



# the Quail

Mount Diablo Audubon Society

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

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

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## River Otters: Back on the Bay Area Map + Robin Aston

Who knew that the San Francisco Bay Area is host to a vibrant and recovering population of river otters? Nobody, apparently, until The River Otter Ecology Project was born out of its founders' questions: "Are we really seeing river otters more frequently, or is this wishful thinking? And if so, where are they, and how are they doing? Most importantly, how can we help to ensure their future in the SF Bay Area?"



River otters are charismatic carnivores and make wonderful ambassadors for river and wetland restoration and conservation efforts. Because they use every part of watersheds, from reservoirs, lakes and creeks all the way to the coastal wetlands and near-shore ocean, their ability to thrive depends upon healthy waterways and thriving fish populations. Very little has been known about their population, range, basic health and seasonal eating habits in the Bay Area. The River Otter Ecology Project has taken on the challenge of discovering and documenting their ecological niche, with the goal of informing land use decisions and preserving habitat for these lively aquatic mammals.

Using citizen science, "Otter Spotter" sightings entered on their website ([www.riverottterecology.org](http://www.riverottterecology.org)), an array of remotely-



Jouko van der Kruijssen photos, [www.sfwildlife.com](http://www.sfwildlife.com)

placed motion-sensitive cameras and scat collection, ROEP is building a Bay Area-wide picture of river otter populations, with focal study on a 200-square-mile area of Marin County, largely along waterways and in State and National parklands. Partnering with the California Academy of Science's Center for Comparative Genomics and The Marine Mammal Center for genetic analyses and disease studies respectively, ROEP is discovering baseline population and health issues for local river otters.

ROEP's lively and exciting presentation will cover what's known, what needs to be discovered, and just how they manage to research elusive, secretive mammals who slide into the water and disappear when approached. They will show slides and videos from their "ottercams," and discuss the project and the role that citizen science plays in this otterly exciting work.

### BIRDING INFORMATION

We will hear about Birds and Wildlife of the Peruvian Amazon. Jill Hedgecock will present some of her incredible photos of birds and other animals she saw on a recent trip to the Amazon.

### Meeting Schedule

The next general meeting of Mount Diablo Audubon Society will be **Thursday, October 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 Robin Aston

*Please remember to bring a cup.*

Thursday, November 7:

Judy Irving, Brown Pelicans

## President's Corner

By Jimm Edgar

Well it is back to our regular schedule of events. Our first meeting of the fall is behind us. It was another great meeting with just over 100 folks in attendance. We always give a little time at our meetings to hear what people have seen in the way of birds since we last met. We call this time "sightings". I finally had to say we need to stop because we were out of time, but how fun to hear all the stories. The program about the possible building of a peripheral canal was very insightful. Our program chairperson, Ariana Rickard, spent a week on the Farallon Islands and showed slides of her time there for our birding information. Also very good. Our field trip chair, Hugh Harvey, gave a short report on field trips and said nearly 500 people attended field trips last year. Impressive.

We are still in need of a volunteer coordinator for the chapter. Bev Walker has been nice enough to fill in, but we are looking. We are involved in about six festival events a year and they need to be filled by all of you, and someone has to organize all of that.

I hope all of you are aware that our chapter sponsors a Yahoo group called "East Bay Birders." I also hope you are signed up for it. Scores of people report their bird sightings every day of birds they have seen in the East Bay. It is fun to see what people

see and a great way to keep in touch with the movement of birds in our area.

I attended the California Audubon board meeting in Santa Monica in late September. It is a real privilege to serve on this board. There are three of us from local state chapters that serve on the board of about 30 people. California Audubon does some really great work around the state for habitats and for our birds. I will give you an update from the meeting in my next column.

It seems like every time we turn around we read some sad things about the plight of birds. The huge fires we have been having have a huge impact on birds, and of course all wildlife, not only in our state but across the country. People sometimes think "Well, can't birds just fly away from the fire?", but it is not that easy. When habitat is lost there is often nowhere to fly to. David Yarnold, CEO and President of National Audubon, in the most recent *Audubon* magazine, said that "Climate change is the greatest threat to birds and biodiversity since humans have been on the planet". There is a lot to be done if we are to help save birds and wildlife.

Thanks for your commitment to Audubon and probably to other efforts that want to help.

Hope to see you at a meeting or field trip soon.

## Welcome New Members

Julia Angalet	Port Costa
Diana Brooks	Walnut Creek
Bonnie Dunham	Antioch

**Q** Because it squeaks like a mouse and in winter is found along the ocean shores, this bird has sometimes been referred to as a Sea Mouse.

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

ACDEHIKLNQRUU

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## Rim Fire and Birds

The Rim fire in Stanislaus National Forest and Yosemite National Park, which was 400 square miles in size on September 7 with about two weeks to go until fully contained, has been described as "catastrophic". Realistically over time, however, the Rim fire is a good thing for the health of the forest ecosystem. It is not devastation; it is ecological restoration.

Intense fires have always been a natural occurrence in Sierra Nevada forests. High-intensity fire, wherein most or all trees are killed, creates "snag forest habitat," one of the most ecologically important, forest habitat types. Forest rejuvenation begins in the first spring after the fire. Native wood-boring beetles rapidly colonize burn areas, detecting the fires from dozens of miles away through infrared receptors that these species have evolved over millennia, in a long relationship with fire. The beetles bore under the bark of standing snags and lay



A bird soars over charred trees of the Rim Fire. CBS photo by Justin Sullivan

their eggs, and the larvae feed and develop there. Woodpecker species, such as Black-backed Woodpecker (currently proposed for listing under the Endangered Species Act), depend upon snag forest habitat and wood-boring beetles for survival.

Black-backed Woodpeckers, which are naturally camouflaged against the charred bark of a fire-killed tree, are a keystone species, and they excavate a new nest cavity

every year. This creates homes for numerous secondary cavity-nesting species, like the Mountain Bluebird, that do not excavate their own nest cavities. The woodpeckers thrive for 7 to 10 years after fire and then must move on to find a new fire, as their beetle larvae prey begins to dwindle. Several years after a fire, flycatchers and other birds increase and continue to increase for another two decades. Thus, snag forest habitat is ephemeral, and native biodiversity in the Sierra Nevada depends upon a constantly replenished supply of new fires.

The native flowering shrubs that germinate after fire attract many species of flying insects, which provide food for flycatchers and bats; and the shrubs, new conifer growth, and downed logs provide excellent habitat for small mammals. This, in turn, attracts raptors, like the California Spotted Owl and Northern Goshawk, which nest and roost mainly in the low/moderate-

*Continued on Page 7 »*



# Observations

By Maury Stern

Submit Contra Costa County sightings to [mbstern2@yahoo.com](mailto:mbstern2@yahoo.com) or (925) 284-5980 or send to [EBB Sightings@yahoo.com](mailto:EBB Sightings@yahoo.com). If you report sightings to eBird, please also send to Maury Stern.

August and September saw the return of shorebirds from the north as well as northern and Sierra songbirds moving through to more southern areas. Some will remain with us until next spring and will soon be joined by geese, ducks, swans, cranes and raptors.

On 8/11, BM and LK saw 7 **Brant** on Brooks Island. MP saw 2 **Brant** at the mouth of Meeker Slough in Richmond.

A **Greater White-fronted Goose** was at Martinez Shoreline 8/26. BK.

BM saw a **Virginia Rail** at Meeker Slough 8/18.

Two **Common Gallinules** were at Mountain View Sanitary District 8/29. JA.

LK and BM saw a **Lesser Yellowlegs** at Iron House Sanitary District 8/11.

On 8/13 AF and ES saw an unusual for the area **Wandering Tattler** near the Point Pinole Fishing Pier. Another was at Richmond Marina 8/22. JC.

A **Red Knot** was at Meeker Slough 8/16. MP.

A single **Red-necked Phalarope** was at Iron House 8/11. LK and BM. Six more were at McNabney Marsh 9/9. JB.

100 **Elegant** and 60 **Caspian Terns** were on Brooks Island on 8/11. LK, BM.

A **Common Murre** was just off the tip of Point Isabel 8/11. LK.

CS saw a **Lesser Nighthawk** over Slatten Ranch Road in Antioch 8/15.

There were 1 and 2 **Acorn Woodpeckers** at Tilden Regional Park and Wildcat Canyon on 9/4 and 9/5. AF, JC. **Acorn Woodpeckers** are rare in Tilden RP.

HN saw an **Olive-sided Flycatcher** and a **Western Wood-Pee-wee** at Vollmer Peak in Tilden 8/30.

A **Willow Flycatcher** was at Ferry Point near Miller-Knox RP on 9/4. LL.

PS had a **Western Wood-Pee-wee** and a **Pacific-slope Flycatcher** visit his Antioch yard 9/1.

ES reported an **Ash-throated Flycatcher** at Jewel Lake in Tilden 9/4.

**Western Kingbirds** were at Round Valley RP 8/26 and at Castle Rock Park 9/1. JCo, LLa.

A **White-breasted Nuthatch**, unusual for Miller-Knox RP, was seen 9/4 by LL.

RS heard a **Pacific Wren** at Jewel Lake 9/6.

JR had two bathing **Western Bluebirds** in her Alamo yard 9/3.

The last reported **Swainson's Thrush** was reported 8/21 from Tilden by naturalist AF.

The first **Hermit Thrush**, very early, was well seen by TF on 9/4 at Jewel Lake area.

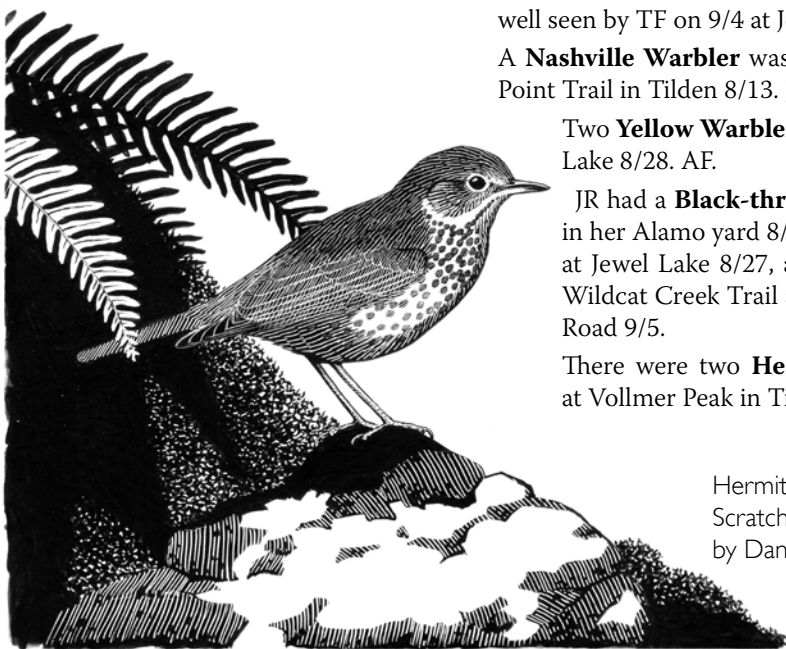
A **Nashville Warbler** was on Inspiration Point Trail in Tilden 8/13. JB.

Two **Yellow Warblers** were at Jewel Lake 8/28. AF.

JR had a **Black-throated Warbler** in her Alamo yard 8/19. AF saw one at Jewel Lake 8/27, and another on Wildcat Creek Trail and Rifle Range Road 9/5.

There were two **Hermit Warblers** at Vollmer Peak in Tilden 8/30. HN.

Hermit Thrush.  
Scratchboard drawing  
by Dana Gardner.



AF saw a **Northern Waterthrush** that stayed one day at Jewel Lake 9/3.

PS had two **Wilson's Warblers** in his Antioch back yard 9/1 and 9/2.

Five **Western Tanagers** were at Jewel Lake 8/27. AF. Four were at Donner Canyon in Mount Diablo State Park 9/2. BP. Three were at Tilden nature area 9/6. RS.

LLa saw a flock of 30 **Lark Sparrows** at Castle Rock Park in Walnut Creek 9/1.

Two **Grasshopper Sparrows** were in Wildcat Canyon 9/5. AF.

On 9/2, PS saw a first fall **Black-headed Grosbeak** in his Antioch yard.

JA Jeff Acuff, JB John Blakelock, JC Jim Chiropoulos, JCo Jeremy Constant, TF Tracy Farrington, AF Anthony Fisher, LK Logan Kahle, BK Bill Kondrat, LLa Lynn Lasko, LL Laura Look, BM Bruce Mast, HN Harold Newman, MP Michael Park, BP Bob Power, JR Jean Richmond, RS Rusty Scalf, ES Ed Schoenberger, PS Paul Schorr, CS Catherine Spaulding.

## Project FeederWatch

Join the thousands of FeederWatchers across North America who count the birds at their feeders from November through early April. The data from these counts help scientists track broadscale movements of winter bird populations and long-term trends in bird distribution and abundance.

Project FeederWatch is a winter-long survey of birds that visit feeders at backyards, nature centers, community areas, and other locales in North America. Anyone with an interest in birds is invited to periodically count the birds they see at their feeders and send their counts to Project FeederWatch. Count birds that appear in your count site because of something that you have provided (food, water or plantings). For each species, you will report only the highest number of individuals that you see in view at one time. By following this procedure, you are certain to avoid counting the same bird more than once.

Project FeederWatch is operated by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Bird Studies Canada. Project FeederWatch is supported by an annual participation fee of \$15 (\$12 for Cornell Lab of Ornithology members). Sign-ups for the 2013-2014 FeederWatch season are open now. This is fun; doesn't take too much of your time; and is really useful. Visit [www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw/](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw/).

## ② Tuesday, October 1

### Hayward Regional Shoreline, Winton Avenue

Leader: Bob Richmond, 510-427-9843.

Carpool leaves Sycamore Valley Road Park and Ride lot in Danville at 8:00 AM. Meet at 8:45 AM at Winton Avenue entrance. From I-880, exit Winton Avenue, drive west 4.5 miles. Park near the trail head just before the parking lot gate. Because traffic is so unpredictable, if no one is there, wait a while. Shorebirds and possible early ducks. Time permitting, we will finish at the San Leandro Marina. Bring drinks and lunch.

## ② Saturday, October 5

### Hawk Hill

Leader: Fred Safier, (925) 937-2906.

Carpool leaves El Nido Ranch Road at 8:00 AM. Meet in parking lot upper Rodeo Lagoon at 9:15 AM. From southbound US 101 take last Sausalito exit, Alexander Avenue, just before the Golden Gate Bridge. From San Francisco, pass the Vista Point and take the Alexander Avenue exit. On west side of freeway, turn left toward the Marin Headlands and go up the hill (Conzelman Road); at the intersection go right and down hill (McCullough Road). Turn left at the stop sign onto Bunker Road and continue to the parking lot on the right just before the bridge. We will bird the lagoons before going up to the hawk watch site. At noon the staff gives a talk on their work and usually demonstrates the actual banding. Carry lunch and liquids. The walk up the hill is only a few hundred yards, but it is steep.



Hawk Hill. Beth Branthaver photo

## ① Wednesday, October 16

### Berkeley–Emeryville Shoreline

Leader: Eugenia Larson, 806-0644.

Carpool leaves at 8:00 AM from El Nido Ranch Road. Meet at 8:30 AM in the parking lot at the north end of the Emeryville Marina. Take SR 24 to I-580 west, turn north onto I-80. Take Powell Street exit, turn left on Powell, go out to Emeryville Marina, park in last lot near pier. May be cold and windy, dress in layers. Loons, grebes, bay ducks and shorebirds.

## October

- 1 Tuesday. . . . . Hayward Shoreline/Winton Avenue
- 5 Saturday . . . . . Hawk Hill
- 16 Wednesday. . . . . Berkeley–Emeryville Shoreline
- 26 Saturday . . . . . Abbott's Lagoon

## November

- 12 Tuesday. . . . . McNabney Marsh/Mountain View Sanitary
- 16 Saturday . . . . . Charleston Slough/South Bay
- 30 Saturday . . . . . Limantour

## ③ Saturday, October 26

### Abbott's Lagoon

Leader: David Hutton (925) 938-4485.

Carpool leaves Sun Valley at 7:00 AM. The leader is driving directly from Sacramento and not coming to the carpool site. Meet at 8:30 AM at Bear Valley Visitor Center, Point Reyes National Seashore. From I-80 in Vallejo, follow SR 37 19.1 miles to Atherton Avenue, exit and turn left, cross US 101 to San Marin Drive and continue for 3 miles. Turn right on Novato Blvd. for 6 miles to stop sign, then turn left on Point Reyes–Petaluma Road for 7 miles to another stop sign. Turn right across the bridge, go 3 miles to SR 1. Turn left into Point Reyes Station. After a stop at the Bovine Bakery for coffee and pastries, continue out of town towards Olema, then turn right onto Bear Valley Road. Visitor Center is off Bear Valley. Be prepared to carry lunch and liquids. Lots of walking in sand.

## Come birding with us!

Field trips are open to members and non-members, beginners and advanced birders, but please do leave your dogs at home. Weather or other contingencies may require changes. For updates, visit the MDAS website at [www.diabloaudubon.com/index.php](http://www.diabloaudubon.com/index.php). Phone area codes are 925 unless specified otherwise. 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 +, possibly rough terrain

Category ③: Difficult, extensive walking on rough terrain.

Our Mount Diablo Audubon Chapter is a conservation organization. As such, we encourage members to consider meeting at the carpool point to pick up or ride with others. It is important that given the cost of gasoline, those who ride with others offer to pay some of this cost. Don't forget about any bridge tolls or park entry fees on some of our longer trips. Carpool locations: **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. **El Nido Ranch Road**—Exit SR 24 at St. Stephens Drive east of Orinda. El Nido Ranch Road is parallel to and north of the freeway. Park just east of the intersection with St. Stephens Drive. **Sun Valley**—Southwest corner of the Sun Valley Mall parking lot at Willow Pass Road and Contra Costa Boulevard in Concord.



## Trip Reports

**Bodega Bay, August 17.** Although the day started fairly auspiciously with a close-by Cooper's Hawk at Sun Valley, it turned out rather slow birding, at least by the usual standards of Bodega Bay. The leader apologized on behalf of the Mount Diablo Audubon Society that the normally guaranteed chapter regular, Black Phoebe, failed to put in an appearance. 17 birders did see 50 other species—but the weather was delightfully sunny, with some wind and clouds, no fog. Highlights included two Ospreys, several Black Oystercatchers, Ruddy and Black Turnstones, and a Wandering Tattler. A Virginia Rail deep in the reeds answered the iPhone call, but stayed hidden. We ended by seeing, far off, a very large group of White Pelicans, accompanied by a mixed group of Caspian and Elegant Terns.

Fred Saifer

**Jewel Lake, September 4.** Fourteen members and guests had a beautiful day at Tilden Regional Park. A Northern Waterthrush had been seen the day before at Jewel Lake, but we failed to find it. The most unusual bird was a very early Hermit Thrush. We had good looks at Townsend's Warbler, Warbling Vireo, and Brown Creeper.

Maury Stern



Warbling Vireo. Beth Branthaver photo

## Check-List Changes

Here's a bit more news about the changes in taxonomy for 2013. The September Quail reported the Sage Sparrow split into Sagebrush Sparrow (*Artemisiospiza nevadensis*) and Bell's Sparrow (*Artemisiospiza belli*); and the name change of Little Shearwater, to Barolo Shearwater (*Puffinus baroli*).

In addition, there have been some shifts in family and genera.

Surfbird, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Broad-billed Sandpiper, Spoon-billed Sandpiper, and Ruff formerly had their own individual genera, but have now been lumped into the genus *Calidris* with the peeps. The Flammulated Owl, previously placed in the genus *Otus* with the scops-owls, now gets its own genus *Psilosops*. The family name of Phainopepla is changed from *Ptilogonatidae* to *Ptilionotidae*.

[Got that? Look again! Ed.]

And as you pass through Phoenix (en route to the Paton's?) you will be pleased to learn that those parrots you encounter are now considered countable; this is the Rosy-faced Lovebird (also known to parrot fanciers as the Peach-faced Lovebird).

Fortunately the AOU has resisted a scary proposal that would have further divided the Canada Goose into as many as **five** species!

## Save Paton's Birder Haven!

The help of birders and friends of birds is needed to purchase an international birding landmark. Paton's Birder Haven—the home of Wally and Marion Paton in Patagonia, Arizona, that has welcomed so many birders through the years—must be sold by the family.

Join American Bird Conservancy, Tucson Audubon, and Victor Emanuel Nature Tours in the effort to purchase the Paton property. \$300,000 is needed by October 15, with about half that amount already pledged. One hundred percent of your tax-deductible donation will be applied to the acquisition and management of this legendary birding mecca.

Paton's Birder Haven had its start in 1974, when Wally and Marion—life-long bird-lovers—began to plant flowers and install water features on their property. They put up hummingbird feeders and had great success, attracting Violet-crowned Hummingbirds along with even rarer species like the Cinnamon Hummingbird and Plain-capped Starthroat.

When the couple realized birders were crowding outside their fence to get a better view, the Patons opened the gate and welcomed them inside. Over time, the Patons provided benches for visiting birders and provided bird guides. They placed a chalkboard in the yard so daily sightings could be noted. On the gate, they installed a tin can called the “sugar fund” for donations to defray costs.

The Patons have now passed on, creating an uncertain future for this birding landmark. With your help, the property will be maintained by Tucson Audubon in perpetuity for birders and birds—a fitting tribute to the Paton's generosity and dedication. And you will be able to visit to see the birds too!

You can make a donation online at <http://www.abcbirds.org/paton/>, or mail your check to: Paton's Birder Haven, c/o American Bird Conservancy, P.O. Box 249, The Plains, VA 20198. The Mount Diablo Audubon Society Board of Directors has authorized a contribution of \$500. Please help if you can; this is a limited time opportunity that is worth while.

Recent decisions by the California Bird Records Committee have added two new species to the California state list. These changes together with the changes published in the 54th supplement of the AOU Check-List, as summarized above, bring the California state list to 655 species, of which 11 are established introductions.

Great Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*) is added by the acceptance of a record of an adult at the northwest corner of the Salton Sea in May 2013; it is placed on the California list after Glaucous Gull, and is also placed on the CBRC review list.

Nutmeg Mannikin (*Lonchura punctulata*) is added by acceptance of a package of information showing that it has met the CBRC's criteria for addition to the California state list as an introduced species. It represents a new family (*Estrildidae*: *Estrildid* finches) for the California list and is placed at the end of the list following House Sparrow. Note that the name “Nutmeg Mannikin” is not the English name used in most of the native range of this species, and it is possible that the name will be changed by the AOU to “Scaly-breasted Munia” in the future. Also, the ABA Checklist Committee is currently voting on the addition of Nutmeg Mannikin to the ABA list, with a decision due very soon.

# George Bird Grinnell

» Continued from Page 10

Grinnell calls attention to the "reckless destruction of animals in the park." He states that in the winter of 1874-75 3,000 elk were killed for their hides in the Valley of the Yellowstone. A year later, Custer invited Grinnell to join his 1876 expedition. Grinnell reluctantly declined, owing to his duties at the Peabody and work on his doctoral thesis on *Geococcyx californius*, Greater Roadrunner. Had he been able to join, he would have been at Little Big Horn two months later.

While still with the Peabody Museum, Grinnell became natural history editor of *Forest and Stream* magazine in 1876. Four years later, he took over the journal as owner and editor-in-chief. He promptly launched sustained campaigns against market hunting and for realistic game laws.

In the Summer of 1885, Grinnell explored country in Montana; and, through his subsequent writings, he was largely responsible for the creation of Glacier National Park in 1910.

In one *Field and Stream* article, Grinnell panned Theodore Roosevelt's book, *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman* (1885). Roosevelt went to discuss the bad review with Grinnell, and they struck up a friendship. They shared the belief that if something was not done to stop the wanton hunting of large mammals, the result would be their extinction. Together, they formed the Boone and Crockett Club, named for hunters, but ad-

dressed to responsible hunting and wildlife conservation.

In the February 11, 1886 issue of *Forest and Stream* Grinnell urged people to join an organization he was just beginning. Grinnell called his new operation the Audubon Society of New York, remembering his boyhood at Audubon Park. Within a year he had 39,000 members. The society had no membership restrictions or dues. All you had to do was promise to prevent the killing of wild, non-game birds, to stop the destruction of all bird eggs and nests, and to not wear bird feathers as ornaments or dress-trimming. This was the forerunner of the National Audubon Society.

In February 1887 Grinnell began a magazine especially for his new "save-the-birds" society—*The Audubon Magazine*. But response to the society and the magazine was so overwhelming that Grinnell and his meager staff could not handle the workload. In December 1888, *The Audubon Magazine* ceased publication and the society ended operations. It wasn't until 1896 that a new Audubon Society formed in Massachusetts.

George Bird Grinnell served on the first advisory board for Federal Migratory Bird Law. He was a founding member of the American Ornithologists' Union,



Lucy Audubon's home featured her famed husband's painting of the Eagle and the Lamb. She willed it to George Bird Grinnell. He, in turn, graciously bequeathed this treasure to the National Audubon Society. The painting is at the Audubon Center at Mill Grove, Pennsylvania

president of the National Parks Association, and trustee of The American Museum of Natural History in New York City.

Grinnell was an author or coauthor of 26 books, including a number of classic ethnographic studies, such as *The Cheyenne Indians, Their History and Ways of Life*, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales* and *Pawnees Hero Stories and Folk Tales*.

George Bird Grinnell died at his home in New York in 1938.

## Harlequin Duck ♦ *Histrionicus Histrionicus*

**a** These beautiful sea ducks are listed as a California species of special concern. The slate blue-gray plumage with distinct black, white, and rufous markings is reminiscent of the gaily colored dress of medieval court jesters or "harlequins." There are different populations, with most of the birds breeding in the northern climes from Oregon and Wyoming to the Yukon and Alaska. These birds winter along the coast as far south as California. Others breed from Greenland to Quebec and Labrador, then winter along the northern Atlantic coast. A small population inhabits a section of the northern Sierra Nevadas. It is likely that these are the ducks that may be seen throughout the year in the

Bay Area and amidst the rocks of the rugged Northern California coast. Ariana Rickard reported a sighting from a kayak trip near the Marin Islands in August.

Harlequin Ducks prefer fast-moving turbulent mountain rivers. They like streams with low acidity, steep banks, in-stream rocks and islands for roosting and nesting. They forage by diving in clear, cold rapids, where they search rock crevices for aquatic insects, including the adults and larvae of caddis flies, mayflies, and stone flies; occasionally they consume small fish.

Wintering Harlequin Ducks forage near large kelp beds, over rocky shorelines, breakwater areas, and coastal lagoons, often in rough water. They usually forage in shallow water, but they can dive to depths up



Harlequin Duck drake, Glacier National Park. to 65 feet. Their diet is composed entirely of animal matter consisting of a variety of intertidal marine invertebrates, including crustaceans, gastropods (especially mussels), and occasionally small fish and roe.

ELLIS MYERS PHOTO



# Good News for Cliff Swallows

After intense criticism, the California Department of Transportation and Federal Highway Administration are reevaluating the impacts of netting on bridge overpasses at a highway-widening project in Petaluma along Highway 101, which trapped, killed and injured scores of cliff swallows and other migratory birds this spring. The agencies must decide whether to do additional environmental review of the project by analyzing impacts to swallows nesting on the bridges. A new review could consider construction and exclusion alternatives that do not harm birds.

Every spring highly social, wide-roaming cliff swallows travel thousands of miles from South America to return to their

nesting sites in the Petaluma area. These swallows nest on bridges and other human infrastructure as well as rocky cliffs and foothills. Exclusionary netting installed in February 2013 was documented by late March to be trapping, maiming and killing swallows returning to nest. Although exclusion of nesting birds is permitted by regulatory agencies and is often standard procedure for such construction projects, the netting is ineffective at this location, was sloppily installed, and was loosened by high winds. The netting did not prevent swallows from attempting to nest on the bridges.

The entrapment and killing of swallows violates the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and National Environmental Policy Act.

When the agencies refused to remove the deadly netting, the Animal Legal Defense Fund filed a lawsuit in May on behalf of the Center for Biological Diversity, Golden Gate Audubon Society, Madrone Audubon Society, Marin Audubon Society and Native Songbird Care and Conservation.

The plaintiffs provided a list of alternatives for continuing the bridge demolition and highway widening without harming protected birds. Better options are scheduling construction outside of nesting season, creating nearby nesting structures or deterring swallows from nesting on the bridges with nonlethal plastic or vinyl coverings over potential nest locations.

*Excerpted from Press Release from Center for Biological Diversity, August 26.*

# Rim Fire and Birds

» Continued from Page 2

intensity fire areas, or in adjacent unburned forest, but actively forage in the snag forest habitat patches created by high-intensity fire — a sort of “bedroom and kitchen” effect. Deer thrive on the new growth, black bears forage happily on the rich source of berries, grubs, and small mammals in snag forest habitat, and even rare carnivores like the Pacific fisher actively hunt for small mammals in this post-fire habitat.

In fact, every scientific study that has been conducted in large, intense fires in the Sierra Nevada has found that the big patches of snag forest habitat support levels of native biodiversity and total wildlife abundance that are, in most cases, higher than old-growth forest.

Wildlife abundance in snag forest increases up to about 25 or 30 years after fire, and then declines as snag forest is replaced by a new stand of forest (increasing again, several decades later, after the new stand becomes old forest). The



Black-backed Woodpecker near its nest in a dead tree on the edge of the Angora fire near South Lake Tahoe, 2012.

AP/Rich Pedroncelli photo.

Black-backed Woodpecker, for example, has been reduced to a mere several hundred pairs in the Sierra Nevada due to fire suppression, post-fire logging, and commercial thinning of forests, creating a significant risk of future extinction unless forest management policies change. This species is a bellwether for the entire group of species associated with snag-forest habitat. As the Black-backed Woodpecker goes, so too do many other species, including some that we probably don't yet know are in trouble. The Rim fire has created valuable snag-forest habitat in the area in which it was needed most in the Sierra Nevada: the western slope of the central portion of the range. In fact, the last moderately significant fires in this area occurred about a decade ago, and there was a substantial risk that a 200-mile gap in Black-backed Woodpecker populations was about to develop, which is not a good sign from a conservation biology standpoint.

The new scientific data is telling us that we need not fear fire in our forests. Fire is doing important and beneficial ecological work, and we need more of it, including



Area equivalent to that of the Rim Fire.

the occasional large, intense fires. Nor do we need to balance home protection with the restoration of fire's role in our forests. The two are not in conflict. We do, however, need to muster the courage to transcend our fears and outdated assumptions about fire. Our forest ecosystems will be better for it.

*This story is adapted from an article by Dr. Chad Hanson, Director of the John Muir Project of Earth Island Institute, Dr. Hanson has a Ph.D. in ecology from the University of California at Davis and focuses his research on forest and fire ecology in the Sierra Nevada. Visit [www.johnmuirproject.org](http://www.johnmuirproject.org) for more information.*

# Nature's Canvas

The Arts and Cultural Foundation of Antioch announces an exhibit called Nature's Canvas at the Lynn House Gallery from October 5 to October 26. Artists living in and around the Delta, with the many hills and valleys, along with East Bay Regional Park properties, have an abundance of opportunities to capture nature and all its wonders in many art forms. The Nature's Canvas Exhibit will feature nature, in all mediums. The exhibit is open to all artists on a first come basis, up to a total of 35 artists. Four members of MDAS have already signed in. The work must focus on nature. There is no entry fee and each artist may enter two pieces of work.

The exhibit begins on Saturday, October 5, with an artist reception from 2-4 PM. The exhibit continues through October 26 on Wednesdays and Saturdays from 1-4 PM. The artist reception and exhibit are free to the public.

Prizes will be awarded for Best of Show \$100, 1st Place \$75, 2nd Place \$50 and 3rd Place \$25, with two Honorable Mention Ribbons. For details, go to <http://art4antioch.org/Nature's%20Canvas-Artist-Information.asp>.

The Lynn House Gallery is at 809 West First Street, Antioch, across from the Amtrak station, and is open 1-4 PM Wednesdays and Saturdays.

## Please Help!

MDAS member volunteers are needed to help at the 22nd anniversary celebration of the Wild Birds Unlimited store on Contra Costa Blvd. in Pleasant Hill on Saturday, October 5. Participants will work between the hours of 10 AM and 4 PM in 2-hour shifts, sharing the joys of bird watching, answering questions about our Audubon Chapter and signing up new members—who will receive a free five-pound bag of birdseed from WBU. If you are interested in helping us and receiving a free lunch compliments of the store, please contact Bev Walker at (925) 952-9925 or [beewalk@comcast.net](mailto:beewalk@comcast.net) before September 26.

*Bev Walker*  
Volunteer Coordinator pro tem

# SPEAKING OF CONSERVATION \_\_\_\_\_ By Nancy Wenninger Lead Ammunition Outlawed in California

On September 9, 2013, the State Senate approved Assembly Bill 711, which is aimed at protecting wildlife, humans and the environment from toxic lead contamination. Championed by Audubon California and a coalition of veterinarians, child welfare advocates, scientists, hunters and animal and wildlife advocates, the bill passed by a vote of 23-15, despite last-minute opposition by the National Rifle Association.

Like mercury and arsenic, lead is a known toxin which has been outlawed and removed from paint, gasoline, pipes, children's toys and many other products to protect human health and the environment. The Centers for Disease Control and leading scientists from around the country agree that there is no safe level of lead exposure for humans.

Lead-based ammunition is one of the greatest sources of lead discharged to our lands and water. Meat from animals shot with lead ammunition poses a health risk to humans and other animals when fragments of lead are ingested. More than 130 wildlife species are at risk of poisoning by spent lead ammunition.

Lead ammunition is a critical threat to endangered species like the California Condor and other protected species such as the Golden Eagle. One in five free-flying condors has ingested potentially lethal levels of lead from these sources. Despite a 2007 law banning lead ammunition from condor territory, the mortality problem persists. The National Academy of Sciences has concluded that unless lead ammunition is completely removed from the environment,

the California Condor will not survive.

Eliminating lead ammunition is already a priority for national agencies, and there are safer alternatives available and already in use by hunters across the country. In 1991 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service began to require the use of non-lead ammunition (such as steel and copper) for hunting ducks and geese. In 2009 the National Park Service announced the goal of eliminating the

use of lead ammunition. Thousands of hunters in California already use non-lead ammunition.

AB 711 will phase in the non-lead requirement over a three-year period after allowing the Fish and Game Commission 18 months to develop an implementation plan which will mitigate impacts to ammunition manufacturers, retailers and hunters.



Golden Eagle • *Aquila chrysaetos*

NATIVE BIRD CONNECTIONS

*"The case against lead ammunition is closed. Lead ammunition poses a serious threat to wildlife and to people."*

*David Yarnold, National Audubon*



Western Scrub-Jay. Sketch by Meg Sandri.



# Catching Birds

## Caching *By Mike Eliot*

Fall is always a bit of a lull time for backyard feeding. Grosbeaks and orioles have left. Year round residents no longer have young to feed and may have dispersed. White- and Golden-crowned Sparrows will begin to return along with Dark-eyed Juncos and Northern Flickers. Chickadees and titmice will begin flocking together looking for food; they are often joined by Bushtits and kinglets. It's a lot to look forward to.

As fall gets into full swing, we should see feeder activity increase. There will be less natural food available. Some species will be eating more seeds, suet, or peanuts, and fewer insects. Many birds are molting and need extra energy to develop new feathers. Hummingbirds migrating from the north will be stopping by for nectar.

Another behavior that begins in early fall is caching, the storing of seeds and nuts for winter. Chickadees, nuthatches, titmice, and even jays are doing it. Chickadees, in a behavior called "scatter-hoarding," hide each seed in a unique location. Common storage sites include under tree bark, dead leaves, knotholes, and even house siding and shingles. They have a unique ability to remember where each seed is stored as well.



Birds will cache both unshelled and shelled seeds and nuts. Have plenty of fresh seed and nuts available, since natural supplies are dwindling at this time, so these birds can stock up. Throw out any seed that is over three months old because caching birds may store it for another three months or more.

On another note, we are having a "White Owl Art Auction" and sale to support Native Bird Connections. All proceeds from this event, happening at Wild Birds Unlimited on November 9, will be donated to them. We are looking for quality pieces including paintings, art photos, sculptures, and other art objects, all with bird themes. Please contact Mike Eliot at the store if you need to have them picked up or if you have questions.

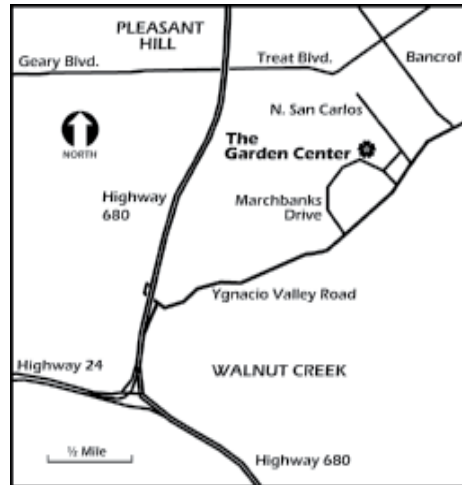
# Mount Diablo Audubon Society

*Mount Diablo Audubon Society, a Chapter of National Audubon, is committed to the sustainable balance of our community's people, birds, other wildlife, and habitat through conservation, education, and advocacy.*

## MDAS Board of Directors \_\_\_\_\_ (Area code 925 unless specified)

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Quail Editor



*Mount Diablo Audubon Society meets at 7:00 PM on the first Thursday of each month, except July and August, in the Camellia Room of The Gardens at Heather Farm, 1540 Marchbanks Drive, Walnut Creek. Everyone is invited.*

**Mount Diablo Audubon Society** thanks our Business Partners for their generous support:

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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. 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:

MOUNT DIABLO AUDUBON SOCIETY and mail with this application to:

Membership Chair, 282 Firestone Court, Walnut Creek, CA 94598

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*Grinnell Glacier, Glacier National Park, circa 1910. NPS photo..*

## **George Bird Grinnell** **Ecologist • Ornithologist • Anthropologist**

The aptly named ornithologist George Bird Grinnell was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1849. His father was a partner with Levi P. Morton in the wholesale dry goods business (Morton later was Vice President under Benjamin Harrison). The family moved in 1857 to Audubon Park, the neighborhood in Manhattan where John James Audubon had built his Minniesland estate on the banks of the Hudson River. Young George became one of the pupils of Lucy Audubon, who accepted students in order to help with expenses after John James's death in 1851. George became a classmate and playmate with Audubon's grandsons Victor, John and William. George received his first lessons about birds from Lucy and those lessons eventually led his interest to an A.B. degree in 1870 and a Ph.D. in Osteology in 1880, both from Yale University.

While still an undergraduate at Yale, Grinnell heard a rumor that Professor O. C. Marsh would lead a summer expedition to

the western territories in search of fossils. While not a student of Marsh, Grinnell talked his way on to the team. From Fort McPherson on the Platte River in Nebraska, the "Party of Twelve" based their exploration into Kansas, Wyoming and Utah. Grinnell kept a meticulous journal, recording the birds and other interesting fauna and flora they encountered. In one entry, writing about his excitement of seeing what he thought to be a new species of Great Blue Heron, he states "on closer examination I found it was only one of the mosquitoes of the country". This trip engendered Grinnell's fascination with the West and with the Indians of the West. He was later to write his many authoritative books on the Cheyennes, Pawnees, Blackfeet and others.

Grinnell became an assistant to Marsh at the Peabody Museum at Yale, and in 1874 served as naturalist on the Black Hills military expedition led by General Custer. In 1875 Col. William Ludlow made a re-



*George Bird Grinnell*

connaissance to Yellowstone Park and was accompanied by George Bird Grinnell, who later played so large a part in Yellowstone matters. On that trip, he catalogued some 40 mammals and 139 bird species. In his report, published by the War Department,

*Continued on Page 6»*