



# the Quail

Mount Diablo Audubon Society

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

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## Trinidad and Tobago • Scott and Claudia Hein

We open our new meeting year on September 4 with spectacular photos of the amazing wildlife of Trinidad and Tobago. MDAS members, Scott and Claudia Hein, spent the 2007 holidays acquainting themselves with the varied wildlife, beautiful landscapes, and friendly people of this unique Caribbean island nation. Through his photos, Scott will take us to both Trinidad and Tobago, and introduce us to the world-renowned Asa Wright Nature Center on Trinidad.



*Photo by Scott Hein*

*Wattled Jacana at Nariva Swamp, Trinidad.*

The continental origin and proximity of Trinidad to South America, along with its varied habitats, has resulted in an extremely diverse biota. This island supports 97 native animals, 400 bird species, 55 reptiles, 25 amphibians and 617 butterflies, as well as 2,200 species of flowering plants. Few areas of comparable size in tropical America can match this species diversity.

Trinidad is 50 miles long and 37 miles wide and is dominated by the Northern Range rising to 3000 feet and covered by tropical rainforest. Located at 1,200 feet, seven miles north of the town of Arima, is the Asa Wright Nature Center. Here the Squirrel Cuckoos, Toucans, Tufted Coquettes, and varieties of parrots are a small part of what the birder will find. A special attraction is a breeding colony of the nocturnal Oilbird, or Guacharo, which is located in Dunston Cave, a beautiful riparian grotto.

Scott Hein is a freelance nature photographer whose passion is photographing

the native plants, wildlife, and landscapes of the American West. His favorite photo locations are the wild lands and parks surrounding Mount Diablo, although his photographic explorations have taken him from Alaska to Antarctica. He strives to be a naturalist first and a photographer second, and he believes that improving his knowledge of natural history leads to becoming a better nature photographer.

Scott's images have appeared in many local, regional, and national publications including 'Bay Nature', 'Diablo Magazine', 'California Wild', and 'Outdoor California', and in newspapers ranging from the San Francisco Examiner to the New York Times. His images have appeared most recently in the books, 'Rare Birds of California' and 'Fifty Places to Go Birding Before You Die'.

In addition, Scott's images are used by a number of non-profit conservation and environmental organizations to support their conservation and land preser-

vation efforts. He serves on the Board of Directors of Save Mount Diablo, a Walnut Creek-based land trust. Scott received Diablo Magazine's 'Threads of Hope' award in 2007 in recognition of his volunteer efforts supporting land conservation.

A native of Indiana, Scott and his wife Claudia, have lived in Concord near the foot of Mount Diablo since 1988. Scott has a doctorate degree in Analytical Chemistry and is co-owner of Diablo Analytical, Inc., a technology and development company located in Concord.

**It's Birding Trivia Time!** In his own inimitable fashion, Mike Williams has been creating challenging, humorous, and unusual questions designed to test your birding IQ as well as entertain you. Join a Trivia Team or quietly test your skills against the skills of our experts. There are always surprises and it is always fun.

### Meeting Schedule

The next general meeting of Mount Diablo Audubon Society will be **Thursday, September 4**, 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,\* door prize
- 8:05 PM Speakers:

Scott and Claudia Hein

*\* Please remember to bring a cup.*

**October 5: Stephen Joseph  
Muir Woods**

# President's Corner

We start a new Mount Diablo calendar year this month. Alice Holmes, our Program Director, has once again lined up a wonderful group of speakers, and Hugh Harvey, Field Trip Chair, has the year's field trips and leaders ready to go. Hugh has about 50 trips planned for the year with some exciting new ones. Two of our best birders, Denise Wight and Steve Glover, will lead a "rarity chase" on January 3. They will try to re-find some of the rare birds seen on either of our Christmas Bird Counts. Should be fun. I look forward to seeing all of you at a general meeting or on a field trip.

Volunteers! We have two openings on our Mount Diablo board that we really need your help filling. Our Volunteer Coordinator position is open. We do a number of fairs and other outings that require people to man our Audubon table. We need someone to get these people signed up. We have a solid list of people to volunteer, but need that one person to coordinate them. Our former coordinator, Shirley Ellis, is willing to train you. The other opening will be later this year as Barbara Vaughn steps down as Sales Manager for the chapter. Please think about helping out in one of these positions. Give me a call at 510-290-8006 (cell phone).



Scott Hein Photo

Don Yoder, the Bluebird man, passed away last month. We lost a truly wonderful human being. I have asked one of our members, Georgette Howington, who worked closely with Don, to write some personal thoughts about her experiences with Don.

"Don Yoder, a dedicated and much loved member of the Mount Diablo Audubon Society, passed away on July 9, 2008. While Don devoted much of his life to public service through the Rotary Club, Emergency Preparedness (Don was a radio man in the military), the Rossmoor Nature Association, and his church, most of us

knew him as the founder of the California Bluebird Recovery Program.

"Building, setting up and monitoring nest boxes at Rossmoor in the early 70s after he and his wife, Sue, became residents there, became more than just a hobby. Don knew that due to loss of habitat without our help the Western Bluebird population would continue to dwindle and possibly even disappear. In 1994, supported by MDAS and affiliated with the North American Bluebird Society, the California Bluebird Recovery Program was born.

"CBRP is 'for the encouragement and conservation of cavity nesters – especially bluebirds – anywhere in the West.'

"Since then, 31 county coordinators in California along with hundreds of nest box monitors have helped to fledge thousands of secondary cavity nesters annually.

"Robert Carlton, President and founder of the Rossmoor Nature Association, has organized a group of monitors to maintain Don's nest box trail where he monitored over 70 nest boxes. The trail has been named after Don in honor of his contribution, not to mention the continual source of joy and beauty in the sightings of the many Western Bluebirds fledged there every year.

"Benjamin Disraeli said, 'Most people leave this life with their music still locked up inside their head.' But we shall hear our friend Don Yoder's music every February when the Western Bluebird male sings to find his mate, when the hatchlings' hungry mouths chirp and when the last fledgling has flown from the nest box—finally free to sing his very own song.

"If you would like to become a nest box monitor, I have several trails that need adopting in Moraga consisting of about 10 boxes. (925) 686-4372 or Georgette@bird-scape.net. Don's family asks if you would like to make a contribution to CBRP on Don's behalf please send them made out to CBRP and mail to: Dick Blaine, CBRP, 22284 N. De Anza Circle, Cupertino, CA 95014."

Thanks Georgette.

Still waiting for more ideas on how to save water. I mentioned in the last Quail that with the EBMUD 20% mandatory reduction of water use, we need to get creative. Let me know what ideas you have that work. We bought a plastic bucket for the shower and fill it while the water warms up, then use that in the containers with plants outside. *Jimm Edgar, President*

## Welcome New Members

Gina Dupell	Vacaville
Morris Fraser	Walnut Creek
Kathy Gilman	Walnut Creek
Alessandra Jouberteix	San Ramon
William Kezer	Pleasant Hill
Dick Shouse	Lafayette
Simone St. Clare	Martinez

## Mt. Diablo Birds

*The Common Birds of Mount Diablo* is Mount Diablo Interpretive Association's latest publication. Several MDAS members helped in the production of this guide. Some of the photographs were donated by Scott Hein and Brian Murphy. A pocket at the back of the book holds a removable Checklist which was revised by Phil Gordon. The text is by John Robinson, familiar to members as a speaker and tour leader. This colorful guidebook describes the 70 common birds most likely to be seen on a typical visit to the Park. Accompanying each photograph is a description of where the bird nests, its defining characteristics, and in most cases its diet. The books may be purchased for \$5.00 at the Summit and Mitchell Canyon Visitor Centers, or by mail from MDIA, P.O. Box 346, Walnut Creek, CA 94597-0346 at a cost of \$7.50 which includes tax and shipping. They are also available at some of the local book stores and REI. This would make an excellent gift for a young birder or a great stocking stuffer.

**Q**

This species is unique in that in the Eastern states it is wholly dependent

on man-made housing, while in the West the birds manage on their own. Recent sightings in Contra Costa County have been rare occurrences, while they are seen regularly and have been known to breed in Alameda County.

Unscramble these letters, or turn to Page 7 to learn more.

**AEILMNPPRRTU**

# California State Duck Stamp Features Harry Adamson Art



*Harry and Betty Adamson with his painting of Mallards for the State Duck Stamp.*

MDAS founding member Harry Adamson has been honored when the California Department of Fish and Game chose to depict one of his paintings on the 2008-2009 State Duck Stamp. Harry offered an original painting of Mallards, which he completed earlier this year and which was unveiled July 12 at the Pacific Flyway Wildlife Art Festival in Sacramento.

For next year Fish and Game is introducing a new policy of a statewide art competition for the Duck Stamp design. DFG Director Donald Koch said, "We felt that a Harry Adamson original work of art would help bring attention to our program and inspire other artists to enter the competition."

A nationally renowned waterfowl artist, Harry Adamson's career has spanned more than 60 years. His stunning landscapes awash with Mallards and Pintails are sought by art collectors worldwide. His credits include 1979 "Ducks Unlimited Artist of the Year" and "First California Waterfowl Association Artist of the Year." He portrayed a pair of Mallards for the 1994 Arizona State Duck Stamp. The 2008/2009 State Duck Stamp art is his

second image to be used for a DFG stamp. His first image was a Peregrine Falcon he painted in 1998, which was used on the first California Native Species Stamp.

Also featured at the Pacific Flyway Wildlife Art Festival were the Federal Junior Duck Stamp winning entries. Second place was awarded to Lydia Han, a 15-year old girl from San Jose, for her pair of Ruddy Ducks. Harry Adamson regards this drawing as surely the finest he has ever seen from the brush of one so young.

The Junior Duck Stamp is produced by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to recognize the conservation efforts of young people. Stamps are sold at US Post Offices for \$5, and proceeds support conservation and education programs.

The State Duck Stamp is required for hunting waterfowl in California, and it is also valued by wildlife stamp collectors. Proceeds are used for waterfowl and wetlands conservation programs authorized by the Fish and Game Commission. Since the program began in 1971, it has generated more than \$22 million for waterfowl conservation activities.



A current project funded by California Duck Stamps will restore more than 200 acres on the Llano Seco and Little Dry Creek Units at the Upper Butte Basin Wildlife Area. The work will be coordinated by the California Waterfowl Association with a budget of \$65,000. Restoring riparian habitat at Upper Butte Basin Wildlife Area will benefit a host of neotropical migrant song birds and a variety of other wildlife species.

## Federal Duck Stamps

Again this year, Mount Diablo Audubon will support the Federal Duck Stamp program by making it easy for members to acquire the stamp without a trip to the Post Office. When you purchase a stamp at the September meeting for the regular price of \$15, you will be offered a plastic enclosure which can serve as an identification tag to attach to your scope or binoculars.

Originated by Jay "Ding" Darling, for whom the National Wildlife Refuge in Florida is named, the Duck Stamp Program allocates 98% of sales to the purchase of wildlife habitat lands. "Without habitat—no birds!" All birders should be pleased to contribute—for their own benefit as for the benefit of wildlife. The stamp is a pass to all NWR areas where admission is charged. It also lets you shoot ducks—with a camera!

# 2008-2009 Field Trip Schedule

By Hugh Harvey

## September

- 4 Thursday ..... Jewel Lake
- 18 Thursday ..... Hayward Regional Shoreline
- 27 Saturday ..... Outer Point Reyes

## October

- 4 Saturday ..... Hawk Hill
- 8 Wednesday ..... Berkeley Shoreline
- 18 Saturday ..... Abbott's Lagoon

## November

- 8 Saturday ..... Davis Area/Vic Fazio
- 15 Saturday ..... Limantour
- 22 Saturday ..... Charleston Slough/South Bay
- 24 Monday ..... Mt. View Sanitary/McNabney Marsh

## December

- 11 Thursday ..... Niles Area
- 12 Friday ..... Arrowhead Marsh-High Tide
- 17 Wednesday ..... Christmas Count/East Contra Costa
- 20 Saturday ..... Christmas Count/Central Contra Costa

## January

- 3 Saturday ..... Christmas Count/Rarity Chase
- 10 Saturday ..... Putah Creek
- 17-18 Saturday/Sunday ..... Bodega Bay
- 24 Saturday ..... Las Gallinas/Rush Creek/Shollenberger Park
- 31 Saturday ..... Thornton Area/Cosumnes Preserve

## February

- 8 Sunday ..... Lake Merritt/Arrowhead Marsh
- To be determined ..... Grizzly Island
- 19 Thursday ..... Sunol Regional Park
- 21 Saturday ..... Tomales Bay State Park
- 25 Wednesday ..... Mt. View Sanitary/McNabney Marsh

## March

- 4 Wednesday ..... Walnut Creek Parks
- 19 Thursday ..... San Leandro Reservoir
- 25 Wednesday ..... Lake Lagunitas
- 28 Saturday ..... Black Diamond Mines

## April

- 4 Saturday ..... Garin Regional Park
- 8 Wednesday ..... Orinda Connector Trail
- 11 Saturday ..... Pine Canyon
- 14 Tuesday ..... North Briones
- 18 Saturday ..... Mines Road
- 21 Tuesday ..... Del Puerto Canyon
- 30 Thursday ..... Mitchell Canyon

## May

- 6 Wednesday ..... Mount Diablo State Park
- 9 Saturday ..... East Contra Costa County
- 14 Thursday ..... West Briones Regional Park
- 27 Wednesday ..... Sycamore Grove/Shadow Cliffs

## June

- 6 Saturday ..... Outer Point Reyes
- 13-14 Saturday/Sunday ..... Yuba Pass/Sierra Valley

The schedule of field trips this year follows the pattern we have used for a number of years. By participating in all of our trips, one would have a reasonable chance of finding most of the birds which could be expected to be found in Northern California.

This year there are some changes. We are offering an overnight trip to Bodega Bay in January, taking advantage of the facilities at the U.C. Marine Laboratory there. We are also anticipating a new event—a Rarity Chase to look for any unusual birds which might be found on our Christmas Bird Counts. Details of these events and others will be published in the *Quail* and available online at our website calendar.

With weather patterns changing, many of our spring trips have become hot, dry affairs, with fewer birds found. Starting mid-April of 2009, the new calendar has been advanced 1-2 weeks from traditional dates of the past. It is hoped that this will make our birding more productive.

Note that minor date and leadership changes may be made throughout the year. The leaders often have unforeseen circumstances which require accommodation on our part. We will make every effort to publish the most up-to-date information in the *Quail*, please read it closely.

Above all, remember that these are your trips. Should any member have additional thoughts on when and where we go, or desire other input, let your leadership know. We serve on *your* behalf, not ours.

Field trips are open to members and non-members, beginners and advanced birders. Weather or other contingencies may require changes. For updates, visit the MDAS website at [www.diabloaudubon.com/index/php](http://www.diabloaudubon.com/index/php).

Because most trips do not return until late afternoon, bring a lunch and drink and join us during our midday break.

Category ①: Easy, little or no walking, smooth paths

Category ②: Moderate, one mile or more, possibly rough terrain

Category ③: Difficult, extensive walking on rough terrain.

Carpool locations: **Sun Valley**—Southwest corner of the Sun Valley Mall parking lot at Willow Pass Road and Contra Costa Boulevard in Concord. **Sycamore Valley Road Park and Ride Lot**—Just south of Danville, exit I-680 at Sycamore Valley Road to the east; the Park and Ride lot is on the left. **El Nido Ranch Road**—Take the Acalanes Road/Upper Happy Valley Road exit off SR 24, west of Lafayette. El Nido Ranch Road is parallel to and north of the freeway. Park just east of the intersection with Acalanes Road and on the north side of El Nido Ranch Road.

## July

- 25 Saturday ..... San Mateo Coast

## August

- 15 Saturday ..... Bodega Bay

## Come birding with us in September!

### ② Thursday, September 4 Jewel Lake

Leader: Maury Stern, 284-5980.

Meet at 7:30 AM in Nature Center parking lot at north end of Tilden Regional Park. Short morning walk to look for migrants. Among the birds we might see at this lovely area in September are Allen's Hummingbird, Hutton's Vireo, Warbling Vireo, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Bewick's Wren, Swainson's Thrush, Orange-crowned Warbler, Wilson's Warbler, Western Wood-Pewee, and Western Tanager.

### ② Thursday, September 18

#### Hayward Regional Shoreline Winton Avenue Entrance

Leader: Bingham Gibbs, 838-9257.

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 to parking lot. Because traffic is so unpredictable, if no one is there, wait a while. This trip will include a walk past Mt. Trashmore to Frank's Dump West. Shorebirds and possible early ducks.

### ② Saturday, September 27 Outer Point Reyes

Leader: Jean Richmond, 837-2843.

Carpool leaves southwest corner Sun Valley parking lot at 7:30 AM. Meet 9:00 AM at Drake's Beach parking lot. 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, turn left on Point Reyes-Petaluma Road for 7 miles to the stop sign. Turn right and drive to SR 1, turn left and pass through Point Reyes Station. At the green bridge turn right onto Sir Francis Drake Boulevard. Continue for about 14 miles to Drake's Beach Road on left. We are hoping for migrants and vagrants. Weather is unpredictable.

## Trip Report

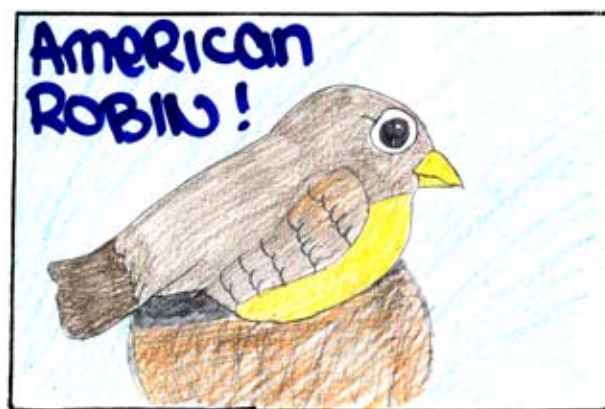
**San Mateo Coast, July 26.** Eighteen members and guests spent a beautiful day at the San Mateo Coast. At the rocky shoreline and ocean we saw Black Oystercatcher, Wandering Tattler, Ruddy and Black Turnstones, White-winged Scoter, Red-breasted Merganser, the three local cormorants, Common Murre, Marbled Murrelet, Pigeon Guillemot, and Elegant Tern. Inland we saw Red-shouldered Hawk, Hairy Woodpecker, Orange-crowned and Wilson's Warblers. *Maury Stern*

## No Child Left Inside *By Paul Shorr*



*Drawing by Christopher C.*

Following the field trip to Contra Loma Regional Park on June 6, the Jack London School fifth grade students submitted a portfolio of thank-you letters to the chapter. One of the letters and two of the drawings are shown. The others will be available for member perusal at an upcoming meeting. Common themes that appeared in the letters included their appreciation of the following: instruction on how to use binoculars; bus transportation and paying for the field trip; the volunteers and the time they spent teaching them about birds; the Backyard Birds of California field guides that each student received; and an increased appreciation of nature and birds that they developed through this program. The following statement from Fernando was very gratifying and validated the importance of this program: "I go outside and try to find some of the birds in the book and ever since you took us to Contra Loma Regional Park, I have been looking at birds in a different way."



*Drawing and letter by Lexxi M.*

DEAR MR SHORR,  
 Thank you and all the other people  
 that took their time out of the day to  
 accompany us. I was glad to be in the  
 first group that saw the Barn Owl. I liked  
 looking at the Osprey hanging over the  
 water. I really enjoyed using the binoculars.  
 Thank you!  
 Lexxi

# San Pablo Bay NWR

» *Continued from Page 10*

vides a spectacular view of San Pablo Bay, its largest wintering population of wintering Canvasbacks, as well as other ducks, and numerous tidal marsh species.

A visit to Lower Tubbs Island requires a considerable investment in time and effort, but can be very rewarding. Clear days offer sweeping views of Mount Diablo, Mount Tamalpais, three Bay bridges and the San Francisco skyline. The trail begins a half mile east of the junction of Highway 37 and 121 at Sears Point. Walk or bike along a gated farm road for two and three-quarters miles to the heart of the refuge. By adding the loop trail around Lower Tubbs Island the total trip is a bit over eight miles. But here is the ideal spot from which to view the thousands of shorebirds covering the shallow open water at peak migration.

The Cullinan Ranch Unit lies north of Highway 37, west of the bridge over the Napa River at Mare Island. Access is at a small parking area along Highway 37 four miles west of the Walnut Avenue turn to Mare Island. This is a recommended spot for photography of the waterbirds. Plans for improvement to Cullinan Ranch include a kayak launch site here so birders can explore the wetlands for a different viewing experience. West along Highway 37, turn onto Skaggs Island Road and stop in one of the roadside pull-outs, but do not proceed as far as the Naval Air Station.



*Snowy Egret. USFWS, David Hall*

The property west of this road is managed by California Department of Fish and Game, and can be productive for bird watching. Skaggs Island is a potential addition to the San Pablo Bay NWR.

A great way to sample the birding opportunities San Pablo Bay Wildlife Refuge has to offer is to join one of the field trips offered each year during the San Francisco Bay Flyway Festival in February. This event, in which Mount Diablo Audubon Society participates, is a not-to-be-missed festival of art show, displays by conservation organizations and vendors, field trips, boat tours and informational

demonstrations and classes, all in celebration of the birds of the San Francisco Bay

The Refuge is working to acquire additional lands for endangered and threatened species, such as the California Clapper Rail, the salt marsh harvest mouse, and the California Brown Pelican. Many of the current and additional lands of the Refuge will be restored to seasonal or tidal wetlands to provide migratory birds with a natural wetland habitat. Also planned for the future are a visitor center, additional birding trails, and development of an active educational program.

Audubon California and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are looking for volunteers to help prepare for a tidal marsh enhancement project in San Pablo Bay National Wildlife Refuge this fall.

This will be a great opportunity to experience the Refuge, and participate in some of the important work that Audubon California is doing there. It should also be a fun adventure to count salt marsh harvest mice, hear Black Rails, see the arrival of migratory shorebirds, and taste the pickleweed.

Shorebird counts will be conducted monthly through April 2009. Planting of native plants along levees will occur Saturday, October 18.

If you are interested, please contact Mike Perlmutter, Bay Area conservation coordinator for Audubon California at (510) 601-1866, Ext. 231 or by email at [MPerlmutter@audubon.org](mailto:MPerlmutter@audubon.org)

## Observations

By Steve Glover

Submit Contra Costa County sightings to Steve Glover at [countylines@sbcglobal.net](mailto:countylines@sbcglobal.net) or (925) 997-1112.

A Cackling Goose at Miller/Knox Regional Shoreline, Richmond on 7/4 was the first to be found in the county during the summer months (DW, SG). A summering Greater White-Fronted Goose was found again near the Richmond Marina on 7/21 (SD). It had been present at least a week earlier (DW). Four Brant, also likely summering, were at Brooks Island on 7/13 (DW).

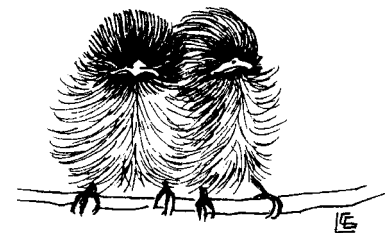
A male Harlequin Duck apparently intent upon summering was at Brooks Island near Richmond on 7/4 (SG, DW). Also seemingly summering on that date were two Long-tailed Ducks (SG, DW). Each species has been found at that location in summer for well over a decade whenever the area has gotten sufficient attention.

A Brandt's Cormorant was near Brooks Island, Richmond on 7/4 (SG, DW); the species is unusual but regular around Richmond.

A pair of Ospreys was noted at Martinez Regional Shoreline on 7/27 (JH).

A single American Avocet at Heather Farm Park in Walnut Creek on 8/4 may have been the first ever found at that location (HH). On 8/3 a single Red-necked Phalarope was at Pinole Bayfront Park and two Wilson's Phalaropes were at Meeker Slough near Point Isabel (DW).

At least 45 Elegant Terns were present on Brooks Island near Richmond on 7/4 (DW). The flock was estimated to have grown to 200 on 7/13 (DW). Three Least Terns were at Pinole Bayfront Park on 8/3 (DW).



An unprecedented tally of at least 15 Common Murres (there were likely far more) was obtained near Brooks Island on 7/4 (SG, DW). Much larger numbers still were reported elsewhere in the bay in the ensuing weeks. A single Murre was found dead near Point Isabel on 7/13 (DW); a live one was present there on 7/1 (SD). Three more still were at Point Isabel on 8/3 (DW).

Two Lesser Nighthawks were noted near the east end of Camino Diablo in the hamlet of Byron on 7/5 (SG, DW) and 7/6 (HH).

*Continued on Page 7 »*

# Purple Martin • *Progne subis*



Photographed at Memory Lake Park, Grantsburg, Wisconsin, by Ellis Myers

Purple Martins, the largest swallow in North America, breed in Canada, the United States, and Mexico. In late summer, after their young have left the nest, they migrate to their nonbreeding range in South American tropics where they find an abundance of insects.

Martins are secondary cavity nesters; they do not excavate the cavity themselves, but use old woodpecker cavities, or natural cavities in dead trees and cliff faces. In the eastern half of North America, Purple Martins have undergone what's known as a tradition shift. Gradually, they have switched from using natural cavities to artificial housing humans supply for them. Native Americans started this tradition shift hundreds or even thousands of years ago, by putting up dried, hollowed-out gourds for the Martins. In western North America, Martins have not undergone this tradition shift and still nest as all Martins did originally, in natural tree cavities. But this trend may still be progressing, as in

the Pacific Northwest, where Martins once nested almost exclusively in cavities in pilings along rivers and on the coast, they now nest almost entirely in human-supplied housing in these same habitats due to widespread nestbox programs. Now they will nest in clusters of gourds and groupings of single-unit wooden boxes. In California, where Martins nest in cavities in trees, lava tubes, and road bridges, it may be possible to attract them to gourds and single-unit boxes. Martins in Arizona, New Mexico, and Mexico nest only in cavities in trees and cacti.

Purple Martins, like all swallows, are aerial insectivores. They eat only flying insects, which they catch in flight. Their diet is diverse, including dragonflies, damselflies, flies, midges, mayflies, stinkbugs, leafhoppers, Japanese beetles, June bugs, butterflies, moths, grasshoppers, bees, wasps, flying ants, and ballooning spiders. Martins are not, however, prodigious consumers of mosquitoes as is so often claimed by companies

that manufacture Martin housing. Martins are daytime feeders, and feed high in the sky; in contrast, mosquitoes stay low in damp places during daylight hours, or only come out at night. Since Purple Martins feed only on flying insects, they are extremely vulnerable to starvation during extended periods of cool or rainy weather.

## Library Fest

Mount Diablo Audubon Society will join with the Walnut Creek Library Foundation, Walnut Creek Open Space, Lindsay Wildlife Museum, Gardens at Heather Farm and others to host *Library Fest—A Day of Discovery* on Sunday, September 14. This event, from 1 to 5 PM at Walnut Creek Civic Park, is a mix of activities and entertainment to represent the dynamic range of services that will be available at the new downtown Walnut Creek Library set to open in 2010.

Circling the world, performances will be given by the Diablo Valley Chinese Cultural Association, the Russian Barivink Ensemble of singers and dancers, Irish Celtic harp music and folklore, and back to sword fights by California Shakespeare Theater. Of special interest will be presentations on drought-tolerant landscaping and workshops on going green.

## Observations

» *Continued from Page 6*

A male Black-chinned Hummingbird at a Moraga feeder 8/6 was a nice find away from east county (JC).

The highlight of the reporting period was surely the discovery of two Purple Martins at Upper San Leandro Reservoir on 7/6 (BL). This is the first sighting in the county in about 15 years. The "summer" date of this sighting is intriguing, particularly since the species has never been found nesting in the county.

Unexpected was a family group of 6 Western Bluebirds at Point Pinole Regional Shoreline on 7/15 and 7/23 (LL). The species was unrecorded in that area during the atlas project and is virtually never recorded in far west county.

A female Phainopepla, always an enigmatic species in the county, was in the Mitchell Canyon parking lot in Mount Diablo State Park on 7/6 (RS).

Judi Cooper, Sheila Dickie, Steve Glover, Hugh Harvey, Bob Lewis, Laura Look, Rusty Scalf, Denise Wight

# Birding Babylon

—A Soldier's Journal from Iraq

Perhaps you have heard of this book by Jonathan Trouern-Trend or you have read it. This is my kind of book, small, easy to read, interesting, well done. It was well organized, illustrated, and even I could read it in one sitting—a miracle. The author's interest in birding and nature was an asset to him during a very difficult time. Much can be said about the joys and advantages of birding as an interest. The following is from the publisher's promotion:

Early in 2004, a National Guardsman from Connecticut arrived in Iraq for a year's posting. Sergeant First Class Jon Trouern-Trend had been a birder since age 12. So naturally he looked for birds—and found them in surprising number and variety around Anaconda Base in the Sunni Triangle, where he was stationed: old-world warblers near the laundry pond, kestrels at the dump, wood pigeons by the airstrip, owls on the cement bunkers. And whenever he got “outside the wire”—collecting water samples from the Tigris, delivering supplies to schoolchildren, at a forward operating base in Mosul, or on a trek to the ruins of ancient Babylon—his lifelist grew longer.

From nearly day one until he left Iraq, Trouern-Trend wrote about his sightings in an online journal, which attracted thousands of readers and was excerpted in the press. Now some of the highlights of his “Birding Babylon” blog are collected in this small, beautiful volume, designed to resemble a birder's journal. In a preface, the author looks back on his experience—and ahead to what the future might hold for the rooks, doves, storks, bulbuls, and sparrows of Iraq, and for its people.

This little book cuts through the politics of war like birdsong, reminding us of our imperishable connection with nature; of how birds and their journeys tie the world together; of the persistence of life even in a wasted land. It's a small act of grace. Jonathan Trouern-Trend served with the 118th Area Support Medical Battalion in Iraq and currently works for the American Red Cross Blood Services in their Epidemiology and Surveillance program. He lives in Marlborough, Connecticut, with his wife and their five children.

The book is published by Sierra Club Books and is priced at \$9.95.

By Shirley Ellis

# Connecting People with Nature

By Brian Murphy

one rodent every two to three weeks, as they do not have large territories.

Victor was connected up with the owner of a recycled building materials business, Fachini Salvage, Recycling and Scrap Enterprises in Bay Point who provided wood for construction of the houses at no cost. A tour of the ranch revealed opportunities to erect five barn owl boxes in a variety of locations around the ranch. A resident requested a Barn Owl box in their back yard located across the Contra Costa Canal from a golf course.

Victor organized his helpers, including his father, to pick up the recycled plywood, cut it

out and build the boxes according to ‘Bob Wisecarver approved’ Barn Owl box plans. They then erected new housing opportunities for Barn Owls around the ranch.

As the Barn Owl boxes become occupied, the rodent population will decrease and rattlesnakes will have to look for other locations. The entire community will benefit.

Experience has shown, at times much to our surprise, just how well providing housing for very efficient rodent feeders works.

We installed a Barn Owl box in horse barn with a huge rat problem and a year and a half later there were no rats in the barn. The Barn Owl box was in need of cleaning as it was half full of rodent remains since the chicks in that box were very well fed.

In the photo is the sixth Barn Owl box Victor and his team installed. This is in a backyard facing the Contra Costa Canal. Next to

Victor and his dad, George, are Sue and Richard Rainey who are smiling because soon they won't have a gopher and rat problem. After the owls clean out the neighborhood, across the canal is Boundary Oak Golf Course with an abundant supply of gophers.



De Vito Equestrian Ranch, in Walnut Creek below Rancho Pariso, has a terrible problem with gophers all over their open land and rats in the barn. Since they have an abundance of rodents, rattlesnakes have found a nice place to feed. It is a good idea for people and horses to minimize their interaction with rattlesnakes to avoid serious consequences.

Victor Charron of Troop 282, Pleasant Hill called, looking for a good Eagle Scout project and was offered the challenge of reducing the rodent population at De Vito ranch using integrated pest management. In this case it would be building and erecting Barn Owl boxes to allow the resident rodents to provide food for breeding Barn Owls. Since Barn Owls are cavity nesters, the Barn Owl box provides a great artificial cavity for owls to breed in. One pair of Barn Owls with chicks may consume as many as 1,000 rodents by the time the chicks leave the nest box. What we have noticed in the area is that there is such a good rodent population Barn Owls tend to breed year around with three to four clutches a year! A rattlesnake may eat



Barn Owl (Monkey-faced Owl)

*Tyto alba pratincola*  
Birds of Golden Gate Park  
Joseph Mailliard • 1930



# Ornithological Opportunities

**Monterey Bay Birding Festival.** September 26-28, Watsonville. Fall is a magical time of year for birding along the Monterey Bay. Over 400 species of shorebirds, ducks, geese, seabirds and songbirds gather along this beautiful coast to overwinter among the wetlands, sloughs, shores and woodlands. This year's schedule includes special outings to the Big Sur Condor Project, and a special presentation on the Snowy Plover. [www.montereybaybirding.org/](http://www.montereybaybirding.org/)

**Western Field Ornithologists (WFO) Annual Meeting.** October 9-12, San Mateo. WFO is a unique organization that seamlessly blends birding with ornithology. WFO meetings are only occasionally held in Northern California. So, if your interest in birds goes beyond just adding another tick to your list, don't miss this one. Workshops will cover topics like sketching birds and using GPS in the field. Scientific sessions will give you a glimpse into the most current ornithological research. [www.wfo-cbrc.org/](http://www.wfo-cbrc.org/)

**Festival of the Cranes.** November 18-23, Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, south of Socorro, NM. The Festival of the Cranes celebrates the return of the Sandhill Cranes and the Snow Geese to the Refuge for the winter. Educational

workshops, including lectures, hands-on, and field-trip experiences combined with the beauty of the northern Chihuahuan desert make this a great destination for birders from all over the world. Phone: (575) 835-1828. E-Mail: [festival@sdcc.org](mailto:festival@sdcc.org).

**Birds of the Bay Area.** September 12–December 19, Castro Valley Adult School. Treat yourself to an adventure into the world of birding. Join naturalist, wildlife photographer, and ornithologist, Phil Gordon, to learn important tips on bird identification, bird finding, and birding equipment. This class includes ten hours of lecture/discussion interspersed with hiking and field practice in local regional parks and open spaces. Phil Gordon has over 25 years experience as a birding instructor, and he is a member of MDAS.

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## the Quail

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Please enroll my family and me as a member of Mount Diablo Audubon Society for \$25 for one year.

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.

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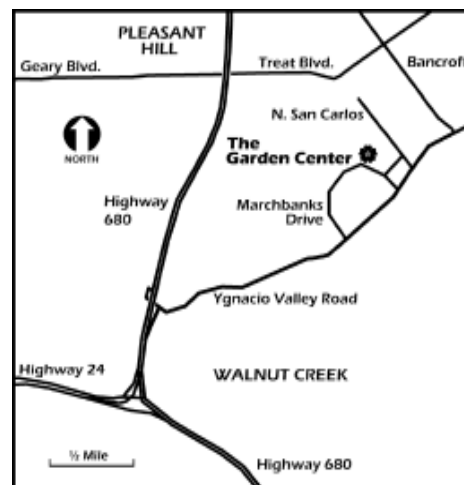
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Membership Chair, 1932 Golden Rain Road #4, Walnut Creek, CA 94595

### The Garden Center

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



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*Twenty-seven raptor species have been observed at Cullinan Ranch Unit, San Pablo Bay National Wildlife Refuge.*

## San Pablo Bay National Wildlife Refuge

In September, along the north shore of San Pablo Bay, waterbirds begin to arrive from their Alaska and Canada breeding grounds. From November through January, myriad diving ducks and shorebirds, including Canvasback, Scaup, scoter, Bufflehead, Ruddy Duck, goldeneyes, sandpipers, plovers, Dowitchers, Willets, godwits, and curlews, feed and shelter in the Bay's wetlands.

The San Pablo Bay National Wildlife Refuge, one of seven refuges making up the San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge Complex, was established in 1974 to conserve and restore these wetlands and the off-shore waters. Species of concern within the Refuge include the California Black Rail, San Pablo Song Sparrow, and Suisun shrew.

Raptors, such as White-tailed Kites, Northern Harriers, Red-tailed Hawks, and

American Kestrels, are abundant from November through January. They hunt over the refuge's marshes and on nearby agricultural fields. A Peregrine Falcon or a Merlin might be observed dining on a shorebird at the edge of the Bay. By May, most of these migrants move north to nest. Black-necked Stilt, Mallard, and Gadwall nest on the refuge. Migrant Caspian Terns



*Canvasback. USFWS photo, William Vinje* and Barn Swallows arrive from the south to nest here. Non-breeding American White Pelicans are commonly seen during summer and stay into the fall. Gulls, herons, and egrets are here year-round, and many varieties of songbirds also enjoy the benefits of the Refuge.

The Refuge office is located on Sears Point Road, Highway 37, between Lakeville Road and Highway 121. You must approach it from eastbound Highway 37—look for a driveway about a hundred yards east of the weigh station. *Note:* the gate opens toward the buildings, not toward the roadway. Restrooms and drinking water are available at the refuge office during regular office hours. No restrooms, picnic areas, campgrounds, drinking water, or other facilities are available elsewhere on the refuge.

Throughout 13,000 acres of salt marsh, mudflats, freshwater wetlands, and uplands, you might see jackrabbits, hawks, pelicans, ducks, Avocets, swifts, egrets, stilts, and endangered creatures like the Clapper Rail and salt marsh harvest mouse. These year-round residents are joined in autumn by migratory ducks and shorebirds, and the raptor population swells to include falcons, kestrels, kites, and Northern Harriers. Larger mammals roam the marsh as well, but you will probably only see their footprints.

One of the best places to see wildlife is the Lower Tubbs Island Trail, which pro-

*Continued on Page 4 »*