



the Quail

Mount Diablo Audubon Society

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

www.diabloaudubon.com/index.php

Volume 50, Number 5

February 2005

Can't Happen Here?—Think Again • Jay Holcomb

In January 1971, two tankers collided beneath the Golden Gate Bridge spilling 900,000 gallons of crude oil into San Francisco Bay. Little was known about oiled bird care but volunteers from all over the Bay Area showed up to try. Out of 7,000 oiled birds, 300 birds survived.

Within months, the International Bird Rescue Research Center (IBRRC) was formed. The primary goals of the IBRRC were to develop oiled wildlife cleaning and rehabilitation techniques, provide ongoing research, and provide oiled wildlife response management capabilities during oil spills. In 2001 the IBRRC moved from Aquatic Park in Berkeley to its new 12,000 square-foot rehabilitation facility in Fairfield shared with the California Department of Fish and Game.

IBRRC has cared for more than 150 species of wild birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians, including endangered species, in over 150 oil spills in 11 states and nine different countries. With an oil spill response team of 30 wildlife experts and partnerships with other rescue and government organizations, IBRRC has played a lead role in the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska, the 2000 Treasure oil spill in Cape Town, South Africa and the 2002–2003 Prestige oil spill in Spain.

Jay Holcomb, Executive Director, joined the IBRRC in 1986 and will share with us his nearly 30 years of experience in animal rehabilitation. He began his career at the Marin Humane Society, helping to found the wildlife rehabilitation program at the Marin Wildlife Center.

During the Exxon Valdez Spill, Jay pioneered the search and rescue program in Prince William Sound, the largest of its kind ever attempted. In addition, Jay managed the entire 6-month rehabilita-



A pipeline that cuts through the bird rich Suisun Marsh ruptured on April 27, 2004, spilling an estimated 60,000 gallons of diesel fuel, forming the sheen seen here. The break was 20 miles due north of our meeting place at Heather Farms. U.S. Coast Guard Photo.

tion program caring for over 1,600 birds. Jay has served on the Board of Directors for the National Wildlife Rehabilitators Association and the International Wildlife Rehabilitation Council, an association of wildlife rehabilitators and centers. In 1996 he was awarded the NWRA Lifetime Achievement Award, the highest award given in the field of wildlife rehabilitation, recognizing his pioneering efforts and dedication to wildlife conservation.

Flight Plans

We get snowed in, rained out, blown away, frozen stiff, and socked in. Frankly weather has the ability to put many a crimp in our plans. So how do the birds plan around and survive this transition time as winter plays tug of war with spring? We are taking a step forward as the days get longer (my miniature rose is

blooming) but two steps back with sudden temperature drops in bone chilling dark days. Diana Granados of Native Bird Connections will briefly discuss some of the adaptations birds have when hunkering down by the fire or pulling out an umbrella are not options.

Meeting Schedule

The next MDAS general meeting will be **Thursday, February 3**, in the Camellia Room of The Gardens at Heather Farm, 1540 Marchbanks Dr., Walnut Creek (see map on page 7).

6:30 PM Doors open

7:00 PM Birding Information

7:25 PM Announcements and business

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

8:05 PM Program

* Please remember to bring a cup.

Can You Help MDAS Raise Funds?

As a member of Mount Diablo Audubon Society, you share a commitment to preserve wildlife habitat, to promote environmental knowledge especially focusing on our youth, and to enhance public appreciation of the natural world with an emphasis on birds. These are the stated goals of our organization.

Are you someone who has experience in fund-raising? Would you be willing to volunteer your talents to assist with our current fund-raising campaigns and to work on some new endeavors? To continue to move forward with our programs of conservation and advocacy, MDAS will require funds that are not presently flowing in.

President Mike Williams would be eager to talk to you about specific needs. Please call him at 925-798-0303.

Mount Diablo Audubon is also looking for individuals to join our cadre of enthusiastic volunteers who are the workers behind the scenes, making our conservation programs work. There's a place for you, according to your interests. Are you a field trip leader? Can you help with placing Audubon Adventures in the schools? Please talk to Volunteer Coordinator Shirley Ellis at 925-938-3703.

Discover the Delta

The Delta Science Center is sponsoring a two-hour cruise on the Delta on Saturday, February 19, 10 AM to 12 noon. The cruise will give passengers a closer view of this water wonderland, its history, and wildlife. The cost of the cruise on the 60-passenger research vessel Brownlee is \$35 per person. Space is limited. To reserve your space, call Joel Summerhill at (925) 753-0862 by February 14, 2005.

The Brownlee will depart from the Antioch Marina at Humphrey's Restaurant (One Marina Plaza). You may enjoy having lunch at Humphrey's after the cruise.

The Delta Science Center has been a project of the Mount Diablo Audubon Society for many years. Phase 1 of construction is finally underway near Big Break Marina in Oakley.

Nora Bain Wins Mott Award

This year's recipient of the William Penn Mott, Jr. Environmental Award is educator and bird enthusiast Nora Bain. A long-time member of Mount Diablo Audubon Society, Bain is being recognized for her outstanding use of our community's unique ecological assets.

The William Penn Mott, Jr. Awards program of the National Society for Park Resources officially recognizes outstanding accomplishments in the field of recreation and parks.

Nora Bain will receive the commendation at an Awards Dinner hosted by the Orinda Association on Sunday, January 30 at the Orinda Country Club. This event will also honor the Educational Foundation of Orinda, named Orinda Volunteer of the Year for 2004, for their service to the schools and students for 25 years. Please call (925) 254-0800 for tickets to this event, which are \$65.

A native of England, Nora Bain taught early childhood education there and also in San Francisco before moving to Orinda in 1956. For many years, Nora shared her extensive environmental

Bird Check List

MDAS has published a new check list of Birds of Northern California to update the version last revised in 1998. There have been a number of changes over the years, and this new list incorporates changes in taxonomy and nomenclature as published by the American Ornithological Union (AOU) in the July, 2004 issue of *The Auk*.

The *A.O.U. Check-list of North American Birds* is the official source on the taxonomy of birds found in North and Middle America, including adjacent islands. It lists 2038 species. Western Field Ornithologists' California Bird Records Committee (CBRC) has delimited these species to generate a California Bird List of the 624 species found in the State, ten of which are non-native species, and two of which have been extirpated within historical times (Sharp-tailed Grouse, California Condor). An additional six species have been recorded in

Welcome New Members

Dyann Blaine	Walnut Creek
Dan Bylin	Walnut Creek
Carol Cantor	Oakland
Louise Cracknell	San Ramon
Steve Huckabone	Livermore
Greta Kemp	Danville
Ruth and Ed Kenney	Alamo
Donna Kimura	Concord
Laura Look	Pinole
Margaret O'Connell	Walnut Creek
Marian Porter	San Ramon
Josephine Rankin	Antioch
Gerry and Nancy Salsig	Martinez
Kathleen Wacker	Martinez
Janet Weil	Concord
Peter and Dolores White	Martinez

knowledge with others by conducting bird watching classes through the Orinda Community Center. She was also a docent at Audubon Canyon Ranch in Marin County, and did shorebird census work at the Ranch. Nora has also been a frequent field trip leader for Mount Diablo Audubon. She is certainly qualified for this accolade.

the State, but are of uncertain natural occurrence.

Steve Glover, a member of the CBRC, has generously donated his time to present a selection of Northern California birds, omitting any species that has fewer than 10 records in the area. There are 461 listings, compared to 423 on the 1998 publication.

Those familiar with finding Loons and Grebes at the top of the taxonomy hierarchy will be surprised to find that these two families have been demoted, and Anseriformes—Geese, Swans, and Ducks—have come to the fore.

Another notable change is the addition of Cackling Goose, as noted in the September issue of *The Quail*. Some familiar names have changed: Rock Dove is now Rock Pigeon; Common Snipe is now Wilson's Snipe.

The new lists are designed for use in the field, and they will be available for sale at MDAS meetings for twenty-five cents.

NEWS FROM WILD BIRDS UNLIMITED



BIRDSEED SALE
All 20 lb. to 25 lb. bags
SUET SALE
Buy 4 — Get 1 FREE
(Sale February 2–21, 2005)

Activities at Wild Birds Unlimited

- February 5, 10:30–3:00. **Native Bird Connections** will present on-going programs with a Peregrine and a Prairie Falcon.
- **The Great Backyard Bird Count** is Friday–Monday, Feb. 18–21. Wild Birds Unlimited and National Audubon Society are major sponsors of this event. You count birds in your backyard and report the results online or bring them to WBU. It's a great web site to investigate at www.birdsource.org/gbbc.

It's fascinating to watch the maps explode with bird reportings.

Bird feeding tips:

- This has been the fall and winter of the Pine Siskins. It has been 9–10 years since we have seen them in such large numbers. Flocks of 50–100 are being seen in Martinez, Lafayette, and Moraga. They often travel with goldfinches. Both species love thistle (niger) seed and readily come to bird feeders.
- Suet feeding is a great way to attract birds to your backyard. Suet is rendered (cleaned) beef fat to which various ingredients are added such as nuts, peanut butter, insects, or fruit. These additions make suet very attractive to birds, especially in cold and wet weather. It is then formed into easy-to-handle cakes.
- Birds readily attracted to suet include woodpeckers, jays, chickadees, titmice, and nuthatches.

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

Visit us at www.wbupleasanthill.com

Observations

By Steve Glover

Two male and one female **Redhead** were at Clifton Court Forebay near Byron on 12/10 (DW). At least 6 were there on 12/11 (SG, FO). A female **Red-breasted Merganser** at Clifton Court Forebay on 12/11 was at a site where they are regular in winter (SG).

An adult **Bald Eagle** over Jewel Lake on 12/21 was a rare sighting for Tilden Park (BB), though they are regular in winter at San Pablo Reservoir just to the east. An **Osprey** was at Marsh Creek Reservoir near Brentwood on 12/11 (SG, FO, JE, DL). A **Peregrine Falcon** was at Holland Tract near Knightsen on 12/22 (SG, JC, JT), a rarity for east county.

Clapper Rails continued at Meeker Slough, north of Point Isabel, the only publically accessible spot in the county for that beleaguered species. Two were there on 12/10 (GP) and again on 12/11 (LS).



Lutescent Warbler
Vermivora celata lutescens
Birds of Golden Gate Park
Joseph Mailliard
1930

A notably large flock of 200 **Long-billed Curlews** was along Lindeman Road near Clifton Court Forebay on 12/13 (DC).

Caspian Terns are summer residents in Contra Costa County and have never been recorded in winter, until this year. On 12/10 a single Caspian was at Holland Tract east of Knightsen (DW) and on 12/22 there were two birds present (JT, SG, JC). Except for a small wintering population around Humboldt Bay, Caspians are very rare in winter in Northern California.

A **Lewis's Woodpecker** was at Los Vaqueros Reservoir on 12/22 (DW).

A **Tropical Kingbird** in residential Walnut Creek on 12/21 was just the second for the county; the first was also in winter (CO).

A **Yellow-billed Magpie** well west of usual haunts near Bay Point on 12/18 was the first ever found on the Christmas Bird Count (KF, JS).

Two **Barn Swallows** near Bay Point on 12/18 were the first ever found on the Christmas Bird Count (KF, JS). Winter records of Barn Swallow have accumulated rapidly in Northern California in recent years.

A **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher** was at the Los Vaqueros Reservoir Dam on 12/22 (JA).

A **Townsend's Solitaire** in residential Moraga 12/5–12 may have marked the return of last year's bird, but in any event was not seen again (NW). Solitaires are sporadic winter visitors in the county, with most records emanating from Mount Diablo.

Two male **Black-throated Gray Warblers** were in residential Brentwood on 12/11 (SG, FO, JE, DL).

A female **Western Tanager** at Markham Park in Concord on 12/18 was a first for the Christmas Bird Count but the third time in four years one has been present at this park (FO, SG).

A **Green-tailed Towhee** in Orinda was found during the Oakland Christmas Bird Count on 12/19, providing a very rare winter record for the county (SO). A **Chipping Sparrow**, rare in winter, was in residential Brentwood on 12/11 (SG).

A female **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** was reported from an Orinda feeder on 12/11, but was not seen thereafter (JR). There are very few winter records for the county.

A total of 20 **Great-tailed Grackles** at McNabney Marsh near Martinez on 12/12 was the largest number yet recorded in Contra Costa County (PK).

Jeff Alvarez, Josiah Clark, David Coursey, Jimm Edgar, Kent Fickett, Steve Glover, Patrick King, Don Lewis, Sean O'Brien, Chet Ogan, Frances Oliver, Gary Palmer, Jim Roethe, Leonard Schwab, Joel Summerhill, Jim Tietz, Nat Weber, David Wimpfheimer

Field Trip Schedule

February

3 Thursday	Grizzly Island
5 Saturday	Bodega Bay
9 Wednesday	Concord City Parks
17 Thursday	Sunol
19 Saturday	Morgan Territory
23 Wednesday	Point Pinole

March

3 Thursday	Walnut Creek City Parks
5 Saturday	Bolinas-Five Brooks
10 Thursday	Berkeley Shoreline
16 Wednesday	San Leandro Reservoir
19 Saturday	Black Diamond Regional Park
24 Thursday	Huckleberry Preserve
30 Wednesday	Lagunitas-Bon Tempe

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

Field trips are open to members and non-members, beginners and masters. Weather or other contingencies may require changes. For updates, read the *Quail*, visit the MDAS website at www.diabloaudubon.com/index/php, or call the Audubon taped recording at (925) 283-8266. Trip directions and meeting times will be published in the *Quail*. Customary carpool expense is 37½ cents per mile, plus tolls and entry fees, shared among driver and riders. Category 1: Easy, little or no walking, smooth paths; Category 2: Moderate, one mile or more, possibly rough terrain; Category 3: Difficult, extensive walking on rough terrain.

February Field Trips

Thursday, February 3, **Grizzly Island**. Carpool leaves at 7 AM from southwest corner of Sun Valley parking lot. Meet at 8:15 AM at Refuge headquarters. Take I-680 north, then I-80 east to SR12. Follow SR12 through Fairfield; watch for sign to Grizzly Island Refuge on right and follow road to headquarters. Entry fee for refuge. Watch for raptors and Short-eared Owls along road; this is an outstanding area for raptors. Leader: Maury Stern, 284-5980. Category 1

Saturday, February 5, **Bodega Bay**. Carpool leaves at 7:30 AM from Acalanes Ave. off Pleasant Hill Rd. north of Highway 24. Meet at 9:15 AM at the Tides Restaurant in Bodega Bay. Alternate route to San Rafael Bridge: take Camino Pablo to El Sobrante, go 1½ miles east on I-80 to Richmond Parkway exit; turn left and go straight through stoplight. Cross the San Rafael Bridge. Go north on US101 to Washington St. exit in Petaluma. Go west on Bodega Hwy. to SR 1, turn right to Bodega Bay. The Tides is on left, opposite a Union '76 station. Shorebirds, rails, waterbirds, migrants. Call Pat MacEachern, 934-3041, for information.

Wednesday, February 9. **City Parks**. Meet at Howe-Homestead Park on Walnut Blvd. in Walnut Creek. We will explore several Walnut Creek and Concord parks for birding possibilities.

Bring lunch if desired. Leader: Lynn Lakso. 932-6367, evenings. Category 1.

Thursday, February 17. **Sunol Regional Park**. Carpool leaves at 8 AM from LaGonda Way in Danville. From I-680 southbound, exit on El Pintado, turn right, and right again onto LaGonda. From I-680 northbound, exit at El Cerro Blvd., Danville, turn left, then right on LaGonda, and drive about ¼ mile north to El Pintado. Or meet at 8:15 AM in the parking lot, Sunol Park. Go south on I-680 to Calaveras Rd. Go left under I-680 and drive 4 miles south on Calaveras Rd.; turn left on Geary Rd. and go 2 miles to park. Watch and listen for Wild Turkey along Geary Rd. Golden Eagles and other raptors, Rufous-crowned Sparrow, Dipper, and Canyon and Rock Wrens possible. Leader: Hugh Harvey, 932-4715. Category 3.

Saturday, February 19. **Morgan Territory**. Check the website for details.

Wednesday, February 23. **Point Pinole Regional Park**. Carpool leaves at 7:15 AM from Acalanes Ave., off Pleasant Hill Rd., just north of Hwy. 24. Meet at parking lot at the entrance from Richmond Parkway. Going south on I-80 take Richmond Parkway exit. Going north on I-580/80, take Cutting Blvd. to Richmond Parkway. Bay shore and marsh areas. Check the website for details. Category 1.

By Elizabeth Dickey

Backyard Bird Count

The 2005 Great Backyard Bird Count is to encourage you to go out into America's Great Backyard—our public lands—and count birds. During the weekend of February 18–21, take your family to a National Park, National Wildlife Refuge or other public space with a bird checklist, and count the birds you see. Then return to your computer and enter the birds you've seen through the Internet. Your sightings will be added to those of others to present a full picture of our bird life.

This is the eighth year of the popular event, developed and managed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society, with sponsorship from Wild Birds Unlimited. People are encouraged to enjoy the birds around them by going out into the "Great Backyard" during any or all of the count days and keeping track of the highest numbers of each bird species they see. For information, or to report sightings, go to www.birdsource.org/gbbc. Those who would like to participate but who aren't online can try their local library. Wild Birds Unlimited will accept observations and relay them to Cornell Lab. There's no fee or registration.

During last February's Great Backyard Bird Count, bird enthusiasts across North America submitted almost 50,000 checklists totaling 573 species, more than four million birds. Scientists can learn a lot by knowing where the birds are. Now that winter has gripped much of the continent, what are our birds doing? Everyone's contribution is important. It doesn't matter whether you identify, count, and report the 5 species coming to your backyard feeder or the 75 species you see during a day's outing to a wildlife refuge.



This species comes in two different color forms determined by genetic differences. Oddly, individuals almost always mate with a bird of the opposite morph. Almost all these birds breed in southern Canada, returning to the same nest area each year. Some birds regularly winter along the Pacific Coast, and are a rare and welcome visitor to back yards here.

Answer on Page 6

Moore Foundation Grant Helps Park District Double Size of Vasco Caves Regional Preserve

By Nancy Wenninger



Photo: Glenn Young

On December 14, 2004, the East Bay Regional Park District Board of Directors unanimously approved the purchase and permanent protection of 617 acres of important wildlife habitat in south-eastern Contra Costa County.

This region has one of the fastest growth rates in California. During the past ten years, the nearby City of Brentwood has experienced a 260% increase in population with a 40% increase in housing units. The expansions of Vasco Road, Byron Airport, and the Los Vaqueros Reservoir also threaten the wide variety of wildlife and high-quality habitat which need to be protected from urban encroachment and habitat fragmentation.

“This acquisition is a critical link in a 30-mile-long regional wildlife corridor,” said EBRPD General Manager Pat O’Brien. “Now, more than ever, it is important to preserve the remaining cultural and natural resources of the area. The people who live here deserve the quality of life provided by open space and recreation opportunities which could quickly disappear with future development.”

Generations of the Souza family have owned and ranched the property and surrounding lands along Vasco Road since 1940. The rolling grasslands and localized wetlands support special status species like California tiger salamander, California red-legged frog and longhorn fairy shrimp. In the 1970s, the California Department of Fish and Game designated the acquisition site an area of “statewide biological significance,” due to its unique combination of rare plant and animal species, cultural resources and geological features, including rock outcrops and vernal pools. The property also contains a large population of California ground squirrel, a keystone species whose success supports a number of other species, including the Golden Eagle, Burrowing Owl and San Joaquin kit fox.

Wind and open grasslands benefit the high concentration of raptors which forage on the Souza property. The abundance of wind, however, has also resulted in a conflict between these legally protected birds and wind turbines, an important source of “clean” energy. The ma-

chines in the Altamont Pass Wind Resource Area—which includes the Souza property—continue to have a significant unmitigated impact on raptors and other wildlife. The species most heavily impacted are raptors, primarily Golden Eagles, Red-tailed Hawks, Burrowing Owls and American Kestrels.

Three separate wind companies currently have leases for approximately 70 turbines on the Souza property. For the remainder of the leases, EBRPD will work proactively with the California Energy Commission, wind companies and environmental groups to seek solutions to mitigate wildlife impacts. EBRPD will have the opportunity to renegotiate the leases when they expire in 2014, and new terms could include removal or relocation of some or all of the turbines. In the interim, however, they will produce revenue which will be used by EBRPD for the restoration and management of the property.

The total purchase price for the Souza property was \$2,961,600. The acquisition was made possible in part by a \$1.5 million grant from the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, established in September 2000 by Intel co-founder Gordon Moore and his wife Betty. The Moore Foundation funds projects it believes will measurably improve the quality of life for future generations and support their principal areas of concern: environmental conservation, science, higher education and the San Francisco Bay Area.

“By acquiring the Souza property, the East Bay Regional Parks District will be establishing permanent protection for a region that has been designated as a high priority in the East Contra Costa Habitat Conservation Plan,” explained Marguerite Bachand, Senior Program Officer in the Bay Area program. “We are pleased to support EBRPD in their work to protect and manage 617 acres of critical wildlife habitat in a corridor that stretches from the Altamont Pass to Mount Diablo.”

Field Trip Reports

December 1, Hidden Lakes

Two members enjoyed a beautiful, clear, frosty morning walk along the chain of ponds at Hidden Lakes. The first sighting was of a large flock of Cedar Waxwings in the parking lot. Most of our common oak woodland birds were present though waterfowl were represented only by several Mallards and a Pied-billed Grebe. The most interesting sightings were of a Lark Sparrow and a Red-breasted Sapsucker. A total of 31 species were seen.

Lynn Lakso

December 4-5, Sacramento Refuges. Six birders enjoyed two beautiful but chilly days of birding at the Central Valley wildlife refuges. The group began with an early morning walk at the Sacramento River NWR and continued with driving tours of the area. We shared a pleasant dinner that evening in Yuba City and completed the weekend trip with a visit to Grey Lodge on Sunday.

We saw 88 species, including blue morphs of both the Ross and Snow Geese, 13 duck species, Tundra Swan, an American Bittern, and White-faced Ibis. We had long looks at three Soras sunning themselves. The sight and sounds of hundreds of thousands of ducks and geese created an unforgettable spectacle.

Joel Summerhill

December 11, Palo Alto Baylands. Four bird watchers enjoyed a beautiful day and saw at least 50 species, Clark's, Western, Eared and Pied-billed Grebes, Green-winged and Cinnamon Teal, Northern Shovelers, Northern Pintails, Gadwall, Canvasback, American Wigeon, Common Goldeneye, plus many shorebirds. Highlights of the day were two Peregrine Falcons that circled low over the parking lot just as we arrived; and later a Short-eared Owl flew across the headlands, briefly skirmishing with a White-tailed Kite. There were many Song Sparrows, and at least ten Common Yellowthroats in the meadow grass.

Pat MacEachern

January 8, Putah Creek. In a break between storms, 7 intrepid birders enjoyed a mild, sunny day with only two short periods of rain. Birds were everywhere, 73 species in all! Highlights included Brown Creepers, Hooded Mergansers, Osprey (carrying fish), and several Phainopepla.

Fred Safier

Casino at Arrowhead Marsh?

Golden Gate Audubon Society is protesting plans for a 35-acre casino on land directly adjacent to Arrowhead Marsh near the Oakland airport. Arrowhead Marsh includes a successfully restored, 72-acre wetlands and is part of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Regional Shoreline Park.

Many species of birds, including the endangered Clapper Rail and the Brown Pelican, could be harmed if the Lower Lake Rancheria-Koi Nation gets approval to build the 24-hour casino at the corner of Swan Way and Doolittle Drive. The 54-member tribe from Sonoma County plans to have 2,000 slot machines, a high-rise hotel, and a large paved parking lot.

Although Mayor Jerry Brown supports the project because it will generate \$11 million in revenue and create 4,400 jobs, on January 11 the Oakland City Council voted 5-0 against it. The city of Alameda opposes the project, and the Alameda County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously against the casino, saying it would harm public health and safety. East Bay Regional Park District also opposes the casino because of concerns about the casino's impact on the shoreline park.

White-throated Sparrow

Zonotrichia albicollis

The handsome White-throated Sparrow stands out from the White-crowned and Golden-crowned Sparrows it flocks with, with its yellow tufts in front of the eyes and its clean white throat. The crown and superciliary stripes may be white or tan; the breast plain gray or more brownish and lightly streaked, respectively, denoting the white or tan morphs of this species.

In Northern California, this species is rare, but a few are always reported on the Christmas Bird Counts from Monterey northward. Only one individual of this species was reported on this year's Christmas Bird Count in the Central Contra Costa circle.

Once known as Canada Sparrow, in New England they are familiarly called Peabody Birds. There is a legend that in the early days along the Saint John River

The U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs must approve the proposed casino. If you are not a resident of Oakland but have an opinion about the impacts of the casino, you can send letters to Senator Don Perata and the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Here are some points to make:

- Increased traffic and potential noise will significantly impact your enjoyment of the park.
- Increased lighting will negatively impact nesting birds, particularly the endangered California Clapper Rail.
- The casino will generate waste that will attract rats and other predators that will threaten the Clapper Rail, American Avocets, Black-necked Stilts and other waterbird species at the wetlands.
- Traffic impacts will harm the entire East Bay as I-880 comes to a standstill.

Send your letters to:

Senator Don Perata, State Capitol, Sacramento, CA 95814.

Email: Senator.Perata@sen.ca.gov

Clay Gregory, Regional Director, Pacific Regional Office, Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2800 Cottage Way, Sacramento, CA 95825



in New Brunswick when everybody traveled on little steamboats, old Captain Sam Peabody used to bring up passengers, freight, and the news, stopping with a blast of his whistle at every farmer's wharf. White-throated Sparrows returned north to their breeding grounds about the same time as the ice broke and the Captain's boat chuffed up the river for the first trip of the season, and the people said the sparrow whistled: Old Sam Peabody, Peabody, Peabody. That is how the Peabody Bird got its name.

Christmas Bird Count By Jimm Edgar

The 105th Audubon Christmas count is history and the two Contra Costa county counts are as well. On Saturday, December 18, 48 members and guests were out from dawn to dusk counting the birds in central Contra Costa. The weather was quite cooperative, with fog in the morning but fairly clear skies in the afternoon.

We once again surpassed the magic 150 species threshold with 154 species. Only about 70 counts in the USA out of 1600 see over 150 species. Weather, good leaders, some great finds and the fact that we were able to put a boat out into the delta where our circle touches ever so briefly all helped to reach this total. The boat group found a small raft of Surf Scoters; a duck we have not seen in many years on the count. They also saw a Common Loon, a bird only seen on 3 of the last 23 bird counts. Two Redheads at the Bollman water treatment plant in Concord were also birds only seen on 3 of the last 23 counts. Two Blue-gray Gnatcatchers found at separate locations on Mount Diablo were very good birds for our count. A high of five Wood Ducks was encouraging as was 27 Hooded Mergansers. Three new birds for the count added some excitement at the countdown dinner. Two Barn Swallows and a single Yellow-billed Magpie have long been

expected, but in the same year!? Steve Glover found a single Western Tanager at Markham Park in Concord that was a first for our count.

The east Contra Costa count was on Wednesday, December 22. On Monday, the 20th, it poured rain all day and we were expecting the worst, but the 22nd was clear and no fog. This, plus 36 participants, produced our highest species count in the five years we have done this

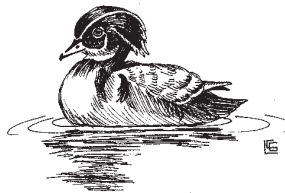
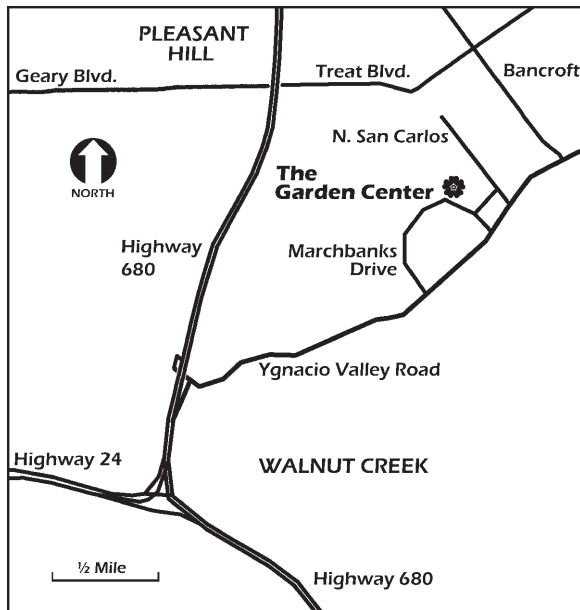
Central Contra Costa
154 species

East Contra Costa
146 species

count, 146 species. The boat on Los Vaqueros reservoir found a Bald Eagle again as well as two Osprey and a Common Loon. A single

Lewis's Woodpecker was on the east edge of Round Valley Regional Park, which we have only seen on one count. The large dike areas on the east edge of our circle produce large flocks of geese, swans, cranes and ducks, species we rarely see on the central county count only 10–15 miles west. Also in the east county we get all of the buteo's; Ferruginous, Rough-legged, and Red-shouldered Hawks, as well as all falcons. We added a new species, Caspian Tern, which had been in the area of Clifton Court forebay for about a week.

From Maury Stern, co-compiler, and myself a big thank you to all counters, feeder watchers and the hospitality folks who arranged the dinners.



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

the Quail

is published 10 times a year by the **Mount Diablo Audubon Society**

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

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

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

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Deadline for the March issue is February 8.

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Common Loon, Moss Landing

Quickies

Weekend birding in California

Moss Landing and Elkhorn Slough

Moss Landing and Elkhorn Slough are well worth a weekend trip for beginning birders. Avid birders certainly know this area well, and they also know that the Moonglow Dairy is an absolute requirement on your itinerary. There is a foremost caveat for those who visit this privately owned birding hotspot. And that is to remember that birders' access depends on common sense and birding ethics. Park only along the edge of the eucalyptus grove, and do not interfere in any way with dairying operations. Stay away from residences and from cattle pens and feed troughs.

Walk along the levee that goes below the feed lots and heads up along Elkhorn Slough away from the ocean. More than 240 species have been observed from the dairy, including such birds as White-winged Tern, Little Stint, Bar-tailed Godwit, Ruff, and Bobolink.

Moonglow Dairy is off Dolan Road, a little more than one mile from Highway 1 at the Moss Landing power plant. See Don Roberson's site at <http://montereybay.com/creagrus/moonglow.html> for a complete description of this fine birding spot, including photos.

Elkhorn Slough Estuarine Research Reserve is three miles north of Dolan Road on Elkhorn Road. A visitor's center is the start of many miles of hiking trails, which lead in various directions through a variety of habitats. It's a great place for spring wildflowers, including a special coastal variety of the California Poppy. Grasslands are patrolled by White-tailed Kites and Red-shouldered Hawks; Ospreys, Peregrine Falcons and Merlins are also possible. Look for Barn Owls in the barn (naturally!). There are oak woodlands for such as Oak Titmice, Nuttall's Woodpeckers and Hutton's Vireos. Farther down the trails you will come to the tidal sloughs where waders and Cormorants will be seen. You may also come across a Coast Starlight, or at least its tracks.

In Moss Landing itself, you can find antique stores and popular restaurants. And in the harbor or along the channel by the south jetty, three species of loons (plus an occasional Yellow-billed Loon) may be found, as well as sea ducks, grebes and terns. Outside the jetties are Common Murres, and in late summer, Pigeon Guillemots.

The Elkhorn Slough surroundings are listed as one of the Important Bird Areas of California. This is a critical site for shorebirds along the Pacific Flyway, as it supports a number of species of concern, such as Snowy Plover, Long-billed Curlew, and American Bittern.

Off Highway 1 just north of the channel is Moss Landing Wildlife Area. From one of two parking lots a short trail leads to a viewing platform; from the other, a longer trail goes along the edge of the slough.

Moss Landing State Beach and Salinas River State Beach are nearby and are popular with birders. Kayak rentals and naturalist-led boat trips are available in Moss Landing.