



# the Quail

Mount Diablo Audubon Society

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

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

Volume 57, Number 4

December 2011

## Sacramento Wildlife Refuge Complex ♦ Dan Frisk

Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamps, commonly known as "Duck Stamps," are pictorial stamps produced by the U.S. Postal Service for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Originally created in 1934 as federal licenses required for hunting waterfowl, Federal Duck Stamps have a much larger purpose.

Dan Frisk, Refuge Manager at the Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge Complex, will discuss the role of Duck Stamps in wetland conservation. Sales of Federal Duck Stamps have generated more than 750 million dollars, which has been used to help purchase over 5.3 million acres of waterfowl habitat for our National Wildlife Refuge System. Birds, other than waterfowl, as well as numerous mammal, fish, reptile and amphibian species that rely on wetland habitats have prospered due to this program. An estimated one-third of the Nation's endangered and threatened species find food and shelter in refuges established using Federal Duck Stamp funds.

Dan Frisk will provide an overview of the outdoor recreational opportunities available at the Sacramento Wildlife Refuge Complex as well as the challenges he faces as its manager. Located 90 miles north



Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge. Photo by Scott Hein

of the city of Sacramento, the Complex consists of five national wildlife refuges (NWR) and three wildlife management areas (WMA) that comprise over 35,000 acres of wetlands and uplands in the Sacramento Valley. In addition, there are over 30,000 acres of conservation easements in the Complex. The Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge Complex provides resting and feeding areas for more than forty per cent of the Pacific Flyway's wintering waterfowl. More than three million ducks and one million geese migrate to the Sacramento Valley every fall.

Dan recently took over management of the Sacramento NWR Complex. During his thirty years with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service he has served as manager of the Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge in Marion, Illinois; the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge in Oak Harbor, Ohio; and the Pee Dee National Wildlife Refuge in

Wadesboro, North Carolina. Prior to becoming a refuge manager, Dan worked as a wildlife biologist in North Carolina. He is a native of Michigan and his hobbies include birding, hiking, camping, canoeing, fly fishing, hunting and long walks with his wife Sheila and their golden retriever.

### BIRDING INFORMATION

Denise Wight will help you brush up on your winter bird vocalizations. Learning a few interesting bird songs and calls can help you track down species for your Christmas count area or just add enjoyment to a winter birding field trip.

Denise Wight is well known for her ear birding skills. She teaches a class in "Birding by Ear" at the Albany Adult School. We all admire her abilities to detect subtle differences in bird songs and calls that occur depending on the age of the bird or as seasons or habitats change.

### Meeting Schedule

The next general meeting of Mount Diablo Audubon Society will be **Thursday, December 1**, in the Camellia Room of The Gardens at Heather Farm, Walnut Creek.

7:00 PM Birding Information

7:25 PM Announcements

7:40 PM Refreshments,\* raffle

8:05 PM Speaker: **Dan Frisk**

\* Please remember to bring a cup.

Thursday, January 5: Mike Williams

DEDICATED TO HABITAT CONSERVATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

## President's Corner

By Jimm Edgar

We had another great rare bird sighting recently in Contra Costa County, actually right at Heather Farm; a Black-and-White Warbler. Just like last month when Paul Schorr found the Northern Waterthrush at Contra Loma the Black-and-White Warbler appeared one afternoon by the nature area at Heather Farm. First reported by our field trip chair, Hugh Harvey, (although the bird may have been seen the day before but not reported). There are only a handful of sightings of this warbler in Contra Costa County. We are waiting to hear back from former member Steve Glover on the records of this species. Even though Steve now lives in Texas he is the "keeper of records" for the county. I saw the bird on my second try on Sunday, October 30. When the bird showed up about 5 PM there were ten people looking for it and all got to see it well. The warbler seemed to have a regular schedule of where it would be at a time of day. I am sure, going by the reports on our East Bay Birders sightings, that scores got



Photo by Calvin D. Lou

to see the bird. What was really fun was the sense of camaraderie and accomplishment felt by us all. As one person noted while I was watching the bird, you usually go out

## Welcome New Members

Serina Culleton

Moraga

Ariana Rickard

Walnut Creek

to look and fail. Maybe we will find it on the Christmas Bird Count.

Speaking of Christmas Bird Counts, they are coming up in December. The Central Contra Costa count will be Saturday, December 17 and the East County Count on Tuesday, December 20. We will have sign-ups at our meeting or you can contact either me or co-compiler, Maury Stern. Our numbers are in the *Quail*.

I hope many of you saw the article in the SF Chronicle on 10/15. The article was on the state of the birds and the title was "Majority of bird species doing better." The article talked about how conservation efforts and restoration plans were making a difference on birds. Good news.

## Observations

By Maury Stern

Submit Contra Costa County sightings to [mbstern2@yahoo.com](mailto:mbstern2@yahoo.com) or (925) 284-5980 or send to [EBB\\_Sightings@yahoo.com](mailto:EBB_Sightings@yahoo.com).

More migrants arrived for winter residency and a few late-leaving migrants were seen. The most exciting bird of the period was the Black-and-White Warbler at the Heather Farm pond seen first by AH on 10/27 and seen until 11/2 by HH, RH, FS, C&TW, PS, CL, JH, GR, AL.

A flock of 8 Wood Ducks came to Las Trampas Creek on 10/15 and continued into November about a quarter-mile upstream from the staging area of the Lafayette-Moraga Bike Trail near Olympic Blvd. and Pleasant Hill Road in Lafayette. This is adjacent to the back yard of MS.

On 10/23 2 Eurasian Wigeons were at Albany Bulb on the Contra Costa County side. JH.

A Hooded Merganser was a first-time visitor at Contra Loma RP in Antioch 10/28. P&NS.

MW saw a Golden Eagle fly over her Concord back yard near the Concord Pa-

vilion on 10/20, and P&NS saw 3 near the Antioch/Brentwood boundary on 11/6.

On 11/2 TD saw or heard 5 Great Horned Owls at dusk in Tilden RP.

3 Burrowing Owls were seen in Brentwood by P&NS on 11/6.

BH found a dead Common Poorwill on North Gate Road in Mount Diablo SP. 10/12.

On 10/15, DW found late-leaving Hammond's, Pacific-Slope, and Olive-sided Flycatchers in Tilden RP.

A late Cassin's Vireo was found by AL in the Diablo Foothills/ Mount Diablo SP area on 10/16.

Hermit Thrush was seen on 10/15 by MS in his Lafayette yard and by P&NS in their Antioch yard on 10/19.

A Varied Thrush was in his Lafayette yard on 11/8. MS.

BD saw a Sage Thrasher at the Richmond Landfill Loop on 10/11.

A Cedar Waxwing flock flew over her Concord yard 10/18. MW.

A Phainopepla was at Black Diamond RP on 11/4. P&NS.

SD saw a Black-throated Gray Warbler at Miller-Knox RP in Point Richmond on 10/17.

P&NS saw Rufous-crowned Sparrows at Black Diamond Mines RP on 11/4.

A Brewer's Sparrow was at the Richmond Landfill Loop on 10/11. BD.

Lincoln Sparrows were at the Diablo Foothills on 10/11, AL, and in her back yard 10/20. MW.

SD saw White-throated Sparrow at Marina Bay in Richmond on 10/17, and LL saw one in Tilden RP 10/21, as did HH and JR in her back yard in Alamo on 10/21.

AK saw a Black-headed Grosbeak in his Richmond yard on 10/16.

TD Taite Darlington, SD Sheila Dickie, BD Bob Dunn, JH John Harrison, HH Hugh Harvey, RH Rosita Harvey, JHa Jack Hayden, AH Allen Hirsch, BH Bob Hislop, AK Alan Krakauer, AL Albert Linkowski, LL Laura Look, CL Calvin Lou, JR Jean Richmond, GR Gail Ryujin, FS Fred Safier, P&NS Paul and Nancy Schorr, MS Maury Stern, DW Denise Wight, C&TW Chris and Teri Wills, MW Marilyn Wojcik.





# Field Trip Schedule

By Hugh Harvey

## December

3-4 Saturday/Sunday ..... Sacramento Refuges  
 8 Thursday ..... Niles Area  
 17 Saturday ..... Christmas Count/Central County  
 20 Tuesday ..... Christmas Count/East County

## January

8 Sunday ..... Christmas Count/Rarity Chase  
 14 Saturday ..... Putah Creek  
 20 Friday ..... Lake Merritt/Arrowhead Marsh  
 28 Saturday ..... Las Gallinas/Rush Creek/Shollenberger

## February

4 Saturday ..... Thornton Area/Cosumnes Preserve  
 9 Thursday ..... Grizzly Island  
 15 Wednesday ..... Sunol Regional Park  
 25-26 Sat./Sun. .... Los Banos/Panoche Valley

### ② Saturday/Sunday, December 3-4 Sacramento Refuges

Leader: Terry Colborn at [tlcgdc@aol.com](mailto:tlcgdc@aol.com) or 916.705.8991.

This weekend field trip to several refuges in the northern Sacramento Valley will feature a number of habitats to view thousands of wintering waterfowl. On Saturday we'll tour Sacramento NWR, 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. 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. 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. In the afternoon we'll bird the Sutter Buttes area. 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 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.

Space is limited and carpooling is essential. Contact the trip leader to register and for specific directions. There are several hotels in Williams; early room reservations are recommended.

*The Quail* is published monthly except January and August by Mount Diablo Audubon Society, P.O. Box 53, Walnut Creek, CA 94597-0053. *The Quail* is printed on 30% post-consumer waste recycled paper. **The deadline for the January-February issue is December 13.**

### ② Thursday, December 8 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 Sunday, January 8 Christmas Count/Rarity Chase

Leader: Bingham Gibbs, 838,9257.

This trip will attempt to find as many of the unusual birds found on the Christmas Counts as possible. Last year, after starting at McNabney Marsh, the group proceeded to Martinez Regional shoreline before continuing to the East County area. We found 104 species in Contra Costa County. Call leader for meeting place and time. Bring lunch and drinks.

## Come birding with us.

Field trips are open to members and non-members, beginners and advanced birders. Weather or other contingencies may require changes. For updates, visit the MDAS website at [www.diabloaudubon.com/index.php](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 +, possibly rough terrain

Category ③: Difficult, extensive walking on rough terrain.

Carpool locations: **Sycamore Valley Road Park and Ride Lot**—Just south of Danville, exit I-680 at Sycamore Valley Road to the east; the Park and Ride lot is on the left.

Our Mount Diablo Audubon Chapter is a conservation organization. As such, we encourage members to consider meeting at the carpool point to pick up or ride with others. It is important that given the cost of gasoline, those who ride with others offer to pay some of this cost. Don't forget about any bridge tolls or park entry fees on some of our longer trips.



These birds nest in underground tunnels. They were featured on the Canadian five-dollar bill issued between 1986 and 2002.

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

**BDEEEFGHIIKLNRS**

# Trip Reports

**Berkeley–Emeryville Shoreline, October 19.** Our group of 5 bird watchers saw 61 species on our field trip to the El Cerrito shoreline. Patchy morning fog opened to bright sun with a slight breeze off the Bay. Notable species: Pelagic Cormorant on a rock within 30 feet of viewing, Long-Billed Curlew, Horned Grebe, Brown Pelican, Black Turnstone, Townsend's Warbler, and Red breasted Nuthatch at eye level and within 20 feet of viewing. At Berkeley Aquatic Park we had Marbled Godwit, Willet, Greater Yellow Legs, Semipalmated Plover, Black-necked Stilt and American Avocet all in one shoreside flock.

*Kent Fickett*

**Abbott's Lagoon, October 29.** The Abbott's Lagoon field trip remains a popular event with MDAS members. A cloudless blue sky with no wind greeted us as the 12 participants left the trailhead; the temperature was already in the mid 60s. The usual Sparrows (White-crowned and Song) accompanied us as we started out down the trail. A sole Fox Sparrow was a nice early addition, as was a flock of Tricolored Blackbirds. At the pond to the left of the trail some of us were delighted to catch a glimpse of a Virginia Rail and Sora dashing between clumps of rushes. On the north



Photo by David Hutton

side of the upper reaches of the Lagoon we were fortunate to find two American Bitterns. Ducks had started to return to the upper Lagoon, with Gadwall and American Wigeon well represented. Crossing the bridge to the lower Lagoon we found 5 species of Grebe (Horned, Eared, Pied-billed, Clark's and Western) together with many Surf Scoters and a few Northern Pintail. Waders along the edge of the Lagoon included Dunlin and Sanderling, as well as Western and Least Sandpipers. Reaching the beach and turning north, we were fortunate to come across at least 12 Snowy Plovers, well camouflaged in the sand. Lunch was enjoyed in our usual spot in the dunes on our favorite log. Several raptors were observed, adding to the day's sightings, Red-tailed Hawk, Osprey, White-tailed Kite and Northern Harrier. On returning to the trailhead and completing our list, we found we had encountered 59 species, seen or heard.

*David Hutton*

**Solano County Raptors, November 8.** On a cloudy but mild fall day, eleven MDAS members and guests went afield to bird the rural areas of southeastern Solano County noted for wintering raptors and Mountain Plovers. As it turned out, this venture was correctly and most prominently billed as a "raptor run".

Certainly, birds of prey account for most of the day's highlights, especially for one of the guests. At the introduction, one guest described himself as "bicoastal", living and working for part of the year in both California and Massachusetts. He stated that four of the raptor species we saw were "lifers" for him. Early on along the birding route, we saw our first, of five, Ferruginous Hawks. In addition, we had three Prairie Falcons, and one Golden Eagle, Merlin, Cooper's Hawk and White-tailed Kite. There were numerous Red-tailed Hawks, Northern Harriers and American Kestrels. We also saw three Great Horned Owls and one Burrowing Owl. On the other hand, the Mountain Plovers did not make themselves apparent. However, there were many Killdeer and one Black-bellied Plover observed. Other highlights include several flocks of Long-billed Curlew, numerous Loggerhead Shrikes and large, still colorful flocks, 200 plus, of both House Finches and American Goldfinches. By day's end, the group tallied 68 species.

*Gary Fregien*

**Antioch Dunes and Dow Wetlands, November 9.** Susan Euing, a US Fish & Wildlife Service biologist, gave us a quick verbal history

of the Antioch Dunes NWR, then we walked around the western portion known as the Stamm Unit. We learned about the endangered Lange's Metalmark Butterfly, Contra Costa Wallflower and Antioch Dunes Evening Primrose. We also learned about Naked Stem Buckwheat, the host plant for the butterfly. On our walk we had a variety of birds, including Belted Kingfisher, Common Gallinule and a



Antioch Dunes and Mount Diablo

particularly busy large flock of American Goldfinches. At the Eastern portion of the property, known as the Sardis Unit, we saw a Red-tailed Hawk being harassed by Ravens. We heard Soras at both sections of the refuge. Lunch was eaten at the Dow Wetlands where we heard more Soras plus Virginia Rail, more Common Gallinules, and we saw pairs of White-tailed Kites and Northern Harriers. The 13 participants tallied 41 species.

*Hugh B Harvey and Kent Fickett*

## DFG Lands Pass Reminder

A reminder. Birders visiting Grizzly Island, Gray Lodge, and Los Banos Wildlife Areas, or Elkhorn Slough Ecological Reserve must verify that all members of your party have a prepaid Day Use or Annual DFG Lands Pass. Except at Elkhorn Slough, these passes cannot be purchased at the site, but must be secured in advance at a DFG license sales office, a license agent, or online. Passes purchased online, will be mailed to the customer. Allow 15 days for delivery of your pass. If you need a pass for use sooner than 15 days, please purchase a pass from a license agent or DFG license sales office. In Contra Costa County, license agents include sporting goods stores such as Big 5, Sports Authority, and Sports Chalet, CVS pharmacies, KMart and WalMart stores, and Raley's markets. If you do not have the above items, you will not be issued an entry permit.





Bridled Titmouse. Jackie Lewis photo.

quiet, and the spectacular night skies, which draw astronomers from around the world.

Last winter was extremely cold, with the temperature reaching zero degrees in Portal, the coldest temperature in decades. It was also very dry last winter—very little rain for months. This cold, dry winter set the stage for a disaster. The forest was incredibly dry—the moisture content was less than that of kiln-dried wood. Everywhere there was unburned debris that had accumulated over decades. The risk of a catastrophic fire was very high.

**May 9, 2011 Disaster!** This was not a Mother's Day to remember fondly. A camp fire in an illegal alien/smuggler's camp spreads to the tinder dry grass and foliage. It is a very windy day. The fire spread over 9,000 acres in one day, threatening Portal and surrounding area. Residents are engulfed in smoke and told to evacuate. The fire got very close to town—it came just over the ridge and top of the mountain. The wind changed direction—no longer blowing toward Portal. If not for the wind change, it is probable that Portal and a great portion of Cave Creek would have been lost.

It is hard to describe how hot, dry, windy and dangerous the fire was. In one area that the fire was expected to reach in 30 days, 60 MPH winds came up and the fire reached that area in 3 hours.

This is the second large fire in consecutive years that originated in the same illegals' camping spot in the mountains a few miles from Portal. The 2010 fire started later in June, closer to the summer monsoons which start in July. The 2011 fire consumed over 222,000 acres, 12% was severely burned including the soil and 74% had low severity burn. The cost was over \$51 million to fight the fire requiring over 1100 firefighters for 7+ weeks.

Many of the acres that had controlled or low burning have the potential of surviving. The huge buildup of flammables has been

extensively reduced. In other areas the soil has been sterilized by the heat and it looks like "moonscape".

**Birds** Local ornithologists feel that birds either did not breed this season or the breeding failed, because of the fire. The different species were seen as usual, but they were not behaving normally.

The Elegant Trogon census was down about 50% from last year's count, which was down some from 2009, also a "fire" year. It was difficult to judge the fire's impact on hummingbird species. According to Jackie Lewis of The George Walker House (super place to stay at and bird) and longtime hummingbird bander in Paradise (7 miles from Portal), the banding numbers were way down this year at both Portal and at the Southwest Research Station, south of Portal. For the hummingbird migration in September "numbers were up from recent years." Jackie also operates a hummingbird banding station during the summer. During banding, the number of breeding hummers was down noticeably.

The fire and smoke did not seem to have a large impact on backyard feeder birds. Backyard bird feeding here is rather exotic as compared to the Bay Area. There are yards here with lifetime species counts of 150–180. It is not impossible during the "high birding seasons" to see 8–9 hummer species in a day.

For some reason there was an invasion of Painted Buntings this summer. Can you imagine having 20–30 in your yard? In general, fall migrant numbers and number of species were way down from normal years.

**Rebirth?** About six weeks ago, a group was allowed into a portion of the heavily burned area to assess the situation. According to local bird guide and naturalist Narca Moore-Craig, "What they saw at [heavily burned] Rustler surprised everyone. Normally after an intense crown fire, such as the one that roared through Rustler Park, the soil is sterilized by the high heat, and almost no plants grow for a very long time, possibly years. Even the mycorrhizae—the fungi associated with plant roots which allow seedlings to germinate—need to be reintroduced to sterilized soils. ... No one was prepared for the lush growth of wildflowers and ground cover which greeted everyone at Rustler Park. How can botanists account for the unexpected growth? After puzzling over the situation, they settled on this theory: the backburn done about two weeks before the crown fire blazed through



Magnificent Hummingbird. Jackie Lewis photo.

must have removed enough fuel that temperatures at ground level never got high enough to sterilize the soil. Whatever allowed the strong recovery to take hold ... botanists are seeing post-fire plants that they've rarely seen here, and the burnt aspen groves are surging with new growth."

According to Reed Peters of Friends Cave Creek Canyon and owner of Cave Creek Ranch (a great place to stay): "while fire is good for Ponderosa pines, there is concern about what will happen to the areas of other mixes of conifers and oaks. There are many visible signs of new growth around the bases of those burned trees. Hopefully, the deer and other critters won't eat that all down."

We found many instances of new growth starting on the base of partially burned trees and shrubs. It was startling to see acres of ferns and other bright green plants coming up in forests of dead trees. The forest service did aerial seeding of grasses in many of the burned out sections. This grass will help hold the soil in place until the natural plants return.

According to Reed Peters the black bears had a very hard year. It was a very cold winter, the acorn crop was bad, and then the fire destroyed most of their food. It is estimated there were 100–250 bears in these mountains before the fire. How many survived is not known, but there were 7–8 driven to the Portal area for food. They destroyed lots of bird feeders (we lost two). Thankfully they seem now to be moving back to the high country for their hibernation! It was fun to have in the yard once or twice, but that's enough.

We are really looking forward to seeing the rebirth of this incredible area. This, hopefully, is once in a lifetime opportunity you owe yourself to witness.

## NEWS FROM WILD BIRDS UNLIMITED



### California Birds Grow Larger

Here is an article you might like:

Researchers in California have found that birds around San Francisco Bay and Point Reyes National Shoreline have slowly gotten bigger over the last 27 to 40 years. The finding is certainly interesting—most of all, because it counters some conventional wisdom on how animals respond to climate change.



A well-known ecological rule, called Bergmann's Rule, states that animals tend to be larger at higher latitudes. It is believed that this occurs because larger animals are better able to conserve body heat. Bergmann's Rule, then, would suggest that animals will shrink in size as their native climates get warmer.

"We had the good fortune to find an unexpected result—a gem in research science," the researcher at the San Francisco State explained, "but we were then left with the puzzle of figuring out what was going on."

They came up with several possibilities, all indicating that birds—and ultimately other animals—may respond to climate change in unexpected ways. One theory is that the larger body size was caused by fat stores which have increased in response to increasingly common severe weather events. Another was that changes in plant ecology could have altered the birds' diet, leading to increased body sizes.

Regardless of the specific mechanism, it is clear that climate change is causing significant shifts in traits—like body size—that don't usually exhibit much flexibility.

Though the finding was unexpected, however, it was not necessarily all bad news. "It gave me a little more hope," Study Co-Author Gretchen LeBuhn explained, "that these birds are able to respond—hopefully in time—to changes in climate."

Written by David DeFranza, Treehugger



Mike and Anne Eliot  
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## New Bird Species Identified

Researchers have found a new bird species in the United States. Based on a specimen found in a burrow on Midway Atoll among a colony of petrels during the Pacific Ocean Biological Survey Program in 1963, biologists have described a new species of seabird, Bryan's Shearwater (*Puffinus bryani*). Scientists at the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute confirmed it to be an entirely new species, based on DNA evidence.

Bryan's Shearwater is the first new species reported from the United States and the Hawaiian Islands since the Po'ouli was described from the forests of Maui in 1974.

Bryan's Shearwater is the smallest shearwater known to exist. It is black and white with a black or blue-gray bill and blue legs. These findings have been published in a paper, "A New Species of Shearwater (*Puffinus*) Recorded from Midway Atoll, Northwestern Hawaiian Islands," in the current issue of *The Condor*.

The specimen was the only observation during the Survey Program, which occurred on islands and atolls throughout the North Pacific from 1963 until 1968. Given that Bryan's Shearwaters have remained undiscovered until now, they must be very rare and possibly extinct.

## Belted Kingfisher ♦ *Ceryle alcyon*



You will likely hear the rattle of a Belted Kingfisher before you see it fly along a stream or over a lake. These

birds are uncommon in Contra Costa County, but they are indeed here year around. Except during nesting, they are solitary birds.

In May or June, the female will join a male who has established a feeding territory, and together they dig a tunnel into the side of a stream-side bank. They use their strong claws and sturdy beak to excavate about three inches in diameter and six feet into the ground, terminating with a large rounded cavity. Belted Kingfishers sometimes share their tunnel with swallows, who make small rooms off the tunnel walls.



Sketch by Megan Sandri

another month. By dropping insects in the water beneath the youngster's perch, parents teach their offspring to dive. Teaching offspring how to fish and feed is a three week process. After the mating season,

the pairs break up and the young are independent.

Only the female Belted Kingfisher sports the red belt. Thus John Audubon claimed that the species was misnamed, and he



When 5 to 8 eggs hatch—simultaneously after three weeks of incubation—the parents bring 8-11 small fish for each bird each day for about two weeks. Then, with fish in their bills, the parents coax the young from the burrow for the first time, and will continue to feed them occasionally for

would call it United States Kingfisher instead. Two other kingfishers occur in the country, but only in south Texas. They are the similar Ringed Kingfisher, and the Green Kingfisher. Worldwide, there are 91 species of kingfisher including the Kookaburra of Australia.



# Ornithology Opportunities

**California Department of Fish and Game Swan Tours.** Saturdays at 9:30 AM and 1:00 PM, through January. (December 10 afternoon trip is full.) Yuba County, north of Marysville.

Before winter takes hold in the Arctic, more than 100,000 tundra swans migrate along the Pacific Flyway from their remote and solitary breeding grounds to spend winter in California. The swan tour offers participants a spectacular opportunity to encounter these stately, elegant birds.

Tours are led by naturalists and each tour is limited to 30 participants. The tour explores an area called District 10, a 23,000-acre expanse of privately-owned rice fields and restored habitat. This area boasts one of the largest seasonal concentrations of Tundra Swans in the Central Valley, as well as a wide variety of other species, including ducks, geese, shorebirds, herons, egrets, Sandhill Cranes and raptors. Tour groups will caravan around the site on county roads, stopping for wildlife viewing opportunities—little walking is required. Dress for the weather and bring drinking water and snacks. Binoculars and field guides are recommended. A restroom is available at the meeting/staging area. A \$7 donation is requested for each adult participant. Donations are used to support this program. Donate online or send a check to: California Wildlife Foundation, 428 13th St., 10th Floor, Suite A, Oakland, CA 94612.

The 16th Annual Celebration of the **Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival** will be held January 13-16. The Saturday evening keynote speaker will be Jon Dunn, who is considered one of the primary experts on field identification in North America. Every Martin Luther King weekend over 450 birders visit Morro Bay, California, a Globally Important Bird Area, to see, photograph, and learn more about birds. Morro Bay is located halfway between Los Angeles and San Francisco on the Pacific Flyway. The area offers pristine beaches, beautiful state parks, an excellent natural history museum, panoramic views of the Pacific Ocean and, best of all, thousands of birds. Over 200 species are usually sighted during the Festival weekend. <http://morrobaybirdfestival.org/index.htm>.

The City of Galt in Collaboration with the Cosumnes River Preserve and Galt Joint Union Elementary School District are pleased to bring you the 5th Annual **Winter Bird Festival**. Many migratory and resident birds call Galt their winter home. Guided Tours offer an exciting opportunity to see the winter birds that call the Central Valley home! Hop on a bus and have your binoculars ready! Saturday, January 28. [www.ci.galt.ca.us/index.aspx?page=495](http://www.ci.galt.ca.us/index.aspx?page=495).

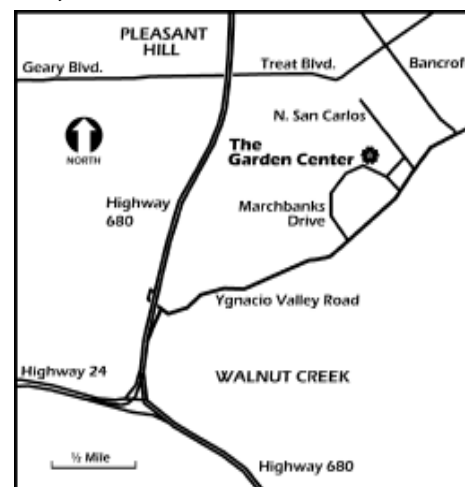
**Snow Goose Festival.** January 26-29, Chico. It will be a "Big Year" for the 13th Annual Snow Goose Festival of the Pacific Flyway. Greg Miller, one of three birders chronicled in the book "The Big Year" and the movie of the same name, will be the keynote speaker. Greg has also offered to co-lead a field trip, and he will be available for a book signing. [www.snowgoosefestival.org](http://www.snowgoosefestival.org).

**"Be grateful for luck.  
Pay the thunder no mind—  
Listen to the birds.  
And don't hate nobody."**

*Eubie Blake (1887-1983)*

## 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

President: Jimm Edgar, 510-658-2330  
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☐ Please enroll my family and me as a member of Mount Diablo Audubon Society for \$25 for one year. Your membership dues are tax deductible.

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*Painted Bunting. Steve Maslowski photo.*

## The Chiricahuas ♦ Fire and Birds

**By Mike Williams**

Southeast Arizona is considered by many birders as one of the five best birding areas in or near the contiguous United States after Point Pelee, Cape May, Florida and the Texas coast. I was very fortunate to have been directed to this area by MDAS' Jean Richmond as a great place to go birding in 1991. What a trip—175 species, 150 lifers! Over the years Jean has sent many MDAS and other birders to SE Arizona, giving them detailed instructions on where to go, what to expect to see, and more. Thanks Jean for sharing.

The Chiricahua Mountains are the largest of the "Sky Islands" of SE Arizona, stretching over 40 miles in length and up to 25 miles wide. These are mountains that run north-south, rising steeply out of the desert floor to over 9700 feet and are the "single most diversified land, ... plant and animal community in the entire United States" (R. Taylor, *Birder's Guide to SE Arizona*). The Chiricahuas are Arizona's easternmost mountain range and are only a few miles from New Mexico. They

are incredibly rugged and beautiful, very reminiscent of the Sierra.

Because of their height, water and flora, the Chiricahua Mountains and other sky islands attract many Mexican bird migrants and dispersals that are rarely seen elsewhere in the United States. This includes Elegant Trogon, numerous hummingbird species (with such great names—White-eared, Violet-crowned, Magnificent, and Blue-throated), Mexican Chickadee, Arizona Woodpecker and many more.

Cave Creek Canyon in the Portal area is called the "Yosemite of Arizona". The mountains rise up many thousands of feet above the scrub desert. We have been birding in many places in the US and overall, consider this the most beautiful.

This is such an incredible area for bird watching! In addition to the exotic species that may come north in post-breeding dispersal, this area has numerous species that seem to breed only here, such as Elegant Trogon,



*Yellow-eyed Junco. Steve Maslowski photo*

Mexican Chickadee, Montezuma Quail, Blue-throated Hummingbird and more.

The hamlet of Portal is the birding "headquarters" of the area. It is a very birder friendly community—it is also incredibly quiet—cell phones don't work and you are over one hour from the closest stop light. You will love the

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