

CALENDAR

MDAS general meetings are on the first Thursday of every month. Our next meeting is Thursday, March 4. Meetings for the rest of the 2003-2004 year are April 1, May 6, and June 3. There are no meetings in July or August.

If you are a new member or new to the area, let us know. We want to welcome you and tell you about our activities. All new members and visitors receive a free door prize ticket.

The MDAS Board meets at 7 p.m. on the second Thursday evening of the month at the conference room of Wild Birds Unlimited, 692 Contra Costa Blvd., PH. All members are welcome 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 one-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, 4801 Shavano Peak Ct., Antioch, CA 94531.



Driving directions: Take Ygnacio Valley Rd. to signal light at N. San Carlos Dr. (Heather Farm entrance). Go 1 block and turn left on Heather. At Marchbanks Dr. turn right. The Garden Center is located about 200 ft. on the right.



The QUAIL

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Next Deadline: March 6, 2004

Golden Eagle to Be Focus of March Meeting

At our March 4 general meeting, we will celebrate the Golden Eagle as well as learn about status in California. Two of our own members, Brian Murphy and Diana Granados, will share their unique experiences with this magnificent bird. Our Birding Information segment will feature a California Energy Commission biologist who will speak on "Avian Mortality in the Altamont Hills Wind Resource Area." (See Birding Information below.)

Brian Murphy's Eagle Photos

In addition to being a staunch member of MDAS, Brian Murphy is a member of the Walnut Creek Open Space Foundation Board. Due to his interest in his own "backyard," he has spent years observing and photographing the wild creatures in Contra Costa County. Some of Brian's photographs have been the basis of Chuck Todd's illustrations in *The Raccoon Next Door*, written by Gary Bogue. Brian has spent eight years watching, enjoying, and photographing the Golden Eagles in Shell Ridge Open Space of Walnut Creek. His program will focus on these Golden Eagles that live only 1.5 miles from Heather Farm Park.

According to the UCSC Predatory Bird Research Group, the slopes and valleys of the Diablo Mountains support the highest known density of Golden Eagle nesting territories in the world. In one square 820-kilometer section of oak savanna near Livermore, there are at least 44 occupied breeding territories, or one pair every 19 square kilometers. The open grassland habitats, upslope winds funneling from San Francisco Bay to the Central Valley, the scattering of oaks suitable for nesting, and an abundance of California ground squirrels create ideal conditions for this highly-regarded predator.

Live Golden Eagle Visitor

After Brian has shared his photographs of the Golden Eagles, Diana Granados and Jenny Papka of Native Bird Connections will share their resident Golden Eagle with us. The young, two-year-old bird was found in east Contra Costa County with a permanent wing injury and became a "partner educator" with NBC in 2003.

Native Bird Connections was founded in 2000 to nurture "Respect, Reverence, and Responsibility for the Natural World." It is a professional organization offering non-releasable birds an opportunity to have working and useful lives in captivity. Diana and Jenny and their staff provide advice and assistance for rescued wildlife and educational presentations for youth and adult audiences.

Diana Granados, founder and director of Native Bird Connections, has 28 years of experience in the fields of education and

captive animal management. The NBC curator, Jenny Papka, has 16 years of experience in those two fields. They are an amazing team. It is thrilling to experience their skilled handling and understanding of the magnificent birds in the NBC collection. Join us for a special evening.

Birding Information

Linda Spiegel, a wildlife biologist with over 20 years of experience and an employee of the California Energy Commission, will be our speaker for Birding Information. Ms. Spiegel will be giving us a summary of research on avian mortality in the Altamont Hills from the wind machines there. She runs the terrestrial resource research program for the Public Interest Energy Research (PIER) Program. This program currently involves wind and bird interactions, bird electrocutions, reducing fuel loading to mimic natural fire regimes, and reducing exotic invasions from transmission line corridor maintenance activities.

Meeting Schedule

The next MDAS general meeting will be **Thursday, March 4**, in the Camellia Room of The Gardens at Heather Farm, 1540 Marchbanks Dr., Walnut Creek (see map on p. 6).

- 6:30 p.m.—Doors open
 - 7 p.m.—Birding Information
 - 7:25 p.m.—Business meeting
 - 7:40 p.m.—Social time, refreshments and door prize drawing
 - 8:05 p.m.—Program
- Remember your coffee cup!



Golden Eagle sits on falconer's glove

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Spring Arriving Birds Focus of March Field Trips

Elizabeth Dickey, Field Trip Chair

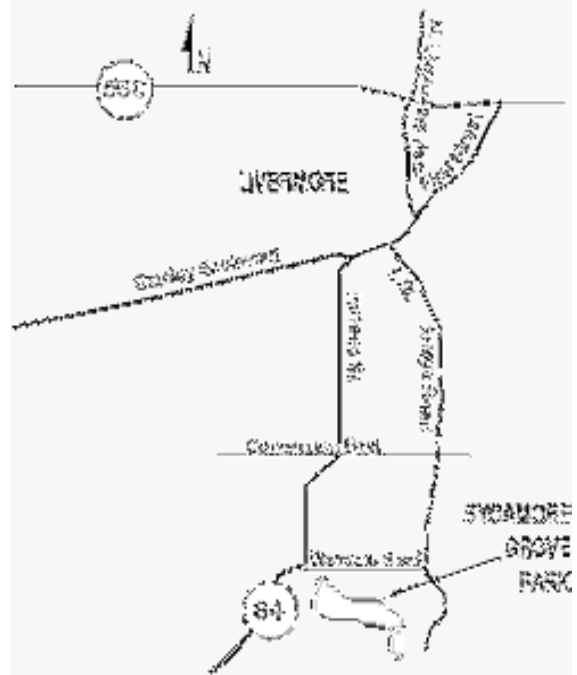
Field trips are open to MDAS members and nonmembers alike. You do not have to be a birding expert; only one who enjoys nature. Bring binoculars, field guides, and lunch. We have a limited number of loaner binoculars available by calling the trip leader **at least 7 days in advance**. Weather or the availability of leaders may require changes. Trips go in light rain or drizzle. If in doubt, call leader up to 1/2 hour before departure. Carpool time is the departure time. Carpool expense: 20 cents per mile shared among driver and riders; tolls and entry fees are shared equally by driver and riders.

March 3, Wednesday—San Leandro Reservoir. Meet at 8 a.m. at Valle Vista staging area off Canyon Rd. From SR 24 west, take Orinda exit south; in Moraga, turn right on to Canyon Road. Leader: call Elizabeth Dickey (925-254-0486) for more information Category 2

March 6, Saturday—Capay Valley. Carpool leaves Sun Valley parking lot in Concord at 7:30 a.m. This is a 225-mile car caravan trip to Yolo County. We will be going west of I-505 on SR16 and continue north to SR 20. Possible birds are Lewis's Woodpecker, Common Mergansers, and Canyon and Rock Wrens, and raptors, including Bald and Golden Eagles. Trip will go in light rain. Leader: call Elizabeth Dickey (925-254-0486) for more information Category 2

March 11, Thursday—Rockville Park. Take I-80 East to Fairfield; exit at Suisun Valley Road. Follow this north, and turn left at traffic light onto Rockville Road. Take Rockville Rd. straight up about 2.5 miles. The small dirt parking lot will be on the left side. Look for signs: "Rockville Park," "Park 800 ft. Ahead." Leader: call Elizabeth Dickey (925-254-0486) for more information Category 2

March 17, Wednesday—Sycamore Grove-Livermore. Alternate Route 1: From Highway 680 in Alameda County, exit Highway 84 east (from southbound 680 you must exit, cross under the freeway, get back on the freeway, and then exit again). Drive about 6.5 miles east on Highway 84, then turn right onto Holmes. Drive just 0.2 mile, and shortly after the road turns sharply left (becoming Wetmore), turn right into the park. Alternate Route 2: From Highway 580, exit Portola on outskirts of Livermore. Drive south on Portola about 0.5 mile, then turn right onto North L Street. Continue south (North L becomes South L, then Arroyo Road), altogether about 2.2 miles, then turn right onto Wetmore. Drive about 0.7 mile and then turn left into the park. Alternate Route 3: From I-580 eastbound take Santa Rita Rd. south, turn left on Valley Ave., and left on Stanley Blvd. Turn right on Murrietta and right onto SR 84 (Holmes) Continue on Holmes when SR 84 bends to the right. Turn left on Wetmore and look for parking lot on right. This is a new trip to one of the largest sycamore groves in the state. On the way home, we may stop to look at the heron rookery at Shadow Cliffs. Leader: Elizabeth Dickey, 925-254-0486 Category 2



Map to Sycamore Grove in Livermore

March 20, Saturday—Black Diamond Mines Regional Park. Carpool leaves 7:30 a.m. from the southwest corner of the Sun Valley parking lot. Meet at 8:15 a.m. in the parking lot at Black Diamond Mines park. Go east on Ygnacio Valley/ Kirker Pass Roads; in Pittsburg, turn right on Buchanan Rd. Go east on Buchanan Rd to Somersville Rd. (Antioch) and turn right. Follow the road to the parking lot at the end. Woodland, chaparral, and some grassland birds. Leader: Pat MacEachern, 934-3041 Category 3

March 25, Thursday—Huckleberry Preserve. Meet at 8 a.m. at parking lot on Skyline Blvd. From Hwy 24 westbound, take Fish Ranch Rd, turn left onto Grizzly Peak, and left again onto Skyline Dr. Parking is on left just past Sibley Preserve. Leader: Elizabeth Dickey, 254-0486 Category 2

Difficulty of field trip:

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

Category 2: Moderate, 1 mile or more, possibly rough terrain.

Category 3: Difficult, extensive walking on rough terrain.

March 31, Thursday—Skyline Park, Napa. Take I-680 to Benica Bridge; then take I-780 to Vallejo. Go north on SR 29 to SR 121. Turn right on Imola east to park entrance. Parking fee \$5. Meet at 8:45 a.m. in first parking lot. Expect Brown Creepers and White-breasted Nuthatch. Bring lunch. Leader: Elizabeth Dickey 254-0486 Category 2

Lindsay Wildlife Museum Trip Spring Birds at Pfeiffer Big Sur & Molera State Parks

Join Phil and Pat Gordon, Leaders/Guides with decades of successful experience, on a Lindsay Museum-sponsored weekend birding and camping trip. The group will leave from the Lindsay Museum, 1931 First Ave., Walnut Creek, at 8 a.m. on Saturday, March 27, and return on Sunday.

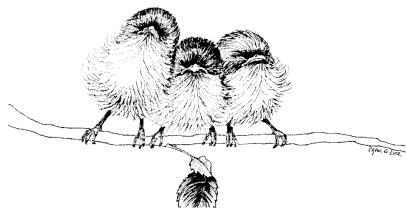
This will be an opportunity to explore some of the birdiest locales in California. Their sojourn will include visits to habitats from coastal shores, rocky near-shore zones, mud and sandy flats, rivers and their riparian galleries, grassy and oak savannas, to oak and redwood woodlands, to name a few.

The historic Big Sur area is also part of the Condor Introduction and Release Program. They will visit the Ornithology Lab and Condor Center supported by the Ventana Wilderness Society to witness

their active mist-netting and bird banding program.

The inland venture will be to upper Carmel Valley to the Hastings Natural History Reserve, where the discovery was made regarding social intricacies in family life of Acorn Woodpeckers and Western Scrub-Jays. Their delightful trails will be for our use.

Camping along the Big Sur River drainage in the Park among the Coast Redwoods may also offer some Owling Saturday night. On the trip back north, they will visit Moss Landing for another look at the outer coast and the Estuary of Elkhorn Slough and its host of Wintering/Spring arriving birds. FOR MORE INFORMATION: Contact Janine Sidran, Lindsay Wildlife Museum 1(925) 935-1978 or Phil Gordon (510) 538-3550.



-drawing by Carol Lutz

Golden Trout Natural History

At this hike-in wilderness camp at 10,000 ft near Mt. Whitney, guests have an superb opportunity to learn from professional botanists, naturalists, and geologists. The Golden Trout Camp is composed of historic log cabins (some of the only structures allowed to remain inside this federally designated Wilderness Area). Guests are provided with meals, showers, and tent camps. The sessions are one-, two-, and three-week sessions, very economical. Sessions start June 27, July 4, and July 11. Reserve early—the limited space is often full by April. For brochure, call 805-688-8344. See the web site at <<http://www.lstartists.com/gtc/>>.

Chapter Election

Next month, the MDAS Board will name a Nominations Committee to seek candidates for four officer positions: Chapter president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer. If you are interested in serving on the Nominations Committee, call Mike Williams at 925-798-0303.

Field Trip Reports

Santa Cruz, Saturday, January 17—Thirteen birders enjoyed a beautiful day in Santa Cruz. We saw a total of 58 species, including three species of cormorants, but missed a target bird, Wood Duck, at Neary Lagoon.—*Joel Summerhill*

Sunol Regional Park, Wednesday, January 21—A sunny January day was enjoyed by 10 birders who walked to Little Yosemite. Acorn Woodpeckers were everywhere along the road. A flock of White-throated Swifts was heard and seen high over the hills. We identified 38 species during the trip.—*Hugh Harvey.*

News from Wild Birds Unlimited

692 Contra Costa Blvd.
Pleasant Hill, CA
798-0303

Visit Our Website at
<<http://www.wbupleasanthill.com>>

American and Lesser Goldfinches are abundant at the feeders. For the second year in a row, very few Pine Siskins have been seen during the winter. This irruptive species is very nomadic and is not always seen in Northern California backyards. Goldfinch and Siskins love thistle and sunflower seeds and will readily use bird feeders.

Dark-eyed Juncos have been quite abundant. We have also received many reports of Nuttall's Woodpeckers, Oak Titmice, and Chestnut-backed Chickadees visiting peanut and suet feeders. Large flocks of American Robins and Cedar Waxwings have been devouring the toyon and pyracantha berries.

Anna's Hummingbirds have already had their first nesting of the year. After mating, the male has nothing to do with the nest building and raising of the young. The female has the complete responsibility for rearing the young. She makes a nest out of lichen, lint, and downy plant fibers that is often held together with spider webs. The female usually lay 2 eggs and incubates them 14-19 days. She feeds nectar and insects to the young for 18-23 days in the nest. The young are fledged and on their own 1-2 weeks later.

Chickadees and titmice are already starting to nest. It's not too late to put out birdhouses. Both of these species, along with woodpeckers, nuthatches, bluebirds, wrens, and others will readily use nesting boxes. Birdhouses should have drainage, ventilation, and cleanouts. These elements provide a safe, secure home for the birds. Also, depending upon the species you are trying to attract, specific hole sizes and floor dimensions are required. For a free Bird House handout showing the requirements for different species, come to WBU.

Vote No on Measure N

President's Notes

by Mike Williams

Many of the measures and propositions on the March 2 ballot will shape the direction of our state and county and deserve our careful consideration. As a conservationist and businessman, one local issue that concerns me greatly is Measure N. After looking at the measure and reading both sides of the story, I joined my fellow MDAS board members in opposing Measure N. I urge you to vote NO on Measure N. Here's why.

Measure N has been placed on the ballot by the Contra Costa Water District. (If you don't live in the area served by the CCWD, you will not be voting on the measure.) The CCWD seeks voter approval to expand the Los Vaqueros Reservoir to five times its present size—that's right—five times its present size, making Los Vaqueros larger than Lake Camanche. Los Vaqueros #2 will flood an additional 2600 acres of habitat as well as millions of dollars of trails, marinas, and other visitor facilities built with our money by the CCWD. This huge reservoir will cost an estimated \$1.5 billion and take 4 to 7 years to complete.

CCWD has put up signs that say a yes vote will provide drought protection for the District's ratepayers. But that's misleading. If you go to the CCWD's own website (<http://www.ccwater.com/publications/watersupply.asp>), you can find a document entitled *Future Water Supply Study* dated 1996. This document published by the CCWD says that in the very worst, prolonged drought at the outer edge of the years covered by the study (2040), the District might be 13,000 acre feet short of water. But the document also states that the District has already purchased the rights to an additional 12,000 acre feet of water. We already have drought protection. The study also recommends three alternatives to take care of drought situations. Not one of the recommended alternatives is expansion of Los Vaqueros. Another CCWD document, *Urban Water Management Plan*, dated December 2000, states, "Near-term demands can be met under all supply conditions except in the latter years of a multi-year drought where short-term water purchases in conjunction with a request for up to 5 percent voluntary conservation would be considered to meet demands." Here are two documents written by CCWD experts who say we don't need an expanded reservoir to provide drought reserves for at least the next 45 years.

Let's look at the dollar costs. In 1988 when CCWD first sought voter approval for funding to build Los Vaqueros #1—our present reservoir—the District told voters that it would cost \$88 million. Then that cost rose to \$350 million. The final price tag was \$450 million. Los Vaqueros #2, according to the District's estimates, will cost \$1.5 billion. I don't have any reason to think that the District has improved its ability to estimate costs.

In order to build Los Vaqueros #2, the District will have to drain the existing reservoir and tear down the existing dam. The existing dam is 4 years old! The concrete is hardly dry! During the 4 to 7 years of reconstruction and filling Los Vaqueros #2, we won't have a reservoir to improve water quality or to protect us in case of a drought—but we will still have our sky-high water rates.

It gets worse. The District wants our approval to proceed with these questionable plans, but they can't even tell us where the extra 400,000 acre feet of water will go. They say it won't go to southern California, but we live in a state where water is a commodity and sold to the highest bidder. The District cannot guarantee that this water won't find its way into a canal heading south.

I'm a businessman and this measure fails the common-sense test. It's a bad measure badly timed. Vote NO on Measure N.



The *Quail* is published 10 times a year by the Mt Diablo Audubon Society, a nonprofit organization dedicated to habitat conservation and environmental education

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The American Coot Can Count

All experienced birders have observed and probably dismissed that small, ubiquitous waterfowl, the American Coot. But that familiar marsh bird is not as stupid as its name may indicate. A new study found that coots are able to recognize and count their own eggs, even in the presence of eggs laid by other birds.

According to Dr. Bruce Lyon, who studied this species, this talent of this unassuming bird is a defense mechanism used by female coots to thwart other coots who lay their eggs in rival nests. Lyon's findings were published in the April 3, 2003, issue of the journal *Nature*.

"At first, I didn't believe the results," said the assistant professor of ecology and evolutionary biology at the University of California, Santa Cruz. "The ability of females to count only their own eggs in a mixture of eggs is a remarkable feat that provides a convincing, rare example of counting in a wild animal."

Lyon studied hundreds of coot nests in British Columbia during a four-year investigation that was originally designed to study how coot parents care for their chicks., but the focus of his study changed when he discovered high levels of "brood parasitism," or the practice of one species laying eggs in another species' nests. Lyon realized that coots were often the victims of this parasitism.

Brood parasitism affected 41 percent of the nests that Lyon studied and accounted for 13 percent of all eggs laid by the study population.

The phenomenon has a serious impact on the coot population, Lyon explained. "Typically about half the chicks in a nest starve to death," Lyon said. "That explains both the cost of parasitism to the host and the benefit to the parasite."

But female coots, Lyon says, are good at recognizing and rejecting parasitic eggs. Rejected eggs were buried deep in the nesting material and never hatched.

Lyon examined whether the presence of parasitic eggs affected clutch size because

Observations

by Steve Glover

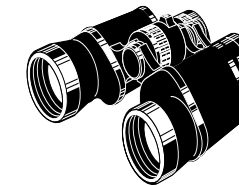
A female **Wood Duck** continued at the unlikely location of Heather Farms Park, Walnut Creek, through at least 1/28 (HH). Hooded Mergansers seem to increased locally in recent winters, and several reports were again received this period. Four were at Civic Park in Walnut Creek on 1/13 (NC), a pair was at the San Ramon Royal Vista Golf Course on 1/18 (AR), an unknown number were seen again at Civic Park in Walnut Creek on 1/30 (HH), and four were at Hidden Lakes Park, Martinez, on 2/8 (PK).

An **Osprey** was at Mt. View Sanitary District near Martinez on 1/7 (GF, JM). Another or possibly the same bird was at Martinez Regional Shoreline on 1/11 (NC). Ospreys are apparently quite unusual in this particular area although a single bird is found most winters at nearby Mallard Reservoir.

A displaying male **Allen's Hummingbird** was at Jewel Lake, Tilden Park, on 1/12 (DH). People are often surprised at just how early Allen's Hummingbirds, our earliest migrants, can return. This bird was right about on schedule. Tilden Park's wintering **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** continued to be seen through at least 2/12 (PK).

coots lay eggs until an internal cue tell them to stop. Scientists had thought this cue was triggered by a sense of touch, prompted when the female was sitting on the right number of eggs.

"Rejection takes a long time, so the clutch-size decision is made while the parasitic eggs are still in the nest," Lyon said. "That means they are not using a touch cue. These birds are looking at their nests and counting only those eggs they recognize as their own to make a clutch-size decision."



The highlight of the winter was clearly the brief visit of a male **Black-throated Blue Warbler** to a Martinez backyard. The bird was spotted and photographed by Anne and Nikhi Kumaranayagam on 1/12, but within 20 minutes the bird was gone and never seen again. This appears to be the third record for Contra Costa but the first for winter. The previous two records had both been in fall.

Badly overshadowed was an adult male **Wilson's Warbler** in a Kensington yard on 1/17. Wilson's Warblers are extremely rare in the East Bay in winter with just a tiny handful of records for Contra Costa County, although the observer saw one at the same spot in 12/01 (GG).

As was the case in the past several winters, a small flock of **Chipping Sparrows** is once again wintering at Hidden Lakes Park, Martinez. At least three birds were seen there on 2/9 (DW). Chipping Sparrows are generally considered to be rare in northern California in winter. **White-throated Sparrows** are uncommon winter visitors to Contra Costa County, with most of the records being from backyard feeders. This period brought three reports: One on 1/3 in a Moraga yard (SP), one on 1/20 in residential Walnut Creek (MP, GF, JR), and one on 1/30 near Heather Farms, Walnut Creek (HH). One wonders how many are present that we never hear about.

Observers: Nathan Crawford, George Finger, George Griffeth, Hugh Harvey, Derek Heins, Patrick king, John Marsh, Susan Parr, Marjorie Plant, Jean Richmond, Audrey Riddlebarger, Denise Wight

Please send observations to Steve Glover, 6526 Conestoga Lane, Dublin 94568, or call (925) 828-7793. Please include your phone number with your observation.
Northern CA Bird Box:
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