



Mt. Diablo Audubon Society

The Quail

VOL. 65 No. 6

MARCH 2020

Next Member Meeting: Thursday, March 5

The Mt. Diablo Audubon Society will meet **Thursday, March 5**, 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: *Microplastics: The "Almost Invisible Threat"*

7:25 PM News

7:40 PM Refreshments* and Raffle

8:00 PM Main Program: *Birds Of The American West*

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

8:00 PM Main Program: *Birds Of The American West*

Norman Kikuchi, MD



This program features a glimpse into the lives of iconic birds of the western United States drawn from a personal selection of photographs from birding hotspots in New Mexico, Oregon, and California. Starting in the world-famous Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge in New Mexico, we witness the unforgettable spectacle

of immense flocks of Snow Geese and Sandhill Cranes.

Norman Kikuchi's childhood interest in birds began while stalking Ring-necked Pheasants in the foothills of Mt. Diablo, but his real bird epiphany occurred during his college days when he witnessed the impalement of a Western Fence Lizard by a Loggerhead Shrike on a Joshua tree spine. He was transfixed by the moment!

Norman graduated from the University of California, Davis, with a degree in Zoology and a minor in Herpetology. He completed medical school and family practice residency at the University of California, Irvine.



He currently practices Urgent Care and Occupational Medicine in Redding, California, and he is a lifetime member of the Santa Cruz Bird Club and a field trip leader for the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society.

Western Tanager (top)

Greater Sage-Grouse (bottom)

Photos: Norman Kikuchi, MD

7:00 PM Birding Info:

Microplastics: The "Almost Invisible Threat"

Jill Hedgecock

Microplastics are tiny fragments of plastic that are 5 millimeters (about the size of a grain of rice) or smaller. These fragments of plastics are everywhere: in table sea salt, in fish and shellfish, in detergent, and in personal care products. In her role as an environmental risk assessor, Jill has been on the leading edge of addressing the emerging environmental concern of microplastics. Jill will share information on this "almost invisible threat" and ideas on how every person can reduce their "plastic footprint". Jill Hedgecock is a long-time MDAS member. She has a master's degree in Environmental Management from University of San Francisco and a bachelor's degree in the biological sciences from University of California, Davis.

Photo: Jill Hedgecock



Presidents' Letter

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

On a February camping trip to Death Valley National Park, my husband and I were in awe as we re-explored the diverse desert habitat, having last visited over 30 years ago. Its other-worldly landscape is unique and varied, a desert filled with vast salt flats, ancient dried-up lake beds, volcanic craters, colorful rock palettes, undulating sand dunes, sheer canyons carved by infrequent, but gully-washing rains, historic mines, sweeping vistas, and a surprising salt marsh oasis where wildlife and plants have adapted to eke out a living.





Badlands from Zabriskie Point

Photo: Maren Smith

Visiting Badwater Basin, we were mere specks as we stood in the middle of 200 square miles of salt flats. At 282 feet below sea level, it is the lowest (and hottest and driest) point in North America. Yet, in the distance, we gazed upon the snow-capped Panamint Range and Telescope Peak topping out at over 11,000 feet. What a peculiar land of contrasts!



Badwater Basin and Telescope Peak, Panamint Mountain Range

Photo: Maren Smith

We are National Park enthusiasts, but still have a huge bucket list to tackle. Each National Park we have visited has been incredible, but Death Valley with 3.4 million acres and something new around every corner is pretty spectacular. As Wallace Stegner so aptly said, "National parks are the best idea we ever had. Absolutely American, absolutely democratic, they reflect us at our best rather than our worst." Amen.

It wasn't an overly birdy trip, but each bird we saw seemed like a small miracle. We enjoyed observing a resourceful Rock Wren as it flitted amongst the salt crystal formations in perpetual motion (and deep knee bends), admiring the persistence necessary to find food in such a hot, dry place.



Rock Wren at Badwater Basin

Photo: Maren Smith

One cool morning, we joined a ranger-led hike into Golden Canyon. She pointed out Desert Holly growing precariously out of tiny cracks in rock slabs, and high above us, ancient fossilized rocks embedded with wave patterns providing evidence of geologic forces, faults, and uplifts that had moved the rock upwards from ancient inland lake beds, many millions of years ago.

At the conclusion of the group hike, the ranger left us with a thought-provoking quote by Jane Goodall, a message she hoped might inspire us as we reflected upon all that we had seen and learned on our visit to Death Valley.

“You cannot get through a single day without having an impact on the world around you. What you do makes a difference and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make.”

It struck a resounding chord that echoed Juan Pablo Galván’s February program message detailing the Audubon Climate Change Report, the effects of climate change on birds and our planet, and his call to action. We can, and must, all do our part to make a difference.

In this issue of *The Quail*, there are articles that provide information and ideas on that very notion. Check out Young Birders Club Leader, Juan Pablo Galván’s article **“Do These Simple Things To Help Stop Climate Change”** to help Mother Earth. Sign up

for a tour of Conservation Chair, **Nancy Wenninger's California Native Plant garden** and learn how to create a water-wise, pollinator-friendly habitat. Grab a friend and volunteer for a fun, 2-hour shift at an upcoming **MDAS Outreach Tabling event**—your chance to educate the public, share the joys of birding, and inform visitors about our Audubon Chapter. The Hospitality Committee **could use some volunteers** to help setup or cleanup the refreshment tables at our monthly programs. The "**No Child Left Inside**" program needs a few more volunteers for this important May event, educating the next generation of birders. **Volunteer with a local creeks group**, working to eradicate arundo, an invasive plant, and replanting to create bird habitat. Get involved!

It's March and the hills are an emerald green color that rivals Ireland, a sign that spring has sprung. We both hope to see you at an outreach event or on a **partnership hike** or field trip this spring. Let's all get out there and make a positive impact—collectively, we can make a difference.

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

Welcome, New Members!

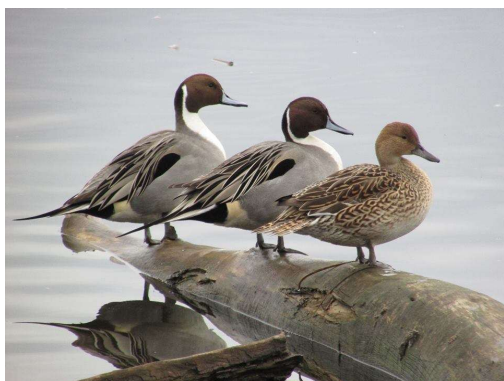
Audrey Staton, Walnut Creek; **Peter Shen**, Castro Valley; **Sergio Llorens**, Walnut Creek; **Sarah Yang**, Antioch; **Rose Babcock**, San Ramon; **Jeffrey Maier**, Lafayette; **Karen Sutton**, San Ramon; **Charles Fox**, Santa Fe, NM; **David Thomas**, Castro Valley; **Debra De Leon**, Clayton; **Louise Rowland**, Moraga

New Mt. Diablo Audubon Society Caps

Be sure to drop by the raffle table at our next member meeting on March 5 to purchase tickets and see our beautiful new MDAS caps! They will be available for sale at \$17 apiece—cash or check, please.



Entries Now Being Accepted For The First-Ever MDAS Photography Competition!



Northern Pintails

Photo: Maren Smith



Green Heron feeding

Photo: Christine Kass

No special skill or equipment is required — just send your coolest shots.

Awards and Slide Show
at June 4 Potluck Meeting.

See rules and enter at

<https://mtdiabloaudubon.org/photo-contest/>

Must be an MDAS member to enter.

Memberships start at \$25. Join or renew your membership [here](#).



White-breasted Nuthatch

Photo: Jean Halford

Upcoming Field Trips

Walnut Creek City Parks

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

Leader: Hugh Harvey 925-935-2979

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 925-998-0070

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 925-798-0303

Walk among the Ohlone Indian grounds and shell mounds looking for Northern Harriers, Great Horned Owls, rare Rough-legged Hawks and Northern Pygmy Owls. We also hope to see many marsh and 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 Hintsa, 925-798-0303.

Category 2

Mt. View Sanitary/McNabney Marsh

Tuesday, March 17, 9:00 AM–2:00 PM

Leader: Steve Taylor 925-828-8810

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 925-284-5480

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

Lake Lagunitas

Wednesday, March 25, 7:30 AM

Leader: Hugh Harvey 925-935-2979

This very popular birding trip to Marin passes through varied terrain in the beautiful area of the northern slopes of Mount Tamalpais. Carpool leaves from Sunvalley at 7:30 AM. Cross the San Rafael Bridge to US 101 north. Take the first San Rafael exit, go left on 3rd Street. In San Anselmo turn right onto Sir Francis Drake Blvd, continue to Fairfax. Go left on Fairfax Bolinas Road, follow to left turn on Sky Oaks Road and continue to kiosk. Entry fee required (\$8 last year). Drive to parking lot near foot of Lagunitas Dam. Approximate meeting time is 9:00 AM. After birding the nearby area, we will hike around Lake Lagunitas. We have often found Pileated Woodpeckers here. Category 3.

Tomales Bay State Park

Saturday, March 28, 7:00 AM

Leader: Linda Shinn 925-597-0234

Birds that can be seen here include Spotted Owl, quail, goldfinches, puffins, Great Blue Heron, pelicans, Ruddy Ducks, woodpeckers, meadowlarks—and more. Carpool leaves 7:00 AM from Sunvalley. Meet at 8:30 AM in the parking lot at Heart's Desire Beach in Tomales Bay State Park. From I-80 in Vallejo, follow SR 37 19.1 miles to Atherton Avenue, exit and turn left, cross US 101 to San Marin Drive and continue for 3 miles. Turn right on Novato Blvd for 6 miles to stop sign, then turn left on Point Reyes-Petaluma Road for 7 miles to another stop sign. Turn right across the painted 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 and turn right after the bridge onto Sir Francis Drake Blvd. Follow "the Frank" through Inverness. Just over the ridge, turn right onto Pierce Point Road. The park entrance is on the right. Entry fee required.

Category 2.

Orinda Connector Trail

Wednesday, April 1, 8:00 AM–12:00 PM

Leader: Don Lewis 925-284-5480

We will walk towards the base of Briones Dam looking for spring birds on this EBMUD trail. Meet at 8:00 AM at the northeast corner of Camino Pablo and Bear Creek Road, Orinda. Exit at Orinda from SR 24, turn north on Camino Pablo and drive just over 2 miles to the intersection. We will walk towards the base of Briones Dam looking for spring birds. We will be finished by noon.

Category 2.

Garin Regional Park

Saturday, April 4, 7:15 AM

Leader: Fred Safier 925-937-2906

Carpool leaves 7:15 AM from Sycamore Valley Road Park and Ride. Meet in parking lot at the end of Garin Road at 8:00 AM. Take I-680 south and I-580 west. Take Castro Valley exit and continue west. Turn left onto Crow Canyon Road and go under the freeway. Crow Canyon Road becomes Grove Way and then A Street. At A Street and Mission Blvd turn left; stay left to continue south on Mission Blvd, which becomes SR

238. Go south about 3 miles to Garin Road, turn left, and follow up the hill to its end. Spring migrants will be our goal. Lunch in the park after.

Category 3.

North Briones

Tuesday, April 7, 8:30 AM

Leader: Cheryl Abel 925-957-6229

Meet 8:30 AM in the parking area at the north entrance of Briones Regional Park. Take Briones Road off Alhambra Valley Road and drive up this narrow winding road, park at the end. Wildflowers, spring birds and poison oak are along shaded trails. A continuation through grasslands to Sindicich Lagoons makes this walk about 3 miles round trip. Bring liquids.

Category 3.

Irish Canyon

Saturday, April 11, 8:00 AM

Leader: Jerry Britten 925-321-5332

Leader: Maren Smith 925-322-9477

Partnership hike with Save Mount Diablo and MDAS on private land with 320 acres of oak savannah and grassland. Reservations required. Meet at 8:00 AM at the Park & Ride, 1000 Peacock Creek Drive off Clayton Road in Clayton. From Ygnacio Valley Road, take Clayton Road toward Clayton for about 2 miles. Turn left onto Peacock Creek Drive and park on the right. We will walk a short distance to the trailhead from there. The hike is roughly five miles round trip with 900 feet of elevation gain/loss. Eventbrite registration required at www.savemountdiablo.org. Dress accordingly, bring liquids and snacks.

Category 3.

Pine Canyon

Tuesday, April 14, 8:00 AM

Leader: Tracy Farrington 925-788-6223

Meet in parking lot at end of Castle Rock Road at 8:00 AM. Turn south on Walnut Avenue from the intersection with Ygnacio Valley Road in Walnut Creek. At the traffic circle, turn right and continue on Castle Rock Road past the high school to the end, which is the parking lot for Castle Rock Recreation Area and Diablo Foothills Regional Park. We will hike into Pine Canyon at least as far as the Castle Rocks. The trail crosses Pine Creek several times. Be prepared to carry lunch and liquids. Spring migrants and Peregrine Falcons.

Category 3.

Black Diamond Mines

Thursday, April 16, 7:30 AM

Leader: Paul Schorr 925-998-0070

Carpool leaves Sunvalley at 7:30 AM. Or meet the leader at 8:00 AM at the parking lot at the end of Somersville Road. Exit Highway 4 at Somersville Road (south). Alternate route, go east on Ygnacio Valley/Kirker Pass Roads, in Pittsburg turn right on Buchanan Road. Turn east on Buchanan to Somersville Road (Antioch) and turn right. Follow Somersville to the entry gate, entry fee required, proceed to the last parking lot. Woodland, chaparral and some grassland birds. Bring lunch and a beverage.
Category 3.

Mines Road

Saturday, April 18

Leader: Hugh Harvey 925-935-2979

Because of limited parking along Mines Road, carpooling is essential. This is an all-day trip and often hot! Bring lunch and liquids. Phainopepla, Lewis' Woodpecker and Lawrence's Goldfinch and many spring migrants are possible, plus great spring wild flowers. Entry fee required for Del Valle Regional Park. Call the leader for meeting time and location.

Category 1.

Mitchell Canyon (Wild Birds Unlimited Bird Walk Series)

Monday, April 20, 8:00 AM

Leader: Chick Chickering 925-686-9231

Visit a great area for an Audubon bird walk with lots of shade and brilliant wild flowers. Find Bullock's Orioles, Peregrine Falcons, Black-chinned Sparrows, Orange-crowned Warblers, Lazuli Buntings, flycatchers, and grosbeaks. Hopefully see rare Blue/Grey Gnatcatchers. Leave at 8:00 AM from the Wild Birds Unlimited parking lot returning approximately noon. Carpooling encouraged. \$6.00 parking fee. Wear layers.

Category 2-3.

Mitchell Canyon

Thursday, April 23

Leader: Maury Stern 925-284-5980

Meet at 8:00 AM in Mitchell Canyon parking lot. There is a \$6.00 parking fee. From I-680 in Walnut Creek, take Ygnacio Valley Road to Clayton Road. Turn right on Clayton Road and right on Mitchell Canyon Road to the end. Gnatcatchers, spring migrants and residents, lots of wildflowers. Usually hot! Bring liquids and lunch.

Category 3.

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

Field trips are 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 1 mile, possibly rougher terrain.

Category 3: Difficult; extensive walking on rough terrain.

Do These Simple Things To Help Stop Climate Change

Juan Pablo Galván, *Young Birders Club Leader*

If you were at the MDAS Member Meeting this month, you heard and saw how human-caused climate change is having serious effects on birds, humans, and the entire planet, and that if humans don't act in major ways to stop fossil fuel emissions right now, things will get much, much worse. Everyone needs to act **right now**.

Each month *The Quail* will now include a short list of five things you should do to help stop catastrophic climate change. Everyone should do them, and everyone NEEDS to do them, but don't stop there. It only takes a quick online search to find hundreds of things you can do. Start with these, and spread the word to your friends, family and neighbors:

1. **Eat less meat, especially beef.** Raising animals for food is a major contributor to climate change, responsible for more than 14% of all global emissions. Get more protein from nuts, legumes, beans, vegetables, and chicken.
2. **Drive less.** Carpool, bike, take a bus or BART, or enjoy a walk.
3. **NEVER idle your car.** Not only does it waste gas and money, it increases greenhouse gases for no reason at all. Only turn your car engine on if you're ready to drive at the very next moment, and if you know you're going to be stopped for more than 10 seconds, turn off your engine. Restarting your car does not burn more fuel than leaving it idling. In fact, idling for just 10 seconds wastes more gas than restarting the engine.
4. **No more plastic.** One plastic bag can take 1,000 years to decompose. There is almost no spot on the Earth, on land or sea, that doesn't have plastic pollution. Plastic is also created by petroleum (ie, fossil fuels). Use reusable bags, reusable water bottles like Klean Kanteen, and bring your own reusable utensils and paper straws (**HERE**) instead of using plastic utensils and straws.
5. **Power your home with 100% renewable energy.** Solar panels are great, but depending on where you live, they're not necessary to power your home completely free of fossil fuels. Sign up for MCE Deep Green 100% Renewable Energy. It's easy (there's no confusing paperwork, you don't

have to switch accounts or energy providers) and only costs a few dollars more each month. Click [HERE](#) to get started.



Photo: Juan Pablo Galván

Martinez Shoreline & Moorhen Marsh January 29, 2020

Annually around this date, MDAS schedules a field trip that includes areas associated with the Martinez Regional Shoreline Preserve. On a mild and sunny day, approximately 27 birders continued this tradition, beginning at Waterbird Regional Preserve overlooking the north end of McNabney Marsh. Birds identified here included: Mute Swan, Gadwall, Eurasian Wigeon, American Wigeon, Northern Pintail, Northern Shoveler, Cinnamon Teal, Green-winged Teal, Canvasback, Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, Ruddy Duck, Hooded Merganser, Pied-billed Grebe, Anna's Hummingbird, American Coot, Black-necked Stilt, Ring-billed Gull, California Gull, Glaucous-winged Gull, Double-crested Cormorant, American White Pelican, White-tailed Kite, Belted Kingfisher, Snowy Egret, Great Egret, Say's Phoebe, Black-crowned Night Heron, Black Phoebe, Northern Mockingbird, Red-winged Blackbird, Great-tailed Grackle, Golden-crowned Sparrow, Rock Pigeon, California Towhee, and of course Canada Goose and Mallard.

Our next destination was the pond along N. Court St. at Martinez Shoreline Park. Birds spotted here included: Cackling Goose, Canada Goose, Gadwall, Bufflehead, Green-winged Teal, Lesser Scaup, Canvasback (two beautiful ducks), American Goldfinch, Lesser Goldfinch, House Finch, Marsh Wren, Red-breasted Sapsucker, Willet, Mallard, Black-necked Stilt, Herring Gull, Ring-billed Gull, California Gull, and White-tailed Kite.

Next stop was the observation platform on the west side of McNabney Marsh. A great viewing position, generally speaking, but not particularly productive today. The previously reported Eurasian Teal was not found. Also on the lookout for rails but no luck. Not even a Sora. We did scope, from quite a distance, a male Kestrel, perched atop an old Kestrel house at the western end of the McNabney Preserve.

The day concluded with lunch and a walk through sections of the renovated Moorhen Marsh, a wetland maintained by the Mt. View Sanitary District. The site was closed for two years during the extensive work, and reopened to the public last May. The restoration project is ongoing, including removal of non-native vegetation, and planting of several riparian species. And the birds are returning.

During this walk we saw Green Heron, Great Blue Heron, Common Yellowthroat, Marsh Wren, Black-crowned Night Heron, Double-crested Cormorant, Red-tailed Hawk, Yellow-rumped Warbler, California Towhee, White and Golden-crowned Sparrows, Snowy Egret, Great Egret, Canada Goose, and Red-winged Blackbird. Bird numbers and variety will most certainly improve as the riparian growth begins to mature.

All in all, a very pleasant and productive day of birding with a total of 72 species sighted.

Good birding to all, Tracy Farrington.



Green Heron
Moorhen Marsh
Photo: Isaac Aronow



White-tailed Kite
Martinez Shoreline
Photo: Isaac Aronow

Thornton Area / Cosumnes Preserve February 1, 2020

A foggy morning led to a sunny afternoon as a dozen birders under the leadership of Ethan “Chick” Chickering toured Westgate Landing Regional Park, the Isenberg Crane Reserve, and the Cosumnes River Preserve. Ducks, geese and the like included Northern Pintails, Northern Shovelers, Cinnamon Teal, Green-winged Teal, a number of Greater White-fronted Geese, Tundra Swans, Snow Geese, and Sandhill Cranes. Highlights included: Tricolored Blackbirds in a tree, a Kestrel catching a mouse and returning to its wire perch to devour it, and a Hutton’s Vireo being chased by a Ruby-crowned Kinglet (tiny but fierce!). 45 species in all.



Greater White-fronted Geese
Cosumnes Preserve
Photo: Isaac Aronow



Sandhill Cranes
Isenberg Sandhill Crane Reserve
Photo: Isaac Aronow

Bodega Bay February 9, 2020

What a glorious day for 18 MDAS members and visitors. It was windy, but the skies were clear and the birds wonderful. Some participants said they had never seen the water so high—the king tides were evident. Though nearly blown off Bodega Head, they had great looks at Surfbirds, Pelagic and Brandt’s Cormorants, and Black Oystercatchers. At Campbell Cove

they spotted a Red-necked Grebe, and saw both Red-throated Pacific and Common Loons. Brants filled the harbor among nine shorebird species. Leader Hugh Harvey and the group tallied up 67 species for the blustery day, including Willets, Surf Scoters, Ruddy Turnstones, Black Turnstones, Marbled Godwit, Common Merganser, Clark's Grebe, Kingfisher, Bufflehead, Western Gull, Brewer's Blackbird, American Coots, Western Grebe, Common Goldeneye, and Whimbrel.



Pelagic Cormorants
Bodega Bay
Photo: Isaac Aronow



Whimbrel
Bodega Bay
Photo: Isaac Aronow

Grizzly Island February 13, 2020

The estuarine marshes of Grizzly Island were spectacular for the 18 participants on the MDAS field trip to Grizzly Island led by Hugh Harvey. Lots of ducks near the entrance, and raptors and other birds along the way. Highlights were the 14 waterfowl species, a Ring-necked Pheasant seen by many, a very handsome male Allen's Hummingbird, numerous Red-tailed Hawks and White-tailed Kites, one American Kestrel, and a seemingly out of place Spotted Towhee. Seven owls were tallied—seven Great Horned Owls, one Barn Owl and one Burrowing Owl. At least one participant saw two of the resident Tule Elk rear up and appear to fight each other. Marsh notables included a Sora, Common Yellowthroat, and Marsh Wren.



Northern Harrier
Grizzly Island
Photo: Isaac Aronow



Allen's Hummingbird
Grizzly Island
Photo: Isaac Aronow

MDAS Volunteer Opportunitites

Kitchen Birds Cleanup Team

Kathy Kellogg, *Hospitality*

After our February meeting, a new couple helped me with cleanup and suggested I could use some planned regular help! What a good and sensible idea, I thought on the way home! Even though there are usually a couple angels who bring things into the kitchen for me to pack while I'm washing up, sometimes I don't have enough help to leave the 9:30 PM out time. I really appreciate everyone's generosity in bringing delicious goodies for everyone to enjoy during the break, and a few have almost regularly helped in the cleanup. One angel regularly brings me stacks of the most beautiful birdy napkins for our club's use!

But let's try a new system: on next meeting's refreshments sign-up sheet you'll see a "Help with Cleanup" category with 2 spaces underneath for your names. What can you do to help? Bring the tablecloths into the kitchen and fold them up. Bring in the table decorations and coffee table things. Wash and dry the tea and coffee urns, punchbowl and spoons. Meanwhile I'll pack the bins with all these things to take home and take out the garbage and recycle.

Welcome to the MDAS "kitchen birds cleanup" team!

Calling All Volunteers

Susana de Trapaga, *Outreach Coordinator*

If you enjoy spreading the love for birds and nature we could use your help. We are looking for people to help staff our Mt. Diablo Audubon table with its ever-popular "Whose Nest?" game. We will be promoting MDAS field trips and the Young Birders Club, providing MDAS general information, answering bird questions and helping kids and parents with the nest game. If you can volunteer for a 2-hour shift, please contact MDAS Outreach Coordinator Susana de Trapaga at outreach@mtdiabloaudubon.org.

We need volunteers for the following events:

- John Muir Birthday–Earth Day at The John Muir National Historic Site on Saturday, April 18, 10:00 AM–4:00 PM
 - We Love Mother Nature at Wild Birds Unlimited on Saturday, May 9, 10:00 AM–4:00 PM
 - Mt. Diablo Discovery Day at Mt. Diablo State Park Summit on Saturday, May 16, 10:00 AM–3:00 PM
 - Beaver Festival at Susana Street Park, Martinez, on Saturday, June 27, 11:00 AM–4:00 PM
-

"No Child Left Inside" Program

Paul Schorr, *Board Member-at-Large*

This year marks the thirteenth year that Mt. Diablo Audubon Society has sponsored the "No Child Left Inside" Program, which has been a cornerstone of the Chapter's Education Outreach Mission. During those years, MDAS has provided outdoor education for more than one thousand students. This year's field activities will occur at Contra Loma Regional Park in Antioch and will take place on Tuesday, May 19, and Thursday, May 21, from 8:30 AM to 1:00 PM each day.

MDAS volunteers are needed for these events, even more so this year because some past loyal volunteers have indicated that unfortunately they are not available this year. Therefore, I am reaching out to MDAS members in hopes of securing new volunteers. If you are interested in this opportunity to introduce children to the wonderful world of birds and their habitats, please contact me at pkshorr@comcast.net. I can assure you that there will be many rewarding teachable moments. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Tricolored Blackbird Survey Volunteers Needed!

Alan Bade, *Community Science*

Every three years, a statewide census of Tricolored Blackbirds is conducted to assess the health of the population. This survey is a joint effort between Audubon California, UC Davis and other stakeholders to monitor trends in the distribution and abundance of these passerines, which were once one of our state's most plentiful birds. They now face many challenges and the 2008 survey estimated the statewide population at approximately 400,000 birds. The 2011 Statewide Survey estimated that only 258,000 birds remained, the 2014 the statewide population estimate was only 145,000 birds, but the 2017 statewide population estimate went up to 177,600 birds. This survey is one of the best tools researchers have to estimate numbers and to discover where the colonies may be congregating to breed, which *greatly* aids in their protection. We hope to have an Audubon California conservation representative come to the chapter to update us on these efforts in the near future.



Tricolored Blackbird

Photo: Dan Murphy/Macaulay Library at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology (ML54496371)

The survey has nine sites in Contra Costa County (and a few nearby in Alameda County where they are hoping to have coverage as well). The survey tries to check these sites and to discover any newly established breeding sites nearby. In 2017 and in previous years, MDAS helped with this survey and we'd like to do so again. The survey dates will be April 3–5. Birders of all abilities are welcome. There are training dates on March 7th and 14th, which will also be captured as a webinar and may be available after that date on the web. I will be learning more about these in the near future.

As Community Science chair, I will be helping to recruit volunteers and facilitate this. I greatly encourage participation in this excellent bird conservation project! Please contact me, Alan Bade, for more information at communityscience@mtdiablo-audubon.org. For more information on the Tricolored Blackbird portal site, see <https://tricolor.ice.ucdavis.edu/>.

Bird Feeding And Rat Solutions

Mike Eliot, *Member-at-Large*

People often ask me how to prevent rats from being in their yards and houses. The first thing I tell them is that rats are not attracted to bird feeders, but rather by the smell of rotting food, pet foods, pet waste, or unharvested fruits and nuts. They will also come to any open source of standing water.

The native pest rats found in our area are roof rats. Weighing 5–9 ounces, 13” to 18” long, they breed about five times per year with litters of 4–8 pups. Lifespan is about 9–12 months.



They nest in trees, vines, stacked lumber or wood piles, overgrown landscaping, attics and wall spaces, sewers and drains, and even in burrows if necessary. They stay within 150 feet of their nest, are omnivorous, and consume about an ounce of food and ½ oz of water per day.



Though rats generally feed from dusk to dawn, they are easily detected by their pellet-shaped droppings, about ½” long, found wherever they travel and eat. Fresh droppings are soft, while old droppings crumble easily.

When feeding backyard birds, there are three basic premises to consider:

1. Keep rats off your bird feeders.
2. Keep food off the ground.
3. Don't give rats a place to hide.

You can prevent rats around bird feeders by using squirrel-proof bird feeders, baffles that prevent rats from getting to the feeders, and trays to catch what may end up on the ground. If you provide seed or nuts for ground-feeding birds or squirrels use trays to limit the spread, limit the amount so that all foods are eaten completely each day, use hot pepper, or sweep up any excess.

Start with good bird food that does not contain fillers that birds discard. Black oil sunflower or pure sunflower chips will be completely eaten by birds on feeders. Nyjer is not attractive to rodents. You can also get foods that are treated with hot pepper sauce, or apply hot pepper sauce yourself. Birds cannot taste hot, but rats don't like it.

Steps for sanitation include removing water and ground food sources at night, such as outdoor pet bowls. Clean barbecues after use or put them in rat-proof structures, pick excess fruit and nuts from plants and the ground, keep compost bins closed, and store bird food and food waste in metal containers or indoors.

Steps to prevent rat nesting include removing any stacked wood or wood piles, yard equipment, pots, or other protective coverings, pruning overgrown shrubs, trellises, fences, and trees. Also close off any openings large enough for rats to enter buildings—about the size of a quarter or larger.

Please avoid rodenticides, which can kill animals that eat poisoned rats, including raptors, dogs, and cats. Instead use snap traps or put up a Barn Owl box.

Photo: Mike Eliot

Invasive plant removal improves bird habitat on our local creeks!

Alan Bade, *Community Science*

Most birders know that healthy creeks offer excellent bird habitat. In our area, we have many creeks originating in higher elevation open spaces that thread through our urban

environment, connect our parks, and even run through some of our own backyards. These urban riparian areas are important sanctuaries for birds to escape human disturbance and are habitat for migratory birds along the Pacific Flyway.

Unfortunately, many of our local creeks are quite environmentally challenged! Some have been forced into concrete or trapezoidal dirt channels while others are completely underground. Our creeks need to provide flood water conveyance and to provide important habitat for our local wildlife. Opinions have changed, however, about how these can be mutually compatible rather than exclusive to one another. Indeed, there are many efforts underway to restore natural habitat in our local waterways.

One of these efforts, the removal of the invasive plant *Arundo donax* (giant reed), is championed by the **Walnut Creek Watershed Council** (WCWC). The Council is a non-regulatory stakeholder group that includes both governmental agencies (**Contra Costa Resource Conservation District** and **Contra Costa Flood Control**), and non-profits, such as local citizen creek groups. *Arundo donax* can grow 4 inches a day and attain heights of 30 feet in dense stands that crowd out all the native vegetation. It has little or no habitat value, is a fire hazard, and can block flood channels. The Council has recognized *Arundo* as a major threat to our watershed and has formed an important working group to eradicate this highly invasive plant: the **Arundo Removal and Replacement Team** (ARRT).

Arundo is particularly difficult to remove, but the ARRT team has developed an effective methodology. First, it has documented approximately 300 stands on an **interactive map** created through a combination of aerial imagery and walking the creeks. This is continually updated as more stands are identified and as stands are treated. Next, local creek groups help prioritize stands for removal. Since *Arundo*'s root system of corms just grows back after you cut it, the roots must either be treated with an herbicide, or dug out which is usually not feasible. Finally, native plants such as willows, sedges, and other riparian species are planted in replacement.



Hap Magee Park in Danville
Before treatment



Hap Magee Park in Danville
After treatment

Photos: Dick Heron

In 2019, the WCWC hired the non-profit restoration specialist, **The Restoration Trust**, to do most of the "heavy lifting" of stalk removal and herbicide treatments, and used volunteers for the native plant replacements, grown in advance by The Restoration Trust. This is where local non-profit creek groups can help. Many MDAS members recently joined volunteers from **Friends of Pleasant Hill Creeks** and the **East Bay California Native Plant Society** in January to plant native grasses along Grayson Creek in Pleasant Hill. 38 volunteers braved

chilly January weather at this event, which took place on one of our Grayson Creek bird survey sites. We will be monitoring how our avian friends like their new habitat!



Lafayette Creek restoration
Downtown along Mt. Diablo Blvd



Grayson Creek restoration
Golf Club Road bridge in Pleasant Hill

Photos: Contra Costa Resource Conservation District and Lisa Damerall

Other major stands have been removed at Hap Magee Park in Danville, Civic Park in Walnut Creek, and along Lafayette Creek in downtown Lafayette. Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, church groups, city officials, and many concerned creek enthusiasts joined in these efforts, but there is much more to do in the 309 miles of creeks in the Walnut Creek watershed!



Planting of natives - Hap Magee Park in Danville

Photos: Contra Costa Resource Conservation District and Lisa Damerall

Arundo eradication is an important part of restoring our creek habitats and will greatly benefit our local birds. But it is also an important part of protecting major downstream projects such as the upcoming **Lower Walnut Creek Restoration Project** (LWCR) and Pacheco Marsh. This visionary plan is a partnership between the Contra Costa Flood Control District, East Bay Regional Parks, **The John Muir Land Trust** and other stakeholders.

Eradicating Arundo upstream of this project will help keep it from becoming a major maintenance issue in this fabulous new bird-friendly habitat! The LWCR Project is currently scheduled to start construction in 2021 and will restore and enhance approximately 252 acres of tidal marsh, 52 acres of adjacent lowland terrestrial grasslands and seasonal wetlands, and 50 acres of uplands. Eradicating Arundo and native plant restorations on our local waterways are key components to improve bird-friendly habitat where we live AND increase the viability of major restoration efforts such as the LWCR Project.

If you are interested in learning more about creek restoration efforts and Arundo removal, contact your local creek group through the **Contra Costa Resource Conservation District**. Scroll down on their home page to links to any of our four watersheds and their local creek groups. You can also reach out to me, Alan Bade, MDAS Community Science Lead, at communityscience@mtdiabloaudubon.org, for help in discovering how best to learn about and contribute to this important effort.

Walnut Creek watershed groups:

Friends of Pleasant Hill Creeks

Friends of the Creeks

Friends of San Ramon Creek

Lafayette Creeks Committee

Events

Point Reyes Birding & Nature Festival

April 23rd–26th, 2020

Point Reyes Station, CA 94956

Celebrate the Environmental Action Committee of West Marin's 11th Annual Point Reyes Birding & Nature Festival. The festival engages birders, artists, and nature lovers by providing quality birding and nature experiences, and is open to a variety of ages and experience levels. For more information visit <https://www.pointreyesbirding-festival.org>.

Join Save Mount Diablo and MDAS on Partnership Hikes

Through a partnership with Save Mount Diablo (SMD), MDAS is offering two bird-focused tours of private SMD and East Bay Regional Park (EBRP) properties in April and May, properties that are otherwise closed to the public. If you'd like to explore new birding locations, please join leaders Maren Smith, Jerry Britten, and Joan Duffield as we search for spring migrants and warblers along riparian corridors.



Birdwatching in Curry Canyon Ranch

Photo: Maren Smith

- Saturday, April 11, 8:00 AM–12:00 PM, Irish Canyon (EBRP property) in Clayton. Moderate hike, about 5 miles round-trip, 900 ft. elevation.
- Thursday, May 7, 7:00 AM–12:00 PM, Curry Canyon Ranch (SMD property) in Clayton. Easy–moderate hike along a road, about 3–4 miles round-trip

The hikes are FREE, but reservations are required in advance. To sign up, visit the SMD website: www.savemountdiablo.org and go to the specific hike on the “Discover Diablo” hikes page (registration via Eventbrite).

All hikes will meet at Park & Ride at 1000 Peacock Creek Drive at the intersection of Clayton Road and Peacock Creek Drive in Clayton, CA with carpooling suggested to Curry Canyon Ranch.

If you have any questions, contact Maren Smith at education@mtdiablo-audubon.org.

Create a Water-wise, Habitat-friendly, California Native Garden

Join Conservation Chair, Nancy Wenninger, for a special tour of her California Native Plants garden on Saturday, May 2, from 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM. Learn why it's important to plant natives, take in new ideas for your own yard, and discover resources that will help you save water while creating the perfect habitat for pollinators—birds, bees, and butterflies. Bring your questions!

The class is free, but reservations are required in advance and will be limited to 15 participants. Interested? Please email education@mtdiabloaudubon.org to secure your spot! Information will also be posted on the [MDAS website Education page](#).



American Robin in Toyon berries

Photo: Maren Smith

National Park Expansion & Almond Ranch Dedication

Saturday, May 2, 2020, 9:00 AM–5:00 PM

John Muir National Historic Site

4202 Alhambra Ave, Martinez, CA 94553

Enjoy a festive day at the National Park! There's something for everyone. It's free, open to the public and packed with activities for kids of all ages.

Join as we celebrate the addition of West Hills Farm to the John Muir National Historic Site and the much-anticipated public opening of beautiful Almond Ranch.

For more information about the National Park Expansion & Almond Ranch Dedication see the **John Muir Land Trust** website.

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!

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



Hyacinth Macaw

Photo: Eric Schroeder

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



Helmet Vanga

Photo: Eric Schroeder

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

March Gallery



At the February MDAS monthly program Juan Pablo Galván presented a very dire, but factual, science-based, important talk on climate change with models showing temperature effects on birds, weather, and our planet.

Photo: Maren Smith



At the February MDAS monthly program Wally DeYoung did a wonderful presentation on the Peregrine Team complete with a slide show with dramatic video footage of the peregrine family from 2019.

Photo: Maren Smith



Snowy Egret seen on the MDAS field trip to Cosumnes River Preserve.

Photo: Isaac Aronow



One of the Great Horned Owls seen on the MDAS field trip to Girzzly Island.

Photo: Isaac Aronow



California Poppy, Ubehebe Crater in Death Valley

Photo: Maren Smith



White-tailed Antelope Squirrel, Death Valley

Photo: Maren Smith

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Mt. Diablo Audubon Society Leadership

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