



# the Quail

Mount Diablo Audubon Society  
P.O. Box 53, Walnut Creek, CA 94597-0053  
www.diabloaudubon.com/index.php

Volume 50, Number 6

March 2005

## Fabulous Falcon Foursome • Diana Granados



Faster than a speeding bullet! Able to leap from tall buildings in a single bound! Is it Superman? No, it's super falcon. On March 3rd there will be four super species of falcon coming live to Mount Diablo Audubon at Heather Farm Garden Center. Don't miss a chance to meet these amazing birds and learn their stories.

Diana Granados and Jenny Papka will introduce four of the six species of true North American falcons. These birds are the heroes of our own backyard of Contra Costa County and can be seen in action around our county. Diana and Jenny represent Native Bird Connections, which was founded five years ago in the spirit of native traditions—Respect, Responsibility, and Reverence. NBC is a not-for-profit, volunteer organization whose volunteers combine experience of over 50 years in the field of environmental education and captive wildlife management and consultation. Diana and Jenny will offer insightful conversation about the birds that share their lives.

*Falco columbarius*, *Falco sparverius*, *Falco mexicanus* and *Falco peregrinus* will be on hand to demonstrate the biological and personal characteristics of this charismatic genus. A falcon traveling at warp speed cannot afford to “crash” into a

flock of birds, so how do they manage to grab the prey and live to tell about it? What can we do, and what did we do, to assure these super birds will always be our neighbors? Find out about their role as educational partners and the role that Mount Diablo Audubon has played in providing valuable work for these incredible birds. Don't miss the opportunity to be “blown away” by the presence of these super falcons.

### Birding Information

#### A Legacy in the Making

Brenda Henschan and Carole Jensen will introduce the Del Rey Elementary School nature garden project and some very important bird and garden participants. If we are really lucky, these participants will give us some of their observations. Join us to hear and see the reality of Mount Diablo Audubon partnerships in action. This will be a memorable renewal of wonder when we experience discovery through the thoughts and actions of the future caretakers of our natural world. Don't miss it.

Photo credits (l. to r.):

- |                  |                   |
|------------------|-------------------|
| Merlin           | Stuart Healy      |
| Kestrel          | Wendell Long      |
| Prairie Falcon   | Stuart Healy      |
| Peregrine Falcon | Eastman Kodak Co. |

## President's Letter

Why did you become a birder? Was it because of their beauty? The challenge of identification? Concern about the environment? All of the above?

People become involved with Mount Diablo Audubon for many reasons. They are **birders** or want to become birders. They want to conserve **important bird areas**. They want to improve **habitat** for birds and other animals. They want to make a **difference** in their community. They want to ensure the safety of the environment around them for future generations. As members of Mount Diablo Audubon Society, we know that many

## Meeting Schedule

The next MDAS general meeting will be **Thursday, March 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.

## Field Trip Reports

**January 5, Santa Cruz.** Seven birders enjoyed a beautiful, much appreciated, sunny day in Santa Cruz. We visited both the new Wilder Ranch State Park north of town and the Monarch Butterfly Grove at Natural Bridges State Park. Featured birds were a Wood Duck and a Common Loon. We had a total of 64 species.

Joel Summerhill



**January 20, Thornton Area.** What a trip! Five birders tallied 82 species despite valley fog which, although not thick, hampered visibility a bit early in the day then lifted somewhat by late morning, the temperature was in the low 40s all day but luckily there was no wind. Although not in the usual numbers, we saw numerous Sandhill Cranes in several places and some of them were dancing. We saw Tricolored and Yellow-headed Blackbirds in the huge flock at SR 160 and Sherman Island Road, 6 Cattle Egrets on Guard Road, a male Eurasian Wigeon, a Merlin, a Lesser Yellowlegs and a Great Horned Owl along Woodbridge Road, another Merlin on Staten Island Road, and a Long-eared owl at the end of the public part of the road, the Eastern Phoebe at Cosumnes River Preserve, and ended the day with over 100 Mountain Plovers along Flannery Road in southeast Solano County.

Jean Richmond

**January 26, East Contra Costa County.** Three members and guests braved a rainy morning to head out to the eastern part of Contra Costa County. We birded a number of the east county special spots including Ironhouse sanitation ponds, Clifton Court forebay, Jersey Island, the roads around Byron airport, the north side of Los Vaqueros reservoir, and the Round Valley staging area briefly. We saw 61 species during the day that included good looks at Lesser Yellowlegs at Ironhouse. We also had about 20 Wilson's Snipe there. Near the Byron airport we studied a textbook example of Rough-legged Hawk and at the Round Valley staging area our last bird

## Observations

By Steve Glover

**Greater-white Fronted Geese** appeared at strange locations this period, including 17 at the Stege Marsh Restoration Area near Point Isabel, Richmond on 1/23 (MR). Stranger still was the presence of 9 at the lagoons in Briones Regional Park on 1/30 (NK). Northeast winds were responsible for similar sightings in the Bay Area during that time period. A **Snow Goose** put in a brief appearance at Martinez Regional Shoreline on 1/17 (PK, N&GS).

An out-of-place **Wood Duck** was found wintering at the San Ramon Royal Vista Golf Course duck feeding area in January and continued into February (KH).

A stunning male **Long-tailed Duck** was found at Martinez Regional Shoreline on 1/28 (KT). It was also seen 1/30 (KT), 2/1 (HH, SG), 2/2 (KL) and 2/3 (JC, BG, LL).

**Hooded Mergansers** were noted at several locations during January and into February, including the Moraga Country Club (JC) and in San Ramon along the Iron Horse Trail south of Pine Valley Road and at Pacific Bell in Bishop Ranch (KH).

At least one **Clapper Rail** continued at Meeker Slough near Point Isabel, Richmond on 1/4 (BB) and 1/15 (RC).

A **White-throated Sparrow** was noted visiting a Walnut Creek feeder through at least 1/19 (LG). A bird reported as a "red" **Fox Sparrow** was reported at

for the trip was a beautiful adult Golden Eagle flying over the parking lot.

Jimm Edgar

**February 3, Grizzly Island.** Eight members toured the Suisun Marsh area. We started off as the fog lifted and spent the rest of the day in bright sunshine. Grizzly Island Wildlife Area was closed for a junior hunt, but there were ample roads and places to explore elsewhere on the island. Twelve species of ducks and geese were seen in excellent light, with the sun behind us. We also saw 8 species of raptors among the 59 species seen. Highlight birds: Ferruginous Hawk, Merlin, Barn Owl, Yellow-billed Magpie, and Tree Swallows. Maury Stern

**February 9, Parks of Concord and Walnut Creek.** On a clear sunny morning three birders met for a tour of 5 parks

Meeker Slough near Point Isabel, Richmond on 1/4 (BB) and again on 1/15 (RC). Fox Sparrow taxonomy is currently in flux but if this truly was a "red" one then it was almost certainly of the subspecies *zaboria*, which breeds in central Alaska. The nominate eastern form has never been reliably recorded in California and all specimens apparently pertain to *zaboria*.

A male **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** brightened up a rainy winter at a Walnut Creek feeder 1/18-19 (LG). Though still rare in the county, feeder sightings have continued to mount in the county during the past decade and are no longer the surprise they once were.

A **Hooded Oriole** visiting a feeder in suburban Concord (PB) provided another great winter record. The bird was present through at least 2/6. There are just a handful of winter records for the county.

**Pine Siskins** were noted widely throughout the county for the first time in years, including a group in an Antioch backyard on 1/21 (JB).

Bob Battagin, Polly Boissevain, Jeanne Bonner, Rich Cimino, Judi Cooper, Laura Gee, Bingham Gibbs, Steve Glover, Hugh Harvey, Kevin Hintsa, Patrick King, Nikhi Kumaranayagam, Lynn Lakso, Kay Loughman, Matt Ricketts, Nancy & Gerry Salsig

in Walnut Creek and Concord. Habitat included small lakes, creekside, lawn and garden areas. 51 species were seen. Yellow-rumped Warblers and Cedar Waxwings were abundant at most locations. In Heather Farms, both Black-crowned Night Herons (adult and immature) and a Green Heron were found. The birds of the day were a pair of Hooded Mergansers found hidden in a tangle of overhanging branches and roots at Newhall Park. With their perfect camouflage, we could see only tantalizing glimpses until a walker passing close by flushed them into the open for few moments. Both birds fully opened their crests as they swam a slow pas de deux in the sunlight, then disappeared even deeper into the tangle of vegetation and shadows. Lynn Lakso

# Field Trip Schedule

By Elizabeth Dickey

## March

- 2 Wednesday Walnut Creek 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

## April

- 2 Saturday Garin Regional Park
- 7 Thursday Tilden
- 13 Wednesday East Briones
- 16 Saturday Pine Canyon
- 21 Thursday Ida Clayton Road
- 27 Wednesday Del Puerto Canyon

For the full list of field trips through Summer 2005, see the October 2004 *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](http://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.

## March Field Trips

Wednesday, March 2, **Heather Farms**. **Note change of date!** Meet at 8:30 AM at the duck ponds. Leader: Hugh Harvey. 932-4715.

Saturday, March 5, **Bolinas Lagoon-Five Brooks**. Carpool leaves at 8:00 AM from the southwest corner of the Sun Valley parking lot in Concord. Meet at 9:15 AM in the parking lot at Five Brooks. 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. From Hwy. 101 north, take Central San Rafael exit. Go 2 blocks, turn left on 3rd St. and continue west to Sir Francis Drake Blvd. Continue on Sir Francis Drake to Highway 1 at Olema. Go south 5 miles to Five Brooks. Leader: Nancy Wenninger, 938-7987. Category 2.

Thursday, March 10. **Berkeley Shoreline**. Meet at 8:30 AM in the parking lot at the north end of the Emeryville Marina. Take Hwy. 24 to 880 West; turn north onto I-80. Take Powell St. exit, turn left on Powell; go out to Emeryville Marina, park in last lot near pier. May be cold and windy. Loons, grebes, and bay ducks.

Wednesday, March 16. **San Leandro Reservoir**. Meet at 8 AM at Valle Vista staging area off Canyon Rd. From SR 24 west, take Orinda exit south; in

Moraga, turn right onto Canyon Road. Call Elizabeth Dickey for information, 254-0486. Category 3.

Saturday, March 19. **Black Diamond Regional Park**. Carpool leaves 7:30 AM from Acalanes Ave., off Pleasant Hill Rd., north of Hwy. 24. Meet at 8:10 AM in the last parking lot at park. Go east on Ygnacio Valley and Kirker Pass Roads. Turn right on Buchanan Rd. Go east on Buchanan Rd to Somersville Rd. 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.

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

Wednesday, March 30. **Lagunitas-Bon Tempe**. This very popular birding trip to two jewel-like lakes in Marin passes through varied terrain (meadows, marshes, forests, ridges as well as along two lake shores) in the beautiful area of the northern slopes of Mount Tamalpais. Carpool leaves Acalanes Ave., off Pleasant Hill Rd. just north of Hwy. 24 at 7:30 AM. From first San Rafael exit, go left on 3rd St. and continue to Sir Francis Drake Blvd and turn right. In Fairfax, go left

## Welcome New Members

- |                          |              |
|--------------------------|--------------|
| William and Deborah Carr | Concord      |
| Jane Edwards             | Berkeley     |
| Dian Kavanagh            | Concord      |
| Joyce Pollack            | Walnut Creek |
| Janice Ransley           | Lafayette    |
| Pamela Rogers            | Antioch      |



Vigors Wren  
*Thryomanes bewickii spilurus*  
Birds of Golden Gate Park  
Joseph Mailliard  
1930



This is the only American bird known who can narrow its pupils to a slit, as do the eyes of a cat. This is so it can control the glare of bright light; yet it is a bird that normally rests during the day and forages at dusk and even on the darkest nights. The French name for this bird is Bec-en-ciseaux Noir.

Answer on Page 6

on Fairfax Rd. Turn left on Sky Oaks Rd.; take left fork to parking lot near foot of Lagunitas Dam. Approximate meeting time is 8:30 AM. We will hike around Lagunitas in the morning and walk over to Bon Tempe in the afternoon. We have often found Piliated Woodpeckers here, and sometimes Common Loon in breeding plumage. Leader: Jean Richmond, 837-2843. Category 3.



# Birding Workshops and Festivals

**Owls of the Peninsula.** March 12, Point Reyes Field Seminars. Who hoots and who doesn't, and who's who? Find out how owls can catch a mouse on a moonless night and learn some of the secrets of their silent flight! On this adventure, we'll learn about the natural histories, identification, vocalizations, adaptations, and ecology of our local owl species. The evening will begin with slides and discussion. Then we will head out into the field to search for owls in various haunts on the peninsula which may provide us with satisfying contact with these specialized, highly adapted birds of prey. 4-9 PM, \$43 (\$40 members).

**Olympic Peninsula BirdFest.** April 1-3, Sequim-Port Angeles, WA. This second annual event is a fundraiser to support the Dungeness River Audubon Center. Top birders will take small groups to favorite birding areas. The Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe will host an evening salmon bake banquet with traditional story telling. For further information, see [www.olympicpeninsulaudubon.org](http://www.olympicpeninsulaudubon.org).

**Godwit Days.** April 15-17, Arcata. Held at the peak of spring migration, shorebirds abound and special opportunities are planned to see many other species, including Marbled Murrelet, Spotted Owl, and Snowy Plover. Nearly 100 small group field trips, lectures, workshops, boating excursions, and community activities are led by experienced local guides. The "Humboldt Big Day" trip consistently observes over 110 species in a single day! Register on-line at [www.godwitdays.com](http://www.godwitdays.com) for an exceptional weekend of birding on the scenic Redwood Coast. For further information or assistance with registration for Godwit Days call 800-908-WING.

The San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory and Ventana Wilderness Society's Big Sur Ornithology Lab announce an **Ageing and Sexing of Passerines Workshop** on Monday-Friday, April 18-22. Peter Pyle, Institute for Bird Populations Biologist, and author of *The Identification Guide to North American Birds, Part I*, will be the primary instructor.

The action-packed week will consist of presentations, study of specimens, field mist-netting, banding, and processing at

three locations on the central coast of California, field trips to renowned birding locations, and a social on Thursday evening. Participants will be trained in a synthesis of methods pertaining to identification, ageing, and sexing of landbirds in the hand and in the field. Cost is \$650 (\$550 early registration, by March 18th). Breakfasts, lunches, and one dinner are included; lodging not provided.

For more information and a registration form please see [www.ventanaws.org/PeterPyleWorkshop.htm](http://www.ventanaws.org/PeterPyleWorkshop.htm) or contact the Big Sur Ornithology Lab (831-624-1202 or [jessicagriffiths@ventanaws.org](mailto:jessicagriffiths@ventanaws.org)).

Published by San Joaquin Audubon Society, **Birding In and Around San Joaquin County** is a spiral-bound 146-page book three years in the making. Thirty areas in San Joaquin County and four others are described by various authors. Each account covers a description of the area, directions, target birds (listed by season, plus rarities) and frequently other details you need to know. There is an updated "Field Checklist of the Birds of San Joaquin County" by David Yee and Waldo Holt. It's chock-full of information, and user-friendly as well as fun to read. If you're going to bird San Joaquin County (or Salt Springs, Cosumnes, Del Puerto Canyon, etc.) this book will be most useful. To obtain a copy, mail a check for \$14 made out to San Joaquin Audubon Society and mail to: "Bird Guide", PO Box 7755, Stockton, California 95267.

## President's Letter *Cont'd from page 1*

of these reasons take funding. We are all aware of the year to year appeals, which we get from many worthwhile organizations. Many of you have contributed each year to our successful fund-raising campaign. Have you ever considered investing in the environmental future for the benefit of your children and grandchildren? Have you considered a gift to Mount Diablo Audubon Society through your estate plan or your retirement program? An estate gift can reduce taxes. It can make you feel good today and your family proud. We will be providing more information about these exciting ideas in future issues of the *Quail*.  
*Mike Williams*

# SF Bay Flyway Festival



Pam and John Leggett were among the Mount Diablo Audubon Society members who donated a couple of hours to help staff the table at the SF Bay Flyway Festival at Mare Island in January. Others were Cheryl Abel, Ellen Beans, Carolyn Erdman, Gene Fletcher, Helen and Don Holm, Alice Holmes, Ron Kline, Mimi and Ellis Myers, Rita Tischler, Beverly Walker, and Denise Willis. Theirs was a valued service to Mount Diablo Audubon Society and to the many children and adults who stopped by.

The next opportunity for members to volunteer for outreach to the community will be Saturday, March 19, when, for the second year, MDAS will participate in the Family Festival at the Markham Nature Park and Arboretum. This neighborhood park in Concord is unique, and the event is an ideal occasion to bring an increased awareness of our outdoor environment to children, and to spark their interest. Please consider being part of this effort. Contact Cecil Williams at 376-1631 for details.

## MDAS is looking for:

- Field trip leaders
- A Secretary for the Board of Directors
- Someone to write grant proposals

Shirley Ellis, Volunteer Coordinator, can tell you more about these and other ways you can help MDAS. 983-3703

# What Do You Know About the California Bluebird Recovery Program?

By Don Yoder

Bluebirds and many other cavity nesting birds need our help by restoring spaces for their nesting and conservation. With such a goal in mind, the California Bluebird Recovery Program (CBRP) was hatched and fledged in Concord, California, at a regular meeting of the Mount Diablo Audubon Society on the first Thursday of September 1993.

Don Yoder had learned that only 13 bluebird nestbox monitors had sent reports to North American Bluebird Society (NABS) in 1992. Just imagine: with all of the habitat in the State of California and all of the people living here, it seemed ludicrous that only 13 birders surfaced in such an effort, keeping records and sending them to NABS.

At that September meeting the featured speaker was Bob Barnes, Field Representative of Audubon California. Bob's chosen subject was *Partners in Flight*, a timely topic dealing with preservation of habitat for all birds faced with the loss of nesting areas because of development. His remarks described an opening into which Yoder's ideas could prosper. At meeting's end Bob agreed that a statewide program to determine how many people were currently trying to help bluebirds could be worth while. An effort to encourage all monitors to submit reports could be beneficial. A postcard survey from NABS members in 15–20 counties showed enough interest to promote such a program.

Bob made suggestions to get the program under way: issue a newsletter; secure agreement with Mount Diablo Audubon for certain financial cooperation, such as to use the chapter's bulk mailing permit to distribute the newsletter; select available willing and experienced individuals to serve as County Coordinators to afford local promotion and assistance to trail monitors in establishment of new trails, trying to answer nesting questions and helping with problem



Western Bluebird

Chuck Peck • Sierra Foothill Conservancy solutions . . . and assign to Yoder a fancy title of Program Director.

The California Bluebird Recovery Program with the byline "For the Encouragement and Preservation of Cavity Nesters—Especially Bluebirds—Anywhere in the West" was off the ground in February, 1994.

In 1997 editor Hatch Graham renamed the newsletter *Bluebirds Fly*, with an open option for any alternative name that might be submitted by subscribers. (No further name has come forth.) And in the Spring 1998 issue the sub-heading was appropriately changed from "Preservation" to "Conservation" of Cavity Nesters. (Had you not noticed?) The newsletter itself provides useful information for birders. It is intended to be a vehicle for sharing of field notes by birders for birders up and down the state. Inclusion of birding data from outside sources also adds interest and reliable reading material. Nestbox plans and drawings are useful aids in helping new monitors.

To volunteer as a monitor and/or subscribe to the quarterly newsletter, *Bluebirds Fly*, send your name, address, phone number, e-mail address, and your \$10 tax-deductible check payable to MDAS Bluebirds to:  
CBRP, 2021 Ptarmigan Drive, #1, Walnut Creek, CA 94595

In return, you will receive the quarterly newsletter and an excellent monitoring guide. If you have any question concerning CBRP, contact MDAS member Don Yoder at [cbrp@value.net](mailto:cbrp@value.net).

## Alexander Skutch

Dr. Alexander Skutch, the legendary naturalist, botanist, and philosopher of Costa Rica, died last May 12, 2004, a week short of his 100th birthday, at his home, Los Cusingos.

Dr. Skutch was a pioneer in the exploration of Central American flora and fauna. His contributions to science, ornithology, and tropical ecology are unparalleled. He was best known for his work on the life histories of Central American birds. He was the author of over 30 books about nature, including *A Guide to the Birds of Costa Rica*, *The Mind of Birds*, and *A Naturalist on a Tropical Farm*. He also published over 300 journal articles and several books on philosophy, such as *Life Ascending*.

Shortly after receiving his PhD in botany from Johns Hopkins University in 1928, Dr. Skutch worked as research botanist in Panama. He became fascinated with the beauty and behaviors of a Rufous-tailed Hummingbird near his office window; thus he began his lifelong study of tropical birds. He also remained an ardent botanist throughout his life, sending hundreds of specimens to museums around the world. He discovered several new species, including nine new orchids in Costa Rica and two in Guatemala.

After a decade of travels and observations throughout Central America, Dr. Skutch bought a parcel of forest in 1941 that was to become his home for over 60 years. This land he named "Los Cusingos" in honor of the Fiery-billed Aracari common to the area. Many hundreds of birdwatchers made a pilgrimage to that small farm to visit Dr. Skutch and his wife, Pamela Lankester.

In 1993, Dr. Skutch gave his 76-hectare farm to the Tropical Science Center, which will continue to operate Los Cusingos as the Los Cusingos Neotropical Bird Sanctuary.

A modest, humble man, Alexander Skutch had a simple personal philosophy: Don't do anything that hurts other feeling creatures, and live simply and modestly so as not to tax the environment and its resources. The Costa Rican newspaper *La Nación* eulogized Alexander Skutch as "the guardian of paradise."  
*By Gloria Cannon*



## NEWS FROM WILD BIRDS UNLIMITED



### Zulugrass Jewelry New at Wild Birds Unlimited!

- Discover the exotic beauty of these strands handcrafted by the Masai women of Kenya. There's nothing else like it!



### Song Bird Coffee

Choose blends from Costa Rica, Panama, Nicaragua or Guatemala; French Roast or Decaf.

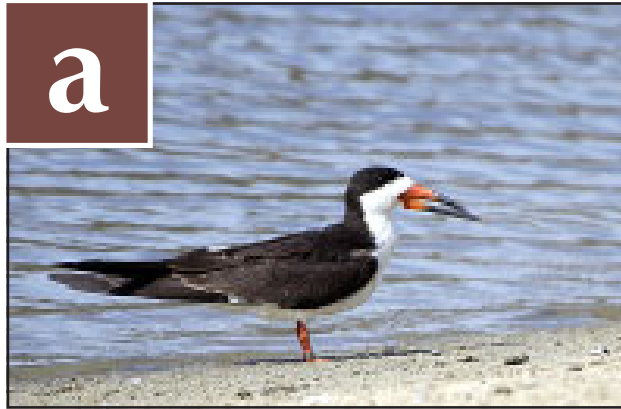
- A way to help preserve bird habitat that's in good taste.

### Why Shade-grown Coffee:

- Many birds familiar to North Americans migrate to the canopies of Latin American rainforests. In fact, 33% of all migratory birds that breed in the United States spend winter in coffee growing areas of Latin America.
- Shade coffee farms support over 150 species of birds. This is a far greater number than is found in other agricultural habitats and is only slightly exceeded in undisturbed rainforests. In the midst of shrinking rainforest habitat, migratory birds have found sanctuary in shade-grown farms.
- The Song Bird line of shade-grown coffees enables bird lovers and coffee lovers and everyone to vote with their pocketbooks for the survival of bird habitat while enjoying superb coffee.
- We invite you to come in to the store and enjoy a taste of this flavorful brew.

Mike & Cecil Williams  
**Wild Birds Unlimited**  
692 Contra Costa Blvd.  
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925-798-0303

Visit us at [www.wbupleasanthill.com](http://www.wbupleasanthill.com)



Black Skimmer at Martinez Regional Shoreline

*Photo by Scott Hein*



water for small fish, but they rarely use their eyes to locate individual prey. Almost exclusively, they catch food in flight by skimming the water with mouth open and lower mandible submerged. Prey items touched by the mandible are grasped, and then the fish is swallowed in flight or after landing.

Only the Black Skimmer is found in North America. Others are the African and Indian Skimmers, primarily denizens of large rivers. North American Skimmers depend on sandy coasts and barrier islands. Forty percent of California Skimmers nest at the Salton Sea. The first record for the state was in 1962. The first nesting in San Francisco Bay was in 1994.

In the spring of 1968 at the Dow Chemical Company in Freeport, Texas, several Black Skimmer pairs were found nesting among the cars in the parking lot. It was the perfect site for building a nest, or scrape, because the lot was covered with crushed oyster shell, an aggregate commonly used in place of gravel. The site is located near salt marshes and the beaches of the Gulf of Mexico. Part of the lot was barricaded to protect the skimmers and their scrapes. That first spring, 38 adults fledged seven young birds. More and more skimmers used the old parking lot until it grew to become the largest colony on the Texas coast. Today the colony occupies a four-acre site, managed by Dow employees. The lot has been fenced to keep out predators, and two acres are covered with crushed oyster shell and another two acres with crushed limestone. The Black Skimmers and Gull-billed Terns make their scrapes in the oyster shell. Least Terns prefer the limestone. Because the lot is located inside a manufacturing plant, there is little human disturbance.

Every summer since 1984, Dow Texas Operations has conducted an Open House to allow the general public to observe the nesting skimmers and their chicks. The nesting colony is now an official site on the Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail.

### Pinnacles

*Continued from page 8*

Pinnacles is one of the release points for the Condor Recovery Program, and a number of these magnificent vultures are flying free over the park. One of the Condors, in particular, has been quite venturesome and has roosted outside the park for up to a week at a time. In August, one of the Condors from the Big Sur group visited the Pinnacles area, a good sign that these birds are wild and

free. Some of the birds are now fitted with GPS transceivers, so that their whereabouts can be monitored on a frequent and routine schedule.

Visitors to Pinnacles do report Condors. Chances of seeing one are better from the trails above tree line. But, even for those who do not wish to attempt the more strenuous trails, and except for the hot summer months, the birding can be spectacular.

## Black Skimmer

*Rynchops niger*

In North America only Black Skimmers can close their pupils into vertical slits, an observation first noted in 1874. Their eyes are somewhat larger than those of terns, for better vision at night, but they must also contend with brilliant light during daytime. The illustration (J. Field Ornithology, 1981) shows how the pupils react to differing light intensities.

Skimmers use their unique bills to scythe the

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**Mount Diablo Audubon Society**  
• a nonprofit organization dedicated to habitat  
conservation and environmental education •

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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.*

### MDAS Board of Directors

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**Deadline for the April issue is February 23.**

## MDAS MEMBERSHIP/RENEWAL APPLICATION

\_\_\_\_ Please enroll my family and me as a member of the Mount Diablo Audubon Society for \$25 for the year 2005.

\_\_\_\_ Please enroll me as a lifetime member for \$500. Payment can be made in two annual payments of \$250 each.

\_\_\_\_ Please enroll the individual/family listed below as a gift membership for \$25 for the year 2005.

\_\_\_\_ For an additional \$20 (new NAS members only) or \$35 (returning members), please enroll me in the National Audubon Society to receive four quarterly issues of the *Audubon Magazine*.

\_\_\_\_ I'm enclosing an additional donation of \$\_\_\_\_\_.

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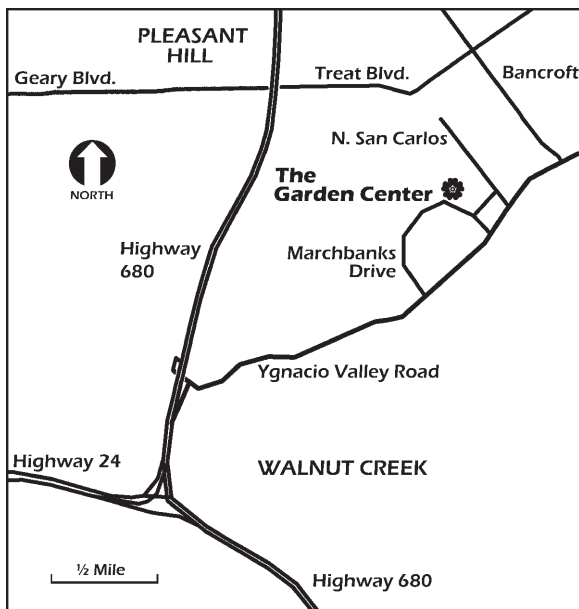
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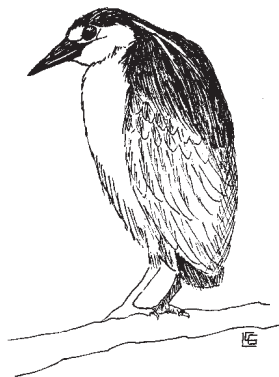
Please make your tax-deductible check payable to:

MT. DIABLO AUDUBON SOCIETY and mail with this application to:

Membership Chair, 400 Oneida Court, Danville, CA 94526



*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.*



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

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*Pinnacles, view from Condor Gulch Trail*

## Quickies

Weekend birding in California

### Pinnacles National Monument

A place for birders and botanists, for geologists and speleologists, for hikers and rock climbers—Pinnacles National Monument is all of these. Its varied terrain, from lofty crags to rolling hills and gentle streams, gives rise to a great diversity of native plants and animals.

Five plant communities are included. Chaparral covers the hillsides with chamise, buckwheat, manzanita, and toyon. Spring wildflowers feature monkeyflower, Indian paintbrush and woolly blue curls. Most of the rest of the park is woodland, with blue oaks, valley oaks and coast live oaks. Gray pines are growing throughout. Riparian communities have sycamores, willows, ferns, and many beautiful flowering plants. There are open grasslands as well, where annual wildflowers mingle with the wild oats and other grasses. And of course the rocks and scree, while

nearly bare of vegetation, do support mosses and lichens. These diverse habitats support a rich fauna especially of birds, reptiles and bees. (Pinnacles has a record 400 species of bees.) Mountain lions, bobcats and rattlesnakes are at home here, too.

Ask at the Visitor Center for a Bird Checklist and you will find a roll call of 123 species, with another 27 listed as rare. Eagles and hawks prey on smaller animals who are drawn to the food supply of the chaparral. American Kestrels, Red-tailed Hawks, Red-shouldered Hawks, Cooper's Hawks, and Golden Eagles all nest in the park.

Peregrine falcons were not observed at Pinnacles from the 1960s to the 1990s. Then a program of cross-fostering—placing Peregrine eggs and chicks into Prairie Falcon nests—was instituted. Last year, a Peregrine Falcon pair was observed in March, with regular observations throughout the breeding season. The pair aggressively defended a territory by stooping upon a Prairie Falcon pair (which were using an adjacent territory), Turkey Vultures, and even Cali-

fornia Condors. Although the pair did attempt to mate and inspected potential nest sites, they did not nest this year.

Pinnacles National Monument can be accessed from Salinas on the west, or from Hollister or King City on the east. There is no road connecting the two portals of the park. There are no accommodations, although there is a fine private campground just outside the east entrance. A small Visitor Center is at the east entrance. A seismograph makes an interesting exhibit, as the park is adjacent to an active portion of the San Andreas fault. On display is their strip recording of December 26, 2004, which shows a tremor lasting over fifteen minutes, the shock that triggered the catastrophic tsunami in the Indian Ocean.

Outside the Visitor Center and in the shaded picnic areas Acorn Woodpeckers vie with Steller's Jays for attention. Interestingly, prior to 1985 there were only two records of Steller's Jay (in 1958 and 1966, both in April), yet they were the first birds we spotted on a visit this January.

*Continued on page 6*