



the Quail

Mount Diablo Audubon Society

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

www.diabloaudubon.com/index/php

Volume 50, Number 1

September 2004

Condors and Corridors Share September Spotlight



Condor No. 64 in the wild over Highway 1 south of Big Sur, June 2004. Photo by Joel Summerhill.

Protecting Wildlife Corridors in the East Bay

Urban sprawl encroaching on open lands threatens to isolate animals in blocks of habitat too small to sustain them. Wildlife depends upon "corridors" or linkages between islands of habitat for survival and genetic diversity.

"Animals need large blocks of habitat to sustain a robust population," according to Ron Rempel, a biologist for the California Department of Fish and Game. "If they lose access to adequate habitat, their populations can be wiped out."

Nancy Wenninger, East Bay Regional Park District's Land Acquisition Manager and member of the Mount Diablo Audubon Society Board of Directors, will discuss wildlife corridors in Contra Costa and Alameda counties and what the East Bay Regional Park District is doing to conserve and enhance these vital connections.

The Magnificent *Gymnogyps californianus*

California Condors, one of the rarest birds on earth, provide the focus for the second half of our September program.

These magnificent birds are also among the largest birds on earth and can live as long as 70 years. Our speaker, Joel Summerhill, will show us awesome slides from his recent search for condors along the Big Sur coastline and bring us up to date on the efforts being made to save these birds from extinction.

California Condors (*Gymnogyps californianus*) once lived as far east as New York and as far north as British Columbia. In the past 100 years, egg collecting, killing and poisoning, and diminishment of suitable habitat ravaged the Condor population. In 1987, in a desperate and controversial effort to save the condor, the last wild condor was captured, and a captive breeding program

was begun between that bird and 26 others raised in zoos. The captive breeding program has been successful; and since 1992, young condors have been released into carefully chosen areas in California, Utah, and Arizona.

Since 1996, the Ventana Wilderness Society has been releasing young condors into the wilds of California's Central Coast/Big Sur wilderness. That's the area where Joel Summerhill focused his search for condors. His success is evident in his photographs of these fascinating birds against a backdrop of beautiful Big Sur scenery.

Joel is a frequent guest speaker at MDAS meetings. He is on the MDAS Board of Directors and is the MDAS representative on the Delta Science Center board. He will provide specific directions for locating the condors in Big Sur and suggest other places where birders have a good chance to observe them.

For him, seeing California Condors up close was one of the high points of birdwatching as well as being a life bird. "They are so big—with wingspans up to 10 feet—that it is hard for them to move around on the ground," he said.

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Meeting Schedule

The next MDAS general meeting will be **Thursday, September 2**, in the Camellia Room of The Gardens at Heather Farm, 1540 Marchbanks Dr., Walnut Creek (see map on page 9).

6:30 PM—Doors open

7:00 PM—Birding Information

7:25 PM—Announcements and business

7:40 PM—Social time, refreshments*, door prize

8:05 PM—Program

* Please remember to bring a cup.

President's Letter Add a Species

By Mike Williams

Thanks to many volunteers!

Your chapter has had an eventful summer! Through the efforts of Patrick King, Ann McGregor, Barbara Vaughn, and others, MDAS has taken on the operation of East Bay Birders website and reporting service. This is a major accomplishment for your chapter. Please read the accompanying article and check our website.

A special thanks to Gloria Cannon, the former editor of the Quail. She has done a magnificent job for seven years. The Quails that she produced so painstakingly were far, far superior to most other Audubon chapters.

Insightful articles, well written and informative, were her trademark. We will miss her contributions.

Welcome to Ellis Myers as our new Quail editor. He is a longtime member and experienced newsletter editor. We look forward to his good work!

Going on a birding field trip is one of the pleasures of participating in MDAS. Field trips give us an opportunity to experience the excitement of seeing a life bird (or almost any bird), of making new friends, and spending time out-of-doors in an avocation that we love.

Our trip leaders are crucial to making our field trips a pleasure. They are there to guide the group from point A to point B, help identify the birds, and just generally give a cohesive focus to the outing. Our dedicated field trip leaders give their time and expertise. Often they scout the trip ahead of time, familiarize themselves with birds in the area, locating the specific spots where they can almost guarantee the presence of a particular species, and direct the group toward identifying the birds found.

Elizabeth Dickey is our MDAS Field Trip Chair. Even when she isn't leading the trip, she is frequently there to lend a keen eye and a lifetime of birding knowledge. She organizes over 45 trips a year for the chapter and has been doing this for years. She has developed a great cadre of trip leaders for all our outings. She is a real asset to our chapter. We salute her and her leaders. Thanks for a job well done!

You may have one more species on your life list that you didn't know about!

With the publishing in *Auk* in July, the AOU released the 45th Supplement to the Check-list of North American Birds. The American Ornithologist's Union's Committee on Classification and Nomenclature split the Canada Goose into two species. Cackling Goose will have the scientific name *Branta hutchinsii* and will lump the smaller subspecies, including Aleutian, Cackling, and Richardson's, while the larger subspecies will retain the name *Branta canadensis*. In taxonomic sequence, the Cackling Goose will fall after Barnacle Goose and before Canada Goose.

Furthermore, the Check-list Committee suggested that further taxonomic revisions may be forthcoming. This would suggest that you should make a careful examination of Canada-type geese—and



Cackling Goose

Courtesy Sean Niland, Colorado Birding Society
any recognizable subspecies—as further splits may lie in the not-too-distant future.

The AOU report points to other possible changes to be mandated next year, such as the lumping of Yellow-billed and Black-billed Magpies. So don't be too elated about your fortuitous gift, as it may be only a temporary increase. And maybe Fox Sparrow will split four ways.

MDAS Adds East Bay Birders Circle

By Ann McGregor

The Bay Area birding community for the past six years has relied on Larry Tunstall's web site, East Bay Birding Circle, and the EBB List Serve to provide us with useful birding links, an extensive calendar of birding events, and a method of communicating where to find various bird species. Larry is leaving the Bay Area and has entrusted MDAS to continue operating both services.

All the information from the EEB Web Site is currently located at

<http://diabloaudubon.com/ebb>

Over the next few weeks MDAS volunteers will be integrating all the content into the MDAS web site. We will keep you posted of all the changes on our homepage under News at

<http://diabloaudubon.com/index.php>.

All of the EBB List Serve members have been successfully transferred to Sightings, the MDAS List Serve, which now has nearly 400 members. If you have never been involved in a birding list serve, you are missing a great communications tool. Members of the list

serve post the where, when, and what birds they have located to the rest of the group. If any member posts an unusual species, it is immediately sent to the group so others might have the opportunity to see the same bird. Even if you only watch the birds in your backyard, it is interesting to follow the postings from your home computer. It's easy to join Sightings. Go to the MDAS homepage, scroll down to Sightings, and "click on here to subscribe." A huge thank you to Patrick King for making the transfer possible. His technical ability along with his many hours of work made for a smooth transition.

We at MDAS are sorry to see Larry Tunstall leaving the area. He will be missed. Larry, MDAS is proud to be carrying on your work and we wish you the best of luck in your new endeavors. Larry spent many hours providing visitors to his web site an extensive calendar of birding events. All of these events are now posted on the MDAS calendar with the help of Mary McCanta. Mary has graciously volunteered to continue keeping the expanded calendar up to date. Thank you, Mary. And thank you to our MDAS volunteer, Ethan Chickering, for keeping the MDAS events on the calendar.

McNabney Marsh Mimics Moonscape

By Gloria Cannon

The mudflats are dry and cracked at McNabney Marsh near Martinez; without water, once numerous waterfowl are scarce. This moonscape is temporary, assures Dick Bogaert, wetlands biologist with the Mountain View Sanitary District (MVSD). "The draining of McNabney Marsh is part of the management plan," he said. The long-range management plan calls for making McNabney Marsh tidal wetlands.

With the channels exposed, an accurate, to-scale aerial photograph has been taken of the marsh. The exposed channels will be surveyed for depth and width, and a dredging plan will be developed.

"The dredging of the channels (next summer) will allow faster draining and flooding of the marsh and better water management of the marsh. The drying will also inhibit spread of the cattails," said Bogaert. This project was made possible by a grant from California Fish and Game, Office of Spill Prevention and Response.

The marsh will be flooded again sometime in October in time to provide a resting area for the migrant waterfowl. The marsh will remain flooded until about July of next year; the end of the nesting season will determine when the marsh is drained again.

The background for this project was established years ago. Shell Marsh (renamed as McNabney Marsh) was routinely drained during the summer months and had a varied plant assemblage of salt grass, fathen, pickleweed, brass buttons and few other minor species. Gradual subsidence of the marsh bottom, increased flow from the MVSD treatment plant, gradual silting in and obstruction of the channels and cessation of pumping by the Contra Costa Mosquito and Vector Control District

caused the marsh to remain flooded year-round.

Year-round flooding promotes the growth of cattails and inhibits the growth of other plants. Eventually, if the situation continued, the marsh would fill in with cattails, a situation that would provide less open water and less forage for waterfowl. The overgrowth of cattails would also provide more pockets where mosquito larva could develop and



make control of the mosquito breeding areas much more difficult.

With the spread of West Nile virus, draining the marsh provides a tool to control the development of mosquito breeding pockets without resort to more labor-intensive biological and pesticide methods. The McNabney Marsh Management Advisory Committee will evaluate the effectiveness of the dredging and the improvement of drainage through the railroad culvert and the tide gates, and assess the whole marsh system, said Bogaert. They will then refine the water management plan and that could include summer draining of the McNabney Marsh plain but not as extensively as this summer.

McNabney Marsh Management Advisory Committee meetings are open for the public and the committee would welcome citizen input.

McNabney Marsh represents a victory for the environment and an example of how nature, with help from dedicated volunteers, can recover from disaster. During the night of April 23, 1988, hundreds of thousands of gallons of crude oil leaked from a damaged tank at the Shell Oil Refinery near Interstate 680. The oil drained

into a nearby creek, flowed under the freeway, and down into what is now called McNabney Marsh. By morning, oil filled the 100-acre marsh to a depth of more than four inches.

For weeks, federal, state and local agency personnel, oil company representatives, cleanup contractors, scientists and volunteers responded to the spill. But once oil is released, damage is inevitable. Not all of the spilled oil can be recovered, as it disperses on water and land. Even oil that is recovered causes damage before its removal. Damages include direct effects on fish, wildlife, and plants, damage to habitat and to recreational areas.

In April 1990, Shell offered about \$20 million to settle all of the claims in a single consolidated state and federal action. The settlement included almost \$11 million to restore damage to natural resources, under the direction of a Trustee Committee established by the court.

Because the marsh was the most heavily oiled area during the spill, the Trustees gave special consideration to restoring and enhancing this marsh. In 1992, the Trustees funded purchase of the marsh and uplands for \$3 million. East Bay Regional Park District completed the acquisition and is managing it in partnership with the Mountain View Sanitary District and other trustee agencies in accordance with the fish and wildlife values of the area.

The goal for restoration of the marsh is to create a brackish marsh by returning salt waters from the Bay to the marsh. Such flows have been absent from the marsh for many years, because of water control structures built along the shore. Tidal action would allow the marsh to retain its estuarine vegetation and species.

One volunteer who worked tirelessly to restore the marsh and to protect it in the future was Al McNabney, the longtime chair of the Mount Diablo Audubon conservation committee. Al was instrumental in obtaining funding for interpretive elements to be built there. As a memorial to him and to commemorate his efforts, the marsh was renamed McNabney Marsh.

2004 Yuba Pass Trip

By Hugh Harvey

What is the attraction of the Yuba Pass field trip? Is it the location, 6700 feet of elevation in the Sierra, 35 miles from Truckee? Is it the scenery of the ever-green forests and the Sierra Valley? The flowers? The Sierra Buttes? The chance to sit at a mountain campfire? Is it sharing a glass of wine from a balcony at Harrington's while overlooking the Yuba River? Is it the camaraderie and expertise shared by the members of the group?

All of these add to the total experience of the trip, but undoubtedly, the best answer is still the simplest. It is the birds. While it is not a record, a total of 102 bird species were seen or heard on the two days of the trip. Some birds went missing which we have found in years past, but other events added to our appreciation of the natural world.

Meeting at the early hour of 7 AM at the parking lot right at the pass, we watched begging Black-backed Woodpecker chicks sticking their heads out of the hole while they waited for Mom and Dad to return. While we did this, the Cassin's Finches, Pine Siskins and Evening Grosbeaks were at the road's edge. What a way to start the day. We then proceeded north on a small walk which would take up the morning. Olive-sided Flycatchers, calling Mountain Quails, Wilson's Warblers, and five more woodpecker species kept us busy.

Two, maybe three, highlights of this walk stand out: the Williamson's Sapsucker nest and nearby sap wells, and the "Attack Robin." This year there were actually two easy-to-see Williamson's Sapsucker nests. One was near the parking lot; the second was north of the highway. It is this second nest which puts our view into perspective in terms of judging tree size. These birds will often put their nest hole high in a fir, possibly 80–100 feet off the ground. This second nest might have been only 25–30 feet up, but the tree was of such girth, and other holes were deceiving, so that seeing the true nest hole was most easily done when the parents came to feed their young.

The best attribute of this pair of birds was their sap well. Many of us are familiar with the rows of round holes in fruit and pine trees made by our winter

visitors, the Red-breasted Sapsuckers. Nothing could have prepared us for what their cousins had done. In a fir tree right by the logging road on which we walked was a line of holes extending from ground level straight up the tree for about ten feet. These holes were drilled through the reddish bark exposing the inner layer where sap runs freely. Each hole was about 1¼ inches wide and maybe ¼ inch tall. As a hole dried and produced less sap, either the male or the female would make a new hole just above it. This was truly an amazing sight. Out of curiosity, several participants took and tasted small samples of the sap. The sap was said to have the flavor of Pine-Sol, to take a long time to rinse from one's mouth; and its food value was seriously questioned.

Undoubtedly, the best answer is still the simplest. It is the birds.

While this testing was being performed, we were able to watch a female Dusky Flycatcher sitting on her nest well hidden in some bushes. This in itself was eventful, but then we found her mate in the area. He was busy flycatching and then coming to the nest to feed her so she did not have to leave. Nature is so marvelous! Finally we paid a visit to a Robin nest site, where we sent three volunteers ahead to see how the male Robin would defend the area. While not as physically threatening as he had been earlier, he made a big enough ruckus to attract some other birds including Townsend's and Yellow-rumped Warblers, an Anna's Hummingbird and a Red-breasted Nuthatch.

Upon returning to the highway and the prospect of lunch, we learned that the Black-backed Woodpecker young had fledged. A noise was heard in some trees about 50 yards west of the nest, and we finally saw a fledgling female calling and calling. Eventually she flew across the meadow in the direction of the campground. Some discussion ensued as to just how these birds strengthen their muscles in preparation for flight, but no answers were forthcoming. We only know that their strategy of flying



A small "earless" owl with yellow eyes and black beak, this rich-red-dish brown bird shows a Y-shaped white marking between and over the eyes. The back shows large white spots, while the underparts are white with cinnamon streaks. It nests in woodpecker cavities and is distributed throughout the United States. *(Answer on Page 8)*

right out of the nest hole must work because there were no signs of fresh road kill on the highway.

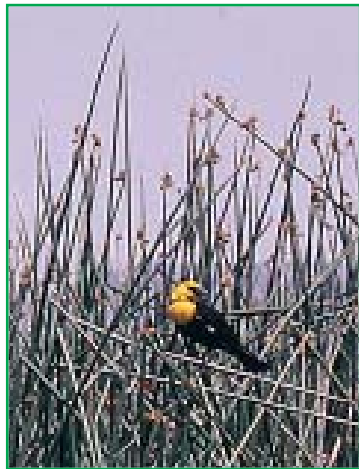
Reconvening after lunch we caravanned to the San Francisco State Sierra Nevada Field Station. A pair of Dippers was known to have recently fledged two young from their nest under the bridge. Soon one bird was seen up stream, then another. Suddenly a shout was raised of a third bird. A final cry indicated a fourth bird, all of them seen in one binocular view. The white gapes of the fledglings were obvious as was their hesitancy to enter the fast, cool waters of the Yuba River's headwaters.

Wishing them well, we continued downhill to Doherty's Store at Bassets. Ice cream and hummingbirds were the targets, but we failed to find any hummers. Driving up Gold Lake Road, we stopped at one unnamed lake and at Goose Lake. The only bird of note was a female Common Merganser.

Deciding to try one more time for hummingbirds, we drove to Frazier Falls. The one-half mile wheelchair-accessible trail passes a number of marvelous wildflower displays. And that is what we saw, fantastic flowers and the beauty of the falls. When no one volunteered to shoot the falls in an inner tube, we dispersed until the evening.

After showers, campfires, wine and dinner, a very large group met to drive about one mile above the campground to a spot known to have Common Poorwills and Nighthawks. Though it had been seen or heard five nights in a row, the Common Nighthawk failed to show. Just before 9 PM we played a tape to attract the Poorwill. It did not fail us. It called, flew around us, and eventually

perched east of the road where many saw it. The vista of the Sierra Valley as the day faded to night and the thinnest crescent of the new moon in the western sky more than made up for the pesky mosquitoes which swarmed around us while we awaited the birds' appearance. Sunday morning on Mountain Quail Road in the southwest corner of Sierra Valley started with Green-tailed Towhees and a magazine cover view of a singing Brewer's Sparrow. Then we heard a Gray Flycatcher and off we went to find it. We did not. Continuing around a short loop on our return to the cars, we heard a second Gray Flycatcher sing. More bush-bashing by some of the group was futile as we did not find that bird, either.



After driving north we headed across the valley and out into the marsh. We were surrounded by a cacophony of sound from Yellow-headed Blackbirds and Marsh Wrens. White-faced Ibis flew over us, and Sandhill Cranes were seen at a distance, as were several raptors and American White Pelicans.

The mountains circling the valley still held snow patches. Shirley Ellis remarked that it was like a circus. She referred to the birds, not the birders. Every minute, it seemed, brought another sighting, swallows, willets and ducks among them. A second stop in the marsh even produced two Western Aquatic Garter Snakes.

After this excitement we drove into a sage brush environment which is part of a property owned by the Feather River Land Trust. Our Chapter supports this organization, and this was our second annual visit. The Porta-Potti was possibly higher on the priority list than the birds. The sun was hot, but we still found Sage Thrashers, Vesper's Sparrows and Brewer's Sparrows.

On the way to Loyalton and lunch we crossed along the marsh edge again as we drove down Harriet Lane in Plumas County. We saw Black-necked Stilts with chicks and a third Western Aquatic Gar-

ter Snake. This snake—a skinny garter snake remember—was slowly dragging an eviscerated road-kill swallow out of the water below a small bridge. None of us was quite sure what the snake would actually do with this super-sized windfall of a meal. We continued south on Heriot Lane in Sierra County and headed for lunch.

The city park in Loyalton has a gazebo where we eat, a museum with indoor plumbing, and an active Swainson's Hawk nest about a mile to the north. We did our preliminary checklist after eating, and then drove to see the hawk chicks on the nest with Mom.

Then at our old lunch site at the Rotary Picnic Grounds on Smithneck Road, we added a number

of birds including Black-headed Grosbeak, Western Bluebird, Bullock's Oriole and Yellow Warbler. The Lewis' Woodpecker nest was our seventh Piciformes (Woodpeckers) sighting of the weekend.

The group had dwindled to five as we drove the last leg over Antelope Valley Road through the burned area of the 1994 fire. We saw more of the Lewis' Woodpeckers. A long search at the top after leaving the fire area was rewarded by the finding of a Mountain Bluebird family, both adults and their three fledgling young.

It is a long, tiring weekend, and a four-hour drive is required to return to the Bay Area. Only a few are afforded the luxury of sleeping Sunday night in the peace of the Sierra forest. A good meal, followed by hot chocolate is enjoyed while sitting around the campfire. As the light fades to dark, stories are told of the present as well as the past. A scope is placed to view not only the Earth's moon, but also those of Jupiter. The air begins to chill the body. Finally, the sizzle and pop of water extinguishing the fire brings a close to the evening. Darkness and quiet surround us, and we make the last preparations for what will truly be a good night. *June 19–20, 2004*

Condors

Continued from Page 1

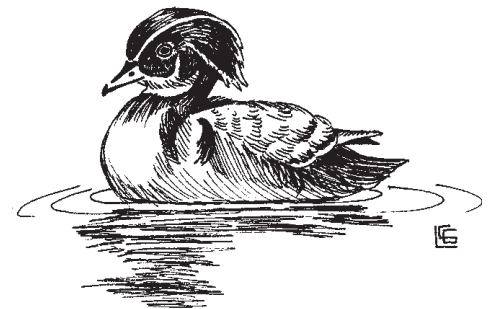
"But once they are airborne, those wings give them amazing grace and precision."

Joel was also very excited about the way these young condors want to relate to people: "The volunteers have been very careful about limiting human interaction while they are raising the condors. But the released condors seem to seek out places where they can make contact with humans. That makes for an interesting dynamic when unsuspecting tourists come around a curve in the highway and spot these giant birds teetering on guard rails or circling just overhead."

For more information about these endangered birds, visit the U.S. Fish and Wildlife website at

<http://endangered.fws.gov/i/B0G.html> and the Ventana Wilderness Society website at

<http://www.ventanaws.org/condors.htm>.



Field Trip Reports

June 12, Saturday, Point Reyes

On a clear sunny day, five birders tallied 63 species (several heard only), including a Prairie Falcon being harassed by three Ravens at Mendoza Ranch. Ten Wood Ducks were on Five Brooks Pond, and many birds at MP-1.06 on Bear Valley Road north of Seashore Headquarters, including a male Northern Parula, Black-throated Gray Warbler, American Redstart, and Lazuli Bunting. It was very windy on the outer point and the few birds off the Fish Docks included only one Surf Scoter. *Jean Richmond*

August 8, Saturday, San Mateo Coast

10 birders, 57 species. Gray morning, sparkling afternoon. Few truly unusual birds, but we did see Black Oystercatcher, Baird's Sandpiper, Osprey, and Bank Swallow. *Fred Safier*

NEWS FROM WILD BIRDS UNLIMITED

Birdfeeding Thoughts:

- One of the fun aspects of bird watching and feeding is how each year is different from others. This summer we saw more Bullock's and Hooded Orioles.
- Chestnut-backed Chickadees were very numerous. Many people reported multiple broods in the nest boxes. These are resident birds, staying with us year round. They love sunflower seeds, suet, and peanut butter. Be sure and use "chunky" peanut butter and push seeds into the peanut butter. Birds do not have saliva glands. Straight peanut butter is very hard for them to eat safely.
- Titmice, Morning Dove and House Finch backyard sightings were up noticeably this summer.
- Anna's Hummingbirds were very abundant. There were very many reports of multiple birds feeding at the same time. This is more typical of what you see in Arizona, not in northern California where the males chase away the others.
- More backyards are now being visited by Band-tailed Pigeons. 8–10 years ago most sightings were in the Orinda-Moraga area. Now we receive reports for them in Walnut Creek, Alamo, Martinez, etc. These are okay birds to see in the wild, but are not appreciated at the feeders as they vacuum up all the seed.
- There were abundant numbers of Lesser Goldfinches at the thistle feeders, with some American Goldfinches. That ratio will begin to change as we move into fall. More and more American Goldfinches will begin showing up at the feeders in flocks as they finish nesting.

West Nile Virus & Birdfeeding

There is no evidence to suggest that feeding the birds increases your chance of getting WNV. There is evidence that decreasing mosquito breeding places decreases mosquitoes. You may continue to provide food and fresh water for your birds just as you always have, but you should change the water in your birdbath at least twice per week—simple as that! The mosquito's (carrier of WNV) breeding cycle is a minimum of 5 days, so by cleaning your bath twice per week, or more frequently if necessary, you can wash away all mosquito eggs and larvae without worry. Put a *Water Wiggler* in your birdbath. The battery-powered Wiggler keeps the water constantly moving. Mosquitoes cannot lay eggs on moving water.

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Observations June 2004

By Steve Glover

Despite several large reservoirs, aechmophorus grebes have never been found nesting in Contra Costa County, so the discovery of a pair of Clark's Grebes with two small downy youngsters at San Pablo Reservoir on 6/6 was a much-anticipated discovery. There were a total of 13 adult Clark's and 4 adult Westerns present (RS). On 6/13 the two young Clark's Grebes were still present and, naturally, larger than when previously reported (RD). This area was thoroughly checked each season during the atlas project and no breeding birds were found.

A Blue-winged Teal at the east end of Camino Diablo near Byron on 6/5 was present on a date suggestive of breeding (D&PB). Another male Blue-winged Teal was at McNabney Marsh on 6/17 (SG, BW). Summer records have begun to accumulate rapidly in recent years but there is still just one breeding record, that being from McNabney Marsh.

The Bald Eagle situation at San Pablo and Briones Reservoirs has grown even more intriguing. On the afternoon of 6/13 an adult and a second or third year bird were each present in the area. Of course this isn't confirmation of nesting but it is extremely tantalizing evidence that breeding is or soon will occur in the county (RD).

Wild Turkeys are continuing to colonize the woodlands of the East Bay. Reports from Tilden Park, very recently a turkey-free zone, included a hen with ten young south of Inspiration Point on 5/19 (ES), a hen with 6–8 youngsters at the Meadow Canyon Trailhead on 6/6 (MB) and a group of five adults and eight juveniles on the Nimitz Trail on 6/15 (JP). A Spotted Sandpiper at McNabney Marsh on 5/20 was at a strange location on a strange date (SG, BW).

Elegant Terns are annual visitors to the Richmond area of the county, primarily as post-breeding visitors in late summer, but nothing like this summer has ever been recorded. On 7/15 an estimated 8,000 birds were on Brooks Island! (KL).

A Short-eared Owl near the east end of Camino Diablo near Byron on 6/5 was at a location where breeding has been suspected in the recent past, but it has now been decades since the last breeding confirmation for Contra Costa County (D&PB). At least six Lesser Nighthawks were at the east end of Camino Diablo near Byron on 6/5 (D&PB). This is the most reliable and convenient spot in the county for this species.

Two singing Yellow Warblers near the south end of San Pablo Reservoir on 6/13 is strongly suggestive of breeding at that site (RD). Nesting was confirmed during the atlas at only two sites in the county. Two singing Black-throated Gray Warblers at Upper San Leandro Reservoir around the Alameda/Contra Costa County line on 6/13 were in an area where singing males were also found during the atlas project (DW). It has been a decade since they were last confirmed nesting in

the county. An immature male American Redstart was a great find at St. Mary's College in Moraga on 5/21 (JO). Redstarts seem to be found about every other year in the county and would undoubtedly be found annually with more searching.

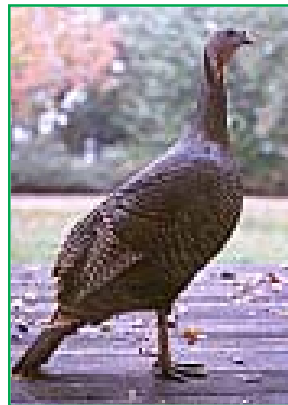
A Green-tailed Towhee near the summit of Mount Diablo on 5/29 was a nice find (SH). There are four

Mount Diablo records, all from May (this being the latest). The other three county records consisted of two wintering birds and a fall migrant.

Yet another summering male Rose-breasted Grosbeak has appeared, this time at a Martinez feeder on 7/7 (CA).

A male Great-tailed Grackle was at the trailhead on Fetzer Lane in Oakley on 5/22 (PG). The first east county nest record is both anticipated and dreaded.

Cheryl Abel, Dennis & Patricia Braddy, Michael Butler, Ryan DiGuadio, Steve Glover, Phil Gordon, Scott Hein, Keith Larson, John O'Neil, John Poole, Rusty Scalf, Emilie Strauss, Denise Wight, Bob Wisecarver



September Field Trips

Sat. Sept. 11, **Outer Point Reyes.** Carpool leaves southwest corner Sun Valley parking lot at 7:30 AM (Note new meeting place). Meet in Drake's Beach parking lot at 9:00 AM. We are hoping for migrants. Weather is unpredictable. Call Elizabeth Dickey 254-0486 for further information. Category 2.

Wed., Sept. 15, **Tilden Park Pack Rat Trail.** Meet 7:30 AM in Nature Center parking lot at north end of park. Short morning walk to look for migrants. Leader Elizabeth Dickey, 254-0486. Category 2.

Thus., Sept. 23, **Richmond Crescent.** Carpool leaves Acalanes Ave., Lafayette at 8:00 AM. From Hwy 24 exit Pleasant Hill Rd. north and take the first right; park along the EBMUD right-of-way to the left. Meet 8:45 AM in parking lot at dog run on Ryden Road. Whether you take 24/I-580 with commute traffic or Dam Road/San Pablo Ave. with stop signs, exit on Central Avenue west. After crossing all freeways take first right turn—Ryden Rd. If possible, park along Ryden; if not, seek a space in the dog-run parking area. This is a shore-line walk with a little marsh area. Clapper Rails have been seen. Leader Elizabeth Dickey, 254-0486. Category 2.

Sat., Sept. 25, **Hawk Hill.** Carpool leaves southwest corner Sun Valley parking lot at 8:00 AM. Meet in parking lot upper Rodeo Lagoon at 9:15 AM. From Hwy 101 exit Alexander Ave. On west side of freeway turn right and go up the hill; at the fork at the top go right and down hill, turn left and continue to the parking lot. We will bird the lagoons before going up to the hawk-watch site. We are taking this trip earlier in the season to increase the chance of seeing Broad-winged Hawks. 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. Leader Fred Safir, 937-2906.

Wed., Sept. 29, **Hayward Regional Shoreline.** Carpool leaves La Gonda Ave. in Danville at 8:00 AM. From 680 southbound, exit El Pintado, turn right

and park; from 680 northbound exit El Cerro, turn left to La Gonda and turn right about one mile. Meet 8:45 AM at Nature Center on Breakwater Ave. From SR92, exit Clawiter; cross Clawiter Ave. and turn left onto Breakwater Ave., continue to end. Because traffic is so unpredictable, if no one is there, wait a while. If there are cars, look out in marsh to see where people are. Waders and possible early ducks. Leader Elizabeth Dickey, 254-0486 Category 2.

West Nile Disease

By Joe Frank

West Nile Virus has arrived in Contra Costa County and the prime carrier is a mosquito that may find a home and egg laying environment in our bird baths and outside watering features. Mosquitoes lay their eggs in places where water collects which means mosquitoes can only develop and multiply in standing water. WNV is a potentially serious illness that affects the central nervous system. It may be transmitted when an infected mosquito bites a human to take in blood. Mosquitoes become infected when they feed on infected birds, which may circulate the virus in their blood for a few days. In addition, recent investigations confirmed WNV transmission through transplanted organs and transfused blood. The recent introduction of routine WNV screening of blood donations should greatly reduce the risk of spread of WNV through transfused blood. Don't handle dead birds you may find around your property without rubber gloves as you may transmit the virus.

There are several species of mosquitos that have been identified as vectors for West Nile, and more species are constantly being identified. One of the most common species, *Culex pipiens* or house mosquito, is a carrier as is the Tiger mosquito. These two species are common in and around residential areas which makes the disease that much more dangerous.

Here are some things the health department says you can do to cut down on mosquitoes around your home.

- Clean your rain gutters and downspouts.
- Clean and refill bird baths and ant traps with fresh water every 2-3 days.

- Repair failed septic systems.
- Make sure all your windows and doors have screens and are in good repair.
- Repair leaky outside faucets.
- Discard old tires or store them inside where rain water cannot collect.
- Empty flower pots including the "drip plates" underneath, also empty tin cans, buckets, children's toys, any container that may collect water.
- Secure swimming pool covers tightly, and remove any standing water after rainfall.

Also make sure to store wheelbarrows, canoes, and boats upside down. And to keep grass cut and bushes trimmed.

Gambusia minnows attack mosquitoes in landscaping ponds and are available free from Contra Costa County.

There are certain personal precautions we can all take, such as applying insect repellent sparingly to exposed skin. The more DEET a repellent contains the longer time it can protect you from mosquito bites. A higher percentage of DEET in a repellent does not mean that your protection is better—just that it will last longer. DEET concentrations higher than 50% do not increase the length of protection. Choose a repellent that provides protection for the length of time that you will be outdoors.

Repellents may irritate the eyes and mouth, so avoid applying repellent to the hands of children.

Whenever you use an insecticide or insect repellent, be sure to read and follow the manufacturer's "Directions for Use," as printed on the product.

Contra Costa County has launched an English and Spanish toll-free telephone line to provide callers with information on the West Nile virus. The telephone line offers information on prevention, symptoms, testing and where to report dead birds, one sign of the virus. The telephone line links callers to Contra Costa Mosquito and Vector Control District where they can get information about mosquito control and instructions on how to get free mosquito-eating fish.

The number to call around the clock is 888-959-9911. West Nile virus information also is available on-line at cchealth.org.

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The scientific name for the **Northern Saw-whet Owl** is *Aegolius acadicus*, derived from the Greek word for owl, plus Acadia, because the first discovery of this species was in Nova Scotia. "Saw-whet" is anglicized from the French Canadian "chouette," a little owl. Some say it sounds like a lumberjack's saw being sharpened.

Their diet is chiefly mice and voles. These small raptors may eat the front half of a mouse and store the rest for future use. If the prey freezes, the owl will sit on it to thaw it when needed.

The Saw-whet's closest look-alike is the Boreal Owl, which is a little larger, has a yellow bill, and shows none of the reddish tones of the Saw-whet Owl.

New Pictures On MDAS Website

By Ann McGregor

Our MDAS volunteer webmaster, Chet Reynold, is also a very talented photographer. His photographs of birds, butterflies, and plants of Black Diamond Mines are now posted on the MDAS website. To see these beautiful pictures, go to the MDAS homepage, <http://www.diabloaudubon.com/index.php> and click on the direct link in the MDAS News section. Thank you, Chet, for sharing these great pictures and for all the work you do in keeping the MDAS web site updated, organized, and running. We all appreciate your work.

Birding Classes and Festivals

Natural History of California Birds. Study the life history of birds with emphasis on habitats of birds and where to find them. Also, examine the natural history of the lesser known raptors of the AOU area. Microscope labs, specimens, slide shows, and use of bird guides will keep us focused on birding skills, along with updates on bird nomenclature, birding techniques for the yard and field, landscaping for wildlife, and travel tips. A local field trip is included. Beginners to advanced welcome.

Wednesdays, 7:30-9:30 PM, 15 September – 7 November, Room B5, Del Valle Campus, 1963 Tice Valley Blvd., Walnut Creek (near Rossmoor). Acalanes Adult Center. 925 935-0170. \$80. Participants can pre-register or register at first class.

City College of San Francisco Continuing Education offers evening birding courses beginning in September. *Field Ornithology: Intro I* meets on Tuesdays at 7 PM at the Marina Middle School at Fillmore and Bay Streets. *North American Land Birds I* meets on Wednesdays, and *North American Water Birds I* meets on Thursdays. Joe Morlan, co-author of *Birds of San Francisco and the Bay Area* and *Birds of Northern California*, gives all courses. Optional week-end field trips are planned.

The Tuesday sessions will cover basic field skills with the study of bird ecology, biology, evolution and behavior. The land bird course is an in-depth study of sparrows, juncos, longspurs, buntings, and cardinals. The third study will consider snipe, phalaropes, skuas, jaegers, and gulls.

Each class is continued in November with a second unit, which extends into December. For further information, go to <http://fog.ccsf.cc.ca.us/~jmorlan/fall04.htm>. The classes are endorsed by Golden Gate Audubon Society. Pre-registration is recommended.

Denise Wight will instruct a series of six Wednesday evening **Classes at Wild Birds Unlimited**, starting September 1. An avid and enthusiastic birder, Denise has taught birding classes for years, leads field trips for Mt. Diablo Audubon Society, and has been actively birding for 18 years. Two birdwalks are included. These

workshops/classes are recommended for those who have some birding experience. Call 798-0303 for reservations.

The Kern River Valley Turkey Vulture Festival will take place at Audubon-California's Kern River Preserve from September 24–27. It celebrates the height of fall Turkey Vulture migration through California's "Valley Wild", the Kern River Valley. At one of the two largest known migration sites in North America (north of Mexico), 4585 Turkey Vultures were counted during the 4-day festival in 2003. The magnitude of the migration over this southern Sierra Nevada count site is awe inspiring. <http://www.valleywild.org/tvfest.htm>.

Annual Meeting of the **Western Field Ornithologists, Oregon Field Ornithologists, and Western Bird Banding Association**. September 9–12, 2004, in Ashland, Oregon. The joint annual meeting will offer full-day field trips to the Klamath Refuges. Other activities include banding workshops, photography and sketching workshops, evening field trips, banding trips, afternoon science sessions, and a poster session, plus expert slide identification and sound identification panels. For additional information please contact John Alexander of the Klamath Bird Observatory, jda@klamathbird.org, or Rob Hewitt, lbjent@humboldt1.com.

Central Coast Birding Rally, October 3–5, 2003, LaPurissima Audubon Society, PO Box 2045, Lompoc, CA 93438. The Central Coast Birding Rally is a celebration and showcase of northern Santa Barbara County sites on the Central Coast Birding Trail. It caters to birders of all abilities. In the rally, teams of birders visit selected trail sites to observe and identify birds. There is an Experienced Class which is a real competition and normally draws birders with considerable experience. There is also a Novice Class which enables birders from any experience level to compete. Free. www.lpas.westhost.com/rally/index.htm

Florida Birding and Nature Festival, Friends of Flight. October 7–10, Tampa Bay.

Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival. Tropical Birds of the Border. November 10–14, Harlingen, Texas.

Space Coast Birding and Wildlife Festival. November 17–21, Titusville, FL.

MDAS MEMBERSHIP/RENEWAL APPLICATION

____ Please enroll my family and me as a member of the Mount Diablo Audubon Society for \$25 for the year 2004-2005.

____ Please enroll me as a lifetime member for \$500. Payment can be made in two annual payments of \$250 each.

____ Please enroll the individual/family listed below as a gift membership for \$25 for the year 2004-2005.

____ For an additional \$20 (new NAS members only) or \$35 (returning members), please enroll me in the National Audubon Society to receive four quarterly issues of the *Audubon Magazine*.

____ I'm enclosing an additional donation of \$_____.

Name _____

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Name on Card: _____

Please make your tax-deductible check payable to:

MT. DIABLO AUDUBON SOCIETY and mail with this application to:
Membership Chair, 400 Oneida Court, Danville, CA 94526

the Quail

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Mount Diablo Audubon Society general meetings are on the first Thursday of every month except July and August in the Camellia Room of the Garden Center at Heather Farms, 1540 Marchbanks Drive, Walnut Creek. Board of Directors meets at 7 PM on the second Thursday of every month in the conference room of Wild Birds Unlimited, 692 Contra Costa Boulevard, Pleasant Hill. All members are welcome and encouraged 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 1-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, 94526. SEND ADDRESS CHANGES for both NAS and MDAS to P.O. Box 53, Walnut Creek, CA 94597-0053. Please send exchange bulletins for MDAS to the editor, 215 Calle La Mesa, Moraga, CA 94556.

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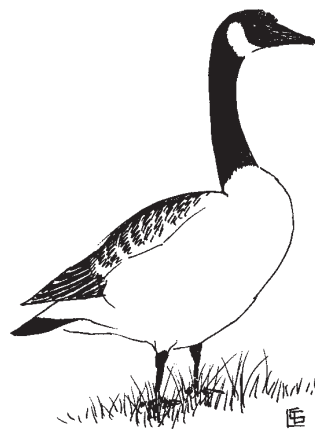
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Deadline for the October issue is September 13.



Driving directions: From Walnut Creek, take Ygnacio Valley Road to signal at Marchbanks Drive. Go left and follow Marchbanks to the Garden Center opposite the Greenery Restaurant. Turn left into parking lot. From Highway 680 north, take Treat Blvd. to Bancroft. Go right to Ygnacio Valley Road, turn right and go one block past signal at N. San Carlos Dr. (Heather Farm entrance). At Marchbanks Drive turn right. The Garden Center is located on the right in the second block.



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Quickies

Weekend birding in California

Big Morongo Canyon Preserve

Fifteen miles north of Palm Springs along State Highway 62 is the little town of Morongo Valley. And not far from the highway is Big Morongo Canyon Preserve, an internationally recognized birding site that has been designated as one of the United States' Important Bird Areas by the American Birding Association and the American Bird Conservancy.

For many centuries, nomadic Indians used Big Morongo Canyon as an easy route between high and low deserts; water was available and game was plentiful. In 1846 the Morongos were moved to a reservation near Banning, and the canyon was held by one rancher or the next until 1968, when 80 acres were acquired by the Nature Conservancy. Later, 160 acres adjacent to the north was obtained by San Bernardino County to

form the Big Morongo County Wildlife Preserve. The Bureau of Land Management assumed administration in 1994, supervising the outstanding ecological and geological features of the area. Within the Preserve are some of the oldest rocks in the State of California, dated at almost two billion years.

Big Morongo Canyon is a desert oasis, one of the ten largest cottonwood and willow riparian habitats in California. The canyon separates the Mojave Desert from the Colorado Desert, with Big Morongo Creek draining water from the surrounding Little San Bernardino Mountains to form the marsh habitat. The Preserve has a desert climate with hot, dry summers and moderate winters.

Several rare or unusual species are known to nest here, and many other birds are abundant during the spring and fall migration seasons. In all, 246 species of birds have been recorded at Big Morongo. Among those listed as common residents are California Thrasher, Gambel's Quail, Black-throated Sparrow, Verdin, and Cactus Wren. Fairly com-

mon and known to nest in the area are Virginia Rail, Greater Roadrunner, both Ladderback and Nuttall's Woodpeckers, and Phainopepla. The area is reported to host the largest populations of Brown-crested Flycatchers and Summer Tanagers in California.

Numerous trails, including boardwalks through the marsh and stream habitats, meander through the Preserve. The one-half mile Marsh Trail is wheelchair-accessible.

The Preserve is open from 7:30 AM to sunset daily throughout the year, but April is a particularly good month to visit, as hundreds of flycatchers, tanagers, warblers and orioles stop by during their spring migration from the Colorado Desert. Fall migration in September can be productive, as well. Admission is free but donations are welcomed.

Adjoining the Preserve is Covington Park, which is an almost certain spot for Vermilion Flycatcher. Picnic tables and other small-town park facilities make this a worthwhile stop.