



Mt. Diablo Audubon Society

The Quail

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MAY 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 the May monthly meeting and all field trips through May 31.*** 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.

Presidents' Letter

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

April, usually a bustling month filled with Earth Day celebrations, John Muir's birthday party, and popular field trips, passed a little more slowly as we stayed home and navigated our new normal. However, the swallows, warblers, and flycatchers have returned and we are reminded that nature gives us some much needed reliable predictability, giving us some comfort in these uncertain times. Thank goodness for the birds!



While utterly devastating, the pandemic has also spawned stories of resilience, resourcefulness, creativity, and some much-needed positivity. I look forward to CBS "Sunday Morning" with Jane Pauley for the feel-good stories, some much needed levity, and the awe-

inspiring, “Moment of Zen” nature video at the culmination of the show, a little calm in the midst of chaos. Have you seen actor **John Krasinski’s “Some Good News” web series**? If not, you might enjoy his humorous and refreshing take featuring inspiring humans.

Speaking of some good news, the MDAS Board met by teleconference in April with a focus on donations to deserving non-profits that could use some financial good news about now. Using the MDAS mission statement as guidance, we focused on non-profits that directly affect birds, wildlife, and habitat through conservation, education, and advocacy, with 25% of the total donations focused on international non-profits doing work where “our” birds winter. For the year, MDAS has donated \$23,750 on behalf of its members.

For 2019–2020 the following donations were made:

- **Golden Gate Raptor Observatory**
- **International Bird Rescue**
- **Raptors are the Solution**
- **The Gardens at Heather Farm**
- **The Lindsay Wildlife Experience**
- **Point Blue Conservation Science**
- **Save Mount Diablo** (land acquisition)
- **John Muir Land Trust** (Almond Ranch acquisition and Pacheco Marsh project)
- **San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory** (SFBBO)
- **Mono Lake Committee**
- **Audubon California Tricolored Blackbirds**
- Avery Peters (Eagle Scout raptor perch project)
- **Integral Ecology Research Center**
- **Wildcare Marin**
- **Feather River Land Trust**
- **American Bird Conservancy**
- **California Native Plant Society—East Bay Chapter**
- **Mt. Diablo Wetlands Fund** (McNabney Marsh projects)
- **National Audubon Society**
- **Native Bird Connections**
- **California Bluebird Recovery Program**

and non-profits with an international focus:

- **Pronatura Sur**
- **Rainforest Trust (Amazon and Colombia)**
- **Trees, Water & People**
- **Siyaj Chan**
- **Pronatura México**

Through thank you notes and emails, these non-profits have expressed their gratitude for MDAS's support. In a recent email from Max Tarjan, PhD, SFBBO Waterbird Program Director, she said, "Thank you so much for Mt. Diablo Audubon Society's generous donation to the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory. We greatly appreciate the support at this time. While our fieldwork is limited to the tasks that support essential services, our programs continue to thrive and grow through planning for future projects and developing new ways to work with partners and the public virtually. In 2017 I gave a talk at the Mt. Diablo Audubon Society about SFBBO's **Colonial Waterbird Monitoring Program**, which engages citizen scientists in nest monitoring at waterbird breeding colonies in the San Francisco Bay Area. This hiatus in fieldwork has allowed me to make the resulting long-term dataset visible to the public via an **interactive webmap** and also a **data request form**. Please feel free to share these resources with your members if you think they would be of interest. Thank you again for your support. I hope that you and all of your members are doing well."

As we become hyperaware of each nook and cranny of our own backyards, decks, and neighborhoods, and have had more time to observe the spring nature show, members are reporting never-before-seen backyard or neighborhood birds. Is it possible that they were visiting each year all along, but we hadn't had the time or the laser focus to notice?

EBB Sightings is full of first-of-season (FOS) birds like orioles and flycatchers, but birders have also reported five hummer observations in patches of purple Pride of Madiera flowers near Garin East Bay Regional Park. I had my first backyard Rufous Hummingbird for a day and a half, and Ariana saw her first neighborhood Steller's Jay. Celebrate the little things.

Everyone has experienced new challenges navigating the Stay-At-Home orders. Are you making bread or homemade pizzas? Have you dusted off the sewing machine to create DIY facemasks? Graduations, concerts, and family milestones may be missed or postponed this year, but other important memories are being made. For example, Ariana's 5-year-old son, Dimitry, shed the training wheels and learned to ride a two-wheeler bike.

What about you? Have you discovered birding spots that are favorable to social distancing? Are you enjoying the fledglings in your yard learning to eat from their parents at a bird feeder? Do you have a stay-at-home story to share? Submit your stories and photos of birding to thequail@mtdiabloudubon.org.

With less traffic and less-crowded parks, there are reports of bear parties in Yosemite NP, and I saw a photo of a coyote on the beach at Crissy Field in San Francisco with the Golden Gate Bridge as a backdrop. With fewer cars on the road, Los Angeles has reported a 31% drop in smog pollution resulting in clear skies, as have other major cities worldwide. Imagine that!

In between activities and work obligations, hopefully, you will be able to gain new perspective by getting outside for some exercise, fresh air, change of place, and the reassuring sounds of bird song, nesting season, and new life.

Hopefully, some of you are culling through years of photographs in an effort to get organized. Please consider sending those in for the **MDAS Photo contest!** Deadline is May 13! See www.mtdiabloaudubon.org for details.

Our regularly scheduled May monthly meeting and all May field trips have been canceled due to COVID-19. We will follow Contra Costa County health guidelines to be sure that when we do gather, it is safe to do so. If plans change, we will contact you by email and through social media and website portals.

Since we will not be meeting in May, our annual election will take place by email. The Nominating Committee has proposed a slate of four candidates: Jerry Britten, President; Ariana Rickard, Vice-President; Steve Buffi, Treasurer; Carol Pacht, Secretary, but, per MDAS Bylaws, nominations are also permitted from the floor—in this case, as a write-in vote.

You will receive information about how to vote in the Monday, May 4 email reminder sent to members. PLEASE!! take the time to vote when you receive that email (directions will be in the body of the email).

In a recent National Audubon communication, it read: “Birds have meaning and we keep them safe for their own sake, of course. But it’s also true that they have important things to teach us: They offer us a sense of wonder. They give us a sense of place. And they show us how to persist with resilience through the toughest times.”

These are stressful, unprecedented, tough times. But, with persistent resilience, we will get through this to gather, to work together towards conservation efforts and policies that benefit birds, and to share some wonderful bird observations and stay-at-home tales. Hang in there.

Until then, stay safe, and see you on the other side!

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

<p>ANNUAL ELECTION TO BE HELD VIA EMAIL</p>
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The election for 2020–2021 Board of Directors officers, normally held at the May monthly meeting, will instead be held online via email, due to meeting cancellations in light of COVID-19 health orders.

LOOK FOR YOUR BALLOT in your email inbox on or around May 4. Please check your spam or junk folder if you do not see it.

Simply click the link, vote yes or no, and submit. There is also a line for write-in candidates.

It is essential to submit your ballot as soon as possible, as we need a quorum for the election to be valid. The nominations slate includes: Jerry Britten as President, Ariana Rickard as Vice President, Steve Buffi as Treasurer, and Carol Pachi as Secretary.

DEADLINE TO VOTE IS MAY 13.

Thank you for making this adjustment as we continue to use technology to adapt to present circumstances!

Rosalie Howarth, *MDAS Publicity and Social Media*

Last Chance for the MDAS Photo Contest!



Yellow-headed Blackbird

Photo: Maren Smith



Northern Flicker

Photo: Cassie Tzur

The first-ever Mt. Diablo Audubon Society 2020 Photography Contest
is STILL ON!

We have received a number of amazing, charming, and flat-out funny photos in all six categories, but we'd still love to see YOUR best shots!

Go through your birding photos taken at any time, anywhere within California, and choose your favorites to submit to: <https://mtdiablobaudubon.org/photo-contest/>

It's a great stay-at-home activity!

This is a casual, friendly, amateur-oriented competition. No need for special equipment or techniques. We just want to see that cool catch, that special moment, that wonderful composition, or that weird bird behavior. Nationally renowned and award-winning local avian photographer Bob Lewis has agreed to be one of our judges. THE DEADLINE IS MAY 13.

We'd especially love to see more Youth submissions. Youth need not be members to submit, so encourage your kids, grandkids, nieces and nephews, or neighborhood young people 9–17 to enter. A slide show of the finalists and modest prizes to the winners will be awarded at our September meeting, fingers crossed.

Must be an MDAS member to enter.*

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

*Youths ages 9–17 do not need a membership to participate.



Upcoming Field Trips

Important notice: Field trips are canceled through May 31. 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.

Outer Point Reyes

Saturday, June 6, 7:00 AM

Leader: Hugh Harvey 925-935-2979

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 Hints 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. 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. **Limited to 25 participants. Must call leaders ahead of time.** 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.

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.

Do These Simple Things To Help Stop Climate Change

Juan Pablo Galván, *Young Birders Club Leader*

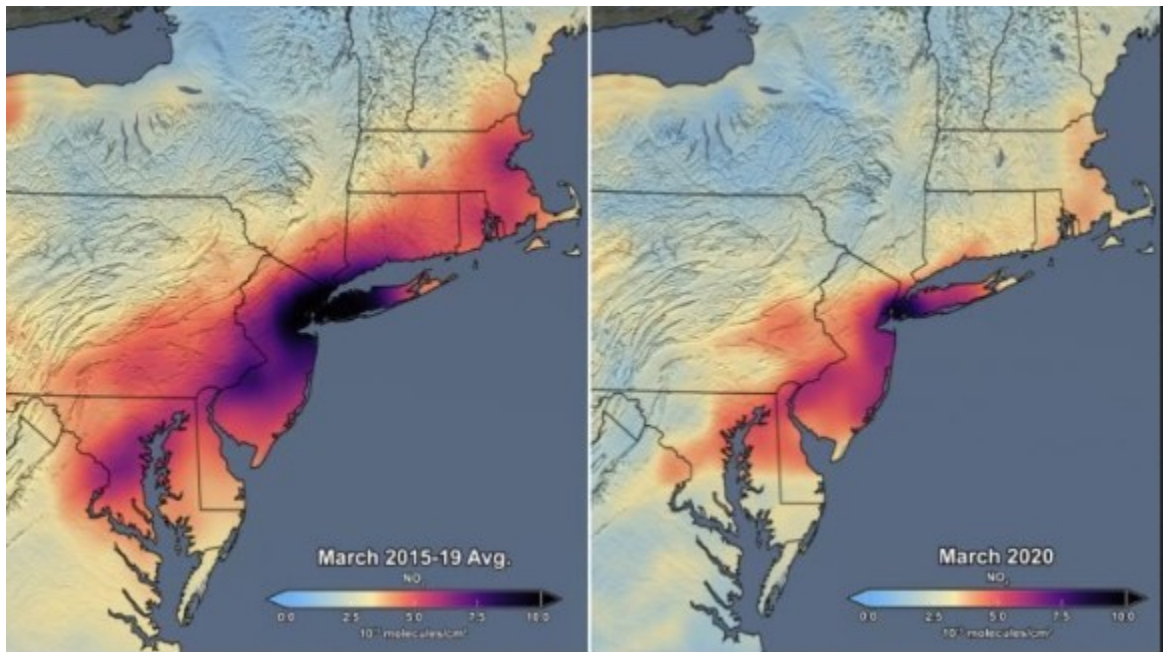
There Are TWO Global Crises Going On. Act On Both With the Urgency You've Acted On The Virus.

For many of us, the COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically changed our lives. Since its appearance in December 2019, most governments and people around the world have ordered and implemented huge changes to avert disaster.

A global response like this is exactly what has been needed for decades to confront catastrophic global climate change. There are no quick fixes. What is needed is a fundamental change to how we live our lives, just like we've responded to the virus. There will be a new normal in response to COVID-19. The same must be true if we are to avoid climate catastrophe.

What can you do now...?

1. **Reflect** on the hard lessons COVID-19 has taught us that can be applied to fighting climate change, and practice them going forward. Read **THIS** for a good start.
2. **Eat less meat.** Did you know that only 4% of all mammals on Earth are wild? The remaining 96% are livestock and human biomass. Get more protein from beans, nuts, legumes, etc, not just for climate change, but for all sorts of reasons. Read a great article about it **HERE**.
3. **After lockdowns, CONTINUE TO REDUCE fossil fuel use.** You might have seen articles about how, due to the shutdown of polluting industries and driving less, air pollution is being reduced and greenhouse gas emissions are temporarily going down. Keep it up even after the lockdowns end! Drive a lot less, use a conference call or virtual meetings. Think of ways to do things that avoid polluting. Get creative, and recognize that if the air is so much cleaner in this crisis, what are we doing to our environment and ourselves in 'normal' times?



Reduction of air pollution on the East Coast as a result of the lockdown

4. **VOTE for the environment.** The Trump administration is using this pandemic as cover to let polluting industries get away with doing even more environmental damage without repercussion (read more [HERE](#) and [HERE](#)). Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the US government's environmental record has been appalling. The Fall 2020 election is getting closer. VOTE.
5. **Understand the Big Picture.** Individual actions on climate change are important. They are also not enough. The pandemic is a reminder of just how wicked a problem climate change is because it requires collective action, public understanding and buy-in, and decarbonizing the energy mix while supporting economic growth and energy use around the world. All of these factors will be extremely difficult to address. Look into other ways that you can better understand and help tackle these huge issues right now.

Field Trip Reports

Pine Canyon April 14, 2020

For several years in mid-April, Mt. Diablo Audubon has conducted a field trip through Pine Canyon, Walnut Creek. I was slated to lead the April 14 trip but COVID-19 has precluded any group activities by MDAS—and wisely so.

The regional park district, while closing all facilities, and the parking lot at the end of Castle Rock Road near the trailhead, has allowed the trails to remain open, as well as the large dirt lot opposite the equestrian paddocks. As such, I considered a bird walk

with just one other birder—both strictly maintaining the 6-foot social distance rule. I was joined on Tuesday by Beth Branthaver.



Spotted Towhee

Photo: Jerry Britten

We began in the recreation area (Castle Rock), looking through the grand oaks adjacent to the pool, and checked out the row of Locust Trees next to the basketball court. Then it was up the trail and into that section of Pine Canyon known as Diablo Foothills Regional Park. We proceeded to, and went no further than, the state park boundary. Up and back took about 3½ hours.

This is our species list:

California Quail, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Mourning Dove, White-throated Swift, Anna's Hummingbird, Turkey Vulture, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Acorn Woodpecker, Nuttall's Woodpecker, Peregrine Falcon, Black Phoebe, Western Kingbird, Cassin's Vireo (heard), Warbling Vireo (heard), California Scrub-Jay, Common Raven, Violet-green Swallow, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Oak Titmouse, Bushtit, White-breasted Nuthatch, House Wren, Bewick's Wren, Western Bluebird, American Robin, California Thrasher, House Finch, Lesser Goldfinch, Orange-crowned Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler (both Audubon's and Myrtle), Townsend's Warbler, Wilson's Warbler (heard), Spotted Towhee, California Towhee, Lark Sparrow, Song Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Golden-crowned Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco (Oregon), Black-headed Grosbeak (heard), Western Meadowlark (heard), Bullock's Oriole (three very active pairs along the way).

Count: 43 species

Hear The Hummmm?

Mike Eliot, MDAS Member-at-Large

Now that most of us are staying home, we have the time to pay more attention to our backyard birds. Migration has started early this year bringing hordes of hummingbirds to our yards and feeders. Rufous, Allen's, and Calliope have been seen recently in the area.



Hummingbirds are some of the most beloved and awesome birds to attract to our yards. They're not only fun to watch, but they can do things most birds can only dream about. Flying upside down, backwards, and drinking nectar while in flight are only a few remarkable feats. They do not walk, but fly, even if a fraction of an inch.

Customers often wonder if nectar is appropriate. Because of hummers' high metabolism, they require lots of quick energy. Sugars in nectar are quickly converted to energy. You will often see the same hummer at your feeder every 10 to 15 minutes during the day. The rest of their diet is small insects, which provide their protein, fat, and vitamins.



Male Rufous Hummingbird at feeder

Photo: Mike Eliot

Here are a few tips: Position nectar feeders to be easily visible and away from predator hiding places. The birds will learn how to drink from feeders that have top, side, and even tube openings at the bottom. Their tongues are substantially longer than their beaks, so they can reach to the bottoms of long flowers or deep hummingbird feeders. Hummer's tongues also split at the ends to envelop a drop of nectar and move in and out of the nectar at over 12 times per second.

Nectar in feeders may last up to a week in cool weather or go bad in as little as three days in hot weather. Clean feeders often and use new nectar after cleaning. If moldy, clean with a 10% bleach solution, vinegar, or even hydrogen peroxide and brushes. Wash with warm soapy water, rinse thoroughly, and dry. Use fine brushes and don't forget to use a port brush to clean the tiny ports.

Nectar mix is available or you can make your own. Please do not buy nectar mix or liquid that is colored, which can be harmful to birds. To make nectar, use plain, white sugar, no minerals, brown sugars, honey, or syrups. The recipe is one part sugar to four parts water. Put only enough nectar in the feeder to feed the birds for 3-4 days. Extra can be kept in a sealed bottle in the refrigerator for up to two weeks. If you notice any discoloration, brown stuff, or bugs in the nectar, discard it and clean the container. There are also additives available that can make nectar last about twice as long in the feeder and about a month in the refrigerator.

Happy hummer viewing.

Mike Eliot

Wild Birds Unlimited

A Backyard Birding Bonanza

Jerry Britten, *MDAS Vice-President*

Our backyard has been filled with birdlife this spring—and observing them has been a blessed at-home diversion during the unprecedented stay-at-home requirements brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Of course, it helps that our "backyard" is 5 acres of mostly wooded hillside adjacent to open space east of the Mt. Diablo summit! As well as the usual suspects we have come to know over the last 15 years, we have seen quite a number of new yard birds this spring. Some, like the Calliope Hummingbird, may just be the result of more time watching, but others have been truly unexpected.



Calliope Hummingbird

Photo: Jerry Britten

A small flock of Red Crossbills has been in the area for over a month. I have come to recognize their calls as they fly over the house, and they occasionally drop down to our sunflower seed and suet feeders. These are birds of the mountain conifer forests where they use their odd bills to pry open pine cones. We don't have a single conifer on our property, but I have observed them foraging on the valley oak flowers that are abundant this time of year. They are spectacular birds up close.



Red Crossbill

Photo: Jerry Britten

A Yellow-breasted Chat also took up residence for a few days, even singing his unique mockingbird-style song. The presence of this bird in our habitat is equally surprising!

A Chipping Sparrow made a cameo appearance at the top of our hill in late March to round out the new yard-bird species list for the year (so far). In terms of returning migrants that we usually see, warblers have been plentiful. Wilson's warblers are always the most abundant, but I have seen numerous Nashville, Black-throated Gray, Yellow-rumped, Townsend's, and even one Hermit. Warbling Vireos are also quite common this time of year. We have had a good showing of Rufous Hummingbirds this spring, as well as the always-abundant Anna's.



Wilson's Warbler

Photo: Jerry Britten

Now on to nesting birds. After a few-year hiatus, Red-shouldered Hawks are again nesting in a big oak over our patio. They started late compared with other reports of nesting of this species. Black Phoebes are nesting under the gable. In nest boxes scattered around the property are, per usual, nests of Oak Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Western Bluebird and House Wren. I know of one Bushtit nest down by our gate and an Oregon Junco nest on the hillside.

Large flocks of turkeys come through almost daily. Paired-up California Quail are constant visitors to the feeders, as well as a large flock of Golden-crowned Sparrows and House Finches, with a few White-crowned Sparrows, California Towhees, and Spotted Towhees thrown in. Bullock's Orioles are enjoying the birdbath. Very recently, we had Lesser Goldfinch, American Goldfinch, and Pine Siskin on our nyjer seed feeder simultaneously!



Yellow-breasted Chat

Photo: Jerry Britten

In the coming weeks we look forward to the annual arrival of Swainson's Thrush, Yellow Warbler, and Lazuli Bunting, and to increased numbers of Western Tanagers, Ash-throated Flycatchers, and Black-headed Grosbeaks. The latter two have nested here in the past. Good Birding to you all, enjoy your backyard or neighborhood birding, and stay safe!

Jerry Britten, *MDAS Vice-President*

Restoring Pacheco Marsh: An Inspiration to All

Krista Vossekui, *MDAS Member-at-Large*

The Restoration of Pacheco Marsh, where Walnut Creek flows into Suisun Bay, is part of the greater effort to recover the extensive salt marsh ecosystem that is vital for a healthy San Francisco Bay. John Muir Land Trust is raising funds to construct amenities that will allow the public to explore and discover this remarkable site. MDAS has donated to help support this project.



Pacheco Marsh Map

Restoring the 232 acres of Pacheco Marsh has innumerable benefits for natural and human communities:

THRIVING HABITAT

Biologists are recreating habitat for threatened bird species, marine invertebrates, and coastal fish. Pacheco Marsh is home to 10 special-status plant and animal species, including the Salt-marsh harvest mouse and the Black Rail—rarely-seen and on the list of avid bird-watchers. Nutrients and biological connectivity are being restored through soil quality rehabilitation and lowering of the levee. When the site opens, visitors will experience abundant wildlife thriving side-by-side with human communities. The site is known as a birders' paradise.

NATURAL SOLUTIONS TO MEET COMMUNITY NEEDS

Salt marshes protect shorelines from erosion by buffering wave action and trapping sediments. Marshes protect water quality by filtering runoff and metabolizing excess nutrients. Marshes protect community infrastructure during periods of intense flooding.

Thoughtful design strengthens ecological resilience by allowing the marsh to adapt over time to climate change and sea level rise.

RECREATION

With planned low-impact features in place, bird watchers and outdoor enthusiasts will soon view wildlife responsibly in restored habitat. Those seeking healthy recreation will explore carefully constructed trails that offer up-close views of each sub-ecosystem while protecting the marsh's full-time residents. Young minds will experience nature firsthand. All will be enthralled by the stunning contrasts—thriving habitat surrounded by a stark industrial backdrop. The towers of oil refineries can be seen in the distance while tankers pass underneath the parallel spans of the Benicia-Martinez Bridge to the north. The entire history of the shoreline can be experienced in this one remarkable place.

NEXT STEPS

Three partners are working to restore Pacheco Marsh's wildlife habitat and wetland activity: John Muir Land Trust (JMLT), the Contra Costa County Flood Control District, and the East Bay Regional Park District. Biological restoration is underway. JMLT is raising funds to begin construction on features needed to open the marsh to the general public.



Proposed Features Map

Learn more about Pacheco Marsh on [JMLT's website](#).

DONATE by clicking [here](#).

View [JMLT's Virtual Briefing](#) here.

Read the article in "Estuary News".

For questions, please contact John Muir Land Trust's Director of Philanthropy, Krista Vossekul, at krista@jmlt.org

An Ode To The Usual Suspects

Rosalie Howarth, *MDAS Publicity and Social Media*

I am by no means a "Snooty Birder", but I do confess to undervaluing, even ignoring, our common-as-dirt everyday birds.

I'm talking about *you* Mallards, Canada Geese, Mourning Doves, TVs, American Crows, Coots, and House Sparrows!



House Sparrow

Photo: Evan Lipton/Macaulay Library at the
Cornell Lab of Ornithology (ML51357991)



Mourning Dove

Photo: Maren Smith

Sometimes I actually forget to eBird the Canada Geese, while meticulously logging the Ring-neckeds, Buffles, and Ruddies. Then I have to enter, oh I don't know, 35? 60?

And have you ever said—"Oh it's only a Turkey Vulture" while scanning the skies raptly for raptors?

I've even heard, barked out, "Gull—species unknown. Don't care."

Scanning for "cooler" birds, I eye-roll the clumsy Mourning Dove squeaking along, head bobbing.

I know they can't ALL be Kestrels, Buntings, Peregrines, Orioles, Mergansers, or the (all BUT Common) Yellowthroat.

But today I celebrate the lowly, the ordinary, the overlooked...the "Usual Suspects".

The other day at the Heather Farm Nature Lake I saw a little girl about 6 years old, shrieking, laughing, and pressing her hands to the sides of her face. When I got closer to see what was setting her off, I saw that she was staring at a male Mallard on the bank, his green head shimmering in the sun, the blue chevron winking on his wing. Suddenly I saw him through her eyes: iridescent, psychedelic; a feast of color with crisply curled tail. She was beside herself, and I was ashamed of myself, routinely dismissing the dime-a-dozen Mallard without appreciating his splendid awesomeness.



Mallard Ducks

Photo: Linda Lewis/Macaulay Library at the
Cornell Lab of Ornithology (ML32932881)



American Crow

Photo: Henry Burton/Macaulay Library at the
Cornell Lab of Ornithology (ML51777001)

Then I considered the much-reviled Canada Goose (may his tribe not increaseth). These intensely social Big Birds share the duties of raising the young, defending the young vigorously with hissing pink tongues, and welcoming geese of other species into the flock without prejudice. Perhaps this is the secret to their success?

And the slow and stupid Mourning Dove with her dim-witted stick nests, doomed to serve as Cooper's fodder in a burst of dove-grey feathers found later on the deck. Her evening call is a haunting touchstone at dusk, and her pearly velvet feathers the color of fog. Bravely she raises her awkward brood on any flat surface an inch-and-a-half wide.

Meetings and Walks Canceled? Enjoy Your Love of Birds Online!

Dal Leite, *Former MDAS Webmaster*

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.

Gardening for the Birds

Kathy Kramer, *Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour Coordinator*

You have likely heard that bird populations have plummeted over the last five decades, with a decline of nearly 3 billion birds across North America in that time period. The causes of this decline are habitat loss, non-native ornamental plants, outdoor cats, roadside mortality, climate change, and security lights (which disrupt bird migrations and reduce birds' food supply when moths exhaust themselves on outdoor lights).

How to reverse this trend? Wildlife ecologist Douglas Tallamy writes,

“We must abandon the notion that humans and nature cannot live together. Though vital as short-term refuges, nature preserves are not large enough to meet our ecological needs—we must restore the natural world where we live, work, and play. Because nearly 85% of the U.S. is privately owned, our private properties are an opportunity for long-term conservation if we design them to meet the needs of the life around us.

“In order to have functioning ecosystems we need to redesign residential landscapes to support diverse pollinator populations and complex food webs by replacing half of the area dedicated to lawn or non-native ornamental plants with diverse plantings of native woody and herbaceous species. Plants differ widely in how well they support wildlife. Native plants support pollinators and food webs far better than introduced ornamentals, and some native plants support much more life than others. Choosing the best plants for your area is the key to success.

“In the past we have designed our landscapes strictly for our own pleasure, with no thought to how they might impact the natural world around us. Such landscapes do not contribute much to local ecosystem function and support little life.”

Tallamy goes on to say,

“With property ownership comes the responsibility to choose plants wisely. The days when we could choose a plant just because it is pretty in the garden are over. When we make that choice, we choose ecological destruction. Native plants are bird feeders. If we plant natives, we’ll have birds, butterflies, and native bees in our gardens.”

The backstory behind the native/ornamental non-natives issue is that while in the nest, and even after they leave it, almost all baby birds feed primarily on caterpillars. Baby birds do not live on seeds, or berries, or sugar water. Caterpillars are not optional for baby birds. If we don’t have caterpillars, we won’t have baby birds.



Black-headed Grosbeak with caterpillar

Photo: Mark Rauzon

As an example, it takes 6,000 to 9,000 caterpillars, collected by both busy chickadee parents over the course of 16 days, to raise a clutch of chickadee babies. And chickadees are tiny birds; just a third of an ounce. How many caterpillars does it take to raise a woodpecker, a bird about eight times heavier?



Chestnut-backed Chickadee with caterpillar

Photo: Alan Kraukauer

So, where do these caterpillars come from? They hatch from the eggs of butterflies and moths. However, butterflies and moths have specialized so that they generally lay their eggs on just one or two kinds of host plants. If we don't have those native host plants, there will be no caterpillars, and thus no baby birds.



Orange-crowned Warbler with caterpillar

Photo: Alan Kraukauer

Native plants—and lots of them—are what's required to restore bird populations. To give some examples, [here](#) is a comparison of how many species of caterpillars are attracted to native and non-native plants.

The good news is that we can reverse these depressing trends by changing the way we manage our own gardens and homes.

Here are the things you can do to help create the world we want to live in and leave for our children:

1. Remove at least half of your lawn and non-native ornamentals and replace them with California native plants: 70% is better. The higher percentage of natives is a requirement for some birds before they will nest in a garden; otherwise they have to fly too far to find enough caterpillars for their chicks.
2. Remove weeds and invasive species from your property.
3. Preserve leaf litter under trees, as this is where many caterpillars spend time as pupa.

4. Incorporate native “keystone species plants” into your garden. These are species with the greatest habitat value to wildlife. Examples are oaks, willow, California lilac, lupine, sages, manzanita, native strawberry, goldenrod, and many more. You can find a list of natives that have the highest value to wildlife in the center of the **Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour’s home page**.
5. Eliminate insecticide use. Homeowners use more insecticides than agriculture does.
6. Put motion sensors on your outdoor lights to protect birds and moths. (Moths exhaust themselves around outdoor lights.)
7. Keep your cats indoors, or confined within a catio.

Events

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 canceled click **HERE**.

Bringing Back the Natives Virtual Garden Tour

Here in the Bay Area, we have an outstanding resource for people who want to create bird-friendly gardens—the annual **Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour**. Due to circumstances we have all heard enough of, this year’s event will take place as follows:

Sundays in the Gardens with the Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour!
Online, instead of in-person. Three days, instead of one. Free.

Join us to hear inspiring speaker and author Douglas Tallamy, who will kick off this event on Sunday, April 26 at 10:00 AM! Following that talk will be a series of live, on line virtual garden visits.

This program will be hosted on Zoom, and livestreamed on YouTube.

These free, online events will be held on the following Sundays:

April 26
10:00 AM–2:00 PM

May 3
10:00 AM–3:00 PM

May 10
10:00 AM–2:00 PM

Pre-registration is required at: **Register for Sundays in the Gardens**
(You will need to register for this event, even if you already registered for the Tour)

earlier this year.)

Schedule for April 26, 2020

10:00 AM–11:45 AM: Renowned ecologist **Douglas Tallamy**, author of “Bringing Nature Home: How Native Plants Sustain Wildlife in Our Gardens” and the New York Times bestseller “Nature’s Best Hope” will kick off this event with the talk “Restoring the Little Things That Run the World: Why It Matters and What We Can Do.” (You won’t want to miss this awesome talk!)

11:45 AM–2:00 PM: In a series of live garden visits passionate garden owners and the talented designers of the Bay Area’s most beautiful and inspiring landscapes will show us what’s happening in the garden now, feature their favorite natives, describe the native plant gardening resources they use most, provide tips for those just getting started, and more!



American Robin in Toyon berries

Photo: Maren Smith

Schedule of garden visits:

Check the **website** closer to the dates of the events for the exact schedule of gardens we’ll be visiting.

“Global Big Day”, May 9, 2020

Alan Bade, *Community Science*

On May 9th, The Cornell Lab of Ornithology will host Global Big Day 2020 within their citizen science program eBird. A “Big Day” is a midnight to midnight attempt

to record as many species (and individual birds) as possible. In 1985, the Cornell lab's competitive birding team, Team Sapsucker, started having "Big Days" every Spring to fundraise for conservation and the Lab. The locations varied and included many years at the **World Series of Birding** a fun event hosted by New Jersey Audubon. Future locations included Texas, Arizona, and California. In 2015, the team went international for the first time in **Panama**. That's when the Lab decided to open up the Big Day to everyone as a truly global event. It was a resounding success with more than 6,000 species recorded, which is approximately 60% of the world's species!



Illustration: Luke Seitz

Last year, 35,209 eBirders from 174 countries collected a record 92,284 checklists, documenting 6,967 species. South American countries **recorded the greatest diversity** with a staggering 1,596 species for Columbia in 2019, 1,511 species for Peru, and well over 1,000 species each for Ecuador and Brazil. In the US, we tallied 727 species. This produced an avalanche of data for ornithologists. These data help them produce world-class **abundance maps** that show changing trends in global bird populations. And, it engages new and experienced birders all over the world in a 24-hour collective effort of observation. Global Big Day increases awareness of bird conservation in a global act of birder solidarity.

It's easy to participate! A checklist of even 5 or 10 minutes can be useful to bird science, or multiple lists during the day. The cumulative total of the worldwide effort builds valuable data for researchers. All you do is record your list(s) in eBird online or in the eBird mobile app. If you don't have an eBird account you can get one **here**. You don't have to be an expert or bird all day; whatever you can record helps. Perhaps this year will be when Global Big Day surpasses 100,000 checklists and beats 2018's record of 7,025 species!

While we are still stuck in a COVID-19 shutdown and social distancing keeps us primarily at home or on solitary birding trips, Global Big Day could be a fun way to pass the time.

McNabney Marsh Earth Day Cleanup & Bird Watching



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

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.



Contact Heidi Petty for more info or to RSVP: hpetty@ccrcd.org.

Bedford Gallery

BEDFORD GALLERY CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS



BIRD, NEST, NATURE

deadline extended to May 9!



bedfordgallery.org/bird

Artwork by David Tomb @david.tomb, *Resplendent Quetzal*, 2007, mixed media on paper.

Calling all bird lovers! Bedford Gallery is currently accepting art submissions for their Summer 2020 exhibition *Bird, Nest, Nature*. The deadline to apply is May 9.

Birds have captured the attention of humankind since the beginning of time, providing an endless source of fascination and inspiration. With their exquisite coloring, stunning tufts of feathers, distinctive silhouettes and graceful flight patterns, birds entice us to look up and marvel. Artwork submitted should be completed pieces or concepts for installation that reference the theme of birds in the work.

Eligibility: Open to all artists, 18 years of age or older, working in all media and all sizes.

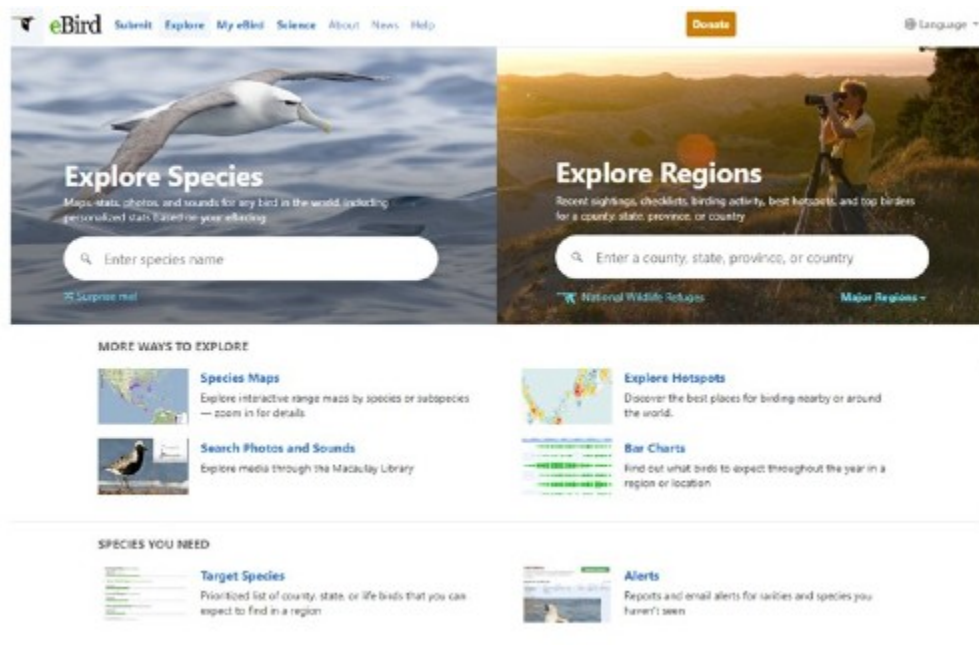
Jurors: Jeffrey De Blois, Assistant Curator, ICA Boston and Rebecca Lowery, Assistant Curator, MOCA Los Angeles.

Over \$2,000 in cash and prizes for artist awards.

Bird, Nest, Nature will be on view at Bedford Gallery from July 12 - September 13, 2020.

For more application details visit bedfordgallery.org/bird.

Attend a Free Class: Using eBird



The eBird Basics class scheduled for May 20 is postponed until a later fall date. Please see future announcements through *The Quail*, via email, and on the MDAS website.

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.

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*
*Please note that this date may be postponed. Check the **JCCSF website** for the most current information.

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/>

May Gallery



Our birds entertain us in Bird Song Opera
Courtesy **Volker Pannes**



Damn The Crows!
Photo: Maren Smith

More Of The "Usual Suspects"



California Scrub-Jay
Photo: Maren Smith



Downy Woodpecker and House Finch
on feeder
Photo: Maren Smith



Squirrel who stole an entire length of Tibetan prayer flags for her nest
Photo: Maren Smith

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Mailing address:

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

Email address:

info@mtdiabloaudubon.org

Mt. Diablo Audubon Society Leadership

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