

the Quail

Mount Diablo Audubon Society

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

www.diabloaudubon.com/index/php

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Marbled Murrelet • Amy Fesnock

In 1974, a chance discovery solved the mystery of the nesting habits of the Marbled Murrelet. A tree climber in Big Basin Redwoods State Park found a nest high in an old growth Redwood, well inland from their known marine habitat.

Amy Fesnock, Senior Fish and Wildlife Biologist with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, will share the fascinating story of the biology and ecology of the Marbled Murrelet. This small Puffin-like seabird spends most of its long life in the marine environment. They are fast fliers with rapid wing beats and short wings. Courtship of Marbled Murrelets, foraging, loafing, molting and preening occur in near-shore marine waters whereas they come further inland to nest.

The nesting location of this breed was discovered to be old-growth forests, characterized by large trees and multiple canopy layers. Their nest, a cup built of moss, lichens, and needles, is built on large limbs and may be up to 150 feet above the ground. Their breeding range extends from Alaska south to Monterey Bay. In California, nests are found in coastal redwood and

Douglas fir forests. In non-forested portions of Alaska, Murrelets can nest on the ground or in rock cavities. In Washington state, nests have been found inland from the coast up to a distance of 50 miles.

The Endangered Species Act lists the Marbled Murrelet as a threatened species in Washington, Oregon, and California. California lists it as endangered.

Audubon Important Bird Areas in California and sites throughout their range help protect critical habitat for Marbled Murrelets. Even so, it has been estimated the species is experiencing an annual population decline throughout their range as great as 4% to 7% per year.

Our speaker, Amy Fesnock, is living her childhood dream of working to minimize the impact of humans on other species. As a Girl Scout, she was bewildered to find that the summer camp lake had been allowed to go dry and that no one had attempted to save it. She earned a BS in Wildlife Biology from UC Davis and an MS in Natural Resources from Humboldt State University. Fourteen years with the National Park service allowed her to work with woodrats, mice, Prairie Falcons, California Red-legged frogs, Condors, migrating hawks, tule elk, bats, bighorn sheep, California tree frogs, and the desert tortoise.

In 2005, Amy moved to Sacramento and joined the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service endangered species program where she works specifically with species found in the forest and foothills ecosystems. She is pleased that she has been able to influence projects involving species such as the Shasta crayfish, valley elderberry, longhorn



beetle, Carson wandering skipper, Kern primrose sphinx moth, Northern Spotted Owl, Bald Eagle, and Marbled Murrelet. For the last four years she has enjoyed teaching general ecology and wildlife management courses at Sacramento State University. She also enjoys time with her husband, two-year-old son and eight-year-old daughter.

Birding Information

Join us for a special 'March Birding Surprise'. Mount Diablo Audubon's ex-president and current vice president, Mike Williams, will join our excellent Native Bird Connections friend, Diana Granados, to present a spectacular *Birding Information* extravaganza. Top secret plans are brewing for your entertainment. Don't miss it!

Meeting Schedule

The next general meeting of Mount Diablo Audubon Society will be **Thursday, March 6**, 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:

Amy Fesnock

* Please remember to bring a cup.

**April 3: Denise Wight
Why Birds Sing**

DEDICATED TO HABITAT CONSERVATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

President's Corner Observations Steve Glover



Jimm Edgar, MDAS President (left) with Richard Louv. Photo by Amy Sullivan

I had the great privilege of representing our chapter at a dinner that honored Richard Louv, the author of *Last Child in the Woods*. The prestigious Audubon Medal began in 1947 and has been given only 50 times. Jimmy Carter received the award as did Rachel Carson and many other worthy recipients. Louv's book is a must read for all of us who enjoy all of nature. *Last Child in the Woods* points out that children today are deprived of nature due to computers, safety issues, fear, obesity, etc. The result is that kids don't get outside much. Louv asked the rhetorical question that night, "who will be the next generation to care for the environment?" He is so right. This spring our chapter begins a program in schools to get kids out in nature and teach them about the great outdoors. It should be fun and will help overcome the *Last Child in the Woods* syndrome.

I hope all of you are keeping abreast of the issue of the wind farms in Alameda and Contra Costa Counties. The new evidence of raptor kills is alarming to say the least. We were part of a lawsuit two years ago that we won forcing the wind farm companies to comply with a number of restrictions including new turbines that were safer, more monitoring of fatalities, taking down old turbines and other restrictions. The companies have failed on most of these demands and we are now faced with how to move forward on getting compliance. Stay tuned.

I would also note that we continue to be very involved in the Reuse Plan for the Concord Naval Weapons Station. The alternatives that are being considered all have significant amounts of open space (from 60% to 80%.) There are 5000 acres involved here so 3000-4000 acres of open space is considerable.

Jimm Edgar

Submit Contra Costa County sightings to Steve Glover at countyline@sbcbglobal.net or (925) 997-1112.

A flock of 75 **Cackling Geese** flew east over Dutch Slough/Jersey Island Road near Oakley on 1/13 (DW). A mixed goose flock over Clifton Court Forebay 1/13 included 100 **Greater White-fronted**, 150 **Snow** and 7 **Ross's** (DW). A **Snow Goose** was at the Ygnacio Pumping Station pond northwest of Heather Farm Park in Walnut Creek on 1/16 (JH).

The **Brant** at Miller Knox Regional Shoreline, Richmond was seen again on 1/21 (FO).

Over 2000 **Tundra Swans** were noted near Clifton Court Forebay on 1/13. The majority were in San Joaquin County but 264 flew over Contra Costa airspace (DW).

A male **Eurasian Wigeon**, said to have been present since about early December, was at Point Pinole Regional Shoreline on 1/19 (DV).

An estimated 3000 **Canvasbacks** and 1000 **Common Mergansers** at Clifton Court Forebay near Byron on 1/16 was astonishing (DW). **Canvasback** formerly occurred in the county in larger numbers than currently and numbers such as this haven't been reported in decades. There is no precedent for such a high number of **Common Mergansers** in the county. A **Long-tailed Duck** was near the Richmond Marina on 1/10 (BB).

Twenty-four **Barrow's Goldeneyes** and an out-of-place male **Hooded Merganser** were at Carquinez Regional Shoreline near Martinez on 1/13 (DW).

The female **Hooded Merganser** continued at Jewel Lake, Tilden Park to at least 1/19, when it was joined by five **Common Mergansers** (DW). Five **Common Mergansers** on the bay near the Richmond Marina on 1/10 were also noteworthy

Q A bird widespread throughout America, this bird is protected in some states as a song bird, while in other states, including California, it is classed as a game bird sought by hunters. 45 million of these birds are killed in North America each year.

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

DEGIMNNOORUV

as the species is quite rare in west county and virtually unknown on saltwater in the county (BB).

Two **American White Pelicans** were at Lafayette Reservoir on 1/19 (ST). Twenty pelicans were at Holland Tract near Knightsen on 1/20 (JH).

A **Pelagic Cormorant** was east of the Carquinez Bridge in Crockett on 1/11 (KS). This is as far east as the species is regularly found in the county.

An **Osprey** was at Clifton Court Forebay on 1/13 (DW). The species is curiously unusual at this spot.

A **Prairie Falcon** was of local interest near Marsh Creek Reservoir on 1/6 (DW).

A **Virginia Rail** was a nice find at Heather Farm Park on 1/17 (FS).

A **Ruddy Turnstone** was among a flock of **Black Turnstones** at Brickyard Cove, Point Richmond on 1/30 (BL) and 2/1 (JH). This species is hard to find in the county but has apparently been more regular in recent years.

A single **Black Skimmer** was near Meeker Slough in Richmond on 1/23 (SD).

A **Pigeon Guillemot** was a great find near Brooks Island, Richmond on 1/30 (BL). This species is found on rare occasions in the Richmond area but usually in the late summer and fall.

An apparent **Red-breasted** × **Red-naped Sapsucker** hybrid, first found on the Contra Costa CBC and seen again 1/20, was on North Gate Road about a ½ mile from the park entrance (TR, DW).

A **Yellow-billed Magpie** was at Martinez Regional Shoreline on 1/16 (AH). Although this species is quite rare away from east county, there is a pattern of out-of-place birds, usually in fall and winter.

A **Canyon Wren** was on the Chaparral Loop Trail in Black Diamond Mines Regional Park on 1/15 (DW).

A "**Slate-colored**" **Dark-eyed Junco** visited an Antioch yard 1/24-26 (PS).

A **Hooded Oriole** is spending its fourth consecutive winter at a Concord feeder (PB).

Bob Battagin, Polly Boissevain, Sheila Dickie, Joel Herr, Anne Hoff, Jeff Hoppes, Bob Lewis, Ted Robertson, Fred Safier, Paul Schorr, Sharon Tissue, Doug Vaughan, Denise Wight

Cheers for Our Volunteers



A big thank you to our chapter volunteers who spent time at our MDAS display at the 12th Annual SF Bay Flyway Festival held on Mare Island February 2-3.

Ron Kline set up the exhibit on Friday, February 1. Thank you to the Wild Birds Unlimited store for providing storage space for our materials and to Cecil Williams for securing prizes for the many children who were able to identify a bird's nest.

Volunteers were: Ruth and Ethan Chickering, Susan and Jack Cooper, Gene Fletcher, Helen and Don Holm, Diane Malucelli, Ann McGregor, Barbara Minneman, Mimi and Ellis Myers, Rita Tischler, and Maury Stern. Ruth and Ethan Chickering packed up the display and returned it to the store.

The kids had a lot of fun, and so did the volunteers.
Shirley Ellis



Volunteers are needed for these upcoming events, and others. How about you? To step forward, just call 938-3703.

- McNabney Marsh Celebration, May 17;
- Heritage Day at Borges Ranch, June 14.

A young family stops by the MDAS table at the San Francisco Bay Flyway Festival and learns about how bird families live.

MDAS Scrapbooks

MDAS has a collection of eight scrapbooks covering the time span from 1961 to the present. I have these books in my possession and they are currently up to date. These can be used as historical records for the chapter. Maury Stern and I spent time going over the information we used for our 50th Anniversary celebration held on October 3, 2002.

Information is currently collected from the Contra Costa Times, the San Francisco Chronicle, The Quail, Audubon, and from individual contributions given to me.

The Audubon Society is mainly a conservation organization and information is chosen concerning conservation and environmental subjects locally, statewide, nationally and perhaps globally.

These books are on display occasionally at general meetings, and if anyone would like to check any out to look at leisurely, let me know. I would be pleased to loan these to you.
Shirley Ellis

NEWS FROM WILD BIRDS UNLIMITED



American and Lesser Goldfinches are present at the feeders in more abundant numbers than we have seen in recent years. Pine Siskins are almost non-existent in local backyards. We only had two reported sightings all winter. This irruptive species is very nomadic and is not always seen in Northern California.

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.

Both Allen's and Rufous Hummingbirds are being seen in local backyards at feeders.

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 lays two 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 about two weeks later.

It's such a delight to hear the titmice calling—a sure sign of spring. 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.

We have been receiving reports of Northern Flickers damaging homes. They will often be heard pounding on your house, trying to excavate a rooting cavity! They can be deterred with strips of Mylar or by putting up a flicker house.

Mike and Cecil Williams
Wild Birds Unlimited
692 Contra Costa Blvd.
Pleasant Hill, CA 94523

Field Trip Schedule

By Hugh Harvey

March

- 5 Wednesday..... Walnut Creek Parks
- 13-16 Thursday-Sunday..... Susanville/Honey Lake
- 20 Thursday..... San Leandro Reservoir
- 26 Wednesday..... Lake Lagunitas
- 29 Saturday..... Black Diamond Mines

April

- 5 Saturday..... Garin Regional Park
- 12 Saturday..... Pine Canyon
- 15 Tuesday..... North Briones Regional Park
- 29 Tuesday..... Del Puerto Canyon

May

- 3 Saturday..... Mines Road
- 8 Thursday..... Mitchell Canyon
- 14 Wednesday..... Mount Diablo State Paark
- 17 Saturday..... East Contra Costa County
- 22 Thursday..... West Briones Regional Park

Come birding with us!

① Wednesday, March 5 Walnut Creek Parks

Leader: Hugh Harvey, 935-2979.

Meet 8:30 AM at wooden railing at the natural pond, just past the community center in Heather Farm Park. This is down the hill from where our monthly meetings are held. We will tour the park, view wintering birds, then drive to Howe-Homestead Park south of Ygnacio Valley Road. Time permitting, we will visit two other park areas off Rudgear Road.

② Thursday, March 20 San Leandro Reservoir

Leader: Bingham Gibbs, 838-9257.

Meet at 8 AM at Valle Vista staging area off Canyon Road. From SR 24 in Orinda, take Moraga Way to Moraga. From Mt. Diablo Blvd in Lafayette, take Moraga Road south through Rheem and then Moraga. At the Chevron station, go south on Canyon Road to Valle Vista.

③ Wednesday, March 26 Lake Lagunitas

Leader: Hugh Harvey, 935-2979.

This very popular birding trip to Marin passes through varied terrain in the beautiful area of the northern slopes of Mount Tamalpais. Carpool leaves from Sun Valley at 7:30 AM. Cross the San Rafael Bridge to US-101 N. Take the first San Rafael exit, go left on 3rd Street. In San Anselmo turn right onto Sir Francis Drake Blvd., continue to Fairfax. Go left on Fairfax Road, follow to left turn on Sky Oaks Road and continue to kiosk. Entry fee required. Drive to parking lot near foot of Lagunitas Dam. Approximate meeting time is 8:30 AM. After birding the nearby area, we will hike around Lake Lagunitas. We have often found Pileated Woodpeckers here.

① Thurs.–Sun., March 13–16 Susanville/ Honey Lake

Leader: Terry Colborn, 530-758-0689.

This trek will visit the birding-rich areas of Lassen County in search the “sages”—Sage Sparrow, Sage Thrasher and Greater Sage Grouse. Raptors and waterfowl should be plentiful at Honey Lake WA. We'll also bird Janesville and Eagle Lake in search of montane species including Mountain Chickadee, Mountain Bluebird and Mountain Quail, along with White-headed, Lewis's and Pileated Woodpeckers.

Moderate walks of one-half to two miles over gravel roads and dirt trails will be included with drives and numerous stops to search and scope for birds. Late winter weather can be very cold and crisp, especially early mornings on the lek, and sometimes wet; dress accordingly. We will stay in Susanville for three nights. Space is limited and car-pooling is highly encouraged.

Full trip details will be provided. Sign up at tlgcd@aol.com, or call Terry Colborn, 530-758-0689.

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 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. **El Nido Ranch Road**—Take the Acalanes Road/Upper Happy Valley Road exit off SR 24, west of Lafayette. El Nido Ranch Road is parallel to and north of the freeway. Park just east of the intersection with Acalanes Road and on the north side of El Nido Ranch Road. **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.

③ Saturday, March 29 Black Diamond Mines

Leader: Fred Safier, 937-2906.

Meet at 8 AM at the parking lot at the end of Somersville Road. Go east on Ygnacio Valley/Kirker Pass Roads, in Pittsburg turn right on Buchanan Road. Go east on Buchanan to Somersville Road (Antioch) and turn right. Alternate route, exit Highway 4 at Somersville Road (south). Follow Somersville to the entry gate, entry fee required, proceed to the last parking lot. Woodland, chaparral and some grassland birds. Bring a lunch.



Trip Reports

Lake Merritt/Arrowhead Marsh, January 21. A group of ten MDAS birders braved the cold and the rain to bird Lake Merritt and Arrowhead Marsh. The target bird for Lake Merritt was the Tufted Duck. While we missed seeing our target we did see a large number of Scaups, both Lesser and Greater, several canvasbacks and a couple of Redheads, male and female. We also saw several Buffleheads, Cormorants, Grebes (Eared, Horned, Clark's, Pied-billed and Western), Gulls (Glaucous-winged, California, and Western). Then it was onward to Arrowhead and the search for the elusive Yellow Rail. It didn't stay elusive for long as there were at least 10–15 birders with scopes and cameras on the boardwalk with the Yellow Rail in their sight. It was visible in the reeds and looked wet and cold. We also saw a Sora and Virginia and Clapper Rails. All in all a successful trip despite the rainy and cold weather.

Ethan Chickering

Las Gallinas/Rush Creek/Shollenberger Park, January 26. The trip was cancelled due to heavy rain the day before which resulted in mud, high creek levels, and some flooding of roads. *Jean Richmond*

Sunol Regional Park, January 30. Eleven members enjoyed the wonderfully blue skies and cool weather while visiting Sunol Regional Park. We crossed the bridge near the entry and walked upstream a bit. We then spent a couple of hours walking to Little Yosemite and back. Highlights among the 39 species seen or heard were: Golden Eagle, Hutton's Vireo, Red-breasted Sapsucker, and Rufous-crowned Sparrow. While some of us were leaving, a flock of 60–80 Wild Turkeys was seen along Geary Road. From Calavaras Road, in one of the nursery areas, we had Red-winged Blackbirds and 7 Yellow-billed Magpies.

Hugh B. Harvey

Cosumnes River Preserve, February 1. Six MDAS birders braved the cold and the rain to bird the Cosumnes River Preserve in hopes of seeing the Sandhill Cranes that winter over in that area. We saw many en route but, sadly, none at the preserve. However, we got 60 species overall including many Sandhills on Staten Island Road after we left Cosumnes. We spotted a Peregrine Falcon on one of the radio towers in the vicinity. While we were watching, it swooped down and snagged what looked like a small

Top Secret Local Birding Hotspot

The Port of Oakland is the fourth largest container port in the US and one of the largest in the world. It includes 25 active deepwater berths and 33 gantry container cranes, and handles 98% of all containerized cargo which passes through California ports. Located in the heart of this bustling port, Middle Harbor Shoreline Park offers outstanding year-round birding, scenic vistas of San Francisco Bay and opportunities to observe maritime activities.

Built by the Port of Oakland and operated by the East Bay Regional Park District, this 38-acre shoreline park has an interesting history. In its natural state, Oakland's waterfront was covered by hundreds of acres of salt marshes and shallow tidelands which provided food and shelter to a wide variety of wildlife. Dredging and fill for military, Port and commercial uses greatly reduced the habitat in size and quality. By 1935, fill had extended some areas of the shoreline nearly two miles into the bay.

The park is built on the site of the former Oakland Naval Supply Depot, an important supply center for the Pacific Fleet during World War II. Oakland was chosen because of the city's extensive rail and highway connections leading almost directly to the bay and its shipping lanes. Civilian and military workers processed and shipped a wide variety of cargo, including aviation materiel, electronics, weapons, clothing, food, fuel, lumber and medicine. Middle Harbor itself was dredged to create a 40-foot-deep berthing area for naval ships.

In 1998, the depot was closed and transferred to the Port of Oakland. The former tidal wetlands are now being restored

bird or rodent. Among other sightings were Tundra Swans, Green-winged Teals, a Ring-necked Pheasant, Loggerhead Shrike, and some Tree Swallows. Also, we saw Savannah, White-crowned and Golden-crowned Sparrows and possibly a Tricolored Blackbird. All in all it was a very successful trip despite the rain and cold weather.

Ethan Chickering

Grizzly Island, February 7. Fifteen members and guests traveled to Grizzly Island Wildlife Sanctuary in the morning and finished with lunch at Rush Ranch. It was



Middle Harbor Shoreline Park

Photo courtesy Waterfront Action

by the Port and the US Army Corps of Engineers. Dredged sediments from the Oakland navigation channels are being used to restore and enhance shallow water habitat. Eelgrass revegetation is underway, and a jetty has been constructed near the mouth of the harbor to reduce tidal energy.

The park's shoreline pathways allow for excellent year-round wildlife observation. Numerous shorebirds, diving ducks and seabirds can be seen just offshore. A variety of shorebirds forage on the wide beach and on the numerous sandbars which are developing as the habitat improves. The endangered Least Tern breeds on the nearby former Alameda Naval Air Station, and can readily be seen foraging in the harbor in the summer.

Middle Harbor Shoreline Park is a great spot for a picnic and leisurely bird watching at any time of the year. Located at the intersection of Seventh Street and Middle Harbor Road, getting there can be somewhat challenging during the week with the busy port truck traffic. However, the park's amenities and good wildlife viewing more than compensate for the extra effort. *By Nancy Wenninger*

a beautiful day with clear skies and 60-degree temperatures. In addition to the birds, we saw a group of Tule Elks with a very impressive alpha-male. Highlights included: large skeins of Canada and White-fronted geese; 13 duck species; excellent looks at Ferruginous Hawk and Rough-legged Hawk (both typical and dark phase); Merlin sitting quietly, with terrific looks by telescope; Caspian Tern; Great Horned Owl sitting on a nest; Short-eared Owl; and many Tree Swallows. 83 species were seen in total.

Maury Stern

Ornithological Opportunities

Aleutian Goose Festival, March 28-30. Come join the "Celebration of Wildness" on the extreme coast of northern California. Experience an in-depth extended weekend in the home of Redwood National and State Parks and the Smith River National Recreation Area, by choosing among the 60+ workshops/fieldtrips led by experienced, qualified guides. Outstanding birding, geology, Native American Heritage and more. Register online at www.aleutiangoosefestival.org or 1-707-465-0888.

Olympic BirdFest 2008, Sequim, WA, April 4-6. Visit the rain shadow of the Olympic Peninsula to discover the birds of the coastal Pacific Northwest—Marbled Murrelets, Rhinoceros Auklets, Harlequin Ducks, American Dippers, Black Oystercatchers, Long-tailed Ducks, and more. Guided field trips, a boat cruise in the Strait of Juan de Fuca, silent auction, and a salmon banquet with our partner, the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe. New this year: A three-day, two-night birding cruise of the San Juan Islands immediately following BirdFest. Contact: Dungeness River Audubon Center, P.O. Box 2450, Sequim, WA 98382; 360-681-4076; email: info@olympicbirdfest.org; or go online at www.olympicbirdfest.org.

14th Annual Kern River Valley Spring Nature Festival, April 30–May 6, at Audubon-California's Kern River Preserve in Weldon. The Kern Valley Spring Nature Festival is a celebration of our natural diversity at the height of spring abundance. kern.audubon.org/bioregion.htm.

Spring bird migration creates an exciting time for birders visiting the Kern Valley Spring Nature Festival. The last five festivals have averaged 233 bird species! The region centered on the Kern River Valley hosts 138 butterfly species (68%+ of California's lepidoptera), 2,000+ species of plants (a third of California's flora), and the highest mammal diversity in the United States (115 species)!

Field trips are limited to between five and twenty people to insure the highest quality and most enjoyable birding and natural history experience possible. The Festival offers a variety of trips and activities for all interests and age levels.

Black Diamond Mines

Continued from Page 8

and visitors will be able to take a tour that will be over twice its previous length, opening areas not accessible to the public in more than a quarter century. Plant and animal fossils in the tunnel walls give evidence of the climate and fauna of 50 million years ago when the sand and coal deposits were formed. The underground Greathouse Visitor Center and museum will be closed all year for renovation. If folks want to explore underground elsewhere, Prospect Tunnel across from the Stewartville group camp is great fun, and it is open. Bring a flashlight.

Wildflowers put on a spectacular show in spring. Look for the rare Mount Diablo globe lily (*Calochortus pulchellus*), Mount Diablo sunflower (*Helianthella castanea*), and Mount Diablo manzanita (*Arctostaphylos auriculata*), distinguished by its pink, rather than white, flowers. The Chaparral Loop trail is a favorite among those who are wildflower and native plant enthusiasts. This is an excellent hike in the rain when the smooth, orange-maroon trunks of the manzanas shine through

the evergreen leaves, and the prominent sandstone outcroppings show their resplendent colors. The Chaparral Loop is also an excellent place to see foothill pine (*Pinus sabiniana*) and Coulter pine (*Pinus coulteri*) growing side by side. Gray-green needles of the foothill pine droop, contrasting with the straight, dark green needles of the Coulter pine. Mount



Coulter pine cone, Black Diamond Mines. Photo by Scott Hein.

Diablo sunflower can also be seen on this loop, look for it on a rocky outcropping on the western side of the loop. It is easily recognizable in flower (March-June) by its large, yellow sunflower heads, and its leaves that have three prominent veins.

Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve has interesting birding. Look for Phainopepla along the entry road, at the Somersville townsite area, and also on the Carbondale trail where they may have nested. Rose Hill Cemetery is a good bet for orioles in spring, as is the fremontia next to the miners' office east of the entrance kiosk. The Chaparral Loop Trail, north of the parking lot, has White-throated Swift, Violet-green Swallow, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, California Thrasher, and Sage Sparrow. Townsend's Solitaire is often here in good years. Listen and look for

Canyon Wren below the rocky cliffs on the east side of the Chaparral Loop Trail. Rock Wrens might also be found. In spring, you can't hike far without seeing a Western Meadowlark, a Western Bluebird, or a Western Kingbird. The Ridge Trail is

one of the trails where the views are magnificent, overlooking the Delta, the Central Valley and the Sierra. Woodpeckers, hummingbirds, warblers and sparrows keep you company along the way. The Nortonville side of the park, reached by a pretty steep walk past the cemetery, has Lark Sparrow, Rufous-crowned Sparrow, nesting Say's Phoebe, and Rock Wren.

McNabney Marsh Update

The Peyton Slough Wetlands Advisory Committee's latest restoration effort has been a huge success. MVSD spearheaded a dredging project which allowed for the removal of sediment from 3 main waterways in McNabney Marsh, along with the installation of new water control gates in Peyton Slough. The gates will allow water levels to be lowered in the late winter and spring to expose nesting refuge for water-

fowl. In early summer the water will be drawn down further and then flooded with salt water to better control the encroaching cattail population. In late summer, the gates will open to flood the marsh, providing resting and forage areas for migratory birds. The new gates help to provide the best habitat for a greater diversity of species living in the marsh.

Mountain View Sanitary District

Mourning Dove

Zenaida macroura



Photo courtesy of Stan Sutfin

During their long breeding season, from spring into late summer, a male Mourning Dove leads the female to potential nest sites. When she chooses one, he brings nest materials and she builds a flimsy platform of twigs that they call a nest. Nests are usually in a tree or shrub, but may be on the ground, on a building ledge, or other structure. The female lays

two eggs, and the male usually incubates from midmorning until late afternoon, and the female sits the rest of the day and night.

Both males and females produce "pigeon milk" in their crops, rich in protein and fat, which they feed to their young. It is more nutritious than cow's milk. After two weeks, the young leave the nest, although they stay close by and are fed by the parents for another 1-2 weeks. Soon after the end of the breeding season, Mourning Doves congregate into flocks, so for most of the year you will see such coveys, until spring finds them separating into mating pairs and the males are heard cooing their mournful songs.

The Dove, an emblem of peace, is important as a religious symbol, too. On a Christian tombstone, an ascending dove means the departed's soul is being carried to Heaven, as in this grave marker at Rose Hill Cemetery.



the Quail

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

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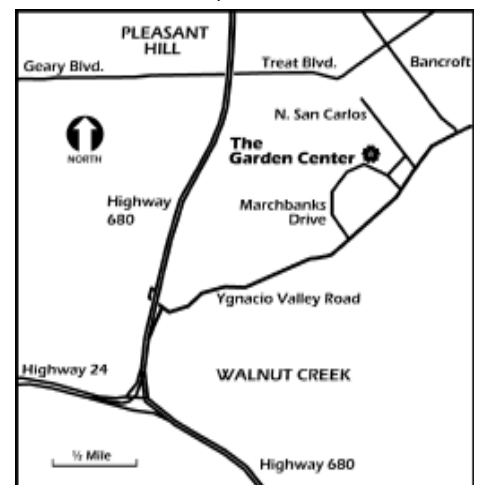
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The Garden Center

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

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Somersville site viewed from Nortonville Trail

Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve

The “Diamonds” at Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve are, of course, the coal that was brought to the surface from the underground mines in the foothills of Antioch in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In the twenty-first century, this hidden gem is a grand, secluded park that offers superb bird watching, as well as splendid wildflower displays, miles of hiking trails, and a close-up view of history. Five coal mining towns thrived in the area: Nortonville, Somersville, Stewartville, West Hartley, and Judsonville. The largest coal mining operation in California, the Mount Diablo Coalfield mined nearly four million tons of lignite coal, a crucial component of the state’s energy resources from the early 1860s to the late 1890s. Miners from many parts of the world came to work in these mines, trading their hard work and long hours in

Wales, perhaps, for long hours and hard work in Contra Costa County.

The Rose Hill Cemetery reminds us of the arduous lives of those miners. It even has its own ghost, the White Witch of Rose Hill Cemetery. Sarah “Granny” Norton, wife of Nortonville’s founder, was a skilled midwife who was killed when on



her way to deliver a baby. Her horse bolted, the buggy toppled, and she was thrown and crushed. Now, dressed in white, she is sometimes seen as she keeps watch over the children she brought into this world and who remain at Rose Hill.

By 1900, the mines had become unprofitable, and they and the townsites were abandoned, but in the 1920s underground mining for sand began near the deserted Nortonville and Somersville townsites. The sand was used in glass making by the Hazel-Atlas Glass Company in Oakland, and for sand casting

Red-breasted Sapsuckers drill their feeding holes in the bark of Brazilian pepper trees, such as this one at Rose Hill Cemetery.

by the foundries of Columbia Steel Works. Sand mining in the area ended by 1949. After the mines closed, some miners began ranching. Descendants of original mining families still graze cattle in the Preserve. A section of the Hazel-Atlas Mine has been restored to appear as it did when the mine was active. Right now the mine is in the midst of a major rework and is closed. It is scheduled to reopen in April, however,

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