



the Quail

Mount Diablo Audubon Society

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

www.diabloaudubon.com/index.php

Volume 55, Number 5

February 2010

Sea Turtle Nesting and the Birds of Angola • Alan Abel

So many of our MDAS members are quietly involved in fascinating conservation projects! On February 4 we will hear from two of our members working on projects in very different parts of the world. During Birding Information, Georgette Howington will provide an update on the California Bluebird Recovery Program here in Contra Costa County, and our main speaker, Alan Abel, will tell us about Sea Turtle Nesting in Angola, halfway around the world.

Endangered Olive Ridley turtles, *Lepidochelys olivacea*, nest on the coast of southern Africa between October and March. Alan will describe the sea turtle conservation activities in Angola and will include examples of bird and wildlife observed in the area. Daily monitoring throughout the season documents sea turtle nesting locations and frequency and tracks nest hatching success. Local fishermen are engaged in the monitoring activity to encourage increased public awareness and conservation outside of the protected habitat areas.



Pin-tailed Whydah (Vidua macroura); Olive Ridley Turtle. Photos by Alan Abel

Alan has worked for Chevron in a variety of environmental positions for nearly 25 years. Currently he is an Environmental Supervisor in Angola, southwest Africa, where his schedule is four weeks at work, alternating with four weeks at home, here in Martinez. The responsibilities of his team include monitoring sea turtle habitat as part of broader technical and regulatory support for offshore oil production operations.

In addition to the sandy beaches where sea turtles nest, local wildlife habitat includes savannah, small wooded areas, and mangrove swamps as well as developed residential and industrial areas. So, Alan has been able to observe more than 70 species of African birds, and local birders have recorded more than 100 species in the immediate area. He will include, in his presentation, many of the birds and other wildlife that he has been fortunate to see.

Alan is an avid birder. When he is at home, he goes birding with his wife, Cheryl, who is a trip leader for Mount

Diablo Audubon bird walks and is also a Park Ranger at the John Muir National Historic site in Martinez. Their vacation trips are usually birding trips. Their most recent trip was to the Galapagos Islands.

BIRDING INFORMATION

Georgette Howington will provide an update of the California Bluebird Recovery Program and its activities monitoring secondary cavity nesters in Contra Costa County. Georgette has been County Coordinator for three years and is also State Assistant Director for CBRP. She will describe the monitoring activities of her teams of volunteers as well as the Foster Parent and Adopt A Trail programs.

The California Bluebird Recovery Program was founded about twenty years ago by the late Don Yoder "For the encouragement and preservation of cavity nesters—especially bluebirds—anywhere in the West." Don was an active and respected member of MDAS for many years.

Meeting Schedule

The next general meeting of Mount Diablo Audubon Society will be **Thursday, February 4**, in the Camellia Room of The Gardens at Heather Farm, Walnut Creek.

7:00 PM Birding Information

7:25 PM Announcements

7:40 PM Refreshments,* door prize

8:05 PM Speaker: **Alan Abel**

*Please remember to bring a cup.

Thursday, March 4: **Jay Holcomb**
Bird Rescue Techniques

DEDICATED TO HABITAT CONSERVATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

President's Corner

By Jimm Edgar

I thought I would take my spot this month in the *Quail* to give the highlights of our two Christmas bird counts. Maury Stern and I are co-compilers of the counts. The East Contra Costa county count was held on December 15. The day started a little cool but by 10 or 11 it had become very pleasant with no wind. We had a total of 143 species which is quite good for this count. This is our tenth year of holding this count so we are beginning to get a handle on what we will see although there are always surprises and this year was no different. Of the 102 species we have never missed seeing in the last nine years, we saw them all as well as birds seen on eight of the last nine counts. Then we missed a few. Some of the good birds were Wood Duck, Common Loon, Lewis's Woodpecker and Blue-gray Gnatcatcher. These four birds have only been seen four of last nine years. Horned Grebe, Mountain Bluebird and Yellow-headed Blackbird, three of nine years. Black-throated Gray Warbler two of nine. Remarkably, we saw four birds only seen once before on this count: Eurasian Wigeon, Wild Turkey, Eurasian Collared Dove and Phainopepla. We had two new birds for the count. A heard only Common Nighthawk and a well described and well photographed Wilson's Warbler. This bird and the also photographed Black-throated Gray Warbler were found by Jim Tietz who was with Ted Robertson's group near Bethel Island. Jim is a research scientist on the Farallon Islands.

The Central Contra Costa county count was held on Saturday, December 19. Again, we were fortunate to have great weather. We ended up with 147 species for the day. 150 species is the magic number that gets you onto the special list

of counts that see 150 or more species. One count in Texas usually has 225-230 species. Only about 60 or 70 counts out of about 1500 counts see 150 or more. What was disappointing particularly is that we did not see three birds we have not missed seeing on 28 out of 28 years. They were Spotted Sandpiper (the group out near Pittsburg always have seen one on the same pond, but the pond was being cleaned so the bird was not there. Thayer's Gull and Purple Finch were also missed for the first time. Some of the good birds seen were House Wren and Canyon Wren. A Townsend's Solitaire was found in Mitchell Canyon. Osprey and Rough-legged Hawk were very good finds. A Lewis's Woodpecker up North Gate Road on Mount Diablo has only been seen two out of 28 years. The prize bird, though, was a young male Rose-breasted Grosbeak that had been coming to a feeder in Danville and stayed around for the count. That is a first for the count.

We had about 30 people for the East count and about 60 for the Central count. I did six other counts around Northern California and they all have their own specialties that make them interesting. I hope you can all get in a count next year.

Flyway Festival



Jenny Papka of Native Bird Connections at a previous SF Bay Flyway Festival at Mare Island.

Mount Diablo Audubon is a sponsor of **The Fourteenth Annual SF Bay Flyway Festival**, celebrating the return of millions of shorebirds and hundreds of thousands of ducks, geese, hawks and even monarch butterflies, which migrate through or winter in the San Francisco Bay Area. This year the Flyway Festival will be held Friday through Sunday, February 5-7 in Building 897 on Mare Island. Admission is free. Festival-goers will be able to choose from hundreds of fun activities, including a Family Wildlife Exploration and Birding Expo with over 100 exhibitors, more than 50 guided nature walks throughout Solano, Napa and other nearby counties, boat tours aboard Napa River Adventures, wild bird demonstrations, and art and photography exhibits.

Mare Island outings will include guided tours of the Navy's oldest cemetery in the Pacific, founded more than 150 years ago, and Sierra Club guided walks to the Navy's first arsenal in the Pacific founded in 1857, both of which are located on the Island's scenic south end in the Mare Island Shoreline Heritage Preserve. The Preserve, Solano County's newest regional parkland, will be open to hike, bike, take in scenic vistas of seven counties from its hilltop vantage point. St. Peter's Chapel, with its renowned Louis Comfort Tiffany stained-glass windows, will be open for tours, as will the Mare Island Museum

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Welcome New Members

Karen Dadd	Pleasant Hill
Pat Doughty	Lafayette
Valerie Glass	Huntington Beach
Harry Goforth	Antioch
Virginia Hamrick	Walnut Creek
Dave Kwinter	Walnut Creek
Marcia Leath	Oakland
Elizabeth Leite	Walnut Creek
Russ & Rosemary Nishikawa	Walnut Creek
Lorraine Osborn	Martinez
Karen Sandri	Martinez
Dr. John Tysell	Richmond
Ethan Winning	Walnut Creek

Q

This bird family has an onomatopoeic name. A flock of Ravens is called an "Unkindness", while a flock of these birds is called a "Troop".

Unscramble these letters, or turn to Page 7 to learn more.

AABCCCCDDEEEHHIK-KNSTTU

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GBBC

Bird watchers coast to coast are invited to take part in the 13th annual Great Backyard Bird Count, Friday, February 12, through Monday, February 15, 2010. Participants in the free event will join tens of thousands of volunteers of all levels of birding experience to count birds in their own backyards, local parks or wildlife refuges. Each checklist submitted by these “citizen scientists” helps researchers at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society learn more about how the birds are doing—and how to protect them. Last year, participants turned in more than 93,600 checklists online, creating the continent’s largest instantaneous snapshot of bird populations ever recorded.

Anyone can take part in the Great Backyard Bird Count, from novice bird watchers to experts. Participants count birds for as little as 15 minutes (or as long as they wish) on one or more days of the event and report their sightings online at www.birdcount.org. Bird populations are always shifting and changing. For example, 2009 GBBC data highlighted a huge southern invasion of Pine Siskins across much of the eastern United States. Participants counted 279,469 Pine Siskins on 18,528 checklists, as compared to the previous high of 38,977 birds on 4,069 checklists in 2005. Failure of seed crops farther north caused the siskins to move south to find their favorite food.

On the www.birdcount.org website, participants can explore real-time maps and charts that show what others are reporting during the count. The site has tips to help identify birds and special materials for educators. Participants may also enter the GBBC photo contest by uploading images they have taken during the count. Many images will be featured in the GBBC website’s photo gallery. All participants are entered in a drawing for prizes that include bird feeders, binoculars, books, CDs, and many other great birding products.

For more information about the GBBC, visit the website at www.birdcount.org. Or contact the Cornell Lab of Ornithology at (800) 843-2473 or gbbc@cornell.edu, or Audubon at citizenscience@audubon.org or (215) 355-9588, Ext 16.

The Great Backyard Bird Count is made possible, in part, by generous support from Wild Birds Unlimited.

SPEAKING OF CONSERVATION

A Hard Choice

In 1976, the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers introduced a non-native species of cordgrass (*Spartina alterniflora*) to control erosion in Alameda Creek, located near Coyote Hills Regional Park in Fremont. Their strategy worked well until sometime in the 1980s, when Mother Nature cooked up a hybrid of the non-native with the native “laid-back” *Spartina foliosa*. The result was a super-aggressive and robust plant which began to spread throughout the San Francisco Bay region.

The new plant accreted sediment and created its own environment, colonizing and eliminating the shoreline mudflats which are critically important to migratory wading birds. Its large size also shaded out and destroyed other native vegetation including pickleweed. At its peak in 2006, the new plant covered 2,000 net acres from the South Bay to the Napa River; another 50,000 acres were threatened.

Scientists agreed that something had to be done. In 2003, the Invasive Spartina Program of the California Coastal Conservancy began to provide funding and support to affected Bay agencies to deal with the problem. After first experimenting with burning and tarping, experts determined that spraying with Imazapyr, an approved herbicide which is non-toxic to mammals, birds, fish and aquatic invertebrates, worked best. Following treatment, the plants start to brown and die back. Stands of dead material may persist for several years; however, once the spread of the non-native has been halted and the *alterniflora* gene has been eradicated, it is hoped that the native marsh plants will begin to recolonize the area. Now in its sixth year, the program has been quite successful.

Unfortunately, the big loser in this battle is the California Clapper Rail. Federally-listed as endangered, the Clapper Rail actually benefited from the greater bio-mass of the invasive *Spartina*, and the rail’s numbers increased as the non-native spread. As Fisheries Program Manager for the East Bay Regional Park District Pete Alexander explained, “Would you rather stay at the Hilton or the Motel 6? The native cordgrass is the Motel 6, whereas the non-native’s larger size and density is more lush and creates better cover for forage and nesting.” At Martin Luther King, Jr.



California Clapper Rail (*Rallus longirostris obsoletus*) Palo Alto Baylands Nature Preserve. Photo by Glen Tepke

Regional Shoreline’s Arrowhead Marsh, for example, the Clapper Rail population rose to a peak of 175.

Since the spraying began, the number of Clapper Rails has dropped precipitously. The pesticide did not kill the birds; radio-telemetry suggests that some have relocated north to the San Pablo Bay and Marin marshes. The elimination of dense cover has probably also resulted in greater mortality from predators, as well as reduced rates of reproduction. It is anticipated that long-term the population will fall from its peak at 1,400 to a level closer to historic “normal” between 500 and 700.

Critics of the ISA are unhappy about the impacts on the Clapper Rails and say that the project needs to put more emphasis on restoring native plant material. Some restoration activities have begun and will continue. Only time will tell whether the humans have chosen wisely.

By Nancy Wenninger

SFBay Flyway Festival

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and WWII’s only remaining landing craft support gunboat docked along the Napa River/Mare Island Strait. You will have a wild time at the Flyway Festival. Most Festival activities are free. Some require pre-registration. Hours: Friday outings throughout the day with a reception and program 5:30–9 PM. Saturday and Sunday, 9 AM–4 PM. For more information and directions, visit SFBayflywayfestival.com or call 707-649-WING (9464).

Field Trip Schedule

By Hugh Harvey

February

- 6 Saturday Thornton Area/Cosumnes Preserve
- 11 Thursday (Note schedule change) Grizzly Island
- 18 Thursday Sunol Regional Park
- 25 Thursday Mt. View Sanitary/McNabney Marsh
- 27 Saturday Tomales Bay State Park

March

- 3 Wednesday Walnut Creek Parks
- 18 Thursday San Leandro Reservoir
- 24 Wednesday Lake Lagunitas
- 27 Saturday Black Diamond Mines

April

- 3 Saturday Garin Regional Park
- 7 Wednesday Orinda Connector Trail
- 10 Saturday Pine Canyon
- 14 Wednesday Mount Diablo State Park
- 19 Monday North Briones

Come birding with us in February!

① Saturday, February 6

Thornton Area/Cosumnes Preserve

Leader: Ethan Chickering, 686-9231.

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

① Thursday, February 11 (Note change)

Grizzly Island Wildlife Area

Leader: Maury Stern, 284-5980.

Carpool leaves at 7 AM from Sun Valley. Meet at 8:30 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. The California Department of Fish and Game's Grizzly Island Wildlife Area is in the heart of the 84,000-acre Suisun Marsh, the largest contiguous estuarine marsh in the United States. Grizzly Island provides habitat for more than 200 species of birds and is home to a variety of threatened or endangered wildlife and plants. We may see the herd of Tule Elk. We may also bird at the Rush Ranch if time permits after finishing at Grizzly Island.

③ Thursday, February 18

Sunol Regional Park

Leader: Eugenia Larson, 806-0644.

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

① Thursday, February 25

Mountain View Sanitary/McNabney Marsh

Co-leaders: Bingham Gibbs and Hugh Harvey, 935-2979.

Meet at 9 AM at the Mountain View Sanitary Visitor Center. Exit from I-680 southbound at Arthur Road, turn left and go under the freeway. Exit I-680 northbound at Pacheco Blvd, turn right onto Arthur Road and go under the freeway. Arthur Road will turn left. At 0.4 miles turn sharp left onto Mountain View Sanitary's private road. Follow the road through the entry gate, alongside the freeway and through the tunnel under I-680. Park and sign in at the Visitor Center. Trails may be muddy. Close-up looks at dabbling ducks; possibly bitterns and herons. If you wish, bring a lunch and explore Martinez shoreline on your own in the afternoon.

② Saturday, February 27

Tomales Bay State Park

Leader: Maury Stern, 284-5980.

Carpool leaves 7 AM from El Nido Ranch Road. Meet at 8:30 in the parking lot at Heart's Desire Beach in Tomales Bay State Park. After crossing the Richmond Bridge, follow US 101 north and take the first San Rafael exit. Go 2 blocks, turn left onto 3rd Street. In San Anselmo turn right on Sir Francis Drake. Follow Sir Francis Drake Blvd through Inverness. Just over the ridge, turn right onto Pierce Point Road. The park entrance is on the right. Entry fee required.



*Spotted Owl
photographed
at Tomales Bay SP*

Field trips are open to members and non-members, beginners and advanced birders. Weather or other contingencies may require changes. For updates, visit the MDAS website at www.diabloaudubon.com/index/php. Because most trips do not return until late afternoon, bring a lunch and 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.

Trip Reports

Limantour, November 21. Eighteen birders spent a nice day at Bear Valley headquarters and Limantour Beach area of Point Reyes in pleasant 50 degree weather with clear skies. 65 birds were seen as contrasted with 57 and 45 the previous two years. The Sleepy Hollow Pond revisions are still not complete, which greatly decreased the number of ducks seen in previous years. We started off with a Merlin, Red-breasted Sapsucker, Brown Creeper, Winter Wren, and Golden-crowned Kinglets at the headquarters. At the Limantour area we saw Osprey, Sora, and Snowy Plover. Many thanks to Hugh Harvey and David Hutton who took over for me when I had to leave early. *Maury Stern*

Mountain View Sanitary/McNabney Marsh, November 23. A beautiful fall day at Mountain View Sanitary and McNabney Marsh was enjoyed by 18 members and guests. This is a great place for close-up views of many birds. The large numbers of herons and egrets was probably the highlight with five species seen. One tree was covered in Great and Snowy Egret "ornaments". Numerous Black-crowned Night-Herons gave good comparisons of different age plumages. Green herons are easily seen here, too. A couple of unusually cooperative Common Yellow-throats were favorites for several people. Part of the group saw a Sora in the reeds. A flock of American White Pelicans was beautiful to see on the water, along with the usual waterfowl. About half of the group stayed long enough to look around in the trees above McNabney Marsh where we saw a very upset Downy Woodpecker try to chase away a Nuttall's Woodpecker. The final count came to 55 species. *Cheryl Abel*

Wildlife Refuges of the Sacramento Valley, December 5-6. Day 1: A hearty group of 18 enthusiastic birders gathered at 7:00 AM in Williams for the start of a two-day tour of wildlife refuges in the Sacramento Valley. We arrived at Sacramento NWR bright and early, and were immediately treated to multiple skeins of White-fronted, Snow and Ross's geese flying low and directly overhead. Our walk on the Nature Trail got off to a good start when we found an Orange-crowned Warbler, associating with several Yellow-rumped Warblers. At the marsh a handsome Lincoln's Sparrow was working the edge. A Barn Owl flushed and was soon found in a nearby tree, giving us good scope views. We watched as a female

Downy Woodpecker worked a small hole in an oak gall in search of a tiny morsel. Scanning the wetlands produced a nice sampling of wintering waterfowl including Gadwall, Bufflehead, Cinnamon and Green-winged Teal, Northern Pintail, Northern Shoveler, Canada and Cackling Geese, while several flocks of White-faced Ibis cruised past. At the start of the auto tour loop, two adult Bald Eagles flew over the impoundment, causing thousands of ducks and geese to take flight, circle around and settle back down on the water. We came upon a juvenile Bald Eagle feeding on a kill, giving us a close-up view of this magnificent bird. A pair of Great-horned Owls perched in a tree; while a cooperative Peregrine Falcon resting on the ground less than 50 yards from the road was another good find. A single Lesser Scaup and a few pairs of Ring-necked Ducks rounded out our waterfowl sightings for the morning. On the last leg of the auto tour loop, the Moorhen outnumbered the American Coot, with up to eight individuals present!

At the Parker Unit of the Sacramento NWR system we added Western Bluebirds, both California and Spotted Towhee, and flushed a Great-horned Owl. Another Bald Eagle flying north was our seventh of the day. A couple of birders were in the right place to catch a view of a Red-breasted Sapsucker. This unit, with its footpath through a mature oak woodland/riparian habitat, can be very productive and is always worth checking out.

We worked our way north to the Llano Seco Preserve, with stops along Roads "Y" and "Z". Searching these back roads produced an American Bittern, Belted Kingfisher, Loggerhead Shrike, several Wilson's Snipe and California Gull. A real treat was finding nearly 1,000 Sandhill Cranes, many fairly close to the road. We watched as numerous individuals "danced" about, sometimes tossing small sticks into the air. Along Seven Mile Lane, we watched a large flock of Tundra Swan resting in the shallow waters of a rice check as they were soon joined by several dozen more swans; a small flock of American Pipit landed near our vehicles. At Llano Seco we were again treated to more flocks of wintering waterfowl, raptors and other birds. Carefully searching the assembled throng, we picked out a drake Redhead, an uncommon winter species in the Sacramento Valley. There were also several Eurasian Wigeon, including one American x Eurasian Wigeon hybrid.

Day 2: We were greeted to a cold, frosty morning as we set out to bird the back roads northwest of Williams. A White-tailed Kite hunting over an open field was our first raptor species of the day. We had a distant view of a Ferruginous Hawk hunting over the open range land that was soon joined by a second bird, while a pair of American Kestrel was spotted above us on the telephone pole. A small flock of Horned Lark moved quickly across an open field, calling as they flew, and a lone Cattle Egret was spotted, appropriately, on the front gate of a cattle ranch. A distant raptor had us stumped until we drove closer and scoped a cooperative first-year Golden Eagle, giving everyone good looks at this uncommon raptor. As we headed to our next destination, a group of eight Common Merganser took to wing from an irrigation canal.

Arriving at Colusa NWR, we quickly found a Lincoln's Sparrow out in the open as it foraged on the ground with White-crowned and Golden-crowned Sparrows. We scoped the open waters from the Nature Trail and had close-up views of Black-necked Stilt; along with twelve species of waterfowl. Using our vehicles as mobile "blinds" our drive along the auto tour loop provided great opportunities for close-

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Observations

By Maury Stern

These two months have seen mainly ducks, raptors and some passerines reported.

At Heather Farm, there were three **Wood Ducks** on the main Pond, 11/14 (H&RH). On 1/3 AM saw a male **Tufted Duck** at Clifton Court Forebay in East County. At Miller-Knox Regional Shoreline in Richmond, LL saw a **Eurasian Wigeon** on 1/3. **Hooded Mergansers** were seen in Walnut Creek and Briones Reservoir by BH, KH, and HH. HN saw a **Common Merganser** in Jewel Lake on 12/28. One **American Bittern** was seen on 11/23 by GC at Contra Loma (RP). PS saw two **American Bitterns** there on 12/12. **Golden Eagles** were seen 11/28 near Lafayette Reservoir by GA; Valle Vista Staging Area by DE on 11/29; and in Antioch by PS on

12/12. **Merlins** were seen in Walnut Creek, Antioch and Clayton by DN, H&RH, PS. A **Peregrine Falcon** was in downtown Walnut Creek 12/28 (HN). A **Virginia Rail** was at Jewel Lake 12/28 and 12/30 (TR, JS, PK). A **Spotted Sandpiper** was at Lafayette Reservoir on 11/24 (BH). A **Pileated Woodpecker** was in Redwood RP on 11/28 (DB). PS had a **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** eat out of his hand in Antioch on 12/14. There was a **Mountain Bluebird** at San Pablo Bay RS in Pinole on 11/25 (LL). AS saw a **California Thrasher** near San Pablo Reservoir on 12/29. On 12/2, KP saw a **Palm Warbler** at Meeker Slough in Richmond. FS saw a **Black-throated Gray Warbler** on Cherry Lane near Heather Farm on 1/2. **White-throated Sparrows** were seen in Antioch, Heather Farm, Tilden RP, and Richmond near Wildcat RP (AK, JS, PS, HH). On 12/1, SH saw a **Slate-colored Junco** in his Alamo back-

yard. Twenty **Great-tailed Grackles** were around a taco truck near the entrance to Waterbird Park in Martinez on 12/10 (HN, JG). The most unusual bird of the period was in Pleasant Hill on 12/16, a male **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** at the home of B&AL.

GA Gerry Argenal, DB Debbi Brusco, GC Gloria Cannon, DE Daniel Edelstein, JG Joel Goldman, H&RH Hugh and Rosita Harvey, BH Bob Hislop, KH Kate Hoffman, SH Steve Hutchcraft, PK Patty Kline, AK Alan Krakauer, B&AL Bob and Ann Landfear, LL Laura Look, AM Amy McDonald, HN Harold Newman, DN Diane Niemi, KP Kathy Parker, TR Ted Robertson, FS Fred Safier, PS Paul Schorr, JS Judi Sierra, AS Ann Spaulding.

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

Trip Reports

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up views of Ross's, Snow and White-fronted Geese. A young Red-shouldered Hawk called from high up in a cottonwood tree, while a nearby roost of over 100 Black-crowned Night-Heron was impressive.

Next up, we drove to the Sutter Buttes; along Pass Road we were rewarded with a dozen or more Mountain Bluebird, several of which perched along the fence line, affording great photo ops. As we watched, a pair of Golden Eagle soared right over us! A short drive put us at Gray Lodge WMA where we hoped to catch the waterfowl spectral at sunset. We weren't disappointed. Driving the auto tour loop, we stopped for a visit to the Harry Adamson hide; a beautifully built blind which pays tribute to Harry's vision for wildlife conservation. Mr. Adamson is a preeminent wildlife artist; a second hide nearby is named in honor of his wife, Betty, who, along with husband Harry, were founding members of Mt. Diablo Audubon Society. From the blind we had our only Hermit Thrush. A Virginia Rail called from the marsh, while a Cooper's Hawk zipped by and perched in a nearby tree. As the sun set, creating a pastel of pinks and reds against the clouds, we watched the mass exodus of nearly half a million Snow and Ross's Geese and tens of thousands of Pintail and Northern Shoveler as they all lifted off and headed to their

nighttime feeding areas. The cacophony of their calls as they flew against the sunset, with the Sutter Buttes as a backdrop, was a very memorable experience. As we wrapped up this very special weekend and said our good-byes, a pair of dueting Great-horned Owls called from a nearby tree.

We tallied 106 species for the weekend, including 14 species of raptors, and 20 species of waterfowl. Terry Colborn

Christmas Count Rarity Chase, January 2. The first outing of 2010 for MDAS proved to be much more productive than anyone had hoped since few rarities had been found on the CBC. We began at McNabney Marsh where the Great-tailed Grackles were everywhere. Among the ducks were a pair of Cinnamon Teal along with all the other expected species. At the Carquinez Strait we found Barrow's Goldeneye with the Common, but the best bird of all was the Long-tailed Duck. On to Ironhorse Sanitary District where we had time to study many Bonaparte's and Mew Gulls and were able to hear Sora and Virginia Rails. On our way to Los Vaqueros we stopped to see Burrowing Owls that are still fairly plentiful in that area in spite of all the construction. After a late lunch at the reservoir we added Lewis's Woodpecker and Bald Eagle and headed on to Clifton Court Forebay to find Common Mergansers, Canvasbacks, and White Pelicans among two Scaup species. Our last stop was Holey Road where we



Santa Cruz Chickadee
Penthestes rufescens barlowi
Birds of Golden Gate Park
Joseph Mailliard • 1930

saw Yellow-headed and Tricolor Blackbirds, Brown-headed Cowbirds and Greater Yellowlegs. 20 happy birders ended the day at 4:15 with a total of 106 birds to start the year. Denise Wight and Bingham Gibbs

Putah Creek, January 9. It was gray. It was cold. But there were plenty of birders and birds enjoying Pleasants Valley Road, Putah Creek, and Lake Solano. The highlight bird of the day was probably the adult Bald Eagle we all saw perched, then flying across Lake Solano. Other birds that we don't see on every trip to that area include a Rock Wren posing nicely at Monticello Dam and a Brown Creeper who kept us company at lunch. Expected specialties were all seen: Osprey, Hooded and Common Merganser, Barrow's Goldeneye, American Dipper and Phainopepla. Final totals: 15 birders, 69 species. Fred Safier

Merge Funds?

At the December 10th Board Meeting, a proposal was put forward to consolidate the McNabney Fund holding \$7230 into the Conservation and Education Fund. The original purpose of the McNabney Fund was to fund improvements in and around McNabney Marsh. Given the fund's balance, the typical improvement project cost, and East Bay Regional Parks management of the Marsh, the Board feels the funds would be better utilized for conservation and education activities.

The Board is seeking your comments on this proposal. The Board will be making a decision at its March 2010 meeting. Please send your comments to Steve Buffi. E-mail: steveb1@astound.net or care of Mt. Diablo Audubon Society, P.O. Box 53, Walnut Creek, CA 94597-0053.

Dana Gardner Art

The wonderful scratchboard drawings of Dana Gardner that illustrate the Breeding Bird Atlas of Contra Costa County are being offered for sale for prices ranging from \$40 to \$75. These are original pieces of art, signed and matted by the artist and ready for framing. Dana, who lives in Berkeley, is the illustrator of such books as *The Minds of Birds*, *Origins of Nature's Beauty*, and other books by the renowned Alexander F. Skutch, as well as many other birding and nature books.

Also being offered are note cards printed on 100% recycled paper, \$3 for each card and envelope, or a set of six for \$15. Sales tax is included. And don't forget that the Breeding Bird Atlas, \$22 at the meeting, or \$26.80 by mail, is a useful reference, or a welcomed gift for any birder.



Yellow Warbler, \$40

Chestnut-backed Chickadee · *Poecile rufescens*



Photo by Ethan Winning.

This perky little fellow is a friendly and inquisitive bird who loves to come to backyard feeders for suet, "bark butter", peanuts or sunflower chips. In the mountains, Chestnut-backed Chickadees like to forage for insects and spiders in conifers such as

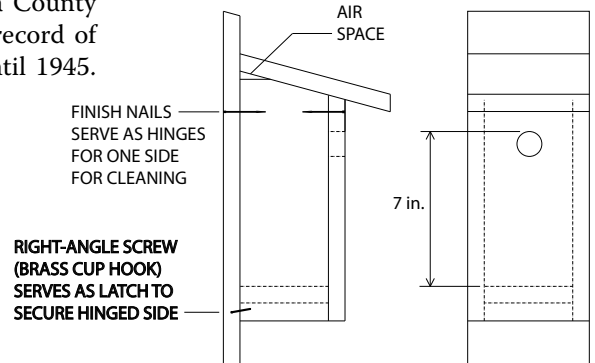
Douglas fir. They will often be seen upside down as they cling to the under sides of branches in their search.

The range for this species extends along the Pacific Coast, but not south of Santa Barbara. They are at home in British Columbia and coastal Alaska north to Anchorage. Another population claims an area in eastern Washington, stretching into Idaho, Montana and British Columbia. Chestnut-backed Chickadees were essentially unknown in Contra Costa County before World War II. The first record of nesting in the county wasn't until 1945.

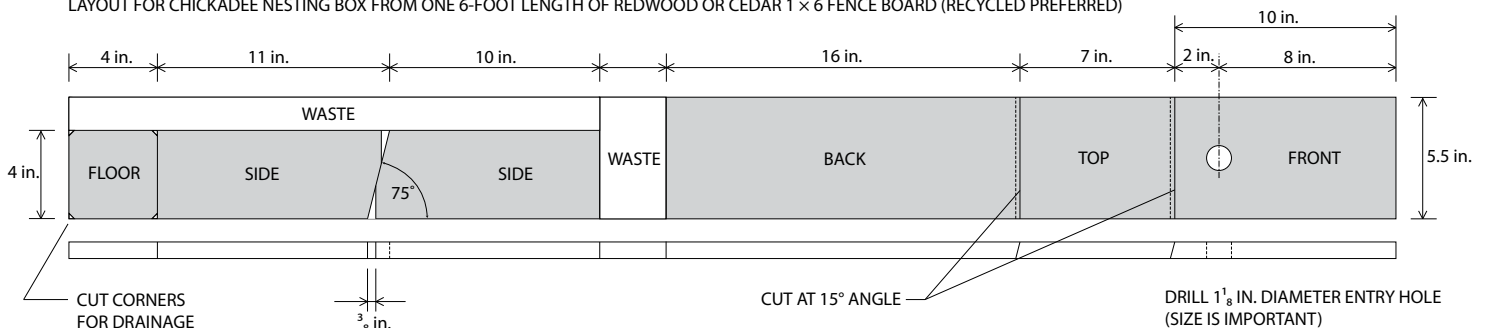
Now, however, they are ubiquitous throughout all but the drier parts of east county.

These avian friends use abandoned woodpecker nests, or excavate their own cavities in soft wood. They will line their nests with feathers, ferns, moss,

grass and bark, and cover with a layer of milkweed down, fur, and hair. They will readily use man-made boxes, not only for nesting, but also for winter roosts. Here are plans for a simply-made nest box. Nail it to a post or tree, at a height from five to ten feet. Nesting season in this area is from mid-February until mid-April.



LAYOUT FOR CHICKADEE NESTING BOX FROM ONE 6-FOOT LENGTH OF REDWOOD OR CEDAR 1 × 6 FENCE BOARD (RECYCLED PREFERRED)



Wildlands Conservancy



A herd of Nelson's bighorn sheep supervises the activities at Whitewater Preserve near Palm Springs. Photo taken by David Clendenen, TWC Resource Ecologist, courtesy of The Wildlands Conservancy.

of a deciduous black oak forest that opens onto a chaparral hillside then follows a willow-shaded stream onto a boardwalk that is replete with butterflies when the wetlands are in bloom. Oak Glen naturalists have provided free school fieldtrips for over 60,000 children, some of whom may get their first experience in nature using this trail as an outdoor classroom. All classes include a Conservation and Appreciation component about saving landscapes, how plants and animals are affected by loss of habitat, and enjoying nature's beauty wherever one may be. The trail is open to the public without charge Saturdays and Sundays from 8:30 AM to 4:30 PM. When you return from the trail, a glass of cider goes well with a slice of pie. The Conservancy has entered a long term lease with Oak Glen apple farmers to operate the orchards and bakery.

On the opposite side of the San Geronio is Whitewater Preserve, only 20 miles northeast of Palm Springs. Three years ago the Conservancy acquired 291 acres along the Whitewater River, formerly a commercial trout farm. After clearing the debris and many non-native elm trees, they planted native sycamores, alders and cottonwoods. As a result, Great Blue Herons, Ospreys, Barn Owls, Red-tailed Hawks, as well as California tree frogs and bobcats, have reappeared. This year's Christmas Count tallied 437 individuals of 44 species from Ruby-crowned Kinglet to Golden Eagle. In the spring, groups of endangered Nelson's bighorn sheep look down from the steep escarpment that edges the river. One of the original trout ponds will be retained as a catch-and-release activity for the kids who come on nature field trips. Aside

» Continued from Page 10

from its use for educational programs the Whitewater Preserve is enjoyed by families and individuals on weekends. A trail connects the area to the Pacific Crest Trail, just a third of a mile away from the preserve.

You may have also heard of The Wildlands Conservancy's efforts to establish a Mojave Desert Trails National Monument that would preserve nearly a million acres of BLM land and provide a protected connection between Joshua Tree National Park and Mojave National Preserve in the Mojave Desert. [See Senator Feinstein's press release for December 21 at <http://feinstein.senate.gov>.] The Wildlands Conservancy donated \$45 million in private donations to the U.S. Department of the Interior to help acquire 600,000 acres of previous railroad lands throughout the Mojave Desert to protect these lands, home to desert tortoises and bighorn sheep. National Monument status would assure for public use outdoor recreation, a portion of historic Route 66, outstanding geology, and wildlife corridors in wilderness areas.

The Wildlands Conservancy conducts conservation, stewardship and outdoor education, entirely with private donations. The Wildlands Conservancy is a California nonprofit, 501(c)3, public benefit corporation (www.wildlandsconservancy.org).

Whitewater and Oak Glen Preserves are worth your visit when in Southern California, and The Wildlands Conservancy

E-mail, Anyone?

Our e-mail address lists have been recently updated. An announcement of the February meeting is scheduled to be sent to that list of members. If you do not receive it on February 2, and if you want to receive future meeting reminders, please send an e-mail to the *Quail* Editor at ellis.myers@earthlink.net. If you wish to be removed from the list, also make that request by e-mail. Mount Diablo Audubon does not share addresses with anyone, ever. Please also consider asking that your copy of *The Quail* be sent by e-mail

NEWS FROM WILD BIRDS UNLIMITED



BIRDFOOD SALE

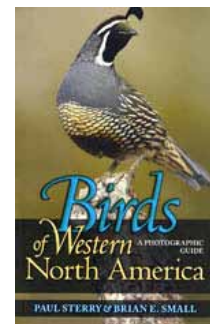
All Seed, Peanuts, etc.

SUET SALE

SALE: February 10-21, 2010

➔ The Great Backyard Bird Count is Friday-Monday, February 12-15. 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.bird-source.org/gbbc. It's fascinating to watch the maps explode with bird reportings.

Birds of North America A Photographic Guide



This is a new field guide that was released in November. The images are absolutely outstanding and the colors are rich and true. Good range maps and descriptions. Comparisons within species are maybe the best I have seen.

Come check out what is now the new standard in field guides at only \$18.95.

Bird Feeding Tips

This fall and winter has not seen the Pine Siskins that we often have. We have had only one sighting report of Siskins. We have had many reports of Goldfinches at the feeders. The numbers of American and Lesser Goldfinches being seen are the largest in many, many years.

Many people feed suet and it is a great way to attract birds to your backyard. Now even better—is Jim's Birdacious Bark Butter. It is similar to suet, but with different ingredients, it also attracts many non-suet eating birds. Robins, Bushtits, Wrens, Warblers, Sparrows, Juncos and all suet eating birds are attracted to Bark Butter. Give it a try!



Mike and Cecil Williams
Wild Birds Unlimited
692 Contra Costa Blvd.

Pleasant Hill, CA 94523, 925-798-0303
Visit us at www.wbupleasanthill.com

Ornithology Opportunities

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.

Olympic Birdfest 2010, April 9-11, Sequim, WA. A bird watching vacation for beginners to experts, from leisurely strolls to active hikes. Bird for a few hours, or all day ... from the dawn chorus to the evening owl prow. Enjoy the show from guided birding trips, boat tours, silent auction, salmon banquet, and more. Also this year! Stay on for a three-day, two-night birding/sightseeing cruise of the San Juan Islands. Register at www.olympicpeninsulaudubon.org. BirdFest program information and registration can be found at www.olympicbirdfest.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.

Hog Island

The National Audubon Society will reopen its legendary Hog Island off the coast of Maine for ornithology sessions called Project Puffin during the summer of 2010. Some of the country's top ornithologists, including Kenn Kaufman, Pete Dunne, and Scott Weidensaul, will serve as instructors. On the 330-acre spruce-covered island participants will enjoy three home-cooked meals a day in an historic island farmhouse that overlooks Muscongus Bay. During the five-day sessions, small field groups will go on a variety of trips and cruises, and attend workshops and presentations on topics ranging from the identification of warblers to the restoration of Atlantic Puffins and terns on nearby Eastern Egg Rock, and more. (www.projectpuffin.org)

Additionally, Exploritas (formerly Elderhostel) (www.exploritas.org) will offer two service programs to assist Project Puffin biologists to census gulls, eiders and cormorants at nearby seabird nesting islands. Participants will assist with habitat management for endangered terns and storm-petrels at Eastern Egg Rock.

Roger Tory Peterson was the first birding instructor when Hog Island camp first opened in 1936.

Mount Diablo Audubon Society meets on the first Thursday of each month, except July and August, in the Camellia Room of The Gardens at Heather Farms, 1540 Marchbanks Drive, Walnut Creek. Everyone is invited.

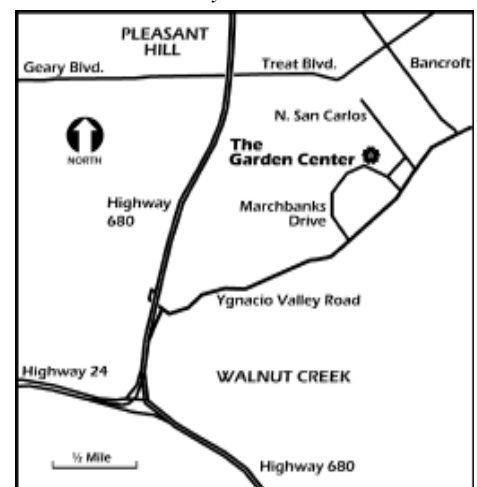
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The Garden Center

Mount Diablo Audubon Society meets on the first Thursday of each month, except July and August, in the Camellia Room of The Gardens at Heather Farms, 1540 Marchbanks Drive, Walnut Creek. Everyone is invited.



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
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Whitewater Preserve, Riverside County

The Wildlands Conservancy

The vision and accomplishments of the people at The Wildlands Conservancy (TWC) are laudable. This organization has preserved more land in California with private funds than any other conservation organization. It owns the largest nonprofit preserve system in California, mostly in Southern California, but also including the 5832-acre Spy Rock Preserve along five miles of the National Wild and Scenic Eel River in Mendocino County. There is also a 97,000-acre Wind Wolves Preserve in Kern County, where Golden Eagles and tule elk range, and a 33,000-acre Sand to Snow Preserve System, linking the Mojave Desert to the heights of the San Geronio Mountains.

Primary in the mission of The Wildlands Conservancy, in addition to preserving the beauty and biodiversity of the earth, is to fund programs so that children may know the wonder and joy of nature. TWC funds

more free outdoor education programs for youth than any other nonprofit organization in Southern California.

The Wildlands Conservancy's headquarters is at Oak Glen Preserve, east of Yucaipa and adjacent to the San Bernardino National Forest. The Preserve includes prominent peaks the Conservancy purchased to guard against exploitation of private lands within the National Forest and to promote the expansion of the San Geronio Wilderness. These peaks include Wilshire Peak (8,707 feet) and Galena Peak (9,324 feet), an important lambing area for bighorn sheep. The preserve is part of the Conservancy's Sand-to-Snow Preserve System.

Oak Glen Preserve is at scenic Los Rios Rancho, southern California's largest historic apple ranch. More than 200,000 visitors each year come to Los Rios to pick apples, picnic, hike, participate in environmental programs, and enjoy homemade apple pie. The Wildlands Conservancy acquired the ranch when it was being marketed for residential subdivision. The use of pesticides in the orchards has been elimi-

nated. Important pollinators and beneficial insects are no longer sprayed in efforts to destroy apple pests. As a result, the Southwest Willow Flycatcher, a federally endangered insect-dependent bird, now breeds along the stream on the preserve.



Oak Glen Preserve's Childrens Trail begins at the apple orchard and serves as an outdoor classroom.

The Wildlands Conservancy built a children's nature trail at Los Rios for its outdoor education program. This trail meanders through an evergreen forest, past several ponds that have ducks during winter migration, and under the canopy

Continued on Page 8 »