



# Mt. Diablo Audubon Society

## **The Quail**

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

Mt. Diablo Audubon Society has canceled all activities for the month of June. Please check our [website](#) and our [Facebook page](#) for updates.

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## **Presidents' Letter**

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

June, traditionally the month for brides, graduates, the annual MDAS potluck dinner, and the official start of summer is a little different this year. Unfortunately, all MDAS activities are canceled for the month of June.



Pandemic fatigue is upon us as we struggle to be good sports while we navigate social distancing norms, figure out how to wear face masks without our glasses fogging up, and find new and novel ways to interact with friends and family at a safe distance.

The MDAS Board has joined the world of Zoom for meetings and realizes how important it is for everyone to have a chance to learn, interact, and feel a sense

of community. Starting in September, should we be unable to gather in person, we hope to provide monthly meetings by Zoom with a webinar format.

If you are interested in helping make that happen, we could use your help and expertise, working with the Program Chair and guest speakers to make the content available to our members. Please contact any Board member to help MDAS continue to provide interesting monthly meetings in new ways.

The MDAS year is winding down. Elections were held using online voting this year, and we welcome Jerry Britten as the 2020–2021 President (and Web Editor), with Ariana Rickard serving as Vice-President (and Program Coordinator) and Carol Pachl continuing in her role as Secretary, and Steve Buffi as Treasurer. Thank you to our members for voting, and congratulations to the new Board Officers!

Thank you to everyone who served on a committee, led a field trip, tabled a community event, participated in meetings, worked with our community and youth to promote educational and conservation programs and projects, took a leadership role, and supported MDAS this year. A special thanks to Cathy Castillo, Sales Manager, who is “retiring”; we thank her for taking the lead on MDAS gear and making the raffle a fun way to support MDAS.

Looking back on the year, until mid-March, we were on a roll, accomplishing many important goals. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, varied spring events were postponed, but they will be back next year, for sure, bigger and better!

- Communication was a key focus as MDAS launched a robust, modernized website, embarked on a new eQuail format for the newsletter, initiated Mailchimp to communicate with members for meeting reminders and time-sensitive “Call-to-Action” issues, and provided engaging social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, and MeetUp to interact with members and a wider audience.
- Conservation sponsored a successful raft repair project at McNabney Marsh in conjunction with Mt. View Sanitary District, providing revamped nesting platforms for shorebirds. Other spring event plans had included a McNabney Marsh Earth Day event, California Audubon Tricolored Blackbird Survey, two Save Mount Diablo partnership hikes and the BioBlitz, and a California Native Plants Garden Tour by Nancy Wenninger. Jerry Britten had scheduled an eBird class with an eye on helping members become more comfortable and proficient with the eBird format for Christmas Bird Count reporting data. Next year!

- To build Community, MDAS offered stylish Audubon ball caps along with polo shirts, and initiated a first-ever photography contest to showcase our talented members. Look for a special summer eQuail issue as winners and their spectacular photos are announced. As always, we had a full line-up of fascinating monthly programs and well-attended field trips, and the Young Birders Club was active with a growing crew of new members attending monthly field trips.
- The Education Committee provided adult classes, bird guide brochures at the Heather Farm information kiosk, is working with the City of Walnut Creek to provide bird posters for Open Space kiosks, participated in several community tabling events, and had plans to present a Beginning Birding slide show with activities for a Cub Scout Den in Danville. The “No Child Left Inside” program was also postponed, but when it’s safe to gather, we will be back!

Looking at our current situation, while health issues remain uncertain, the birds have stayed the course providing us with endless entertainment at backyard feeders and in nearby natural spaces. The fledglings with their insistent, loud begging calls and fluttering wings put on an entertaining show as they vie for parental attention and food. I’ve had an all-star line-up on stage this spring: Oak Titmouse, House Finch, Bushtit, Nuttall’s Woodpecker, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, and a surprise guest, a Brown-headed Cowbird!

Ariana and I enjoyed working together as MDAS Co-Presidents this year, and feel a sense of pride and satisfaction in having helped promote our chapter’s goals. Thank you for a great year!

Looking to the future, MDAS will strive to adapt to find innovative ways to provide monthly meetings, education, and opportunities to stay engaged. One thing is certain: we remain committed to conservation, education, and advocacy concerns, hopeful for a better future that we work toward together.

*“Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul and sings the tune without the words and never stops at all.”*

~Emily Dickinson

Stay safe, stay hopeful, and see you on the other side!

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

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**Welcome, New Members!**

Natalie Ambrosio, Berkeley  
Mark Burnham, Walnut Creek  
William Roca, Walnut Creek  
Kathryn Siegel, Walnut Creek

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## Election Results For The 2020–2021 MDAS Board Of Directors

We had a fantastic turnout in the online election for annual officers! Almost 150 MDAS members took part, and the result was a resounding affirmation for the slate of Board officers proposed for the July 2020–June 2021 MDAS year:



Jerry Britten, *President*



Ariana Rickard, *Vice-President*



Steve Buffi, *Treasurer*



Carol Pachi, *Secretary*

We are fortunate that these long-time members are willing to devote countless volunteer hours and their experience and leadership to help guide the chapter through this very challenging year. Take a moment to get to know them below!

### **Jerry Britten, *President***

Jerry has participated in the MDAS Christmas Bird Count surveys and data compilation since the mid 1990s. He served as Vice-President last year, and steps up to President on July 1. He also serves as our Website Editor.

Jerry has a Ph.D. in Chemical Engineering from the University of Colorado, and worked at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory for 32 years. He is currently a consultant/independent contractor in the design and manufacture of diffractive optics and thin-film coatings. Also an active member of Save Mount Diablo, Jerry is an enthusiastic and talented bird photographer.

He and his wife of 41 years, Carrie, live in a rural area outside Clayton. Their daughter and two grandkids live nearby, and a son lives in Florida.

As he takes over the reins, Jerry says: "The social component of our group activities, monthly meetings, outreach, and the popular field trip programs, have been hit hard by the current situation. We need to focus on community engagement to keep our organization relevant until all this is over. We are lucky to have a tremendously talented and committed governing board, and I like our chances."

Among his three favorite birds: "the next new one", Western Tanager, and Sri Lanka Frogmouth.

### **Ariana Rickard, *Vice-President***

Our current Co-President (with Maren Smith), Ariana Rickard is our Programs Chair, and since 2012 has been presenting the fascinating speakers, authors, and photographers that have made our monthly meetings so successful. She worked for Audubon California for 5 years, and now serves as Conservation Program Coordinator with the SF Bay Joint Venture.

Ariana's spark bird was "Pale Male", a famous Red-tailed Hawk who made his home near Central Park in NYC. Ariana read the book *Red-Tails in Love* by Marie Winn, chronicling his adventures and the fans who watched him from Central Park. She was fascinated by how this one hawk brought together so many New Yorkers from all walks of life, and her fascination with birds was born.

Ariana also serves on the Public Relations Committee of the Contra Costa County Commission for Women & Girls, and is collaborating with our Young Birders Club Chair Juan Pablo Galván to create an Environmental Professionals of Color chapter in San Francisco. Their goal is to diversify the environmental

movement by promoting more inclusion of people of color, who are underrepresented in the field.

And as if that weren't enough, she and her husband Pierre Bull are working from home in Pleasant Hill while caring for their two sons Dimitry, age 5, and Nico, age 3!

Among her three favorite birds: Roseate Spoonbill, Acorn Woodpecker, Belted Kingfisher.

**Steve Buffi, *Treasurer***

One of the great secrets of our chapter's success and stability has been our Treasurer Steve Buffi, whose steady hand has guided our finances since 2005. Steve and his wife Anne Waters live in Walnut Creek with their two indoor cats Lucy and George.

As Steve's 37-year career in IT at Chevron began to wind down, Anne suggested bird-watching as a hobby. It was an inspired suggestion, and since then he has enjoyed traveling the country on birding road trips, learning about our nation's avian treasures.

Steve also serves on the board and selection committee of the Mike Voyne Memorial Scholarship Fund, named for the famed Lowell High School football coach.

Steve's goal for our chapter's future is to remain financially secure as we navigate the choppy waters of the current economic climate, and to emerge ready to continue the vital work of bringing people together to protect birds and their habitats.

Among his three Favorite Birds: Chestnut-backed Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, and Nuttall's Woodpecker.

**Carol Pachi, *Secretary***

Carol has been a member of Mt. Diablo Audubon for 17 years, serving as Secretary since 2015. She is also a member of the Education Committee and the Legislative Action Committees, and is the chapter's representative for the Bay Area Council of Audubon California.

Carol has spent many hours updating and revising our chapter's governing documents such as the Bylaws and Articles of Incorporation, which had fallen out of date over time.

Before retiring, she worked in regulatory affairs at Roche Diagnostics, and prior to that on diagnostic test development and vaccine research at Chiron.

Carol lives in Orinda and recently began volunteering at Mt. Diablo State Park. In addition to birding and botanizing, she also enjoys working in her (mostly) native plant garden.

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Besides these officers, the MDAS Board of Directors, Advisory Members, and Associates include:

- Nancy Wenninger, *Conservation Chair*
- Hugh Harvey, *Field Trips Chair*
- Bill Chilson, *Membership Chair*
- Maren Smith, *Education Chair*
- Rosalie Howarth, *Social Media & Publicity Chair*
- Juan-Pablo Galván, *Young Birders Club Chair*
- Marc Desin, *The Quail Editor*
- Members-at-Large Paul Schorr, Mike Eliot, and Krista Vossekuil, *Social Media & Publicity member*
- Advisory Positions: Elizabeth Leite, *Christmas Bird Count*, Alan Bade, *Community Science*, Kathy Kellogg, *Hospitality*, and Susana de Trapaga, *Outreach Coordinator*

Contact any of them with your ideas or with areas of interest at: <https://mtdiabloaudubon.org/about/>

A very special thank-you to departing Co-President Maren Smith, who continues on the Board as Education Chair. Maren's vision, organizational skills, and inspiration have brought our chapter forward by leaps and bounds. She is looking forward to more time to care long-distance for her 93-year-old mother, and spending more hours hiking and kayaking seemingly every park and wildlife refuge in the state with her husband, Jerry. We look forward to more of her jaw-droppingly beautiful photographs on Facebook!

Rosalie Howarth, *Nominating Committee Chair*

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**Mt. Diablo Audubon Society 2020 Photography Contest  
Results To Be Revealed In Special Edition Of *The Quail***



Despite challenging circumstances, the first-ever Mt. Diablo Audubon Society 2020 Photography Contest was a resounding success, with over 120 striking photographs submitted by 27 talented photographers!



Wilson's Warbler

Photo: Cassie Tzur



White-faced Ibis

Photo: Barry Howarth

Because of the uncertainty of presenting the winners at a live, in-person membership meeting, the committee (Krista Vossekui and Rosalie Howarth) decided, along with *The Quail* editor Marc Desin, to publish them in a bonus issue of *The Quail* in July. Please keep an eye out for it!

Krista Vossekui

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## Upcoming Field Trips

**Important notice:** Field trips are canceled through the end of June. 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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### San Mateo Coast

**Saturday, July 25, 7:30 AM**

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

**Co-Leader: Kent Fickett** 415-269-4277

Carpool leaves at 7:30 AM from El Nido Ranch Rd. Meet at McDonald's parking lot in Half Moon Bay at 8:30 AM. Cross the bay to San Francisco, from US 101 S take the I-280 exit toward Daly City. Merge onto Hwy 1 south toward Pacifica and continue to Half Moon Bay. Turn right into McDonald's. Bring lunch and sunscreen—one can get badly burned on a foggy day at the seashore. Early-



returning shorebirds, gulls and seabirds, but the exact itinerary will be announced the day of the trip.

Category 2

### **Frank's Dump—High Tide**

**Sunday, July 26, 3:00 PM**

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

For a shorebird spectacle, we will visit this site late in the day with the sun to our backs and birds congregating to avoid the high tide. Many of the returning shorebirds still have much of their breeding plumage. Some of these birds will stay the winter, some will continue a southerly migration. Leave the Sycamore Valley carpool location at 3:00 PM, then meet at the Winton Ave entrance for Hayward Regional shoreline. From I-880, exit Winton Ave, drive west 4.5 miles. Park near the trail head just before the parking lot gate. We will walk at least a mile to our viewing site. Bring a snack.

Category 2

### **Bodega Bay**

**Saturday, August 15, 7:30 AM**

**Leader: Fred Safier** 925-937-2906

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

Category 1

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.

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## Do These Simple Things To Help Stop Climate Change

Juan Pablo Galván, *Young Birders Club Chair*

### **Going Back to How Things Were Means Disaster. Climate Change & COVID-19 Require a New Normal.**

As restrictions imposed due to the global COVID-19 pandemic ease in June, many are looking forward to getting back to “normal”. Going outside, travel, restaurants, care-free shopping, etc. Some of that is ok. But getting back to “business as usual” is getting back on the path that is leading to catastrophic climate change impacts around the world, and the path that allowed COVID-19 to get so bad.

Don't go back to the way things were. Start a NEW NORMAL that avoids climate catastrophe and protects you, those you care about, and complete strangers from COVID-19, which is still very lethal and by no means all under control. What to do?

1. **Only Buy Recycled Toilet Paper & Paper Towels.** Hopefully you didn't panic and hoard a bunch of TP these past couple of months. Those big Costco packs of TP and paper towels are the worst in terms of environmental impacts. Huge forests are cut every year just to make TP and paper towels, which destroys habitat and decreases the carbon pulled from the atmosphere by trees. Buy brands that use lots of recycled materials. **Whole Foods sells the brands 365 and Seventh Generation, which are great at reducing environmental impacts.** Read more [HERE](#).
2. **Power Your Home With 100% Renewable Energy.** Summer is here, and that means heat, which means you'll want to turn on the air conditioner. Reduce energy consumption by getting in the shade, enjoying an ice cold drink, and opening your windows at night to cool

down. Just as important, don't use fossil fuels to power your home. Click [HERE](#) to power your home with clean energy and help the climate!

3. **Get Political In Other States, Right Now.** The US election in November 2020 is about 5 months away. If Trump wins, it will be an unmitigated disaster for the environment in all sorts of ways, but especially for the fight to avoid catastrophic climate change. This isn't so much a political statement as it is simply a basic fact. Things being what they are, the election will be decided by so-called "swing" states, and on an even smaller scale "swing counties". Do you have friends or family in Michigan, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, or Florida? Reach out to them, share your views, donate to efforts in those areas fighting Trump's re-election. Voting is necessary, but it's not enough. The election does not hinge on California. Increase your impact now. Read more [HERE](#).
4. **Learn What A Sustainable Economy Looks Like.** COVID-19 has exposed the fragility, unfairness, and bias of the current global economy, especially in the US. Why are "essential workers" in many cases the ones making the least, often with no health safety net, and the ones with the most exposure to a deadly disease? Read [HERE](#) for a good start in understanding, and [HERE](#) and [HERE](#) for visions on how to change economies for the good of both the Earth and people.
5. **Do You Really Need A Car?** We've all been living the past few months under some pretty crazy circumstances, but hopefully it's shed some light on new truths people are discovering. Is driving every day necessary? Probably not. Are there other ways to get around that don't require me owning a car? Quite possibly. Ride-sharing like Lyft, Uber, or even an old-fashioned taxi cab can allow you to get around town on most errands. A walk or bike ride are great to get outside and exercise. And for getting out to bird farther away, are ride-shares, public transportation or just asking a friend to carpool an option? Ask yourself if it's been hell not driving as much these past few months. If you've made it work, that's great, and you might have a chance to reduce your carbon footprint in a huge way. Everyone **MUST** drive a lot less as people emerge from quarantine, but you might be able to take it a step further. Decide if those costs of having a car outweigh the benefits.

Jerry Britten, *MDAS President-elect*

Continuing the theme of backyard birding, here's a quick update of the nesting activity at our place. The Red-shouldered Hawk nest over our patio has produced two nestlings. The parents are busy feeding them and not as vocal as they were during the spring. The Cooper's Hawk nesting farther up the hill took a small bird from our back yard just this morning. At least three Oak Titmouse nests have fledged; these and the Chestnut-backed Chickadee and White-breasted Nuthatch fledglings make up for numbers, if not diversity, as the migration season winds down.



Red-shouldered Hawk with nestlings

Photo: Jerry Britten

I also discovered a Nuttall's Woodpecker nest in a tree hole, and a California Towhee nest nearby in a tree branch about 8 feet off the ground. Western Bluebirds and House Wrens are still occupying nest boxes. I believe there is a Downy Woodpecker nest nearby, as we see the adult male daily, but have yet to locate it.





Nuttall's Woodpecker with some tasty morsels

Photo: Jerry Britten

There are still several Swainson's Thrush around, and an occasional Yellow Warbler and Lazuli Bunting, but most migrants have moved on as we enter the end of May.

Stay safe, enjoy *The Quail*, and keep on the lookout for the birds!

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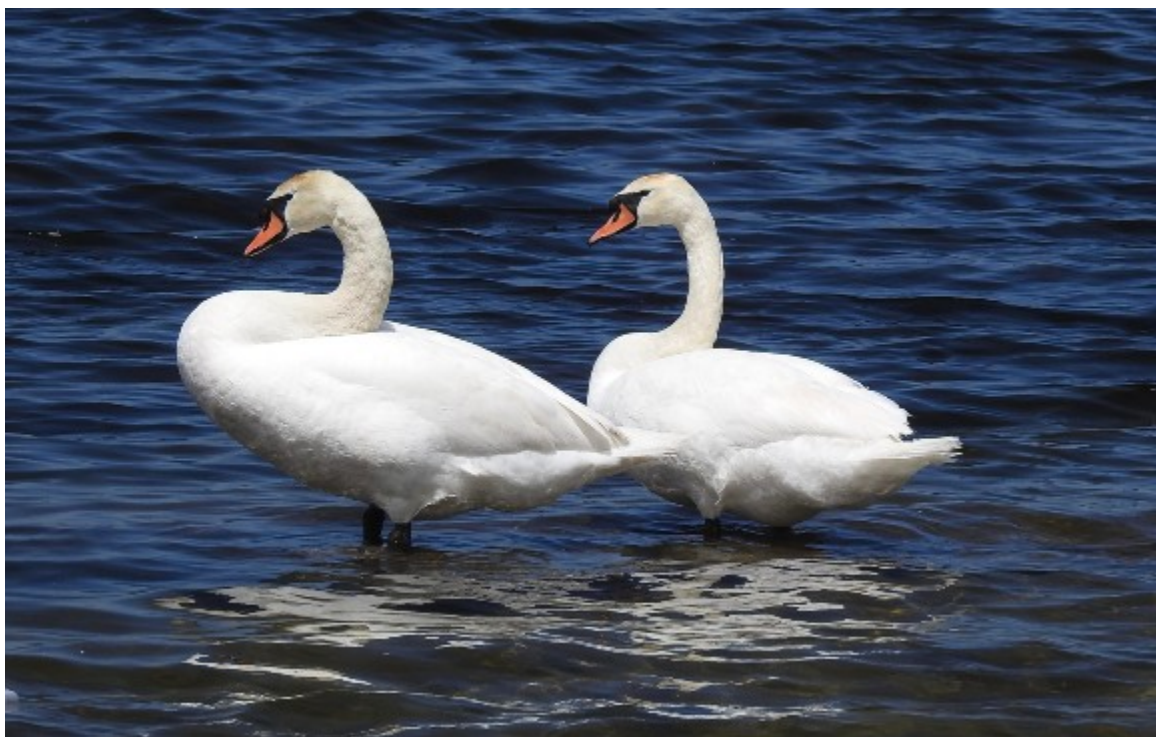
## **Birding During The Pandemic**

Paul Schorr, *Former MDAS President and Current Member-at-Large*

When *The Quail* editor, Marc Desin, asked me to write an article for the June issue, I agreed without giving the subject matter much consideration at the time. However, when I began to give more thought as to what to write about, I hesitated until it dawned on me that birding during the pandemic had completely upended our birding strategies as it had for every other birder. So, I know that my comments simply echo what most birders have experienced during these past many weeks and will continue to experience moving forward.

Birding for Nancy and me during the pandemic has really necessitated that we concentrate on our yard and our nearby patches of Contra Loma and Black Diamond Mines Regional Parks. During one particular visit to Contra Loma, we added two new species to our park list, a Swainson's Hawk and a pair of Mute Swans, which brought

our park list to 152 species. In addition, we had very close looks at an early-arriving Ash-throated Flycatcher.



Mute Swans at Contra Loma Regional Park

Photo: Paul Schorr



Ash-throated Flycatcher at Contra Loma Regional Park



On rare occasions, we made outings to other notable birding areas like Pine Canyon, Round Valley Regional Park, and Marsh Creek Trail, wearing masks and maintaining social distancing throughout our visits. These outings not only provided us with opportunities to see more birds, but also afforded us essential exercise.

Shelter-in-Place dramatically increased our appreciation of the birds visiting our yard, as we have watched more closely and listened more intently for their arrivals. In addition to the regular visitors, we had spring migrants that included Black-headed Grosbeaks, Rufous and Black-chinned Hummingbirds, and a Western Tanager. Perhaps the most notable yard bird was an albino female House Finch that appeared on April 15. She was accompanied by a normal-colored male and while we watched them, she gathered nesting material. On April 26, they both appeared at our bird bath and I was able to take the accompanying photo. Quite conceivably, we could easily have missed these sightings had we been birding elsewhere as usual and not concentrating so intently on our yard birds.



Albino female House Finch at birdbath

Photo: Paul Schorr

In addition, birding vicariously through the email group **EBB-Sightings** and **eBird** reports aroused even more interest as we “experienced” the moments of spring migration excitement through those reports. In that regard, we read with greater enthusiasm and interest the accounts from other birders who were able to visit areas that were inaccessible to us, such as Mitchell Canyon. We also carefully followed the reports of yard sightings and hoped those identified species might appear in our yard as well.

Clearly, birds and birding have afforded all of us an important diversion from the tragic accounts of COVID-19 cases throughout the US and the world. To be quite honest, this incomprehensible time would have been even more challenging without the daily hope that birds brought us.



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## An Ode To The Usual Suspects, Part 2

Rosalie Howarth, *MDAS Publicity and Social Media*

I recently did a gratitude exercise focusing on the ordinary, everyday birds we tend to overlook and take for granted, either because they are so common, or because they look drab and unremarkable.

And yet each species has its own endearing charm and unique characteristics. I cited Canada Geese, Mallards and Mourning Doves as examples, and today I'll honor a few more of the dismissed and downright spurned!

Whenever I pass a murder on the street (or in a nearby tree) I squawk back at the American Crow, who deserves the first word of his name: loud-mouthed, always complaining, trying to police the world, declaring that he's Number One. But his piercing black eye reveals an almost frightening intelligence; a brain that can reason, build tools, improvise...and hold a grudge.

Egrets, Snowy and Great, are so common on the Canal Trail that I eventually ceased marveling at them. Until one day a pair of cyclists stopped dead, brakes screeching, to contemplate a fishing Snowy. One rider said to his companion "Dude. That's a really BIG bird". The other replied "Yeah. A really big WHITE bird". So I stepped in as Bird Ambassador and provided them with nomenclature, history, and feeding habits. People like to have a name for something so they can tell people later and sound SO knowledgeable.



Snowy Egret

Photo: Evan Lipton/Macaulay Library at the  
**Cornell Lab of Ornithology (ML66801751)**



Rock Pigeon

Photo: Luke Seitz/Macaulay Library at the  
**Cornell Lab of Ornithology (ML61674401)**

I confess I felt embarrassed by my fondness of the jaunty House Sparrow once I was informed of their invasive non-native status. They bully other sparrows and exploit nesting sites. But I love to peer at their chestnut head-swoosh and black bib, and I find it interesting that they are not found in "undisturbed grasslands and forests", but thrive only in or near human landscapes such as towns and farmland.

Speaking of which, the poster child for the Usual Suspects is surely the lowly Rock Pigeon: scorned and reviled, bobbing and squabbling round park benches to the delight of children and urban peregrines. And yet they have some of the most sophisticated navigation skills on the planet, using the earth's magnetic fields, sounds, smells, and the position of the sun to find "home" from over a thousand miles away. If only the rest of us had such reliable homing instincts. And that dazzling iridescent plumage!

However, the limits of my gratitude are tested by the lowly cowbird. I'm unable to say a single kindly thing about it. I also recoil from the ghastly young-rearing habits of the American Coot. Perhaps someday I will be able to expand my compassion to include these exasperating birds.



Brown-headed Cowbird

Photo: Brian Sullivan/Macaulay Library at the  
**Cornell Lab of Ornithology (ML27266711)**



American Coot

Photo: Christoph Moning/Macaulay Library at the  
**Cornell Lab of Ornithology (ML68049341)**

After all, any day with *any* bird in it—even an ordinary one—is better than a day without!

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## Dutch Harbor Is My Kind Of Port

Hugh Harvey, *Field Trips Chair*

**Editor's Note:** In 1996 while working on a ship, the author, Hugh Harvey, wrote a lot of stories about the first sightings of many species that contributed to his life list. This story was written on July 6, 1996 about his first sighting of Steller's Eider on February 22, 1994.

### Steller's Eider (*Polysticta stelleri*)

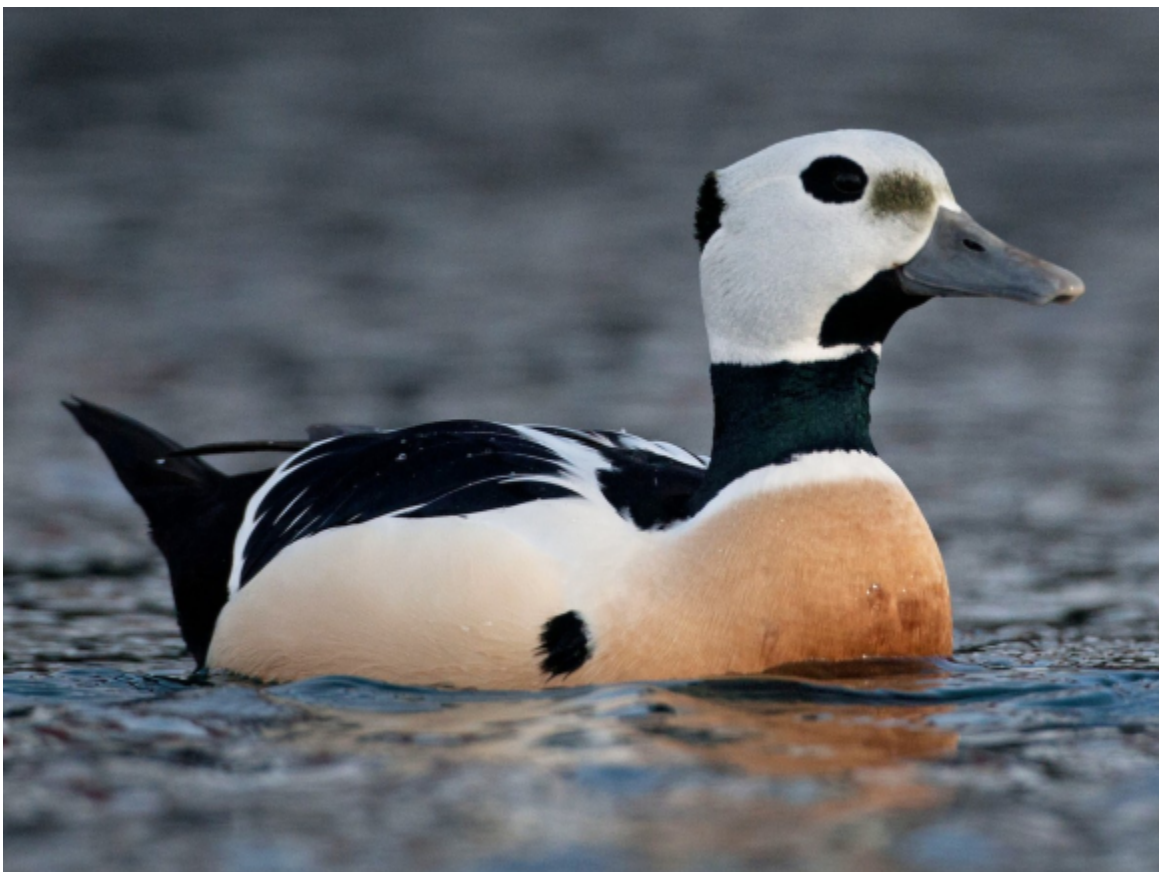
By now I had been working for something less than a week. I joined the Sealand Liberator and we left Oakland on Thursday. Now it was Monday and we were in Dutch Harbor in the Aleutian Island chain. The first time I was here in 1985, I realized it was good birding.

Way out before entering the harbor are flocks of Sooty Shearwaters and Northern Fulmars. An occasional Tufted Puffin can be seen if one waits on the bow long enough. Sometimes Common Murres, too, though they are more readily seen farther west on

the way out of Dutch Harbor. They inhabit a volcanic islet we pass a few hours after departing.

As soon as I could after work, I walked the road which skirts the edge of the harbor. Fishing piers, junked cars, rusting cranes, old crab pots and miscellaneous junk line the dirt road. This time of year it was still solid, but I was reminded of an episode of "Northern Exposure" when spring thaw came to Alaska. Yes, Alaskans do not waste a lot of time or water washing their pickup trucks.

I wore just about all the clothes I had on the ship and went to take my walk. It was not out of the question to see thirty or forty Harlequin Ducks. It became overwhelming, actually. "Oh, there are four more moving in and out of the fishing piers." Occasionally, I saw a Pigeon Guillemot, there were lots of Glaucous-winged Gulls, and once I even saw a Ringed Kingfisher. Then, there were the Ravens and the Bald Eagles. I never spent any money there, but this was my kind of port.



Steller's Eider

Photo: Jessie Barry/Macaulay Library at the  
**Cornell Lab of Ornithology (ML161968281)**

This was a holiday, George Washington's Birthday, so I was ready to have a good time. When I saw some unfamiliar ducks, I knew they were some kind of Eider, but having knowingly seen only one female Eider from a distance, I was not very familiar with them. Referring to my field guide, I learned about Steller's Eider. I expected the green of an Eider to be more of a day-glow shade, but it was really more of an institutional green used on school and hospital walls.

After seeing some Long-tailed Ducks (still Oldsquaws in 1994), and more or less reaching the end of the road, I slowly headed back to the ship. After stopping at a phone booth to call home, I went up the gangway and climbed four decks to my room. A long hot shower was in order, to be followed by the Winter Olympics on television, as aired by the local station.

Yes, Dutch Harbor is okay in my book.

February 22, 1994, Dutch Harbor, Alaska

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## Community Science Wrap-Up

Alan Bade, *Community Science Advisory*

As the MDAS Community Science Advisory board member, my role is to help provide opportunities for chapter members to engage in fun, bird-related community science. Fortunately, the Christmas Bird Count is in the able hands of Elizabeth Leite and Jerry Britten!

Some of our projects were canceled, unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These included helping **Save Mount Diablo** with a BioBlitz, and the triennial statewide **Tricolored Blackbird Survey**. Hopefully, the public health situation will improve enough for the Tricolored Blackbird survey to go out next year. Our chapter had around eight people interested in helping, which is fantastic! I'd like to thank all those interested in participating! We'll rejoin this important survey when it's back in action.

Despite the Tricolored Blackbird survey being canceled, sixteen sites with colonies were identified in the Central Valley. One of these is estimated to have 20,000 birds! **Audubon California** is actively monitoring these and can use our help with financial donations. I'm proud to say that the MDAS Board recently voted to contribute \$1,000 toward saving these colonies. Audubon CA has partnered with several other organizations in this work, one of which is **Dairy Cares** which posted **this story** on their website.

In other community science news—for the last 2½ years, we've conducted a bird survey on Grayson Creek in Pleasant Hill as a joint project between Mt. Diablo Audubon and Friends of Pleasant Hill Creeks. This is now continuing as an individual effort as all chapter field trips are canceled due to the statewide lockdown. To date, we have recorded 88 species, with our checklists and photos posted on eBird **HERE** and **HERE**. Our results indicate that the Grayson Creek corridor is still an important resource for migratory and resident birds. The survey will be used in ongoing advocacy work for habitat preservation.

Next year, I'm hoping to add **Climate Watch** surveys to Mt. Diablo Audubon's community science, depending on interest from chapter members. As demonstrated in Juan Pablo Galván's recent report at a chapter meeting, climate change is having profound impacts on birds. The National Audubon Society has been gathering data since 2016 in their Climate Watch citizen science program to examine the impact of climate change, published in **these peer-reviewed studies**. Currently, three other California chapters are collecting data: Napa-Solano, Alcatel, and Redwood Region



Audubon. These are important data to collect in as large a geographic scale as possible, so it would be great to add our chapter.

One hundred years ago, Audubon created the **Christmas Bird Count** as a response to the over-hunting of birds for fashion and "sportmanship". The CBC has been hugely successful in documenting bird life all over the world. And it directly engages the public in bird conservation. Climate Watch is our era's citizen science program for this newer very real threat, augmenting and helping to refine the much larger data sets of the CBC and eBird.

To quote Climate Watch's website; "The surveys are set up to directly test the Birds and Climate Report models for each species, at a fine-scale resolution, with a structured protocol so that data are collected to help calculate detection, occupancy and abundance estimates. Data from other programs are less structured and do not allow for as rich of an analysis but are often included to complement our detailed Climate Watch data set... Both Christmas Bird Count and Climate Watch data are needed together to improve our body of knowledge about how birds are affected by climate change."

If you are interested in participating in Climate Watch surveys, please let me know. Surveys are scheduled for January 15–Feb 15, 2021, and May 15–June 15, 2021. I hope to write up a description of the survey for a future edition of *The Quail*.

Other fun community science programs abound! I just learned of an interesting one from Wendy Schackwitz of Napa-Solano Audubon. It's a collaboration between Point Blue, Sonoma State University, and NASA called **Soundscapes to Landscapes**. It uses community scientists to train computers to recognize bird species in sound recordings through artificial intelligence. If successful, it could greatly add quality data to our understanding of bird diversity with more accurate remote sensing. I will be looking to write about this in a future edition of *The Quail*.

Stay safe and healthy!

Alan Bade, *Community Science Advisory*  
[communityscience@mtdiabloaudubon.org](mailto:communityscience@mtdiabloaudubon.org)

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## Events

**Nature And You Lecture Series: Tricolored Blackbirds—Online**



Photo: [tuleyome.org](http://tuleyome.org)

Tricolored blackbirds (*Agelaius tricolor*) look very much like the abundant and widespread red-winged blackbird, to which they are closely related, but they are a distinct and unique species with different behaviors. The Tricolored blackbird is highly gregarious and breeds in colonies that historically numbered in the hundreds of thousands. Today, their entire population has declined to less than 200,000 and continues to decline. Join UC Davis Biologist and Tricolored blackbird expert, Bob Meese, to hear about this interesting local bird, the challenges it faces, and the science of monitoring this species.

**Date:** Thursday, May 28, 2020  
**Time:** 7:00 PM–9:00 PM  
**Location:** Online in a Zoom meeting. Registration required for link.  
**Registration:** <http://tuleyome.org/events/2020-nature-and-you-lecture-tricolored-blackbirds/>

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**Golden Gate Audubon Society Birdathon 2020 Auction**

GOLDEN GATE  
AUDUBON SOCIETY



Birdathon is Golden Gate Audubon Society's biggest fundraiser. This year we had to cancel all our live Birdathon events due to COVID-19, but instead we're thrilled to bring you this auction of inspiring Bird Art! Your generous bids will support both Audubon and the artists as we shelter in place at home. Proceeds will be split 50/50 between the artist and Golden Gate Audubon, unless otherwise indicated.

**Start Date:** Sunday, May 17, 2020 8:00 AM

**End Date:** Monday, June 1, 2020 7:00 PM

**Location:** <http://goldengateaudubon.org/>

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**Audubon Virtual Advocacy Day 2020**





Birds of a feather will flock together for our Virtual Audubon Advocacy Day on June 2. Our elected officials need to hear from YOU!

We must ensure that California continues to protect birds and address climate change as the federal government continues to roll back key environmental laws like the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the Endangered Species Act, and the Clean Water Act.

The day will include video meetings with your legislators and the opportunity to get involved in shaping public policy. To make it easy for you, we will make the video appointments with legislators for you. You are also invited to participate in free advocacy training webinars about the issues that impact birds in California.

**Date for Prep Session:** Friday, May 29, 2020

**Date for Advocacy Day:** Tuesday, June 2, 2020

**More Information:** [CLICK HERE](#)

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**"Bird, Nest, Nature"**



David Tomb, *Resplendent Quetzal*, 2007, mixed media on paper.

"Bird, Nest, Nature" is a juried and invitational exhibition featuring a roster of local and national artists. Birds have captured the attention of humankind since the beginning of time. The earliest evidence of our love of birds can be found in cave drawings that reflect all that we cherish in nature from flora to fauna. Birdsongs and birdcalls, incorporated into artworks and compositions for hundreds of years, still inspire contemporary artists today. With their exquisite coloring, stunning tufts of feathers, distinctive silhouettes, and graceful flight patterns, birds entice us to look up and marvel. The interest endures from the indomitable and historic artist John James Audubon to contemporary artists such as Walton Ford and Fred Tomaselli.

**Exhibition Dates:** July 12–September 13, 2020  
**Location:** Bedford Gallery at the Leshner Center for the Arts  
1601 Civic Dr, Walnut Creek, CA 94596  
**More Information:** [CLICK HERE](#)

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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.

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**Notes from New England: The Beginning of Spring**

Douglas Chickering  
Newburyport, Massachusetts

Here at last, from out of a chilled and rainy April that seemed to last forever, emerges the real spring. The warblers have arrived, the migrants have come back. Of course, they have already been dribbling in: Pine Warblers, Palm Warblers, Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, Louisiana Waterthrush. All on time, more or less, all appearing at their usual places at their appointed time, more or less. They have been a welcome change, a saving distraction from the monster virus lurking in the shadows of our lives. But they have not been the bright days of migration like today has been. I haven't read the other accounts that will appear on the Internet, but I have received enough texts from my special friends to know that we have all had a great day of discovery, of blurry, half remembered songs from the tops of trees, of surprises skulking in the shadows of the underbrush, and of the pure bright colors in the sun. We are free of winter at last and the next few weeks are redolent with the promise of the full migration.

These days, these first days of spring are special. The warmth and sun seem fresh, the trees are still nearly bare and all the songs, though familiar, are new to the year. It is renewal in its finest sense. Also, this is the first of those days that the sightings, though fantastically beautiful, are so crowded together as to burden the memory. And in the tired reflection of the evening only a few will stand clear of the others. For me it was among my first sightings. There, high in a tree at Oak Hill Cemetery, I saw some movement and at the edge of a branch a dark silhouette. I maneuvered around to gain better light. Yet just by the slow deliberate movement of the bird, the way it paused and looked around and up and down I knew what it was. Then I caught it illuminated brightly in the sunlight and I could feel my whole being smile in appreciation: Solitary Vireo. The first of the year. My favorite bird of the early migration. It sang a few times, to my delight, then leisurely moved to another branch. On this warm and beautiful morning on Oak Hill I eventually counted nine Solitary Vireos.



Blue-headed Vireo

Photo: Brian Sullivan/Macaulay Library at the  
**Cornell Lab of Ornithology (ML27264021)**

I cling, unashamedly and tenaciously to the old name. I expect to be corrected a few times this year and informed that it is a Blue-headed Vireo. But this bird, as much as any other represents forty-odd years of birding and carries with it many memories of many early springs of the past. I know it has a Blue Head, but whenever I see it, it is also solitary. I still fondly hope that the name will be restored. After all, such a thing has happened before. You remember: from Baltimore Oriole to Northern Oriole and back to Baltimore Oriole. There was Green Heron to Green-backed Heron and back to Green Heron, as well as Common Gallinule to Common Moorhen, back to Common Gallinule. So I can hope that some kindly Ornithologist in need of a Ph.D. will do this service for me.

So, like many of my years past it has started with Solitary Vireo and now moves forward at a quickening pace.

*Douglas Chickering is the brother of MDAS Member Chick Chickering*

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## June Gallery





Western Tanager  
Photo: Nick Saunders/Macaulay Library at the  
**Cornell Lab of Ornithology (ML60660141)**



Sri Lanka Frogmouth  
Photo: Swapnil Thatte/Macaulay Library at the  
**Cornell Lab of Ornithology (ML62177741)**



Roseate Spoonbill  
Photo: Paul Hueber/Macaulay Library at the  
**Cornell Lab of Ornithology (ML51287891)**



Acorn Woodpecker  
Photo: Isaac Aronow



Kingfisher  
Photo: Beth Branthaver



Chestnut-backed Chickadee  
Photo: Isaac Aronow



Nuthatch  
Photo: Jean Halford



Nuttall's woodpecker  
Photo: David M. Bell/Macaulay Library at the  
**Cornell Lab of Ornithology (ML58829751)**

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**Mt. Diablo Audubon Society Leadership**

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