



the Quail

Mount Diablo Audubon Society

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

www.diabloaudubon.com/index.php

Volume 57, Number 8

May 2012

The Plight of the Philippine Eagle

Disappearing Species –

Mindanao, Philippines

Ian Austin and David Tomb

David Tomb and Ian Austin were half of a group who made a trip to Mindanao in southern Philippines in January 2010 to look for the magnificent and critically endangered Philippine Eagle. While seeking out the eagle and viewing its rapidly diminishing rainforest habitat was the main motivation for the trip, the Philippines is home to 570 species and 170 endemics, so local frogmouths, hornbills, and pittas were also high on the agenda.

Each pair of eagles needs 25 to 50 square miles of primary rainforest in which to hunt and breed. Last year, the total population was estimated at 200 to 400 birds with perhaps 25 breeding pairs. Reproduction is a challenge. The eagles take 5 years to reach maturity, and if bonding is successful (females are larger and picky!) an adult pair raises a single juvenile for two years. Illegal hardwood logging in the national parks and slash-and-burn agriculture has taken a huge toll. Two rainforest stands where the local guide had seen Philippine Trogons



Ian Austin photo

the previous year had vanished, replaced by charred stumps and plowed fields that would yield about two years of crops before depleting the soil.

After visiting the resource-strapped Philippine Eagle Center (PEC) in Davao, the idea for "Jeepney Projects Worldwide, Art for Conservation" was born. The project seeks to raise awareness of the eagle's plight, raise support for the PEC, and seek longer-term solutions to the habitat destruction, such as providing ecotourism as an alternative to subsistence agricultural.

David Tomb has been a bird nerd and bird artist since childhood in Oakland, is a successful artist with works in public collections, and has created prints for central American and Philippine species. Ian Austin has been birding since childhood in

Canada, led trips for LA Audubon, and has conducted research on Xantus's Murrelets in the Channel Islands. They will present photos and videos of birds seen during the Mindanao trip, and discuss what we can do to support globally threatened species.

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, May 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,* raffle

8:05 PM Speakers: **Ian Austin**
David Tomb

* Please remember to bring a cup.

Thursday, June 7:

Annual Pot-luck Dinner Meeting

DEDICATED TO HABITAT CONSERVATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

President's Corner

By Jimm Edgar

I hope all of you have had a chance to read some of the many books by Kenn Kaufman or have used his *Field Guide to North American Birds*. He is a wonderful writer and teacher and has columns in almost all of the birding magazines. I first came across his work with the book *Kingbird Highway*. It is story of Kenn as a teenager hitchhiking all over the country to see how many birds he could see in a year. It is a great book and one you should read, particularly if you are here in northern California because it talks about the early days of birding here in the 70s when birding was really taking off. I had heard Kenn speak at some ABA conferences, but had not met him personally until about 15 years ago when Maury Stern and I and another friend were birding in southeast Arizona. We had stopped at a marsh outside of Nogales, and when we got out of the car I saw Kenn across the field looking through his binoculars. I told the guys that this was Kenn Kaufman and a pretty famous birder. We walked over to where he was and I asked what he had. He said a Vermilion Flycatcher and we all took a look. Then he put down

his binocs and introduced himself and we in turn did the same. When I introduced myself he paused a second and said, "I know you by reputation." Well whether he did or not it sure made me feel good and my friends were impressed also.

A couple of weeks ago I received a copy of *Bird Watcher's Digest*. Not sure how I got it but as I looked through it, there was an article written by Kenn Kaufman. It was titled "After the Spark: Yesterday's Future." A friend of Kenn's had come to him to get some help on a talk he had to give. The title of the talk was "The Future of Birding." Kenn went to the library nearby to think about the question and ran into a professor of future studies from a local university. They began to talk and the professor went on and on about how DNA would eventually be discerned by a hand-held device that would immediately ascertain what the bird was, and about how camouflage would be made with LED components so you would be invisible and could walk right up to birds. He talked about the future where time travel would make it possible to see a thousand species in a single day and even

Welcome New Members

| | |
|---------------------|--------------|
| Amy Cole | Walnut Creek |
| Miriam Delay-Friant | Danville |
| Sandro Sandri | Lafayette |

go back in time to see extinct birds. All of this was totally mind boggling to Kenn. The professor left and Kenn got up to go home. As he walked down the street he saw a Downy Woodpecker in a tree and recalled how on a recent field trip for beginners he showed them a Downy Woodpecker and they watched it for 10 minutes or so while Kenn talked to them about its behavior and calls, etc. He concluded the article with this.

"That's the real future of bird watching, I said to myself. Forget the impacts of technology. The best things about birding in the future will be the same as the best things today: these encounters, alone or shared with friends, brightening our own lives with the beautiful aliveness of birds."

I thought, what a great insight as to why many of us enjoy watching these wonderful creatures.

Observations

By Maury Stern

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

Bird migration is definitely in operation since mid-March with the return of swallows, Selasphorus hummingbirds, some warblers and flycatchers, vireos and grosbeaks. A number of winter residents are almost ready to depart for the north or the mountains, including many waterfowl, shorebirds, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Townsend's and Yellow-rumped Warblers, some crowned sparrows and sapsuckers.

On 3/16, HH saw a Greater White-fronted Goose with a flock of Canada Geese at Heather Farm.

A **Mute Swan** was at Martinez Shoreline 3/18. It may have come from the expanding flock at the Concord Weapons Station, which has been present for many years. K&WT.

RS saw a **Wood Duck** pair along the stream at the Orinda Connector Trail 4/8.

A number are at the Upper San Leandro Reservoir.

Up to 34 **Ring-necked Ducks** were at Heather Farm pond on 3/16. HH.

A **Chukar** was a treat for CA in Crystall Springs development in Concord 3/20. These are almost always escapees from private aviaries.

Horned and Eared Grebes in breeding plumage were at Briones Reservoir 4/7. JA.

Many **American White Pelicans** continue to hang out at the Lafayette Reservoir as of 4/8. MS.

An **Osprey** was at the Contra Costa side of Albany Bulb 3/26. JH.

DV saw an adult and a juvenile **Bald Eagle** over San Pablo Reservoir 4/6.

LL had early fledgling **Red-tailed Hawks** in her Lafayette neighborhood in early April. They have nested there for 10 years, but usually fledge in June.

There was a **Golden Eagle** at Sibley on 3/20. TH.

A **Merlin** was along the Contra Costa Canal trail near Heather Farm on 3/29. HH.

JA saw a **Peregrine Falcon** at Briones RP on 4/3.

A **Prairie Falcon** was along a ridgeline at Black Diamond Mines RP on 4/6. LLo.

Up to 4 **Black Rails** vocalized steadily from 3/16 to 3/18 at Martinez Shoreline. C&TW, S&CL, GT.

A **Virginia Rail** was also at Martinez Shoreline on 3/16, S&CL, and at Jewel Lake in Tilden RP on 4/3. DV.

DW found a **Sora** at Mountain View Sanitary District 3/13.

A recently killed **Common Poorwill** was on North Gate Road in Mount Diablo SP on 3/13. BH.

Rufous Hummingbirds came to a number of yards. KB in Lafayette on 3/22, P&NS in Antioch 4/3, and DH in Walnut Creek on 4/9.

Red-breasted Sapsuckers were still about. P&NS in Black Diamond Mines on 3/12 and MS at the Upper San Leandro Reservoir on 3/27.

A possible **Pileated Woodpecker** flew over his Danville house on 3/11. SH.

Continued on Page 3 »

Observations » *Continued from Page 2*

In recent times, there have been Pileated Woodpeckers in the Oakland Hills between Canyon and the ridge line, and last year on a trip to Pine Canyon a pair was seen.

First of the year **Hammond's Flycatchers** were seen by JA at Briones RP 4/3 and at Mitchell Canyon by DW on 4/8.

GS saw a **Pacific-slope Flycatcher** on 3/31 on Canyon Trail in El Cerrito. RS saw them on the Orinda Connector Trail 4/8 and they were at the Briones Reservoir 4/9. JA.

A **Western Kingbird** was at the Albany Bulb on 3/26. JH. PS saw a pair in Brentwood 4/5.

DW saw and heard **Warbling Vireos** at Mitchell Canyon 4/8, and JA saw some 4/9 at the Briones Reservoir.

A **Yellow-billed Magpie** was near the Knightsen Elementary School on 3/16, PS and 3/20, SL.

Many swallows returned to the area in mid-March, HH, and have started building their mud nests on the Lafayette Reservoir tower. MS 4/8.

Bushtits were nesting in their Antioch yard on 4/1. N&PS

BP has had a **Red-breasted Nuthatch** in his Lafayette yard since December, MS heard one 4/1 in his Lafayette yard, and SH had one in his Alamo yard in March.

There were many **Pygmy Nuthatches** in the pines along the Orinda Connector Trail 4/8. RS.

Blue-gray Gnatcatchers were at Black Diamond Mines 4/6, LLo, Orinda Connector Trail 4/8, RS, and Mitchell Canyon 4/9, DW.

A pair of **Western Bluebirds** were at her WC suet feeders for a week prior to 4/5, ELe.

DW had singing **California Thrashers** in Mitchell Canyon 4/8.

Cedar Waxwings were widespread. LC in Brentwood 3/31 and P&NS in Antioch 4/1.

LLo saw 3 male **Phainopeplas** at Black Diamond Mines 4/6.

RS reported an **Orange-crowned Warbler** from the Orinda Connector Trail 4/8.

A **Nashville** and a **Black-throated Gray Warbler** were part of a migratory flock seen by DW at Mitchell Canyon 4/8.

JHo saw a **MacGillivray's Warbler** along the Inspiration Point Trail in Tilden RP 4/6.

On 4/1 GS saw **Wilson's Warblers** at Jewel Lake in Tilden. Others were seen at Lafayette Reservoir 4/4 by ELe and RS at the Orinda Connector Trail 4/8.

Singing **Lark Sparrows** were at Black Diamond Mines RP 4/6. LLo.

The red race **Fox Sparrow** left JR's Alamo yard on 3/17.

White-throated Sparrows were plentiful. BP had one in his Lafayette yard from December, E&MM had one off and on in Moraga, 3/25, and JA saw at least 4 on 4/9 at the Briones Reservoir.

P&NS have had a **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** male in their yard since January and it has gone into breeding plumage, after first appearing as a young male.

HA had a **Black-headed Grosbeak** in his Lafayette backyard in late March, M&SS in their Lafayette yard 4/3.



Townsend's Warbler, by Megan Sandri

A male **Hooded Oriole** arrived 3/28 to her Moraga yard. SP. JC had one in Moraga 3/31. JR welcomed a pair on 4/4 in Alamo.

Bullock's Oriole came 4/3 to JR's Alamo yard, EL's San Ramon yard on 4/7, and JC's Moraga yard on 4/9.

Purple Finches were in Lafayette at HA's house in March, and KB's yard 3/22.

JA saw 2 **Pine Siskins** at Briones RP 4/3.

Lesser Goldfinches were taking care of fledglings on 3/15 at their WC house. H&RH.

JA Jeff Acuff, HA Harry Adamson, CA Christine Anderson, KB Kristen Baker, LC Larry Cawthorn, JC Judi Cooper, HH Hugh Harvey, H&RH Hugh and Rosita Harvey, JH Jack Hayden, BH Bob Hislop, JHo Jeff Hoppes, TH Tim Howe, SH Steve Hutchcraft, DH David Hutton, LL Lynn Lakso, EL Eugenia Larson, ELe Elizabeth Leite, S&CL Steve and Carol Lombardi, SL Stephen Long, LLo Laura Look, E&MM Ellis and Mimi Myers, SP Susan Parr, BP Benny Peterssen, JR Jean Richmond, RS Rusty Scalf, PS Paul Schorr, P&NS Paul and Nancy Schorr, MS Maury Stern, M&SS Maury and Susan Stern, W&KT Will and Kate Taylor, GT Gary Thompson, DV Doug Vaughan, DW Denise Wight, DWi Dean Williams, C&TW Chris and Teri Wills.

Q

This bird is not known to drink water. It gets all the water it needs from eating insects and earthworms; that's probably a good thing, because it lives in dry country in the western states and Mexico.

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

CEKNORRW

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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 | Secretary | Diana Granados |
| Vice-President | Paul Schorr | Treasurer | Steve Buffi |

Field Trip Schedule

By Hugh Harvey

May

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

June

- 2 Saturday Outer Point Reyes
- 23-24 Sat./Sun.....Yuba Pass/Sierra Valley

July

- 21 Saturday San Mateo Coast

August

- 18 Saturday Bodega Bay

③ Tuesday, May 1 Black Diamond Mines

Leader: Paul Schorr, 757-5107.

Carpool leaves Sun Valley at 7:30 AM. 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.



② Thursday, May 10 Mount Diablo State Park

Leader: Jimm Edgar, 510-658-2330.

MDSP is a treasure trove for birders. Although every season in the park has its special qualities, May on the mountain is especially beautiful because wildflowers add brilliant color to the vistas. Carpool leaves at 8 AM from La Gonda. Meet at 8:45 AM at the South Gate entrance after birding South Gate Road. Usually hot! Bring lunch and drinks. Entry fee required. Many migrant and nesting species are possible including Sage Sparrows, California Thrashers, woodpeckers, raptors

③ Tuesday, May 15 Mitchell Canyon

Leader: Maury Stern, 284-5980.

Meet at 8 AM in Mitchell Canyon parking lot. There may be a \$6.00 parking fee per vehicle. From I-680 in Walnut Creek, take Ygnacio Valley Road to Clayton Road. Turn right on Clayton Road and right on Mitchell Canyon Road to the end. Gnatcatchers, spring migrants and residents, lots of wildflowers. Usually hot! Bring liquids and lunch.

② Thursday, May 17 West Briones Regional Park

Leader: Maury Stern, 284-5980.

Meet 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 19 East Contra Costa County

Leader: Gary Fregien, 916-708-0636.

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 O'Reilly'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.

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 website at www.diabloaudubon.com.

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. **La Gonda**. From I-680 southbound, exit at El Pintado, turn right and right again; park along open space on left. From I-680 northbound, exit El Cerro, turn left, then right at second light onto La Gonda; carpool point is about one-half mile north.

Future Trips

Saturday/Sunday, June 23–24, Yuba Pass. This is always a productive and well-favored weekend trip to the northern Sierra which requires driving and walking, some of it over rough terrain. Saturday we will bird in the Sierra Valley for basin birds. Sunday we will be birding in the Yuba Pass area for mountain birds. Meet at the parking lot at the top of the pass at 7:00 AM Saturday morning. After June 17 call Wild Birds Unlimited (925-798-0303) for information. Leaders: Rosita and Hugh Harvey, (925) 935-2979.

Make lodging reservations now! Closest motels are in Sierra City, 11 miles down Highway 49 to the west. Herrington's Sierra Pines (530-862-1151 or 800-682-9848) is one of the most popular; or try Yuba River Inn (530-862-1122) with cabins and kitchenettes (cash or check only). Bassett's Station (530-862-1297) at Highway 49 and Gold Lake Road has some accommodations and meals, High Country Inn (530-862-1530 or 800-862-1530) is across Hwy 49 from Bassett's. Also, in Calpine is Sierra Valley Lodge (530-994-3367 or 800-858-0322). More listings are at www.sierracity.com/Stay/LodgingCamp.html Campgrounds are located at Yuba Pass and Chapman Creek downhill to the west. Sites are available first come/first serve for only three days at a time. Longer term reservations can be made at 877-444-6777, but there is an additional \$10 charge for this service.

Saturday/Sunday, October 6–7, Monterey Bay. Terry Colborn is leading a birding trip to the Monterey Bay area which will feature a pelagic trip on Saturday and land birding on Sunday. The pelagic trip is limited to 25 participants, and there are only a few spaces left. The cost is \$95.00 per person. 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. Payment in full is your reservation. In the event the boat trip is cancelled by Monterey Seabirding, due to weather conditions, etc., participants will receive a full refund. Details and accommodations information will be sent to all well in advance of the weekend. For questions, contact Terry at tlcfdc@aol.com, or 916-705-8991.

Trip Reports

Valle Vista/Upper San Leandro Reservoir, March 22. Twenty-three birders spent a pleasant although cool and overcast morning enjoying the open fields, woods, and lakeshore of this easy birdwalk. The parking lot always produces a fair number of birds and then Lynn Lakso spotted a posing California Thrasher on the hillside shortly after starting down the trail. Many of the group agreed that this was the best bird of the day but we went on to find lots more species. The only migrants which had arrived were a single Orange-crowned Warbler, an Allen's and a Rufous Hummingbird, all at the flowering bush group at the end of the bridge. We saw several Wood Ducks and Common Mergansers among the 8 kinds of ducks. A number of Purple Finches near the corral allowed pointing out the differences between them and House Finches to several birders.

Returning to the parking lot at noon, we did a checklist count, coming up with 64 species. Just after the leader commented that this was only one shy of the record for MDAS trips at Valle Vista, an Osprey flew by, thereby tying our record of 65 species for the day.

Don Lewis

Lagunitas, March 28. This trip was canceled because of rain.

Hugh Harvey

Orinda Connector Trail, April 4. Ten birders had a very nice morning walk along San Pablo Creek and to the base of Briones dam, enjoying clear, cool weather, all the spring greenness and blooming trilliums of two colors, along with 53 bird species. First-of-season birds were House Wren, Warbling Vireo, and Wilson's Warbler. Most thought that the best birds were either the pair of Virginia Rails, a Pygmy Nuthatch, or a late-staying Varied Thrush. Among the other nice birds were Brown Creeper, several beautiful Wood Ducks, a Common Yellowthroat, a pair of Wrentits, and a 10 AM Great Horned Owl flyby.

Don Lewis

Garin Regional Park, April 7. Garin Park was at its best with green hills and many leafed-out trees on a Spring day that started chilly and ended warm. Birds in plenty too—we had good looks at many, including Bullock's Oriole, Warbling Vireo, Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Orange-crowned and Wilson's Warblers. There was a second Empidonax too that we were almost certain was a Willow Flycatcher, but it might have been the Hammond's Flycatcher that others have been reporting. For the third year in a row we also found Grasshopper Sparrows singing on the ridge. The numbers: 11 birders, 62 species.

Fred Saifer

International Migratory Bird Day

International Migratory Bird Day celebrates and brings attention to one of the most important and spectacular events in the Americas—bird migration.

International Migratory Bird Day officially takes place on the second Saturday in May in the U.S. and Canada and in October in Mexico, Central and South America, each year. Across the Americas Bird Day events are providing great ways for people to get involved. But this date doesn't work well for all bird events, or for the migratory birds themselves. To the south, migratory birds have left, heading for breeding sites to the north. Farther north, the birds haven't arrived.

In California, IMBD events will take place at 12 sites, from California Department of Fish and Game's Shasta Valley Wildlife Area near the Oregon border, to the Tijuana Estuary National Estuarine Research Reserve in Imperial Beach. Nearby, International Migratory Bird Day

will be observed at Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge, at Muir Woods National Monument, at Stone Lakes NWR in Elk Grove, and at the US Army Corps of Engineers' Eastman Lake near Madera.

The wetlands at Don Edwards are an important stop on the Pacific Flyway, a major bird migration route. The docent-led Bird Migration Walk will follow an easy and level trail. All ages and abilities welcome. Meet at the SF2 trail parking area on the west side of the Dumbarton Bridge at 9:00 AM on May 12. For information and directions, call 510-792-0222 ext. 139.

Join the 12th annual International Migratory Bird Day May 12 at Muir Woods for a free event filled with activities and fun for all ages.

At Stone Lakes, the celebration will be on May 19 with "Walk on the Wild Side." See www.fws.gov/stonelakes/wow.htm for more information.

Louis Agassiz Fuertes

» Continued from Page 8

while Thayer's ideas of camouflage and protective coloring meant that the backgrounds were important to a full understanding of the species. Most settings in Fuertes' paintings are subdued, but one in particular, of a Ruffed Grouse in autumn could be a textbook case for Thayer's hypotheses.

In 1898, Fuertes undertook the first of many collecting trips to places then in need of field study. The first was to Florida, with Abbot Thayer and two other young people. Later trips included Alaska, Texas, the Bahamas, Yucatan, Colombia (twice), and Abyssinia. This last trip brought Fuertes back to Ithaca in June 1927. Later in the summer, he and Mrs. Fuertes drove to visit Dr. and Mrs. Frank Chapman in Tannersville, about 100 miles to the east, to show the pictures Fuertes had drawn from the Abyssinia collections. Chapman, who had been with



Ruffed Grouse, by Louis Agassiz Fuertes
Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology

Louis on over 60,000 miles of expedition trails, called them the finest Louis had ever done. On the return to Ithaca, a train struck the Fuertes' car at a grade crossing. Louis was instantly killed.

Among lasting memorials to the great illustrator is the Fuertes Room at the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, a good collection not only of his drawings and paintings, but also of birds mounted by him. The Louis Agassiz Fuertes Wildlife Sanctuary in New York is named in his honor, as is a local council of the Boy Scouts. Some bird species also carry his name, such as the Rusty-faced Parrot, *Hapalopsittaca amazonina fuertesii*.

A sampling of the art of Louis Agassiz Fuertes from more than 2500 pieces in the collections of Cornell University can be found at the Internet address <http://rnc.library.cornell.edu/Birds/>.

Rock Wren ♦ *Salpinctes obsoletus*

a In his book *Birds of the Pacific States*, published in 1927, Ralph Hoffmann writes "a small gray bird bobs energetically on some solitary rock, or if undisturbed pours out of its long slender bill trills and sweet notes that suggest the perfect technique and joyous vigor of a Mockingbird."

The male Rock Wren is indeed a noteworthy singer and may know as many as 100 song types, some likely learned from other species. During the breeding season, the song is more lyrical and varied than it is during the rest of the year.

Rock Wrens have the curious penchant for building a pathway to their nests. They

find a secluded nook or cavity among rocks, line it with bits of grass, moss, hair or spider silk. Then they usually make a foundation of small stones extending from the nest to the entrance of the nest niche and beyond. The purpose of this behavior is unexplained.

During the last several months, sightings of Rock Wren in Contra Costa County have been reported to e-bird for Black Diamond Mines, Diablo Hills Regional Park, and the Macedo Ranch and North Gate Road areas of Mount Diablo State Park. MDAS member Ethan Winning photographed this architect and landscape contractor along the Buckeye Trail at Shell Ridge earlier this spring.



Silent Auction June 7

Visit our silent auction table at the June 7 potluck! The auction will include artwork and several wonderful books such as the *Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North America Birds* and *The Jepson Manual of Higher Plants of California*. You can bid on two vacation homes, one in Colusa near the Sacramento Wildlife Refuge and one in South Lake Tahoe. Please note: We will only be able to accept cash or checks for payment.

Future Changes?

What can birders expect this year as the AOU Committee on Classification and Nomenclature makes field guides obsolete? Only a few changes of interest may be disclosed this year in the July issue of *The Auk*:

A possible split of Gray Hawk into two species. There is a breeding population in southeast Arizona, and a resident population at the southmost tip of Texas.

Under consideration is a revised taxonomic order for the *Spizella* group of sparrows, which includes Black-chinned, American Tree, Field, Brewer's, Clay-colored, and Chipping Sparrows.

The Maui Parrotbill's name may be changed to the Hawaiian term *Kiwikiu*.

Although not on this year's agenda, there is also a possible future split of Xantus's Murrelet, reflecting recent DNA research.

**NEWS
FROM
WILD BIRDS
UNLIMITED**



Let's Go Birding!

In early April Annie and I visited the Sacramento National Wildlife Refuges near Colusa. This is a wonderful area to view birds, even in the pouring rain. We stayed at the JayHouse, which is a cute little 1940s cottage near downtown. The owners are birders and provided several books and a binder of information on birding in the area.

The first day we visited Colusa Wildlife Refuge, spotting over 25 species, including lots of Northern Shoveler pairs, coots, ibis, Black-crowned Night-Herons, Black-Necked Stilts, Northern Flicker, Northern Pintails, pheasants, and a Great Horned Owl. Most of this was from our car, since it was raining pretty steadily. But the birds didn't mind, so we didn't either.

On the second day we drove out to Gray Lodge Wildlife Area, again in the rain.

We were treated to a Ferruginous Hawk, Western Kingbird, a young Rough-legged Hawk, a flock of American White Pelicans, Cattle and Snowy Egrets, Pied-Billed Grebes, Northern Harrier, Double-crested Cormorants, turkeys, and Turkey Vultures, among others.

Our last day was spent at the Sacramento Refuge. The rain abated and we were able to walk the 2-mile trail through the woods and marsh. We saw many swallows, Yellow-rumped Warblers, Killdeer, sandpipers, and a variety of teals and coots. On the driving tour we saw the last remaining group of Snow Geese. I estimated about 300 circling from the center of the refuge. They seemed to be readying themselves for the long flight home.

As we drove the last mile of the 6-mile car path, we looked up over our heads at a huge bird high in a tree. It appeared to have something in its claws.

With binoculars and telephoto lens, we captured this elegant Golden Eagle with what appeared to be a scrub jay that it was lurching on. It was the highlight of our day.

We highly recommend this area even in March and April. We had all three refuges nearly to ourselves and found over 70 species of birds seen in three trips out.



**Mike and Anne Eliot
Wild Birds Unlimited**

692 Contra Costa Blvd.
Pleasant Hill, CA 94523, 925-798-0303
Visit us at www.wbupleasanthill.com

Ornithology Opportunities

The **Heron Festival**, presented by the Redbud Audubon Society, will be held on Saturday, May 5. This year the Heron Festival is returning to the south end of Clear Lake to Redbud Park in the city of Clearlake. As in the festival's first nine years, the pontoon boat tours will leave from Redbud Park to visit the heron rookery in Anderson Marsh. All other festival activities will also be at Redbud Park. Sign up early for the 90-minute boat tours, for which this festival is well known. Free admission to the festival. 707-263-8030, www.heronfestival.org.

The **37th Annual Conference of Western Field Ornithologists** will take place in Petaluma from September 26 to 30. Details on the meeting are online at www.westernfieldornithologists.org. The program includes: Peter Pyle, author of *Guide to North American Birds* will discuss the discovery and identification of one of the newest additions to the world's bird species, Bryan's Shearwater.

The conference offers a rich combination of science sessions and workshops to improve your field skills: workshops on shorebirds with Al Jaramillo, pelagic birds with Jim Danzenbaker and Scott Terrill, and raptors with Homer Hansen and Allen Fish. Peter Pyle will show how understanding molt can enhance your time in the field, Keith Hansen will teach new ways of looking at birds as you learn to make field sketches, and Richard Vacha will help you identify tracks of birds and other wildlife.

"There can be no greater issue than that of conservation in this country."

Theodore Roosevelt

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.

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Yellow-throated Warbler, by Louis Agassiz Fuertes

The Singular Louis Agassiz Fuertes

By Ellis Myers

Editor's note: This article was originally published in the December 2002 issue of The Quail. A number of technical problems with that printing have been corrected here.

Certainly one of the most remarkable bird illustrators of all time, Louis Agassiz Fuertes was not only that, but he was also a pioneer in the history of ornithology as a science and birding as an avocation.

Recently, I had the good fortune to read a biography of Fuertes written by his daughter, Mary Fuertes Boynton. Titled *Louis Agassiz Fuertes, His Life Briefly Told, and His Correspondence*, this book describes a man unique in his dominant love for his friends.

Before I had reached Chapter 3, Fuertes had become one of my heroes.

Louis Fuertes was born in Ithaca, New York, in 1874 and was named for the great Swiss naturalist, who had died two months before. His father, Estevan Antonio Fuertes, was Professor of Civil Engineering at the young Cornell University. He was an avid

amateur astronomer, and the student observatory at Cornell is named in his honor.

Louis had the privilege of growing up in a college town that had easy access to the countryside where wildlife beckoned. The town library had one of the original elephant folio sets of *Audubon's Birds of America*. Louis was allowed to look at the pictures at length, but only with a librarian on hand to turn the pages for him. The pictures became his inspiration, and by the age of 24, the boy was drawing birds from the wild, and drawing the attention of members of the Cornell faculty as well. By age 18, Louis Fuertes' drawings of birds were on exhibit; by age 21, his drawings of birds were on exhibit at the national museum of the American Ornithologists Union!

The major part of this book is an edited collection of letters to and from Fuertes. He had become a protégé of Elliot Coues, among the leading ornithologists of his time. [Coues' Flycatcher, renamed Greater Pewee in 1953] Fuertes' mentor, however,



Wren-tit, by Louis Agassiz Fuertes

was Abbot Thayer, a principal champion of protective coloration in nature.

Popular as a lecturer, Fuertes was on the faculty of Cornell for only four years. He made a comfortable living from his studio. Yet his book illustration work led him to a quandary, because publishers wanted the birds to be set off from their surroundings,

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