



Mt. Diablo Audubon Society

The Quail

Volume 66, Number 3

NOVEMBER 2020

Next Monthly Program Meeting: Thursday, November 5

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** Birding Info: *Paul Detjens and Krista Vossekuil will talk about the Lower Walnut Creek / Pacheco Marsh Restoration and Public Access Project.*
- 7:25 PM** Board Announcements
- 7:35 PM** Main Program: *Wildlife and Wildfire: Animal Adaptations for a Dynamic Ecosystem* with Lynn Schofield
- 8:30 PM** Adjourn

Main Program: *Wildlife and Wildfire: Animal Adaptations for a Dynamic Ecosystem*

Lynn Schofield

Wildfires are an important part of many ecosystems around the world. Fires provide an opportunity for new growth, to return nutrients to the soil, and to create a wholly unique type of habitat. Many species are adapted for these ever-changing systems, and they have developed a wide variety of strategies for making the best of the post-fire habitat. However, these systems exist in a delicate balance. Recently, forest fires have been increasing in size, intensity,

and frequency due to human activities, and even fire-adapted species are struggling to keep up. In this talk we discuss how animals survive and thrive in a system defined by fire and what we can do to help protect the balance of these special ecosystems.



Lynn Schofield is a biologist for the



Institute for Bird Populations. Her research covers a diversity of topics including bird migration, forest fire ecology, and wetland conservation. In addition to using her research to help inform effective conservation strategies, Lynn also works to help make connections with nature accessible to all. She is one of the core members of the Cal Falcons social

media project, a frequent trip leader for the Bay Area chapter of the Feminist Bird Club, and a long-time volunteer for the Golden Gate Raptor Observatory.

Photos of Great Gray Owl (top) and Black-backed Woodpecker (bottom) by Lynn Schofield

Birding Info:

Lower Walnut Creek / Pacheco Marsh Restoration and Public Access Project

Paul Detjens and Krista Vossekuij

Join Paul Detjens of Contra Costa County Flood Control District and Krista Vossekuij of John Muir Land Trust to learn about the Lower Walnut Creek / Pacheco Marsh Restoration and Public Access Project. The project will restore and enhance more than 232 acres of salt marsh habitat and become a favorite destination for birdwatchers throughout the region. Learn more [HERE](#).



Pacheco Marsh

Photo: Adam Weidenbach

Webinar Access Info:

Date: Thursday, November 5, 2020

Time: 7:00 PM–8:30 PM Pacific Time (US and Canada)

Location: Zoom online meeting

Access: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88040646768?pwd=TEo1RWhlVlJDS0xSc0lOM0xWcmtUUT09>

Passcode: 450642

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: 450642
International numbers available:
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88040646768?pwd=TEo1RWhlVlJDS0xSc0lOM0xWcmtUUT09>

President's Letter

Jerry Britten, *MDAS President*

Just a few quick notes regarding chapter business—I've been working on organizing our Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs), which you can read about [HERE](#).

We are pleased to announce the filling of two vacant board chair positions: Juan Pablo Galván has taken over the *Conservation Chair* formerly occupied by Nancy Wenninger, and Krista Vossekul has assumed the *Education Chair* formerly held by

Maren Smith. We welcome these capable and dedicated board members into their new responsibilities. For the moment, I am taking over the CBC organizing, a role previously filled by Elizabeth Leite. Please see the tribute to Elizabeth later in this issue.



Late in November, expect to see our annual fundraising campaign solicitation, and please consider giving, however small the amount, to help keep the chapter running and to assist others, as these are trying times as well for nonprofits dedicated to conservation and habitat preservation for birds and other wildlife.

We have far surpassed the required minimum number of votes from members approving our revised Chapter Bylaws. Thanks to all who took the time to vote, and a reminder for everyone to vote on or before November 3 in our country's General Election.

Good birding, and stay safe!

Welcome, New Members!

Cody Cardana, Discovery Bay

Sheridan Colbourn, Danville

Bob Feldman, Lafayette

Edgar Molina, Pleasant Hill

Kris Peerland, Pleasant Hill

Lois Shaffer, Walnut Creek

Ann Marie Wasserbauer, Walnut Creek

Emily Wheeler, Walnut Creek

Remembering Elizabeth Leite—A Tribute



This month we are sad to report the passing of one of our longtime, well-respected members, Elizabeth Leite. Elizabeth served on the MDAS board as *Citizen Science Chair*—in fact, she essentially created this position to foster member involvement in citizen science efforts such as our Christmas Bird Count (CBC), FeederWatch programs, and Climate Watch. Although very ill, she continued her work in this capacity right up to the end. For several years Elizabeth organized the Mt. Diablo Audubon CBC. This is one of the more complicated volunteer responsibilities requiring fielding surveys in two areas—Central and Eastern Contra Costa County. Her work involved organizing teams, assigning birders and routes, and obtaining necessary permits and waivers from government organizations and property owners for the areas we survey. She also compiled the data and submitted it every year to the National Audubon CBC Database. The way she managed the count is a tribute to her tremendous organizational skills. She always was very polite, attentive, and performed a wonderful service in a quiet, unassuming, and likely, under-appreciated way. And, not to be overlooked, she always organized a delicious count dinner afterwards where birders could meet in a convivial atmosphere to share their sightings. With her husband of 54 years, Dal, Elizabeth was also a frequent and very welcome participant on our field trips. Her sightings were always helpful and contributed to everyone's experience. She was energetic and engaging. It was a joy to see her arrive at the field trip meeting site and spend the day with her, trading observations. She will be missed.

—Beth Branthaver, Carol Pacht, Jerry Britten

Elizabeth expanded MDAS community science in other ways as well. I met Elizabeth when we were volunteering at Friends of Pleasant Hill Creeks. I approached her for advice on how to conduct bird surveys. She threw herself

wholeheartedly into this, seeing its potential to build new alliances and further bird conservation. In fact, it led to much more than this. She and Dal, along with others, warmly welcomed us into the MDAS community. Her mentorship and friendship meant a great deal to me, and I will miss her greatly.

—Alan Bade

Thank You To Everyone Who Gave So Generously In 2019–20

Steve Buffi, *MDAS Treasurer*

California Condor (\$1,000+)

William D. Chilson, Lenora and Michael Robertson

California Gnatcatcher (\$250–\$999)

Jerald Britten, Steve Buffi and Anne Waters, Tracy Farrington, G. Hing, Ann and Donald Hughes, Bruce and Judy Kronmiller, Lynn and Gordon Lakso, Donald W. and Susan E. Lewis, Norman and Christy Lundberg, Paul and Nancy Schorr, Nancy Wenninger

California Thrasher (\$100–\$249)

Hanako and Paul R. Andrews, Gus and Gerry Argenal, Isaac Aronow, Rex Ballard, JD Bergeron, Sarah Cahill, Darrell Cannon, Cathy Castillo, Alice Collins, Yolanda and Robert Cronin, Ian and Karin Deas, Marc Desin and Andrea Baird, Kent Fickett and Rebecca Beemer, Pam Giarrizzo, Carol and John Harkin, Claudia and Scott Hein, Rosalie Howarth, Richard Kleker, Michael Larkin, Elizabeth and George Leite, Herb and Randi Long, Diane and Bob Malucelli, Theron Nelson, Carol Pachi, Donna Preece, Sharon and Dennis Randall, Sandra S. Ritchie, Trudy and Charles Salter, Fay and Edwin Schoenberger, Robert G. Slyker, Julia M. Starr, Maury and Susan Stern, Del Stipe, Joel Summerhill, Gary Thompson, Michael and Rita Tischler, Erin M. Wilson

California Quail (\$25–\$99)

Lisa Aaron, Cheryl Abel, Joy Addiego, Lori and Mike Altabet, Phillip Araki, Lin and Dennis Ashlock, Barbara Beno, Emily Blanck and Daniel Weiss, Joanne Bourland, Dr. and Mrs. Douglas Bradley, Beth Branthaver, Karen Case, Ethan and Ruth Chickering, Margaret Clark, Don and Susan Couch, Nahide Craig, Regina Dakin, Michael Delmar, Walt Duncan, Doug Elliott, Leland Elster, William T. Espey, Carol Evans, Don Fallon, Daniel Fitzgerald, Tina Fletcher, Nancy J. Flood, Dana Gallo, Tom Gardner, Betsy and David Gifford, Janet M. Goodman, Carol Haglund, Joy Hakola-Dardin, Richard Hansen and Kristen Yanker-Hansen, Elizabeth Hoople, Donna and Richard Immel, Renate Johnson, Diana Karkiewicz, Susan Dee and Edwin F. Katibah, Matty

Kilpatrick, Sandra and Fred King, Ronald Kline, Michelle Koski, Donna Kramer and Scott Kramer, Mona Lange, Eugenia and Gary Larson, Robin L. C. Leong, Charlotte Liniger, Sue Littlehale, Mike Loper, John Masek and Margaret Elgin Masek, Carrol Mills, Andrew Naegeli, Antonio B. Nafarrate, Janie Nelson, Cindy and Hank Nigro, Nancy Norris, Sharon Noteboom, Lorraine Osborn, Margaret and Christopher Panton, Lori Patel, Susan Peters, Susan and Clinton Phalen, Roberto M. Pombo, Austin and Marjorie Prindle, Charleen Raines, Dorothea Ray, William and Lana Rocha, Janet and Richard Saillard, Lois L. Shaffer, Robert Sheehan, David and Linda Shinn, Ned and Elizabeth Soares, Ann Spaulding, Caroline Stephens, Gary Stevens, Donna S. Stonemen, Fred W. Sullivan, Patricia Sullivan, Marianne Tanner, Willard Taylor, Kathleen Usher, Barbara Vaughn, Bev Walker, Blake Wu

California Towhee (to \$24)

Margaret Bradford, Ted Chamberlin, Mary Jankowski, Kathryn B Kellogg, Renette MacIntyre, Doris Miller, Lou and Yolanda Pilastro, Moses de los Reyes, Dr. and Ms. Howard Sturtz, Astrid Thomas Monica Zhang

Climate Change—Hold Your Breath

Juan Pablo Galván, *MDAS Conservation Chair & Young Birders Club Chair*



In about a week we will be witnessing what could be a huge turning point in the global response to climate catastrophe. Things could get better, or they could get much, much worse. Either way, there are many important things you, your friends, family, and neighbors can do right now to avoid a far hotter, drier, fire-filled future.

1. **INVEST IN WAYS THAT ARE GREEN AND THAT MAKE GREEN.** Your money, when put into things that can save the planet instead of things that destroy it, can earn you more cash while also saving the environment. Exxon is planning to emit more greenhouse gases than ever before and increase fossil fuel drilling (read [HERE](#)). This, while seas rise, coral reefs bleach, and the West burns. Don't want to support that? Want to make sure your retirement funds and other investments aren't full of fossil fuels? Watch [THIS](#) to learn how you can make green by going green.
2. **ELECTRIFY YOUR KITCHEN.** This year, as people have sheltered inside and the air has turned toxic at times, there's been more research and

more attention paid to if the air we're breathing indoors is any good. Turns out, gas stoves are bad for indoor air quality, your lungs, and the planet (read [HERE](#), [HERE](#), and [HERE](#)). Get fossil fuels out of your kitchen and get an electric stove and oven.

3. **RETHINK DRIVING.** If you have a gas car, try seriously asking yourself, do I need to drive as much as I do? What is the benefit vs. the harm I'm doing by emitting greenhouse gases? How much money am I spending on gas, insurance, maintenance, and repair? Is a car really a necessity for me? The rise of things like Lyft, Uber, Instacart, Prime, and Google Shopping means there are more ways to get around and get groceries and other household necessities delivered to your door than ever before, without the need for you to ever get in your car. Using those services means other people are driving for you, but if you decide you don't need your car, if there are others you can use, that's one less vehicle on the road. The less people drive, the less greenhouse gases go into the atmosphere, and the better our chances of avoiding the worst of climate change. Think about it and see if you should make a change.
4. **WATCH, LEARN, AND ENJOY.** Want to watch a program featuring some of the most beautiful places on the planet? Want to get inspired to save those places while listening to what might be the best voice any human has ever possessed? Watch David Attenborough's "*A Life On Our Planet*" on Netflix (more info [HERE](#)). Probably one of the best things you'll see this year! When you're done with that, if you missed the presentation of MDAS's climate report months ago before the pandemic, click [HERE](#) (starts at 28:30) for a very similar version presented to Sequoia Audubon.
5. **GET INVOLVED LOCALLY.** There are plenty of ways to influence key issues that affect climate change right in your community. Everything from land use policies to housing to your city's General Plan—there are lots of ways to make things more sustainable right where you live (see the article in this issue about [Sensible Walnut Creek](#)). Check out [Contra Costa Climate Leaders](#) and [350 Bay Area](#) to learn more and join others that want to make positive change. Development is also a huge issue. Building at the urban edge often causes people to drive more since they live further away from services and job centers, and it gobbles up open space that provides habitat and stores carbon. But what about development in areas that are already surrounded by buildings, or areas that are already disturbed? Building in places like these can take pressure off more sensitive land, not to mention keeping development out of areas at the wildland—urban interface that are more likely to burn. Housing has been called the “megafire-sized climate issue that lawmakers in California keep failing to adequately address”. If more people supported infill and climate-

smart infill policy, that could be a big positive step toward fighting climate change. Read more [HERE](#).

Image: "choices" by danielmoyle is licensed with [CC BY 2.0](#)

2020–2021 Duck Stamps

Jerry Britten, *MDAS President*

One of the easiest ways that anyone can support bird habitat conservation is by buying Federal Duck Stamps—among the most successful conservation tools ever created to protect habitat for birds and other wildlife.



Federal Duck Stamps are conservation revenue stamps; 98% of the purchase price goes directly to help acquire and protect wetland habitat and purchase conservation easements for the **National Wildlife Refuge System**. Wetlands acquired with Duck Stamp dollars help purify water, aid in flood control, reduce soil erosion and sedimentation, and enhance outdoor recreation opportunities. See more information [HERE](#). Duck stamps can be purchased at this site: <https://www.duckstamp.com/>.

Mt. Diablo Audubon in the past has purchased duck stamps for resale at chapter memberships meetings, but with these meetings in hiatus, we have highlighted the above links for interested members to purchase online.

This annual art competition, sponsored by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, now requires hunting imagery to be part of the artwork, as mandated by a rework of the rules by the current Administration.

A **recent article from Audubon**, delves into the ramifications of this directive. This mandate has drawn some objections from artists and conservation organizations. Images of ducks falling from the sky aren't necessarily the best to solicit purchase from birding enthusiasts, and with few other options, a good number of artists have resorted to images of waterfowl with spent shotgun shells or lost duck calls floating in the water next to them—evocative of litter if nothing else! However, the 2020–2021 stamps for sale now do not contain hunting imagery—they could be the last until and unless the policy is revised yet again.

Birding During COVID-19

Hugh Harvey, *MDAS 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.



Black Skimmer

Photo: Dorian Anderson/Macaulay Library at the [Cornell Lab of Ornithology \(ML121748461\)](#)

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 late 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.

[Charleston Slough and the South Bay](#), Mountain View

A number of places in the southern part of San Francisco Bay are wonderful for birding after the winter birds arrive. Alviso has the Environmental Education Center, which is currently closed, but the entry road, Grand Blvd, is open. The ponds on either side offer excellent birding.

[Shoreline Lake](#), Mountain View

Shoreline Lake can be reached at the north end of N. Shoreline Blvd. At the very

end is a boat house with bathrooms and a view of the lake from the east. An alternative is to drive to the **Palo Alto Baylands Nature Preserve trailhead** at the north end of San Antonio Rd. Park on Terminal Rd and walk the short trail to see Charleston Slough. By making a loop, one comes to the west side of Shoreline Lake and the east end of Terminal Rd. Bird along Adobe Creek and Charleston Slough if you walk out beyond the pump house.

Palo Alto Baylands, Palo Alto

The Palo Alto Baylands includes the Lucy Evans Baylands Nature Center. This is at the east end of Embarcadero Rd. The duck pond and various mudflats and salt marshes offer plenty of birding. A new boardwalk extends across a portion of the marsh behind the nature center.

Foster City Oyster Shell Mounds, Foster City

The Foster City Oyster Shell Mounds are located along the bay. A series of shell mounds along the edge of the water provides wonderful habitat for roosting shorebirds and Black Skimmers. From E. Hillsdale Blvd, follow around onto Beach Park Blvd. Drive south and park near the intersection with Tarpon St. A portion of the Bay Trail is elevated and gives great views of the birds.

McNabney Marsh and Martinez Shoreline, Martinez

Water fowl, gulls, waders, and shorebirds use the edge of the Carquinez Strait and Suisun Bay. The entry road for Mt. View Sanitary has a viewing platform at the southern end of McNabney Marsh. Waterbird Regional Preserve is at the north end; use Waterfront Rd and Waterbird Way. Check the pond a little farther east on Waterbird Way. Martinez Shoreline has several parking areas. Cross the railroad tracks on Ferry St and follow to Court St. Drive to the end. The north end of Berrylessa St has a small paved lot, or turn left after crossing the tracks and follow to a gravel lot near the Martinez Sportsmen's Club. Follow the trail past the East Bay Regional Park District maintenance yard and out to the river's edge near the sailing ship hulk.

Limantour, Pt. Reyes Station

Much of Point Reyes National Seashore is closed right now, due to fire damage or road repairs. The road to Limantour is open, but may be subject to delays. A Bar-tailed Godwit was found here on October 18. Walk the trail around toward Muddy Hollow and look for birds along the beach.

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 or your smart phone for access directions.

Developer Proposes Massive Project On Seven Hills Ranch Property

Michele Sheehan, *MDAS Member*

Rosalie Howarth, *MDAS Publicity and Social Media Chair*

Adjacent to the northwest corner of Heather Farm Park in Walnut Creek is a 30-acre undeveloped property known as Seven Hills Ranch, just steps away from the park's nature area, a well-known eBird hotspot with 176 species observed, and home to highly popular, accessible walking paths.

The gentle slopes of Seven Hills Ranch provide magnificent views of Mt. Diablo. A small stream flows on the eastern side, creating a seasonal wetland. The area's large, biodiverse wildlife habitat offers easy public access, a natural connection and shared ecosystem with the Heather Farm Nature Area's abundant birdlife, and potential for further public environmental education.



Seven Hills Ranch Wetland Today

Photo: Michele Sheehan

This site, on unincorporated county land, is currently designated for “single-family homes, medium-density” only. A developer, Spieker Senior Development Partners, is asking for an amendment in the Contra Costa General Plan in order to build a gated

retirement community—a compound that would include 451 units, primarily for seniors, several multistory buildings, a clubhouse, a recreation building, parking lots, and a multi-story health care center that would overlook the Equestrian Center.



Proposed 451 Unit Spieker Senior Development Partners Compound

The entrance will be on Walnut Creek land at Marchbanks Dr. and Kinross Dr. A second entrance will be located on San Carlos Dr. at Seven Hills Rd., near the nature area and Heather Farm Lake. Grading will require the removal or redistribution of 17,000 dump trucks worth of dirt, leading to destruction of the existing natural environment. Although some will be replanted, 350 trees will be cut down. Construction will disrupt the entire area for three to four years.



Diagram Of Proposed Development

However, escrow will not close and construction cannot begin, if the developer cannot obtain an amendment to the General Plan.

Retaining the current single-family home designation would allow a walk-through (not gated) community and provide homes for a diverse mix of families. It would prevent habitat destruction and avoid a development that is out of proportion with the surrounding neighborhoods and park.

A group of citizens called **Sensible Walnut Creek** is asking county and city representatives to retain the current land-use designation, protecting this unique property from overbuild. Sensible Walnut Creek invites MDAS members to visit the Sensible Walnut Creek website sensiblewalnutcreek.com to view photos and maps and learn more. A petition to sign and letter-writing recommendations are also available.

Although preserving the site as open space would be ideal, the next best thing would be to retain the county's current, prudent land-use designation. That would be a win for people and wildlife.

Please visit the site, take a look at the plan, and sign up for status updates on the proposal.

***Editor's Note:** Michele Sheehan designed and created the posters for the informational kiosks at Heather Farm Nature Lake with the support of MDAS.*

Look For This Year's Irruption Species At Your Feeder

Mike Eliot, MDAS Board Member-at-Large

If summer growing conditions in northern forests aren't ideal, groups of birds will "irrupt" during the winter months in search of food like fruits, nuts, seeds and cones. Irruption patterns vary, but can involve large groups of birds flying west and/or south across North America into regions they aren't typically found.



About 20 years ago, birder **Ron Pittaway started forecasting** if these bird groups, called winter finches, would irrupt in the wintertime by analyzing that summer's growing conditions. Since then, birders have used Pittaway's annual forecast to understand if they'll be lucky enough to catch a glimpse of these irrupting species during the upcoming winter months. He released a **2020 finch irruption forecast** recently with top irruptive species being Pine Siskins and Red-breasted Nuthatches.

Pine Siskins primarily live in the northern forests of the western U.S. They have been moving west across the Pacific Northwest and should eventually move south along the West and East coasts. Pine Siskins have difficulty opening the large seeds of striped sunflower but enjoy black-oil sunflower seed, chips, and especially Nyjer.



Pine Siskin

Red-breasted Nuthatches are one of the most common migrants, coming out of the northern forests about every other year. This year shows good movement already, with many making their way into the southern United States since September. They will stay at feeders for the entire winter and pretty late into spring. Bark butter products and super suet are some of their food favorites.



Red-breasted Nuthatch

Others, including Purple Finches and Evening Grosbeaks have been seen in larger numbers headed south along the West Coast recently. They will eat sunflower, safflower, and Nyjer at your feeders.

Mike Eliot

Wild Birds Unlimited, Pleasant Hill

Project FeederWatch Starts November 14th

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



Project FeederWatch is a citizen science bird survey done from the comfort of your home and is perfect for our pandemic times! Many of us are probably spending a lot more time at home than we used to or prefer. So why not turn a very enjoyable pastime into something meaningful for avian science?

The commitment is relatively minor. A participant records birds at their feeder or in their yard on two consecutive days for a minimum of an hour each day from November 14th, 2020, through April 9th, 2021. (Or longer each day if you prefer. And if you miss some days, that's fine.) These get entered online at the **FeederWatch website**. By doing so, you are contributing to a significant project that is distinctly different from eBird.

FeederWatch records birds that winter at your home with weekly observations. This differs from eBird, which is a snapshot of birds seen at a particular location on a birding trip. While many people make eBird checklists of their yard birds, it's the regularity at a single location and seasonal extent that gives FeederWatch researchers different, valuable data. The information is used to measure changes in the winter ranges and abundances of bird species over time. An important difference is that FeederWatch data informs scientists as to where winter birds are and where they aren't. It helps them put together accurate population distribution maps and to detect gradual changes in birds' winter ranges. Irruptive movements, the extent of common diseases such as Finch eye disease, and interspecies dominance behaviors can be recorded. **HERE** is an excellent article on what researchers have learned from over 30 years of FeederWatch.

FeederWatch started in Canada in the mid 1970s. After 10 years, **a partnership was formed** with the **Cornell Lab of Ornithology** and the project expanded to cover all of North America. **Wild Birds Unlimited** is also a sponsor of FeederWatch. Our local **WBU store can help set you up** with everything you need. There are now over 20,000 participants and the value of the data grows with every new participant!

There are times an unusual bird shows up in our yard and we enjoy adding it to our FeederWatch list. Over time, we've built a record of our winter yard birds. At any time, we can look at our data to see arrival dates and common and unusual species, like the White-throated Sparrow that spent a good part of last winter with us. We'd place seeds on two bricks for it every morning and sure enough, it came to see if the "seed spring" had welled up overnight. We were sad to see it go and hope it comes back this year!



Alan Bade's White-throated Sparrow visitor waiting on his two bricks for his seeds

Photo: Alan Bade

We've enjoyed FeederWatch and think you will too! [Here is more information](#) and how to sign up. You can explore FeederWatch findings, maps, photos plus educational or home school resources [HERE](#), under the "Learn" tab. And FeederWatch could be an excellent homeschool science project for distance learning with [resources for educators and parents here](#).

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](#).

2020 Christmas Bird Count Status

Jerry Britten, *MDAS President*



Photo: Luke Franke/Audubon

We are actively planning the **2020 Christmas Bird Count (CBC)** for Central and Eastern Contra Costa County, in accordance with **guidance published by the National Audubon Society (NAS)**. The dates are Wednesday, December 16, for the East County Count, and Saturday, December 19, for the Central County Count. According to the NAS guidance, we can't officially announce the count until November 15 because the COVID-19 outbreak status could change, but we are optimistic that the count will occur. It will be quite different than in the past, however.

Some of the changes:

- We must comply with all current state and local COVID-19 guidelines.
- Social distancing and/or masking are required at all times in the field.
- Carpooling may only occur within existing familiar or social "pod" groups.
- No in-person gatherings are allowed.
- We will require participants to sign a waiver acknowledging and agreeing to abide by our COVID-19 safety practices.

The ban on in-person gatherings means that our traditional count dinner, where we compare this year's sightings with results of previous counts, will be replaced by a Zoom countdown meeting. Unfortunately, one result of birding during the pandemic is that participation will be limited. In particular, the East County count has a significant segment of car-birding, or at least traveling by car to multiple sites with limited parking, so the restriction on carpooling necessitates fewer participants. In addition, we are leaving to the discretion of individual survey leaders the number of participants that they are comfortable having in their parties. Some have opted for no additional birders, others only one or two. So, we will do our best to let all interested people participate, but please understand that this may not be possible. Of course, if you live within the **Central CBC count circle** or the **Eastern CBC count circle**, you can participate as a feeder watcher or census birds on your property during the count day and in this way contribute your sightings to the count.

To express interest in joining one or both counts, or to sign up for a feeder or private-property count within a count circle on count day, please contact Jerry Britten: president@mtdiabloaudubon.org.

Boat Needed—Central County CBC, December 19, 2020

Jerry Britten, *MDAS President*



Mt. Diablo Audubon Society is in need of a boat for the Central County Christmas Bird Count on December 19, 2020. This is to survey the small section of Suisun Bay that is within our count circle (see map above). We require a shallow-draft boat that can navigate close to shore to search for elusive rails and other marsh birds. We prefer also a pilot to guide the boat while one or two birders scan the shoreline. We require participants to follow COVID-19 protocol as specified by National Audubon and the signing of a waiver. Put-in is to be at McAvoy Yacht Harbor in Bay Point. MDAS is

willing to pay for boat rental and pilot hire. If any member has or knows of a boat/pilot willing to help us on the count, please contact president@mtdiabloaudubon.org.

Webinar On Wood Duck Nest Boxes At San Pablo Reservoir

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

Attention Wood Duck fans: On Thursday, November 19th at 6 PM, the San Pablo Creek group **SPAWNERS** will host a webinar about Wood Duck nest boxes at San Pablo Reservoir and along San Pablo Creek. SPAWNERS's activities include streambank restoration, invasive plant removal, trash clean-up, water quality monitoring, and numerous educational programs and partnerships.

These nest boxes are part of the California Waterfowl Association's **California Wood Duck Program**, which started in 1991 and currently has 178 sites around the state. Last year alone, 41,450 ducklings hatched from the Wood Duck boxes at these sites, and **nearly 900,000 have hatched since 1991**. Clearly, this program is a great example of where Audubon and a waterfowl hunting group's conservation interests overlap, along with wetland preservation and **Federal Duck Stamps**.

At the San Pablo Reservoir site there are 24 nest boxes in place. Four of these are sized for small owls, who seem to like the boxes as well. The boxes have been quite successful. In 2020 alone, 17 boxes had Wood Duck nests and 47 fledglings were recorded!



Female Wood Duck and fledgling

Photo: Bob Lewis

Of course, any nest box can attract squatters, but some of these are more welcome and interesting than others. Northern Saw-whet Owls have moved in and successfully fledged here with 16 nests since 2004 and 44 fledglings. Ducks and owls, alike, are banded.



Northern Saw-whet Owl fledglings

Photo: Sandy Ferreira

Volunteer Doug Vaughan has monitored these boxes for years and will talk about his experiences. His presentation will cover the program's history, its results for both Wood Ducks and owls, and plans for the future. He is currently looking for volunteers to take over the monitoring project, if any Wood Duck (and owl) fans are interested. More can be read about the project in the **Spring 2020 SPAWNERS newsletter**.

Participants in the webinar must RSVP to helen@thewatershedproject.org to receive the meeting link, which she will send out a few days in advance.

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 aboard the MV Sealand Liberator on July 5, 1996, about his first sighting of a Black-headed Gull on February 7, 1994.

Common Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*)

If the experts cannot make up their minds, how do they expect us regular folks to understand the gulls? Depending on the source, there are at least 45 species of gull world-wide. About 40 of them are of the genus *Larus*. Fourteen of them have black heads at some times of the year, the so-called Hooded Gulls; and seven of them have the words "Black-headed Gull" as part of their name. According to three separate sources, the gull *Larus ridibundus* is known as the Black-headed Gull, Northern Black-headed Gull, and Common Black-headed Gull.

In the Bay Area where we live, no matter what English name *Larus ridibundus* has, it is an uncommon bird. In February of 1994, one was seen at the Sunnyvale Sewer Ponds, so one afternoon I decided to look for it. Of course, birding in February may be complicated by the weather, which this day was.

Like many of the locales in the South Bay, public access to the pond levees is freely given. One must only know how to find it. A good CSAA map helps (Google maps in 2020). Take the Caribbean Dr exit off Highway 137 and drive north to the end. It curves a little but stay with it. Turn right at the end as though to go to the landfill. Do not follow the garbage trucks, but turn left and go past the offices of the sanitation plant and park. Put on your high-heeled sneakers—or at least some good walking shoes.



Black-headed Gull

Photo: Adrien Mauss/Macaulay Library at the [Cornell Lab of Ornithology \(ML93689501\)](#)

I had my umbrella with me, but no really good rain gear. Taking my scope and binoculars, away I went. Behind the sewer plant the levee wanders off to the left towards a radar station. To the left of the radar station are some channels, ponds, and gates to control water flow. As I neared the radar station, I stopped to set up my scope and look back along the channel parallel to the levee. A number of Bonaparte's Gulls were flying over the water in that direction.

From a distance, Bonaparte's and Common Black-headed Gulls would probably be identical. Closer inspection would show that Bonaparte's Gull is smaller, the Bonaparte's bill is black, not red, and the underside of the Common Black-headed's primaries are much darker than the paler Bonaparte's.

So, here I was looking down the channel trying to find a Bonaparte's Gull with a red bill. Right! Well, what was this bird flying right towards me in the scope? As it came almost straight on, it certainly appeared to have a red bill, but I was afraid to give up the

spotting scope for the binoculars. Closer it came until I could not follow it anymore. It was more and more like Rudolph. As I moved from the scope to look up, of course the bird turned and merged back to all the other gulls.

I walked past the flow-control gates and searched through many more Bonaparte's Gulls. I stood under my umbrella as the rain came and looked. I stood in the lee of a large electric panel and looked. I stood in the rain talking with Al DeMartini, who had also come out in the rain, and we looked together. He thought that a red bill would be very difficult to see—it is really a dark red. He thought the underwing primaries would be a better identification factory.

Finally, I started back. I was now pretty wet, getting cold, and though I felt confident in what I saw, there was just a touch of doubt. When Florence Bennett and Mary-Jane Culver wanted to try three days later, I said affirmatively, why not?

Well, it really rained on us, and not once, but twice. We walked out, got soaked, walked back to the car, it stopped raining, we dried ourselves and decided to try again. It rained again, too. We saw six species of gull, but no *Larus ridibundus*—only rain abundant.

This story does have a happy ending. Before the month was over, I was working on a container-ship. After a 12-hour stay in Dutch Harbor, Alaska, our first foreign port was Tokyo, Japan. I was awake early, looked out the back door of the 0-4 level, my room's deck, and I saw some gulls. I grabbed a hat, jacket, gloves and binoculars and discovered that, yes, *Larus ridibundus* has an easily detectable red bill. There were probably twenty or thirty of them flying up and down the harbor. Now I have seen the rare "Common Black-headed Gull" on our West Coast, and I have seen the common "Black-headed Gull" on the Japanese coast. As a rose by any other name would smell as sweet, a *Larus ridibundus* by any other name is still a *Larus ridibundus*.

Events

Bay Area Raptor Rundown



Learn to identify raptors on the coast and in the Santa Cruz mountains during the migration season.

Join **Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST)** as we learn about birds of prey this fall with local Naturalist Jeff Caplan, director of Common Language Nature. Raptors play an integral role in the health of our ecosystems! Learn how to identify migratory and resident raptors when out on the coast or hiking in the Santa Cruz

mountains. Jeff focuses on mindfulness, curiosity, and bird language to help people from diverse backgrounds feel safe and connected in nature. This basic birding webinar will be great for all ages, especially kids and adults ages 12 and up!

About the Instructor:

Bird Language instructor Jeff Caplan weaves 30 years as a naturalist and a teacher of communication skills, to cultivate a common language for connecting more deeply with nature and birds. He inspires Youth science educators in Yosemite, tour Guides in the Galapagos, and University students in the Amazon Jungles of Ecuador. He weaves mindfulness, citizen science and bird language to help people from diverse backgrounds to feel curious and connected in nature. If you want an invitation to Jeff's smaller, more personalized workshops on Backyard Bird Language and other topics please go to CommonLanguageNature.com.

Date:	Friday, November 6
Time:	12:00 PM–1:00 PM
Location:	Online meeting
Cost:	Free
Meeting Info:	Register for this event HERE . All registrants will receive the access link prior to the event.

Virtual Talk: Monitoring Nesting Boxes For The California Wood Duck Program



The poster features a circular logo for SPAWNERS with a duck and the text 'PROTECTING SPAWNERS SAN PABLO CREEK WATERSHED'. Below the logo, it reads 'PUBLIC MEETING THURSDAY NOV 19, 6PM'. The central image shows a wood duck and its duckling in a pond. At the bottom, it says 'Join SPAWNERS for our first virtual talk! Doug Vaughan will speak about his experiences monitoring nesting boxes for the California Wood Duck Program at the San Pablo Reservoir.'

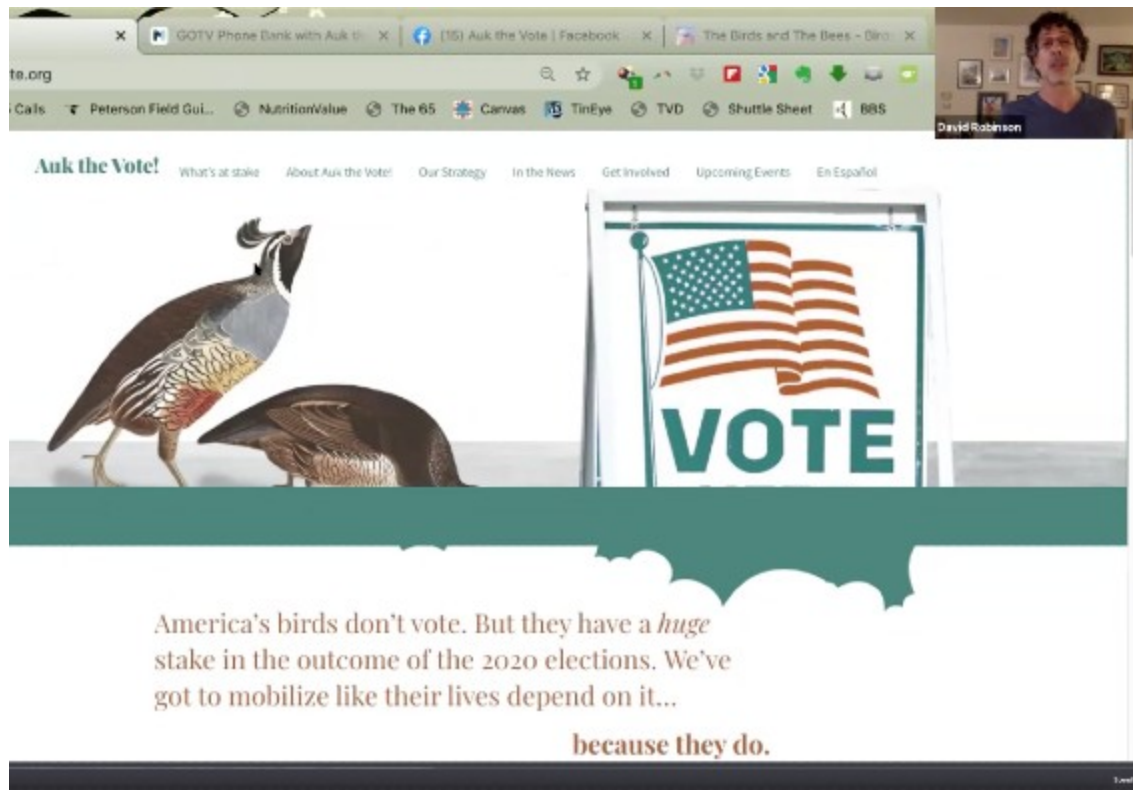
Join **SPAWNERS** for their first virtual talk. Volunteer Doug Vaughan will talk about his experiences monitoring nesting boxes for the California Wood Duck Program at the San Pablo Reservoir.

Participants must RSVP to helen@thewatershedproject.org to receive the meeting link, which will be sent several days prior to the event.

SPAWNERS's mission is to protect the San Pablo Creek Watershed and inspire community appreciation and stewardship through advocacy, education, and habitat restoration.

Date:	Thursday, November 19
Time:	6:00 PM–7:30 PM
Location:	Online meeting
Cost:	Free
Meeting Info:	Participants must RSVP to helenthewatershedproject.org to receive the meeting link, which will be sent several days prior to the event.

November Gallery



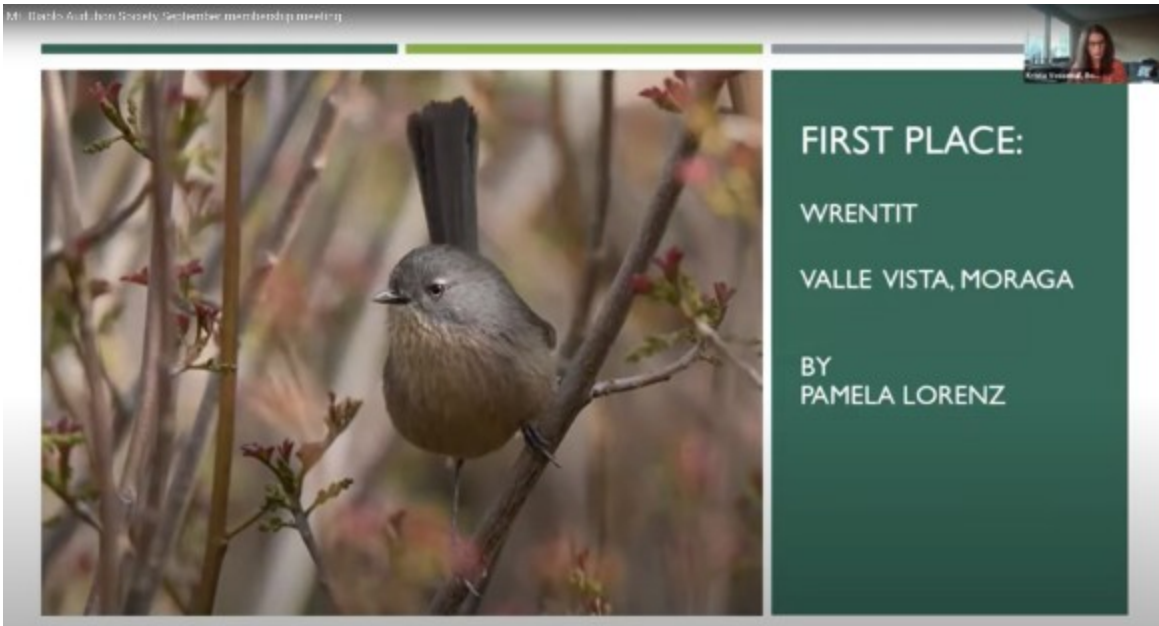
David Robinson in the MDAS October virtual program meeting sharing information on **Auk the Vote!** and the sense of urgency about birds, the environment, environmental justice, and climate change. View the entire virtual meeting **HERE**.



Hummingbirds are specialized nectarivores

Benny Isaac Jacobs-Schwartz in the MDAS October virtual program meeting demonstrating the amazing nectarivorous adaptations that hummingbirds have made.

View the entire virtual meeting [HERE](#).



Krista Vossekul and Rosalie Howarth presented the winners of the MDAS 2020 Photo Contest in the September virtual program meeting. View the entire virtual meeting [HERE](#). Use Passcode "4#atD@^9" (without the quotes).

June



Bird of the Month: Williamson's Sapsucker

Eric Schroeder takes us on a tour of his big year where he set out to see one thousand species of birds around the world in the September virtual program meeting. View the entire virtual meeting [HERE](#). Use Passcode "4#atD@^9" (without the quotes).

Copyright © 2020 Mt. Diablo Audubon Society, All rights reserved.

Mailing address:

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

Email address:

info@mtdiabloaudubon.org

Mt. Diablo Audubon Society Leadership

Want to change how you receive these emails?
You can [update your preferences](#) or [unsubscribe from this list](#).

This email was sent to marc.desin@gardenisle.net
[why did I get this?](#) [unsubscribe from this list](#) [update subscription preferences](#)
Mt. Diablo Audubon Society · P.O. Box 53 · Walnut Creek, CA 94507-0053 · USA

