



the Quail

Mount Diablo Audubon Society

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

www.diabloaudubon.com/index.php

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March 2012

Contra Costa Spring Wildflowers ♦ Michael Marchiano



Michael Marchiano is a lifetime resident of the San Francisco Bay Area with a lifetime love for, and fascination with, its flora and fauna. He has hiked and explored throughout California since he was nine years old. He is an avid photographer of his special interests, insects, spiders, reptiles,

birds, wildflowers and mushrooms. We, at MDAS, have heard Michael speak about spiders and mushrooms. His presentations are always fun and his sense of humor shines through. Join Michael as he shares his fascination with our local wildflowers.

Michael received his BA in History and Political Science from St. Mary's College in Moraga. He went on to graduate work at UC Berkeley and at St. Mary's and received a California Lifetime Teaching Credential. He taught for five years before entering the field of law enforcement where he spent 30 years. He and his wife of 36 years, Paula, have four children.

In retirement, Michael has been busy with presentations and outings for Lindsay Wildlife Museum, S.F. Exploratorium, the Contra Costa Water District, Scouts, 4H groups and numerous schools and civic organizations. Presently, he is resident Naturalist for Wild Birds Unlimited in

Clockwise from top left: Chinese Houses; Alameda Dune Evening-Primrose; Columbine; Vinegar Weed, Elegant Clarkia; Northern Checkerspot on Yarrow; Butter and Eggs. Michael Marchiano photos.

Pleasant Hill and volunteers as a guide with the Mount Diablo Interpretive Association.

BIRDING INFORMATION

Eugenia Larson, MDAS member and stalwart Christmas Bird Count leader, will share her experiences house sitting in New South Wales, Australia. She and her husband, Gary, were fortunate to have a month there and managed to see 152 species of birds and many of the famous marsupials of that amazing country. Eugenia, a native of Washington state, began birding when she moved to Delaware in the 1960s. She and Gary made their way to the West Coast in the late 1980s where Eugenia worked for Save the Bay in Oakland, retiring in 2002.

Meeting Schedule

The next general meeting of Mount Diablo Audubon Society will be **Thursday, March 1**, 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,* raffle

8:05 PM Speaker:

Michael Marchiano

* Please remember to bring a cup.

Thursday, April 5: Caitlin Nilsen
Snowy Plover Conservation

DEDICATED TO HABITAT CONSERVATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

President's Corner

By Jimm Edgar

We have had a couple of wonderful meetings already this New Year. Great programs, lots of goodies at the break and big turnouts. Our general meetings are always a lot of fun and I never cease to learn something. The February 2 meeting focused on the Pantanal area in Brazil, the largest wetland in the world. It also has the largest concentration of Jaguars in the world. I have seen a few fleeting photos of Jaguars over the years, but our speaker had scores of photos of these magnificent animals. Sadly, they are struggling to survive mostly because of the huge cattle herds in the area and that they are being killed by the ranchers to protect their cattle.

Two other MDAS members, Kent Fickett and Bill Chilson, and I once again went to Maui and broke the single-day record for bird species seen on the island. Local Maui resident, Sonny Gampono, was with us again. He knows the island like the back of his hand. Last year we broke the old record

of 42 birds when we saw 45. We saw 49 species this year. We moved our date up from March to mid-January to get any wintering waterfowl. It did get us Northern Pintail and Northern Shoveler which we missed last year. Highlights were 3 Laughing Gulls that had been hanging around for 3 weeks and a single Red Phalarope. We got nearly all the birds we hoped for, but missed Chukar and Long-eared Owl. It is just a fun thing to do and we'll probably do it again.

One last word. Our long time hospitality chair, Gerry Argenal, is stepping down after nearly 10 years. She and her husband would like to do some traveling and our monthly meetings prevent her from being away for very long. Our hospitality is one of the highlights of our meetings. If any of you could step forward to help that would be great. We have at least one person who has volunteered, but ideally we would like 3 or 4 so the job can be spread out. Let me know if you might help on this.

Norah Bain Turns 90

How much does the world change in 90 years? It still circles the sun, the sun still rises and we still have four seasons, though one might question that this year. The Atlantic was crossed non-stop by plane, World War II was started in an era of heavy artillery and ended in the Atomic Age, Mt. Everest was conquered and men walked on the moon. MDAS member Norah Bain has seen it all and more.

On February 5, about 100 family members and friends helped Norah celebrate her 90th birthday with afternoon tea at Woodhall in Orinda. Tea was served by the female members of Norah's family. Beautiful china was donated for the occasion. Scones, sweets and sandwiches preceded the birthday cake.

We learned many interesting facts during the Norah Bain Trivia Contest, including that she has crossed the Atlantic 19 times, birding is not her only interest and she was once tossed from a tennis match for using that naughty four-letter English curse word—"Dash!"

Mount Diablo Audubon Society has benefited from Norah's expertise at teaching birding. She is the matriarch of a wonderful family. We congratulate her for her life achievements. Happy Birthday Norah!



Norah Bain at the gathering in celebration of her 90th birthday. Rosita Harvey photo.



Volunteer Help Wanted

Our Chapter Membership Chair needs a volunteer to help with data entry. Excel experience is required and a knowledge of Filemaker Pro will be terrific but not necessary. Time commitment is flexible and will entail approximately eight hours per month. Interested members should contact Bev Walker at 925-952-9925 or beewalk@comcast.net.

Welcome New Members

Kathryn Blake	Oakland
Joy Dardin	Concord
Clayton Englar	Pleasant Hill
Judi Fewster	Pleasant Hill
Jeannine Gendar	Martinez
Carol and David George	Lafayette
Nancy Hanna	Walnut Creek
Jordan Harroun	Concord
Philip and Linda Myers	Lafayette
Patricia Schneider	Walnut Creek
Cheryl Sibthorp	Walnut Creek
Patty Sorensen	Pleasant Hill
Terhune Family	Clayton
Michael van Duren	Lafayette
Teresa Zaumseil	Walnut Creek



"I honoured this species with the name of... a person too well known for his admirable talents as an engraver on wood, and for his beautiful work on the Birds of Great Britain, to need any eulogy of mine. I enjoyed the pleasure of a personal acquaintance with him, and found him at all times a most agreeable, kind, and benevolent friend."

John J. Audubon

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

BCEEIKNRSWW

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What is eBird?

According to Cornell Lab of Ornithology, which developed the program along with National Audubon Society, "eBird is a real-time, online checklist program that has revolutionized the way that the birding community reports and accesses information about birds."

This means that anyone can enter sightings into a data base, and those data can be retrieved in any number of ways, compiled with the rest of the data, such as by location, species, or date. Combined with the observations of others, your data become part of a powerful tool useful to ornithologists, conservation biologists, educators, and land managers—and to yourself.

Whenever you go birding, or whenever you observe a bird out of normal habitat or out of season, you may submit an online checklist for each location where you birded that day. You should enter the specific date, location, and species. Number of birds seen is preferable, but not necessary. You can even include a photo. The program keeps tracks of your birding list by world, country, state, county, or birding hotspot, and by life total, year, or month.

The value of this program is threefold: bird listing, bird abundance throughout the year or by location, and bird population trending studies for bird conservation.

Bird listing: eBird provides an easy to use system of keeping track of all your major lists.

Bird abundance: the monthly abundance graphs are great for traveling birders. If you are heading to southeastern Arizona and want to know what birds are likely in August, eBird can help you. You can single out Miller Canyon, for example, or even restrict the location to Miller Canyon—Beatty's Guest Ranch.

Bird population trending: a great tool for bird conservation management planning, the data from many birders across an area can be collected and graphed and even mapped to help determine areas of decline or high density of particular species.

Here are some examples of how you can use the information:

- Create a checklist for Sunol Regional Park for February. Answer: 52 species reported over the last three years.
- Where is a good place to look for Mountain Plover? Answer: Flannery Road,

Solano County; Panoche Valley; Carrizo Plain.

- Compare the relative abundance of Greater Yellowlegs and Lesser Yellowlegs.
- Look at the mapped range of LeConte's Thrasher.
- Remember chasing the Snowy Owl in Alameda? When was that? Answer: Way back in 1974.
- When are you more likely to see American White Pelicans at McNabney Marsh? Answer: May and November.
- Find out who else reported the Golden-winged Warbler in San Mateo County. Answer: Steve Glover, 1990.

It is now possible to embed photos within your checklists from photo-sharing sites such as Flickr and Picassa. This not only makes the checklists look more attractive, but also makes it easier for reviewers to review and confirm your rare sightings.

There's another interesting and possibly useful feature of eBird, recently added to the program. You can sign up to receive daily e-mail messages showing rare-bird sightings for any area, such as for Contra Costa County, or for the entire state of California. Such a message will itemize each report of an unusual sighting with date, time and observer, and refer to the precise location at Google maps. Notes also state whether the sighting was confirmed, and add such comments as the observer gave them.

The program is very helpful and practical in maintaining records and personal notations of birds seen during trips abroad. Instead of keeping all these records (often several years old) in notebooks, today we can safely and easily keep them in a central database of e-Bird.

So, besides entering your own data, you can keep track of other sightings in your local county, prepare for a visit to a birding hotspot at any time of year, track year-to-year (or month-to-month) variation in any bird species in any area.

And with your sightings added to the database, you will be helping to make the program more reliable.

eBird is a free service and to sign up is easy. Go to ebird.org/california.

Try it!

Editor's note: MDAS members David Hutton and Albert Linkowski helped with this article.

NEWS FROM WILD BIRDS UNLIMITED



Weird Winter Weather!

Continuous warm and dry weather throughout this winter has resulted in bird numbers being down at feeders throughout the country. Customers have reported large numbers of goldfinches however, but their feeding habits are sporadic, resulting in low consumption.



To keep birds coming to your feeders, there are several things you can do:

1. Provide a source of water for drinking and bathing.
2. Keep your feeders clean and filled with fresh seed. Seed left out on cold damp nights or during rain can mold quickly. Wet seed can be dried in a warm oven for a few minutes or in a sunny window.
3. Provide a variety of foods, including suet, mealworms, Bark Butter and seed blends.
4. Provide protection for food, such as feeder cages, from large, unwanted birds such as jays and crows, as well as squirrels. These intruders will often scare off the smaller birds.
5. Replenish nectar in your hummingbird feeders at least weekly.
6. Clean out your bird houses and nesting boxes right away. Many species will be nesting soon. Wash them thoroughly to rid them of mites, and then allow drying indoors or in the sun before rehangng.

For more information, drop into the store or give us a call. And remember to mention that you are an MDAS member when you come in so that your purchase will count towards our donations to MDAS and Native Bird Connections.



Mike and Anne Eliot
Wild Birds Unlimited

692 Contra Costa Blvd.

Pleasant Hill, CA 94523, 925-798-0303

Visit us at www.wbupleasanthill.com

Chilean Birding

By Hugh Harvey

A male Puna Rhea with 20 or more chicks scrambling through the bushes; Southern Giant Petrels gliding majestically over the Straits of Magellan; the beautiful and graceful Black-headed Swans; the rare and unusual Black-headed Duck, a brood parasite which lays its eggs in the nest of another duck; soaring Andean Condors in the cordillera of the Andes Mountains; the black fluffy balls of the Spot-flanked Gallinule chicks; a pair of wonderful high-altitude Diademed Sandpiper-Plovers, with their two chicks; the Magellanic Plover which feeds its young from milk much as a dove does; the magnificent male Magellanic Woodpecker, almost 18" long; the Gray-breasted Seedsnipe impressing its mate by standing erect, puffing out its chest and holding out its wings, forcing a second male to leave the rock on which this display took place; the miners, canasteros, cinclodes, tyrants, ground-tyrants, tit-tyrants, shrike-tyrants, conebills, seedeaters, yellow-finches, sierra-finches, and siskins; all these are just some of the birding highlights which can be seen in Chile.

Chile is a country which in many respects mirrors the West Coast of North America. With its 2600 miles stretching from about 17.5°S latitude at its northern border to almost 56°S latitude at the Beagle Channel south of Tierra del Fuego, Chile would stretch from Acapulco, Mexico, to Ketchikan, Alaska. The southern section of the country, with its islands, glaciers, and mountains, matches the Alaska Panhandle. The and most densely populated part of the country, from Puerto Montt to Valparaiso, corresponds to the Central Valley of California plus Oregon and Washington. The northern section of the country, as well as part of Peru, includes the famous Atacama Desert. This driest place on earth is more than a match for our southern California deserts which extend well down into Mexico.

The natural habitats of Chile are dominated by two major physical features, the Humboldt Current of the Pacific Ocean, and the Andes Mountains. The cold northward-flowing current cools the air masses coming from the west and the moisture falls out before the winds reach the coast; hence, the formation of the Atacama. The desert in the north and the Andes Mountains running the length of the country along the eastern political border make a formidable, though not impassable, barrier, physically isolating Chile from the rest of South America.

A portion of Chile's more than 430 species are common to North America. These include at least 60 species such as Pied-billed Grebe, Great and Snowy Egret, Black and Turkey Vulture, Peregrine Falcon, Common Gallinule, at least 30 shorebird species, Franklin's Gull, Rock Pigeon, Burrowing Owl, Vermilion Flycatcher, and California Quail.

The almost 60 families of birds represented roughly parallels those we see at home in North America, but there are some notable differences. Crows and jays, for example, do not appear in Chile.

In addition, there are, according to one list, nine species endemic to Chile. Birders are especially interested to see these birds, which include Chilean Mockingbird, Dusky Tapaculo, White-throated Tapaculo, Mustached Turca, Chestnut-throated Huet-Huet, Dusky-tailed Canastero, Chilean Seaside Cinclodes, Crag Chilia, and Slender-billed Parakeet.

Due to the physical shape of the country, extensive travel is required to see the various habitats. Popular birding areas include the Lluta and Azapa valleys, river oases outside the city of Arica near the Peruvian border, Lago Chungara in the puna and altiplano regions of Lauca National Park in the north, the coastal region of Valparaiso and Vina del Mar, the Yeso Valley and Cajon de Maipo in the central Andes, Nahuelbuta National Park and its coastal Araucaria Forest, the Patagonian steppe northeast of Punta Arenas, Torres del Paine and the Isla Grande.

An additional factor in the distribution of the bird population of Chile is the distribution of the human population. The area from slightly north of Santiago south to and including the first island of Chiloe is something less than one third of the length of the country. Yet this same area holds 87% of the population. The areas of undisturbed habitat in this part of the country are few and far between. Much of this area not under cultivation for food and dairy production has been converted to tremendous acreage of fast-growing non-native pine and eucalyptus trees. The bird life in this central part of the country is essentially one which tolerates humans and their associated development. Many of the common species can be found here. A list of these birds would include Neotropic Cormorant, Yellow-billed Pintail, Variable Hawk, Chimango Caracara, California Quail, Southern Lapwing, Eared Dove, Chilean Flicker, Chilean Elaenia, Fire-eyed Diucon, Chilean Swallow, Blue-and-white Swallow, Southern House Wren, Austral Thrush, Chilean Mockingbird, Common Diuca-Finch, Rufous-collared Sparrow, Austral Black-bird, and Long-tailed Meadowlark.



Editor's note: This article was adapted from a story originally appearing in the March and April, 2002 issues of The Quail.

We hope to have a Mount Diablo Audubon trip to Chile in late October or early November. The areas to be visited would be Central Chile, centered around Santiago, and the very south of Chile around Punta Arenas. A second part would be from Punta Arenas and would include parts of Isla Grande, as well as a visit to Torres del Paine.

The tour company, Fantastico Sur, is co-owned by Enrique Couve, who was one of the Chilean guides for a trip taken by Rosita and myself in 2001.

To learn more about this adventure, contact Hugh B. Harvey at 935-2979 or hughrosita@gmail.com.

Observations

By Maury Stern

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

Winter has come without rain, but there have been many sightings of interest anyway. Paul and Nancy Schorr's **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** was a wonderful bird and Elizabeth Leite's **Cassin's Finches** were very unusual for the area.

JE found a **Greater White-fronted Goose** on the Rossmoor Golf Course while scouting for the MDAS Christmas Bird Count, 12/14.

An immature **Snow Goose** was out of its usual territory at Miller-Knox RS pond on 12/26, ELi, and 1/4, LL.

JHe found a **Cackling Goose** 2/5 at Newhall Park in Concord.

Six **Wood Ducks** were still at the almost dry Upper San Leandro Reservoir Creek. PD, MT, 12/20.

Eurasian Wigeons, 1 pure and 1 hybrid **American x Eurasian Wigeon**, were seen off the Miller-Knox shoreline by KF, JH, BDe, JSt, BB, from 12/25 to 1/15.

Forty-nine **Ring-necked Ducks** were at Heather Farm pond 1/16, HH, and 41 on 1/28, CF.

BG and DW led a trip which saw a **Tufted Duck** at Clifton Court Forebay in East County, 1/8.

A **Black Scoter** was seen by many at Marina Bay Richmond from 1/8 to 2/4. JH, JD, MP, RB, HN, JS, BM, SLo, KJ.

Three **Long-tailed Ducks** were also at Marina Bay 1/8 to 1/12. JH, JD, JHo, DL, MP, NA, SD.

Barrow's Goldeneye was at Crane Pond in Oakley on 12/21, PS, JSu, and 1/8. BG, DW.

Hooded Mergansers were widespread, seen from Moraga, Martinez Shoreline, Tilden RP Jewel Lake, and San Ramon Creek in Danville, from 12/25 to 1/6. JC, LL, BD, DL, TW, JC, SH, AK.

Common Mergansers were at Miller-Knox Pond, Oakley Crane Pond, and Walnut Creek behind Trader Joe's at California and Newell. KF, DW, BG, ELe.

Up to 19 **American White Pelicans** have been at Lafayette Reservoir. ER, 2/2.

Lafayette Reservoir also had a **Green Heron**, 1/17, ELe.

On 1/8, BG and DW saw 3 **Ferruginous Hawks** on Byron Hot Springs Road.

Golden Eagles were in Oakley 1/8, DW, BG; Round Valley RP area MM, 1/15; Eagle Peak trail on Mount Diablo, MM, 1/16; and Briones-Mount Diablo trail, SL, 2/3.

SH saw a **Merlin** in downtown Alamo, 1/3; and MM from his Martinez home 2/6.

MM saw a **Prairie Falcon** on Marsh Creek Road in East County. 1/15.

A **Short-eared Owl** was seen by AM at Clifton Court Forebay on 1/22.

MS had a brief visit from an **Allen's Hummingbird** in his Lafayette backyard, 1/31.

BH found a **Belted Kingfisher** at the DeVito Equestrian Center pond in Walnut Creek, 1/17.

JHa saw a **Hairy Woodpecker** at the East Ridge Trail of Redwood RP on 12/28.

A **Yellow-shafted Northern Flicker** was at Miller-Knox park, 1/15. BB.

BG and DW saw **Horned Larks** along Byron Hot Springs Road on 1/8, and MM saw many along Marsh Creek Road, 1/15.

On 1/16, MS saw a **Pygmy Nuthatch** at Valle Vista Staging Area in Moraga.

SL saw **Rock Wrens** on the Briones-Mount Diablo Trail, 2/3.

Two **Blue-gray Gnatcatchers** were wintering in Kennedy Grove RP, 1/16, LL.

KB had 5 **Western Bluebirds** at her Lafayette home bird bath, 1/20.

Mountain Bluebird was in Byron near Holey Road. EL, 1/28, SL, 1/30.

Many **Varied Thrush** have been seen the past two months, from Valle Vista to Tilden, Orinda to Kennedy Grove. NB, KBe, JC, BD, PD, AKa, DL, LL, JS, MT.

Many flocks of 30-40 **American Pipits** were along Marsh Creek Road in the plowed fields. 1/15, MM.

Many **Cedar Waxwing** flocks were around with hundreds at his WC birdbath, BH; in Martinez, MM; and Lafayette, MS.

Townsend's Warblers were widespread. ELe, JHa, JS, DW.

JHa spotted 2 **Hermit Warblers** along the East Ridge Trail in Redwood Park on 12/28; and DW saw one at Inspiration Point parking area, 1/4.

Rufous-crowned Sparrows were on Eagle Peak Trail in Mount. Diablo SP, MM, 1/16, and Old Borges Ranch Trail, 1/4, SL.

Fox Sparrow numbers seemed larger than normal to most reporters. PD, AK, JL, LL, MM, JS, MT; and JR with one red race in her Alamo yard.

Lincoln's Sparrows were in a number of backyards. P&NS in Antioch, 12/23; EL in San Ramon, 12/22; AK in Richmond, 1/15; and MM on Mount Diablo SP, 1/16.

Many **White-throated Sparrows** were around. PD, AK, LL, JR.

JR had a continuing **Slate-colored Junco** in her Alamo yard.

A young male **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** came to their Antioch yard on 1/29. P&NS.

Tricolored Blackbirds were along the Byron Hot Springs Road on 1/8. BG, DW.

Two well-described **Cassin's Finches** have been at ELe's feeders the past two months in Walnut Creek.

AK had a single **Pine Siskin** hanging out with the **Lesser Goldfinches** in his Richmond backyard, 1/2.

NA Noah Arthur, NB Norah Bain, KB Kristen Baker, KBe Ken Berniker, BB Bob and Barbara Brandriff, RB Richard Broadwell, JC Judi Cooper, BDe Brian and Noah DeLay, SD Sheila Dickie, JD Jay Dodge, PD Pat Doughty, BD Bob Dunn, JE Jimm Edgar, CF Carol Fowler, KF Katherine Francone, BG Bingham Gibbs, JH John Harris, HH Hugh Harvey, JHa Jack Hayden, JHe Joel Herr, BH Bob Hislop, JHo Jeff Hoppes, SH Steve Hutchcraft, KJ Kathy Jarrett, AKa Alan Kaplan, AK Alan Krakauer, JL Johan Langewis, EL Eugenis Larson, ELe Elizabeth Leite, DL Don Lewis, ELi Eric Lichtwardt, SL Steve Lombardi, SLo Stephen Long, LL Laura Look, MM Mike Marchiano, BM Bruce Mast, AM Amy McDonald, HN Harold Newman, MP Michael Park, ER Ellen Reintjes, JR Jean Richmond, JS Jim Scarff, PS Paul Schorr, P&NS Paul and Nancy Schorr, JSt John Sterling, MS Maury Stern, JSu Joel Summerhill, MT Marilyn Trabert, DW Denise Wight, TW Teri Wills,



Field Trip Schedule

By Hugh Harvey

March

- 3 Saturday.....Tomales Bay State Park
- 8 Thursday.....Walnut Creek Parks
- NOTE: This is a change of date from previous announcements.
- 13 Tuesday.....Mt. View Sanitary/McNabney Marsh
- 22 Thursday.....Valle Vista
- 28 Wednesday.....Lagunitas

April

- 4 Wednesday.....Orinda Connector Trail
- 7 Saturday.....Garin Regional Park
- 14 Saturday.....Pine Canyon
- 17 Tuesday.....North Briones
- 21 Saturday.....Mines Road
- 25 Wednesday.....Del Puerto Canyon

May

- 1 Tuesday.....Black Diamond Mines
- 10 Thursday.....Mount Diablo State Park
- 15 Tuesday.....Mitchell Canyon
- 17 Thursday.....West Briones Regional Park
- 19 Saturday.....East Contra Costa County

② Saturday, March 3 Tomales Bay State Park

Leader: Maury Stern, 284-5980.

Carpool leaves 7 AM from El Nido Ranch Road. Meet at 8:30 in the parking lot at Heart's Desire Beach in Tomales Bay State Park. After crossing the Richmond Bridge (toll), 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,
Tomales Bay State Park

① Thursday, March 8

NOTE: This is a change of date from previous announcements.

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 Tuesday, March 13 Mountain View Sanitary/McNabney Marsh

Leader: Steve Taylor, s-Taylor@pacbell.net.

Meet at 9 AM at the Mountain View Sanitary Visitor Center. Exit from I-680 southbound at Arthur Road, turn left and go under the freeway. Exit I-680 northbound at Pacheco Blvd, turn right onto Arthur Road and go under the freeway. Arthur Road will turn left. At .4 miles turn sharp left onto Mt. View Sanitary's private road. Follow the road through the entry gate, alongside the freeway and through the tunnel under I-680. Park and sign-in at the Visitor Center. Trails may be muddy. Close-up looks at dabbling ducks; possibly bitterns and herons. If you wish, bring a lunch and explore Martinez shoreline in the afternoon on your own.

② Thursday, March 22 Valle Vista

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 Mount 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.



③ Wednesday, March 28 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 north. 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 per car). 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.

Trip Reports

Christmas Count Rarity Chase, January 8.

27 well behaved birders participated in the fourth annual first of the year Birding Bonanza. What could have been a difficult outing turned out to be just the opposite because of the group who made my job of wrangling cats quite easy. With the very dry weather we did not have high hopes of getting to our previous high number of 106, but with all the help of our group and Denise's terrific birding skills, we had 109 species. Highlights were Virginia Rail, Sora and Burrowing Owl seen at Contra Loma; at least two American Bittern, White Pelicans, Common Gallinule, Belted Kingfisher, with quite a few ducks and gulls which Denise helped us all sort out at the Delta Science Center; Common Mergansers, Common and Barrow's Goldeneye, Green Heron and a Golden Eagle flyover with lunch; many geese, ducks, swans, cranes and a Peregrine Falcon on the Holland Tract, Tufted Duck at Clifton Court Forebay; and for our finale we had at least three Ferruginous Hawks, Tricolored Blackbirds, cowbirds, and Horned Larks on Byron Hot Springs Road. Tired but happy, all the birders headed for home after a good day with excellent birding and companionable comrades. Thanks for everyone's help in finding birds and keeping the leaders informed.

Bingham Gibbs and Denise Wight

Putah Creek, January 14. 18 birders enjoyed a beautiful day of this unusual winter, with no fog and warm sunshine by 10 o'clock. We missed a couple of the expected birds—Common Gallinule and American Dipper in particular. But we enjoyed great views of Wood Duck, Barrow's Goldeneye, Common and Hooded Merganser, Osprey, and Phainopepla. Special extra sightings included two Brown Creepers at lunchtime, and, perhaps best of all, early, on Pleasants

Valley Road, a flock of Long-billed Curlews on one side and two Lewis's Woodpeckers on the other. The final total was 70 species.

Fred Safier

Arrowhead Marsh/Lake Merritt, January 20. Eleven members and guests with umbrellas and rain gear were keen enough to brave a rare stormy day for the high tide. During the time that we spent at Arrowhead Marsh, only one Clapper Rail was seen by our group. The Nelson's Sparrow that had been delighting birders for several weeks was very cooperative, and it afforded all of us great views. Other highlights were the many Marsh Wrens and Common Yellowthroats that were forced out of the reeds by the tide, and a Cackling Goose on the lawn area. At Garretson Point, Hugh Harvey called our attention to two Spotted Sandpipers that flew across the channel. We finished up at Lake Merritt, finding the Tufted Duck amongst the Greater and Lesser Scaups. A Peregrine Falcon sighting made a nice finish for the day, with 60 species seen.

Sandy Ritchie

Las Gallinas Water Treatment Plant, Rush Marsh, Novato, and Shollenberger Park, January 28. Sixteen members plus five guests from Marin Audubon had a great outing to Marin and Sonoma counties. While walking around the large "pond" at Las Gallinas, highlights included Cackling Geese, one each Ross's Goose and Snow Goose, a male Eurasian Wigeon, Dunlin, Wilson's Snipe, Green Heron, Common Moorhen, a flyover Thayer's Gull identified by Jean Richmond, White-throated Swifts first heard by visitor Marion Porter, Tree Swallows, Lincoln's Sparrow and two Say's Phoebes fly-catching at close range. Hugh Harvey found the hot-lined Laughing Gull for the group. A Virginia Rail responded to Paul Schorr's tape but failed to show. Several Mute Swans were at Rush Marsh among

the many ducks. Shollenberger's mud flats produced more Dunlin and one Long-billed Curlew. Weather was sunny and cool in the morning, warming up in the afternoon. A total of 79 species were seen plus one heard Virginia Rail.

Eugenia Larson

Thornton Area/Cosumnes River Preserve, February 4. Eight intrepid birders turned out to take advantage of the trip to Thornton and the Cosumnes Preserve. With a chill in the air initially, the day quickly saw temperatures rise into the 60s with a cloudless blue sky. Among notables at Westgate Park, Green Heron, Cattle Egret and Common Yellowthroat yielded good views. Moving on to Woodbridge Road to the Sandhill Crane viewing areas, we were not disappointed finding several gatherings of 30–50 cranes. Most frequently encountered, however, were Greater White-fronted Geese; well over 1000 were seen. Several American Pipits were also observed here. Cosumnes Preserve provided a wide array of ducks including Ring-necked, Northern Pintail, Cinnamon and Green-winged Teal; other good birds included Belted Kingfisher and Wilson's Snipe. Route 12 just west of Terminus proved to be the only place that we found Snow Geese during the day. All in all at the end of the day we had observed 67 species.

David Hutton



Cosumnes River Preserve

Come birding with us.

Field trips are open to members and non-members, beginners and advanced birders. Weather or other contingencies may require changes. For updates, visit the MDAS website at www.diabloaudubon.com/index.php.

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

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

Category ❷: Moderate, one mile +, 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.

Our Mount Diablo Audubon Chapter is a conservation organization. As such, we encourage members to consider meeting at the carpool point to pick up or ride with others. It is important that given the cost of gasoline, those who ride with others offer to pay some of this cost. Don't forget about any bridge tolls or park entry fees on some of our longer trips.

Bosque del Apache

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(they didn't get the memo about that being the other Las Vegas).

This is a photographic expedition for us. We have cameras to beat the band, and tripods, and a rented lens as long as my arm (I have short arms). We head out to the Bosque each morning before sunrise, stopping first at the Socorro Denny's to get a quick breakfast. In the late afternoon we return to see the birds at sunset.

Sunrise comes early at The Bosque. Though the official sunrise was 7:11 AM today, the birds were very active at about 6:35 AM. The big Sandhill Cranes had already started taking off in flights of three or four when we rolled up to the pond just north of the visitor center at Bosque del Apache, New Mexico, this morning.

The photographers were also getting restless. There was a line of birdographers along the levee that lines the pond. I would guess the ratio of birds-to-photographers was about 100:1. The photographers were standing with their tripods along the water's edge, long lenses at the ready.

And, it was cold. The thermometer in our rental car indicated 19 degrees when we arrived. That was two degrees colder than yesterday when I had a take a break to sit in the car due to hypothermia. I'm not used to this kind of cold, coming from San Luis Obispo where it gets down into the high 30s this time of year at the coldest.

With my layers of clothing, gloves over gloves, and wrapped in my stylish Hogwarts scarf, I was breathing frosty breaths this morning. But I felt great, and the birds were providing an amazing show.

At sunrise the light changed dramatically and we all started clicking wildly, gathering our photos of the birds as they squawked and honked and flew into the morning sky. Shutter sounds are mixed with the bird sounds on my recordings. This morning we got to the bird-watching overlook just in time to see about 500 Sandhill Cranes take off at the same time. The sound was comparable to a Boeing 737 doing a reverse-thrust push-back from the gate. I was stunned by the amount of air that 500 cranes can move at one moment.

That rush of air was quickly replaced by the cacophony of cranes barking out orders to each other about altitude and flight path.



Photographers line the levee adjacent to the water at the north entrance to Bosque del Apache in New Mexico. It's worth the wait, because the birds put on such a show every day.

off between them from time to time so that both of us can get tracking shots of the birds in flight, or a nice wide shot of the gorgeous Bosque sunset.

Patrick's nice Red Epic video camera is capable of some extraordinary feats, one of which is extreme slow-motion at very high resolution. His best shots from the sunrise bird-launching event are breathtaking. He was shooting at 300 frames-per-second at 2K resolution. The resulting video images are stunning, looking like a ballet performance by Sandhill Cranes. In flight, the cranes' motion is descriptive enough for a study in the musculature of large birds. It's poetic motion, and like nothing I have seen before.

This is definitely flight-by-committee. No single crane is in charge, but there is a collective will about them that carries them into the morning sky. Where they go is anyone's guess, but they return at sunset, squawking their way back to the ponds and fields of the Bosque.

Our photography has been very successful. We are armed with two nice cameras—one for stills, the other for video—and a variety of lenses from ultrawide to ultra-telephoto. We have two tripods, one with a smooth fluid-head, and we switch

Bewick's Wren ♦ *Thryomanes bewickii*



This little bird was known to Audubon, but not to Thomas Bewick. Bewick (1753–1828) never saw America, but Audubon

met the elderly Bewick on a trip to England in 1827. Bewick helped Audubon find paying subscribers for his series of folios of American bird paintings. Six years earlier, Audubon had shot a bird in Louisiana and immediately made a drawing of it.

Thomas Bewick grew up in the countryside of northern England, where he acquired a talent in art and a keen interest in the natural history of the local animals. At fourteen years of age, he was apprenticed to an engraver, and he became highly skilled in the trade. In 1790, he published his observations and engravings in *General History of the Quadrupeds*. In 1799, he published the first of a two-volume work *History of British Birds*. Each of Bewick's engravings depicts the bird itself and most also a tail-piece, or 'tale-piece' as Bewick named them: vignettes that reveal 18th-century rural life ranging from the comic to the everyday: a housewife hangs out her washing oblivious to the dirty pigs rushing through the gate; a fisherman hunching his shoulders against



the rain; a farmer swimming his cow across a river to avoid the toll (losing his hat in the process); a fishing boat rotting on a lonely shore. Each one contains a story.

Bewick's Wren is common throughout Contra Costa County, though more so in the Berkeley Hills and the Diablo Range and less so in the areas east of Antioch and Brentwood. These friendly birds will readily adopt a nesting box, and they are delightful birds to have at your backyard feeders.

Ornithology Opportunities

The 16th annual **San Diego Bird Festival** takes wing on scenic Mission Bay March 1-4, with Kenn Kaufman as keynote. Festival headquarters is just steps away from the "Mile of Birds" along the San Diego River estuary. Nearby islands, Mexico's Islas Los Coronados, complement the ocean view and offer the possibility of adding exotic pelagic bird species to festival-goers' birding lists. From sea to desert to mountaintop, San Diego County has a lot of birding to offer, with more than 500 species of record. The 2012 Festival offers four pelagic trips. Information, including details of a post-festival Costa Rica trip, is at www.sandiegoaudubon.org/images/PDF/birdfestival2012.pdf, or email birdfest@cox.net or call 858-273-7800 to receive a free brochure.



Reddish Egret, San Diego Bay
© Photo courtesy Scott Streit

just might go home with a new bird for your life list! Call 360-681-4076 for more info.

Save the Date for the 2012 **Point Reyes Birding and Nature Festival**, April 27-30. Birding during the breeding and migration season at one of the best locations in North America:

Western Marin and Sonoma Counties. Information, schedule and registration at www.pointreyesbirdingfestival.org

The 2012 Festival will feature trips for all levels of birders, from beginners to advanced. Join trips and lectures led by such experts as Rich Stallcup, Alvaro Jaramillo, Peter Pyle, Jules Evens, David Wimp-

fheimer, Lisa Hug, Joe Moran, Sarah Allen and Keith Hansen.

Observe birds of the ocean, coast, forest and wetlands. There will be tours for children, introduction to bird watching, butterfly and dragonfly walks. Explore wildflower outings, bats, seals and much, much more. Pelagic trips to Cordell Bank, boat trips on Tomales Bay, Big Days, walking, hiking, biking and more! Great equipment displays and birding merchandise will be at the exhibitor's fair, and a festive dinner with keynote speaker will round out the weekend of events. The 2012 Point Reyes Birding & Nature Festival is sponsored by Environmental Action Committee of West Marin. Phone: 415-663-9312, prbnfestival@gmail.com.

"The clearest way into the Universe is through a forest wilderness."

John Muir (1838-1914)

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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- 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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Sandhill Crane, Bosque del Apache. Brian Lawler photos.

Bosque del Apache

Editor's note: This article was written by my long-time friend Brian P. Lawler, Professor of Graphic Communication at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo.

I'm in New Mexico, home of the Los Alamos National Laboratory, the White Sands Missile Range, and the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge.

I'm here with my son Patrick to take photos of migratory birds. There are thousands of them, actually tens of thousands of them. There are Sandhill Cranes, Snow Geese, ducks, and a few miscellaneous birds. Bald Eagles, for example. We saw three this morning.

The Bosque is a magical place, with photo opportunities galore. Bird watchers take flight in this place, and it is nothing

In the distance a virtual cloud of birds flew north from one of the fields at the Bosque. Using Photoshop's Count feature and a grid, I was able to estimate that there are 2,500 birds in this photo. It seemed like many more when they passed us this morning.

short of amazing. You can point your lens in nearly any direction and get a reasonable photo. Frame an image carefully and you get an avian masterpiece.

The Bosque, (pronounced *boz-kay*) as the locals call it, is the winter home to hundreds of thousands of birds as they fly from Canada to Central and South America.

From season to season, week to week, the number and species of birds change. And I promise that you have never seen anything like 50,000 Snow Geese flying toward you as if in a cloud. It is exhilarating, exciting, and almost frightening to see. And, the sound is like nothing I have ever heard. Two weeks ago there were 79,000 Sandhill Cranes at the Bosque. Today there were estimated to be only 1,000. The other 78,000 have flown north to gamble in Las Vegas, New Mexico

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