

# THE QUAIL

Mt. Diablo Audubon Society | [www.diabloaudubon.org](http://www.diabloaudubon.org)

## 7:45 pm: The Film, "Super Hummingbirds"

Hummingbirds are amazing. The tiniest of birds, they possess natural born super powers to fly backward and upside-down, even to float in mid-air. Their wings beat faster than the eye can see, and the speed at which they travel makes people wonder if it was indeed a hummingbird they actually saw. These attributes have both intrigued scientists and made it hard to study the species, but with the latest high-speed cameras and other technologies, "Super Hummingbirds" reveals new scientific breakthroughs about these magical birds.



Emmy-winning filmmaker Ann Johnson Prum returns with her second film on hummers, which presents new discoveries such as how they drink a flower's nectar so quickly and why they are able to thrive in the thin air at high altitudes. For the first time, viewers will be able to watch in intimate detail as the birds mate, lay eggs, fight, and raise families.

Hummers may be the smallest birds in the world, but what they lack in size, they make up in speed and the ability to adapt in ways we're just beginning to learn about as they continue to evolve. *(Photos courtesy of ANN JOHNSON PRUM/© THIRTEENPRODUCTIONS LLC)*



## 7 pm: International Donations

Young Birders Club Coordinator Juan Pablo Galván will discuss the international organizations to which MDAS has recently donated, including where they are located and what kind of work they do. He'll also share beautiful photos from these areas.

## Next Meeting: JUNE 6

The Mt. Diablo Audubon Society will meet **Thursday, June 6**, in the Camellia Room of The Gardens at Heather Farm in Walnut Creek.

**6:00 pm** Doors Open

**6:30 pm** Potluck

**7:00 pm** News, Birding Info

**7:30 pm** Avian Fashion Show

**7:45 pm** Main Program

**"Super Hummingbirds"**

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# Letter from the President

Dear Friends,

This is my final President's Corner, as I will be leaving office on June 30. At that time I will have served the past seven years as vice president, acting president and president. I have enjoyed my roles and I am very proud of MDAS and the accomplishments the chapter has made during that time, but it is time to pass the baton, and I am so pleased that Ariana Rickard and Maren Smith have stepped up to serve as co-presidents for the 2019-20 year. I know that they will do an outstanding job in their new roles, and I strongly urge everyone to provide them the same valuable support as you have provided me and the board of directors over the years.



**PRESIDENT'S CORNER**

I plan to continue to lead field trips, take part in Christmas Bird Counts, coordinate the No Child Left Inside program, table events when possible and help out at the general meetings.

In closing, I also want to take this opportunity to thank my wife, Nancy, for all the help and support she has provided throughout our involvement with MDAS. My contributions would clearly not have been possible without her.

Best regards, and as always, happy birding.—Paul

## Earth Day Two Ways

### John Muir Birthday, April 20:

The blustery April day began with our volunteers (literally) holding down the tent, but the winds subsided, the sun came out, bagpipers played, and "John Muir" greeted thousands of people who had gathered to celebrate John Muir's birthday and Earth Day. Many family groups enjoyed testing their bird nest knowledge to win a prize at the Mt. Diablo Audubon Society table. Our volunteers also answered bird-related questions, handed out information about our chapter activities and events, and even had time to enjoy Muir House tours, birthday cake, the recyclable art fashion show, and nearly 50 other conservation-minded booths. Many thanks to our enthusiastic volunteers: Kenny



and Winny Lin, (seen above), as well as Susana de Trapaga, Maren Smith, Nahide Craig, Carol Pacht, Rosalie Howarth, and Cheryl Abel. (We all really had a fun time!)

### McNabney Marsh Cleanup and Birdwalk, April 13:

We had nine for the bird walk: six MDAS members, and three guests including some John Muir Land Trust volunteers and a student at Cal State East Bay in Hayward. We had a fun couple of hours



birding, with over 40 species seen! Afterward, about 20 people helped with the cleanup along Waterbird Road on the north end of McNabney Marsh. It was a fun day; it would be great to ramp this up and get more involved for next year. Very satisfying, and it felt good to do a little something for the Earth. – Education Chair Maren Smith

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MDAS general meetings take place on the first Thursday of the month except July and August in the Camellia Room of the Gardens at Heather Farm, 1540 Marchbanks Dr., Walnut Creek.

The MDAS Board meets at 6:45 pm at Wild Birds Unlimited in Pleasant Hill on the second Thursday of every month except July and August.

The Quail is published monthly except in January, July and August by the Mt. Diablo Audubon Society, PO Box 53, Walnut Creek, CA 94597-0053.

For Young Birders Club, search Facebook for Mount Diablo Audubon Society Young Birders Club.

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Like us on Facebook!



**WELCOME** to our newly elected officers for the coming Mt. Diablo Audubon year, which runs July to June.

Co-presidents: Ariana Rickard and Maren Smith

Vice President: Jerry Britten

Treasurer: Steve Buffi

Secretary: Carol Pachtl



**WE THANK** the outgoing leaders who contributed so much to our chapter. President Paul Schorr served in the top two jobs for seven years, and yet found time to create the No Child Left Inside program. Vice President Kent Fickett brought an ardor for local conservation, with a special eye toward improving McNabney Marsh. Webmaster Dal Leite stepped in on an emergency basis when the previous webmaster fell terminally ill, and he stayed on to expand and improve the site. Membership Chair Virginia Hamrick combined strong management skills with a warm welcome for new members and for every visitor to our meetings. Mt. Diablo Audubon has thrived on the strength of such passionate and purposeful volunteers.



**DON'T FORGET** to wear your favorite bird attire to the June 6 meeting for the first-ever Mt. Diablo Audubon bird fashion contest. This is your chance to show off your favorite bird T-shirt, vest, pin, or other birding attire or body art. We will award fantastic prizes to the best fashion, by popular vote.



**RUTH BANCROFT GARDEN & NURSERY**

**COME SEE** the brand new Visitor Center at the Ruth Bancroft Gardens, during the free "Pollinators & Friends Day" Sat., Aug. 10, from 10am – 1pm. Celebrate birds, bees and butterflies with organizations

that strive to support these vital pollinators. Lots of family fun, and we are looking for a couple of people to help staff our Mt. Diablo Audubon table with its ever-popular "Whose Nest?" game. If you can volunteer for a shift, please contact MDAS Volunteer Coordinator Susana de Trapaga at trapaga@sbcglobal.net. She is also taking names for the Martinez Beaver Festival, June 29.

# Free Birding eBooks

Many birdwatchers have purchased and downloaded ebooks for reading on a Kindle, an iPad, or another type of ebook reader. But they may not know of the free birding ebooks that can be borrowed online. Other birders may have never used an ebook, and may not realize that using browser and app-based text readers can be easy and convenient – and that ebooks on birding are available through their public library or through vast free collections of scanned and digitized print material.



One free mobile app affiliated with many U.S. public libraries is called **Libby**. I wrote this article on an iPad, on which I had also downloaded Lyanda Lynn Haupt's fascinating history, *Mozart's Starling*, a **favorite** on a 3-week Libby loan. Ample, clear directions on how to get the Libby app, search your library's catalog for ebooks, and obtain free loans are given on both the Libby website, as well as its developer, **OverDrive**.

The most extensive and varied resource, however, is the **Open Library project** provided by the **Internet Archive**, which is affiliated with several global attempts to preserve printed material and make it freely accessible online. Want to read John Chancellor's classic biography of **John James Audubon** on your next cross-country flight? It's there. Same with **Volumes 1-2 of the Audubon Magazine** from 1887-89.

And, finally, if you're curious why Haupt might blame England's great playwright for the Central Park release of European Starlings, the Open Library also offers **Shakespeare's Birds** for your enjoyment--or, at least, your edification. --

*Former MDAS Webmaster Dal Leite*

For live links and past columns, see [www.birdwideweb.com](http://www.birdwideweb.com).



# Field Trips

## Saturday, June 1, Outer Point

**Reyes.** Carpool leaves Sun Valley at 7am. Meet 8:30am at Bear Valley Visitor Center in Olema. From I-80 in Vallejo, follow SR 37 19.1 miles to Atherton Ave, exit and turn left, cross US 101 to San Marin Dr and continue for 3 miles. Turn right on Novato Blvd for 6 miles to stop sign, then turn left on Point Reyes-Petaluma Rd 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 Rd. Visitor Center is off Bear Valley. We are hoping for migrants. Bring lunch and liquids. Weather is unpredictable. Leader: Juan-Carlos Solis. (925) 222-8573. Category 2.

### **PARTNER HIKE: CASTLE ROCK**

**Sunday, June 9:** Join us for a leisurely stroll along Pine Creek in the Castle Rock Regional Recreation Area adjacent to Mount Diablo State Park. The area is dominated by oak woodlands and prominent sandstone formations. Peregrine falcons nest in rock formations. Bring plenty of water and a snack. Dress in layers. Sturdy shoes or hiking boots. Distance: 3 miles, Elevation change: 75' (easy hike). Leaders: Judy Abrams and Staci Hobbet. *RVSP: Registration will open two months prior to the hike.*

[www.eventbrite.com/e/castle-rock-audubon-hike-tickets-54554844007](http://www.eventbrite.com/e/castle-rock-audubon-hike-tickets-54554844007)

## Saturday/Sunday, June 22-23,

**Yuba Pass.** Make motel reservations now! Closest motels are in Sierra City, 11 miles down Hwy 49 to the west. Herrington's Sierra Pines

(530-862-1151 or 800-682-9848) is one of the most popular; or try Yuba River Inn (530-862-1122) with cabins and kitchenettes (cash or check only). Bassett's Station (530-862-1297) at Highway 49 and Gold Lake Road has some accommodations and meals. High Country Inn (530-862-1530 or 800-862-1530) is across Hwy 49 from Bassett's. Also, in Calpine is Sierra Valley Lodge (530-994-3367 or 800-858-0322). More listings at [www.sierracity.com/Stay/LodgingCamp.html](http://www.sierracity.com/Stay/LodgingCamp.html). Campgrounds at Yuba Pass and Chapman Creek downhill to the west. Sites available first come/first serve for three days at a time. Longer term reservations can be made at 877-444-6777, but there is an added \$10 charge for this service. Co-leaders: Nancy Wenninger, (925) 938-7987, Bill Chilson (510) 619-6692.

**Saturday/Sunday, July 20-21, Mt. Lassen National Park.** If you are planning to participate in this MDAS birding trip to Lassen Volcanic National Park, let the leader know ahead of time that you are coming. On Saturday morning, we will meet in the Loomis Museum parking lot in the Manzanita Lake area at 7:30am. Camping is available at the Manzanita Lake Campground, where Sections A and C are reservable, while Sections B and D are not. (Section D is a tents-only area). There are also a few sleep-only cabins at Manzanita Lake with nearby bathroom facilities. Outside the park, there are several small motels and B&Bs; in the past, some birders have stayed in Anderson and even Redding. Make reservations

soon, as they fill up quickly. Due to extraordinary snowfall this winter, we do not know how many roads through the park will be open. Contact Leader Mike Robertson for details at: [LandMRobertson@outlook.com](mailto:LandMRobertson@outlook.com). (925) 685-4690

**Saturday, July 27, San Mateo Coast.** Carpool leaves El Nido Ranch Rd at 6:30am OR meet at the

### **Wednesday, July 24, Field Trip Planning**

**Meeting.** Anyone interested in shaping the 2019-2020 trip calendar is invited to attend this meeting, which will start at 7pm. Former and future leaders are welcome, as well as any MDAS members with field trip ideas or suggestions. Light refreshments will be served. Location: 1052 Sheppard Rd, Walnut Creek. Leader: Hugh Harvey (925) 935-2979.

McDonald's parking lot at Half Moon Bay at 7:30am. Go west on Hwy 24, take I-980 to I-880 S, and west on SR 92. Cross the San Mateo Bridge and continue to Half Moon Bay. Turn right at the first stoplight (N. Main St.), drive one block to the next light, and cross Hwy 1 into the parking lot. We hope to see

early returning shorebirds, gulls and seabirds. Low tide at 1pm, high tide at 8:37am. Primary stops will include Half Moon Bay Harbor, the Mavericks overlook, Pescadero Beach and Pigeon Point Lighthouse. Bring lunch, liquids and sunscreen, even when foggy or overcast. It's easy to get a sunburn. Co-leaders: Kent Fickett (415) 269-4277, Bill Chilson (510) 619-6692. Category 2.

**Monday, August 5, Frank's Dump@High Tide.** For a shorebird spectacle, we will visit this site late in the day with the sun to our backs and birds congregating to avoid the high tide. Many of the returning shorebirds still have much of their breeding plumage. Some of these birds will stay the winter, some will continue a southerly migration.

Leave the Sycamore Valley carpool location at 3pm, then meet at the Winton Avenue entrance for Hayward Regional shoreline. From I-880, exit Winton Avenue, drive west 4.5 miles. Park near the trail head just before the parking lot gate. We will walk at least a mile to our viewing site. Bring a snack. Leader: Hugh Harvey, (925) 935-2979. Category 2.

**Saturday, August 17, Bodega Bay.** Carpool leaves Sun Valley at 7:30am. Meet at the Tides Restaurant on water side of Hwy 1 in Bodega at 9:15am. Take I-680 across the Benicia Bridge. Go west on I-780 to I-80 towards Sacramento, exit to SR 37. Follow SR 37 to Lakeville Rd, turn right. In Petaluma turn left on E Washington St and continue on Bodega Rd, Valley Ford Rd and SR 1 to Bodega Bay. Walk through or around The Tides to find the group viewing the harbor birds from the outdoor seating. Possibilities at Bodega Bay are flocks of shorebirds including Black Oystercatcher, Wandering Tattler, Marbled Godwit, as well as terns, gulls, cormorants, near-shore pelagics and more. Bring lunch, liquids and sunscreen. Leader: Fred Safier, (925) 937-2906. Category 1.

- 1 Easy. Little walking, smooth paths
- 2 Moderate, more than one mile, possibly rougher terrain
- 3 Difficult. Many miles, rough terrain

#### Carpool Meeting Spots

- El Nido Ranch Rd:** Exit Hwy 24 at St. Stephens Dr. East of Orinda. El Nido Ranch Rd runs parallel and north of 24. Park just east of St. Stephens.
- Sun Valley Mall:** SW corner of mall lot at Willow Pass Rd and Contra Costa Blvd in Concord
- Sycamore Valley Rd Park and Ride:** One block east of I-680, off the Sycamore Valley Rd exit in Danville.

Trip Coordinator Hugh Harvey (925) 935-2979.

## Trip Reports

**North Briones, April 11:** Fifteen members visited the North Briones area for a bird and wildflower walk in moderate 60-degree weather. We saw 44 bird species. The flowers were mediocre at best, with many of the usual wildflowers either in very sparse numbers or not present. They will probably be in larger numbers and variety in a few weeks. The "best" birds seen were House Wren at the staging area; beautiful Western Bluebirds (*photo Isaac Aronow*), especially in the grassy areas near the lagoons; Purple Finches



along the trail; a Chipping Sparrow just past the trail entrance, and a Grasshopper Sparrow on the hillside at the Briones Crest Trail. *Maury Stern*

**Pine Canyon, April 16:** Under partly cloudy skies and cool temps, 16 birders enjoyed excellent birding in Pine Canyon. The creek crossings were the highest in years, but it was worth wet feet to see all of the usual suspects plus a few extras. Highlights included

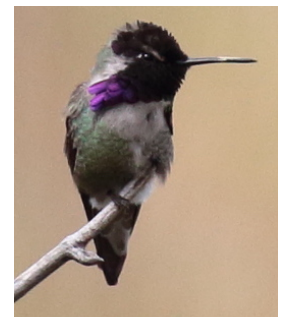


numerous Bullock's Orioles (*photo Isaac Aronow*). We had a chance to observe interesting behaviors: a pair of orioles challenged a Red-tailed Hawk at close range, and another pair of males dueling over a most attractive female. Also seen were a FOS Western Kingbird and a

Calliope Hummingbird, as well as a good sighting of one of the nesting Peregrine Falcons, which flew over us while vocalizing loudly. Altogether, 58 species were seen—a very satisfying day in the field. *Nancy Wenninger*

**Black Diamond Mines, April 18:** Many flowers and birds surrounded us on the first really warm day of the spring. Though we did not find the hoped-for Canyon Wren and Grasshopper Sparrows, we did tally 60 species at the end of our lunch. Most notable was a Green-tailed Towhee, which perched on a fence rung near the upper parking lot bathroom. Though it flew before everyone had a scope view, it was obvious that the bird had no tail. After lunch, we moved to the lower parking lot at the visitor center and added a Yellow Warbler and three other species for a total of 64. Flowers seemed almost as plentiful as the birds, with Blue Dicks everywhere and Indian Warrior at the top of the ridge. *Hugh Harvey*

**Del Puerto Canyon, April 23:** For our annual Del Puerto Canyon Trip, 17 of us traveled to Patterson on I-5, where Del Puerto Canyon Rd begins. We spent most of the day winding our way up the canyon, stopping at several pull-outs. At the end of Del Puerto Canyon Rd, we headed south on San Antonio Valley Rd, looking for Lewis's Woodpeckers. From there, we headed back toward Livermore, making one more stop to find a singing Bell's Sparrow. In spite of the warm temperatures, we had 68 species for the day, including Golden Eagles, a Costa's Hummingbird (*photo Beth Branthaver*), Lewis's Woodpeckers, Western Kingbirds, Bullock's and Hooded Orioles, Loggerhead Shrikes,





Ash-throated Flycatchers, Phainopepla, Yellow-billed Magpies, Western Tanagers and Rock Wrens.  
*Beth Branthaver*

**Mitchell Canyon, April 25:** Fifty-five species were seen on a 75-85 degree day. Twenty-five members and guests attended the walk of about four hours. In addition to birds, we looked at flowers, among which were Fairy Lanterns, Chinese Houses, Larkspur, and on the Globe Lily Trail, a Mariposa Lily. Highlight birds were many first-of-season birds, including Calliope Hummingbird, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Western Wood-Pewee, Hammond's Flycatcher, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Hermit Warbler and Western Tanager. We also saw a Bushtit nest and an active Hutton's



Vireo nest with a baby being fed (photo Isaac Aronow). It could

not have been a better spring day.  
*Maury Stern*

**Mt. Diablo State Park, April 30:** Eight birders joined this trip, which consisted of driving up South Gate entrance road to the park and making several stops along the way. Birds were a little scarce on the entrance road, but when we reached the Rock City area, things improved. We saw a total of 45 different species. Highlights included Ash-throated Flycatcher, Western Tanager, Black-headed Grosbeak, Western Bluebird, Bewick's & House Wrens, and the highlight of the day California Thrasher (photo Beth Branthaver), which provided excellent looks.  
*Steve Taylor*



**West Briones, May 2:** Twelve birders spent about 4

hours at Briones Regional Park in 70-degree weather and walked from the entrance to Homestead Valley and back again. The usual target bird, Lazuli Bunting, was not seen at the parking lot, but was heard later in the walk. Over all, 39 species were seen or heard. (Photo of Hutton's Vireo by

*Beth Branthaver*). Highlights included hearing a Great-horned Owl near Homestead

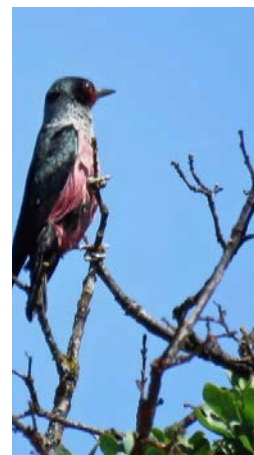


Valley, as well as seeing Olive-sided Flycatcher, Pacific-slope Flycatcher, and Ash-throated Flycatcher at Homestead Valley. An absolutely stunning Western Bluebird was seen. Only 2 Warbler species were seen: Wilson's and Orange-crowned. Many Black-headed Grosbeaks were singing throughout the walk. *Maury Stern*

**Mines Road, May 4:** Seven birders enjoyed a pleasant outing with seasonably mild temperatures and the usual array of birds at most locations where we stopped and walked. At Lake Del Valle, we were able to scope and view a seemingly equal number of Western and Clark's Grebes, as well as Common Merganser, Double-crested Cormorant and an Osprey. We also heard Cassin's and Warbling Vireos, and saw Steller's Jay, California Scrub-Jay, Yellow-billed Magpie, American Crow and Common Raven to round out the corvids, and

we finally got good looks at Ash-throated Flycatcher. At the bridge, we saw White-throated Swift and the usual swallows, including Northern Rough-winged and Cliff. At the Bald Eagle nest overlook, the nest appeared unattended and abandoned. Along Mines Rd, we had a relatively close flyover of a Golden Eagle, along with several Turkey Vultures, some Phainopeplas, Black-headed Grosbeaks, Bewick's Wrens and California Thrashers. Another stop along Mines Rd gave us looks at Brown-headed Cowbirds, as well as Tree and Violet-green Swallows at "The Junction." We located a single

Lewis's Woodpecker (photo Isaac Aronow) on San Antonio Valley Rd, and a small flock of Tricolored Blackbirds. We stopped about a half mile north of the junction on Mines Rd at



the known stop for Bell's Sparrow. After quite a bit of coaxing, we got the sparrow to pop up on a scrub at a distance of a couple of hundred feet. A bit later, we discovered it even closer; it had come in to check us out. We were also able to get distant looks at three female Lazuli Buntings, bringing our final tally to 72 species. Of some interest and amusement, a local stopped-on the wrong side of the road, yet-to query us about a "tiny" woodpecker he was able to get a picture of on his cell phone. No, it wasn't a Downy Woodpecker, but rather a White-breasted Nuthatch! *Gary Fregien*

**Q:** What songbird was divided into 2 separate species during the early 20th century, with one species limited to central and coastal California, and now a subspecies of the nominate species? *Answer on page 8.*

# Fledglings Feeding

Babies make birdwatching one of the most enjoyable pastimes I know. Their lack of skills and coordination make us root for them as they try to master the tricks of feeding and bathing at our backyard



## Wild Birds

larger than their parents, with ragged tufts of down pushing through their chest and back feathers. They lack the colors of their parents, but make up for it by attracting attention with lots of noises and rapidly vibrating wings.



Perch-feeding babies do not begin to use feeders immediately. Instead, the parents begin to make repeated trips to the feeders, picking up seeds, returning to the young, and dropping the food down their wide-open mouths. Over the next half-hour or so, the parents patiently work at demonstrating the techniques needed to land at a feeder perch and pick up seed. Then they taper off the number of trips back to the young. This process repeats itself several times a day as the families come and go. The young usually make their first attempts at perching on the feeders after parents stop bringing them food. Landing is hilarious as they circle a perch



site, touching down and lifting off incessantly, as if they can't quite get the grasp needed to set down securely. Other adult birds may move out of their way, but often just peck at the young birds, showing their dominance. The fledglings keep trying, though, and soon get the skills and confidence to feed on their own.

Ground feeders will bring their young to the areas where seed is on the deck, ground, or in open trays. These youngsters have a much less difficult time learning the ropes as they stand amid hundreds of tiny morsels. It takes little time for them to begin foraging on their favorites: millet and safflower. With few distractions other than several larger and more experienced birds getting in their way, they become independent feeders in short order. As summer moves ahead, all of the birds find their niches, and a pecking order sets in. —Member at Large Mike Eliot



## Beaver Festival

Why on earth should any birder make time for a beaver festival? Beavers help birds - increasing fish and insects and creating wetland habitat. The tools of curiosity, community engagement, and public outcry that saved the Martinez beavers can help Audubon as well.

Once again, MDAS will exhibit at the 12<sup>th</sup> annual Beaver Festival: Saturday, June 29, from 11am-4pm in Susana Park, Martinez. Live music, wildlife booths, beaver tours and children's activities mark an event so unique it was mentioned in both the Congressional Record and *National Geographic*! This year, chalk artist Amy Hall will complete a focal medallion showing species helped by beavers -- a project that will take her two full days. If you aren't planning to bring your spouse or grandchildren to this beloved family event, you'll be missing a dam good time. - Festival Founder Heidi Perryman



Are you a "people person" who would like to get more involved in our organization's inner workings? We are looking for a

**Membership Chair** who would enroll new members, process renewals, and greet members and guests as they enter our monthly meetings. (You can sit wherever you like once the meetings get started). This is a Board of Directors position with full voting rights. Training and software provided. Reach out to Virginia Hamrick at vhamrick8@gmail.com.

## WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS:

*Castro Valley:* Deborah Pam; *Clayton:* Joan Duffield; *Danville:* Anne Sutherland; *El Cerrito:* Karen Anderson; *Orinda:* Christie Batterman Jordan

Would you like to help keep Mt. Diablo Audubon's website timely and engaging? Do you have experience working with WordPress software? We are looking for a **Web Editor** to post member-supplied content to our soon-to-be-relaunched website. This position would keep your finger on the pulse of outings, events and advocacy—everything going on in our chapter. Contact Maren Smith at marensmithbkk@yahoo.com

**Q: What songbird was divided into 2 separate species during the early 20th century, with one species limited to central and coastal California, and now a subspecies of the nominate species?**

## A: Red-winged Blackbird

The Red-winged Blackbird is one of the most abundant songbirds of North America. It lives in most of North America and Central America year around. It also breeds in the wetlands of Canada and migrates south in the fall to winter in Mexico and the southern United States.

This bird, *Agelaius phoeniceus*, is highly polygamous, with one male having up to 15 different females making nests in his territory, but one quarter to one half of nestlings turn out to have been sired by nearby males, not the territorial male.

Red-winged Blackbirds can have 2-3 broods in a year. To attract a mate and defend their territory, males flash their scarlet epaulets (red shoulder patches), hunch their shoulders forward and spread their tails, sing on high perches, make a slow, stalling song flight, and do a bill-tilt (*see photo*).

Females build cup-shaped nests made of marsh vegetation fastened to reeds, bushes or tall grasses. In Contra Costa County, Red-winged Blackbirds often nest in stands of mustard. In this photo taken at McNabney Marsh, the mustard has grown to about 6 feet tall! Females lay 3-5 bluish-green spotted eggs that they incubate for 11-13 days. The young stay in the nest for 9-12 days. The nestlings sometimes fall from their nest into water and can swim short distances to grab hold of reeds or cattails, but may get eaten by frogs, turtles, snakes and fish.

Other predation of the nests occurs as well. Raccoons, snakes, foxes and other birds, even as small as Marsh Wrens may prey on the nestlings and eggs. The Red-winged Blackbird is also a victim of brood parasites, particularly Brown-headed Cowbirds. Several adaptations have evolved in response to these predations. Colony nesting helps by increasing the number of alert parents. Nesting over water helps, as do alarm calls. Nests are often concealed in thick reeds and placed at 2-8 feet over water. Mobbing, especially by males, is also used to fend off predators. The female's streaky brown coloration helps to camouflage her at or near her nest.

After the breeding season, Red-winged Blackbirds flock with other blackbirds, grackles, starlings and cowbirds, feeding on open ground and roosting in flocks of thousands of birds. Red-winged Blackbirds are omnivorous, feeding primarily on plant materials including seeds and waste grain from corn and rice. A quarter of their diet consists of insects and other invertebrates, but during the breeding season, they feed their young almost 100 percent insects for the protein that ensures rapid growth.

A subspecies occurs in coastal and central California that was considered a species in the early 20th century. It was called the Bicolored Blackbird because the male's epaulet has only one color, red, not bordered in yellow as are other Red-winged Blackbirds. Its scientific name was *Agelaius gubernator californicus*.

Red-winged Blackbirds may be one of the most abundant native birds in North America, but their populations have declined by over 30 percent between 1966 and 2014, according to the North American Breeding Bird Survey. This decline is due in large part to habitat loss due to drainage of wetlands for agriculture and development. They are also targeted at their large roosts in agricultural areas, where the birds can cause significant crop damage. In these areas, control measures include shooting, trapping and poisoning. —Jean Halford





# International Gifts Support Migratory Birds

This winter I was very happy to return to my favorite place in the world, southern México. The great food, wonderful people and beautiful forests and ancient ruins that I experienced in this global biodiversity hotspot were no surprise, as I had lived and worked on conservation projects here before. But what did surprise me was that I saw so many species, and such high concentrations, of birds like Western Tanager and Wilson's Warbler that I always thought of as California birds! This was a great reminder of something we all know, but might not fully appreciate: Many birds migrate, so if conservation efforts (and donations) only focus on the places in the developed world where most birders are used to seeing them, we're missing what's happening in their wintering and migratory habitats further south, in the Tropics.



This is especially true for Diablo-area birds. Of the 161 species identified in the *Contra Costa Breeding Bird Atlas* that breed in the county, 42 percent are migratory, with a significant portion (in many cases, most), of their migration and wintering habitat south of the United States. Just click on the "Abundance animation" tab for Western Tanager and Bullock's Oriole (*photo Beth Branthaver*) under the eBird website's "Science" section to see how important México and Central America are to the survival of these beautiful species. The Partners in Flight network, World Migratory Bird Day (May 11), and even the 101-year old Migratory Bird Treaty Act are all efforts to protect birds across the length and breadth of the many countries and habitats they call home throughout the year.

In this spirit, earlier this year Mt. Diablo Audubon Society donated to three organizations in the Tropics whose work contributes to bird monitoring, research and conservation, and who are in great need of funding. They are [Monitores Comunitarios \(Community Monitors\) Siyaj Chan](#), a group using monitoring and avitourism to protect the Selva Maya Lacandón rainforest, (you can donate [here](#)), [The Nature Conservancy México \(Chiapas Chapter\)](#), the southern México chapter of the international conservation group, (you can donate [here](#)) and [Pronatura Sur](#), a local NGO active in everything from reforestation to

writing conservation easements (you can donate [here](#)). The money given to these groups by MDAS has helped cover the cost of greatly needed equipment and program expenses, and contributes to the conservation of Diablo-area birds through population monitoring, habitat conservation and restoration, and community patrolling, among other things. But it's just the tip of the iceberg. MDAS will look to donate to other international organizations in the future, but we hope you can donate today. To protect the birds you love seeing every spring and summer, please consider donating to organizations trying to protect them in their winter and fall homes. -*Young Birders*

*Coordinator Juan Pablo Galván*

## Funding Conservation

I recently read with much gratification that Congress passed and the president signed the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act. This is a sweeping bill that covers a wide variety of subjects related to environmental protection, including the reauthorization of the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act. The law provides direct conservation support for 386 species and their habitats in Central and South America.

In recognition of the urgent need for increased funding to protect vital habitat in the tropics, MDAS Board Member Juan Pablo Galván presented at the March board meeting information about several organizations in Mexico as well as Central and South America that would be good candidates for a donation from MDAS. After discussion, the Board approved the following contributions: \$3,000 to Siyaj Chan and \$500 each to the Nature Conservancy Mexico and Pronatura Sur.

Other donations approved by the board include:

Native Bird Connections	\$2,500
The Gardens at Heather Farm	500
Golden Gate Raptor Observatory	500
John Muir Land Trust	500
International Bird Rescue	1,000
Tesla Park Fund	1,000

Thank you to the members of Mt. Diablo Audubon whose gifts support our directed donations. -*Paul Schorr*

Spring usually brings pleasant birding weather, along with the return of many of the local breeding birds in good color and lively song. – *Maury Stern*

## Observations

(March 11–April 30, 2019)

SD saw 8 **Greater White-fronted Geese** with a single **Snow Goose** near the Rosie the Riveter area in Richmond. AL saw a single **White-fronted Goose** at McNabney Marsh 4/30.

A **Mute Swan** was at McNabney Marsh 3/20. SH

Six **Wood Ducks** were in the creek at Upper San Leandro Reservoir 3/11. JL

The Richmond Marina **Black Scoter** was seen 3/14 by MK and 3/16 by ST. An additional 13 people saw it as well.

JL saw 11 **Common Mergansers** at Upper San Leandro Reservoir 3/11.

A **Common Poorwill** was seen in the early morning of 4/17 on Red Road on Mt. Diablo by TFr and PG.

Six **Vaux's Swifts** were over Black Point Trail at Mt. Diablo SP 4/22. PM

A **Black-chinned Hummingbird** was at P&NS's Antioch home 3/15.

MD and his birding class saw 5 **Rufous Hummingbirds** at Mt. Diablo 4/20.

An **Allen's Hummingbird** was at Mt. Diablo 4/22. PM

Numerous **Calliope Hummingbirds** were along Red Road, Black Point, and Globe Lily Trails. 8 on 4/11; TFr, PG, and 7 on 4/20 by MD.

A **Virginia Rail** was at Jewel Lake in Tilden Nature Area 4/7, PY, and 4/8 MSh.

RR saw a **Pigeon Guillemot** off Pt. Potrero in Richmond 3/24.

AL saw 3 **Mew Gulls** at West County Wastewater District in Richmond 3/14.

Three **Caspian Terns** were at Heather Farm Pond 4/20. FS

BB saw a **Ferruginous Hawk** near Curry Point on Mt. Diablo 4/25.

On 4/21, STr took a video of a **Golden Eagle** flying over Hercules.

PG and TFr had a **Western Screech Owl** in Mitchell Canyon 4/17.

A **Northern Pygmy-Owl** was at the entrance to the Sibley Volcanic Regional Preserve 3/16, DW, KM; 3/18, BT; 3/19 KP; and 3/26, AL. Another was at Valle Vista Staging Area 4/6, SN, CD, WH, KN.

An **Acorn Woodpecker** 4/26 was a rarity for Heather Farm. HH

A **Pileated Woodpecker** was near the Skyline Gate at Redwood Regional Park 4/29. PG

A nesting pair of **American Kestrels** were in Hercules 4/20. STr

An **Olive-sided Flycatcher** was first seen 4/10 at the Tilden Botanic Garden by AK and 4/11 by JH.

A **Hammond's Flycatcher** was seen in EM's Alamo yard 4/2. Others were in Mitchell Canyon 4/11, TFr, PG; and 4/13, DH.

A **Dusky Flycatcher** was at Castle Rock Park 4/7, TvL, and at Mitchell Canyon 4/14, MR.

JM saw a **Pacific-slope Flycatcher** 3/13 at Wildcat Canyon Park, and EM saw another at Diablo Foothills Park 3/15.

KH saw an **Ash-throated Flycatcher** at Hidden Lakes Park 4/6. MS saw several on the Lafayette Reservoir Rim Trail 4/19, and HH saw one at Heather Farm 4/20.

The **Tropical Kingbird** was seen by 23 observers with the last sighting 4/15. It will be gone soon if it hasn't left already.

EM saw a **Cassin's Vireo** 3/21 at Pine Canyon on Mt. Diablo. Three more were on Mt. Diablo Trails 4/2, EM. V&BL saw one at the Lafayette Reservoir 4/4, and MS had one at his Lafayette home 4/17.

On 4/3, TF heard and saw a **Brown Creeper** as well as 2 **House Wrens** just outside Castle Rock Park.

EM saw 17 **Blue-gray Gnatcatchers** on Green Valley Regional Trail 4/2. PM saw one in the chamise 4/22 on Mt. Diablo and PB saw 2 near the Valle Vista parking lot.

A **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** was at Black Diamond Mines 4/30. Most have probably gone to the mountains. SC.

EM saw a **Townsend's Solitaire** at Round Valley Regional Park 3/23.



**Swainson's Thrushes** were at Mitchell Canyon 4/14, JC, BT and 4/22, PM. One at Briones was seen by KA, 4/17.

A **Varied Thrush** was in Mitchell Canyon 4/28. CW, JW, KP. A surprisingly small number of this species were reported this winter.

JD and PP heard and saw 2 singing **California Thrashers** at Kennedy Grove in El Sobrante 4/21.

**Cedar Waxwing** flocks were seen by many during the period.

JL saw an early **Orange-crowned Warbler** 3/11 at the Valle Vista Staging Area. EM found 6 in some willows in Pine Canyon.

MRi had a first of the season **Nashville Warbler** at his Richmond Annex home. TF saw one at Pine Canyon 4/4. DH saw 4 on Mt. Diablo 4/13, and TFr and PG saw 6 in Mitchell Canyon 4/17.

**MacGillivray's Warblers** were on the Black Point Trail of Mt. Diablo 4/17. TFr, PG. MD and his class saw one in White Canyon 4/20.

JP saw a **Yellow Warbler** at Valle Vista 4/13.

**Black-throated Gray Warblers** were numerous. TF at Pine Canyon 4/4. DH with 16 on Mitchell Canyon and Black Point Trail, and MD with 3 in Mitchell Canyon 4/20.

A **Hermit Warbler** was at Mt. Diablo 4/14, MR, and MD saw 2 in White Canyon 4/20.

A very surprising **Green-tailed Towhee** was at Black Diamond Mines 4/18. HH, BD

A **Chipping Sparrow** was at the Mt. Diablo junction 4/23. HH

EG saw a **Black-chinned Sparrow** 4/28 in Mitchell Canyon.

A **Lincoln's Sparrow** was at Valle Vista 3/11, JL. Another was at Pine Canyon 4/4. TF

RR saw a **Swamp Sparrow** at the Valle Vista area 3/30.

**White-throated Sparrows** were at Cherry Lane and Contra Costa Canal Trail 3/11, FS. RB had one for a month at her Walnut Creek home. On 3/23, DF saw one on the Orinda Connector Trail off Bear Valley Road in Orinda.

The most unusual bird of the month sent a large number of visitors to Castle Rock Park. A **Harris's Sparrow** was found 3/15 by TF, JM, and EM. At least 65 more people reported the bird.

PS found a **Western Tanager** near the entrance to Black Diamond Mines 4/19, and 2 were at Mitchell Canyon 4/20. MD

CM had a **Black-headed Grosbeak**

at his Alamo home 3/23. PY saw one 4/7 at Tilden's Jewel Lake 4/7, and M&SS had one at their Lafayette home 4/15.

A **Lazuli Bunting** was near the Globe Lily Trail 4/20. MD

3 **Great-tailed Grackles** were seen by HH at Heather Farm 4/1, and HS had a video from 3/20.

GW saw a **Brown-headed Cowbird** in Richmond 4/7.

**Hooded Orioles** were seen 3/30 in San Ramon, SL, and Hercules, STr, and 4/18 in Martinez, JB, and 4/19 in Alamo. JR

**Bullock's Orioles** returned to Castle Rock Park 3/24. TF, P&NS

*To submit sightings, write Maury Stern at [mbstern2@yahoo.com](mailto:mbstern2@yahoo.com) or call (925) 284-5980.*

KA Karen Anderson, PB Pat Bacchetti, RB Ruth Barcelon, JB Jackie Bobrowsky, BB Bob Bolles, JC Juli Chamberlin, SC Srikant Char, SD Sheila Dickie, CD Carla Din, MD Matthew Dodder, JD Judith Dunham, BD Bob Dunn, TF Tracy Farrington, DF Dan Fitzgerald, TFr Teale Fristoe, PG Philip Georgakakos, EG Eli Gross, HH Hugh Harvey, DH Derek Heins, JH Jeff Hendricks, KH Kevin Hints, WH William Hudson, SH Steve Hutchcraft, AK Allison Kidder, MK Marilyn Kinch, V&BL Virginia and Barry Langdon-Lassange, JH Johan Langewis, AL Albert Linkowski, SL Steve Lombardi, TvL Trevor van Loon, PM Patricia Maloney, JM John Missing, EM Ethan Monk, CM Carter Moore, KM Kimberlie Motou, SN Sharol Nelson-Embry, KN Karyn Noel, PP Pam Peck, JP John Poole, KP Kir Pridatko, RR Robert Raffel, MR Mark Rauzon, JR Jean Richmond, MRi Matt Ricketts, FS Fred Safier, PS Paul Schorr, P&NS Paul and Nancy Schorr, MSh Mike Shannon, HS H Stanton, MS Maury Stern, M&SS Maury and Susan Stern, ST Susan Teefy, BT Bob Toleno, STr Susana Trapaga, DW Denise Wight, GW Greg Wilson, CW Charlie Woidat, JW James Woidat, PY Pam Young



Want to know where birds in Contra Costa and Alameda County are now? Join the MDAS East Bay Birding Sightings group at <https://groups.io/g/EBB-Sightings>.

**Mt. Diablo Audubon Society**

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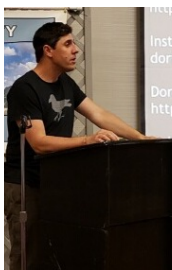
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*Nice catch! Maren Smith nabbed this photo of a Hammond's Flycatcher when she went looking for Calliope Hummingbirds in Mitchell Canyon.*



*From Left: Georgette Howington presents Brian Murphy's stunning photos taken over decades exploring Heather Farm Park. Dorian Anderson explains why he hit the road to bike for birds. MDAS members Mike Eliot, Carol Pachl, Ariana Rickard, Georgette Howington, Napa-Solano's Nancy Piotrowski and our own Tom Garry pause on the Capitol steps before meeting with lawmakers during Audubon Advocacy Day. Juan-Carlos Solis (far right) leads a group through Mt. Burdell Open Space as part of his Avian Treasures class. At the John Muir Birthday/Earth Day celebration, Ariana Rickard's husband, Pierre Bull, beams proudly as their sons play with the possibility of becoming future park rangers. (Photos from Left: First, second and fourth from Dave Shinn, third from a friendly Sacramento bystander, last from Ariana Rickard)*