on territory" for owling, and enable us to take advantage of the favorable tides on Sunday morning.

Due to the limited number of spaces available, this trip is on a first-come, first-served basis. If you would like to sign-up or receive more information, please contact the field trip leader by email at: tlcgdc@aol.com or by calling 530-758-0689.

Come birding with us in December and January!

② Saturday, January 24 Las Gallinas/Rush Creek/ Shollenberger Park

Leader: Jean Richmond, 837-2843

Carpool leaves Sun Valley parking lot 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. Shollenberger 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.

① Saturday, January 31 Woodbridge Road/ Thornton and Cosumnes Preserve

Leader: Ethan Chickering, 686-9231

Carpool leaves Sun Valley at 8 AM. Meet at 8:45 AM in park at end of Glascock Road. Take SR 4 to Antioch Bridge (toll), go north on SR 160 along river to Rio Vista bridge. Turn right on SR 12 for 11.5 miles, then turn left onto Glascock Road. Tundra Swans, Sandhill Cranes, hawks and grassland birds. Trip will go in light rain. If questions, call the leader.

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. Bring a lunch and drink and join us during our midday break.

Category ①: Easy, little or no walking, smooth paths

Category ②: Moderate, one mile or more, possibly rough terrain

Category ③: Difficult, extensive walking on rough terrain

Carpool locations: **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 off 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.

Trip Reports

Wintering Birds of Solano and Yolo Counties, November 10.

Thirty-five birders joined leader, Terry Colborn, for an all-day trek to several hot spots in Solano and Yolo Counties. Heading south from Dixon, our first stop along Hwy. 113 produced a couple of Loggerhead Shrikes, along with Red-tailed, Rough-legged, and Red-shouldered Hawks. An immature Golden Eagle perched on a fence post provided in-the-scope diagnostic views. A pair of White-tailed Kites flew directly overhead, while a male Northern Harrier coursed the open grasslands, flushing Western Meadowlarks. We were off to a good start.

Entering Robinson Road, Jim White immediately spotted a Ferruginous Hawk in flight. Good fortune was with us as it teed up in a small tree about 60 yards away, giving everyone satisfying views. At the old abandoned ranch we were very surprised to hear and then find five Varied Thrush; a first for all of us in this area of Solano County. Further along Robinson Road we searched for one of our target species—the elusive Mountain Plover. After some diligent scanning, about 6-8 birds were spotted about 70 yards away among several Black-bellied Plover. We worked the group of birds through our scopes, getting the diagnostic field marks and observing some of the behaviors that help separate these two species at a distance. The Mountain Plovers, with their buffy tinged breast and light brown backs, would scurry, stop, change direction, and scurry again looking for insects. The Black-bellied Plover appeared to be slightly larger, with black in their axillaries. As we prepared to leave, about 70 Long-billed Curlew circled and landed directly in front of us, giving us superb views of their sunlit cinnamon-colored underwings. At the corner of Robinson and Flannery Roads, we stopped the vehicles to look through a flock of over 75 Killdeer, when Peter Boffey called out, “There is a different looking bird in the middle.” We were delighted to find two bright juvenile Pacific Golden-Plover. Jean Richmond called out a Merlin as it streaked past behind us, once again affirming that Jean does indeed have eyes in the back of her head! Along Flannery Road we spotted two Burrowing Owls.

Moving on to the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area in Davis, our first stop in the wetlands put us on a mixed flock of blackbirds. We had numerous Red-winged, Tricolored and a Yellow-headed Blackbird. Interesting was a leucistic Red-wing, with a white and black feathered head. Over the flooded rice fields thousands of waterfowl were moving about. Skeins of White-fronted Geese flew in formation overhead. Among them we had numerous Snow Geese and even a couple of Ross’s Geese. On the water, among the many species of ducks, we found three drake Redhead, an uncommon winter visitor to Yolo County. Nearby, a Barn Owl was found roosting in the willows at eye level, giving us fantastic scope views. Sharp eyes picked out two Lesser Yellowlegs in and among a large group of Greater Yellowlegs, giving us an excellent side-by-side comparison; Len Blumin was able to capture some great shots.

As we wound down our day, a large rainbow appeared to the east. We watched as thousands of Pintail flew directly in front of it, their pale white underparts showing in stark contrast to the dark clouds behind them. A fitting end to a magical day!

We tallied 80 species for the day, including a couple of life birds for several participants. We had twelve raptor species and twelve species of waterfowl.

Terry Colborn

Thank You to Our Donors

The Board of Directors of Mount Diablo Audubon Society wishes to thank all those who have contributed during the 2007-2008 fiscal year. These donations permit the ongoing programs dedicated to preservation of habitat for birds and other wildlife, and promote an awareness of our natural wonders among young people.

California Condor (\$1000+)
Wild Birds Unlimited.

California Gnatcatcher (\$250-\$999)
Lesley Benn, Steve Buffi and Anne Waters, Galaxy Printing, Hugh B. and Rosita O. Harvey, Lynn Lakso, John Leggett, Donald W. and Susan E. Lewis, David and Linda Loveall, Gerry and Nancy Salsig, Joel Summerhill, Nancy Wenninger.

California Thrasher (\$100-\$249)
Cheryl Abel, Sharon and Carl Anduri, Patricia Bacchetti, Larry and Ellen Beans, R. T. Beevner, William D. and Linda L. Chilson, Laurel Coltart, Doris C. and Peter J. Daniels, Marriott and Elizabeth Dickey, Diana Curtiss Drury, Oscar Enstrom, William T. Espey, Kenneth and Anna Evilsizor, Kathleen Evon, Jim Fincke, Debbie Fletcher, Betty and David Gifford, Alfred S. Harvey, Beverly Hawley, Scott and Claudia Hein, Milton Hughes, Mark Janlois, Alan I. Kaplan, Bob and Ann Landfear, Norman and Christy Lundberg, Ellis and Rose-Mary Myers, Karen Pearson, Jannifer Lee Puyans, Janice and Derek Ransley, Paul and Nancy Schorr, Maury and Susan Stern, Martin Stuart, Michael and Rita Tischler, Kathleen Wacker, Nina and Leary Wong, Donald E. Yoder, Stefanie Ann Yurus.

California Quail (\$25-\$99)
Paul R. Andrews, Gus and Gerry Argenal, Carol N. Baier, Donna Bailey, Dorothy Bell, Barbara Beno, Floy Blair, Jim Blickenstaff, Beverly G. Bortin, Donald and Jeanne Boyd, Alice Breckling, Jim and Barbara Brunell, Alice Burns, Theresa Cabral, Britta E. Cascio, Louise Clark, Arthur Clarke III, Lisa Cohen, Jan Rae Cook, Jack B. and Susan S Cooper, Don and Susan Couch, Yolanda and Robert Cronin, Daniel Danner, R. O. and Vida M. Dawson, Jimm Edgar, Joseph Eiden, E. Enke, Doris P. Faulkenberry, Elizabeth and John Frei, Bill Galvin, Jessica E. Geslien, Gretchen Kreis Givens, Thomas Goedewaagen, Janet M. Goodman, Karin Grillo, Don Groom, Carol and John Harkin, Nell Harvey, Donald and Janet Helmholtz, Dora Henel, Alice Holmes, Ilene Holmgren, Donald H. and Ann V. Hughes, Fenton Hughes, Steve Hutchcraft, Anne Ingalls, Philip N. and Lee

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California Towhee (To \$24)
Phillip Araki, Jan Battislini, Lee D. Baxter, Joseph Beck, Bennett Berke, Lewis Bielanowski, Anne L. Blandin, Ms. Betty Bones, LeeAnne Cisterman, Mary Alice Clagett, Al Covaia, Don Fallon, Catherine Frost, Robert A. Hattersley, Linda S. Huffman, Jane Hunninghaus, Kay E. Johnson, Russell Jones, Mona Lange, Elizabeth Leite, Dolores L. Mauritz, Ellen M. Ohan, Patricia Partridge, Elizabeth Pforr, Barbara Jean Smith, Judy Storro, Joanne Thorne, William J. Toasperm, Claudia Whitnah, Betty Ann Williams.



Around the World

» *Continued from Page 1*



Young Wandering Albatross on Albatross Island, South Georgia.

Photo by Scott Hein.

on a French research vessel departing from Reunion Island, and visiting Mauritius, Crozet, and Kerguelen archipelagos as well as Saint Paul Island. They will discuss the wildlife encountered along the way, focusing primarily on seabirds.

Michelle is currently in the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at U.C. Santa Cruz where she continues her research on the foraging ecology of three species of albatross. Her work is part of the 'Tagging of Pacific Pelagics' project, a multi-disciplinary research program aimed at understanding the migration patterns of large open-ocean animals in the Pacific Ocean.

Peter works with the Common Murre Restoration Project and monitors anthropogenic disturbances at important seabird nesting and roosting sites. His data will be used to designate marine protected areas along the central California Coast.

Use Your IRA to Make a Tax-free Gift

Here's some important news that can help you plan a tax-effective strategy for your IRA distributions in 2008 while you support your favorite charities. Congress has extended, for the tax years of 2008 and 2009, the provision that taxpayers over the age of 70½ may donate up to \$100,000 from an IRA directly to a charity or non-profit organization without having the distribution count as taxable income on their federal income tax return.

And there's more good news: Your IRA charitable distribution will satisfy all or part of your required minimum IRA distribution. Some restrictions do apply: Consult your IRA Administrator.

Connecting People with Nature

By Brian Murphy

Eagle Scout candidate Phillip Nelson of Troop 822 in Walnut Creek is a freshman at Monte Vista High School. Phillip has a very interesting Eagle Scout Project as he will work with Cobblestone Condo Complex Homeowners Association to help with a problem. Barn Owls like to build nests in spaces between double chimneys in some of the units and guano is rotting the sheet metal flashing, causing rainwater leaks. The Homeowners Association appreciates the value of Barn Owls performing rodent control, but the damage to roofs has to be taken care of. They were aware of Victor Charron's Eagle Scout project at De Vito Ranch in Walnut Creek [*The Quail*, September 2008] and sought help to provide a better location for the Barn Owls.

The complex is in a wonderful location off of Crow Canyon Road, surrounded by permanent open space with a wooded creek running through the open space.



Phillip will make and install five Barn Owl boxes using recycled materials, including salvaged political sign material. The new housing will be installed on poles next to fencing between the complex and open space. Once the owls occupy the boxes, the complex will install screening to prevent owls from nesting between the chimneys. The owls will have housing and the Homeowners will have free rodent control.

Fachini Salvage Recycling & Scrap Enterprises in Antioch will provide recycled wood for Phillip's use. Political sign material from Walnut Creek Councilperson elect Bob Simmons' campaign will be recycled into Bluebird Boxes to be installed in Lime Ridge open space.

Delmarva Refuges

» Continued from Page 8

it is denoted Linen Island. The story is that a ship carrying a load of linen ran aground. Sand and sediment slowly covered the wreck and the island was born. In the late nineteenth century, Fisherman Island was an immigrant quarantine station, and during WW I and WW II large guns protected the mouth of the bay. It became a National Wildlife Refuge in 1973.

Land succession on the island brought habitat diversity, and today forests of sassafras and black cherry, with thickets of wax myrtle and bayberry, support rookeries of Great Blue, Little Blue, and Tricolored Herons, Snowy and Cattle Egrets, Black-crowned and Yellow-crowned Night-herons, White and Glossy Ibis. While the island is off limits to the public, guided tours are offered every Saturday from October through March, and reservations are recommended.

At Nassawadox, a few miles north of Kiptopeke and the Eastern Shore of Virginia NWR, The Nature Conservancy maintains its Virginia Coast Reserve. Here the Conservancy protects 14 undeveloped barrier islands, thousands of acres of pristine salt marshes, shallow bays, vast tidal



Atlantic Ghost Crab, Ocypode quadrata, on the beach at Fisherman Island. These crabs have the ability to change color to blend with the color of the sand.

mudflats, and productive forested uplands. A three-mile trail meanders through woodlands, where you can find many breeding songbirds during the summer months and migratory warblers in the fall.

Earlier this year an experimental observation, in conjunction with the College of William and Mary, showed that some Whimbrels use the Virginia Coast Reserve as a final staging area before embarking on a transcontinental flight to their breeding grounds. Equipped with a tiny solar-powered transmitter, one bird left on May 23,



Great Blue Heron at the Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge.

and was monitored along the way until it came to Alaska, 3200 miles and 13 days later. This discovery attests that the fiddler crabs of Delmarva preserves are well-suited to furnish Whimbrels—whose decurved bills are properly shaped to enter the crabs' holes—with the enormous amount of energy required for such a flight.

Some of the birds on the check list for the National Wildlife Refuges that are not seen in California include American Woodcock, Northern Bobwhite, Gray Catbird, Brown Thrasher, Carolina Chickadee and Carolina Wren. With these, and with hawks and herons, crabs and butterflies, the Delmarva Peninsula has nearly everything a birder or naturalist could desire for a wonderful adventure.



*Buckeye Butterfly *Precis coenia* at Kiptopeke State Park.*

Whimbrel • *Nemenius phaeopus*



Scott Hein's photo of a Whimbrel in a field of Alaska cotton was taken on the drive into Pilgrim Hot Springs, which you reach via the Kougarok Road out of Nome while dodging Grizzlies. Whimbrels nest in the tundra in places like this. On the breeding grounds they feed on insects, berries, sometimes flowers. Alaska Cotton is a native grass/wildflower that is unrelated to "real" cotton. Scott reports that this is one of his favorite photos from their trip to Nome in June, 2004. He and Claudia really enjoyed Nome and the Seward Peninsula, and are hoping to return some day.

In Europe in the 1500s these common curlews with sickle-shaped bills were called Whimpernels. In the Americas, the Hudsonian Curlew—also called Short-billed Curlew—was a familiar shorebird sought after by hunters and sold in the markets of Boston and Charleston. John James Audubon wrote "... having compared specimens of the present species with the Whimbrel of Europe, *Nemenius phaeopus*, I am satisfied that they are distinct." The AOU differs.

Away from the breeding grounds, Whimbrels form loose flocks, often with other large shorebirds, such as godwits. They can be found along both the East and West Coasts of the United States. In spring, large numbers stop in the Central Valley and the Imperial Valley. Spring flocks at the south end of the Salton Sea may contain thousands. Some will winter in California, mainly along the southern coast, and small numbers of nonbreeders remain through the summer.

The Whimbrel is on Audubon's Watchlist as a "Species of High Concern" for its population trend and for threats to its wintering grounds, particularly in Central and South America and the Caribbean. Not only is there increasing destruction of suitable habitat, but pollution is also seriously affecting the food sources of Whimbrels and other shorebirds.

Information on where Whimbrels travel in migration and in what numbers is important in planning what steps might be taken to conserve the species.

You can help by reporting your sightings, especially if you see a banded bird, to eBird, the monitoring program operated by Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, www.audubon.org/bird/ebird/index.html.

Whimbrels should be easily distinguished from Long-billed Curlews by their smaller size and shorter bill. Whimbrels are also characterized by the dark stripes on the crown, separated by a thin, whitish median strip.

Ornithological Opportunities

16th Annual **Wings Over Willcox**, January 14–18, Willcox, AZ. Are you ready for a wonderful weekend of watching raptors soar in the sky, cranes dance in the fields, and sparrows skulk in the grass! Or perhaps view the grandeur of the Chiricahuas, Texas Canyon, or Cochise

For more insight into the pleasures of winter birding in Arizona, read the article by Mike Williams in the November, 2007 Quail. www.diabloaudubon.com/newsletter/Quail_Nov_07.pdf.

Lake. Sulphur Springs Valley has the largest concentration of Sandhill Cranes in Arizona. Field trips include astronomy, archaeology, photography, history and others. The seminar speaker topics will include rainwater harvesting, jaguars,

Continued on Page 9 »

NEWS FROM WILD BIRDS UNLIMITED



Holiday Open House

Saturday, December 6

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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. Good numbers of early arriving American Goldfinch are being reported.

Each fall and winter we are always on the outlook for Pine Siskins. They often travel with goldfinches. Both species love thistle (nyjer) seed and readily come to bird feeders.

Birding Optics Seminar

Saturday, December 13

Mike Williams, of WBU and a member of MDAS, will lead a FREE workshop on "How to Buy Birding Optics" on Saturday, December 13 at 10:00 AM at Wild Birds Unlimited. Have you seen the fantastic Vortex Vipers 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.

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Ornithological Opportunities » *Continued from Page 8*

wildlife tracking, and Siberian cranes. 800-200-2272 or www.wingsoverwillcox.com.

Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival, Morro Bay, January 16–19. Every January on the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday weekend, the Morro Coast Audubon Society in collaboration with California State Parks, Central Coast Natural History Association, and Friends of the Estuary host the Winter Bird Festival. All-day and half-day tours will take participants to a wide variety of habitats, including deep water pelagic, oak woodland and riparian, wetland and estuary, and the unique grassland habitat of the Carrizo Plain. Workshops will cover topics ranging from beginner birding classes to gull identification. Outstanding speakers will make presentations on Saturday and Sunday. A variety of vendors will be present with nature related artwork, books, field equipment and attire, and local merchant wares. Morro Bay is one of the few remaining estuaries on the Pacific flyway. Christmas Bird Counts on the bay have numbered above the 200 species mark, and the festival bird lists have totaled over 220 species for the weekend, making this area on the central California coast a prime birding destination.

Snow Goose Festival, Chico, January 22–25. Backyard, novice, and veteran birders, as well as wildlife enthusiasts of all ages, can choose from over 60 field trips, presentations, and workshops. A festival

highlight is Saturday night's, "Gathering of Wings" banquet and silent auction, with keynote speaker, Ed Harper, well-known birder and photographer. There will be live presentations about owls, hawks, and native reptiles, plus more. Admission is free. For more information contact: (530) 345-1865, info@snowgoosefestival.org, www.snowgoosefestival.org. Registration for field trips, workshops, art reception, and banquet starts in December.

San Francisco Bay Flyway Festival, Mare Island, Vallejo, February 6–8. Visit the San Pablo Bay National Wildlife Refuge booth at the Festival Headquarters in Building 897 on Mare Island. Meet the National Wildlife Refuge System's famous Blue Goose! Enjoy Mucky Marsh Music. Trips and workshops. Contact Phone: (707) 649-WING (9464).

The 13th annual 2009 **San Diego Bird Festival** will be held from March 5–8. Many of the field trips will net more than 100 observed species. Many of these trips are already nearly full. Keynote speaker will be David Allen Sibley, who will talk about the universal appeal of birds and the pleasures and challenges of creating a field guide to birds. David is the author and illustrator of the comprehensive *The Sibley Guide to Birds*. David will also lead a border birding trip and will conduct a bird drawing workshop. Info at: www.sandiegoaudubon.org/birdfest.htm.

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MDAS MEMBERSHIP/RENEWAL APPLICATION

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

I'm enclosing an additional tax-deductible donation of \$_____.

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 Audubon Magazine.

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

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MT. DIABLO AUDUBON SOCIETY and mail with this application to:

Membership Chair, 1932 Golden Rain Road #4, Walnut Creek, CA 94595

The Garden Center

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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*The saltmarshes at Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge are home to the Northern Clapper Rail, *Rallus longirostris crepitans*.*

The Delmarva Peninsula

The geography of the East Coast of the United States is such that a finger of land forms a funnel through which migrating birds travel and pause, poised to cross the mouth of Chesapeake Bay on their southward journey each fall. Named for Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia, this is the Delmarva Peninsula. At its tip is the Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge. Just offshore to the south, Fisherman Island is one of only 17 sites in the United States classified as a "Wetland of International Importance." It, too, is a National Wildlife Refuge, an outstanding respite for migratory birds and an amazing nesting site for Brown Pelicans, Royal Terns, American Oystercatchers, herons and egrets.

These two refuges, and Kiptopeke State Park nearby, are habitat for wildlife other than birds. They are a year-round home for 34 species of mammals, including American mink, flying squirrels, river otters, and various species of bats.

The peninsula is particularly important for passerines that breed in north-eastern North America and winter in the Caribbean but is also important for temperate migrants that winter in the southeastern United States. An estimated 10 million songbirds and 80,000 diurnal raptors pass through this area between August and December including many species of conservation concern. The Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory bands thousands of warblers and other birds each season at Kiptopeke. As they record the annual parade of raptors, the researchers at Kiptopeke's Hawk Watch Station also count migrating Monarch butterflies. Kiptopeke and the Eastern Shore NWR have butterfly gardens, where you can find Painted Ladies, Buckeyes and, if you are lucky, the rare Gulf Fritillary.

A good place to begin your journey on the peninsula is the visitor center at the refuge, just north of the Chesapeake Bay



Banding Station at Kiptopeke State Park, Virginia

Bridge-Tunnel. Outstanding exhibits will orient you to the geography, geology and history of the area, and will explain the conservation efforts of the refuge. Bird along the nature trail, or take advantage of a photography blind; climb 69 steps to the top of a World War II bunker for a panoramic view of the marshes, and of the Atlantic Ocean to the east, Chesapeake Bay to the west.

Fisherman Island has an interesting history. On charts of Chesapeake Bay in 1815,

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