



Mt. Diablo Audubon Society

The Quail

Volume 66, Number 2

OCTOBER 2020

Next Monthly Program Meeting: Thursday, October 1

Please mark your calendar for our next virtual monthly program meeting!
See **BELOW** for webinar access info.

- 7:00 PM** Welcome and Introductions
- 7:05 PM** *David Robinson will share information about Auk the Vote!*
- 7:25 PM** Board Announcements
- 7:35 PM** Main Program: *From Sea to Summit: The Marvelous Hummingbird with Benny Isaac Jacobs-Schwartz*
- 9:00 PM** Adjourn

7:35 PM Main Program: ***From Sea to Summit: The Marvelous Hummingbird***

Benny Isaac Jacobs-Schwartz

From Alaska to the high Andes of South America, join us as we explore the magic of hummingbirds! With 360 species recognized globally, we'll discuss their remarkable biology, expansive range, ecological significance, and the best way to attract them to your yard. Mouth watering media, local hummingbird ID, and native plants discussion included.

Benny Isaac Jacobs-Schwartz owns and operates a bird guiding business and lifestyle brand called BIRDS by BIJS (pronounced Bee-jus). Working professionally as a naturalist guide, expedition trip leader, and international bird

guide, Benny works in a variety of locations, most recently bringing him to such exotic places like coastal Alaska, Trinidad and Tobago, and the Ecuadorian Cloud Forest.



Benny or BIJS, has returned



to his roots where he works leading birding adventures, and directing a kids outdoor education non-profit called Biocitizen Los Angeles. He is also a

passionate photographer, specializing in birds. Benny uses his impressive collection of content to leverage his prolific social media presence. Benny hopes his love of the natural world will inspire others to conserve the open spaces around them and look up more often from their phones.

Photo of White-necked Jacobin by Benny Isaac Jacobs-Schwartz

7:00 PM Birding Info: ***Auk the Vote!***

David Robinson

David Robinson, from our sister chapter **Golden Gate Audubon**, will share information about **Auk the Vote!** Partnering with groups such as the League of Conservation Voters, Sierra Club Independent Action, Environmental Voter Project, 350 Bay Area, Dayenu: A Jewish Call to Climate Action, and others, Auk the Vote! helps birders do all we can to elect leaders who share our values and our sense of urgency about birds, the environment, environmental justice, and climate change. David Robinson is the unofficial Bird Nerd at The College Preparatory School in Oakland, where his official job is teaching high-school English.



Webinar Access Info:

Date: Thursday, October 1, 2020
Time: 7:00 PM–8:30 PM Pacific Time (US and Canada)
Location: Zoom online meeting
Access: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83962357198?pwd=djRRRk5FR0F0aGgwSFBtZDNkT1NpUT09>
Passcode: 018022
Phone access: Dial (for higher quality, dial a number based on your current location):
US: +1 408 638 0968 or +1 669 900 6833 or +1 253 215 8782 or +1 346 248 7799 or +1 301 715 8592 or +1 312 626 6799 or +1 646 876 9923
Webinar ID: 839 6235 7198
Passcode: 018022
International numbers available:
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83962357198?pwd=djRRRk5FR0F0aGgwSFBtZDNkT1NpUT09>

President's Letter

Jerry Britten, *MDAS President*

Our first ever virtual monthly program meeting in September was, from all indications, a rousing success. Over 110 viewers were tuned in at one point. We received a lot of positive feedback from our anonymous survey at the end of the meeting, as summed up by one contributor: *"Hey this was great! So much fun to see the program from home, and what an exciting distraction it was.*



Thank you all for putting it all together. Miss you all, but this is the next best thing. MDAS rocks!" A big "Thank you!" to Program Chair Ariana Rickard, and to Rosalie Howarth and Krista Vossekuil for the great presentation on our 2020 Photography Contest winners, and to Eric Schroeder from Golden Gate Audubon, our inaugural main program virtual presenter. The next meeting, on October 1, looks to be equally entertaining, with some fun quizzes thrown in. **More details are in this newsletter.**

Our governing board underwent additional changes in September. Maren Smith resigned as Education Chair, and Nancy Wenninger resigned as Conservation Chair after 20 years in this position! Thank you Maren and Nancy for all your service, and we wish you all the best in your future endeavors. We hope to fill these board vacancies shortly.

Look for an email from our chapter this month with the proposed changes to our Chapter Bylaws attached to the email for your review. This will be followed by another

email with a link to a voting site for your approval. Please see **the article** later on in this newsletter for more info. We need a quorum of 50 votes to officially approve, so please take a little time to review and vote! "Get out and Vote!" or, "Vote by Mail!" goes for the upcoming national general election as well.

Our Chapter has received a generous bequest from the estate of Eldon N. Bachman. Please see **the story** in this issue for more details.

Julie Woodruff's Saw-whet Owl banding project in the Las Trampas Wilderness west of Danville starts up again this month. Please see **her writeup** on this interesting project in this issue.

Another legislative victory is in the works for birds and wildlife! In September, the California Legislature passed AB 1788, which puts a moratorium on the use of second-generation anticoagulant rat poisons by commercial pest-control companies. These products have been banned from direct sale to consumers since 2014, but in the years since, they have continued to kill large numbers of non-target predators and scavengers. Thank you to State Senator Bill Dodd, and Assemblymembers Tim Grayson and Rebecca Bauer-Kahan for voting for this bill! State Senator Steve Glazer voted against it. This bill still needs to be signed into law by Governor Gavin Newsom. Please see the **Raptors Are the Solution** website for more information.

In this month's issue we will continue to highlight birding location suggestions for your solo trips as an alternative for our suspended field trips. As always, stay safe, enjoy the birds, and "see" you at the next membership meeting!

Welcome, New Members!

Timothy Bramer, San Ramon

Donald Davidson, Alamo

Lois Shaffer, Walnut Creek

Wendy Coleman, Walnut Creek

Phil Kennett, Danville

Vote On Amendment To Bylaws Coming In October

Carol Pacht, *MDAS Secretary*

Recently, the Board of Directors approved an amendment to the MDAS Bylaws, and the next step is membership approval. This amendment consists of several updates to the Bylaws, including allowing on-line monthly program meetings, adding the option of on-line voting by the membership for the election of officers and for approval of Bylaws amendments, and changes in some Board and Advisory Committee positions.

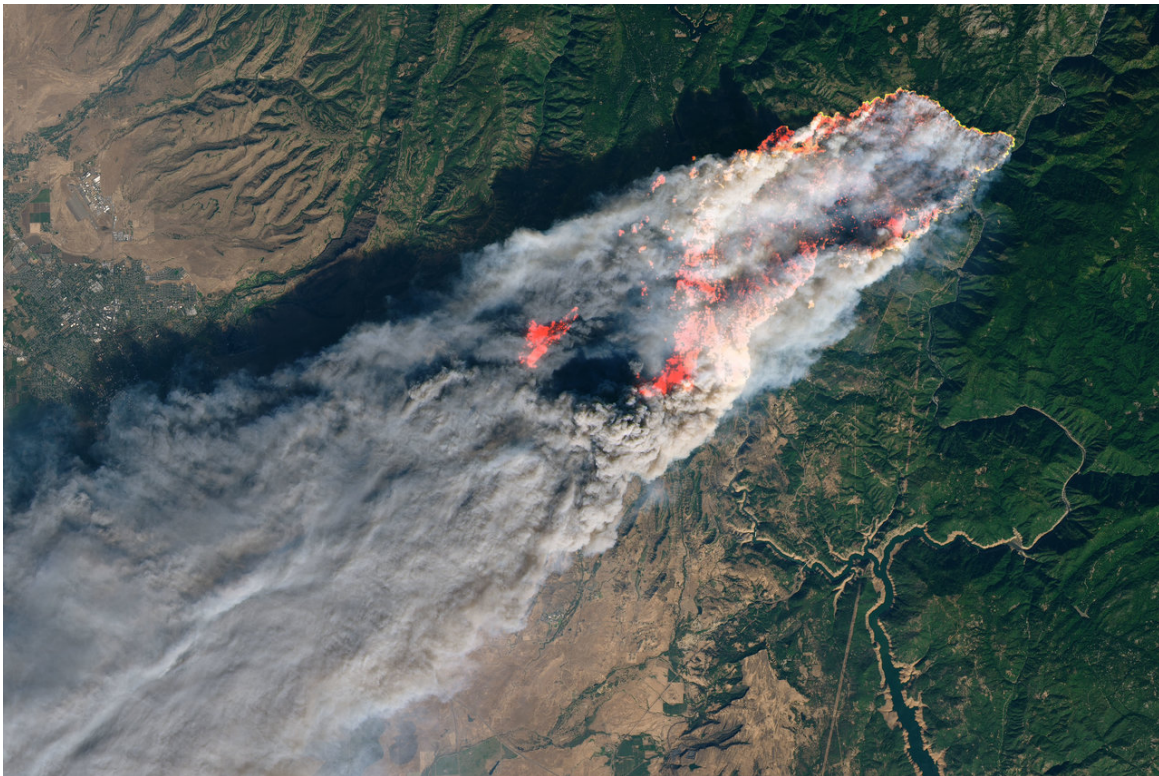
In the past, an amendment to the Bylaws was first approved by the Board and then presented at a monthly program meeting. Then, at the following monthly program meeting, there would be a vote by the members to approve the amendment. However, as in-person meetings are currently not possible, a copy of the amendment, and the revised Bylaws, will be forwarded to the membership by email for their review, followed by an on-line ballot.

MDAS members should expect to receive the amendment, revised Bylaws, and ballot in October. Please plan on reviewing these documents and voting.

Climate Change Has Found Us

Juan Pablo Galván, *Young Birders Club Chair*

The August lightning storm, the orange sky, the ash falling for days, mass exposure to toxic air. California in flames, again. Washington and Oregon getting a taste of California's present, and their future. Dozens dead, again. 2017 was a terrible fire year. 2018 was worse. 2020 is worse. And the fire season has barely started. Notice a pattern? What will 2021 or 2022 look like?



The Camp Fire from space

Photo: NASA Global Climate Change

Not all fire is bad. The habitats of California evolved with it, and in some cases need it. But more intense, more frequent, and larger fires that keep on coming

year after year? That's not natural. Human-caused climate change plays a big part. It's not just fires. Hurricanes, flooding, drought, the list goes on, and so does the list of places increasingly affected by them.

Wishing for things to change or remembering better times will not bring things back to the way they were. It is well within reason to think that the young people of today will look back on 2020, the virus, fires, storms, floods, insane politics, and consider it a good year compared to what came after. Don't want that future? Then everyone, YOU, MUST ACT NOW. Encourage your friends, families, and neighbors to do the same. Here are some ways how.

1. **UNDERSTAND.** Watch this great, one-hour easy-to-understand fire presentation from UC Berkeley [HERE](#). If you like to read, click [HERE](#), [HERE](#) and [HERE](#).
2. **GET POLITICAL WHERE IT COUNTS.** This moment, October 2020, is extremely important for the future of our planet. That is not an exaggeration. Any hope of taking effective action against catastrophic climate change means the current federal administration of the US government must go in November. This is a fact. California voters will not decide the election; voters in Florida, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin will. It doesn't matter if you like politics or think of yourself a Democrat, Republican, Conservative, or Liberal. As the last month or two has made increasingly clear, it's as simple as wanting your house to burn down, or not. Make a difference by clicking [HERE](#).
3. **DO NOT USE PLASTIC.** It's become ever more clear that the idea of recycling as a way to reduce the environmental impact of plastic is a myth. Fossil fuel companies worked hard to make us believe it, and most people have. But we are waking up. Read how the plastic recycling myth was sold to us [HERE](#), and find easy ways to get rid of plastic and lead a more sustainable life [HERE](#) and [HERE](#). Think you need plastic more than ever since coronavirus happened? Read [THIS](#).
4. **EMBRACE PROTEIN FROM NUTS, SEEDS, AND VEGETABLES—MUCH LESS COW.** Most people like eating meat, but people in the US eat way too much of it. This isn't just true in terms of personal health. Huge amounts of greenhouse gas emissions are caused by raising livestock, especially beef. Plant protein is superior, as you can read [HERE](#). Click [HERE](#) for some great non-meat protein sources. Chicken is one of the lowest greenhouse-gas-emitting meats to eat. Avoid eating beef except only once in a while, and instead of cow milk, try oat milk. Read more about better options compared to cow milk [HERE](#), and more about oat milk [HERE](#). Safeway and Whole Foods have lots of options.

5. **GO RENEWABLE.** One of the best ways to fight climate change is to reduce energy use. To keep things cool, don't turn on lights, and don't open your blinds. For light, open your blinds and let sun in. There are many more ways to reduce energy use [HERE](#). If you do use power, use 100% renewable energy. Check out these options for the Bay Area [HERE](#) and [HERE](#).

MDAS Outreach: New Walnut Creek Open Space Posters

Maren Smith, *MDAS Education Committee*

Along with Mt. Diablo State Park, the many East Bay Regional Parks, and city parks in our area, we are incredibly fortunate to be surrounded by nearly 3000 acres of Walnut Creek Open Space (WCOS), providing miles of hiking trails, a wildlife corridor, and views for miles. During the ongoing pandemic, the nearby trails have provided a welcome respite from COVID-19, and outdoor activities such as hiking and birding have become a much-needed nature lifeline.

However, while exploring the hills and oak woodland, we couldn't help but notice that there was some prime real estate in the form of WCOS informational kiosks that could really use some colorful, inviting, basic birding information, perfect for families of hikers, bikers, dog walkers, equestrians, runners, and birders.

Due to the popularity of the Heather Farm birding information kiosk and birding brochures, a project of the Mt. Diablo Audubon Society Education Committee, we wondered if it might be possible to expand this notion into the Walnut Creek Open Space to educate even more people in our community about birds frequently observed there.

After discussions with the City of Walnut Creek Public Works Department and WCOS rangers, the idea was approved and recently became a reality. Three different bright green, eye-catching posters—Woodpeckers, Owls, and Grassland Birds—each with three highlighted, commonly seen birds, were presented to WCOS Ranger Art Janke by Michele Sheehan and Maren Smith.



Michele Sheehan and Maren Smith

Photo: Maren Smith



Michele Sheehan and Art Janke

Photo: Maren Smith

The posters include detailed information about each bird, fun facts and photos, as well as information about Mt. Diablo Audubon Society (MDAS) programs and birding resources. They will be installed in the 24 kiosks scattered throughout the four different WCOS properties: Lime Ridge, Shell Ridge, Acalanes Ridge, and Sugarloaf Ridge.

A group of owls is called a **PARLIAMENT of OWLS**



BUT... you will rarely see a group of owls, unless you happen upon a new family with owlets. Owls are solitary creatures. They don't live, hunt, or eat together. Mating, incubating their eggs, and raising their owlets through the first six weeks life is the only time they "socialize".

AMAZING OWLS:

- **LARGE EYES:** Owls' eyes cannot move in their eye sockets. They use their long and flexible neck vertebrae to allow them to turn their entire head 270 degrees.
- **FLAT FACES:** Large, flat faces act as satellite dishes for owls, allowing them to "catch" sound.
- **SUPER HEARING:** Since they hunt at night, having extraordinary hearing is a big advantage to owls. Some owls can hear a beetle running through grass or a mouse squeaking from a half mile away.
- **CAN'T SEE 'EM:** Owl feathers may perfectly simulate tree bark, camouflaging tree-nesting owls. If you are lucky enough to find one, **do not disturb it.**
- **SILENT FLIGHT:** Unique feather edges, not found on other raptors, allow air to pass through the owls' feathers reducing flight sound. Unusually broad wings also allow for more soaring and less flapping (less noise) during flight.
- **FOOD:** Owls have sharp beaks and powerful talons designed for hunting. They swallow mice, insects, rabbits, birds, and snakes whole. They regurgitate (cough up) the fur and bones in pellets, which are then often found under their perches.
- **HOMES:** Abandoned nests of other large birds, tree cavities, man-made owl boxes, or buildings (such as barns) are homes for owls. They do not build their own nests.



THREE TYPES of OWLS that call the Walnut Creek Open Space home:



Great Horned Owl Height: 22" Wingspan: 44" Weight: 3.1 lbs

- Large brown owl with distinctive "horns" (feathered ear tufts) and



- large, yellow eyes.
- An aggressive alpha predator at the top of the food chain. Hunts large prey such as rabbits, barn owls, and even skunks.
- Their "hoo-hu-HOO, hooo hooo" is probably the most recognized of all owl calls, heard mainly at dawn and dusk. Male and female often call in a duet.



- Barn Owl** Height: 16" Wingspan: 42" Weight: 1 lb.
- Distinctive white heart-shaped face with dark eyes.
 - Nests in high tree cavities, caves, old buildings and barns.
 - Hunts over grassland fields and marshes eating 4 small mammals each night, or 1460 per year—great rodent control! Voles, shrews and mice are favorite prey.
 - Listen for a long, rasping screech heard in the evening, often voiced in flight.



- Western Screech Owl** Height: 8.5" Wingspan: 20" Weight: 5 oz.
- Large head compared to small, stocky body.
 - Yellow eyes, small ear tufts.
 - Nests in tree cavities.
 - Males bring food to the nesting female.
 - Listen at night for a short trilling call that accelerates at the end, the way a bouncing ping-pong ball sounds when dropped.

Still curious? Try these great FREE apps: **Merlin Bird ID** and **Audubon Owls Guide**



This display is produced by the Mt. Diablo Audubon Society
in cooperation with the City of Walnut Creek
[www.mt Diablaudubon.org](http://www.mt Diablo Audubon Society)

Want to know more about birds?
Come to a **Mt. Diablo Audubon Society meeting.**
First Thursday of every month, 7pm.
(except July and August)
The Gardens at Heather Farm, Camellia Room
1540 Marchbanks Drive, Walnut Creek.
Visit us online at www.mt Diablaudubon.org
Enjoy free monthly programs, field trips,
Young Birders Club, and classes.

Are you 9-17 yrs old (or their parent)? Want to get outside and see new places?
Want to meet people your age who like birds and nature?
JOIN the Young Birders Club - It's FREE!
Monthly East Bay Field Trips (with your parent/known adult)
Go to www.mt Diablaudubon.org/YBC for field trip information.



The Owls poster installed at Walnut Creek Open Space kiosks

After quite a bit of research, wordsmithing, and planning, coupled with the creative talents of MDAS member Michele Sheehan, who designed and produced the striking 12" X 24" posters on sturdy material, coated with UV-protection and outfitted with plastic corner protectors to withstand the elements, the posters will soon be a part of the WCOS landscape.

Community outreach has been an ongoing focus for the Education Committee. Hopefully, as the public continues to enjoy the open space trails and its many natural resources, the posters will spark an interest in our local birds, birding, and the Mt. Diablo Audubon Society.

Look for the MDAS posters on your next WCOS adventure!

For more information about the Walnut Creek Open Space including suggested hikes, directions, and the visionaries of the 1960s and 1970s—citizens who created a grassroots effort to stop a housing development in Shell Ridge and then purchase and preserve the land—check out the **Walnut Creek Open Space Foundation website** and the **City Of Walnut Creek website**.

Birding During COVID-19

Hugh Harvey, *Field Trips Chair*

Due to the continuing coronavirus threat, Mt. Diablo Audubon Society (MDAS) is not offering field trips at this time. It is uncertain when field trips will resume, so please check the [MDAS website](#) and/or the [MDAS Facebook page](#) for information about the resumption of field trips.



Ruddy Turnstone

Photo: Jay McGowan/Macaulay Library at the [Cornell Lab of Ornithology \(ML45254791\)](#)

It is always a good time to go birding on your own. If you choose to stay close to home, the National Audubon Society has great information on [backyard birding and photographing birds at home](#).

And getting out into nature is a proven way to improve your physical and mental health. Just be sure to keep in mind local laws and social distancing best practices. See the [National Audubon Society's suggestions for socially distant birding](#).

MDAS has compiled the following list of suggested birding destinations where you will likely see a variety of birds in summer and fall. This list will be updated on the

MDAS website as destinations open up. Click on each destination link for more information including possible COVID-19 restrictions.

Hayward Regional Shoreline, Hayward

This is a very popular location for walkers, fishing persons, and birders. Parking at the Winton Avenue parking lot is best at the first area before entering through the open gate. One can walk to the low, elevated mound known as "Mt. Trashmore." Can you guess what is below the dirt and short grass vegetation? It is about a half-mile out to the edge of San Francisco Bay along the flood control channel. Going north past another landfill area brings one to a large, mostly dry mudflat known as "Frank's Dump." This can be shorebird heaven in late summer and fall, as they either gather for the winter or use the area as a stopping point during their southerly migration. One can see Willets, Marbled Godwits, Red Knots, Short-billed Dowitchers, Ruddy Turnstones, Black-bellied Plovers, and the occasional Pacific Golden-Plover. Migrant passerines may be seen in the trees and weedy areas near the parking lot; raptors can be anywhere.

Outer Point Reyes, Pt. Reyes

The Outer Point Reyes area is a wonderful place to find fall migrants, many of them Eastern passerine vagrants. The best places to check are the trees around the visitor center and monument at Drake's Beach, the trees at the Mendoza Ranch, the trees at the Nunes Ranch, the trees around the residence at the Fish Docks, and the trees near the residence above the lighthouse. Some of the specialty migrants have included Blackburnian, Blackpoll, Chestnut-sided, Connecticut, Black-and-white, Magnolia, Prothonotary, Yellow-throated, and Black-throated Blue Warblers. We have seen Yellow-green, Red-eyed and White-eyed Vireos, Orchard Orioles, Ovenbirds, American Redstarts, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Peregrine Falcons, and Broad-winged Hawks. Look on the water for Common Murres, Pigeon Guillemots, Cormorants, and Loons. The chance to see migrants is very much dependent on the weather; the absence of winds from the northwest and an overcast night sky will help trap these land birds at the Outer Point. Be sure to check the **National Park Service Point Reyes website** for road closure information.

Hawk Hill, Marin Headlands

The fall southward migration of raptors can be quite spectacular if one is in a particularly good location. As birds fly south along the California coast, they eventually arrive at the Golden Gate, the one-mile wide opening to our bay. They don't quite know what to do, as birds don't like flying over the water. As a consequence, raptors congregate at what is now known as Hawk Hill above the Golden Gate Bridge, before finally making the jump across the gap. The **Golden Gate Raptor Observatory** conducts a count every fall of all the raptors. This year, the area where the counters stand is closed to the public, but anyone can stand nearby at Battery 129, where in normal times public demonstrations occur on

Saturdays. Parking should be easier on a weekday. Before going, check the [GGRO website](#).

Elsie Roemer Bird Sanctuary, Alameda

Editor's Note: There is currently no entry into the Elsie Roemer Bird Sanctuary due to ongoing restoration work. Be sure to check the link above for the most up-to-date information.

This Alameda site is really good for shorebirds, as well as gulls, waders, and others. Our field trip would go one-and-a-half hours before a high tide. Our Chapter field trip would have been on Friday, October 16th, when the high tide would be 7 feet at 12:30 PM, the highest tide at a reasonable time for the month. High tides occur near the middle of the day on the 15th and on the 17th, but not quite as high as on Friday. Check a tide table before going to learn the best time to arrive. Parking is usually available along Shore Line Drive.

Abbotts Lagoon, Point Reyes National Seashore

We generally visit this location later in the month of October, but any time would be good. It requires driving to Point Reyes and turning onto Pierce Point Road. A 1-1/2 mile walk through the coastal habitat brings one to a bridge over the upper lagoon. Another 1/2 mile walk across sand and along the edge of the outer lagoon will bring one to the beach. A more rigorous 5,100 mile swim will take one to Japan. Birds we often see on this trip include sparrows, shorebirds, and raptors. The outer lagoon frequently has a good selection of shorebirds which will stay most of the winter. Snowy Plovers nest along the beach and south of the outer lagoon—they are often easy to find. American Pipit flocks need to be checked for possible Red-throated Pipits. Later in October we often have a good selection of raptors including Red-tailed and Ferruginous Hawks, Northern Harriers, and White-tailed Kites. Check the [Point Reyes National Seashore website](#) for access updates. While some Point Reyes sites are closed as of this writing, Abbotts Lagoon is open.

Bodega Bay

Not only is Bodega Bay famous for its role in the Hitchcock movie *The Birds*, but it is also famous for the many birds which can be found there. Starting in early fall and continuing through the winter, many shorebirds and waterfowl make Bodega Harbor their winter home. Any number of locations around the harbor can be visited for birding opportunities: The Tides Restaurant, Porto Bodega, the Rail Pond, Gaffney Point, Owl Canyon, Campbell Cove, and Bodega Head, among others. Currently, Lucas Wharf and Terrapin Creek restaurants are closed, but food is available at The Tides, the crab shack at the Spud Point Marina, and some items at Diekmann's Store. A detailed description of bird-watching spots may be seen at [this website](#).

Other bayside locations to try are:

- **Coyote Hills Regional Park**
- **San Leandro Marina**
- **Oakland Middle Harbor Shoreline**
- **Emeryville Marina**

Within Contra Costa County, one might try:

- **McNabney Marsh**
- **Martinez Regional Shoreline**
- **Valle Vista south of Moraga** (EBMUD pass required)
- **Contra Loma Reservoir**

Before going anywhere, check the internet for access directions.

Help Birds & Nature—Right Now!

Juan Pablo Galván, *Young Birders Club Chair*

PLEASE—Help Birds & Nature In the Biggest Way You Can: Influence Swing States RIGHT NOW For the November Election

Audubon is not a political organization. Because it's a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, chapters can't endorse one candidate over another in an election. But we can present facts and ask you to help birds and the environment. Here are some facts about birds and the current federal administration:

1. It tried to weaken the Migratory Bird Act by not punishing oil and gas companies whose activities kill birds unintentionally (read [HERE](#)).
2. It is taking the final steps to open up 1.6 million acres of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas drilling, a place that millions of migratory birds fly to or through (read [HERE](#)).
3. It weakened auto-emissions standards, which will cause dirtier air, increase gas prices long term, and makes catastrophic climate change worse (read [HERE](#)).
4. It derides climate change as a hoax even as the western US burns (and birds die as a result, read [HERE](#)) and parts of the South flood, aggressively pursues fossil fuel energy development, and ridiculously claims wind energy causes cancer (read [HERE](#) and [HERE](#)).
5. Its executive has been named "*Worst President for Our Environment in History*" by nine green groups, including Sierra Club, Defenders of Wildlife, and the League of Conservation Voters (read [HERE](#)).

These are just five examples. There are many, many more. If the current administration gets another four years of power, its record of anti-conservation actions will not just continue, it will grow much worse. Given the difficulty of stopping the negative impacts of climate change and other forms of destruction of nature, it is entirely possible that the birds that we as Audubon love, the habitats they depend on, and the Earth as a whole will not be able to return to a natural state that we today would recognize—if the current administration wins a second term.

Unfortunately, it is very possible that it will. Unless friends of birds, those that appreciate and love nature, and people that value science and reason act now, the current administration may win in November. WE ARE ASKING EACH ONE OF YOU TO ACT NOW. We are asking you to help birds and nature in the ways that will be most effective to help them for the November election, and we are asking you to urge your friends, neighbors, and family to do the same.

Yes, you can vote. But the election will not be decided by voters in California. It will be decided by voters in Florida, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. The swing states, that are teetering on the edge of going one way or the other in the election. There are many different organizations that you can seamlessly join to make a difference. A good one is [HERE](#).

This is about the birds and natural world we love being in extreme danger, and trying to help them in one of the biggest ways we can. YOU CAN MAKE THINGS BETTER. Please act now. Please volunteer. Please help.

Birds and Wildfires

Mike Eliot, *MDAS Member-at-Large*

With the growing threat of massive wildfires due to global warming, as seen in the western US over the past three years, people are intensifying research on the effects on native birds. It is known already that rising temperatures, shifting rainfall patterns, as well as longer and worse fire seasons are threatening most species of North American birds with possible extinction. We have lost nearly one-third of these birds already over the last 50 years.



In wildfire areas, low-flying wild birds appear to be more apt to die from smoke inhalation. The rapid spread of today's wildfires often leave birds unable to escape the flames and more easily overcome by smoke. Little research exists on the effects of bird smoke inhalation, except that veterinarians and other captive bird experts know that it weakens lung tissue, making them more susceptible to infection. This may lead to increased bird disappearances in areas near wildfires or on migration paths that move through areas that are burning. Some research has shown that birds may alter their migration paths or lose them entirely due to the lack of visibility that blocks views of landmarks used to aid migration. Thus, during wildfire season we may see fewer migratory birds in our backyards.

On the other hand, there is credible evidence that birds may inadvertently cause wildfires, often due to making contact with power lines and causing sparks. Some publications have also reported that raptors have picked up burning sticks and carried them elsewhere, spreading these fires.



Downy Woodpecker on burned tree

Wildfires can actually improve the chances for some species of birds. Bark beetles invade burned forest en masse, laying eggs in burned tree bark. Several species of woodpeckers come into burned areas soon after fires to pick bark beetle larvae off these trees. Certain types of pine cones that are tightly sealed get opened by fires and cause the seeds to become available to birds as well. These fires also burn unevenly, leaving patches of habitat that improve chances for many species to get a foothold on territories.

Mike Eliot

Wild Birds Unlimited, Pleasant Hill

Local Environmental Groups Team Up To Restore Riparian Habitat

Alan Bade, *Community Science Advisory & MDAS Member-at-Large*

Jerry Britten, *MDAS President*

The **Walnut Creek Watershed Council**, **The Restoration Trust**, and the **Contra Costa Resource Conservation District** are moving forward with two new creek restoration projects—one in Walnut Creek and one in Lafayette, CA. The two projects will eradicate invasive plants (primarily *Arundo donax* or “giant reed”) and restore 17,500 square feet of native riparian landscape.

Quite a coalition has been formed. Local volunteers from **Friends of the Creeks** in Walnut Creek and the **Lafayette Creeks Committee** are deeply involved with the site planning and volunteer recruitment. Supporting public agencies are the Cities of Walnut Creek and Lafayette, the **Contra Costa Fish and Wildlife Committee**, the **San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board**, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

One site is on Walnut Creek near the Walnut Creek Library. The other is on Lafayette Creek near the pedestrian Bridge off Mt. Diablo Boulevard in Lafayette. Invasive plant removal and trash pickup is complete at both sites. In late fall, planting with bird-friendly native species to restore a diverse and functional riparian habitat will begin.



Feb 2020 Walnut Creek site

Photo: John Zentner



Aug 2020 Walnut Creek site

Photo: John Zentner

Mt. Diablo Audubon members participated in a similar project last January along Grayson creek in Pleasant Hill. Restoration planting will continue at that site this fall. Please see the **March 2020 edition of *The Quail*** for a description of last year's events.

Other *Arundo* removals are moving forward as well. Friends of San Ramon Creeks volunteers removed four large stands in the Green Valley Creek watershed in Danville on private property. **Two of these** were quite large and very dense.



Lafayette site before

Photo: Jeff Gilman



Lafayette site after

Photo: Jeff Gilman

There will be opportunities for members of the public to volunteer at the Walnut Creek and Lafayette restoration sites in various capacities (examples include planting and site monitoring). To find out more about this project and to volunteer, see the September 8, 2020 Walnut Creek Watershed Council **Press Release**. You may also contact **MDAS Board member Alan Bade**, who is a member of the Walnut Creek Watershed Council's ARRT (**Arundo Removal and Replacement Team**), for more information.

Another source is your local creek group:

- **Friends of the Creeks** (Walnut Creek)
- **Friends of San Ramon Creek**
- **Friends of Pleasant Hill Creeks**
- **Lafayette Creeks Committee**

Auk the Vote!

America's birds don't vote. But they have a huge stake in the outcome of the 2020 elections.



Auk the Vote! is an entirely grassroots campaign. They have no paid staff, no office space, no product lines, no partisan affiliations, and no 501(c)(3) status. They are birders rising to the unprecedented challenge of the current moment, doing all they can to protect the birds, the habitats, and the communities—natural and human—that we love.

To learn more about ***Auk The Vote!*** and what's at stake click [HERE](#).

MDAS Connects People With Birds

Jody Morgan, *Alamo Today & Danville Today News*

Editor's note: MDAS received a thoughtful write-up in the September edition of the *Alamo Today & Danville Today News*. It includes quotes and background information from our own Rosalie Howarth and Hugh Harvey about the inspiration Rosalie receives from our 400+ members, and the important advice that Hugh received from Jean Richmond about how to lead birding Field Trips.

Be sure to check out [this article](#) and other interesting local news articles in the *Alamo Today & Danville Today News*.

Northern Saw-whet Owl Banding Project, Las Trampas

Julie Woodruff, *Biologist, Northern Saw-whet Owl Banding Project*

Last fall, Mt. Diablo Audubon agreed to partner with me to run a Northern Saw-whet Owl (NSWO) banding station. This species migrates in large numbers every fall from their breeding grounds to more suitable wintering habitat at lower elevations and latitudes. In fact, some NSWO banding stations out east capture over 100 owls each night during the migration peak! These stations are part of a larger effort to understand NSWO fall migration called Project OwlNet. After volunteering at a station with Altacal Audubon in Chico for about six years, I decided to start my own owl station here in the Bay Area to determine if the area supported a similar migration.



A newly-captured Northern Saw-whet Owl is banded after being captured by mist net.

I started with a station in 2018 located at Briones Regional Park with promising results; I captured 14 NSWO using mist nets set up at night, along with an MP3 player playing a male NSWO call to attract potential migrant owls. The season was cut short due to the Camp Fire causing poor air quality, but the nightly average was 1 owl per evening. In 2019, I moved the station to Las Trampas Regional Park, located just west of Danville, and had success! In 19 nights of banding, I captured 22 owls: 19 newly banded NSWO, and 3 recaptured NSWO (from the site). The goal of any banding station is to gather long-term data about population trends, timing, and population. The owls I captured were mostly hatch-year birds: 12 hatch-year, 7 after-hatch-year. Hatch-year birds were “born” in 2019, and were migrating for the first time, and a vast majority were females (13 females, 2 males, 4 undetermined). We also occasionally capture non-target taxa—last fall we caught 2 Pallid Bats and one little Brown Bat, and a Western Screech-Owl, which we also banded.



In 2019, volunteers practice taking biometric measurements on a captured Northern Saw-whet Owl.

We are resuming our efforts this year at the same Las Trampas site, beginning about October 14, and running for 6 weeks. Continued, long-term banding at the site will inform us of annual population changes of migrant NSWOW. Recapturing NSWOWs from this site, or from other banding stations, provides the best data on migration routes and residency status.

I have to add, the wonderful team of volunteers (several from Mt. Diablo Audubon), willing to spend the cold nights sitting in the dark with me, are the real MVPs of the project—without them, I would be in the dark!

Large Bequest To MDAS From The Estate Of Eldon N. Bachman

Maren Smith, *MDAS Education Committee*

For the past year, I've been the anonymous person behind the *info@* email on the MDAS website, the person who fields questions or directs folks to resources to answer their questions. The questions and comments have ranged from bird identifications,

suggestions for the website, tree-trimming protocols, to general queries about MDAS programs or procedures, run-of-the-mill inquiries.

However, in January of this year, I received a far more interesting query from Vernon Hague, a trustee of the Eldon Neil Bachman trust. He wanted to know how to make a donation to our chapter. He had previously donated to The Audubon Society of California in Emeryville and when there was no reply or forwarding address, he assumed they no longer existed and sought out a local chapter.

He wrote,

"How do I get my donation to Mt. Diablo Audubon Society?"

Through some back-and-forth emails, I learned that his family friend, whom he called Neil, had lived in Rodeo, Vallejo, and Pinole. I explained that our chapter was located in Walnut Creek, "over the hills" from where his friend had lived, to be sure that he was still okay with making this donation. I also gave him a brief summary of some of the ways we reach out to members and our community through field trips, conservation and educational programs, projects, classes, and community informational kiosks, as well as our Young Birders Club, the next generation of stewards of our planet. I assured him that the donation would continue to support these programs to honor his friend's love of birds.

I then wrote:

"So, this donation, should it come our way, would go a long ways towards promoting a love, appreciation, and understanding of birds, something I hope that your friend would appreciate."

It appeared that the donation wheels were in motion and so, I alerted MDAS Treasurer, Steve Buffi, to the developments and he started a (long) back and forth with NAS in New York. Between the pandemic, NAS members working from home, and standard bureaucratic red tape, it took several month to receive the funds.

In July 2020, I received this email from Vernon: *"Time to take a break. All this work is for the BIRDS. Pun intended for Fun. Please see attached. I started 10 years ago with over 1 million and now I'm down to 5K. Fun, fun, fun."*

Vernon had hoped that there would be no trouble with the money getting to MDAS. He said, *"No matter what, Remember My Friend and now Yours."*

In August, we learned that a total of \$8,428!!! had been received by MDAS, a considerable sum, through a serendipitous exchange of emails between two complete strangers, Vernon and me. I asked for a little more information about our generous bird-loving benefactor and received this information from Vernon in return:

"Thank you Maren for the reply. I am sending a picture with a little info on Eldon. I may have already given it to you but can't remember. Eldon, or Neil as I called him, wasn't a birder as much as he was an avid feeder. He put multiple feeders at every home he ever had. He would sit and watch all the animals but mostly the birds come and feed. He said he liked the Magpies. He told me many, many times how they came dressed for dinner referring to the tuxedo they appeared to be wearing. He would always laugh as he said it and have a big smile on his

face. There are movies and pictures he has taken of the birds coming to his offerings as he stood as close as he could.

"I can only say good things of the man. He treated me as a son and knew my parents as great friends. I am a lucky man for the life he helped to make for me."

And, Mt. Diablo Audubon Society is lucky, too. We will use this incredible donation to further MDAS goals promoting conservation, education, and advocacy.

This chance encounter has been a really bright spot in what has been a really weird year. It has been refreshing to reflect on the serendipity of life, the chance generosity of a stranger, and the benefit birds have provided for so many people.

When you next see a magpie, dressed up in its fancy tuxedo feathers, remember Neil and his friend, Vernon, and send out a message of gratitude to our friends.



Eldon Neil Bachman

Sept. 13, 1924 — April 12, 2009

Birder's Diary

Hugh Harvey, *Field Trips Chair*

Editor's Note: In 1996 the author, Hugh Harvey, wrote a number of stories about the first sightings of species that contributed to his life list. This story was written on July 11, 1996 about his first sighting of a Black Rosy-Finch on June 15, 1994.

Black Rosy-Finch (*Leucosticte atrata*)

Rosita and I had been out camping five days already. We visited Yosemite, Devil's Postpile, White Mountain, and finally Great Basin National Park. Wheeler Peak in

Great Basin and White Mountain have a common feature: a high-altitude dry climate which supports Bristlecone Pine trees. These trees are some of the oldest organisms on earth, some being more than 4,000 years old.

Lehman Cave is also in Great Basin National Park. It is a dry cave, unlike the more famous wet limestone caves, such as Carlsbad Caverns or Mammoth Cave. Because of its isolation, Great Basin is not as heavily trafficked as other parks, but its recent upgrade from National Monument has increased its popularity.

Four drive-in campgrounds are in the park and we have used three of them. Our favorite is the Wheeler Peak campground, situated at almost 10,000 feet. The camp surrounds a large, sloping meadow from which a view of the peak is obtained. The northeast portion of the peak is broken away and forms sheer cliffs soaring above up to 2,000 feet. At the base of these cliffs is a glacier, which may be visited by foot.



Black Rosy-Finch

Photo: Eric Hynes/Macaulay Library at the [Cornell Lab of Ornithology \(ML48149111\)](#)

Having seen the Bristlecone Pines at White Mountain, we wanted to see these trees, too. A not too strenuous hike takes one up into the right habitat. Patches of snow covered the trail in some areas, and the snowmelt muddied it in others. This forest is quite different from the one on White Mountain, where the Bristlecone Pines are often separated by wide spaces. This gives an eerie feeling to White Mountain. Wheeler Peak's forest is much denser and is on a steeper hillside. With the peak looming above and other trees around, the stark beauty we experienced at White Mountain was not present. This is not to say it was unpleasant, it was anything but.

We continued on beyond the pine forest to where we would be able to see the glacier. Some returning hikers told us we could hike to the glacier if we did not mind going across snow and rocks. Mind? No way! We went.

The snow was slippery, the trail unmarked and the rocks were huge piles of sharp-edged boulders, which used to be located where the cliffs and glacier now are. At one point we were above a large patch of snow when about six small birds came fluttering in. They perched on rocks, landed on the snow, and did not hold still for very long. The Black Rosy-Finches seemed to be having just a great old time. It is hard to imagine that they were looking for insects caught in the snow. This place seemed just too wild to support birds of any kind, let alone an insect population.

We crossed the snow and started over the rocks, but it was more than Rosita could do. I continued toward the glacier, never having been to one. It was a very spooky place to be, and definitely a solitary space, with the wind blowing, and the sound of rocks falling from above. The cliffs form a giant wall, which ultimately blocks one's progress, yet when one turns around to look back, the panorama is spectacular.

The glacier itself appeared to be a large snowfield, and we learned later that there is some discussion amongst the experts as to whether it truly is a glacier. Whether it is or not, this was one of the wildest, most desolate places I had ever experienced. Melting snow made small water falls on the cliffs. Some rocks had slid across upper reaches of the glacier leaving their tracks. In some places the tracks looked like muddy streaks. The sun shone brightly on all from a cloudless sky. I did not quite know how best to experience my presence at this place. In the original meaning of the word awful, it was just that, a place of awe.

I took pictures, thinking every view was more spectacular than the last. I walked onto the glacier for a few steps only. It was like walking on a fine carpet and wanting to be careful that one's shoes were clean. After all, I did not want to ruin the glacier. What an odd feeling the nature of the place gave me. I leaned down and picked up a handful of the snow to eat. Well, it tasted like any other snow I had eaten. Finally, I left to find Rosita and return to the civilization.

We ate our lunch and hiked down to a lake by way of a different trail. It looked like a great place to soak our feet, until we found how cold it was. Then, we continued back to camp and prepared to build a fire, have our dinner later, to ponder the experiences of the day and to reflect on the natural wonders of the Great Basin. Black Rosy-Finches, indeed.

Events

Prairie Falcons: Flying into the Future



The **East Bay Regional Park District** invites you to an evening with falcons. We will hear about Prairie Falcon populations across the Park District, including

nesting at Black Diamond Mines and other locations.

Wildlife Program Manager Doug Bell and Naturalist Kevin Dixon will discuss the lives of falcons and other birds of prey: the challenges they face, and their outlook for the future. We will also examine the role the East Bay Parks plays in supporting raptors.

This exciting event will be offered virtually through Zoom for up to 100 participants, and will be simultaneously streamed live on the **Black Diamond Mines Facebook Page**. The event will be recorded for later viewing.

Date: Thursday, September 24
Time: 6:30 PM–7:30 PM
Location: Zoom online meeting
Cost: Free
Meeting Link: [https://zoom.us/j/93649410874?
pwd=WXB1b1VqNTgrOXIUQTQrYnN5ekFNdz09](https://zoom.us/j/93649410874?pwd=WXB1b1VqNTgrOXIUQTQrYnN5ekFNdz09)
Meeting ID: 936 4941 0874
Meeting Passcode: 897203

Golden Gate Audubon Society Online Birding Class



Introduction to Avian Anatomy and Physiology

A science-based course for curious adult learners who have some birding experience.

An overview of what makes birds unique, including feathers and flight; how birds breathe, and how they produce song; their amazing hearts and circulatory system; how they feed, digest, and excrete; how they reproduce and raise their young; how they migrate and navigate. We will look at some comparison and contrasts to mammals, and we will explore resources for continued learning.

Date: Six Tuesday classes by Zoom
October 6, 13, 20, 27, November 3 and 10
Time: 7:00 PM–9:00 PM
Location: Zoom online meeting
Instructor: Maureen Lahiff
Cost: \$75 for GGAS members, \$110 for non-members
Registration: [Click here to register online](#)

Limited to 50 participants. Once the class is full, you may register to be on a waiting list.

Contra Costa County Fish & Wildlife Committee



CONTRA COSTA
COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

CCC Fish & Wildlife Committee Accepting Applications

The Contra Costa County Internal Operations Committee of the Board of Supervisors is now accepting applications from individuals to fill two (2) At-Large Member Seats and one (1) At-Large Alternate member seat on the Contra Costa County Fish & Wildlife Committee. Existing members seeking reappointment and individuals seeking a new appointment may apply. Applications are due by October 2, 2020 at 5:00 P.M.

Fish & Wildlife Committee meetings are held six times a year on the third Wednesday of the month from 3:00 PM to 5:00 PM. For more information regarding the Fish & Wildlife Committee, please visit the [Committee's website](#). An application is available on the website [HERE](#).

Using eBird—A Virtual Tutorial



eBird is among the world's largest biodiversity-related science projects, with more than 100 million bird sightings contributed each year by eBirders around the world. A collaborative enterprise with hundreds of partner organizations, thousands of regional experts, and hundreds of thousands of users, eBird is managed by the [Cornell Lab of Ornithology](#).

This tutorial is aimed at new users. It will introduce the features and navigation of the site, illustrate how to use the site to explore hotspots, species, and other data, and instruct how to enter checklists through the desktop site and the eBird mobile app. Please contact the instructor, Jerry Britten (president@mtdiabloaudubon.org), for info on how to sign up for this Zoom tutorial—free and open to MDAS members.

Date: Thursday, October 22
Time: 6:30 PM–8:00 PM
Location: Zoom online meeting
Instructor: Jerry Britten
Cost: Free for MDAS members
Registration: Contact the instructor, Jerry Britten (president@mtdiabloaudubon.org), for info on how to sign up for this Zoom tutorial

October Gallery

Photos By Cassie Tzur

A selection of photos from talented MDAS member Cassie Tzur



Black Phoebe
Rossmoor



Lesser Scaup
Lake Merritt



Canada Goose with goslings
Rossmoor



Acorn Woodpecker
Rossmoor



Western Bluebird
Rossmoor



Female Mallard with ducklings
Rossmoor



Mourning Dove
Rossmoor



Red-shouldered Hawk
Rossmoor

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Mt. Diablo Audubon Society Leadership

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