



# Mt. Diablo Audubon Society

## **The Quail**

VOL. 65 No. 7

APRIL 2020

### **Important Notice About Mt. Diablo Audubon Society's Response To The COVID-19 Pandemic**

In light of the Stay-at-Home Order instituted for the State of California, ***Mt. Diablo Audubon Society has canceled all field trips and meetings from March 17 through April 7, and the May monthly program.*** If the timing of this order changes, we will reassess the situation and send another message. Please check our [website](#) and our [Facebook page](#) for updates.

While we are disappointed to not be able to share our love of birds with you all through our field trips and meetings, we are going to spend this time getting to know our local birds. Here are some [tips from the National Audubon on how to enjoy backyard birds](#).

Stay safe and well and we look forward to hearing about all your cool backyard birds later this year!

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## **Presidents' Letter**

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

These are unprecedented times, and by the time this newsletter reaches your inbox, there may be more closures, precautions, and safeguards in place. The MDAS Board voted to cancel the April meeting due to guidelines available at that time, but in short time,



with the State of California Stay-at-Home Order and CDC recommendations, we have also canceled the May monthly program and all field trips through April 7.

Any MDAS news will be posted on the website at [www.mtdiablobaudubon.org](http://www.mtdiablobaudubon.org), on MDAS social media, through Mailchimp emails, and in *The Quail*. For health and Stay-At-Home guidelines, check reliable sources for current information such as county and state health department sites, the CDC, the WHO, or your local senator and assemblyperson's offices.

We are all in this together. And every single one of us is a part of the solution. When we meet at a future program or field trip, we'll have a lot to catch up on, including backyard bird sightings. Thank you in advance for your patience and flexibility as MDAS navigates the pandemic and we all stay at home to get through this together.

Here's something you can do from home: Enter your best bird photos in the **First-Ever MDAS Photography Competition** with prizes in each of six categories. The deadline is May 13, but if you can get them in sooner, great! See rules and enter at: <https://mtdiablobaudubon.org/photo-contest/>.

We are all familiar now with new buzz words: flattening the curve, social distancing, hunkering down. In between organizing your pantry and cleaning out your closets, take this time to check out library resources such as [www.ilovelibraries.org](http://www.ilovelibraries.org). Or take one of 20 virtual field trips at [www.adventuresin-familyhood.com](http://www.adventuresin-familyhood.com).

Ariana will be home-schooling her two young sons while working remotely from home. She has researched online teaching materials, found lots of organizations that are offering live streaming videos (her sons met some hippos at the Cincinnati Zoo, and some giraffes in Texas!) and has tapped into the vast network of other resourceful parents who are making the best of this novel situation.

According to the National Audubon Society website, "*This global pandemic has us all pretty freaked out. Handled responsibly, open space and wildlife observation might be just the balm you need.*" Check out [www.audubon.org](http://www.audubon.org) for ideas on how to enjoy birds in the age of social distancing. You might also want to check out bird cams including the **Peregrine Falcons nesting on the Berkeley campanile**, the **Osprey Cam in Richmond**, and those at [www.allaboutbirds.org](http://www.allaboutbirds.org).

While the public library, visitor's centers, museums, wineries(!), and, well, just about everything is closed, I haven't noticed any slowdown in the bird activity in my backyard. The local Cooper's Hawk still drops by daily to create chaos in the ongoing bird soap opera right outside my window. Meanwhile, the trees are leafing out with the recent rains, and wildflowers are popping up in nearby hills reminding

us that nature is immune to this health crisis and may just be the antidote we need to weather this storm.

The phones still work—call up a long lost-friend and catch up on life. Book groups and special-interest groups are now "meeting" by Zoom. Technology is a lifeline for staying connected.

This is a time that will define us, more than ever—how we react to the pandemic challenges, how we help one another, will be our legacy.

I am uplifted by the creativity that isolation has inspired in the midst of adversity, such as videos of actors doing read alouds. Mo Willems, an immensely popular children's author, is offering lunch doodles every day from the **Kennedy Center website**. I read that the NYC Metropolitan Opera is streaming operas for free, giving the gift of music to humanity. I've also been inspired by Italians singing opera from their balconies to connect with neighbors, and cellist Yo Yo Ma creating an online concert for the world.

If you are tired of singing the "Happy Birthday" song as you wash your hands, maybe it's time to choose a new melody. I'm thinking "Rockin' Robin", the Beatles' "Blackbird", "When Doves Cry", or the classic, "Free Bird" might work for me.

As you hunker down, refocus on what you can do vs. what you can't. Change your tune. Grab your binoculars (but do not share them with others!) and observe the birds in your yard or neighborhood and we'll see you when it's safe to gather again.

Be safe, be smart, wash your hands, and we'll see you on the other side.

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

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## **Call for Candidates**

***This information is usually announced at the April monthly program meeting, but due to cancellation we are distributing it digitally this year.***

Nominations are now open for 2020–2021 Officer positions on the Mt. Diablo Audubon Society Board of Directors.

If you are interested in serving as President, Vice-President, Treasurer, or Secretary, please contact anyone on the Nominating Committee: Rosalie Howarth, Hugh Harvey, or Elizabeth Leite **here**.

A slate of candidates has been proposed that includes Jerry Britten standing for President, Ariana Rickard running for Vice-President, Steve Buffi continuing as Treasurer, and Carol Pachl remaining as Secretary.

The election is slated to take place at the May monthly program meeting, pending schedule changes.

Self-nominations are welcome at any time.

Thank you,  
Mt. Diablo Audubon Society Board of Directors

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## Welcome, New Members!

**Sharon Anderson**, Clayton; **George Boscoe**, Orinda; **Duy Dang**, Danville; **Gailyn Johnson**, Walnut Creek; **Vera Kirichenko**, Walnut Creek; **Patricia Mahoney**, Hayward; **Faith Martinez**, Walnut Creek; **Yuko Matsumoto**, Oakland; **Thomas Packard**, Walnut Creek; **Ravindra Shah**, Concord; **Jeani Valentine**, Danville

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## 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 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](#).

\*Pending COVID-19 meeting guidelines.



White-breasted Nuthatch

Photo: Jean Halford

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## Upcoming Field Trips

**Important notice:** Field trips are canceled through April 7. Future trips may be canceled pending further information on the COVID-19 pandemic. Be sure to check with the leader to confirm that the field trip has not been postponed or canceled. You can also check the Mt. Diablo Audubon Society [website](#) for the most up-to-date information.

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**Tuesday, April 14, 8:00 AM**

**Leader: Tracy Farrington** 925-788-6223

Meet in parking lot at end of Castle Rock Rd at 8:00 AM. Turn south on Walnut Ave from the intersection with Ygnacio Valley Rd in Walnut Creek. At the traffic circle, turn right and continue on Castle Rock Rd 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 Rd. Exit Highway 4 at Somersville Rd (south). Alternate route, go east on Ygnacio Valley/Kirker Pass Rds, in Pittsburg turn right on Buchanan Rd. Turn east on Buchanan to Somersville Rd (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, Del Valle Regional Park**

**Saturday, April 18**

**Leader: Hugh Harvey** 925-935-2979

Because of limited parking along Mines Rd, carpooling is essential. This is an all-day trip and often hot! Bring lunch and liquids. Phainopepla, Lewis' Woodpecker, 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**

**Thursday, April 23, 8:00 AM**

**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 Rd to Clayton Rd. Turn right on Clayton Rd and right on Mitchell Canyon Rd to the end. Gnatcatchers, spring migrants, and residents, lots of wildflowers. Usually hot! Bring liquids and lunch.

Category 3.

### **Del Puerto Canyon**

**Monday, April 27, 7:30 AM**

**Leader: Beth Branthaver 510-502-4869**

Carpool leaves at 7:30 AM from Sycamore Valley Rd Park and Ride. Meet on Del Puerto Canyon Rd west of I-5 at 9:00 AM at Patterson Exit (Diablo Grande Parkway and Sperry Rd) off I-5 (56 miles from Sycamore Valley Rd). Take I-580 east to I-5 South. We will stop at the Larry Combs Rest Area near Westley, as there are no facilities on the trip until our lunch stop. Canyon Wren, Costa's Hummingbird, Greater Roadrunner and other goodies. Usually very warm! Bring lunch, drinks, and a radio, if you have one.

Category 1.

**Big Break Shoreline (Wild Birds Unlimited Bird Walk Series)**

**Saturday, May 2, 8:00 AM**

**Leader: Kevin Hintsa 925-798-0303**

We hope to see nesting Black Rails, kites, Northern Harriers, Least Terns, Marbled Godwits, yellowthroats, avocets, chats, willets, ibis and sandpipers in tidal sloughs and fresh water marshes. You may also find beavers, river otters, and turtles. Leave at 8:00 AM from the Wild Birds Unlimited parking lot returning approximately 12:00 PM. Carpooling encouraged. Wear layers.

Category 1–2.

**Mount Diablo State Park**

**Tuesday, May 5, 8:00 AM**

**Leader: Steve Taylor 925-828-8810**

Mount Diablo State Park is a treasure trove for birders. Although every season in the park has its special qualities, late spring on the mountain has its own beauty, wildflowers add color to the vistas. NOTE: Carpool leaves at 8:00 AM from La Gonda. From I-680 southbound, exit at El Pintado, turn right and right again; park along open space on left. From I-680 northbound, exit El Cerro, turn left, then right at second light onto La Gonda; carpool point is about one-half mile north. Meet at 8:45 AM at the South Gate entrance after birding South Gate Rd. Usually hot! Bring lunch and drinks. Entry fee required. Many migrant and nesting species are possible including Sage Sparrows, California Thrashers, woodpeckers, raptors and warblers.

Category 2.

**East Contra Costa County**

**Saturday, May 9, 6:15 AM**

**Leader: Gary Fregien 916-708-0636**

Carpool leaves Sunvalley at 6:15 AM. Or meet the leader at 7:00 AM on Cypress Rd at the Marsh Creek Trailhead parking lot just east of O'Reilly's Auto Parts in Oakley. Go north on I-680, exit Highway 4 toward Stockton/Pittsburg, take right Exit 30 toward CA-160/Sacramento/Rio Vista (just past Hillcrest Ave exit; do NOT continue straight on Highway 4). Take exit 1-A East 18th/Main St, turn right at the

bottom of the exit onto Main St and drive through Oakley for about 4 miles, turn left onto Cypress Rd. Make a U-turn at Picasso Drive, the stoplight after the railroad tracks. May be hot! Bring lunch and liquids. Target birds include: Blue Grosbeak, Hooded Oriole, Black-chinned Hummingbird, Swainson's Hawk, Yellow-billed Magpie, and Yellow-breasted Chat.

Category 2.

### **Mt. Wanda, John Muir National Historic Site, World Migratory Bird Day**

**Saturday, May 9, 8:00 AM**

**Leader: Cheryl Abel** 925-957-6229

We will join with John Muir National Historic Site for a bird count. Meet in Martinez at 8:00 AM at the Mt. Wanda parking lot located at Alhambra Ave and Franklin Canyon Rd (below the railroad trestle). The walk will end around noon. Bring liquids.

Category 2.

### **West Briones Regional Park**

**Thursday, May 14, 8:00 AM**

**Leader: Maury Stern** 925-284-5980

Meet at 8:00 AM in parking lot on the right hand side of the west entrance road, off Bear Creek Rd. From SR 24 in Orinda, drive north on Camino Pablo about 2.25 miles, turn right on Bear Creek Rd, continue for 4.5 miles to park entrance. Wildflowers, spring birds; Lazuli Buntings are usually abundant. Poison oak along shaded trails. Bring lunch and liquids.

Category 2.

### **Outer Point Reyes**

**Saturday, June 6, 7:00 AM**

**Leader: TBD**

Carpool leaves Sunvalley at 7:00 AM. Meet 8:30 AM at Bear Valley Visitor Center in Olema. From I-80 in Vallejo, follow SR 37 19.1 miles to Atherton Ave, exit and turn left, cross US 101 to San Marin Dr and continue for 3 miles. Turn right on Novato Blvd for 6 miles to stop sign, then turn left on Point Reyes–Petaluma Rd for 7 miles to another stop sign. Turn right across the bridge, go 3 miles to SR 1. Turn left into Point Reyes Station. After a stop at the Bovine Bakery for coffee and pastries, continue out of town towards Olema, then turn right onto Bear Valley Rd. Visitor Center is off Bear Valley. We are hoping for migrants. Bring lunch and liquids. Weather is unpredictable.

Category 2.

### **Pine Canyon (Wild Birds Unlimited Bird Walk Series)**

**Saturday, June 6, 8:00 AM**

**Leader: Kevin Hintsa** 925-798-0303



An early summer stroll in a shaded canyon in the Mt. Diablo foothills. Watching for Peregrine Falcons, warblers, buntings, Black-headed Grosbeaks, Cassin's Vireos, Canyon Wrens, and rare Lawrence's Goldfinches. There are a variety of late spring wildflowers and local fauna. Leave at 8:00 AM from the Wild Birds Unlimited parking lot, returning approximately 12:00 PM. Carpooling encouraged. Wear layers and expect some mud on stream crossings.

Category 2.

### **Yuba Pass**

**Saturday, June 13, 7:00 AM–Sunday, June 14, 7:00 PM**

**Co-leader: Nancy Wenninger** 925-938-7987

**Co-leader: Bill Chilson** 510-619-6692

This is always a productive and well-favored weekend trip to the northern Sierra which requires driving and walking, some of it over rough terrain. Saturday we will bird in the Sierra Valley for basin birds. Sunday we will be birding in the Yuba Pass area for mountain birds. Meet at the parking lot at the top of Hwy 49 at the pass at 7:00 AM Saturday morning. Make motel reservations now! Closest motels are in Sierra City, 11 miles down Highway 49 to the west. The Sierra Pines Resort (530-862-1151 or 800-682-9848) is one of the most popular; or try Yuba River Inn (530-862-1122) with cabins and kitchenettes (cash or check only). Bassett's Station (530-862-1297) at Highway 49 and Gold Lake Rd has some accommodations and meals. High Country Inn (530-862-1530 or 800-862-1530) is across Hwy 49 from Bassett's. Also, in Calpine is Sierra Valley Lodge (530-994-3367 or 800-858-0322). More listings are at [www.sierracity.com/Stay/LodgingCamp.html](http://www.sierracity.com/Stay/LodgingCamp.html). Campgrounds are located at Yuba Pass and Chapman Creek downhill to the west. Sites are available first come, first served for only 3 days at a time. Longer term reservations can be made at 877-444-6777, but there is an additional \$10 charge for this service. After June 8, call Wild Birds Unlimited (925-798-0303) for information.

Category 2.

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.

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### **Carpool Locations**

**El Nido Ranch Rd:** Exit Hwy 24 at St. Stephens Dr., east of Orinda. El Nido

Ranch Rd runs parallel to and north of the freeway. Park just east of the intersection with St. Stephens Dr.

**Sunvalley Mall Parking Lot:** Southwest corner of mall lot at Willow Pass Rd and Contra Costa Blvd in Concord.

**Sycamore Valley Rd Park and Ride Lot:** Exit I-680 S at Sycamore Valley Rd (East) in Danville, or from I-680 N, exit at Sycamore Valley Rd and turn right. Park and Ride lot is on the left, one block east of the freeway.

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## Do These Simple Things To Help Stop Climate Change

Juan Pablo Galván, *Young Birders Club Leader*

You're probably still reeling from the COVID-19 emergency and how it has impacted daily life over such a short amount of time. Well, there's an even bigger crisis that if people acted on with even half the urgency of the virus, we'd be well on our way to solving. Yes, I'm talking about climate change.

While you're riding out the virus, act to avoid climate catastrophe. Here's this month's list of five things you should do to 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. **Get your money out of dirty fuels.** Divest. If you own stock, have retirement funds, a 401k, or an IRA, you're probably investing in a wide variety of companies, some of which are damaging the planet. Oil, coal and natural gas companies are just some types of enterprises that are making climate change much worse. Don't invest in them. It's never been easier to invest wisely without supporting enterprises that are leading us to climate catastrophe. Learn how [HERE](#), [HERE](#), and [HERE](#).
2. **Rebut global warming misinformation.** Fossil fuel companies and the Republican Party have quite successfully convinced a significant portion of the population that climate change is a hoax, a conspiracy, or not that big of a deal. Such lies are dangerous and are the major reason why it's so hard to take effective action against climate change at the national and international levels. You can prepare yourself to counter these false arguments with facts, and maybe even get people to change their minds and take action. Spread the word to your friends in real life and online, your family, and more. Learn how [HERE](#).
3. **Recycle your clothes.** The average US resident throws away about 80 pounds of clothing a year. Not only is fast fashion wasteful, but the environmental cost of manufacturing and distributing new clothes is

devastating. A handful of retailers offer recycling programs, while companies like Patagonia will actually purchase, refurbish, and resell your gently worn garments.

4. **Don't drink bottled water.** Landfills already contain more than 2 million tons of plastic bottles. And 1.5 million barrels of oil are used to manufacture water bottles every year. And those bottles take more than 1,000 years to biodegrade. Use your tap (run it through a purifier if you want, though it's not necessary) and reusable water bottles like Klean Kanteen, Nalgene, and many others.
5. **Leave the AC and heater off.** If you're cold, instead of cranking up the heater, put on a sweater or get under a blanket. If you're hot, draw the shades, open the window to get a breeze, or drink a nice cool glass of water (from the faucet or purifier, not plastic bottled water).

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## Field Trip Reports

### Los Banos/Panoche Valley

#### February 22–February 23

The annual field trip by Mt. Diablo Audubon Society this past weekend was quite successful. We had great numbers of waterfowl along Santa Fe Grade Road, along with the expected waders, shorebirds and raptors. An adult Bald Eagle scared up thousands of Snow Geese on the east side of Gun Club Road. We never found Redheads, but a male Blue-winged Teal was found near the north end of Wilson Road. A fairly good number of Bonaparte's Gulls were also seen, more than I can remember in quite a few years.

After lunch at San Luis National Wildlife Refuge, we moved to Merced National Wildlife Refuge and the auto tour route. Here, with the help of another birder, most of us were able to see the previously reported (on eBird) female Vermilion Flycatcher. Another adult Bald Eagle raised thousands more Snow Geese. Of course, we also had plenty of Sandhill Cranes and the other winter residents.

Sunday morning we started south from Los Banos and made our first stop at Little Panoche Reservoir, where we saw some Ring-necked Ducks, a California Thrasher and a couple of Rock Wrens. We continued looking along the way and found a nesting Great Horned Owl and a Prairie Falcon.

Driving up the Bureau of Land Management Road, we found two Burrowing Owls near where we also found some Horned Larks. A Lark Sparrow stayed put while we all drove past on our way to the top. Our only Mountain Bluebird was seen past the gate beyond the picnic/parking area. Down the slope from the information kiosk, we had two Bell's Sparrows.

After lunch at Mercey Hot Springs, \$10 per person for the one-hour visit, we had five Long-eared and two Barn Owls in the trees.

In Panoche Valley, we had a chance meeting with Debi Shearwater. She explained to us about the Panoche Valley Preserve, the 22,600 acres set aside as mitigation for the solar panel project. During our stay in the valley, we had a Cassin's Kingbird, Tricolored Blackbirds, at least five Ferruginous Hawks, a Merlin, Greater Roadrunner, Short-eared Owls and a San Joaquin Antelope Ground Squirrel.

We finished our weekend at the Panoche Inn, listening to music, eating ice cream, and doing our checklist. We tallied 105 species for the weekend.

Beth Branthaver  
Hugh B. Harvey

Click [here](#) to see Beth Branthaver's pictures from this weekend trip.

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### **Walnut Creek City Parks February 26, 2020**

An MDAS field trip to two parks in Walnut Creek produced a total of 48 species for the 14 participants. Our walk around the large, mostly natural pond in Heather Farm produced many of the expected species, including 65 Ring-necked Ducks, a female Common Goldeneye, a Red-shouldered Hawk, both Nuttall's and Downy Woodpeckers, White-breasted Nuthatches, and a Lincoln's Sparrow.

A hike up the hill in the Walnut Creek Open Space and past the Bob Wisecarver Quail Habitat added to our sightings. We did see some quail in the habitat, along with Western Bluebirds, Red-tailed Hawks, Ravens, and a beautiful Common Meadowlark, a bird brighter than the yellow flowers blooming on the hillside below the fence on which it perched.

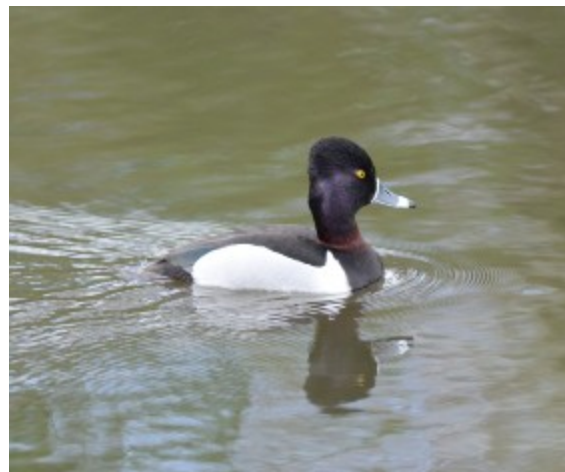
Nothing especially rare was found, other than a late spring day before February has passed.

Hugh B. Harvey



Western Meadowlark

Photo: Maren Smith



Ring-necked Duck

Photo: Jerry Britten

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## Contra Loma Regional Park

March 4, 2020

On March 4, 11 MDAS members and one guest enjoyed a beautiful spring-like day of birding at Contra Loma Regional Park. In addition to the 52 species that were seen and/or heard, we admired an early display of wildflowers among the leafed-out oaks and buckeyes that dotted the green hillsides.

Notable bird sightings included the following: Common Goldeneyes; a lone California Quail; a first-of-season Rufous Hummingbird; Anna's Hummingbird on a nest; Sora; Osprey; American White Pelicans that included some breeding adults with a knob on the upper mandible; Cooper's, Red-shouldered and Red-tailed Hawks; Downy Woodpecker; Hermit Thrush; Common Yellowthroat; Yellow-rumped Warbler – both Audubon's and Myrtle; six sparrow species – Fox, Song, Lincoln's, White-crowned, Golden-crowned, and Dark-eyed Junco. Likely the most significant sighting occurred when a single Prairie Falcon was spotted atop a large rock outcropping. Suddenly another falcon, clearly the male, joined the bird on the rock and they briefly commenced to copulate. Afterwards, they perched together for awhile and all of us had excellent scope views of the pair.

Paul Schorr



Ithuriel's Spear (*Triteleia laxa*)

Photo: Paul Schorr



Western Bluebird

Photo: Paul Schorr

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## MDAS Volunteer Opportunitites

### Kitchen Birds Cleanup Team

Kathy Kellogg, *Hospitality*

**Bakers Be Aware** In this new spring of keeping healthy amidst the coronavirus, the Camellia Room where we meet has made new rules for us. We will no longer be able to share homemade goodies at our monthly meetings. (We will miss your tasty offerings!) Your new challenge is to bring **only commercially made treats** intact in their wrappings. If your cookies are not wrapped individually, I will be glad to open them out on hospitality plates for everyone to snatch carefully at snack time. Good news—we are still allowed to have punch, coffee, and tea as usual! I'll bring sanitizers for your hands after you use the spigots. Do bring your own cups!

Our Board is working on plans for the annual dinner in June, but one thing is sure—it will not be in the potluck form. Look for more news from the kitchen in the next issue of *The Quail* !

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## **Calling All Volunteers For Tabling Events**

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 Society 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@mtdiabloudubon.org](mailto:outreach@mtdiabloudubon.org).

We need volunteers for the following events:

- We Love Mother Nature at Wild Birds Unlimited on Saturday, May 9, 10:00 AM–4:00 PM
- Mount Diablo Discovery Day at Mount 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

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## **Tricolored Blackbird Survey Update**

Alan Bade, *Community Science*

As of *The Quail* press time, it is highly likely the statewide COVID-19 Stay-At-Home Order will cancel the survey until next year. A decision will be made after survey leadership hears from all of the statewide coordinators. This decision is expected on Monday, March 23, and I will notify participants accordingly.

The decision to cancel is not taken lightly. Safety of the participants is of foremost concern, as is the legality of continuing despite the prohibition of non-essential travel. It is also unclear whether the data collected would be sufficient to contribute statistically to the survey and be comparable to previous efforts, due to potential large gaps in coverage. This might skew the data.

Finally, the public health situation is rapidly changing and it is very difficult to predict the conditions we'll face statewide by then. For these reasons, I fully expect the survey to be canceled. I'd like to thank all the Audubon members who signed up to help with this important community science effort!



Tricolored Blackbird

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

### **Survey Description**

Every 3 years, a statewide census of Tricolored Blackbirds is conducted to assess the health of the population. This nearly 40-year survey is a joint effort between Audubon California, UC Davis, and government agencies to monitor the distribution and abundance of Tricolored Blackbirds, which were once one of our state's most plentiful birds. They now face many challenges. The 2008 survey estimated the statewide population at approximately 400,000 birds. The 2011 survey estimated that only 258,000 birds remained, in the 2014 the estimate was only 145,000 birds, but in the 2017 estimate it went up to 177,600 birds. This survey is an excellent tool for researchers to estimate numbers and to discover where the colonies may be congregating to breed, which *greatly* aids in their protection.

Tricolored Blackbirds generally breed in large colonies. With habitat loss, there is an urgent need to monitor colonies in known breeding locations and to identify new ones. Sites are visited mostly by vehicle and can be conducted independently or in small groups, following a well-established protocol.

The survey follows nine breeding sites in Contra Costa County and quite a few nearby in Alameda County. We'll check these historical sites and look for any new ones nearby. MDAS has helped with this survey in previous years. The survey dates are April 3–5, with back-up dates of April 17–19 in case of inclement weather or other unforeseen obstacles. Birders of all abilities are welcome. The training webinar from March 14th is now available on the web in two parts, and is a great source of information about the survey and the Tricolored Blackbird's breeding habitats:

As Community Science chair, I've been hoping to coordinate a group from MDAS for primarily the Contra Costa sites, but volunteers are generally needed to cover sites in Alameda and further south, even as far as Santa Cruz and San Luis Obispo. We invite any members from Golden Gate, Marin, Napa-Solano, or Ohlone Audubon Societies to learn about the survey and join us, when we have definite dates for the next one!

This survey has in the past identified sites in California where large colonies have been saved by paying farmers to delay harvest. It is one of the few community science efforts that can directly and immediately result in thousands of birds saved!

If the survey is canceled as I expect, we'll organize an enthusiastic MDAS participation in the next one. If it is not canceled, I will contact those who have reached out to me and through the EBB-Sightings list serv. And in the meantime, if you see breeding colonies of Tricolored Blackbirds while out birding, please enter them into eBird.

For more information see the [Tricolored Blackbird portal](#) site and [All About Birds](#).

Feel free to reach out to me at [communityscience@mtdiabloudubon.org](mailto:communityscience@mtdiabloudubon.org)

Safe birding to all of you!  
Alan Bade, *Community Science*

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## Bird Watching and Binoculars

Mike Eliot, *Member-at-Large*

Looking for a new set of birding binoculars? Here are some things to consider.



- **Field of view:** How wide you see at a distance of 1,000 yards, which is important following birds in flight. Good birding binoculars provide 300–350 feet width at 1,000 yards.
- **Magnification:** Most birding binoculars are 8 or 10 power, making things appear closer by 8 or 10 times normal. However, higher power makes them harder to hold steady and reduces field of view, making it harder to follow moving birds. About 80% of birding binoculars sold are 8 power.
- **Close focus:** How close you can be to an object and still get it to focus clearly. This is important for close viewing of birds. 6–10 feet is average for most good binoculars.



- **Diameter of the objective lens:** The larger the diameter of the objective lens, the more light reaches your eyes. This becomes important in low-light situations such as early morning, dusk, or in dense woods. The more light, the clearer and more colorful the view. However, the larger this lens, the heavier and longer the binoculars. About 42 mm is a common diameter for good birding binoculars.
- **Lens and prism coatings:** Better binoculars have multiple coatings on all of the lenses and prisms. Good coatings help determine the trueness of the colors you see and help reduce light dispersion, again allowing more light to reach your eyes. Fully multi-coated lenses and prisms have the best performance.
- **Exit pupil:** This is the diameter of the light circle you see when looking into the ocular lens from a distance. The larger this diameter, the more light reaches your eyes.
- **Type of lens glass:** Lenses are usually regular density, high density (HD), and extra low dispersion (ED). Both ED and HD glass allow more light to travel through the lens, with HD being the most preferred. However HD glass makes the binoculars slightly heavier and usually more expensive.
- **Basic binoculars:** Binoculars with cameras, image stabilization, zoom, or ruby coatings all reduce light, clarity, color, or add lots of weight.
- **Mechanics:** Better binoculars have finer and easier-to-use focus adjustments and can adjust for each eye separately. Modern roof prism binoculars can be completely fog- and waterproof. Better binoculars have eye relief adjustments that ensure ocular lenses are the correct distance from your eyes. Better binoculars have rubber eye cups that help keep external light from reaching your eyes while viewing. Better binoculars have rubber exteriors and strong cases that make them easier to hold and help protect them if they are dropped.
- **Feel:** All binoculars have a different feel in your hands. Try out binoculars before buying to make sure they are comfortable and able to match differences in your face and eyes. If you like to go out and watch birds, you may be carrying binoculars for a while, so comfort becomes important.

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## McNabney Marsh Nesting Raft Repair

Alan Bade, *Community Science*

On February 29, a group of MDAS volunteers helped rehabilitate rafts used as nesting platforms at McNabney Marsh. These platforms rise and fall with fluctuating water levels, providing safer nesting opportunities for shorebirds such as Black-necked Stilts, American Avocets, and Killdeer.



Floating nesting raft  
McNabney Marsh



Rehabilitating nesting rafts onshore  
McNabney Marsh

Photos: Nancy Wenninger

**McNabney Marsh** is a 138-acre wetland jointly owned by Mt. View Sanitary District (MVSD) and East Bay Regional Park District. Its hydrology has faced many challenges over the years with the construction of railroad lines, ditches, pipelines, and roads separating it from a more natural connection to the Carquinez Strait. Soil subsidence has contributed to a loss of perhaps 3 feet in recent decades. Additionally, water levels are controlled by the Peyton Slough tidal gate operated by a third party primarily focused on managing a pickleweed marsh mitigation site. These have led to many years of complex management issues that have been very difficult to resolve. McNabney Marsh has been a major **conservation concern** for MDAS for many years, with Nancy Wenninger, our Conservation chair, leading our efforts.



Alan Bade repairs a nesting raft  
McNabney Marsh

Photo: Maren Smith

MVSD also constructed and manages Moorhen Marsh, the first wetlands to use treated effluents as its sole water source. **MVSD's wetlands** support over 125 species of birds (30 of which are known to nest here), and many other species, such as the endangered Salt Marsh Harvest Mouse. The marshes also provide Contra Costa elementary school students **environmental education** opportunities through a partnership with Lindsay Wildlife Experience.

MDAS volunteers joined MVSD's District Biologist Kelly Davidson and Utility Laborer Jesus Diaz near the viewing platform on the southern shore of the marsh for the repairs. The work consisted of repairing wooden railings, fixing broken hardware, and installing new sand and gravel nesting substrate. Winds had blown away the sand and gravel that mimics nesting habitat along the shoreline. We first stapled down fiberglass mesh screening that helps hold the sand and gravel to the smooth wooden decking of the rafts. The screening was captured around the edges by a 2x2 wooden railing. Fresh sand and gravel was then spread upon the rafts. The District fortunately had a backhoe handy to help push the rafts back into the water and they have subsequently moored the rafts in position, just in time for the nesting season! District employees completed additional repairs such as installing 2x6s to close the gap between adjacent rafts. This is to keep fledglings from falling into the gap. One raft had leaking flotation and will be addressed at a later date. The rafts can be conveniently viewed from the observation platform.



MDAS volunteers along with MVSD helpers at McNabney Marsh (from left) Jesus Diaz, Maren Smith, Jerry Smith, Kelly Davidson, Alan Bade, Jerry Britten, Joy Dardin-Hakola

Photo: Joy Dardin-Hakola

MVSD is trying to provide safe nesting habitat for birds that have their nests flooded during high water events. The rafts have proved to be successful especially with Black-necked Stilts and American Avocets. Please see the nesting raft **project page** and **nesting bird report page** for a description of the project's origin. Kelly has posted an account of our repair project on the **Mt. Diablo Wetlands Fund's Facebook page**. The Mt. Diablo Wetlands Fund is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that benefits MVSD's wetlands and education programs. MDAS has contributed \$2000 to this fund. Hopefully, we'll be able to visit the **MVSD Wetlands Facebook page** later in the year for photos of nesting progress and baby birds.

MVSD should be commended for their considerable efforts to enhance wildlife and bird habitat at the marshes! I'm proud that MDAS was able to help in this common goal.

Alan Bade, *Community Science*

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## Meetings and Walks Cancelled? Enjoy Your Love of Birds Online!

Dal Leite

For MDAS members who are looking for ways to enjoy birds while our meetings and walks are canceled, there are online solutions! While the National Audubon Society's "**Bird Therapy**" and Cornell Labs' "**Beacons of Hope**" are specifically designed for these trying times, the **BirdWideWeb.com** website created by the former MDAS webmaster Dal Leite has scores of links and reviews of myriad online birding resources of broad interest. All three sites offer vast opportunities for exploration, learning, and entertainment.

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## Events

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**Important notice:** Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, be sure to check with the event organizers to confirm that the event has not been postponed or canceled. For a list of birding festivals, conventions, and events in the US that have been cancelled click **HERE**.

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### **“Bird-A-Thon” Fund-Raising Event For The East Bay Regional Park District**

Are you interested in participating in an exciting “Dawn-to-Dusk” birding adventure while helping to generate funds to support the East Bay Parks Wildlife Volunteer Program?

During this “Quest for more than 150 birds in a Day” you will get “nose to beak” with birds visiting several active bird research and restoration projects in the East Bay Parks.

A donation of at least \$50.00 to the East Bay Parks Foundation will support the mission of protecting and enhancing the California Least Tern and Western Snowy Plover nesting habitats.

**Date:** Friday, April 24, 2020  
**Time:** ½ hour before sunrise to sunset  
**Instructor:** “Doc Quack” Certified Wildlife Biologist and Friends  
**Registration:** [docquack@ebparks.org](mailto:docquack@ebparks.org),  
**Doc Quack's Wildlife Volunteers,**

Space is limited, so please register by April 10 to receive directions. Join us for a great BIG day of birding!

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## Join Save Mount Diablo and MDAS on Partnership Hike

Through a partnership with Save Mount Diablo (SMD), MDAS is offering a bird-focused tour of private SMD and East Bay Regional Park (EBRP) properties in 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

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

The hike will meet at Park and Ride at 1000 Peacock Creek Dr at the intersection of Clayton Rd and Peacock Creek Dr in Clayton with carpooling suggested to Curry Canyon Ranch.

## Bringing Back the Natives Virtual Garden Tour

*Note that Conservation Chair Nancy Wenninger's special tour of her California Native Plants garden on Saturday, May 2 has been cancelled. Instead take a virtual tour online.*

Use some of that extra time you have at home to plan how you will show your garden some love, bring nature home, and help the environment by incorporating beautiful native plants into your garden.

In addition to the featured Tour gardens, we will include posts on how to get started planning your own native plant garden, what designers can help you plan your own garden with virtual consultations, what natives are in flower, and what birds, bees, and butterflies are visiting the native plants in Tour gardens. Learn what weeds are popping up and how you can control them, and what you can be doing in your garden each month.

Learn more at <https://www.bringingbackthenatives.net/2020-virtual-tour>.



American Robin in Toyon berries

Photo: Maren Smith

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Celebrate Earth Day by Joining Us for this Unique Event !

## McNabney Marsh Earth Day Cleanup & Bird Watching Saturday, May 9th, 2020

Join us for both fun events or just one...

Bird Watching with the Mt. Diablo Audubon Society

7:00am to 9:00am

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Cleanup at McNabney Marsh

10am to Noon

Meet at the Corner of Waterbird Way and Waterfront Road, Martinez, CA

We will start the day with a bird watching event hosted by the Mt. Diablo Audubon Society followed by a cleanup around McNabney Marsh on Waterbird Way in Martinez.

Children 10 years and above (supervised by an adult) are welcome to participate.

Reservations and signed liability forms are REQUIRED. Heavy Rain cancels.

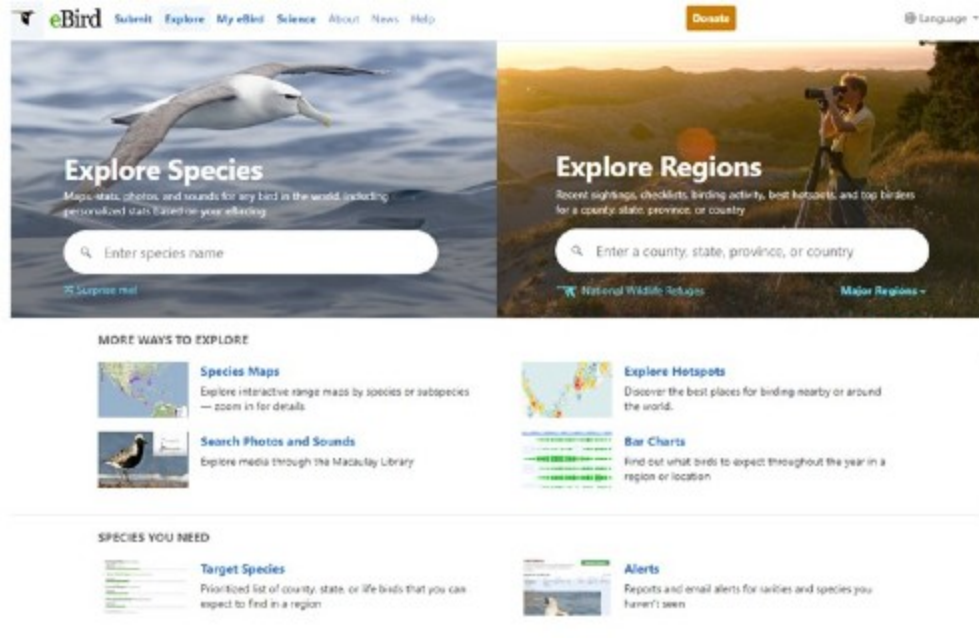


CONTRA COSTA  
CLEAN WATER  
PROGRAM

Contact Heidi Petty for more info or to RSVP: [hpetty@ccrcd.org](mailto:hpetty@ccrcd.org).

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**Attend a Free Class: Using eBird**



**Wednesday, May 20, 2020 6:30–8:30 PM**  
**Save Mount Diablo Offices, Walnut Creek**

This free class will cover the basics of using **eBird** as a tool for the birding enthusiast, and will teach you how to enter, edit, and share your checklists. Participants are asked to bring laptops/tablets and phones to the class for interactive instruction. Limited to the first 15 participants. To sign up contact the organizer and instructor, Jerry Britten, at [vicepresident@mtdiabloudubon.org](mailto:vicepresident@mtdiabloudubon.org).

**David Allen Sibley—What It’s Like to Be a Bird**



Can birds smell? Do robins “hear” worms? From flying to nesting, eating to singing, come hear what our feathered friends are doing up there—and why. David Allen Sibley, America’s preeminent birder and the author of the wildly popular Sibley Guides, answers some of our most common questions and provides a deeper understanding of the fascinating world of birds. Geared for birders and

non-birders alike. Use discount code **MDAS25** for 25% off!

- Date:** Wednesday, May 20, 2020
- Time:** 7:00 PM
- Location:** Jewish Community Center of San Francisco  
3200 California Street, San Francisco, CA 9411
- Tickets:** \$30 (MDAS member code **MDAS25** is 25% off)
- Event Link:** <https://www.jccsf.org/events/arts-ideas/david-allen-sibley/>





At the March MDAS monthly program, Dr. Norman Kikuchi presented vivid photos of iconic birds of the western United States from birding hotspots in New Mexico, Oregon, and California.

Photo: Marc Desin



At the March MDAS monthly program, Jill Hedgecock spoke about addressing the emerging environmental concern of microplastics.

Photo: Marc Desin



McNabney Marsh Nesting Raft Repair  
(from left) Jesus Diaz, Jerry Britten

Photo: Maren Smith



McNabney Marsh Nesting Raft Repair  
(from left) Kelly Davidson, Joy Dardin-Hakola  
Photo: Maren Smith

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**Mt. Diablo Audubon Society Leadership**

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