



Mt. Diablo Audubon Society

The Quail

VOL. 65 No. 5

FEBRUARY 2020

Next Meeting: Thursday, February 6

The Mt. Diablo Audubon Society will meet **Thursday, February 6**, in the Camelia Room of **The Gardens at Heather Farm**, 1540 Marchbanks Drive, Walnut Creek.

6:30 PM Doors Open

7:00 PM Birding Info: *The Peregrine Team in Pine Canyon*

7:25 PM News

7:40 PM Snacks* and Raffle

8:00 PM Main Program: *Audubon Climate Report*

**as a conservation organization we encourage you to bring your own mug for coffee or tea*

8:00 PM Main Program: ***Audubon Climate Report***

Juan Pablo Galván



Audubon's new science shows that two-thirds (389 out of 604) of North American bird species are at risk of extinction from climate change. The good news is that our science also shows that if we take action now we can help improve the chances for 76% of species at risk. MDAS

Young Birders Club Chairperson Juan Pablo Galván will present Audubon's new report on the impacts of climate change on birds. He'll also show the

drastic impacts that climate change is already having on the Bay Area and other parts of the world, attempt to explain why it's been so difficult to make progress against a drastically warmer climate caused by humans, and make a provocative case for who is responsible for this tragedy. Most importantly, every person in the audience and everywhere on the planet must ACT NOW to prevent catastrophic climate change.

Juan Pablo leads the MDAS Young Birders Club. He grew up in Benicia, but since high school has lived and worked in Costa Rica, Mexico, Washington D.C., and different parts of California. Juan Pablo has always loved animals and been interested in learning about and protecting them and the habitats they live in—even since kindergarten when he brought an octopus in for show and tell. Juan Pablo graduated from the University of California, San Diego, with a B.S. in Ecology, Behavior, and Evolution and a minor in Political Science. Then after working in Mexico for a year, he pursued an M.S. in Sustainable Development and Conservation Biology at the University of Maryland, College Park. He's been back and forth between Mexico, Sacramento, and other places, but has lived in the Bay Area the past six years hiking the mountains and checking out the beaches.



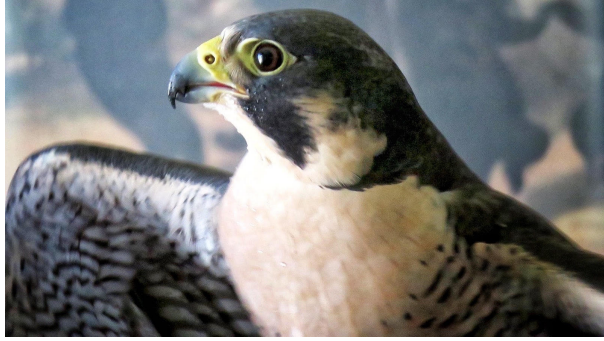
Photo: Juan Pablo Galván

7:00 PM Birding Info: ***The Peregrine Team in Pine Canyon***

Wally De Young

The Peregrine Team in Pine Canyon, an all-volunteer natural history education team, has just begun its sixth season helping to monitor this beautiful apex predator nesting on the western edge of Mt. Diablo State Park. You'll hear an update of last season from a core team member, Wally De Young, and see his brief, inspiring film about the falcons.

Photo: Maren Smith



Presidents' Letter

Maren Smith & Ariana Rickard, *MDAS Co-Presidents*



The year 2020 has a nice ring to it, doesn't it? It conjures up images of clear vision, and with that, high hopes for this year and the decade ahead. Let's harness our collective actions to make this planet a better place—for us, for future generations, and for the birds.



At times it's been easy to become frustrated, disillusioned, and/or overwhelmed in regard to ongoing environmental and climate change concerns. Wildfires burning out of control in Australia have torched over 15 million acres of land and experts estimate that one billion animals are dead. In the US, on a single day in January, the evening news reported tornadoes in the South, blizzards across the Midwest, and unseasonably warm 60-degree temperatures in Boston.

The best thing about the Mt. Diablo Audubon chapter is that it brings everyone together united in our love of and appreciation for birds as well as our strong

commitment to protecting their habitat. For the February monthly program, Young Birders Club Chairperson, Juan Pablo Galván, will give us an update on the effects of climate change on bird populations (through the lens of the recently released National Audubon study), a presentation, and a call to action.

We can all put forth a little more effort to adopt greener lifestyles. The “new” five Rs: **Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Repurpose, Recycle**, make sense. Refuse that plastic straw or bag (bring your own reusable straws and bags) and repurpose (your local thrift shops will appreciate your donations).

If you can, create less waste, consume less energy, compost, plant a tree, install solar panels, drive an electric car, help with a community science or conservation activity, or plant a California native plant garden that is bird, butterfly, and bee-friendly. Each person can help create a collective avalanche of change. As they say, think globally; act locally.

Speaking of native plants, plans are in the works to offer a tour of Conservation Chair, Nancy Wenninger’s California Natives garden as a model you can emulate. Nancy is also coordinating a Conservation work party in February to refurbish floating bird habitat structures in McNabney Marsh as well as a May 8 bird walk and Earth Day cleanup on the north side of McNabney Marsh. For more information, contact Nancy at: conservation@mtdiabloaudubon.org

Jerry Britten is working on plans to offer an eBird class to learn how to use the app with follow-up practice in the field. You will hone your skills while contributing important data to the Cornell Laboratory database. Watch for details in upcoming *Quail* newsletters and meetings.

There are plenty of opportunities to help with ongoing Community Science native plant restoration projects and bird surveys on Grayson Creek, as well as upcoming Friends of San Ramon Creek bird surveys, and an eye on helping Friends of Walnut Creek, too. Contact Alan Bade to get more info at: communityscience@mtdiabloaudubon.org

The Education Committee is working to provide public education birding posters in Walnut Creek’s Heather Farm Park and Open Space kiosks, but is also planning more activities for interested youth. On Wednesday, March 18, we will present a Beginning Birding program for Cub Scout Pack 1776 in San Ramon, so if you want to help educate the next generation of stewards of our planet, please contact Maren Smith to volunteer at: education@mtdiabloaudubon.org. With 58 Cub Scouts in the pack, we could use your help!

For more great ideas on how to help birds—such as drinking bird-friendly coffee, window safety to prevent bird strikes, or keeping cats indoor—check out

And for a little fun and to highlight all of our many talented member photographers, check out the **MDAS photo contest** that will culminate in the program for our end-of-year Potluck on June 4. Prizes will be awarded! Entries in five Adult categories and one Youth category must be received by May 13, but please check the website <https://mtdiabloaudubon.org/photo-contest/> for specific details. Get snapping!

So, put on those 2020 glasses and refocus. Find one thing that you can do in 2020 that will help our planet and the birds and wildlife we love; have the foresight and the insight to make it happen. Mother Earth will thank you.

“The only thing worse than being blind is having sight and no vision.”

~Helen Keller

Cheers to 2020 visions,

Maren Smith and Ariana Rickard, MDAS Co-Presidents

CORRECTION: In the December/January issue of *The Quail*, the link to the MDAS Instagram account is incorrect. Be sure to check out this great space for bird photographs at <https://www.instagram.com/mtdiabloaudubon/>.

Welcome, New Members!

Leslie Yoshitani, Walnut Creek; **Trudy and Charles Salter**, Layfayette; **Pam Giarrizzo**, Walnut Creek; **Lawrence Nathan**, Alamo; **Kathryn Martinsen**, Pleasant Hill; **Derek Lee**, Walnut Creek; **Lou Ann Maihofer**, Concord; **Beverly Lane**, Danville; **Jeffrey Bonneville**, Vallejo; **Raymond and Jerilyn Strong**, Danville; **Regina Dakin**, Martinez; **JoAnn Fujizawa**, Concord; **Tim Vogel**, Denville, NJ

New Mt. Diablo Audubon Society Caps

Be sure to drop by the raffle table at our next members meeting on February 6 to purchase tickets and see our beautiful new MDAS caps! They will be available for sale at \$17 apiece—cash or check please.



Give Us Your Best Shot!

We want to see your finest bird photos for the first-ever Mt. Diablo Audubon Photo Contest.

Submit original photographs taken within California in 6 categories:

- Bird in Action
- Bird Portrait (resting bird)
- Bird Group (small or large grouping; same or different species)
- Birds and Native Plants

- Humorous Shot
- Youth

Deadline for photo submissions is Wednesday, May 13, 2020. Prizes will be awarded in each category during a slide show of the winners and finalists at the June 4th Member Potluck meeting.

For full contest details, see <https://mtdiablobaudubon.org/photo-contest/>.

Upcoming Field Trips

Martinez Waterfront Birds

Wednesday, January 29, 9:00 AM–2:00 PM

Leader: Tracy Farrington

We will visit several areas along the Martinez shoreline. Meet at 9:00 AM in the Waterbird Regional Preserve parking lot. From I-680 N, take the exit for Waterfront Rd.; when driving north, this is the last exit before the Benicia Bridge. Go east about ½ mile and turn right onto Waterbird Way. Go around the corner to the left and then turn right into the parking lot. Bring lunch and a beverage. Leader: Tracy Farrington, 925-788-6223

Category 2

Thornton Area/Cosumnes Preserve

Saturday, February 1, 8:00 AM–5:00 PM

Leader: Ethan Chickering

We will look for Tundra Swans, Sandhill Cranes, hawks, and grassland birds. Carpool leaves Sunvalley Mall at 8:00 AM. Meet at 8:45 AM in Westgate Landing Park at end of Glascock Rd. Take SR 4 to Antioch Bridge, go north on SR 160 along river to Rio Vista bridge. Turn right on SR 12 for 11.5 miles. East of Terminous, turn right onto the exit to Glascock Rd. The road will go under the bridge. Turn left onto Glascock Rd. proper and continue to the park at the end. Trip will go in light rain. Bring lunch and a beverage. If questions, call the leader. Leader: Ethan Chickering, 925-686-9231.

Category 1

Contra Loma Reservoir (Wild Birds Unlimited Bird Walk Series)

Saturday, February 1, 8:00 AM–12:00 PM

Leader: Kevin Hintsa

An easy winter three mile stroll looking for Common Gallinules, Green Herons, soras, as well as Red-shouldered Hawks, harriers, and other raptors. Leave at 8:00 AM from the Wild Birds Unlimited parking lot (692 Contra Costa Blvd, Pleasant Hill). Returning approximately 12:00 PM. Carpooling encouraged. Parking \$5.00. Wear

layers and bring rain gear. Donation to MDAS encouraged. Leader: Kevin Hintsa, 925-798-0303.

Category 1

Bodega Bay

Saturday, February 8, 7:15 AM–5:00 PM

Leader: Hugh Harvey

Bodega Bay is a premier location for wintering shorebirds, loons, gulls, cormorants, and waterfowl. The carpool leaves Sunvalley Mall at 7:30 AM. We will meet at the Tides Restaurant on water side of Highway 1 in Bodega at 9:15 AM. Take I-680 N across the Benicia Bridge. Go west on I-780 to I-80 towards Sacramento, exit to SR 37. Follow SR 37 to Lakeville Rd. and turn right. In Petaluma turn left on E Washington Street 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 wintering shorebirds including Black Oystercatcher, Wandering Tattler, and Marbled Godwit. Bring lunch, beverages, and sunscreen. Leader: Hugh Harvey, 925-935-2979.

Category 1

Grizzly Island Wildlife Area

Thursday, February 13, 7:30 AM–5:00 PM

Leader: Hugh Harvey

The California Department of Fish and Game's Grizzly Island Wildlife Area is in the heart of the 84,000-acre Suisun Marsh, the largest contiguous estuarine marsh in the United States. Grizzly Island provides habitat for more than 200 species of birds and is home to a variety of threatened or endangered wildlife and plants, including a herd of Tule Elk. Carpool leaves at 7:00 AM from Sunvalley Mall. Meet at 8:30 AM at Refuge headquarters. Take I-680 N, then I-80 E to SR12. Follow SR12 through Fairfield, watch for sign to Grizzly Island Refuge on right and follow road to headquarters. There is an entry fee for the refuge. Watch for raptors and Short-eared Owls along road. We may also bird at the Rush Ranch if time permits after finishing at Grizzly Island. Bring lunch and a beverage. Hugh Harvey, 925-935-2979.

Category 1

Sunol Regional Park

Wednesday, February 19, 7:30 AM–4:00 PM

Leader: Steve Taylor

Carpool leaves at 7:30 AM from Sycamore Valley Rd. Park and Ride lot in Danville. Meet at 8:00 AM in the first parking lot on the left, Sunol Regional Park. Go south on I-680 to Calaveras Rd. Go left under I-680 and drive 4 miles south on Calaveras; turn left on Geary Road and go 2 miles to park. Possible entry fee. Watch and listen for Wild Turkey along Geary Road. Golden Eagles and other raptors, Rufous-crowned Sparrows, Dipper, and Canyon and Rock Wrens are possible. Bring lunch and a beverage. Leader: Steve Taylor, 925-828-8810.

Los Banos/Panoche Valley (2 Days)

Saturday, February 22, 8:00 AM–Sunday, February 23, 5:00 PM

Leaders: Beth Branthaver & Hugh Harvey

On Saturday we will leave from Sycamore Valley Road Park & Ride at 6:30 AM or meet at McDonald's in Gustine at 8 AM. We will bird Santa Fe Grade Road, together with the San Luis and Merced Wildlife Refuges and should see a full range of waterfowl and raptors. On Sunday we will bird Little Panoche Road and Panoche Valley. Target birds include Mountain Bluebird, Mountain Plover and Long-eared Owl. Motel options in Los Banos include Best Western Executive Inn (209) 827-0954, Los Banos Days Inn (209) 826-9690, and Vagabond Inn Executive Los Banos (209) 827-4677. Participants need to bring lunch for both days. A communal (optional) dinner is being planned for Saturday evening, let Beth know if you plan to join us. A fee is charged at Mercey Hot Springs. If you plan to go on the trip, please call the leaders as soon as possible for likely last-minute detail changes! Bring a radio if you have one. Leaders: Beth Branthaver, 510-502-4869 & Hugh Harvey, 925-935-2979.

Category 1

Walnut Creek City Parks

Wednesday, February 26, 8:30 AM–1:00 PM

Leader: Hugh Harvey

Meet 8:30 AM Heather Farm Park at wooden railing at the natural pond, just past the community center. This is down the hill from where our monthly meetings are held. We will continue our birding at the Borges Ranch off Castle Rock Road. Leader: Hugh Harvey, 925-935-2979.

Category 1

Contra Loma Reservoir

Wednesday, March 4, 7:45 AM–3:00 PM

Leader: Paul Schorr

Expected species include waterfowl and woodland, riparian/marsh, shore and grassland birds. Carpool leaves Sunvalley at 7:45 AM. Or meet the leader at 8:30 AM at the Channel Point Parking Lot in Contra Loma Regional Park. Go east on Highway 4 and exit at Lone Tree Way in Antioch. Continue south to Golf Course Road and turn right. Continue on Golf Course Road to Frederickson Lane, turn right and continue into the park and the entrance kiosk. Fee required at kiosk. Turn left and continue to first parking lot on right, which is Channel Point Parking Lot. Leader: Paul Schorr, 925-998-0070.

Category 1

Coyote Hills (Wild Birds Unlimited Bird Walk Series)

Saturday, March 7, 8:00 AM–2:00 PM

Leader: Kevin Hintsa

Walk among the Ohlone Indian grounds and shell mounds looking for Northern Harriers, Great Horned Owls, rare Rough-legged Hawks and Pygmy Owls. Also seeing many marsh & shore birds, ducks, yellowthroats, meadowlarks, Hermit Thrushes, and rare Black-and-white Warblers. Leave at 8:00 AM from the Wild Birds Unlimited parking lot (692 Contra Costa Blvd, Pleasant Hill). Returning approximately 2:00 PM. Carpooling encouraged. Parking \$5.00. Wear layers and bring lunch. Donation to MDAS encouraged. Leader: Kevin Hints, 925-798-0303.

Category 2

Mt. View Sanitary/McNabney Marsh

Tuesday, March 17, 9:00 AM–2:00 PM

Leader: Steve Taylor

Expect close-up looks at dabbling ducks, possibly bitterns and herons. Meet at 9:00 AM at the Mt. View Sanitary Visitor Center. Exit from I-680 S at Arthur Road, turn left and go under the freeway. Exit I-680 N at Pacheco Blvd, turn right onto Arthur Road and go under the freeway. Arthur Road will turn left. At 0.4 miles turn sharp left onto Mt. View Sanitary's private road. Follow the road through the entry gate, alongside the freeway and through the tunnel under I-680. Park and sign-in at the Visitor Center. Trails may be muddy. After walking around the ponds we will drive back through the tunnel to the viewing platform on the left to observe more birds and also complete a check list of the birds we saw at the ponds. Leader: Steve Taylor, 925-828-8810.

Category 2

Valle Vista

Friday, March 20, 8:00 AM–12:00 PM

Leader: Don Lewis

We can expect 55–60 species at this EBMUD trail, and be finished by noon! Meet at 8:00 AM at Valle Vista staging area off Canyon Road in Moraga. From SR 24 in Orinda, take Moraga Way to Moraga. From Mt. Diablo Blvd in Lafayette, take Moraga Road south to Moraga. At the Chevron station, go south 1 mile on Canyon Road to Valle Vista. Leader: Don Lewis, 925-284-5480.

Category 2

To view all upcoming trips, see "Field Trips" under Birding at <http://www.mtdiabloaudubon.org>.

Field trips open to members and non-members, beginners to advanced birders. No dogs. Contact leader with questions. MDAS encourages carpooling (riders help with gas, tolls, or entry fees). Drivers who carpool should carry proof of liability insurance in their vehicles.

Category 1: Easy; little walking, smooth paths.

Category 2: Moderate; more than one mile, possibly rougher terrain.

Category 3: Difficult; extensive walking on rough terrain.

Nesting Season Is Coming

Mike Eliot, *Member-at-Large*

Mid-winter is the time when many backyard birds begin to search for nesting sites. Some, like wrens, chickadees, titmice, and bluebirds are cavity nesters, while most others in this area prefer to construct nests high in trees.



If you wish to watch birds nesting, you can provide nest boxes for the cavity nesters. Always consider what's best for both you and the birds. There are lots of crafty boxes out there that are mainly designed for decoration and can be harmful to birds and their young.



Appropriate nest boxes are sized for the species of bird you wish to attract. First, birds notice the opening and its size. If the hole is too large birds will reject it because they fear predators can gain entry. The height of the opening above the floor is also sized by species to provide safety and access.

Box material and thickness is important for keeping the box both warm in cold weather and preventing too much heat entering in hot weather. Some materials, paints, varnishes, and decorations can be harmful or fatal to birds.

Well-built boxes also provide ventilation and drainage openings, as well as interior ladders to allow fledglings to climb out. They do not have exterior perches that make it easier for predators to attack.

Good boxes are easy to use. They often have hinged tops, allowing occasional viewing, and side or front doors to allow for easy cleaning after nesting season ends.

When installing nest boxes, the opening should be widely visible to birds flying by and to people watching the nest activity. Putting them out in mid-winter allows birds to get used to them before nesting season starts. Height above the ground is also important so that birds feel safe from ground predators.

Nesting material is available that birds can use to line nests. This product will help with warmth and make comfortable places for nestlings in the spring. Lint and other fibrous materials can be toxic or can tangle on birds' feet.

After nesting season, boxes should be taken down and cleaned thoroughly to remove wastes and old nesting material and prevent mite and insect infestations.

For more information about correct nest box types, accessories, and how to mount them appropriately, call me at Wild Birds Unlimited (925-798-0303) or download the brochure from our website: www.wbu.com/pleasanthill

Field Trip Reports

American Canyon Wetlands

December 12, 2019

The skies cleared in time for our December 12 American Canyon Wetlands field trip, and 14 birders led by Chris and Teri Wills recorded 80 species! Countless avocets on the Napa River flew in a huge flock to a high tide roost in a protected cove. The group beheld over a hundred Black-crowned Night-Herons in a rookery as Sora browsed nearby. Many Canvasbacks, Common Goldeneye and Cinnamon Teals were seen, and shorebirds included Willets, Godwits, Curlews and a few Black-necked Stilts. A Northern Harrier patrolled overhead, along with two Peregrines, a Red-tailed Hawk and a White-tailed Kite. Want to join us on a jaunt? <https://mtdiabloaudubon.org/birding/birding-trips/>



Avocet with Green-winged Teal, American Canyon Wetlands

Photo: Isaac Aronow

Sacramento Valley Refuges

December 21, 2019

Seven intrepid birders led by Beth Branthaver headed off in the fog for the Sacramento Refuges on December 21st. They moved through a number of the refuges including Colusa National Wildlife Refuge, Llano Seco Wildlife Management Area, and Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge. In spite of the fog, we were able to see 65 species. Highlights of the trip included several sightings of Bald Eagles, in trees and on the ground feasting on waterfowl, several Ring-necked Pheasants, flocks of geese on the ground and in the air, large numbers of Tundra Swans, a small group of Sandhill Cranes, and all the usual wintering ducks. Among the geese we found Ross's, Snow (several blue morphs of each), and Greater White-fronted. Ducks included Gadwall, Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, Cinnamon Teal, Ring-necked Duck, Buffleheads, Ruddy Ducks, Mallards, and American Wigeon. They also saw a Eurasian Wigeon. They did find a small group of Common Gallinules and a single posing Wilson's Snipe. For raptors they saw, in addition to the Bald Eagles, Northern

Harriers, Cooper's Hawk, several Red-shouldered Hawks, and numerous Red-tailed Hawks. At Colusa, the Black-crowned Night-Heron rookery was thriving as usual.



Left: Ring-necked Pheasant (Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge)

Right: Northern Pintail (Llano Seco Wildlife Management Area)

Photos: Isaac Aronow

Solano County Raptors

December 28, 2019

Gary Fregien led 21 eager birders through Southeast Solano County's grassland on a brilliantly clear cold Saturday on December 28. The 50 species sighted included numerous American Kestrels, two Prairie Falcons, a Great Horned Owl, a number of Loggerhead Shrikes, Horned Larks, Lark Sparrows, Burrowing Owls, five Wilson's Snipes and two wonderful Mountain Plovers. The Jepson Prairie Reserve, a haven of uncut native grasses, provided a view of how California looked when Native Americans occupied the land.



Left: Horned Lark (Solano County) Photo: Isaac Aronow

Right: Burrowing Owl (Solano County) Photo: Beth Branthaver

Putah Creek

January 4, 2020

32 enthusiastic birders led by Fred Safier spotted an impressive 71 species on a gloriously sunny day at Putah Creek/Lake Solano. Familiar sightings included Buffleheads, a Green Heron, Common Goldeneye, White-breasted Nuthatch, Yellow-rumped Warblers, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, and an Osprey who crossed the trail and landed in a tree.

Special sightings: Eurasian Wigeon, Barrow's Goldeneye, Hooded Merganser, Sora, a female Phainopepla, White-throated Swift, four Bald Eagles, Common Merganser, Red-breasted Nuthatch (definitely a great year for them), Canyon Wren and a Pileated Woodpecker!



Bald Eagle (Putah Creek)
Photo: Isaac Aronow

Eastern Contra Costa County January 8, 2020

On January 8, Paul Schorr and 18 birders endured a cold morning at Break Regional Shoreline straining to identify birds in the dense mist. As the light improved, they called out Bufflehead, Pied-billed Grebe, Eared Grebe, Common Gallinule, American Coot, Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Black-crowned Night Heron and Common Yellowthroat. As they returned to the parking lot they added: Killdeer; Northern Flicker; Song, Lincoln's, White-crowned, Golden-crowned and Fox Sparrows; Say's and Black Phoebes; Downy Woodpecker; Red-shouldered Hawk; California Scrub-Jay; Northern Mockingbird; and a covey of about twelve California Quail.

Then it was on to the Big Break Trail near Iron House Sanitary District. Visibility had improved and the following species were added: Canada Goose; Gadwall; Mallard; White-tailed Kite; Northern Harrier; Cooper's Hawk; American Kestrel; Marsh Wren; Sora (heard); Black-necked Stilt; Savannah Sparrow; Ruby-crowned Kinglet and Yellow-rumped Warbler.

While eating lunch at Cypress Grove Park, they were delighted to have terrific views of a flock of American Pipits, and a single Long-billed Curlew. The small lake nearby yielded Common Goldeneye; Common Merganser; Great and Snowy Egrets; and three Green Herons. A Green Heron was perched in a distant tree with a Great Blue Heron on the roof behind.

A ¼-mile stretch of Marsh Creek Trail delivered (thanks to the sharp eyes of Hugh Harvey) Tri-colored, Red-winged, and Brewer's Blackbirds; Western Meadowlark; and a Horned Lark. Excellent views of the developing Dutch Slough Tidal Marsh Restoration Project, begun in 2018, were an added bonus.

The group then headed to Knightsen hoping for a Yellow-billed Magpie and perhaps a Ferruginous Hawk. Although they dipped on the magpie, Teri Wills found a Ferruginous Hawk on a distant pole and everyone enjoyed nice scope views. Later a few folks decided to continue to Holland Tract and successfully added Tundra Swans, Sandhill Cranes, and Wilson's Snipe to the tally. Returning on Holland Tract Road, Ian Buchles spotted a Great

Horned Owl in a tree; a life bird for him! It was a great way to end the trip that accounted for 76 species seen and/or heard.



Savannah Sparrow (Eastern Contra Costa County)

Photo: Isaac Aronow

Lake Merritt/Arrowhead Marsh at High Tide

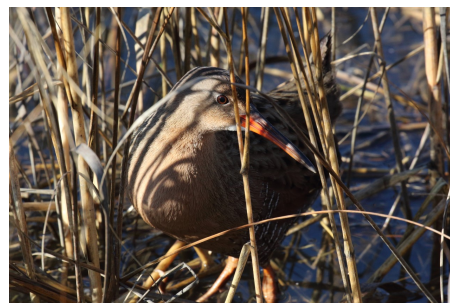
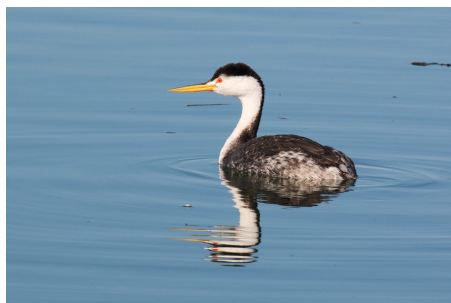
January 10, 2020

We had a sunny and windless day for our annual outing to these two spots. A very vocal female Belted Kingfisher entertained us at Lake Merritt. The duck numbers are still down on the lake, but we did manage to see eight different species. Sadly, the Barrow's Golden Eye did not put in an appearance. We also saw five of the six grebe species there, only missing the Red-necked Grebe.

Our start at Arrowhead Marsh was disappointing as there were no Burrowing Owls present on any of the four mounds, and there was no water in the protected area where we, in many years, see a nice variety of ducks and gulls. When we arrived to search for the rails, we were told that a count survey was in progress. A very noisy boat had started at the dock area and frightened the rails. It took a lot of searching before one Ridgway's Rail was found close to the dock, which afforded everyone nice views. We saw no Soras.

Garretson Point also held disappointment in that the rainwater pond was dry. Our usual chance at all three Teal species didn't happen. Some of the shorebirds that are also seen in the pond were spotted on the far shores of the channel.

There were 13 participants, and we saw 61 species for the day.



Left: Clark's Grebe (Arrowhead Marsh) Photo: Beth Branthaver

Right: Ridgway's Rail (Arrowhead Marsh) Photo: Beth Branthaver

Shollenberger Park/Ellis Creek

January 18, 2020

Shollenberger Park/Ellis Creek, January 18: With us being unable to start our day at Las Gallinas Wastewater Treatment Plant due to a construction project, we had more time to spend at these two sites. Ellis Creek was quite productive with a good selection of duck species, a beautiful Red-shouldered Hawk, a low flying Northern Harrier, eye-popping Western Meadowlarks and two Woodpecker species, Nuttall's and Downy. The standouts at Ellis Creek were the Virginia Rail that was heard and the two American Bitterns that were sighted. One was in an expected reedy area right along the water, but the second was standing in an open field, off of the parking lot. Shollenberger Park had a few additional duck species, which included a nice sighting of a Eurasian Wigeon. In difficult lighting and using scopes, a selection of shorebirds were seen, including Long-billed Curlew, American Avocet, Black-necked Stilt, and Least Sandpipers. Some of the group also spotted a Sora. Our group of thirteen birders saw 67 species for the day.



American Bittern (Shollenberger Park/Ellis Creek)

Photo: Beth Branthaver

Reflections On Our 2019 Christmas Bird Count

Elizabeth Leite, *Christmas Bird Count (CBC) Chair*

Every year's CBC results are different and 2019 was no exception. While the goal of the Count is to primarily document the presence or absence of historical species and to watch the fluctuation of actual numbers, conclusions can always be made from this data. And as usual, some themes presented themselves fairly easily.



Blue-grey Gnatcatcher at Vasco Caves
Photo: Jerry Britten

During this past Central Count survey, parties and individuals spotted 27,708 individual birds and 146 species. In 2018 the number was 33,383 with 145 species. Given that we had more survey parties out looking this year we would expect to have located more individuals. Should this be a cause for concern? Perhaps yes, but in truth species numbers tallied during the count day fluctuate wildly over the years. This year we did temporarily lose some reliable habitat at the Concord Naval Weapons Station which always yields shorebirds, marsh birds, and waterfowl which can be numerous. When the Weapons Station plans logistical activities, we are not permitted access. Of course, lower numbers of migratory species could possibly be the result of continued favorable weather conditions elsewhere. We just don't know. As to species, we did lose reliable locations for two. Over the years Spotted Sandpiper could predictably be found near the PG&E power plant which is no longer accessible, and Jean Richmond almost always recorded White-throated Sparrow on her Feederwatch report. So perhaps these species will be less reliably seen on future counts.

The East County count tallied 143 species and 35,799 individuals, very close to our historical average since the inception of this count in 2000. Individual counts could have been significantly higher, but bad lighting and distance prevented us from counting large rafts of gulls and waterfowl on Los Vaqueros Reservoir and Clifton Court Forebay.

On a positive note, searching "created" suburban habitat (local parks) offered interesting species on both Counts. Many of us visited community parks which yielded warblers and even Chipping Sparrows on Central and numerous specialties on Eastern. Eleven Wood-ducks were located within Rossmoor and in the Walnut Creek Civic Park creek area. A tiny community park in south Brentwood provided habitat for several warblers including a Black-throated Gray, Chestnut-backed Chickadees, unusual this far east, and even a Western Tanager (a first for the East County Count).



Western Tanager at Creekside Park
Photo: Srikant Char

Finally, I'd like to mention that we have new leaders and new volunteers which is tremendously important for the future of these Counts. Megan Jankowski assumed leadership of Pine Canyon this year which has gone through several sets of hands after Maury Stern stepped down. Filling in, Jean Halford and Mona Lange covered Paul Schorr's two surveys, and Cheryl Abel covered the Will's North Briones survey with three new volunteers. A team led by Brian Murphy surveyed Rossmoor for several hours and a new member, Michael Strom, picked up Walnut Creek sites and Sugarloaf Open Space. Sandy Ritchie led a survey of several parks in the Concord/Clayton area, and finally, new participant Joan Duffield surveyed Clayton Community Park, a hotspot which has had inadequate coverage in the past. These additions continue to enhance coverage of our Count Circle along with the Southgate area which we added last year. Thank you all. Thank you to our ten new volunteers and almost 100 combined participants! Special thanks to Jerry Britten, my co-compiler, who did much of the number crunching and shares decision making with me throughout. It is through his guidance that we are utilizing eBird to standardize compiling, develop GPS tracks, and provide an electronic record of what's occurred.

The Great Backyard Bird Count

Alan Bade, *Community Science*

One thing I love about birding is how easy it is to turn a very enjoyable hobby into effective citizen science that has real conservation benefits. Many members help with the **Christmas Bird Count**, record their checklists on **eBird**, and participate in programs such as **Feederwatch**. In February, we have another great project sponsored by Audubon and the Cornell lab of Ornithology: **The Great Backyard Bird Count**.

The GBBC was started in 1998 for our continent and went global in 2013. It provides a critical snapshot of where birds are right before their migrations. In 2019, a record number of 224,781 participants submitted 204,921 checklists, with 6,699 species. Every year, the GBBC grows bigger; a wonderful indication of how birders are embracing citizen science! It is only through such efforts that scientists can hope to keep track of the complicated movements of



vast numbers of birds all over the world. The GBBC is a wonderful modern complement to the 120 years of the CBC.

One innovative element of the GBBC is that the results can be observed in real time during the event, a first for an online citizen science project. On the program website participants can explore maps and charts that show what others are reporting during and after the count.

It's easy to participate! Participants are asked to count birds for



as little as 15 minutes (or as long as they wish) on one or more days of the four-day event and report their sightings online at <https://gbbc.birdcount.org/>.

Anyone can take part in the GBBC, from beginning bird watchers to experts, from your backyard, or anywhere in the world. If you are an eBird user, simply report your observations as usual, as eBird and the GBBC are completely integrated. Or, you can register as a new GBBC user and submit your observations directly into the GBBC database at <https://gbbc.birdcount.org/get-started/>.

MDAS members can also contribute results from group trips and only one member needs to enter the group's results. eBird users can share their results among the trip participants.

The 23rd annual GBBC will be held Friday, February 14 through Monday, February 17, 2020. Please visit the official website at <https://gbbc.birdcount.org/> for more information. MDAS encourages its members to contribute to this important citizen science project that expands a vital ornithological database.

Photos: Mike Eliot

Do you love birds and travel?

Check out the birds of the world with Golden Gate Audubon!

Visit the **world's largest wetlands** in Brazil. Get up-close views of **grey whales and nesting seabirds** off the coast of Baja California. Explore the wildlife in the **cloud forests** of Costa Rica or the **monsoon forests** of Australia. Discover the **birding wonders** of Everglades National Park in Florida. You can experience these adventures and **so much more** with Golden Gate Audubon. Consider these upcoming guided trips, courtesy of GGAS. For information, a detailed itinerary, and registration, please contact

GGAS Travel Coordinators at travelprogram@goldengateaudubon.org or visit their travel website at <https://goldengateaudubon.org/travel-with-ggas-2020/>.

Each trip includes a registration fee that benefits Golden Gate Audubon's conservation and environmental education programs. You will not only enjoy a terrific vacation, but you will help support Bay Area bird conservation!

Baja's Birds & Gray Whales

February 22–29, 2020



Belding's Yellow-throat

Photo: Juan-Carlos Solis

Explore Baja California's Cape region in search of birds and meet 35-ton gray whales during their annual migration to Baja's coastal lagoons. The Cape is one of Mexico's prime birding hotspots. It has six endemic bird species, including the stunning Xantus's hummingbird and various unique subspecies such as the pale San Lucas Robin.

Ohio: Eastern Warblers & Spring Migration Sensation

May 8–15, 2020

Northern Ohio is bordered by the great Lake Erie, creating expansive freshwater marshes. The lake is like a freshwater ocean, creating similar effects as birds migrate along its shores. In the spring, this can create a jaw-dropping spectacle as Blue Jays and many other species move along the lakefront in groups of 100+.



Cape May Warbler

Brazil—Birding & Wildlife Watching

September 21–October 1, 2020



This 11-day/10-night tour will explore the birds and wildlife of Pantanal and Chapada dos Guimarães and is designed to provide for our guests the most incredible birding and wildlife watching experience in this fabulous part of the planet.

Bhutan—Birding, Mammals, & Monasteries

May 2–May 20, 2021

Bhutan, a country roughly the size of Maryland, has almost 600 species of birds. Over 70% of its land is forested with 25% protected by National Parks. We will visit a range of environments varying from subtropical at 150 m to alpine at over 4,500 m.



Fire-tailed Myzornia

Photo: Chubzang Tangbi

Birding in Alaska—Or, “There’s no place like Nome”

June 3–13, 2021



Tufted Puffins

Explore America’s frontier in the vast state of Alaska! The focus of this tour will be birding and wildlife watching, with some geology and ecology in the mix. We’ll explore several major ecosystems across Alaska, including rugged coastlines, boreal forests, subalpine, and tundra. Many bird species breed and nest in the habitats we’ll visit.

Namibia and Botswana

August 12–24, 2021 and August 25–September 6, 2021

On this trip to Namibia and Botswana with Birding Ecotours, you will traverse amazingly diverse ecosystems from the Atlantic Ocean to the Namib Desert, the Erongo Mountains, Etosha National Park with its huge salt pan, the mixed woodland of the Caprivi Strip, and finally the Okavango Delta. This diversity ensures an unusually high number of mammal and bird species.



Southern Carmine Bee-eater

Photo: Andre Stapelberg

Madagascar Magic

September 25–October 8, 2021 with optional Masoala extension, October 8–13, 2021

The best word to describe Madagascar’s wildlife is unique. The planet’s fourth largest island, Madagascar is often called the eighth continent because it’s nothing



Helmet Vanga

Photo: Eric Schroeder

like Africa despite being so close to it. Madagascar is also a country of contrasts and these contrasts include its various ecosystems.

Notes from New England: Winter 2019/2020

Douglas Chickering

Newburyport, Massachusetts

Winter came early this year. A storm that would be more typical of a late January or February monster arrived in the first week of December. I know December is a winter month. But we usually don't experience this type of storm so early. Usually people worry about not having a white Christmas. I guess we can set those concerns aside. This was a true mid-winter blow with all the usual travails and struggles accompanying it. But it wasn't all negative. Newburyport was transformed by the snow, giving a mid-18th century aspect to the restored streets and alleys. The deep snow cover appears to blanket over the modern age, leaving a look reminiscent of the mid eighteenth century when Newburyport was in its heyday. Like a Currier and Ives print. Pre-Civil War, when we were a hotbed of the abolitionist movement and building Clipper ships that sailed the seven seas. Quite striking and beautiful for a while. I half expected to see small groups of carolers in top hats and long scarfs, singing their Christmas songs beneath the candlelight of the lampposts.

On Plum Island, especially on the refuge, there is a decidedly different look. Something more like out of a scene from Dr. Zhivago and the brutal wastes of the Siberian steppes. The storm has piled up the snow into drifts or scoured down to the sand and marsh grass. It looks windblown because it is, and the wind usually doesn't diminish much after the storm. I assume that it is storms and winters like this that drive people to Florida or California. They are like the chaff that the wind driveth away. Yet Plum Island, even under the most extreme circumstances isn't a barren wasteland, but instead just a different form of the abundance of life. The storms do pass, and the bright sunshine does come out, - brighter than at any other time as it reflects off the newly fallen snow. When I walk the road down the island, bundled against the cold, I feel the wind has a purifying effect. It is clean, and dry and free of waste.

The birds are what I look for. The birds of spring and summer have, mostly drained away during the fall, but they do not leave an empty island behind. They are replaced by the birds of winter in a regular and orderly fashion. To stand on the platform at Lot One and Lot Seven, scanning the panorama reveals these winter specialties. Three brands of Scoter, drift by in placid conditions or pop up and down in the rollers when the seas are rough. Seemingly unconcerned no matter the conditions: Purple Sandpipers cling to the rocks, sharing the shoreline with skittering Dunlin and Sanderlings. The number of

Common Eider grow and we birders search among them for the spectacular King Eider that occasionally will grace our shores.

On the land the Robins remain as do the Mockingbirds and Starlings; trying to eke out a living on the various berries of the season. There will be Juncos and a few Song Sparrows and a lot of American Tree Sparrows. Also, I expect to see a few Yellow-rumped Warblers because of the abundance of Bay berries that covered the island this year. And hopefully the specific passerines of winter; Redpolls and Crossbills. There was a Shrike that showed up in the fall and a single Yellow-breasted Chat—a spectacular looking bird—that I hope will stay and, occasionally, pop up to give us a surprise.



Yellow-breasted Chat

Photo: Kent Jensen/Macaulay Library at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology (ML59631831)

Then of course there are the prize birds of the winter: eagles and owls. I have already seen a pair Short-eared Owls working Cross Farm Hill and an adult Bald Eagle putting a multitude of Canada Geese and ducks to urgent flight as it glided over the salt marshes just south of the bridge. I haven't seen a Snowy Owl yet, but do expect to come across one sitting out on a staddle in the marshes. The iconic Plum Island winter bird, elegant in white, looking as opulent and menacing as an eastern potentate.

Douglas Chickering is the brother of MDAS Member Chick Chickering

February Gallery



Jill Hedgecock sharing her experiences in Kenya at the December 12, 2019 MDAS meeting
 Photo: Maren Smith



California Quail on Borges Ranch
 Contra Costa County Christmas Bird
 Count 2019
 Photo: Maren Smith



California Quail on Borges Ranch
 Contra Costa County Christmas Bird
 Count 2019
 Photo: Maren Smith



Christmas Bird Count Contra Costa
 County 2019, Mt. Diablo view
 Wendy Gollop, Alan Bade, Susan de



Sharp-shinned Hawk
 Christmas Bird Count 2019
 Photo: Maren Smith



Mt. Diablo Audubon Society Vice-President Jerry Britten reporting highlights of the 2019 Christmas Bird Counts at the January 2, 2020 MDAS meeting
Photo: Maren Smith



Benny Jacobs-Schwartz sharing his dazzling bird photos, videos, and animated storytelling with MDAS members at the January 2, 2020 meeting.
Photo: Maren Smith

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Mailing address:

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

Email address:

info@mtdiabloudubon.org

Mt. Diablo Audubon Society Leadership

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