



# the Quail

Mount Diablo Audubon Society

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

[www.diabloaudubon.com/index.php](http://www.diabloaudubon.com/index.php)

Volume 56, Number 6

March 2011

## Twenty Years Photographing Mount Diablo

◆ Stephen Joseph

Castle Rock. Photo by Stephen Joseph©



Stephen Joseph will present a retrospective slide show of his panoramic images of Mount Diablo State Park taken over the last twenty years. Stephen's photos of our mountain leave us gasping as he captures its beauty and its many moods. His love for the mountain has been life long and culminates in the March publication by Mount Diablo Interpretive Association of his book, *Mount Diablo, The Extraordinary Life and Landscape of a California Treasure*.

### Meeting Schedule

The next general meeting of Mount Diablo Audubon Society will be **Thursday, March 3**, 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: **Stephen Joseph**

\* Please remember to bring a cup.

Thursday, April 7: **Michael Moran**

Since 1970, Stephen Joseph's career has been devoted to landscape photography. In 2008 he was chosen Centennial Photographer for Muir Woods National Monument in Marin County. We enjoyed a slide show of Stephen's photos, which took us into the "hidden" Muir Woods, areas that the general public may not see.

In November of 2006, we were privileged to see a presentation based on Stephen's first book *Nature's Beloved Son, Rediscovering John Muir's Botanical Legacy*. In August of 2011, the Oakland Museum will be opening an exhibit about John Muir, which will include Stephen's original photos of John Muir's botanical prints and some of Stephen's very large Yosemite panoramic photos. The Muir botanical prints are on permanent exhibit at Cavallo Point in Marin County's Fort Baker and the John Muir National Historic Site in Martinez, California. The John Muir Botanical Project is showing through March 27 at the Bedford Gallery

at the Regional Center for the Arts in Walnut Creek. Then, twenty-three enormous photos will show at museums and galleries around the country and, next year, in John Muir's birthplace in Dunbar, Scotland.

For 45 years, Stephen Joseph has been a photographer. In the 1970s, he received a BFA from California College of Arts and Crafts and, later, an MFA in Photography and Printmaking. His interests include the history of photography and vintage cameras. He collects and restores antique cameras of all types including panoramic and stereographic cameras. Stephen is also committed to creating and preserving open space and has spent the last 18 years working with land trusts throughout the Bay Area.

### BIRDING INFORMATION

Dan Stanton, Youth Education Manager of the Gardens at Heather Farm will discuss the many programs and events sponsored by The Gardens.

DEDICATED TO HABITAT CONSERVATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

# President's Corner

By Jimm Edgar

We just finished the Pacific Flyway Festival at Mare Island. It is one of the best bird festivals on the west coast. We have had a booth for as long as the Festival has been going. About a dozen or more of our faithful volunteers man the booth over the 3 days.

We have a lot more volunteer opportunities available this spring. I hope you can help at one of them.

I read a very interesting article in the *Western Tanager*, the newsletter of the Los Angeles Audubon. Their president, Travis Longcore, wrote about a couple of estates that named Los Angeles Audubon as a recipient. He talked about the fact that

most of us who belong to Audubon do so because we love birds. I know that is why I belong. Yes, we are deeply concerned about local and global environmental issues and lots of other problems, but my conclusion from scores of conversations over the years is that people who belong to Audubon do so because they love birds. This love may manifest itself in a lot of ways: chasing a rare vagrant, adding a new bird to your life list, first of the season, a new yard bird, etc. Johnny Mercer, the great American composer, named Los Angeles Audubon Society as one of the charities to be funded by the royalties on his music. Every year

they receive a donation, which is set aside to educate and cultivate the love of birds in young people. The Los Angeles Philharmonic gets a check as does the Braille Institute, but alongside the Los Angeles Audubon contribution is a simple annotation, "Johnny loved birds."

People love birds for a lot of reasons. If you read Gary Bogue in the *Contra Costa Times* he often writes about people who "follow the nest activity of the Mourning Dove" in their yard, or "I can't figure out why this bird (Mockingbird) sings all night?" People are intrigued by birds. Caring about birds is at the core of the NAS and the MDAS. All the field trips, programs, check lists. We are here because we love birds.

With this in mind we begin again our spring program of "No child left inside." We will touch the lives of hundreds of school children this spring with classroom presentations, with Native Bird Connections, bringing live birds to classrooms and will take all the students on a half-day field trip. We want more kids to learn to love birds.

One last note. On December 23, 2010 a Least Bittern was seen at the EBRP Martinez Shoreline. Word got out quickly and within a few days scores and scores of people got great looks at this very elusive and rare bird. It remained until about January 15, 2011. It is only the second Contra Costa County record; the first was in 1994. This restored wetland, which was once a toxic landfill, is now a thriving marsh.

## Observations

By Maury Stern

Submit Contra Costa County sightings to [mbstern2@yahoo.com](mailto:mbstern2@yahoo.com) or (925) 284-5980 or send to [EBB\\_Sightings@yahoo.com](mailto:EBB_Sightings@yahoo.com).

This will be a short column as I will be away for 3 weeks. The **Least Bittern** at Martinez Shoreline was last seen on 1/16.

FS saw 3 **Greater White-fronted Geese**, one **Snow Goose** and a **Ross's Goose** at Heather Farm park on 1/11. MS saw them on 1/12.

There was a **Ross's Goose** at Miller-Knox RP in Point Richmond on 1/12. DS.

**Eurasian Wigeons** were at Miller-Knox on 1/14, LL, and the Albany mudflats near the Richmond side on 1/15. MP.

A **Northern Pintail** drake spent several weeks at Heather Farm Pond during January. CE.

**Hooded** and **Common Mergansers** were on the Rossmoor Golf Course pond 1/17, BW, and at Jewel Lake in Tilden RP on 1/25. ME, KL.

SS saw 14 **American White Pelicans** on Lafayette Reservoir on 1/28.

An **Osprey** was at Contra Loma RP 1/31. SF. A **Prairie Falcon** flew by on 1/27. P&NS.

**Virginia Rails** and an out of season **Caspian Tern** were at Martinez Shoreline on 1/22. KS.

A pair of **Burrowing Owls** have been at the entrance sign area to Contra Loma RP for about a month. PS, SF.

WK has an **Anna's Hummingbird** building a nest near her Rossmoor home. 1/23

The first **Allen's Hummingbird** of the year was reported by JC at her Moraga home 1/24, and another was at Jewel Lake in Tilden RP on 1/25. ME, KL.

A **Lewis's Woodpecker** was seen on the Corcoran Trail in Black Diamond Mines RP on 1/16 by BM.

Five pairs of **Western Bluebirds** in Concord were reported by MR on 1/26.

A **Townsend's Warbler** was in Walnut Creek yard of L-MH on 1/31.

A pair of **White-throated Sparrows** were seen in Wildcat Canyon area by AK on 1/31. There was one at Heather Farm on 1/31, HH, and Contra Loma RP by SF on 1/31 also.

A **Slate-colored Junco** spent the morning with the usual **Oregon Juncos** in MS's yard on 1/29.

P&NS saw some **Tricolored Blackbirds** with other blackbirds at Contra Loma RP 1/27, as did SF on 1/31.

JC Judy Cooper, CE Carol Evans, SF Stephanie Floyd, MF Mary Foley, HH Hugh Harvey, L-MH Liede-Marie Haitsma, AK Alan Krakauer, WK Win Kryda, LL Laura Look, KL Kay Loughman, BM Bruce Mast, MP Michael Park, MR Mike Robertson, FS Fred Safier, KS Ken Schneider, PS Paul Schorr, P&NS Paul and Nancy Schorr, DS Dan Sidle, MS Maury Stern, SS Susan Stern, BW Bev Walker.

Q

This is a bird that is not often seen, as it spends most of its time on or near the ground where there is dense cover. It is non-migratory and is found only in California and Baja. It has a melodious and varied song.

Unscramble these letters, or turn to Page 6 to learn more.

AAACEFHIIILNORRRST

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# Western Burrowing Owls

The Western Burrowing Owl has been witnessing steep declines in California, owing perhaps primarily to habitat loss, which in turn stems from land development for housing and shopping malls. Another significant problem is seen at the Altamont Pass Wind Resource Area, where as many as 423 to 593



owls are killed each year by the wind turbine blades (*Altamont Pass Wind Resource Area Bird Fatality Study, December 2010. Page 40*). The need for a range-wide conservation strategy was officially recognized by the State in 1995. However, California and the Department of Fish and Game have failed to take any action since the release of that Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation, more than 15 years ago.

Unfortunately, during the last 15 years the population has continued to plummet while the State has sat idle. New surveys have shown a 27 percent drop in the number of breeding burrowing owls in California's Imperial Valley, and a 28 percent drop in the San Francisco Bay Area. These declines ride on the heels of a more than 50 percent Burrowing Owl population decline in the San Francisco Bay Area and parts of Central California between 1983 and 1993.

In an effort to increase the awareness for California's Burrowing Owls and highlight the need for both a statewide conservation strategy and legal protection under the California Endangered Species Act, the Burrowing Owl Conservation Network is asking the people of California and North America to voice their concerns and sign an Action Alert. All signatures will be hand-delivered, along with a detailed letter, to state officials in Sacramento regarding the need for conservation action and legal protections.

Because National Audubon, California Audubon and all Chapters continue to be a critical driving force for the protection of the world's birds, Mount Diablo Audubon is asking for your help to spread the word

and garner signatures and supporters.

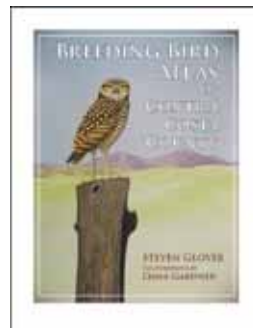
You can do this easily by clicking on <http://burrowing-owlconservation.org/SignCAPetition.html>. Or you may sign the petition at Facebook Causes: <http://apps.facebook.com/causes/petitions/584?m=624281a0>. There is also a link to the petition on our website at [www.diabloaudubon.com](http://www.diabloaudubon.com).

Some of the locations where Burrowing Owls are frequently reported are at Contra Loma and Coyote Hills Regional Parks, Berkeley Meadow and Cesar Chavez Park in Berkeley, Shoreline Park in Mountain View, and Prewitt Family Park Preserve in Antioch. Mount Diablo Audubon recently aided financially in establishing artificial burrows at Prewitt Family Park in order to help sustain the birds' presence there.

*Scott Artis of Burrowing Owl Conservation Network contributed to this article*

Do you have your own copy of *Breeding Birds of Contra Costa County*? This reference book has accounts for the 161 species of birds known to nest here, including current and historical status and conservation concerns. A map for each species locates areas within the county where nesting has been observed. Information is also given about the county's plant diversity and distribution, as well as other factors that govern where birds choose to live.

Written by Steve Glover, with scratch-board drawings by renowned artist Dana Gardner, and published by Mount Diablo Audubon Society, this book is available for \$26.80 including tax and shipping. Order by mail from Ann McGregor, 400 Oneida Ct., Danville, CA 94526, online at <http://diabloaudubon.com/index.php>. Or buy for \$22.00 at a regular MDAS meeting.



## NEWS FROM WILD BIRDS UNLIMITED



### Backyard Birdfeeding

Another dry and somewhat mild January-February has resulted in bird numbers being down at feeders throughout all of California. This is especially noticeable in the American and Lesser Goldfinches. We believe that many of them never migrated down from Washington and Oregon, where there is a great abundance of backyard birds.

Dark-eyed Juncos, White-crowned and Golden-crowned Sparrows have been quite abundant. We have had very few reports of Townsends Warblers at the suet feeders.

There have only been a few reports of Allen's and Rufous Hummingbirds. We did have a Black-chinned Hummingbird seen at the store.

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 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 Oak 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 roosting 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, 925-798-0303  
Visit us at [www.wbupleasanthill.com](http://www.wbupleasanthill.com)

# Field Trip Schedule

By Hugh Harvey

## March

- 2 Wednesday ..... Walnut Creek Parks
- 5 Saturday ..... Tomales Bay State Park
- 17 Thursday ..... San Leandro Reservoir
- 23 Wednesday ..... Lake Lagunitas
- 26 Saturday ..... Black Diamond Mines

## April

- 2 Saturday ..... Garin Regional Park
- 6 Wednesday ..... Orinda Connector Trail
- 9 Saturday ..... Pine Canyon
- 13 Wednesday ..... Mount Diablo State Park
- 18 Monday ..... North Briones
- 21 Thursday ..... Del Puerto Canyon
- 23 Saturday ..... Mines Road
- 28 Thursday ..... Mitchell Canyon

## May

- 3 Tuesday ..... Fernandez Ranch
- 12 Thursday ..... West Briones Regional Park
- 14 Saturday ..... East Contra Costa County
- 19 Thursday ..... Sycamore Grove/Shadow Cliffs

### ① Wednesday, March 2 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.

### ③ Saturday, March 5 Tomales Bay State Park

Leader: Maury Stern, 284-5980.

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



Spotted Owl at Tomales Bay SP

### ② Thursday, March 17 San Leandro Reservoir

Leader: Don Lewis, 284-5480.

Meet at 8 AM at Valle Vista staging area off Canyon Road in Moraga. From SR 24 in Orinda, take Moraga Way to Moraga. From Mt. Diablo Blvd in Lafayette, take Moraga Road south to Moraga. At the Chevron station, go south 1 mile on Canyon Road to Valle Vista. Expect 55-60 species, should be finished by noon. Leader: Don Lewis, 284-5480.



San Leandro Reservoir from Kings Canyon Loop Trail

### ③ Wednesday, March 23 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 (\$8 last year). Drive to parking lot near foot of Lagunitas Dam. Approximate meeting time is 9:00 AM. After birding the nearby area, we will hike around Lake Lagunitas. We have often found Pileated Woodpeckers here.

### ③ Saturday, March 26 Black Diamond Mines

Leader: Eugenia Larson, 806-0644.

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 lunch and a beverage..

# Trip Reports

## Wintering Raptors and Waterfowl of Solano and Yolo Counties, January 15.

On a cold, damp, foggy morning, twenty-two birders joined Terry Colborn for an all-day trek to birding locales in Solano and Yolo Counties. Heading south from Dixon, our first stop produced nice views of a Loggerhead Shrike. In the small marsh nearby we were fortunate to hear, and then see, both a Virginia Rail and two Sora. Several Wilson's Snipe zipped past us as they moved from one area of the marsh to another. At Jepson Prairie Preserve we observed a pair of Great Horned Owls, along with a nice adult Red-tailed Hawk and a pair of White-tailed Kites, while a pair of Northern Harriers flew over the open grasslands, flushing Western Meadowlarks. At our first stop along Flannery Road, we watched as a Burrowing Owl sat on the rocks below us. Our diligent searching failed to produce Mountain Plover, a species that has been rather scarce in the Central Valley this winter. A Ferruginous Hawk coursed directly over us, but continued in a beeline as it disappeared in the distance. We spotted a coyote that had become hopelessly entangled in a fence wire. Nancy Fix called the animal rescue center in Cordelia, and gave them the animal's location. Nancy subsequently reported that staff from the center were joined by a Solano County Sheriff and were able to cut the coyote free!

At the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area in Davis, our first stop on the new road that extends well out into the northeast corner of the wetlands put us on a large, mixed flock of shorebirds. There were several Greater Yellowlegs, with dozens of Dunlin and

Least Sandpiper spread in among scores of Long-billed Dowitcher and numerous Black-bellied Plover. In a large roost of mostly California Gulls, we found a few Herring Gulls and a couple of Bonaparte's Gulls. We watched as grinds of several thousand white geese moved about over the flooded rice fields. Soon skeins of Tundra Swans, White-fronted Geese and Snow Geese flew in formation overhead. Among them we picked out numerous Ross's Geese. On the water we scoped all of the wintering duck species. As we wound down our day, we watched as thousands of Pintail and Northern Shoveler flew directly in front of us. A fitting end to a magical day! We tallied 77 species for the day, including 10 raptor species and 12 species of waterfowl.

*Terry Colborn*

**Lake Merritt/Arrowhead Marsh, January 19.** Six birders enjoyed a lovely sunny day, finding most of the expected species at the two locations. The Green Heron at Lake Merritt was not seen, possibly due to some work being done on the small islands near the nature center, but much searching did produce the Tufted Duck. The high tide at Arrowhead Marsh allowed us to see a few Clapper Rails and a Sora, but our group missed out on sighting any Virginia Rails. We did see the Burrowing Owl on the lawn in front of the large metal sculpture. We had lunch at Garretson Point after spending some time searching for, and finding, Blue-winged Teal. We were also rewarded with a pair of Cinnamon Teal. A total of 83 species were seen at the conclusion of our day. *Sandy Ritchie*

**Las Gallinas/Rush Creek/Shollenberger Park, January 22.** Las Gallinas Water Treatment Plant and Rush Creek Marsh

in Marin County and Shollenberger Park in Petaluma (Sonoma Co.) were the destinations for thirteen members and guests on Saturday, January 22nd. The weather was quite comfortable with the fog lifting by the time we arrived at our first stop in San Rafael. Highlights for the day were the raptors: 4 falcon species »

## Monterey Bay Pelagic Birding Weekend

Terry Colborn is leading a weekend birding trip to the Monterey Bay area, October 1-2, 2011, for Mount Diablo Audubon and Yolo Audubon chapters. The weekend will feature a pelagic trip on Saturday with Monterey Seabirding ([www.montereyseabirding.com](http://www.montereyseabirding.com)), and land birding on Sunday. Monterey Seabirding uses a local skipper with over 30 years experience. Leaders include Roger Wolfe, Don Roberson, Dan Singer and Todd Easterla. All four are seasoned, life-long birders, and have exceptional knowledge of the status and distribution of California birds.

This two-day trip is planned to coincide with the peak of fall migration. Over the years, the Monterey Bay/Salinas River area has produced some excellent vagrants and a nice array fall of migrants. Possible areas to be visited on Sunday include Carmel River State Beach, Point Pinos, Salinas River State WMA, Moss Landing, Moonglow Dairy and Elkhorn Slough. Specific locations will be determined prior to the weekend, and will be based upon up-to-date information on rare bird sightings, weather conditions, tides, etc.

The pelagic trip is limited to a maximum of 25 participants. The cost is only \$85.00 per person. Sign-ups will be taken on a first-come, first-served basis beginning March 1, 2011. Make your check payable to Terry Colborn and mail to: 1714 Magnolia Place, Davis, CA 95618. Include each participant's full name, address, cell phone number and e-mail address. Your payment in full is your reservation. Your space will be confirmed upon receipt of your check. In the event the boat trip is cancelled by Monterey Seabirding, due to weather conditions, etc., participants will receive a full refund. Meeting details and accommodations information will be sent to all participants well in advance of the weekend. For questions, contact Terry at [tlcgdc@aol.com](mailto:tlcgdc@aol.com), or by phone: (530) 758-0689.

» were seen including a perched Peregrine at Rush Creek Marsh and a distant perched Prairie Falcon at Las Gallinas, plus two Merlins among the usual hawks and kites during the day. The total of 80 species included 15 species of ducks, a flock of Tree Swallows, two White-throated Swifts and one heard Virginia Rail. *Eugenia Larson*

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](http://www.diabloaudubon.com/index/php).

Because most trips do not return until late afternoon, bring a lunch and drink and join us during our midday break.

Category ❶: Easy, little or no walking, smooth paths

Category ❷: Moderate, one mile or more, possibly rough terrain

Category ❸: 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**—Exit SR 24 at St. Stephens Drive east of Orinda. El Nido Ranch Road is parallel to and north of the freeway. Park just east of the intersection with St. Stephens Drive.

## Benicia State Recreation Area » Continued from Page 10

in winter, particularly rafting bay species like Canvasback, Bufflehead, scaup, both goldeneyes, and, of course, American Coots.

The presence of two birds listed as Species of Special Concern by California Department of Fish and Game, as well as the relative abundance of Black and Clapper Rails, contributes to the designation of Benicia State Recreation Area as an Important Bird Area of California by Audubon California. Saltmarsh Common Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas sinuosa*) is said to be a common summer resident and is fairly common in winter. More than one percent of the global population of this subspecies live here or visit.

The Suisun Song Sparrow (*Melospiza melodia maxillaris*) is the other subspecies of special interest. Benicia SRA supports about 3% of the global population.

Four subspecies of Song Sparrow reside year-round in the Bay Area. Three of these are endemic to tidal salt marshes while the fourth inhabits nearby uplands. Largest is the towhee-sized chocolate brown Suisun Song Sparrow, found only from Benicia SRA eastward to the brackish marshes of Suisun Bay. Samuel's Song Sparrow is smaller in size and blackish-olive on the back. Its range is west from Carquinez Strait on San Pablo Bay. Slightly smaller yet, the Alameda Song

Sparrow in South San Francisco Bay has a yellowish-gray back color and a yellowish wash to the belly. In the coastal sage scrub along the coast and in fresh-water riparian corridors is the reddish-brown Marin Song Sparrow, intermediate in size between the marsh subspecies. Samuel's and Suisun Song Sparrows are genetically indistinguishable—and are genetically similar to a population of the Modesto Song Sparrow (a fifth subspecies) on the Cosumnes River.

From the park entrance off I-780 at Exit 3A, a road leads about a mile to end at Dillon Point. Stonecutter Patrick Dillon came to California from Tipperary, Ireland, during the 1849 gold rush. With savings from a successful stint in the Mother Lode, Dillon leased the tidal flat at Southampton Bay and Rocky Point peninsula for a sandstone quarry. Sandstone from this quarry was used to build Old Saint Mary's Cathedral in San Francisco. The State acquired the property for Benicia State Recreation Area in 1967.

The Forrest Deaneer Native Plant Botanic Garden displays over 250 species on 3.5 acres overlooking Southampton Bay. The garden is named for the founder of the Willis Linn Jepson Chapter of the California Native Plant Society, whose members and volunteers maintain the plantings. In spring, colorful



Western Redbud and Toyon glow in flaming fall color at Forrest Deaneer Native Plant Garden.

magenta redbuds, golden poppies, blue lupines and pink-flowered currants bloom. Summer and early fall deepen native plant foliage into reds, brilliant yellows and browns. Common resident birds, such as towhees, Western Scrub-Jays, Northern Mockingbirds, and Dark-eyed Juncos scamper under the leaves or call from the shrub tops. One area is devoted to California natives that attract butterflies and hummingbirds.

## **a** California Thrasher ♦ *Toxostoma redivivum*

California Thrashers are about the same plain brown color as California Towhees, but are larger, and if you can see the bird's bill, there is no chance of mixing them up. The slender, sickle-shaped bill is over an inch long. Thrashers forage by sweeping this bill from side to side, raking aside the leaf litter to find insects and spiders beneath. Seeds and berries, such as toyon, are also to their liking.

They have a long tail, equal to the body in length which they hold up at an angle as they run rapidly along the ground toward cover, rather than fly. With this tail as an efficient rudder, and with short wings and sturdy legs, the thrasher is well equipped for quick maneuverability when he wishes to avoid danger. California Thrashers like to stay within a rather small territory, and they like to keep under cover. But when they choose to, especially on an early morn-



ing in spring, they will fly up to the top of a shrub and entertain with a splendid aria.

Members of the Mimidae family, thrashers are relatives of the Northern Mockingbird and the Gray Catbird. Other thrashers found in California are Sage Thrasher, Crissal Thrasher, LeConte's Thrasher, and on very rare occasions, Ben-

dire's Thrasher. A Brown Thrasher, wide-spread in the east and south, was discovered in Point Pinole Regional Shoreline on November 24, 2010, by Mount Diablo Audubon Society member Laura Look. This was the first recorded sighting of this species in Contra Costa County. This bird was reported as recently as February 8 at Point Richmond.

California Thrashers are strictly resident. So if you know of a territory, you may visit the place at any time of year and count on finding the birds there. The species is nowhere abundant, but the *Breeding Bird Atlas of Contra Costa County* shows that these birds, which prefer coastal scrub in the Berkeley Hills and stands of chamise and mixed chaparral in the Diablo Range, are present in many parts of the county, including some residential neighborhoods.

# Ornithology Opportunities

The **2011 Audubon Assembly** will be held in San Diego in conjunction with the **San Diego Bird Festival** on March 3–6. It's the first Assembly in Southern California and includes trips, events and workshops for the entire family. Buy an **ASSEMBLY PASS** (\$125) and get free admission to all Assembly events and workshops including a banquet with seabird expert Peter Harrison and a Saturday night private party to meet new Audubon President David Yarnold. For online brochure: [www.sandiegoaudubon.org/2011%20Brochure.pdf](http://www.sandiegoaudubon.org/2011%20Brochure.pdf)

Don't miss the **2011 Point Reyes Birding and Nature Festival**. The Point Reyes Birding and Nature Festival! The Festival will be held April 29–May 2. It will feature walks, instruction, fun events, great speakers and a silent auction. Such well known birders and naturalists as Al Jaramillo, Jules Evens, Lisa Hug, David Wimpfheimer, Sarah Allen and many others will lead field trips and give talks on everything you want to know. Our keynote speaker is world-renowned birder Alvaro Jaramillo. ([www.pointreyesbirdingfestival.org](http://www.pointreyesbirdingfestival.org))

**Yuma Birding & Nature Festival.** April 13–16. Nearly 400 species of birds make southwestern Arizona and the lower Colorado River area a seasonal stop or year-round home because of its diverse habitat.. There are many tours available but it's definitely a good idea to sign up early if you want the widest choice of trips. Just how wide? The tours range south to

## Welcome New Members

Susan Clark	Berkeley
Mary Krentz	Oakland
Marylou Mull	Hercules
Bernt Pettersson	Lafayette
William Rocha	Walnut Creek
Steve Steinke	Oakland

Cibola National Wildlife Refuge and into Mexico, west to the Salton Sea, north to the Imperial and Kofa National Wildlife Refuges and east to archaeological sites. [www.yumabirding.com](http://www.yumabirding.com).

Audubon California's Kern River Preserve in Weldon, hosts the **17th Annual Kern River Valley Spring Nature Festival** on Saturday, April 23. Numerous free events include bird walks led by Kerncrest Audubon Society volunteers, and information booths and exhibits located at the Preserve's headquarters. <http://kern.audubon.org/KRVSNF.htm>.

The annual **Heron Festival** will be held April 30–May 1 at Clear Lake State Park. The festival is hosted by Redbud Audubon Society. A feature of this festival is the pontoon boat trips to view Western Grebes on the lake and heron rookeries along the shoreline. The Heron Festival also features a Wildflower brunch as well as bird walks, nature speakers, exhibit booths, and children's activities. [www.heronfestival.org](http://www.heronfestival.org).

A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise

*Aldo Leopold*

## Mount Diablo Audubon Society

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



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### MDAS MEMBERSHIP/RENEWAL APPLICATION

Please enroll my family and me as a member of Mount Diablo Audubon Society for \$25 for one year. Your membership dues are tax deductible.

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

For an additional \$20 (new NAS members only), please enroll me in the National Audubon Society.

Please send The Quail by:  US mail  E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

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City, State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Please make your check payable to:

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

Membership Chair 1932 Golden Rain Road #4 Walnut Creek, CA 94595

Mount Diablo Audubon Society,  
P.O. Box 53  
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Saltmarsh Common Yellowthroat  
Photograph by Ethan Winning ©



## Benicia State Recreation Area

Since the days of California's Gold Rush, the waters from the American, Sacramento, and San Joaquin Rivers, and other tributaries have brought silt from hydraulic mining and logging operations downstream to where the fresh water meets the salt water of San Pablo Bay at Carquinez Strait. Here much of the clay and fine sand settled out

at Southampton Bay to build mudflats and marshes. These tidal marshes form a rather special habitat that attracts a host of endangered wildlife and plants. For example, the wetlands support a large and stable population of Black Rail, as well as probably more than one percent of the global population of California Clapper Rail.

Northern Harriers glide over the wetlands in search of the plentiful prey, and in winter you can find Short-eared Owls. The abundance of migrant and wintering waterbirds provides food for Peregrine Falcons, which have maintained one of the Bay Area's few nesting areas on nearby bridges. Other raptors are present, too, such as White-tailed Kites and American Kestrels. The quiet waters of Southampton Bay invite large numbers of waterfowl here

*Continued on Page 6*

*Carquinez Strait, viewed from Dillon Point at Benicia State Recreation Area, with Southampton Bay in the foreground and Mount Diablo in the distance. This lower trail leads around the cape to the right; from there one can see the Al Zampa Memorial/Carquinez Bridge connecting Crockett and Vallejo. The Bay Ridge Trail, high above on the right, offers spectacular views.*

