



# the Quail

Mount Diablo Audubon Society

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

www.diabloaudubon.com/index.php

Volume 55, Number 4

December 2009–January 2010

## Finding Connections in Nature • John Muir Laws

John Muir said “When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe”. Join us on December 3 for an exciting evening of appreciation of some of the most astounding and unappreciated species in the Sierra Nevada. In this illustrated lecture, John (Jack) Muir Laws (no relation to the other John Muir) will help us follow a series of amazing relationships between Sierra plants and animals. You will be delighted and fascinated by the subtle and essential threads that connect species. You can find many of these species on a mountain hike with your friends or family and can share the stories with them. Jack will also discuss some of the conservation challenges in the Sierra Nevada and what stewards of nature are doing to confront them. Whether you are a botanist, birder or backpacker, don't miss this great opportunity to enrich your exploration of the 'Range of Light'.

Jack is a naturalist, environmental educator, author and illustrator. He has worked as an environmental educator for over 25 years in California, Wyoming and Alaska



John Muir Laws Photo

where he has taught classes on natural history, conservation biology, scientific illustration, and field sketching. He is a trained wildlife biologist and a research associate of the California Academy of Sciences. For six years, he backpacked the Sierra Nevada to research and illustrate *The Laws Guide to the Sierra Nevada*, a pocket field guide to over 1700 species found in the Sierra Nevada. This comprehensive guide includes 2710 original watercolor paintings and allows botanists to identify the insects that come to their flowers, bird-

ers to identify the trees in which the birds perch, and hikers to identify the stars overhead at night.

John Muir Laws is deeply committed to stewardship of nature and collaborates with organizations throughout the state to this end. He is currently coordinating efforts to create a standards based, sixth through eighth grade curriculum to help teachers convey a love of nature and an understanding of biodiversity to their students through field studies and nature sketching. In addition, he is a regular contributor to *Bay Nature* magazine with his “Naturalists Notebook” column. He is also the author and illustrator of *Sierra Birds: a Hiker's Guide*.

### BIRDING INFORMATION

Steve Hutchcraft has created a most entertaining, avian alphabet book. It is filled with funny names, wonderful photos and fascinating facts destined to create future bird lovers as well as to entertain people of all ages. As a nature photographer, Steve has built a portfolio of

*Continued on Page 2 »*

### Meeting Schedule

The next general meeting of Mount Diablo Audubon Society will be **Thursday, December 3**, 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: **John Muir Laws**

\* Please remember to bring a cup.

Thursday, January 7:

**James A. Martin**

## The Islands of San Francisco Bay

### James A. Martin

They were hills once. Fifteen thousand years ago the islands of San Francisco Bay were tall pyramids cloaked in green forests of cedar and pine. These hills jutted up from a broad, rumped plain, where Pleistocene bison and horses wandered, as well as camels and saber tooth tigers. Valleys between the hills were threaded by glittering creeks



*Continued on Page 2 »*

James A. Martin Photo

DEDICATED TO HABITAT CONSERVATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

## Welcome New Members

Kate and Will Taylor

Martinez

## President's Corner

By Jimm Edgar

This issue of the Quail is a combined issue for December and January, so it will cover a lot of ground. I had to miss our last meeting on November 5 and heard from a number of people that our speaker, Paul Bannick, was outstanding. Many said it was the best program we have ever had. I am sorry I missed it. Alice Holmes, our program chair, does such a good job at arranging for speakers each month.

Coming up in December are our two Christmas Bird counts. There is a lot of information in this issue regarding the counts. These are fun events that anyone can participate in, regardless of birding skills. I hope you can get in on one of them. I do about eight or nine counts every year around northern California and enjoy every one of them.

We are about to send out our once-a-year appeal for a donation to the Mount Diablo Audubon chapter. I hope you can help out in this appeal. Our chapter does a lot of very worthwhile projects in the county, particularly with children. We could not do these without your help.

I also would mention again the availability of our recently published Breeding Bird Atlas of Contra Costa County. This was a monumental task that took years of data gathering, compilation and finally putting it in print. It is available on our website and is really interesting to read about the birds of our county.

I look forward to seeing you at a meeting or field trip soon.

# Q

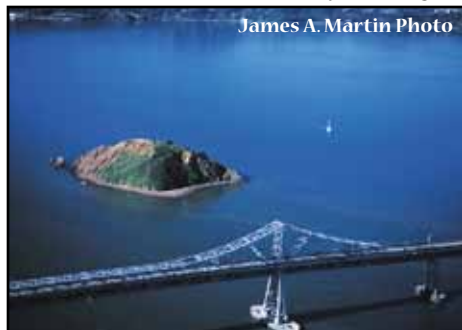
This bird has been classified as the largest of our song birds. A group of jays is called a "Party," a group of crows or magpies is called a "Murder," while a flock of these birds is called an "Unkindness".

Unscramble these letters, or turn to Page 4 to learn more.

ACEMMNNOORV

## January

» Continued from Page 1



and one mighty river. These streams wound through a huge wooded basin, then, out through the Golden Gate, rushing toward the Pacific Ocean.

At that point in time, much of North America was locked under glacial sheets of the last Ice Age causing ocean levels to be 300-400 feet lower than they are today. After shooting the narrows of the Golden Gate, those rivers had to wind westward another 32 miles before they reached the sea. There the waters leapt off of a grand cliff that lay six miles beyond Los Farallones, the edge of the continental shelf. As the earth's temperature rose, the glaciers melted and filled the broad valley that is now San Francisco Bay. Many of the hills became islands.

In 2001, Bay Area photographer and writer James A. Martin began photographing the topography and wildlife of 48 of these islands. In 2006 he published his book *The Islands of San Francisco Bay*. On January 7, James will share his photos and bring to life the histories, ecology and wildlife of some of the islands.

James grew up in San Rafael and began his outdoor adventures, rock climbing in Yosemite Valley. He developed a passion for adventure, so traveled the world, photographing exotic places such as Africa, Alaska, Indonesia, Nepal, and Venezuela. In the early 1990s, he began to photograph professionally for publications such as, *National Geographic*, *Outdoor*, and *Climbing*. James Martin's website is [www.islandsofSFBay.com](http://www.islandsofSFBay.com).

## BIRDING INFORMATION

Jimm Edgar and Maury Stern will bring us their annual update of our East Contra Costa County and Central County Christmas Bird Counts.

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## December

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award-winning images. As a father, he has looked for a way to share his love of nature, especially birds, with his young daughter. He has chosen eye-catching and humorous photos and has combined those with fun facts about the wonderful world of birds. Steve will share his photos and surprise us with unique bird facts.

## Trip Reports

**San Francisco Presidio, October 3.** In Search of *Calidris melanotos*. A group of 24 MDAS birders met at the Presidio in San Francisco for a field trip up Tennessee Hollow. Accompanying us was Steve Phillips, a naturalist with the Presidio Trust. Steve was there to point out and explain the extensive habitat restoration along Tennessee Creek up to El Polin Springs. Our target bird was the Pectoral Sandpiper (*Calidris melanotos*) which had been sighted at the Crissy Field lagoon. Apparently there has been a rash of sightings along the Northern California Coast. At the Crissy Field lagoon we spotted, among others, an Elegant Tern, several Black-bellied Plovers in non-breeding plumage, lots of Killdeer and Ring-Billed and Western Gulls. On an island in the lagoon along with some cormorants and gulls, we spotted what we thought was our bird. As we circled the lagoon to get a better look, the sighting was confirmed. We then crossed over to Tennessee Hollow and proceeded up to El Polin Springs. Along the way we saw all three nuthatches, the Red-breasted, White-Breasted and the Pygmy. We also spotted a Brown Creeper. El Polin Springs yielded a lot of birds but the best ones were a male and female Western Tanager. All in all we logged 44 species. The weather was great and a good time was had by all.

Ethan Chickering

**Outer Point Reyes, September 26.** Seven intrepid birders met at Drakes Beach to find the fog had not lifted on our arrival. Fortunately it did not linger and after an hour or so, we enjoyed cloudless skies, no wind and temperatures in the 70s. Besides Drakes Beach we birded the Mendoza and Nunes Ranches, Spalleta Ranch ponds,

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## Trip Reports

» *Continued from Page 2*

Fish Docks. Lighthouse and RCA station. The day got off to a good start at Drakes Beach with a Wilson's Snipe found sitting in the parking area and showing no inclination to depart once discovered. Palm and Orange-crowned Warblers were quickly found, also at Drakes Beach. Mendoza provided five Pectoral Sandpipers, a life-bird addition for several. During this part of the visit we came across Terry Colborn who mentioned the presence of a Stilt Sandpiper at the Spalleta ponds; doubling back we were able to add this rarity to our list. We then pressed on to the Fish Docks where we were able to find the Prairie Warbler reported earlier in the week. Lunch was enjoyed at the Lifeboat Station. The Lighthouse cypresses yielded Townsend's and Yellow-rumped Warblers; reports of a Blackpoll Warbler seen in these trees could not be unequivocally confirmed. Several participants caught glimpses of a possible suspect but were not convinced. All in all, a great day's birding, several rarities and a total of 68 species. *David Hutton*

**Abbott's Lagoon, October 17.** A small but enthusiastic group of birders gathered at the trailhead to Abbott's Lagoon to find fog swirling around us and temperatures in the upper 50s. The weather however did not prove a dampener on spirits and by midmorning the sun was out, with little or no wind and temperatures into the 60s. Raptors were well in evidence getting great views of Ferruginous and Red-tailed Hawks, White-tailed Kite, and Northern Harrier. Perhaps best of the day were displays put on by normally rather secretive birds—along the path to the lagoon we came across a trio of Bewick's Wrens which insisted on chattering at us in full view. A little further we were treated to another display trio, this time Wrentits; they too, though quite silent, gleaned and foraged away in the path-side bushes in full view for several minutes. In both cases we were observing the birds at between 10–15 feet. Snowy Plovers were encountered on the beach where they have been traditionally observed for several years. Among waders, Black-bellied Plovers, Dunlin, Dowitchers and Sandertlings were well represented. Somewhat surprising, we also had good views of American Pipits coming off the dunes across the pickleweed to the edge of

## Thank You to Our Donors

The Board of Directors of Mount Diablo Audubon Society wishes to thank all those who have contributed during the 2008–2009 fiscal year. These donations permit the on-going programs dedicated to preservation of habitat for birds and other wildlife, and promote an awareness of our natural wonders among young people.,

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the lagoon. On completing our collective bird list, we found we had seen a total of 42 species. *David Hutton*

**Charleston Slough/South Bay, November 7.** Fourteen birders enjoyed a perfect day in the South Bay with 75 species seen, the best probably being the Lark Bunting at Byxbee Park. Although we searched for the Nelson's Sparrow, he had probably left several days before. Also of note were the multiple Blue-winged Teal at Charleston Slough and Black Skimmers at Radio Road.

*Bingham Gibbs*

William E. Davis, Jr., Vida M. Dawson, Faith Dossa, Linda Dugan, Jimm Edgar, Jon Elam, Shirley Ellis, Clayton Englar, Carolyn Erdman, Don Fallon, Doris P. Faulkenberry, Jim Fincke, Nancy J. Flood, Elizabeth and John Frei, Lisa Frost, William Galvin, Greg Gartrell, Thomas Goedewaagen, Janet M. Goodman, K. Groover, Susan C. Haas, Allan Hansell, Roger D. Harris and Meryl Q. Sundove, Alfred S. Harvey, Ilene Holgrem, Donald H. and Ann V. Hughes, Judy Johnstone and Tom Delaney, John Korzick, Ralph Kraetsdn, Donna Kramer, Bruce and Judy Kronmiller, Richard Kurovsky, Timothy E. Lacy, Eugenia K. Larson, Steve Loftin, Mike Loper, Pamela Lorenz, Bob and Diane Malucelli, Frank J. and Carolyn D. Marusarz, Dr. F. Michael Melewicz, Marlene Metropolis, Joan B. Mize and Marilyn M. Seifert, Dolores Morrison, Mary Muerle, Elizabeth H. Nelson, Iola O'Grady, Thomas K. O'Keefe, Nathalie Oram, Frank and Evelyn Owens, Margaret and C. J. Panton, Anthony Paolini, Mr. and Mrs. J. Douglas Philips, Gregory Piatt, Marjorie E. Plant, Joyce Pollack, Austin L. and Marjorie Prindle, Moreland and Jean Richmond, J. C. and M. B. Ricksen, Walter L. and Suzanne L. Schnyder, Jon and Debby Scott, Judy Secor, Jody Sherrard, Henry Simpson, Frances L. Singer, Robert Slyker, Sydney Jo Spencer, Ann-Charlott Stenberg, Sandra M. Stober and Mason F. (Rick) Stober, Bill Surges, Joanne Taylor, Patricia N. Thunen, William J. Toaspern, Margo Watson, Peter L. and Dolores White, Betty Ann Williams, Teri and Chris Wills, Nina and Leary Wong, Stephanie Woods, Celine Zwang

### California Towhee (To \$24)

Phillip Araki, Lewis Bielanowski, Bonnie Brittman, Patricia Caren, Carolyn E. Cogan, Dale Darling, Ms. Deanna Hauser, Jane Hunninghaus, Mona Lange, Mr. and Mrs. Nathan Lutz, Virginia Marques, Carolyn Matthews, Edith A. Mitchell, Joyce M. Rutherford, Bessie Smyth, Ann Spaulding, Dr. Howard Sturtz, W. W. Thomas and N. A. Thomas, Ronald Thomas, Peter Boffey, John and Janet R. Weil, Shirley Mudd Winthrop, Robert W. and Betty M. Young

# Field Trip Schedule

By Hugh Harvey

## December

- 5–6 Saturday/Sunday ..... Sacramento Refuges
- 10 Thursday ..... Niles Area
- 15 Tuesday ..... Christmas Count/East Contra Costa
- 19 Saturday ..... Christmas Count/Central Contra Costa

## January

- 2 Saturday ..... Christmas Count/Rarity Chase
- 9 Saturday ..... Putah Creek
- 16 Saturday ..... Bodega Bay
- 23 Saturday ..... Las Gallinas/Rush Creek/Shollenberger Park
- 29 Friday ..... Lake Merritt/Arrowhead Marsh

## February

- 6 Saturday ..... Thornton Area/Cosumnes Preserve
- 10 Wednesday ..... Grizzly Island
- 18 Thursday ..... Sunol Regional Park
- 25 Thursday ..... Mt. View Sanitary/McNabney Marsh
- 27 Saturday ..... Tomales Bay State Park

### 📍 Saturday/Sunday, December 5–6 Sacramento Refuges

Leader: Terry Colborn, 916-705-8991 or tlcgdc@aol.com.

This weekend field trip to several refuges in the northern Sacramento Valley will feature a number of well known habitats to view thousands of wintering waterfowl and other avian specialties. We'll also visit some lesser known spots. Historically, the wildlife refuges of the greater Sacramento Valley have hosted millions of wintering ducks, geese and swans. Today less than 5% of these vital wetlands remain, magnifying the significant importance of our state and federal refuge systems. On Saturday we'll tour Sacramento NWR, a 10,700 acre complex with over 7,600 acres of seasonally managed ponds and wetlands. Sacramento NWR is one of the premier waterfowl refuges in California and a critically important resting and feeding area for tens of thousands of wintering ducks and geese. The mid-winter numbers of waterfowl peak at over 600,000 ducks and 200,000 geese on the seasonal ponds and adjoining open fields; twenty-five percent of the world's Aleutian Canada Goose population winters at Sacramento NWR. Other unique species include Bald Eagle and Peregrine Falcon. We'll also visit several additional units of the Sacramento NWR complex to the east along the Sacramento River looking for Sandhill Cranes, Tricolored Blackbirds, raptors, herons, egrets and shorebirds. At day's end, we'll enjoy a group dinner; overnight in Williams.

On Sunday morning we'll search farm roads looking for wintering raptors, including Ferruginous and Rough-legged Hawks, Prairie Falcon and Golden Eagle, and visit Colusa NWR, a 4,600-acre refuge that is an important haven to wildlife. We'll search for Barn and Great Horned Owls, Wood Duck and Hooded Merganser. Harris's Sparrow has been found in years past.

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### 📍 Thursday, December 10 Niles Area

Leader: 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 seven 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.

### 📍 Tuesday, December 15 Christmas Count/East County

### 📍 Saturday, December 19 Christmas Count/Central Contra Costa County

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 BirdSource website at [www.birdsource.com](http://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 Tuesday, December 15, and Saturday, December 19. 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](http://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.

**② Saturday, January 2**

**Christmas Count/Rarity Chase**

Leader: Denise Wight, 683-1741

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 9**

**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. Bring lunch. Possible Osprey, Phainopepla, Barrow's Goldeneye and Hooded Merganser.

**① Saturday, January 16**

**Bodega Bay**

Leader: Terry Colborn, 916-705-8991 or tlcgdc@aol.com.

Winter birding in Bodega Bay is always a treat. The Sonoma Coast is the winter host to thousands of shorebirds, a variety of loons, grebes, and 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. We'll also have an optional "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.

**② Saturday, January 23**

**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 onto Binford Road and go north to the marsh. Shollenberger Park is in Petaluma, east of US 101. Exit at Lakeville Highway, go east to S. McDowell and turn right. Look for a half-right onto Cypress Drive, then enter the PRBO parking lot at 3820 Cypress. Go to the back and park near the picnic tables. All three sites are good for wintering waders, shorebirds, waterfowl and raptors.

**① Friday, January 29**

**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 boathouse and aviary. After some birding here, we will drive to Arrowhead Marsh by 10:00 AM for the high tide. Hopefully the rising tide will flush out rails. Area is good for shorebirds and often loons on the estuary.

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](http://www.diabloaudubon.com/index/php). Because most trips do not return until late afternoon, bring a lunch and drink and join us during our midday break.

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

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

Category ③: Difficult, extensive walking, on rough terrain.

Carpool locations: **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**—Exit SR 24 at St. Stephens Drive east of Orinda. El Nido Ranch Road is parallel to and north of the freeway. Park just east of the intersection with St. Stephens Drive.

**Sacramento Refuges**

» *Continued from Page 4*

In the afternoon we'll bird the Sutter Buttes area, remnants of an ancient volcano and the world's smallest mountain range. Target species include Mountain Bluebird, Prairie Falcon, Loggerhead Shrike and Golden Eagle. We'll tour Gray Lodge WMA where we expect to see large flights of Snow Geese, looking for the Ross's Geese among them. We'll also look and listen for Sora, Virginia Rail and American Bittern. We'll check out the Harry and Betty Adamson hides which pay tribute to the couple's vision for wildlife conservation. Harry is a preeminent wildlife artist and the Sutter Buttes/Gray Lodge area is featured in many of his paintings. Betty and Harry were founding members of MDAS.

We'll stay at the refuge until dusk when, as though on cue, thousands of ibis, 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.

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. Participants may want to arrive on Friday evening for the 7:00 AM start time on Saturday.



## Rossmoor Woodpeckers

The Quail has received the following response from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, National Wildlife Research Center in Fort Collins, Colorado: 11/02/09 Update—Acorn Woodpecker Study

NWRC scientists have completed the testing of a nonlethal electronic deterrent device to reduce Acorn Woodpecker damage to utility poles and other structures. Thirteen Acorn Woodpeckers were tested with each of the three sound deterrents and their responses were recorded. The data are currently being analyzed. In a previous study with Pileated Woodpeckers, NWRC scientists found that damage to utility poles was reduced by 70 percent.

The NWRC makes every effort to optimize the use of animals taken into captivity. Since the completion of the deterrent study, the Acorn Woodpeckers have been transferred to a new study that is 1) looking at the effectiveness of a chemical repellent to help deter further damage to locations with existing damage, and 2) comparing Acorn Woodpecker use of natural oak limbs, EFIS board, and constructed cedar granaries. Preliminary results of the repellent tests indicate the repellent may have potential as a nonlethal tool to prevent woodpecker damage to existing structures. NWRC scientists have not yet started the second half of the study which looks at different artificial granary materials. The goal of these studies is to determine whether the use of a chemical repellent in combination with the use of artificial granaries might help reduce structural damage by woodpeckers.

At this time, the NWRC has no plans to trap additional Acorn Woodpeckers.



Sunday, October 18 was the date of our second acorn granary search and observation located near the oak forests, a popular habitat for Acorn Woodpeckers in Rossmoor. On a clear and beautiful day the search included stops on Autumnwood Drive, Falconwood Court, High Eagle Court, Spotted Owl Court, and Quail Hill Court. An observant person might

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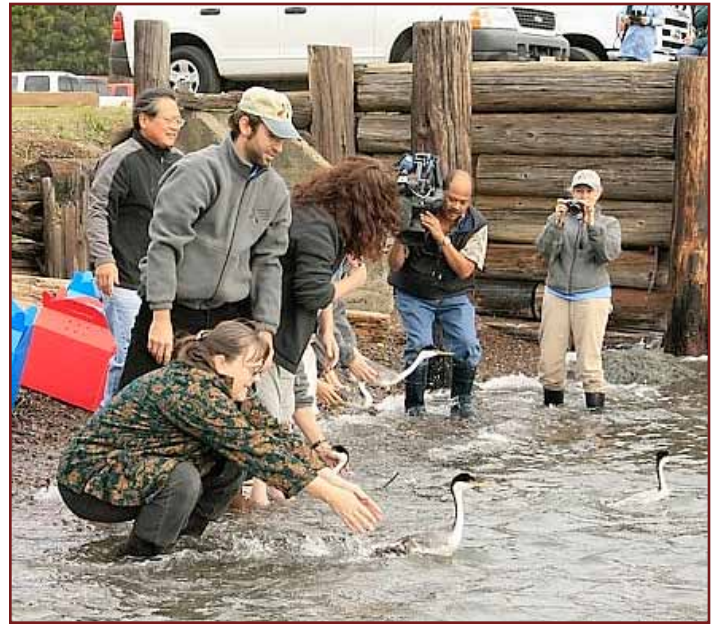
## Sea Slime Rescue

By Laurie Pyne, IBRRC

After weeks of intense activity, thousands of volunteer hours and thousands of pounds of fish, I am happy to report that 225 birds have now been released in an unprecedented event for International Bird Rescue Research Center (IBRRC) and the Pacific Northwest.

On October 24th, 150 seabirds were trucked to our Fairfield facility, victims of a harmful algal bloom caused by the phytoplankton *Akashiwo sanguinea* off the coast of Washington and Oregon. The fall transition in the ocean upwelling brought offshore waters onshore which is what kicked off this event. The data are still inconclusive as to the cause; however decreased salinity and warmer water are thought to have contributed to the proliferation of this algae. On October 26th, the second group of 350 arrived via Coast Guard plane. These birds had beached themselves because they were cold and wet, the slime that coated their feathers rendering them unable to waterproof themselves. More than 10,000 scoters were reported dead. Numerous species of birds were affected and the numbers to date released include: Common Murres (168), Common Loons (9), Red-throated Loons (1), Western Grebes (38), White-winged Scoters (5), Surf Scoters (2), Pacific Loons (1), and Clark's Grebes (1).

The journey for the birds caught in this crisis began with a late night triage upon arrival when a "donut" or keel cushion and stockinette booties were placed on the bird to prevent keel and foot lesions from being in captivity, a tube feeding of liquids, and then warm caging and ample fish before settling in for the night. The following day brought a thorough intake examination on each bird, blood samples and more tubing with fluids and/or food. Once stabilized, each bird



Release of Western Grebes. Cheryl Reynolds Photo

was readied for the stressful but necessary washing process with *Dawn* soap. Because a proteinaceous film was being removed and not oil, the wash process went much more quickly. After washing, each bird was placed

**Donations may be made at  
[www.ibrrc.org/donate.html](http://www.ibrrc.org/donate.html)  
or by mail to  
IBRRC, 4369 Cordelia Road  
Fairfax, CA 94534.**

in a netted soft-bottom cage with a large dryer underneath. Once the birds were dry, the process began to carefully swim them in pools and observe their behavior and waterproofing. This can be a time-consuming process as birds regain their full waterproofing. Once fully rehabilitated they receive their federal bands. It is a magical and emotional moment when the carrier doors are opened and these amazing and beautiful birds swim or fly away to freedom.

Because this was an unprecedented event for IBRRC, in essence, an oil spill without the oil, there was no responsible party to assume the costs of the rehabilitation of all these birds. The silver lining in this event has been the extraordinary volunteers that stepped up, gave up their time and put forth their energy from 7:00 AM to after midnight many nights and did this for weeks to save these birds. They are the heroes as are the people and businesses that sent us donations to provide the necessary elements of care for these magnificent creatures. We are deeply grateful to everyone who has helped in any and every way to help us through this crisis.

## Common Raven · *Corvus corax*



The Raven is the subject of mythology in many cultures, including that of the Greeks, Chinese, Japanese, and the Native Americans of the Pacific Northwest. It is often the trickster of the stories. Ravens are always kept in the Tower of London under the care of a Yeoman of the Guard. Since the time of Charles II, legend says that a great disaster would befall the Kingdom if the Ravens were removed from the Tower. The King decreed that at least six ravens should be kept at the Tower at all times to protect the Monarchy.

Ravens have become more populous in recent years. The 1982 checklist of Contra Costa County birds indicated that they were largely restricted to areas east of

Mount Diablo and Black Diamond Mines. But the Breeding Bird Atlas survey—data collected 1988 through 2002—confirmed that Common Ravens were even nesting in locations throughout the entire county.

Ravens in California are smaller than those in Canada and Alaska. A smaller-sized raven can be confused with a larger-sized American Crow, but some features make identification relatively easy. Ravens have larger, thicker bills, compared to the more slender bill of the Crow. They also have shaggy throat feathers, and their call is deeper in pitch and distinctive. Their wedge-shaped tail differs from the square-shaped tail of the crow.

If you have the opportunity, don't miss reading *Ravens in Winter* by Bernd Heinrich. In 1984 University of Vermont zoology professor Heinrich determined to find out why Ravens call to each other when they discover food, an uncommon sharing behavior in the wild. For four years of winter weekends, he observed these birds at a remote site in Maine. His narrative of this research study is a captivating tale not only of the life of Ravens, but of his own adventure in solving the mystery and finding that only certain juvenile birds make the calls, and then, why they do so.

## MDAS Annual Treasurer's Report—2009

By Steve Buffi

Mount Diablo Audubon Society remains in an excellent position to serve our community. We had another successful year. The annual year-end fundraising drive continues to be strong and our total chapter memberships is strong.

The financial health of MDAS, due to the generosity of our members, allows us to actively pursue our mission. During the year, we funded important habitat preservation projects and continued our community outreach efforts for young people. Your generosity supports our monthly presentation program, this newsletter, the annual Christmas Count, the EBB Bird Sightings list, and much more. You have read about these important community efforts in this and prior issues of the Quail. Each dollar you give is put to good use for the benefit of our community.

The General Fund balance covers operations and reserves; the Conservation and Education balance is used towards those efforts; the Breeding Bird Atlas were used to publish the Atlas; and the McNabney Marsh funds support the marsh and other conservation activities.

July 2008—June 2009

MDAS Managed Funds	Revenues	Expenses	Net	Fund Balance 7/1/09
General Fund	\$30,344.81	\$20,322.85	\$9,495.56	\$95,077.78
Conservation & Education	231.34	2,500.00	(2,268.66)	9,261.86
Breeding Bird Atlas	407.09	0	407.09	20,697.44
McNabney Marsh	142.20	0	142.20	7,230.58
Total All Funds	\$31,125.44	\$22,822.85	\$7,776.19	\$132,267.66

## NEWS FROM WILD BIRDS UNLIMITED



### HOLIDAY OPEN HOUSE

Saturday, December 5

- ✓ 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. Good numbers of early arriving American Goldfinches 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.
- ➔ Watch for Townsends and Yellow-rumped Warblers on your suet feeders. Once they find this food you will see them every day at the feeders.

### Birding Optics Seminar Saturday, December 12

Mike Williams, of WBU and a member of MDAS, will lead a FREE workshop on "How to Buy Birding Optics" on Saturday, December 12 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.



Mike and 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)



## Palo Alto Baylands

down from the boardwalk that extends 800 feet out through the marsh from behind the Nature Center. A little over half-way out, a small rivulet crosses under the boardwalk. This is known as “Rail Alley” and with patience, you may spot a rail. At low tide, from the end of the boardwalk, you’ll find shorebirds, such as Willet, Long-billed Curlew and Marbled Godwit.

Walk along the San Francisquito Creek Trail west from the Nature Center to the channel along the edge of the airport. Here there is freshwater marsh supplied from the outflow of the water treatment plant. Virginia Rails and Soras might make an appearance. This is also the area where there is a chance—though small—to find a visiting Nelson’s Sparrow (formerly called Nelson’s Sharp-tailed Sparrow), or perhaps a Swamp Sparrow. Look throughout the Baylands for the Alameda Song Sparrow, one of three subspecies that inhabit the marshes around San Francisco Bay. It is slightly smaller, and its yellow-gray back and yellowish wash to the belly differ from the Suisun and Samuel’s varieties of the North Bay.

The Duck Pond is not just for ducks, although 17 species of them may be there, including all three teal. There are gulls there, too, as well as Double-crested Cormorants and perhaps some shorebirds. Black-crowned Night-Herons roost in the eucalyptus trees across the lagoon. In the trees around the pond you may find Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Orange-crowned and Yellow-rumped Warblers, Fox and

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Alameda Song Sparrow at Palo Alto Baylands. Photo by Glen Tepke.

Lincoln’s Sparrows in winter, and many other species.

You may wish to drive to Byxbee Park Hills, an “Art Park” where large public sculpture is installed over covered landfill. From here the Adobe Creek Trail would take you around the bayside edge of the marsh two miles to Charleston Slough and Adobe Creek. This is home—from July through December—of hundreds of American White Pelicans. Watch how they gather in small cooperative groups and, with flapping wings and a lot of splashing, herd schools of fish into a confined space where they are easily caught. Also in Charleston Slough is a colony of Black Skimmers, whose feeding routine is different still. They fly low over the water and dip their extended lower mandibles into the water, skimming up small fish. The Charleston Slough area of the Palo Alto Baylands Nature Preserve can also be accessed from the north end of San Antonio Road.

## Observations

By Maury Stern

Winter migrants arrived in force. Many duck species made their first seasonal appearances.

HH saw one **Cackling Goose** at Heather Farm on 10/28 with 262 **Canada Geese**. There was a **Wood Duck** pair as well on the pond. A first-of-season **Canvasback** was at San Pablo Bay Regional Shoreline (SPBRS) in Pinole on 11/1 (LL). On 11/3 **Buffleheads** were seen in Walnut Creek near Trader Joe’s (BH) and in Tilden RP at Lake Anza (TR). JH saw a **Hooded Merganser** in Walnut Creek along the Iron Horse Trail east of Monument Blvd. on 10/18. NB and ND saw an **American Bittern** in McNabney Marsh from Waterbird Park in Martinez on 10/31. On 11/1, LL saw a female **Merlin** in SPBRS Pinole. A **Prairie Falcon** flew over their house in Antioch on 10/26 (P&NS). Two **Black-bellied Plovers**, a **Black Oystercatcher**, and two **Black Turnstones** were at Bay Front Park in Pinole on 10/14 (IW). Six **Black Oystercatchers** were at Point Pinole RP on 10/25 (JD, LP). KU continued seeing **Common Poorwill** at Briones RP on 10/26. IW on 11/8 saw a **Red-Bellied Sapsucker** in El Sobrante. Four **Golden-crowned Kinglets** were near Lake Anza on 11/3 (TR). RS saw up to 50 **Golden-crowned Kinglets** on 11/8 in Tilden RP. LL saw a **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher** at SPBRS in Pinole 10/18 and 10/29. On 10/16, PC saw a **Varied Thrush** in the Wildcat Canyon/Lake Anza area. P&NS saw **Rufous-crowned** and **Lincoln’s Sparrows** at Black Diamond RP on 10/30. On 10/16, LL saw a **Clay-colored Sparrow** at SPBRS in Pinole. HH saw a tan stripe form of **White-throated Sparrow** at Heather Farm on 10/27. On 11/8, DH saw a **Slate-colored Junco** in his Walnut Creek yard.

Abbreviations: NB Nel Benningshof, PC Phil Capitolo, ND Nick Despota, JD Judith Dunham, HH Hugh Harvey, JH Joel Herr, BH Bob Hislop, DH David Hutton, LL Laura Look, LP Lory Poulson, RS Rusty Scalf, P&NS Paul and Nancy Schorr, TR Ted Robertson, KU Kenichi Ueda, IW Idell Weydemeyer.

Submit Contra Costa County sightings to Maury Stern at [mbstern2@yahoo.com](mailto:mbstern2@yahoo.com) or (925) 284-5980 or send sightings to EBB Sightings.

## Tell It on the Mountain

Twenty-two supporters from MDAS along with 300 other individuals participated in the International Day of Climate Action on October 24. The campaign 350.org focused on efforts to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere from the existing 390 ppm to a sustainable 350 ppm. Among 5200+ worldwide events in 181 countries, a necklace of environmental awareness and hope encircled the summit of Mount Diablo along the Mary Bowerman Trail.

This local event was spearheaded by Close to Home: Exploring Nature in the East



Bay and sponsored by EarthTeam, Save Mount Diablo, Strawberry Creek Friends Meeting, Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, and Mount Diablo Audubon.

Bev Walker



# Woodpeckers

» Continued from Page 6

conclude, after reading the names of the streets, that this would be a neighborhood friendly to birds. It's a puzzlement.

We were looking for acorns stored in the granaries by Acorn Woodpeckers. One woodpecker was flying around a residential unit where a net and a large scary black spider were located. Beverley Walker was pelted by a shower of acorns in one location. The shower was caused by a sudden autumn breeze which caused an oak tree to literally "rain" acorns. Meanwhile, none of the five manufactured granaries contained any acorns. Our conclusion is that the Acorn Woodpeckers are not using the granaries at this time. However, we will continue our field trips with a purpose.

We watched a healthy looking coyote watching us. The animal was only about 20 yards away. The animal was unafraid. We had the car doors open ready to dive in if need be.

*Shirley Ellis and Beverley Walker*

# Ornithology Opportunities

Come Celebrate the 14th Annual **Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival**, January 15-18. Located on California's scenic Central Coast, Morro Bay is an important stop on the Pacific Flyway and one of the country's preeminent birding spots. At last year's festival, over 200 species of birds were identified. Field trip group sizes are limited to maximize spotting and identification opportunities. To register and for more information about the Festival, see [www.morrobaybirdfestival.org](http://www.morrobaybirdfestival.org), or call toll free 866-464-5105. The registration deadline is December 31, but early signups are encouraged as the most popular events fill up quickly.

**Wings Over Willcox Birding and Nature Festival**, January 13-17. Wings Over Willcox combines adventure, entertainment, and education to provide a fun-filled weekend of birding pleasure for the novice, expert, or curious. The Wings Over Willcox Birding and Nature Festival takes place during the MLK weekend with daytime and evening activities. The festival is a wonderful opportunity to see the winter migrants and southwest bird species that are found in the Sulphur Springs Valley. The festival also provides many opportunities to explore nature in South-

east Arizona through tours for photography, geology, archeology, history, botany, agriculture, and ranching. A nature expo in the community center has educational booths, live animal displays, and a wide variety of vendors with nature-related crafts and wares. Free seminars about many different topics are offered throughout the day in the community center. <http://www.wingsoverwillcox.com>.

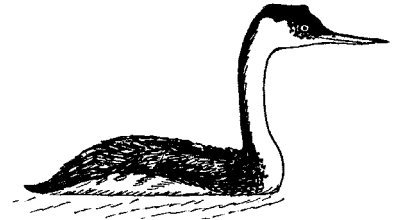
**San Diego Audubon Society's Bird Festival, March 4-7.** Among the 56 field trips and workshops are three trips into Baja California (passports required); an 8-hour pelagic trip to the Islas Coronados and a 6½-hour pelagic trip for whales as well as birds; two trips for birds of the Anza-Borrego Desert. Other special venues are Marine Corps Camp Pendleton, and behind-the-scenes tours at San Diego Zoo's Wild Animal Park and the avian collection at the San Diego Natural History Museum. Plan your trip now as reservations for activities fill quickly. A brochure and registration form can be ordered at 619-682-7200 or contact [sandiegoaudubon.org](http://sandiegoaudubon.org).

**Point Reyes Birding Festival.** Plan now to attend the first annual Point Reyes Birding Festival, April 23-25. The event is sponsored by the Environmental Action Committee of West Marin. Go to <http://www.eacmarin.org> to learn more about this exciting event. Make a reservation to stay at one of the dozens of charming bed and breakfast or other lodging establishments in West Marin from Friday at noon to late Sunday afternoon, since accommodations fill up early for weekends.

**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.*

### MDAS Board of Directors

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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), please enroll me in the National Audubon Society.

Please send The Quail by:  E-mail  US mail

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

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

Phone ( \_\_\_\_ ) \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Please make your check payable to:  
MT. DIABLO AUDUBON SOCIETY and mail with this application to:  
Membership Chair, 1932 Golden Rain Road #4, Walnut Creek, CA 94595

Mount Diablo Audubon Society,  
P.O. Box 53  
Walnut Creek, CA 94597-0053

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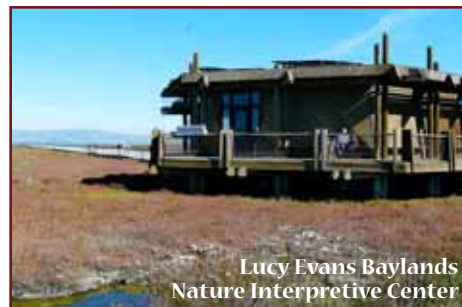
*California Clapper Rail at Palo Alto Baylands*

## Palo Alto Baylands

San Francisco Bay—South is the name for one of the Important Bird Areas of California as defined by Audubon California. It incorporates the bayside wetlands extending from south of the San Francisco International Airport through the Silicon Valley cities of Redwood City and Palo Alto, to Milpitas and Alviso, and north through Newark and Hayward to Alameda. The area is so designated because it provides habitat for endangered species Alameda Song Sparrow, California Clapper Rail, Long-billed Curlew, Saltmarsh Common Yellowthroat and Western Snowy Plover. Fifteen sensitive species are also present, including Black Rail, Black Skimmer, Burrowing Owl, Bryant's Savannah Sparrow and Tricolored Blackbird.

The Palo Alto Baylands along the San Francisco Peninsula south of the Dumbarton Bridge offers an exceptional opportunity for bird watching and for bird

photography. From the Embarcadero Road exit from US 101 in Palo Alto, drive east to the Lucy Evans Baylands Nature Interpretive Center. The center is open Tuesdays through Fridays, 2 PM to 5 PM; and Saturdays, 1 PM to 5 PM. Closed Sundays and Mondays. On Sundays, one hour after high tide, there is a naturalist-guided walk.



Across from the parking lot, adjacent to the sign for the Nature Center is "Rail Corner", possibly the most reliable location to find Black Rail, although you have to consider yourself lucky, if you do. These small secretive birds don't like to come out where they will become an appetizer for an egret or a Great Blue Heron, so only when an unusually high tide floods the

pickleweed salt marsh are you likely to catch a fleeting glimpse. As the time for high tide nears, line up with everyone else at the edge of the marsh and wait for the bird's anticipated debut.

Although high tide brings more Clapper Rails into view, at any time you may be able to see these birds as you look

*Continued on Page 8 »*

Tides are higher during the winter when the earth is closer to the sun, and at new or full moon when moon, earth and sun are aligned. This winter, tides of 9.4 feet or higher occur at Palo Alto Baylands at these dates and times.

December 2, 11:36 AM, 9.4 (Full moon)

December 3, 12:21 PM, 9.4

December 30, 10:32 AM, 9.5

December 31, 11:21 AM, 9.7 (Full moon)

January 1, 12:12 PM, 9.6

January 2, 1:03 PM, 9.4

January 28, 10:21 AM, 9.5

January 29, 11:14 AM, 9.5

January 30, 12:06 pm, 9.4 (Full moon)