



# Mt. Diablo Audubon Society

## ***The Quail***

Volume 66, Number 4

DECEMBER 2020–JANUARY 2021

### **Next Monthly Program Meeting: Thursday, December 3**

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: Julie Woodruff will provide an update on her Northern Saw-whet Owl banding project
- 7:25 PM** Board Announcements
- 7:35 PM** Main Program: *Tricolored Blackbirds* with Xerónimo Castañeda
- 8:30 PM** Adjourn

---

### **Main Program: *Tricolored Blackbirds***

Xerónimo Castañeda, *Tricolored Blackbird Conservation Project Manager*

Xerónimo Castañeda, Conservation Project Manager with Audubon California, will discuss the protection of at-risk Tricolored Blackbird colonies, the development of multi-benefit groundwater recharge projects in target regions to benefit birds and communities, and on-farm habitat enhancement using cover crops and through riparian restoration.

A native of California he has lived and worked from Monterey to Arcata, ventured to the east coast and eventually found his way back to Sacramento. His work with Audubon focuses on habitat restoration and enhancement through multi-

benefit management of Central Valley wetlands, agricultural operations, and groundwater recharge projects to benefit birds and people. Away from work, Xerónimo spends time backpacking, riding bikes, cooking, and of course, birding.

Photo: Xerónimo Castañeda



## **Birding Info:**

### ***Northern Saw-whet Owl Banding Project***

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



Do you love Northern Saw-whet Owls? Julie Woodruff will provide an update on her Northern Saw-whet Owl banding project, a local program supported by Mt. Diablo Audubon Society.

Photo: Julie Woodruff

## **Webinar Access Info:**

**Date:** Thursday, December 3, 2020

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

**Location:** Zoom online meeting

**Access:** <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86425645179?pwd=Zlk5R1RWdzFKNXdKb0hiaWkwY2Q2dz09>

**Passcode:** 881204

**Phone access:** Dial (for higher quality, dial a number based on your current location):  
US: +1 669 900 6833 or +1 408 638 0968 or +1 346 248 7799 or +1 253 215 8782 or +1 301 715 8592 or +1 312 626 6799 or +1 646 876 9923  
Webinar ID: 864 2564 5179  
Passcode: 881204  
International numbers available:  
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/kclz3NFEMY>

---

## President's Letter

Jerry Britten, *MDAS President*

### Birding Highlights In The Year Of The Pandemic

2020 has been a dumpster fire of a year in many respects, but birding, an activity that can be enjoyed in spite of the present situation, hopefully has been able to give all readers respite from the concerns of the day. It certainly has for me. As we wind down the year with this final edition of *The Quail*, I thought I would reminisce on the highlights of my "Year of Birds" during COVID.



The early days of the shelter-in-place orders coincided with the arrival of a small flock of Red Crossbills to my yard, quite an unusual bird for the county. These remained in our area for several weeks, regularly visiting our sunflower seed and suet feeders. A Yellow-breasted Chat also lingered in our yard for a few days, like the crossbills, remarkably out-of-habitat. Photos of each are below. I also posted photos of these birds in the May edition—but I like them, so what the heck! We had good numbers and variety of spring migrants, including many species of warbler visiting our fountains, which offered several photo opportunities.



Red Crossbill

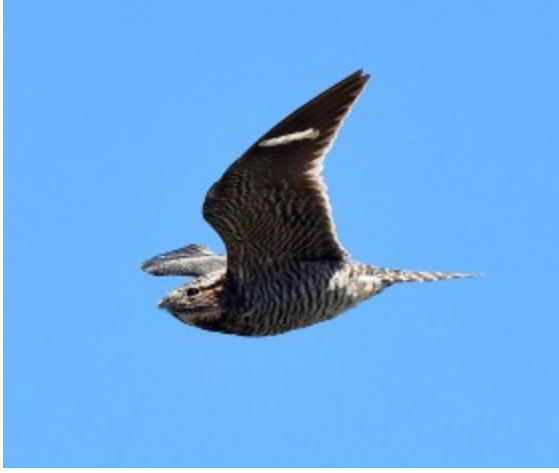
Photo: Jerry Britten



Yellow-breasted Chat

Photo: Jerry Britten

In June we took the grandkids on a camping trip to Eagle Lake, a couple hours northwest of Reno. The marina on the south end of the lake is a great place to get in-flight photos of several kinds of birds, like Common Nighthawk, and Forster's Tern.



Common Nighthawk

Photo: Jerry Britten



Forster's Tern

Photo: Jerry Britten

In July, a trip to central Oregon took us near **Cabin Lake Bird Blinds**, a wonderful spot in the middle of nowhere, sponsored in part by the East Cascades Audubon Society. Two artificial watering holes, each with a blind, are situated in a setting where looking west is an open Ponderosa pine forest, while east is sagebrush desert. Birds from both habitats visit here in the spring and summer since it is the only water source for miles. It is arguably the most reliable place in the U.S. to get close-up photos of Red Crossbill, Lewis's Woodpecker, Gray Flycatcher, Pinyon Jay, and Clark's Nutcracker among many others. We had the area all to ourselves on July 4th!



Lewis's Woodpecker

Photo: Jerry Britten



Gray Flycatcher

Photo: Jerry Britten

After my planned birding trip to the Pribilof Islands was canceled due to the pandemic, I wondered if I might not see any life birds in 2020, something that hasn't occurred since I began keeping track in 1990. But, on a trip to Arizona to prepare for moving my mother-in-law up to the Bay Area, I managed to get some birding in and had a decent view of an Olive Warbler in the Huachuca Mountains and a brief glimpse of a Rufous-capped Warbler in the Whetstone Mountains, so my streak remains intact!



To top off the year, in October I made a trip to the Sierras on a mission to find a Great Gray Owl. Mission accomplished!



Great Gray Owl

Photo: Jerry Britten

Not a bad birding year under the circumstances, and I have the utmost confidence that things will be looking up for next year. I'm thankful that I and my family have our health, and we are looking forward to 2021.

Stay safe, enjoy the holiday season, and get out there for the birds!

---

### **January Monthly Program Meeting: Thursday, January 7**

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

- |                |  |
|----------------|--|
| <b>7:00 PM</b> | Welcome and Introductions  |
| <b>7:05 PM</b> | <b>Birding Info:</b> Mt. Diablo Audubon Society President Jerry Britten will report highlights of the 2020 Christmas Bird Counts |
| <b>7:25 PM</b> | Board Announcements  |

**7:35 PM** Main Program: *Real Life Great Horned Owl Soap Opera* with Karla Bloem

**8:30 PM** Adjourn

---

## **Main Program:**

### ***Real Life Great Horned Owl Soap Opera***

Karla Bloem, *Founder and Executive Director*, International Owl Center

A real-life soap opera has played itself out over the past 15 years between over 25 captive and wild Great Horned Owls that have formed the basis of an in-depth vocal study on the species. You'll experience owl dating, divorce, territorial defense, and more as you learn about their wide variety of vocalizations, and what they mean. Ruby the Great Horned Owl will make a live appearance in this one-of-a-kind entertaining and educational program.



Karla Bloem is the Founder and Executive Director of the International Owl Center. She acquired Alice the Great Horned Owl to use in educational programs in 1998 and began studying Great Horned Owl vocalizations in 2004. Karla is now the world authority on their vocalizations and has given presentations in The Netherlands, Germany, Argentina, Italy, Portugal, and South Africa. Alice's popularity led Karla to create the International Festival of Owls, the first full-weekend, all-owl event in North America that has served as the inspiration for similar festivals in Italy, Nepal, and India. Karla and Alice testified before the Minnesota House and Senate environment committees to successfully gain protection for Great Horned Owls in 2005. She has assisted several authors and filmmakers and has appeared on Animal Planet and the CBC Network's "*The Secret Life of Owls*."

Photo: Brian Plath

---

## **Birding Info:**

### **Highlights Of The 2020 Christmas Bird Counts**

Jerry Britten, *MDAS President*



# Audubon Christmas Bird Count

Mt. Diablo Audubon Society President Jerry Britten will report highlights of the 2020 Christmas Bird Counts.

## Webinar Access Info:

**Date:** Thursday, January 7, 2020  
**Time:** 7:00 PM–8:30 PM Pacific Time (US and Canada)  
**Location:** Zoom online meeting  
**Access:** <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81707095354?pwd=NDZvdEh1Y1JkUUhZUHhvVHVzTnJlODZ09>  
**Passcode:** 406482  
**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 +1 646 876 9923 or +1 301 715 8592 or +1 312 626 6799  
Webinar ID: 817 0709 5354  
Passcode: 406482  
International numbers available:  
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81707095354?pwd=NDZvdEh1Y1JkUUhZUHhvVHVzTnJlODZ09>

---

## Welcome, New Members!

Eric Schroeder and Susan Palo, Berkeley

---

## Bay Point Regional Shoreline Now Open

Jerry Britten, *MDAS President*

After 18 months of extensive restoration, The East Bay Regional Park District re-opened the **Bay Point Regional Shoreline** for public use on November 20. The upgrade includes a non-motorized boat launch dock, over a mile of trails, and public parking, restrooms, and picnic facilities. This tidal marsh habitat is sure to become a birding hotspot—**so go check it out!**



Northern Harrier

Photo: Jerry Britten

---

## Feederwatching During The CBC

Jerry Britten, *MDAS President*

If you live within the **Central County Count Circle**, and would like to contribute your yard sightings to this year's Christmas Bird Count on Saturday, December 19, please contact [cbc@mtdiabloaudubon.org](mailto:cbc@mtdiabloaudubon.org) to sign up. Similarly, if you live within the **East County Count Circle**, please sign up for the count to be held on Wednesday, December 16. If you have "uncommon" birds visiting your yard regularly (e.g., White-throated Sparrow, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Western Screech-Owl) we especially want to record these, but all birds matter, so please consider signing up!

---

## We Have A Chance To Avoid The Worst Of Catastrophic Climate Change

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

The question is, will we seize this chance? It won't be easy, but the





alternative is utter disaster. Look into the most effective ways you can avert climate catastrophe. You can get started below.

- 1. THIS HOLIDAY SEASON, GIVE THE GIFT OF A LIVABLE CLIMATE—DON'T MAKE THINGS WORSE.** 2020 has been radically different from other years. In many ways, people have changed to work differently, interact differently, and think differently. That same mindset of quickly adapting and adopting big changes in our own lives is exactly what is necessary to have a stable climate. How does that apply to the holidays? Think about gifts, food, and travel. Connecting with friends and family through letters or online is different from seeing them in person, but it's much safer and healthier than travel, and greatly reduces greenhouse gas emissions by avoiding flying and driving. Think about gifts. Do your loved ones really need that thing you were going to buy them, or does the cost of material waste, plastic (which is really just hardened petroleum), and greenhouse gas emissions from shipping and transport outweigh the benefit? Instead of gifting a thing, maybe gift them a donation to a charity made in their name. If you do really want to gift an item, check out some sustainable ideas [HERE](#), [HERE](#), and [HERE](#). Think about food. Do you really need a huge feast, or do you want to scale back and replace some or maybe all of that meat with some plants and grains? It'll mean less stress in the kitchen, less greenhouse gases emitted, and more money in your wallet.
- 2. WIN POINTS, EARN PRIZES BY FIGHTING CLIMATE CHANGE.** Click [HERE](#) to join the free Cleaner Contra Costa Challenge to address climate change, find ways to save money and win prizes. Collect points between now and April 30, 2021 by taking actions that reduce your household's overall carbon footprint. Earn points to be eligible to receive prizes such as reusable utensils, bags, and gift cards to local businesses.
- 3. UNDERSTAND WHAT'LL CHANGE AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL.** With the election results bringing a change in the Federal administration, will attitudes and priorities also change? Find out [HERE](#), [HERE](#), [HERE](#), and [HERE](#) (last two may require WaPo subscription).
- 4. THE ELECTION MIGHT NOT BE ENOUGH.** Even if the incoming administration wants to take big positive steps on climate change, that doesn't mean they'll be able to. Two January runoff elections in Georgia will

determine which party holds a majority in the Senate. The new administration could very well be blocked from taking action to prevent catastrophic climate change if the status quo persists. Want to get involved? Clicking [HERE](#) is a good start.

5. **CHOOSE TP LIKE YOUR BUTT DEPENDS ON IT.** From what friends are saying, it looks like panic buying is making an unfortunate comeback. Hopefully you're not hoarding a bunch of toilet paper, but when you do buy TP, choose carefully. Those big Costco packs of TP and paper towels are the worst in terms of environmental impacts. Huge forests are cut every year to make them, which destroys habitat and decreases the carbon pulled from the atmosphere by trees. Buy brands that use lots of recycled materials. Whole Foods in Walnut Creek and Concord sell brands like 365 and Seventh Generation, which are great at reducing environmental impacts. Read more [HERE](#).

---

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

---

## Climate Watch Surveys—Are You Interested in Helping?

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

MDAS hopes to add Climate Watch surveys to its community science efforts. The goals of this National Audubon program are to target easily identifiable species of birds that are considered vulnerable to climate change range shifts, and to have citizen scientists document whether these changes are occurring. This helps identify whether climate-related projections are accurate and makes conservation efforts more effective.

If you can identify bluebirds, nuthatches, goldfinches, or towhees by sight and sound, or are eager to learn—help us conduct surveys to see how these species are already responding to climate change in our area.

The surveys are done in small groups (1 or 2 people). The locations are mapped with the help of a regional coordinator and are chosen based on habitat and accessibility. The next season of Climate Watch is scheduled for January 15–February 15, 2021, and then again May 15–June 15, 2021. Surveys can be conducted anytime between these date ranges. The time periods represent the selected species' wintering and breeding seasons. Audubon has a two-page project description [HERE](#) and a one-page Climate Watch Protocol Overview [HERE](#).

**Peer-reviewed research** has already confirmed projections of range shift that is predicted in Audubon's landmark "***Survival by Degrees: 389 Bird Species on the Brink***." This study shows that 389 out of 604 (nearly two-thirds) of North American bird species are at risk of extinction from climate change. The good news is that science also shows that if we take action now we can help improve the chances for 76% of species at risk.

There's a lot more information on the Climate Watch website including guidance on conducting a safe and socially distant survey **HERE**.

**Contact Alan Bade** for more information if you'd like to participate. I will be learning more from our regional Climate Watch coordinator and hope to write another article in the next issue of *The Quail*. In the meantime, I'd like to gauge interest from our membership. This will help with the planning.

Join MDAS as we participate in Audubon's new community science program, Climate Watch!

---

## **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.



Mountain Plover

Photo: Mia McPherson/Macaulay Library at the [Cornell Lab of Ornithology \(ML33832631\)](#)

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.

### **Visit A Refuge**

Early December is always a great time to visit any or all of three great wildlife refuges in Northern California. [Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge](#) and [Colusa National Wildlife Refuge](#) are filled with Snow, Ross's, and Greater White-fronted Geese. Raptors are visible in the leafless trees, and ducks are plentiful. Both refuges have wonderful self-guided auto tour routes.



Another choice is the **Gray Lodge Wildlife Area**. Many of the same birds will be seen while driving the route. The road passes right next to some prime duck habitat for optimal viewing. Two “hides” are named after MDAS founder Harry Adamson and his wife, Betty. A **California Department of Fish and Wildlife Lands Pass** must be purchased ahead of time. The passes are not available at the wildlife area, but may be purchased at Big 5 Sporting Goods or other places where hunting and fishing licenses are available.

### **Napa River, American Canyon**

A hike out to the wetlands and edge of the Napa River north of Vallejo is a good outing. A 3–4 mile walk on level paths goes past a eucalyptus forest, ponds, and reaches the edge of the river. Raptors are around in the winter, plenty of shorebirds and waterfowl might be seen.

### **Solano County**

Winter raptors can be plentiful in the southeast corner of Solano County. Drive east of Suisun City on Hwy 12, turn left on Branscome Rd, then turn east again onto Creed Rd. This will border the south edge of Travis Air Force Base. Follow Creed Rd and continue straight when it becomes gravel. Watch the power towers, poles, and fence lines for Red-tailed, Ferruginous, and Rough-legged Hawks, as well as Prairie Falcons. After about six miles, Creed Rd intersects Hwy 113. Turn right and immediately left onto the gravel Robinson Rd. Eventually you will turn right and then left again. An abandoned ranch sits under large trees. Continue until passing under the high voltage wires, then start scanning the fields for Mountain Plovers. Sometimes they are seen after another right hand turn. Other roads to check are Goose Haven Rd, Flannery Rd, and McCormack Rd. As you work your way east, you will eventually arrive at Rio Vista. Alternatively, you might try Birds Landing Rd and continue south toward Collinsville.

### **Putah Creek, Winters**

This area was burned by the LNU Lightning Complex Fire earlier this year. Lake Solano Park is currently closed, though may be opened by January. Check their website **HERE**.

Some of the fishing areas may be open on the way to Monticello Dam, but other places are closed. The creek is noted for having Wood Ducks, Hooded Mergansers, and Barrow’s Goldeneyes. Driving east on Putah Creek Rd south of the park may give viewing access to a large part of Lake Solano.

### **East Contra Costa County**

The eastern portion of our county has good winter habitat for many birds. Try **Big Break Regional Shoreline/Delta Science Center**.

Areas farther east could include Jersey Island Rd, Bethel Island and Piper Slough, Holland Tract, and Ironhouse Sanitary District. Cypress Grove Pond on Frank Hengel Way is east of the railroad tracks and north of Cypress Rd.

### **Arrowhead Marsh At High Tide**, Oakland

The winter high tides at Arrowhead Marsh are ideal locations for spotting Ridgway's Rails. On January 28, the high tide will occur about 11:15 AM. Birding at Lake Merritt for waterfowl is easy to do before driving south toward the airport. Plenty of ducks should be present. One year the field trip saw a Short-eared Owl way out over the marsh. This is a popular location, so remember to keep plenty of social distance. The tide will be high for a day before and a day after, be advised that the timing is not the same each day.

### **Shollenberger Park/Ellis Creek**, Petaluma

These two adjacent areas are southeast of Petaluma. Both locations offer extensive wetland birding with relatively short walks. Shollenberger is a large pond area, usually flooded in winter. Waterfowl and shorebirds visit, with access and viewing from raised trails. The Point Blue offices are adjacent to one trail entrance.

**Ellis Creek** is the water recycling facility for Petaluma. Four ponds are within walking distance of the parking area and a public bathroom facility. The site offers similar birding opportunities to Shollenberger Park.

### **Martinez Area**

A number of locations for birding are in Martinez. **McNabney Marsh**, named after the late MDAS Conservation Vice-President, Al McNabney, is a premier site. Birds can be seen from the entry road to the Mt. View Sanitary District facility, reached from Arthur Rd. The north end of McNabney Marsh is off Waterfront Rd and Waterbird Way. The TransMontaigne Pipeline trail is farther east on Waterfront Road. **Viewing of the Mococo Ponds** is done by parking underneath I-680 north of the RR tracks. A trail across the Benicia Bridge starts here. In downtown Martinez, drive across the tracks at the Amtrak station to reach parking for the Martinez Regional Shoreline. Some parking is available at the end of Court St and some is at the foot of Berrelessa St. By driving west on Carquinez Scenic Dr, it is possible to walk beyond the drivable section and look down on the Carquinez Strait. We once saw a Long-tailed Duck near the oil pier at Ozol.

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, make sure to check the pertinent web sites for access information and directions.

---

## **We Need an Editor for Bluebirds Fly!**

Georgette Howington, *Assistant Director*, California Bluebird Recovery Program



Was 2020 a year you wished would fly by? My nest box trail at the Lafayette Reservoir was off-limits due to EBMUD park closures. The pandemic, extreme economic hardship, the massive fires, and a nail-biting election year that we've never seen in our lifetime loomed like a science fiction horror movie over us and our beautiful California.

To make matters worse for **California Bluebird Recovery Program** (CBRP), Steve Simmons, a beloved and legendary nest box monitor passed away. Two Board members resigned plus our long-time Newsletter Editor, Jim Semelroth, stepped down.

In spite of all that, nest box monitors kept going and valiantly continued to check their trails and are reporting their data by December 1st. At CBRP we found ways to spend our time constructively. We have a **brand-new website**, are making educational training videos, have a **YouTube Channel**, and are developing a science curriculum for 3rd to 5th graders. We are striving to grow CBRP, expand our services, and reach out to more people in California.

I'm proud to be the Contra Costa County Coordinator. We have 29 monitored trails and not one has been abandoned! Each monitor has made an impressive contribution to the overall vitality of the secondary-cavity nester populations. I want to thank each nest box monitor for taking the time to monitor your nest boxes and for faithfully turning in your data. YOU ARE the anchor of the nest box program.

We do need a new Newsletter Editor for our biannual newsletter, "*Bluebirds Fly*." You'd work closely with Dick Blaine, *CBRP Program Director*, me, and the Board Members. If you are interested, please email me at **ghbirdscape@gmail.com**. Have a Happy and safe Thanksgiving from all of us at CBRP!

## Antioch Voters Overwhelmingly Approve Growth Control

Marc Desin, MDAS Quail Editor

# WE WON!!! 79% YES

## Antioch YES on Measure T - 11/3/2020



### We Won! It's Yes on T by a Landslide!

79% Say 'Let Antioch Decide'

On Tuesday, November 3, 2020, Antioch voted YES on Measure T, the “Let Antioch Voters Decide: The Sand Creek Area Protection Initiative.” It was a landslide! This result is a powerful statement from the citizens of Antioch about controlling growth in their city and preserving four square miles of undeveloped land in the Sand Creek area. Read more about this victory [HERE](#).

While safely celebrating their victory with a walk on Empire Mine Rd on Sunday the 8th, the members of the Save Sand Creek Steering Committee witnessed a rare juvenile American badger as seen in [THIS VIDEO](#) provided by Save Mount Diablo. You can read more about this [HERE](#) and [HERE](#).

---

## Events

### Bird, Nest, Nature

October 13, 2020–February 7, 2021





Bedford Gallery is now open! Bring the whole family and check out **Bird, Nest, Nature**, a stunning exhibition featuring over 170 pieces of art inspired by the beauty of birds. A trip to the gallery is a great opportunity to catch up with a friend (from a distance!) and a perfect outing for the kids.

Presented by Bedford Gallery October 13, 2020–February 7, 2021, Bird, Nest, Nature is a juried and invitational exhibition featuring a roster of local, national, and international artists. Birds have long captured the attention of humankind, the earliest evidence of which can be found in cave drawings that reflect all that we cherish in nature from flora to fauna. Each visit lasts approximately 60 minutes.

This exhibition was juried by Jeffrey De Blois, *Assistant Curator*, ICA Boston, and Rebecca Lowery, *Assistant Curator*, MOCA Los Angeles, and includes over 150 artists inspired by the exquisite beauty of creatures of flight.

Purchase your tickets **HERE**.

Face coverings are required to be worn by all over the age of 2.

---

## Helping Blue-footed Boobies In The Galapagos

Will and Matty, *Founders*, The Blue Feet Foundation



My little brother, Matty, and I started The Blue Feet Foundation four years ago to sell blue socks to help raise money for the Blue-footed Booby in the Galápagos Islands. Maybe if more people have blue feet we can save the declining population of the Blue-footed Boobies.

Our blue socks are made in Ecuador (home of the Galápagos and Blue-footed Booby) and make great stocking stuffers and holiday gifts!

If you want to help the Blue-footed Booby and make someone really happy with a pair of our comfy Blue-footed Booby blue socks you can order **HERE**.

We don't keep any of the money for ourselves. We donate all the proceeds to charities helping the Blue-footed Booby and to sponsoring a Blue-footed Booby population decline study by the world expert in Blue-footed Boobies!

Thanks,  
Will and Matty

*Editor's note:* *The Quail* reported on Will and Matty's winning the "Youth Conservation Initiative Award" from the John Muir National Historic Site in the June–August 2018 issue found [HERE](#).





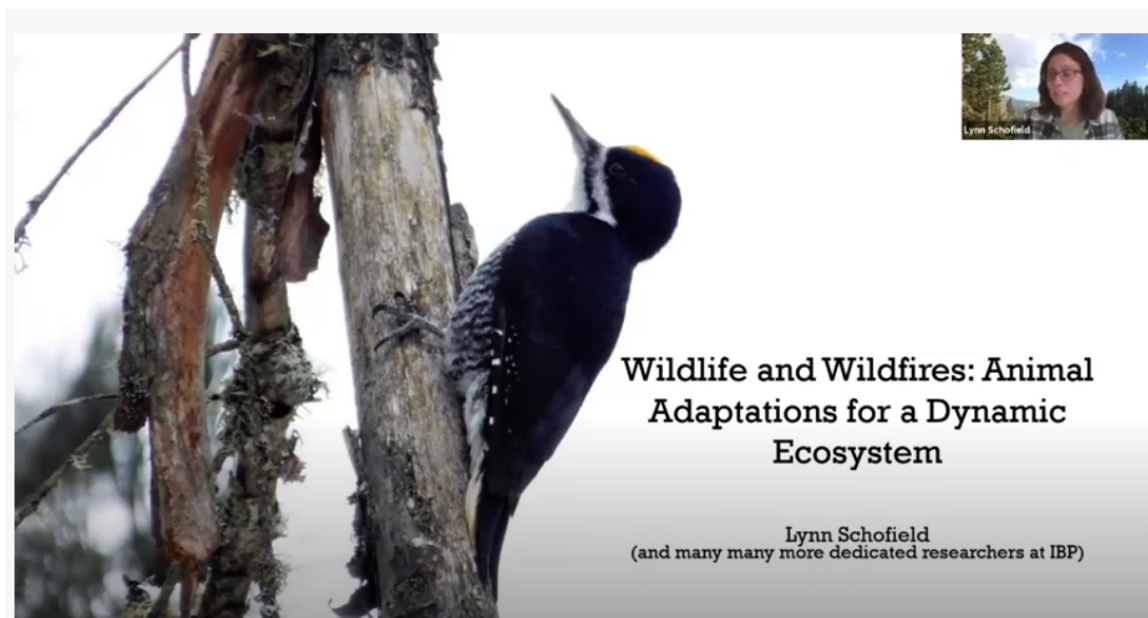
## December Gallery



MDAS November 5 Monthly Program Meeting:

Paul Detjens and Krista Vossekuil describe progress of 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.

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



MDAS November 5 Monthly Program Meeting:

Lynn Schofield explains 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.

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





Great Blue Heron drying its wings  
Contra Loma Regional Park  
Photo: Paul Schorr

---

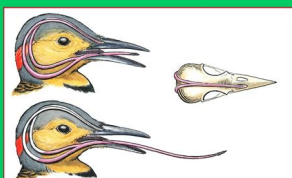




Our birds entertain us in “*Birds Can Dance!*”  
Courtesy **Volker Pannes**

## WALNUT CREEK’S WONDEROUS WOODPECKERS

### WHY DOES A WOODPECKER PECK WOOD?



#### TO SEARCH FOR FOOD:

Long beaks aid woodpeckers as they seek insects and larvae beneath a tree's bark. A woodpeckers' worm-like tongue is so long that it loops around its skull when not in use and is thrust into the tree when feeding.



#### TO NEST:

Exceptionally strong beaks and neck muscles, along with thick-walled skulls, allow woodpeckers to hammer into a tree's trunk and create deep holes for nests that can go down into a tree from 6 to 18 inches.



#### TO STORE FOOD:

Acorn Woodpeckers (see description below) pound away at trees creating storage holes for their primary food, acorns. One tree can have hundreds, if not thousands of acorn size holes.

### TELL ME MORE!

**SPECIAL MESSAGES:** Woodpeckers drum out patterns with their beaks to attract a mate or to announce their territory.



**SPECIAL FEET:** Unlike most songbirds that have three forward-facing toes and one backward facing toe, woodpeckers have “zygodactyl” feet - two toes face forward and two face backward. This adaptation gives woodpeckers a stronger grip for clinging and grasping onto trees.

**SPECIAL TAIL:** Woodpeckers have unusually stiff tail feathers that aid their balance, acting as a tripod, helping them brace against the tree.

### THREE TYPES of WOODPECKERS YOU CAN FIND HERE:



**Northern Flicker** Height: 12.5” Wingspan: 20”

- Large, with a grey and brown neck and head. Back is brown and black barred (striped), with a white rump patch visible in flight. Belly is black-spotted with a black “bib”. Males have a red “mustache” on their cheeks.





- You are most likely to see the red-shafted variety, that is, the underside of their wings are red and stunningly visible in flight.
- Large, slightly down-curved bills aid in foraging on the ground for ants, their preferred food.
- Listen for their distinct "keew" call



### Acorn Woodpecker Height: 9" Wingspan: 17.5"

- Clownish face, white eye iris, red "cap" on head.
- Look for a flash of white feathers on their wings and rump in flight and note their short, stout black bill.
- Stores acorns, its primary food, in a "granary" tree that is tended and defended by a cooperative family group of up to twelve Acorn Woodpeckers, year after year. This same group will work together to incubate and feed their young.
- They make a loud, raucous "wacka wacka wacka" sound. Look for them in noisy groups in oak trees.



### Nuttall's Woodpecker Height: 7.5" Wingspan: 13"

- Distinctive barred, zebra-striped back, black spotted belly. Males have a small red crown.
- Chisel shaped-small bills aid in probing for insects in tree bark crevices.
- Except for a small area in northwestern Baja California, the Nuttall is found only in California.
- Listen for their "pitik pitik" rattle call.

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

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 Bay Area Field Trips (with your parent/known adult).

Go to [www.mt Diablaudubon.org/YBC](http://www.mt Diablaudubon.org/YBC) for field trip information.



### Want to know more about birds?

**Come to a Mt. Diablo Audubon Society meeting.**

First Thursday of every month, 7 pm.  
(except July and August)

The Gardens at Heather Farm, Camellia Room  
1540 Marchbanks Drive, Walnut Creek

Visit us online at [www.mt Diablaudubon.org](http://www.mt Diablaudubon.org)

Enjoy free monthly programs, field trips,  
Young Birders Club, and classes.

One of the posters installed at Walnut Creek Open Space kiosks.

Designed and produced by Michele Sheehan.

See article in the October 2020 issue of *The Quail* **HERE**.

# LOOK FOR US IN THE OPEN SPACE

## THE PERFECT HOME

Among the many creatures who call the Walnut Creek Open Space home you may spot the three birds shown here. The Open Space provides them with abundant nesting sites, secure from urban disturbance, and plentiful food in the form of insects, seeds, berries, and invertebrates.



### Western Meadowlark

*Sturnella neglecta*

Length 9.5", Wingspan: 14.5", Weight 3.4 oz

- Ground foragers: Notice their elongated beaks. In a feeding behavior called "gaping", meadowlarks insert their beak into the ground to make a hole and improve their underground reach for insects and bugs.
- NOT the Eastern Meadowlark: Naturalists assumed the Western Meadowlark was the same as the Eastern, even after famed explorer Meriwether Lewis pointed out the differences between the two species in 1805. The species remained unnamed until 1840 and because of such long "neglect" of the species John James Audubon gave it the scientific name *Sturnella "neglecta"*.
- Don't tread on me: Using her beak, the female makes a nest on the ground, creating a depression in the soil, sometimes covered with a grass dome. Both parents create tunnels and trails through the grass leading to the nest. Western Meadowlarks are *extremely* sensitive to humans and will abandon a nest if disturbed.
- Spectacular color and other identifying characteristics:
  - ~Ironically, the Western Meadowlark is a member of the Blackbird (*Icteridae*) family although it has a strikingly bright yellow chest and throat with a black "V" bib.
  - ~A stout body with a tan and brown back. Long, sharp beaks, tan eyebrows, white cheeks, pinkish legs, flashes of white on their brown tail feathers when they fly.
  - ~Listen for their descending flute-like song.
  - ~Males and females look alike.





## Red-winged Blackbird

*Agelaius phoeniceus*

Length: 8.75", Wingspan: 13", Weight 1.8 oz

- Hard to ignore: In the spring the noisy and distinctive male Red-winged Blackbird perches atop the tall, upright vegetation, singing loudly and insistently to establish his own territory and to entice **up to 15** different females to not only make their nests there but also to mate exclusively with him during breeding season. Each male territory is about half the size of a football field and is fiercely defended.
- Mistaken identity: The brown and plain looking female Red-winged Blackbird is often mistaken for a sparrow. Females are usually found lower to the ground constructing basket nests by winding stringy plant material around several close, upright stems and lining the baskets with mud and soft grasses.
- Is he a good choice for a father? In addition to singing out for female attention, a male works to convince females of his worthiness by "showing off" or fluffing his red shoulder "epaulets" and half-spreading his wings to display the bright patches.
- Identifying characteristics:
  - ~Short, sharply-pointed beaks. Average two-year life span.
  - ~Listen for the gurgling, trill *kon-ka-reeeee*, a "rusty-gate" sound
  - ~Male: Glossy black, stocky body. Scarlet red shoulder "epaulet" feathers, with a hint of yellow at the bottom edge.
  - ~Female: Brown with a streaky belly, off-white eyebrow.



## Western Bluebird

*Sialia mexicana*

Length: 7", Wingspan: 13.5", Weight 1 oz

- No place like home: With short beaks unsuitable for creating their own nest cavities, bluebirds nest in naturally occurring holes in trees or tree cavities made and abandoned by other wildlife. Dead or rotting trees are ideal sites for a bluebird home. People unwittingly do away with potential nesting sites when they clean up and remove old or "dead" trees. Partly due to this, bluebird numbers had been declining.
- To the rescue: Volunteers from the Walnut Creek Open Space Foundation and the California Bluebird Recovery Program install and monitor cavity nest boxes in the Open Space. Bluebird numbers have consequently bumped up. The boxes safely admit and allow the bluebirds to nest while excluding predators.
- Feeding on the fly: Among the type of birds known as "flycatchers", the Western Bluebird will snatch insects from the air while flying out from a low perch or fence post. They also eat worms and berries - mistletoe is a favorite.
- Identifying characteristics:
  - ~Rounded body, white eye ring.
  - ~Listen for their *pew, pew, pew* call
  - ~Nests are made of mud and grass; eggs are pale blue
  - ~Male: Brilliant blue head and back, rust-colored belly
  - ~Female: Lighter gray-blue and tan

**Try as we might, sound is hard to describe.** Luckily, there are apps to help you identify each bird species' unique song and call. *Songs* are much longer, more complex and communicate about territory, courtship and mating. *Calls* are used as alarms or for keeping members of a flock in contact. Listen to bird sounds online at [www.AllAboutBirds.org](http://www.AllAboutBirds.org) Click on "sounds".



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)

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 Bay Area Field Trips (with your parent/known adult).

Go to [www.mt Diablaudubon.org/YBC](http://www.mt Diablaudubon.org/YBC) for field trip information.



## Want to know more about birds?

**Come to a Mt. Diablo Audubon Society meeting.**

First Thursday of every month, 7 pm.  
(except July and August)

The Gardens at Heather Farm, Camellia Room  
1540 Marchbanks Drive, Walnut Creek

**Visit us online at [www.mt Diablaudubon.org](http://www.mt Diablaudubon.org)**

Enjoy free monthly programs, field trips,  
Young Birders Club, and classes.

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

One of the posters installed at Walnut Creek Open Space kiosks.

Designed and produced by Michele Sheehan.

See article in the October 2020 issue of *The Quail* **HERE**.

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

### Mailing address:

P.O. Box 53

Walnut Creek, CA 94597-0053

### Email address:

[info@mt Diablaudubon.org](mailto:info@mt Diablaudubon.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](mailto: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

