

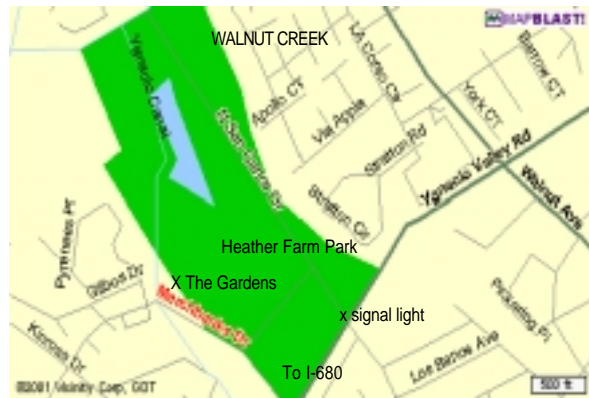
# CALENDAR

MDAS holds its general meetings on the first Thursday of every month. Our next meeting is Thursday, September 4. Meetings for the rest of the 2003-04 year are Oct. 2, Nov. 6, Dec. 4, Jan. 15 (note date change), Feb. 5, March 4, Apr 1, May 6, and June 3. No meetings in July or August.

If you are a new member or new to the area, let us know. We want to welcome you and tell you about our activities. All new members and visitors receive a free door prize ticket.

The MDAS Board meets at 7 p.m. on the second Thursday evening of the month at the conference room of Wild Birds Unlimited, 692 Contra Costa Blvd., PH. All members are welcome to attend.

Questions about membership or mailing addresses? Call Ann McGregor, Membership Chair, at (925) 968-1677. MDAS membership includes 10 issues of the Quail. A one-year family membership in MDAS is \$25/year or \$500 for lifetime membership (payable in two \$250 annual payments). National Audubon Society membership includes the Audubon magazine. Introductory 1-year membership is \$20 or \$30 for 2 years; membership renewal is \$35/year. To join MDAS or NAS, send a check payable to MDAS to Ann McGregor, Membership Chair, 400 Oneida Ct., Danville, 95626. SEND ADDRESS CHANGES for both NAS and MDAS to P.O. Box 53, Walnut Creek, CA 94597-0053. Please end exchange bulletins for MDAS to the editor, 4801 Shavano Peak Ct., Antioch, CA 94531.



Driving directions: Take Ygnacio Valley Rd. to signal light at N. San Carlos Dr. (Heather Farm entrance). Go 1 block and turn left on Heather. At Marchbanks Dr. turn right. The Garden Center is located about 200 ft. on the right.

# The QUAIL

a publication of the  
Mt Diablo Audubon Society  
Walnut Creek, CA  
94597-0053



October 2003

Vol. 50, No. 2

Next Deadline: October 4

## PRESIDENT'S NOTES by Mike Williams

### MDAS By-Laws Revised

Last year MDAS membership approved a number of changes in our By-Laws and Constitution. During the Board's discussion of these changes, we realized that a number of other changes were needed to update and modernize our By-Laws and Constitution. Board members Nancy Wenninger and Shirley Ellis volunteered to take that job and recently presented their recommendations to the Board. This was very difficult and time-consuming task because our chapter's By-Laws were last revised in 1989. We thank Nancy and Shirley for their efforts.

The Board has reviewed the changes that the committee suggested and now places the revised By-Laws before the chapter membership. As required by the By-Laws, a membership quorum must vote on the proposed changes. Copies of the revised By-Laws will be available at the October General Meeting. They will be available on our website <www.diablo audubon.com>. If you cannot attend the meetings or access the website, call Nancy Wenninger at 938-7987, leave your name and address; and she will mail a copy to you. Members will have an opportunity to ask questions about the proposed changes at either the October meeting or the one in November. The vote by the membership will occur at the November General Meeting.

### Position Changes

As I wrote in my June column, Joe Frank is resigning as Treasurer although he will continue as Chapter Vice President. He wants to concentrate on environmental matters and special projects for MDAS. Thanks to Joe for his excellent financial (Continued on p. 4)

## Naturalist Gary Bogue Will Speak at October Meeting

On October 2, we welcome our favorite nature columnist, Gary Bogue, who will speak about "Creatures of the Urban Wilderness." Gary has a unique view of our wild neighbors that live in town and in our own backyards. Gary has endless tales to tell about all of our familiar backyard friends as well as mountains lions, wild turkeys, wild pigs, rattlesnakes, golden eagles, macaws, alligators, and cobras right in our own backyard.

For 33 years, Gary Bogue has written his daily column on pets and wildlife and environmental issues for the Contra Costa Newspapers. He also writes a nationally syndicated weekly column on pets and wildlife for the New York Times Feature Syndicate. He can also be seen on Saturdays on the Daybreak Show on KRON-TV in San Francisco where he discusses the habits of our wild backyard creatures, using live animals from the Lindsay Museum, and answers viewers' questions on pets, wildlife, and environmental issues.

He has been a lifelong advocate for pets and wild animals living in our urban environment. He has been Executive Director of Tony La Russa's Animal Rescue Foundation. As Director of WILD SYSTEMS Consultants, he worked with cities to develop humane solutions to wildlife problems. From 1967 to 1979, he acted as Museum Curator for Lindsay Wildlife Museum where he pioneered the development of the first wildlife rehabilitation facility in the country. As Museum Curator, Gary was responsible for rehabilitating 330 species of wild birds as well as most species of mammals and

reptiles in the Western U.S. He hand-raised and rehabilitated the first and only native mountain lion ever to be successfully returned to the wild. He is considered one of the top experts in the world in the field of native wildlife care and rehabilitation. He has founded numerous wildlife rehabilitation organizations and has published four books.

Gary's fifth book entitled, *The Raccoon Next Door: Creatures of the Urban Wilderness*, will be published in November, 2003. In his new book he examines ways in which our wild neighbors are continually adapting to our urban and suburban environments. Meet Gary Bogue on December 6 at Wild Birds Unlimited where he will be signing copies of his book.

### Birding Information

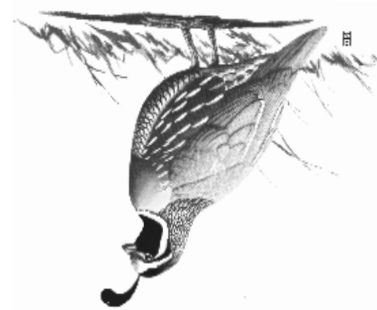
Glenn Zumwalt will share some of his experiences and unbelievably fastastic slides of his recent trip to Montana and Glacier National Park.

### Meeting Schedule

The next MDAS general meeting will be **Thursday, October 2**, in the Camellia Room of The Gardens at Heather Farm, 1540 Marchbanks Dr., Walnut Creek (see map on p. 8).  
6:30 p.m.—Doors open  
7 p.m.—Birding Information  
7:25 p.m.—Business meeting  
7:40 p.m.—Social time, refreshments and door prize drawing  
8:05 p.m.—Program  
**Remember your cup!**

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# Birding Northern Ecuador

by Lynn Lakso

*MDAS member Lynn Lakso took a birding trip to northern Ecuador in November 2002 and wrote this thrilling trip report.*

Our birding trip in northern Ecuador arranged by High Lonesome Ecotours followed a transect from the western slope of the Andes, across the high passes, and down the eastern slope to the Rio Napo, one of the largest tributaries of the Amazon. We stayed at a variety of comfortable lodges with excellent food and wonderful staff. The lodges of the Mindo Valley on the western slope are a birder's dream, and the world-famous Sacha Lodge on the Napo is heaven for any ecotourist.

The week of our trip, El Reventador, "The Exploder," one of Ecuador's many active volcanoes, was blowing ash over much of the Ecuadorian highlands, including Quito, the capital and location of the main international airport. The presence of blowing ash closed the airport, forcing our group to meet in the southern city of Guayaquil a day ahead of schedule and drive to Quito. We followed the Daule River birding our way north to Quito and visiting the Rio Palenque Biostation along the way. We added a number of lowland and riverine birds: Amazilia Hummingbird, Snail Kite, Crimson-breasted Finch, and Croaking Dove to name a few.

Ours was a small, very compatible group, and friendships formed immediately. Jim Black, our leader from High Lonesome Ecotours, proved to be an excellent birder, always cheerful and friendly, and willing to keep working until we all made the sighting. The birds were incredible, and our lists grew rapidly. This tour was highlighted by a staggering group list of 62 species of hummingbirds and 32 raptors. In all, our group saw a total of 519 species of birds, six species of monkeys, plus several other furred and scaled creatures.

Almost all of the Mindo Valley lodges provided hummingbird feeders where we spent many hours mesmerized by hummingbirds, among them the Sword-billed,

Velvet-purple Coronet, Booted Racquet-tail, and Violet-tailed Sylph. We also had fantastic views of Golden-headed Quetzals, Masked Trograns, and many Club-winged Manakins displaying on their lek. There were daily sightings of mixed flocks of up to 20 species of feeding birds, always including several tanager species, flitting through the trees.

In the Tandayapa Valley, higher up the western slope, we stayed at Bella Vista Lodge. There we visited Tony Nunnery's hummingbird feeders where we saw even more hummingbirds, some from inches away. Tony and his wife Barbara, both excellent birders and conservation activists, had located a new Cock-of-the-Rock lek where we enjoyed a dawn chorus of bizarre sounds and calls as we watched these marvelous International Orange birds from a few feet away. Near here, we located the Plate-billed Mountain Toucan (also seen on the cover of Ridgely and Greenfield's *Birds of Ecuador*).

Our day in the Pacific lowlands along the Bancos and Pedro Vincente Maldonado Roads were exceptionally productive with views of Swallow, Moss-backed, and Dusky-throated Tanagers. Other stops presented excellent views of Gray-headed Kite, Chestnut-backed Antbird, and Masked Water-Tyrant.

Papallacta Pass (14,000 feet) was our highest and lowest point. The area above the pass was covered in ash from Reventador, buffeted by high winds reinforced by 36° F temperatures, and lower clouds, discouraging both us and the birds. We retreated. Just down the mountain in a pass with a clear sky, we had a show of two soaring Black-chested Buzard-Eagles followed by the bird-of-the-trip, an incredible 30-minute view of three Andean Condors soaring overhead.

That night was spent in a mountain lodge with gourmet food and swimming pools filled by natural mineral water springs. In the morning, the garden was alive with Shining Sunbeam, Viridian Metaltail, and Tyriann Metaltail hummingbirds.

The next day found us on a eight-hour drive along the Loreto Road from the

pass to Coca on the Rio Napo. The logging trucks on this mountain road reminded me of our northern California highway 299 of 50 years ago! This is an area of pristine cloud forests, countless waterfalls, and scattered farms. Good birds as always, including Fasciated Tiger-heron, Cliff Flycatcher, flocks of Tanagers, and gardens of wild orchids.

In the river town of Coca, we spent the night at Canon de los Monos where we did see Black-mantled Tamarins and first birds of the Amazon lowlands. We boarded a boat for a two-hour boat ride down the great Rio Napo. Upon arrival at Sacha Lodge, we birded the 1.5-mile boardwalk through the Varezza (flood forest) and then were transported by tipsy dug-out canoes to the actual lodge. The *(See Ecaudor continued on p. 5)*

*The Quail*  
is published 10 times a year by the  
Mt Diablo Audubon Society,  
a nonprofit organization  
dedicated to habitat conservation and  
environmental education

P.O. Box 53  
Walnut Creek, CA 94597-0053  
(925) AUD-UBON  
(925) 283-8266

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*Gloria Cannon, Editor,*  
(925) 753-0862,  
P.O. Box 8367, Pittsburg, CA 94565  
[gloriacannon@earthlink.net](mailto:gloriacannon@earthlink.net)

## Have a Birdfeeder? Project FeederWatcher Needs You

The longest running of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology citizen-science projects, Project FeederWatch helps scientists track trends in the movements of winter bird, and bird distribution and abundance. It is a winter-long survey of birds that visit feeders at backyards, nature centers, community areas, and other locales in North America. Participating feeder-watchers periodically count the highest numbers of each species they see at their feeders from November through April.

Project FeederWatch is operated by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in partnership with the National Audubon Society, Bird Studies Canada, and Canadian Nature Federation.

Data collected through Project Feederwatch has taken on new importance due to the spread of West Nile virus. Although crows and jays were among the first species known to be affected by West Nile virus, more than 110 species of birds have been infected, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDCP).

"Because Project FeederWatch has more than 15 years' worth of data, we have a strong baseline to determine population changes in recent years that may be attributable to West Nile virus," said David Bonter, project leader for Project FeederWatch. "But to be able to make an accurate assessment, we need as many people as possible to tell us which bird species they're seeing at their feeders and in what numbers."

The CDCP points out that the virus is spread among birds and to people by mosquitoes and reassures birdwatchers that there is no connection between bird feeding and West Nile virus. Currently, almost 17,000 "citizen scientists" from across the U.S. and Canada are signed up for the project and contribute their observations to researchers at the Cornell Lab.

In recent years, FeederWatchers have been helping track the spread of mycoplasmal conjunctivitis, or "House Finch eye disease." The illness primarily affects the House Finch, manifesting itself as swollen, crusty eyes and frequently leading to blindness and eventually death as the birds starve or are caught by predators. Cornell Lab researchers continue to rely on project participants to help them understand the dynamics of this disease and why it persists.

### Who can participate?

Anyone with an interest in birds! FeederWatch is conducted by people of all skill levels and backgrounds, including children, families, individuals, classrooms, retired persons, youth groups, nature centers, and bird clubs.

### What will I do?

Count any birds that appear in your count site (your bird feeder) because of something (commercial suet or seed, water, or natural foods) that you provide. For each species, report only the highest number of individuals that you saw in view at one time. By following this procedure, you are certain to avoid counting the same bird more than once. After each count, you'll report your bird counts to scientists at the Lab of Ornithology, who use your data to conduct bird population research.

### What will I get?

You'll receive a Research Kit and the Lab's quarterly newsletter, Birdscope. Your kit, which arrives in November (or three weeks after you register) contains instructions, a bird identification poster, a wall calendar, a resource guide to bird feeding, and data forms—everything you need to start counting your birds. You provide the feeder and seed. Go to the Project FeederWatch website at <http://birds.cornell.edu/pfw/index.html> for more information on how you register and obtain your kit of materials.

News from

## *Wild Birds Unlimited*

692 Contra Costa Blvd.  
Pleasant Hill, CA  
798-0303

Visit Our Website at  
<<http://www.wbupleasanthill.com>>

### Seed & Suet Sale October 1–19, 2003

Stock up at up to 20% savings and get ready for fall and winter birdfeeding!

On Saturday, October. 4, we are celebrating our 12th anniversary. Please come and help us celebrate!

- Receive a FREE peanut feeder.
- See a Eurasian Eagle Owl.
- Discounts on every transaction.
- Plants for attracting birds and butterflies to your garden.
- FREE prize drawings.

Sample our Shade Grown Coffee which benefits the birds. This coffee preserves the migratory bird habitats by maintaining the native tree canopy and helps protect endangered species. (Wild Birds Unlimited donates Shade Grown Coffee to the MDAS meetings.)

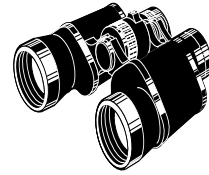
We are in a lull now in backyard birdfeeding. The orioles, grosbeaks, warblers, Allen's Hummingbirds, and may others have migrated south or dispersed. White-crowned, Golden-crowned, and other sparrows will start arriving soon. Their favorite foods are millet seeds and suet. Juncos are not far behind. The numbers of American & Lesser Goldfinches should begin to increase in October. Their favorite food is thistle seeds. Northern Flickers will soon begin to arrive for their fall and winter stay. As they fly, you can certainly understand why they are called "red-shafted."

### Feeding Tips:

As fall gets into full swing, we should see feeder activity increase. Some species will be eating more seeds, suet, or peanuts, and fewer insects—woodpeckers, nuthatches, chickadees and titmice. Try feeding peanut butter, either use a special feeder or spread it on a tree trunk. Mash birdseed into the peanut butter.

# Observations

by Steve Glover



Three **American White Pelicans** were at Pt. Pinole Regional Shoreline near Richmond on 8/26 (AK, EBRPD). It is curious that they appear to occur regularly on this body of saltwater.

A **Clapper Rail** was at Meeker Slough near Pt. Isabel, Richmond, on 8/6 (LT). This continues to be the only publicly accessible spot in the county to see this beleaguered species.

A **Ruddy Turnstone** was reported at Pt. Pinole Regional Shoreline on 8/26 (AK, EBRPD). Ruddys have proven to be rare but regular visitors to the portion of the county around the Albany Mudflats and the Richmond Marina, but this may be only the second record so far along the shoreline to the northeast. Another Ruddy was near Pt. Isabel on 8/6 (LT).

A **Semipalmated Sandpiper** was reported from the Richmond Sewage Ponds on 8/24 (SL, SD). Semipalmateds are only rarely reported in Contra Costa County though they are surely present each fall, only to be overlooked amongst the hordes of Western Sandpipers.

A **Common Murre** in the Richmond Inner Harbor on 8/15 (JL) was outshone by a juvenile **Pigeon Guillemot** inside the Richmond Marina from 8/14-15 (unknown observer; JL). Alcids are rare but regular visitors to the waterfront areas around Richmond, particularly in late summer and fall, with murre always being the mostly frequently represented.

A **Black-chinned Hummingbird** at a Lafayette feeder on 8/10 was the first for that yard (MS) despite many years of feeder-watching. Black-chins are fairly common in the Delta portion of the county but are detected only rarely in the central portion of the county.

A **Yellow-billed Magpie** was reported from the city of Bay Point on 8/10 (anonymous observer). Magpies are quite rare west of the Delta portion of the county though there continues to be a weak trend of post-breeding birds to spots further west in the county. The

observer noted that the habitat at the site seemed ideal for nesting magpies, but one of the mysteries of East Bay bird distribution is why so many areas of apparently suitable magpie habitat remain unoccupied.

Observers: Sharon DeCray, East Bay Regional Parks District, Alan Kaplan, Stephen Long, John Luther, Maury Stern, Larry Turnstall

**Please send observations to Steve Glover, 6526 Conestoga Lane, Dublin 94568, or call (925) 828-7793. Please include your phone number with your observation. Northern CA Bird Box: (415) 681-7422**

## 2003 Entertainment Books Are Here! Still Only \$30!

Entertainment 2003 books are as big as ever and cost only \$30! Support your chapter and save up to 50% on restaurants, travel, entertainment, merchandise, services, and much more for the next 13 months. Pick up your great savings book at Wild Birds Unlimited, 692 Contra Costa Blvd, Pleasant Hill; or at MDAS monthly meetings.

Shop on the web at entertainment.com for additional savings by way of printable coupons, the Frequent Values Program, and an easy way to order out-of-town editions—a marvelous Christmas gift. Be sure to include the MDAS code of 175587 when ordering.

## 2003 CHAPTER FINANCIAL REPORT 7/1/2002–6/30/2003

### REVENUES

National Audubon Society Safety Net	\$ 4,009.00
Grants/Contributions	8,518.21
Fundraising Events	2,303.41
Interest and Investments	1,331.89
Sales	2,070.50
Other (Natural Origins Profit Sharing)	9,610.53
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$ 27,843.54</b>

### EXPENDITURES

Administration	\$ 4,938.77
Newsletter/Postage/Mailing	7,111.01
Education Programs & Events	20,23.96
Website, fundraising & membership	318.70
Grants/Contributions to Others (Specify)	
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$14,392.44</b>

**NET INCOME** \$ 13,451.10

**ASSETS** \$81,742.51

**LIABILITIES & FUNDS BALANCES** \$81,742.51

# October Field Trips

Elizabeth Dickey, Field Trip Chair

Field trips are open to MDAS members and nonmembers alike. You do not have to be a birding expert; only one who enjoys nature. Bring binoculars, field guides, and lunch. We have a limited number of loaner binoculars available by calling the trip leader **at least 7 days in advance**. Weather or the availability of leaders may require changes. Trips go in light rain or drizzle. If in doubt, call leader up to 1/2 hour before departure. Carpool time is the departure time. Carpool expense: 20 cents per mile shared among driver and riders; tolls and entry fees are shared equally by driver and riders.

**Thursday, October 2, Richmond Shoreline.** Carpool leaves Acalanes Ave., off Pleasant Hill Rd., just north of Highway 24 at 8 a.m. Or meet in parking lot at end of Rydin Road at 8:45. From Highway 580 in Contra Costa County, exit Central Avenue west (this is the first 580 exit north of the I-80 split). Drive west one block, then turn right onto Rydin Road. The parking lot is at the end of the road. For more information about Point Isabel, see the East Bay Regional Park District site at <http://www.ebparcs.org/parks/ptisable.htm>. For more information, call Elizabeth Dickey, 254-0486 Category 1

**Wednesday, October 8, Wildcat Gorge/Tilden Regional Park.** Meet at 8 a.m. in parking lot across from the Botanical Gardens. We will be taking a 3-mile walk up Wild Cat Creek. Bring lunch and liquids. Good beginner's trip. Leader: Elizabeth Dickey, 254-048. Category 2

**Saturday, October 11, Point Diablo (Hawk Hill).** Carpool leaves at 8 a.m., from Acalanes Ave., off Pleasant Hill Rd., just north of Hwy 24. Or meet at 9:15 a.m. in parking lot at upper Rodeo lagoon. Alternate route to San Rafael Bridge: take Camino Pablo to El Sobrante, go 1 1/2 miles east on I-80 to Richmond Parkway exit; turn left and go straight through stoplight. Cross the San Rafael Bridge. Take US 101 south to second Sausalito exit (Alexander Ave). At stop sign, go right u the hill. At the intersection, go right downhill. At stop sign, turn left and continue to upper lagoon. Migrating hawks and swifts. At noon, there is a talk and demonstration by the Raptor Watch people. Leader: Fred Safier, 937-2906 Category 1

**Wednesday, October 16, Vic Fazio Yolo Wildlife Area.** Carpool leaves southwest corner of Sun Valley parking lot at 8 a.m., Take I-80 north to Childs

**Difficulty of field trip:**  
**Category 1: Easy, little or no walking, smooth paths.**  
**Category 2: Moderate, 1 mile or more, possibly rough terrain.**  
**Category 3: Difficult, extensive walking on rough terrain.**

Road in Davis. Refuge headquarters are on Childs Road. Meet at 9 a.m. at headquarters. Leader: Elizabeth Dickey, 254-0486 Category 1.

**Thursday, October 23, Arrowhead Marsh.** Carpool leaves at 8 a.m. from Acalanes Ave., off Pleasant Hill Rd. just north of SR 24. Meet in Alameda at 8:45 a.m. from I-880 south, take 23rd St. exit and cross Park St. Bridge. Continue on Park St. to Southshore Dr., and left to Broadway. We will visit several marsh and pond areas and reach Arrowhead near high tide. Rails possible. Leader: Elizabeth Dickey, 254-0486 Category 1

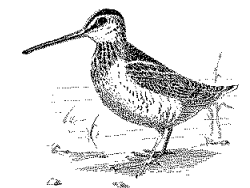
**Saturday, October 25, Abbott's Lagoon.** Carpool leaves at 7:30 a.m. from Acalanes Ave., off Pleasant Hill Rd., just north of Hwy 24. Meet at 9 a.m. at Bear Valley Visitor's Center, Point Reyes. Alternate route to San Rafael Bridge: take Camino Pablo to El Sobrante, go 1-1/2 miles east on I-80 to Richmond Parkway exit; turn left and go straight through stoplight. Cross the San Rafael Bridge. From I-101 north, take San Rafael exit. Go 2 blocks, turn left and continue west to Sir Francis Drake Blvd. Turn right on Sir Francis Drake. At SR 1, turn right 0.25 mile, then left onto Bear Valley Rd. Visitors' Center is off Bear Valley. Waterfowl, shorebirds, and hawks. Carry lunch and liquids. Leader: Pat MacEachern, 934-3041 Category 3

**Wednesday, October 29, Lafayette Reservoir.** Meet at 8 a.m. in the parking lot at the top of the dam. Parking costs \$4 and is prohibited at the bottom of the hill. A good place to learn local birds. Morning trip. Leader: Elizabeth Dickey, 254-0486 Category 2

## Field Trip Reports

**Bodega Bay, August 16**—17 members and guests patiently contended with unusually stubborn, low, thick fog at Bodega Bay. We were treated to very close views of Red-necked Phalaropes; and Osprey and Virginia Rail were the highlights among the 45 species seen.—*Fred Safier*

**Moss Landing, September 13**—Eleven birders enjoyed a beautiful day at Moss Landing and Elkhorn Slough and saw 61 species. The shorebirds were stars of the show, including Whimbrels, Long-billed Curlews, a solitary Black Turnstone and Common Murre, and Dowitchers. At Moonglow Dairy, we saw hundreds of Red-necked Phalaropes.—*Joel Summerhill*



## March Birding Trip to Panama

Golden Gate Audubon Society is offering an eight-day field trip to Panama, departing March 15, 2004, and visiting Canopy Tower and the Panama Canal area, as well as Boquete and the cloud forest home of the Resplendent Quetzal. For more information, call Steve Margolin at 530-342-6476.

# Profile of a Buteo

by Steve Glover

MDAS has just completed 5 years of observations in the initial phase of the Contra Costa Breeding Bird Atlas. Steve is now writing the profiles of the breeding species observed in Contra Costa. This is the first in a series of sample profiles that will ultimately appear in the Atlas. Steve welcomes your comments at <Sglover@aol.com>.

## Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*)

Surely one of the highlights of the Contra Costa Breeding Bird Atlas project was the surprising find that Swainson's Hawks are numerically uncommon but widespread nesters in eastern Contra Costa County. The only historical nesting confirmation of these handsome buteos was a report from May 9, 1915, concerning a Swainson's nest with three eggs in a cottonwood between Brentwood and Oakley (G&W, p. 81).

In the years immediately preceding the start of the Atlas, Swainson's Hawks had clearly increased locally although when this increase had taken place was uncertain. Concentrated birding in East County in the early 1980s turned up this species on only rare occasions. No such efforts were undertaken again until the early 1990s; and at that time, they were readily found, indicating that the increase occurred sometime between the mid-1980s and the early 1990s.

In any event, Swainson's Hawks were confirmed in nine (perhaps as many as ten) blocks and found to be probable in three others, forming a very tidy square on the Atlas map that covers most of the county east of the Diablo Range.

Possibly more surprising than their recent invasion is the situations in which nesting birds were found. Although Swainson's Hawks are often associated with extensive riparian habitats, no such habitats exist in East County. The nests we observed were almost evenly split between isolated cottonwood trees and small clumps of introduced eucalyptus, often immediately adjacent to well-traveled highways. A handful of nests were found in large oaks although oaks are quite scarce in East County. Some nests, notably one in an oak just east of Marsh Creek Reservoir, are on the verge of the Diablo Range, but

open, rolling hills—such as those around Deer Valley and Briones Valley—are rarely if ever utilized by foraging Swainson's Hawks.

The recent invasion has been a welcome event; but, unfortunately, it may be quite short-lived as current wholesale development is consuming the agricultural areas of East County at fantastic rates. On the bright side, birds occupying low-lying areas in the far eastern portion of the county may be spared because little construction has occurred in these flood-prone areas.



## MDAS CAPS ARE ON SALE NOW!

Our new Chapter caps were snatched up at the September General Meeting. MDAS members loved these handsome khaki caps with our distinctive Quail logo embroidered on them. It was fun to see so many members sporting these caps at the meeting, and they will add a unifying note to our field trips. We still have a supply, so get your MDAS cap while they are still available. Only \$15 at the General Meetings or from our website with S&H fee added.

## President's Notes

continued from p. 1

stewardship for the last few years. He has done a very good job and leaves the MDAS treasury in the best shape it has ever been. Patrick King has volunteered to become MDAS Treasurer. Patrick has a finance degree and MBA in addition to taking almost every accounting class possible. Professionally, his various job titles have included accountant, cost accountant, financial analyst (corporate), financial controller, and manager of a corporate financial planning and analysis department. We are very fortunate to have Patrick join our Board of Directors. As pursuant to the MDAS By-Laws, the membership is required to vote to approve Patrick King as treasurer. This vote will take place at the October General Meeting.

I would also like to introduce the new Hospitality "triumvirate": Gerry Argenal, Ellen Beans, and Chelle Palmaffy. They will be organizing the refreshments at our General Meetings, coordinating the meeting room with the Heather Farm Garden Center, and encouraging members to bring the goodies. While you are heading for the cookies and coffee, take a few minutes to meet Gerry, Ellen, and Chele. Please assist them, both by signing up to bring desserts and by cleaning up after the meetings. They have initiated a campaign to reduce the chapter's use of styrofoam cups and ask that members bring their own coffee cups.

Many thanks to Alice Holmes for all her Hospitality work for the last few years. She will continue her great work in her new job as Program Chair.

# Transcendent Tangers Grace Calveras Trip

by Doug Chickering

My brother [Ethan Chickering] and his wife took Lois and me to the Calaveras State Park in California so that we might see the giant sequoias. It was getting to be late in the afternoon, and we had wandered among these red giants for an hour or so, seeing few birds but being suitably impressed with the trees.

We were on the pathway back to the parking lot and just emerging from the heavy forest. My brother was leading the way, and Lois was right behind him when I noticed a two or three birds fly out from the trees above their heads, across an opening at the edge of the path, and into some of the big trees in front of us. Lois and Ethan got on them right away, and I came quickly up behind them. When I arrived, I could see some movement in the lower branches, but the others hadn't gotten a good enough look to ID them.

We only had to wait a few seconds before the birds revealed themselves; and we were treated to what was, for me, the most elegant and spectacular moment of the entire trip. Three Western Tanagers, two males and a female, began to interact among the lower branches of this huge coniferous tree. They were at the bottom tier but still a good 15 feet above the ground, and it was difficult to tell if they were foraging or courting or just having a good time. But whatever their motivation, they persistently came out into the open—sometimes just a head, sometimes a head and shoulders, but often completely revealed.

This was deep forest with afternoon shadows and an aging afternoon sun shining on them, and the contrasts in colors and hues were stunning, almost unimaginable. I had my camera in the case at my side and instantly knew I had a decision to make. Then looking at one of the males sitting in the sunlight, I knew that there was no decision to make. I wasn't going to squander the moment trying to get on a bird in a colorless viewfinder to get videotape of uncertain quality. There are times—and this was surely one of them—when we realize that a picture or video would never quite

capture the vividness of what was before me. Just as I knew that words would never convey the magic, and even memory would fail to reproduce with any lasting authenticity. This was an experience of the moment.

There is much of the treasure of birding that is fleeting—moments that a person realizes can't be captured or preserved and cannot be possessed but must simply be experienced in all their magnificent elusive beauty. The moment and the birds would soon be gone, but now it was here, and I wasn't going to miss it. As I cannot adequately describe the panoply of colors that stood in sharp relief before us, thus also I knew that when it was over I had to be satisfied with the simple fact that I had seen it, that it had occurred, and it was one of the defining moments of beauty that occasionally grace our lives.

We've all had these transcendent, special moments in the field and almost always one of their features seems to be its brief duration. Five seconds on a great bird is enough to satisfy the soul. Yet it was not so here. Not only were we privileged to

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high points of the Sacha Lodge were the two towers: a free-standing one of metal and another of wood built into an enormous Kapok tree. The sightings in the Kapok tree were stunning; the birds seemed to view us a fellow tree dwellers; and at times we had toucans, tanagers, and others with us in the tree. In all, we saw 236 species of birds, six species of monkey, assorted other mammals, butterflies, insects, and reptiles along the Rio Napo.

Our final day was again on top of the world in the high Andes above Quito at Yanacoccha Reserve. Our first bird of the day was a huge Great Sapphirewing hummingbird flying like a swallow with slow and deliberate wingbeats. Following that were views of Golden-breasted Puffleg, Sapphire-vented Puffleg and Sword-billed Hummingbirds, Black-chested and Fawn-breasted Mountain-Tanagers, and a Unicolored (blackish)

see the Tanagers, sparkling in the sun; but they stayed there, displaying and jumping in and out of the shadows for nearly a half hour. Needless to say, the four of us were transported into a state where we could only exclaim out loud at the sheer beauty of what was unfolding before us. So much so that people walking by stopped to vainly look and to inquire. At one point, a young girl looked and saw what we were seeing and, even without binoculars cried out in excitement, "I see them, I see them!!" She kept saying that before the bird she was on flew back into the shade.

Since I saw my first Western Tanager at the Patagonia rest stop in 1990, I had considered it to be the most beautiful bird in North America. I know over the years my memory of the bird has faded and so also some of my conviction. But now I am unhesitant to assert this claim once again. I am sure everyone who has birded has their own opinions as to which bird is the most beautiful, but my conviction has been reinforced by this incredible display among the giants at Calaveras State Park.

Tapaculo at our feet. A wonderful last day for all of us.

This trip was exceptionally interesting and pleasurable because it was a small group with an excellent birding guide, Jim Black. We sampled a wide range of climatic zones and habitats. Guayaquil is just above sea level. The Pacific lowlands around Maldonado Road are at an elevation of 440 feet. Papallacta Pass is at 14,000 feet, then we descended to Sacha Loge on the Rio Napo at 230 feet. Each zone had its own assemblage of hummingbirds, flycatchers, parrots, raptors, antbirds, and tanagers. The lodging ranged from luxury hotels in Quito to comfortable lodges in the Andes and the Amazon basin. The food was all good to excellent with emphasis on fresh fruits and vegetables. The people we met along the way were friendly and eager to show us the wild side of their beautiful country.

I am ready to go again!