



the Quail

Mount Diablo Audubon Society

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

www.diabloaudubon.com/index.php

Volume 56, Number 8

May 2011

Tracking Birds with the SF Bay Bird Observatory

◆ Stephanie Ellis

Birds are excellent indicators of ecosystem health. They are highly visible and cost-effective to track and are extremely sensitive to environmental change. The San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory pays close attention to impacts on birds and their habitats and gathers crucial data specific to local bird populations. Stephanie Ellis, Outreach and Communications Director of SFBBO, will discuss the numerous projects undertaken during thirty years of landbird and colonial waterbird research at SFBBO. She will place special emphasis on SF Bay Bird Observatory's leadership in the Bay's Western Snowy Plover recovery effort.

The San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory is dedicated to the conservation of birds and their habitats through science and outreach. Founded in 1981, the SFBBO works with both government agencies and partner organizations to achieve viable endemic bird populations that are diverse, rich, and abundant and supported by preserved and restored habitats. Critical scientific information acquired through the SFBBO Landbird and Waterbird Program informs land management decisions in the Bay Area.

Meeting Schedule

The next general meeting of Mount Diablo Audubon Society will be **Thursday, May 5**, 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: **Stephanie Ellis**

* Please remember to bring a cup.

Wednesday, June 1: Potluck Dinner



My Tern to Dance was the winning entry of the People's Choice Award in the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory's 2009 Click Off photo competition. Photo by Edward Minh Nguyen.

SFBBO began in the 1970s when Professor Richard Mewaldt of San Jose State University, along with his students and some dedicated local birders, began to study the birds on the commercial salt ponds of the South Bay. They investigated the seasonal use of the ponds by roosting and nesting birds under the auspices of the South Bay Institute of Avian Studies, now SFBBO. In 1999, Coyote Creek Field Station became part of the Bird Observatory's Landbird Program and continues the bird-banding operation that it began in 1982.

Join the SFBBO staff and volunteers for a walk, a workshop, a special event, or a bird banding demonstration and learn about avian conservation in the Bay Area. Be sure to check their website: www.sfbbo.org and meet the staff on Facebook. The Bay Bird Review is a quarterly publication for members and can be downloaded from the website.

BIRDING INFORMATION

Diana Granados of Native Bird Connections will share details of the just completed three-tiered pilot program called *Outside Child*. The program was developed by Native Bird Connections in partnership with Mount Diablo Audubon in our response to Richard Louv's book *Nature Deficit Disorder* and the No Child Left Inside Coalition (nclcoalition.org). The three separate sessions include a live-bird presentation, instruction with field guides, binoculars and study skins, and a supervised outdoor excursion with experienced naturalists. With Diana will be a participating third-grade teacher, a parent and some of the students from Valhalla Elementary School in Pleasant Hill.

One student, Gargi, said in response to the program, "I never knew what falcons really meant to us."

DEDICATED TO HABITAT CONSERVATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

President's Corner

By Jimm Edgar

Our chapter has been without a conservation chair for about six months. Our hope is to put together a conservation committee. Maybe 4 or 5 folks that would meet every other month or so to work on conservation issues; particularly local issues. We have things that come up right now that we are not addressing in any meaningful way. If this is something you could help with, please let me know.

Please come to our May meeting, not only to hear a fine speaker and to learn more about our educational activities, but to choose our officers for the coming year. We have 4 elected offices. The remainder of our board is appointed. We are very lucky to have a very strong board of directors. We also have had a great group of volunteers this year. Moses De Los Reyes, our volunteer coordinator, has done a great job on organizing people for events. We could always use more help however.

One of the fun items our chapter has been involved with is Boy Scout outings. We have taken a couple of groups of Scouts on birding trips this spring. Some of them

are working on merit badges which require more than just seeing the bird. They need to record some information about habitat, songs and calls, *etc.*, so it is a good teaching opportunity. We also have helped with a number of the boys who have built bird houses and put them up. Wood Duck boxes in particular have been popular and successful! Board member Brian Murphy has led this effort with the Scouts.

I gave a short talk at our last general meeting about a trip my wife and I took to the mountains outside of Mexico City to see the wintering Monarch butterflies. It was one of the most amazing things I have ever seen. Millions and millions of butterflies. If you ever get a chance to see this you should jump on it. You can go to "Monarch butterfly migration" on the Internet and get some idea of how spectacular this phenomena is. Amazing.

Spring is here. I hope you will join us for a field trip to one of the many places we go this time of year and join us for our June potluck meeting. This year we will meet on Wednesday, June 1 instead of our normal first Thursday which is June 2.

Audubon Weighs in on Wind Power

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has released two important documents regarding wind power, both open now for public comment: draft federal guidelines for reducing impacts of wind turbines on birds and other wildlife, and draft guidance regarding application of the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act to wind facilities. Audubon participated for three years in a Federal Advisory Committee that provided recommendations to the Secretary of the Interior regarding the federal wind guidelines. Those recommendations formed the basis of the draft guidelines released by the Service. Audubon is developing detailed comments on both documents and will provide opportunities to all of our loyal Audubon advocates to weigh in on these important new guidelines.

Audubon provides Important Bird Area data for energy resource planning. Utility regulators are looking at the country's energy development future and planning the expansion of the power grid across America. As part of this planning process, increasing attention is being focused on the issue of where to place this infrastructure, including electric transmission lines for

traditional or renewable power generation facilities. As the regulators look at siting issues, Audubon has led efforts to ensure that critical habitat areas, including Important Bird Areas (IBAs), are considered early. By providing IBA data for energy resource planning, we enable greater avoidance of sensitive areas. Last month, we provided updated IBA data to all utility commissions in the contiguous U.S., and led a collaborative effort in 39 states that also supplied data on other priorities (public lands, priorities of State Wildlife Action Plans, *etc.*). Audubon will continue to support efforts to give fuller and earlier consideration of critical habitat areas in infrastructure planning of all types as a core strategy for better public policymaking.

From Audubon Advisory

The Quail is published monthly except January and August by Mount Diablo Audubon Society, P.O. Box 53, Walnut Creek, CA 94597-0053. **The Quail** is printed on 30% post-consumer waste recycled paper. **The deadline for the June issue is May 10.**

Welcome New Members

Michael & Paula Marchiano Martinez
Philip and Mary Neff Walnut Creek

Election of Officers

At each May meeting of the Mount Diablo Audubon Society, in accordance with the by-laws, we elect officers for the following fiscal year. All members are eligible to stand for election, and if you would like to run for any of the positions, please call President Jimm Edgar to be considered at the meeting.

All current officers have announced their willingness to serve for another term. Elected offices and the incumbents are:

President	Jimm Edgar
Vice-President	Mike Williams
Secretary	Diana Granados
Treasurer	Steve Buffi



Desert Sparrow Hawk
Cerchneis sparveria phalæna
Birds of the Pacific States
Ralph Hoffmann, 1927
[Now *Falco sparverius*, American Kestrel]

Q The male of this species may attract up to eight females to nest within a small territory of prime nesting reeds which he defends. The male helps feed nestlings, but usually only in the first nest established in his territory. The other females have to feed their young all by themselves.

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

AABBCDDDEEEHILLKORWY

May

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

June

- 4 Saturday..... Outer Point Reyes
- 18-19 Saturday/Sunday.....Yuba Pass/Sierra Valley

July

- 23 Saturday..... San Mateo Coast

August

- 20 Saturday..... Bodega Bay

③ Tuesday, May 3 Fernandez Ranch

Leader: Cheryl Abel, 335-0176.

Carpool leaves Sun Valley at 8:00 AM. Meet in the parking lot of the Fernandez Ranch at 8:15 AM. From the east, take Hwy. 4 to the Franklin Canyon exit. Turn left and go under the freeway and enter the eastbound Hwy. 4 from the left lane. Be careful as traffic can be heavy at this time of day. Pass the golf course and take the Christie Road exit (unmarked) just before the narrow underpass. Proceed down the narrow road to the Fernandez Ranch parking lot on the right. From the West take Hwy. 4 to the Christie Rd. exit and proceed to the Fernandez Ranch parking lot on the right. Probably warm, bring insect repellent, liquids and lunch. This is a strenuous walk!



Fernandez Ranch

② Thursday, May 12 West Briones Regional Park

Leader: Maury Stern, 284-5980.

Meet at 8 AM in parking lot on the right hand side of the west entrance road, off Bear Creek Road. From SR 24 in Orinda, drive north on Camino Pablo about 2.25 miles, turn right on Bear Creek Road, continue for 4.5 miles to park entrance. Wildflowers, spring birds; Lazuli Buntings are usually abundant. Poison oak along shaded trails. Bring lunch and liquids.

② Saturday, May 14 East Contra Costa County

Leader: Paul Schorr, 757-5107.

Carpool leaves Sun Valley at 6:30 AM. Or meet the leader at 7 AM on Cypress Road at the trailhead parking lot just east of Kragen's Auto Parts in Oakley. Go north on I-680, east on SR 4 through Oakley, left onto Cypress Road. May be hot! Bring lunch and liquids. Target birds include: Blue Grosbeak, Great-tailed Grackle, Burrowing Owl, Black-chinned Hummingbird, Swainson's Hawk, Yellow-billed Magpie and Yellow-breasted Chat.



White Padre Shooting Star.
Dodecatheon clevelandii
Black Diamond Mines RP
Photo by Paul Schorr.

② Thursday, May 19 Veteran's Park/Sycamore Grove/Shadow Cliffs

Leader: Bingham Gibbs, 838-9257.

Carpool leaves Sycamore Valley Road Park and Ride at 7:30 AM. Meet at Sycamore Grove at 8:00 AM. From I-680 south, take I-580 east toward Livermore. Exit at N Livermore Avenue toward Central Livermore. Turn right on 1st Street, then left onto S L Street, which becomes Arroyo Road. Continue 3.8 miles to Veterans Park, just beyond Sycamore Grove. The two are adjacent and this end usually has more birds. After birding one of the largest sycamore groves in the state, we will visit other spots in the Livermore area for more birding and lunch. Several entry fees required.



Miner's Lettuce, *Claytonia perfoliata*
Veteran's Park

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 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. **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.

Trip Reports

Los Banos/Panoche Valley, February 26-27. It was a chilly morning, close to freezing, when trip participants gathered at Sycamore Valley Road Park and Ride before setting off for the weekend's birding in the Central Valley. A total of 11 members took part. The trip to Los Banos and Panoche Valley was the first time it had been repeated in 10 years. With a brief stop at the Westley Rest Area on Interstate 5 (where we had good looks at an obliging Loggerhead Shrike), serious birding started on Santa Fe Grade. We were not disappointed; in a space of little more than 1 hour we had five Bald Eagles, two Redheads and two American Bitterns, as well as a host of other ducks, ibises, waders and raptors. From Santa Fe Grade we traveled over to Merced National Wildlife Refuge. After a leisurely lunch under cloudless skies, we birded the area to find massive gatherings of both Snow Geese and Sandhill Cranes; other prominent finds were White-fronted Geese, White-faced Ibis, and American Pipit. Around 4:00 PM the day's activities drew to a close and we adjourned for dinner at the Wool Growers Restaurant in Los Banos. The next day we set out at 8:30 AM for O'Neil Forebay for a brief stop before heading down the Valley to Little Panoche Road. On our way to Mercey Hot Springs we came across many Lark Sparrows, a pair of Sage Thrashers, and a sole female Mountain Bluebird. Lunch was enjoyed under another cloudless blue sky (warmer than the previous day) at Mercey Hot Springs where we found the resident Long-eared Owls together with two Barn Owls. Once into Panoche Valley itself we found on Panoche Road, just before Silver Creek Ranch, a Ferruginous Hawk, a host of Tricolored Blackbirds and a pair of Cassin's Kingbirds. Remarkably, no Mountain Plovers were sighted on the trip. 4:00 PM saw us heading home for Walnut Creek with a total of 99 species having been seen over the 2 days.

David Hutton

Upper San Leandro Reservoir/Valle Vista, March 17. On a day skillfully picked months ahead of time to be dry between lots of rainy days, 15 birders enjoyed excellent birding starting from the Valle Vista staging area in Moraga. This pleasant four-hour walk covered meadow and riparian areas, pine forest, and the very high lake and thus gave us a nice selection of birds. We saw or heard 62 species ranging from

Bushtits to Canada Geese. The day started well with excellent scope views of a singing California Thrasher and his mate in a bare tree above the parking lot. We saw most of the expected land birds and enjoyed Wood Duck views among the eight duck species seen. Lincoln's Sparrow and Hairy Woodpecker were nice life birds for some. After returning to the parking lot and doing a checklist, the stragglers driving last out of the lot were treated to a circling adult Bald Eagle, the first seen there by the leader in 65 visits.

Don Lewis

Lake Lagunitas, March 23. The Lake Lagunitas trip was cancelled due to inclement weather.

Garin Regional Park, April 2. Garin Park was at its greenest on a cool and cloudy day for 8 birders. We enjoyed many of the expected Spring birds, including Allen's Hummingbird, Pacific-slope Flycatcher (the Hammond's Flycatcher that has been at Garin for some time did not choose to appear), Western Kingbird, Orange-crowned and Wilson's Warblers, and Bullock's Oriole. For the first time in our long history of Mount Diablo trips to Garin Park, we had three Acorn Woodpeckers. Other highlights were close and prolonged views of singing House Wren and Warbling Vireo, and as a special treat, a singing Grasshopper Sparrow right at our feet. The species total was 53.

Fred Safier



Grasshopper Sparrow at Garin Regional Park. Photo by Beth Branthaven.

Orinda Connector Trail, April 6 On a beautiful spring morning, 13 birders had a lovely four-hour walk from the riparian area along San Pablo Creek, into the pine forest, and to the base of Briones dam. A nice selection of birds totaled 61 species including three heard-only.

We saw most of the expected land birds, including several just-arrived migrants, and enjoyed Wood Duck views along the creek along with a Common Merganser. Everyone got at least a glimpse of a Virginia Rail in the spillway reed beds. A second called from a different area. We had two Virginias at the same place last year at the same time and thus are wondering whether they stay to breed in an area where none were reported in the Breeding Bird Atlas, or whether they were migrating through. The five raptors seen included a circling adult Bald Eagle.

Don Lewis

Pine Canyon, April 9. Twenty-three birders enjoyed a fabulous day in Pine Canyon. Although we had a chilly start, the day morphed into perfect early spring birding weather. Due to recent rains the numerous creek crossings were more challenging than usual, but all participants survived. Highlights of the trip included a pair of California Thrashers, a Peregrine Falcon and numerous Bullock's Orioles. A total of 50 species were seen or heard, including a brief glimpse of what some in the group believed was a Pileated Woodpecker being chased by a pair of Acorn Woodpeckers. A lively discussion ensued as to the true identity of the mystery bird. I subsequently checked with "Ultimate Arbiter" Steve Glover. According to Steve, in the 70s and 80s there was a small flurry of sightings on Mt. Diablo including North Gate Road and especially Curry Canyon, which is on the east side of the mountain. Steve said that anything is possible, but it would have been great to get a photo to document the sighting. It's all part of what makes birding an adventure; you never know what you might find when you strap on the binoculars!

Nancy Wenninger

Mount Diablo State Park, April 12. 12 members and guests met at the car pool location for the trip to Mt. Diablo. The morning started cool but by the time we reached Rock City just through the south gate entrance it began to hail and temperature dropped to 38 degrees. We were in and out of our cars for an hour or two and finally dropped back to Rock City to conclude the morning. We saw a surprising 38 species. Large numbers of Western Bluebirds were the most numerous bird. A pair of Hairy Woodpeckers, first heard and then seen, at Rock City were nice. There were lots of Acorn Woodpeckers

Continued on Page 5 »

Observations

By Maury Stern

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

A **Cerulean Warbler**, the bird of the month, arrived in Shell Ridge April 9 near Twin Ponds Trail. There have been 7 records in California since 1996, 3 in the Spring and 4 in the Fall. So far, one person has seen the bird. This is a bird of the South-central states, Midwest and Eastern United States which winters in South America.

The return of the migrant nesting birds is well underway with returns starting in large numbers in the last half of March. The Winter residents will be moving on soon as Spring gets lighter and warmer. Many are singing their breeding songs before leaving.



Sketch: Megan Sandri

Wood Ducks were seen at Hidden Lakes Park in Martinez 3/30. MM, Valle Vista Staging Area in Moraga 4/5, DW, and Orinda Connector Trail near San Pablo Reservoir 4/9, MG.

KF saw an **Eurasian Wigeon** at Point Richmond 3/28.

A **Harlequin Duck** was at Brickyard Cove, Point Richmond 3/27. TB.

JH saw a **Long-tailed Duck** at Meeker Slough in Richmond 3/20.

A **Red-throated Loon** was at Clifton Court Forebay in East County 4/2 and 4/3. AS.

23 **American White Pelicans** were at Lafayette Reservoir 3/24, as well as 5 Osprey. JM.

DL and a MDAS field trip group saw an adult **Bald Eagle** at Valle Vista staging area on 3/17.

Two **Swainson's Hawks** were in a nest near Vasco Road and Highway 4 Bypass on 4/1. TR, and KJ saw 1 hawk near there the next day.

RB saw a **Golden Eagle** and 2 **Peregrine Falcons** at Sibley Regional Park 4/3.

A **Prairie Falcon** was on the Library Building at CSU-East Bay off Ygnacio Blvd. on 3/29 and 4/5. MF.

HH and FS saw a **Wilson's Snipe** in a ditch at Heather Farm 4/7.

A **Barn Owl** and two **Burrowing Owls** were near the entrance sign for Contra Loma RP in Antioch 3/17. P&NS.

PB saw a Great Horned Owl attacked by a **Red-shouldered Hawk** at Hidden Lakes Park on 3/28. There was also a **Great Horned Owl** on a nest in Black Diamond Mines RP 4/3. P&NS.

JR had an Arizona-style hummingbird day at her Alamo home on 3/30, with 8 **Anna's**, 5 **Allen's**, 2 **Rufous**, 1 **Costa's Hummingbird** present.

Rufous Hummingbirds were in migration from mid-March on. EM in Moraga on 3/16, DH in Walnut Creek 3/16-3/26, EL in San Ramon 3/17-4/5, 3/20-21 SP in Moraga, and DW with 5 at Valle Vista in Moraga on 4/4.

Western Kingbirds were along Vasco Road the last week of March, TR, and 4/3 at Black Diamond Mines RP, P&NS.

DW saw the first of the season **Cassin's Vireos** at Mitchell Canyon 4/2, and Valle Vista 4/4.

A **Steller's Jay** was a new yard bird for EL in San Ramon 4/5.

An out-of-place **Yellow-billed Magpie** was at the mouth of Pinole Creek 3/22. LOV.

SL found a flock of ten **Varied Thrushes** near the Mitchell Canyon parking lot 3/17.

Up to 3 **Phainopepla** were at Shell Ridge. JH 4/2. HH 4/3 and JS 4/5.

Sage Sparrows of the Bell's sub-species were at White Canyon in Mt. Diablo SP on 4/2, DW, and 4/9, MP.

P&NS saw 2 **Grasshopper Sparrows** at Black Diamond Mines RP 4/3.

White-throated Sparrows continued to be seen: Meeker Slough 3/15, JH; 3/17 Contra Loma RP, P&NS; Heather Farm 4/4 HH.

JR's **Slate-colored Junco** left her Alamo yard on 3/24.

A first of the season **Black-headed Grosbeak** was seen by DW at Briones RP on 4/3.

Tri-colored Blackbird flocks were at Contra Loma RP 3/17, P&NS, and along Vasco Road the last week of March, TR.

Hooded Orioles arrived 3/17 in SP's Moraga yard, 3/29 in JR's Alamo yard and 4/12 at EM's Moraga feeder.

Bullock's Orioles were at Tilden RP 4/1, DW, and Shell Ridge 4/5, JS.

KB had 6 **Pine Siskins** at her feeder in Lafayette 3/27.

KB Kristen Baker, TB Tony Brake, PB Paul Brenner, RB Richard Broadwell, AC Anthony Cermak, MF Michael Feighner, KF Katherine Francone, MG Mike Griffith, HH Hugh Harvey, JH Joel Herr, JHo Jeff Hoppes, DH David Hutton, KJ Kathy Jarrett, EL Eugenia Larson, DL Don Lewis, SL Steve Lombardi, MM Michael Marchiano, JM Jerry Mix, EM Ellis Myers, MP Michael Park, SP Susan Parr, JR Jean Richmond, TR Ted Robertson, FS Fred Safier, P&NS Paul and Nancy Schorr, JS Judi Sierra, AS Akira So, LOV Lisa Owens Viani, DW Denise Wight.

Receive *The Quail* by E-mail

If you haven't switched to receiving the *Quail* via e-mail, please consider the advantages: Be environmentally aware and cut down on the use of paper, enjoy color photos in each issue, receive your e-mail copy several days earlier, and save Mount Diablo Audubon printing and postage costs. Last month's issue cost just under \$1.50 for each copy mailed by US Postal Service. To switch, e-mail your request to the Editor, Ellis Myers, at ellis.myers@earthlink.net, with a copy to the Membership Chair, Bev Walker, at beewalk@comcast.net.

If you would rather not receive the newsletter in your e-mail, but would like to receive a notice when the issue has been posted on our website at www.diabloaudubon.com/newsletter.php, just let us know and that, too, will allow us to take your name off the mailing list and save!

» *Continued from Page 4*

at many locations. It seemed early for warblers with only one Orange-crowned seen and just 3 Yellow-rumped. Maybe the best sighting was a nest of an Anna's Hummingbird found at the car pool site by one of the early arrivals. We had moved this trip a couple of weeks earlier this year, but with the wet/cold winter we have had it may have been too early for many of the expected species. *Jimm Edgar*

Just for Ducks Update — By Brian Murphy

Heather Farm Park in Walnut Creek is a very popular walking and birding area with a variety of species of birds visiting the pond this time of year. Keep your eyes open as 5 Wood Duck boxes around the pond are now 'charged up' and available for wood duck hens to nest.



An absence of old trees with natural cavities is why there has been a decline in wood duck populations in urban settings. The Wood Duck box is an artificial cavity attached to existing trees to provide nesting for Wood Ducks. Last year 25 chicks hatched out of 3 boxes on Tice and San Ramon Creeks. Increased monitoring this season should provide better results this year.

Wood ducks are very shy birds but the large body of water at Heather Farm Pond will provide people with an opportunity to watch them as they are less nervous on lakes than in the confines of a creek.

If you enjoy projects like this, a membership to Mount Diablo Audubon helps support more projects. For more information, or to join, go to www.diabloaudubon.com/index.php



Many of the original scratchboard drawings commissioned for the *Breeding Bird Atlas of Contra Costa County* are still available for sale. They were done by Dana Gardner, the renowned artist who illustrated the books of Alexander Skutch, among others. This American Robin is priced at \$40, and you may purchase it by calling Diane Malucelli, our Sales Manager, at 925-674-0920. The Yellow-billed Magpie shown on Page 8 is also available. The drawings are signed by the artist and are ready for framing.

All proceeds go to the education and conservation programs of the Society.

a Yellow-headed Blackbird *Xanthocephalus Xanthocephalus*

Yellow-headed Blackbirds are seldom seen in Contra Costa County, but there are sightings from November through March in East County: Iron Horse Sanitary District, Clifton Court Forebay, and Holland Tract. They are to be found throughout the year in the Central Valley and along the lower Colorado River. Look for them, also, in the wetlands of the Sierra Valley.

Each spring, flocks of Yellow-headed Blackbirds arrive—from their winter sojourns as far away as central Mexico—to find nesting territories in western North America. From mid-April to July they breed in freshwater marshes or tule-edged lakes, and are often seen foraging in farmlands close by. They often will evict Red-winged Blackbirds to take over areas with the best insect populations, building a community of nests where one male will take a number of mates. Sometimes, though, a female may sneak off to dally with another male.

At Clear Lake, Yellow-headed Black birds feed their young primarily with aquatic insects, such as damselflies. They may clutch on to a vertical tule shaft to catch insects at the water's surface only inches above the water itself. Then they may become breakfast for a striking big-mouth bass. This has led to anglers using top-water lures that closely resemble the striking black-and-yellow bird. A more dangerous predator is the Marsh Wren, guilty of destroying eggs and young nestlings, and found to be the chief cause of nest failure.

The male Yellow-headed Blackbird is the only North American bird with a black body and a yellow head, neck, and chest. He also sports large white wing patches in flight, a feature not present in the plain, more sparrowlike female.

Within the blackbird family (*Icteridae*), the Yellow-headed Blackbird is more closely



Yellow-headed Blackbird at Clear Lake
Photo courtesy of Brad Barnwell

related to the Western Meadowlark than it is to the Red-winged Blackbird. This may seem odd, since the song of the Meadowlark is so melodious while the song of the Yellow-headed Blackbird has been compared to the sound of a rusty gate hinge. Its repertoire also includes decidedly unmusical hoarse chuckles, cacophonous strangling noises, and honking gurgles.

BOOK REVIEW

Alex & Me

How a Scientist and a Parrot Discovered a Hidden World of Animal Intelligence—and Formed a Deep Bond in the Process
By Irene M. Pepperberg

Those of us familiar with observing wild birds are aware that corvids hold prizes for superior intelligence. However, many of us also know that African Grey Parrots are not only extremely smart but have the additional ability to talk clearly. With this in mind, researcher Irene Pepperberg began a wondrous and revealing scientific adventure with an African Grey, which she dubbed "Alex," the acronym for Avian Language Experiment. Beginning in the 1970s her training resulted in news and media reports about this bird's amazing intelligence, including a now-famous interview of Alex by Alan Alda on Scientific American Frontiers. Alex proved to the world that birds are much smarter than people think they are. The astounding results of Ms. Pepperberg's studies disprove the term "birdbrain" as something derogatory because Alex, a parrot with a brain the size of a shelled walnut, could do the same types of tasks that apes, dolphins and some small children perform!

I was fascinated and at the same time pleasantly entertained by the author's firsthand accounts of how she and her associates trained and worked with this marvelous bird as he learned to count and differentiate between colors and shapes—and to voice his answers as various questions were posed to him! At the same time

this amazing bird also communicated in comical and appropriately hilarious ways that make the reader laugh. Meanwhile the author describes behind-the-scenes of scientific research that we otherwise do not read about. But foremost, this book is for everyone who is interested in the bonds that develop between people and animals. (Harper Collins 232 pages)

By Bev Walker

Ornithology Opportunities

The **2011 Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua** is a birding festival of a different sort. The usual field trips and workshops are available, but also, in the American tradition of Chautauqua, you will find cultural events, such as musical performances and presentations on astronomical research. Friday through Sunday June 17-19 at Lee Vining, California. www.birdchautauqua.org

Western Field Ornithologists Conference: Sierra Vista, Arizona, August 17-21. If you've never been to southeast Arizona during the late summer season (or even if you have), this is an opportunity you won't want to miss. Besides a program of speakers and workshops, field trips to southeast Arizona hotspots will be offered to look for local specialties like Scaled and Montezuma Quail, Zone-tailed Hawks, a dazzling variety of hummingbirds and flycatchers, Elegant Trogon, Red-faced Warbler, and Cassin's, Botteri's, Rufous-winged, and Five-striped Sparrows. To register and see full details go to www.westernfieldornithologists.org.

Not the cry,
but the flight of the wild duck,
leads the flock to fly and follow.
Chinese Proverb

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 Board of Directors

- President: Jimm Edgar, 510-658-2330
- Vice President: Mike Williams, 798-0303
wbuphca@sbcglobal.net
- Treasurer: Steve Buffi, 938-0929
- Board Secretary: Diana Granados
theothrwlwf@aol.com
- Corresponding Secretary: Barbara Vaughn
376-8732
- Sales Manager: Diane Malucelli, 674-0920
- Programs: Alice Holmes, 938-1581
greenheron@sbcglobal.net
- Field Trips: Hugh Harvey, 935-2979
- Membership: Beverley Walker, 952-9925
- Volunteer Coordinator: Moses de los Reyes, 755-3734
- Hospitality: Gerry Argenal, 768-6325
- Education: Cecil Williams, 796-0303
tzudiw@yahoo.com
- Webmaster: Betts Sanderson
bettss@pacbell.net
- Chapter Development: Paul Schorr, 757-5107
pkschorr@comcast.net
- Christmas Count: Jimm Edgar, 510-658-2330
- Breeding Bird Atlas Marketing: Ann McGregor, 968-1677
- Member-at-Large: Brian Murphy, 937-8835
Jean Richmond, 837-2843
- Quail Editor: Ellis Myers, 284-4103
ellis.myers@earthlink.net
215 Calle La Mesa
Moraga, CA 94556-1603

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 _____

Name _____

Address _____

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
Walnut Creek, CA 94597-0053

Return Service Requested



Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 66
Concord, CA



Lake Del Valle

Del Valle Regional Park

George Washington Patterson, a young Indiana farmer, followed the lure of gold and came to California in 1849. In less than two years in the mines he had found enough gold to be broke. However, relying on his aptitude for farming, he worked in the fields near Mission San Jose and began to acquire farmlands of his own. Twenty-five years later he owned 4000 acres in the area that was to become Fremont, and 10,000 acres in the Livermore Valley. He was one of the wealthiest and most respected men in the county. His family home is now Ardenwood, the East Bay Regional Park District's vintage farm in Fremont. Coyote Hills is another EBRPD park consisting of Patterson's original farms.

With the burgeoning of industry in the Fremont area after World War II, the Alameda County Water Board worked with the State of California to build Del Valle Dam and Lake on Patterson's ranch as part of the State Water Project for water supply and flood control.



Yellow-billed Magpie. Drawing by Dana Gardner

Water from the Delta flows to Clifton Court Forebay, to Bethany Reservoir and then to Lake Del Valle. From there water is drawn through pipes, tunnels and canals to a terminal reservoir in San Jose to serve the needs of Silicon Valley. Lake Del Valle also receives water from the Arroyo Del Valle watershed.

Birds that may be seen at Del Valle Regional Park include White-throated Swifts near the bridge as the entry road crosses over the southern tip of the lake. Along the one-mile loop of Oak Hills Nature Trail you may find such woodland birds as Nuttall's Woodpecker and Oak Titmouse. Around the picnic areas, look for Wild Turkeys, Steller's Jays and Yellow-billed Magpie. Overhead there are Turkey Vultures, Osprey and other raptors. On the lake are Double-crested Cormorants, Common Mergansers and possibly a Bald Eagle. Each April or May the Mount Diablo Audubon Mines Road field trip stops in at Del Valle; last year three species of grebe were seen. Spotted Sandpiper has been spotted on several of these springtime field trips.

Del Valle Regional Park is a popular destination for fishermen and for others who are drawn to water sports. It has been designated one of the ten best family camping areas in the nation. It is also worthy of birders at selected times, but on a Sunday afternoon during the summer, the most common species to be found might be the *Gallus gallus domesticus* on the barbecue grill.