



# Mt. Diablo Audubon Society

## *The Quail*

Volume 66, Number 5

FEBRUARY 2021

### Next Monthly Program Meeting: Thursday, February 4

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: *Conserving The Salton Sea* with Frank Ruiz
- 7:25 PM** Board Announcements
- 7:35 PM** Main Program: *Birding California's Big Sink* with Eddie Bartley
- 8:30 PM** Adjourn

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### Main Program: *Birding California's Big Sink*

Eddie Bartley, *Visiting Researcher at California Academy of Sciences*

Join Eddie Bartley for a fast-paced spin around one of California's most important birding areas: the Salton Sink.

Though much altered by humans in the past century, the endorheic (drain-less) Salton Sink holds magnificent bird



diversity and abundance, especially in winter, which will be the seasonal

focus of this presentation. Eddie will share photography and natural history stories about the unique biodiversity, regional specialty birds, and favorite wildlifing spots that he and his partner, Noreen Weeden, have discovered in their 25+ years visiting this natural phenomenon-prone region.



A conservation activist since his teens, Eddie is a volunteer researcher and instructor with the Golden Gate Raptor Observatory, California Academy of Sciences, and Golden Gate Audubon Society, and is currently the President of the **Yerba Buena Chapter** of the California Native Plant Society as well as the **Farallon Islands Foundation**. Eddie and Noreen

lead natural history, bird watching, and photography tours for **Nature Trip** out of their home base in San Francisco.

Verdin photo by Eddie Bartley

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## **Birding Info:** ***Conserving The Salton Sea***

Frank Ruiz, *Salton Sea Program Director for Audubon California*

Frank Ruiz, **Salton Sea Program Director** for Audubon California, will provide an update on some recent breakthroughs for conserving the Salton Sea. California's largest lake is a key migratory stopover for millions of birds and a regional home for 650,000 residents.



## **Webinar Access Info:**

**Date:** Thursday, February 4, 2021

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

**Location:** Zoom online meeting

**Access:** <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83134742695?pwd=QVp1a1kzN2ZCYmduTGtNVjRjeUtnZ09>

**Passcode:** 561112

**Phone access:** **iPhone one-tap :**  
US: +16699006833,,83134742695#,,,,\*561112# or  
+14086380968,,83134742695#,,,,\*561112#

**Telephone 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

Webinar ID: 831 3474 2695  
Passcode: 561112

International numbers available:  
[https://us02web.zoom.us/u/ketCvRHhUL](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83134742695?pwd=QVp1a1kzN2ZCYmduTGtNVjRjeUtnZ09)

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## President's Letter

Jerry Britten, *MDAS President*

### An eBird Observation Becomes A Journal Article

We used to own a cabin in the woods in the Ozarks of northern Arkansas when my in-laws lived nearby. In the spring of 2017, I witnessed an interaction between a Red-shouldered Hawk and a Black Racer snake on the property, and submitted an eBird checklist with some photos. Fast-forward to 2019, when I was contacted by Gary Graves, a researcher from the Smithsonian Institution, who wished to incorporate my sightings in an article for the Journal of the Arkansas Academy of Science. In late 2020 this article was published:



**Graves, Gary R, 2020, "Red-shouldered Hawk (*Buteo lineatus*) predation on North American Racer (*Coluber constrictor*) in the Arkansas Ozarks", *Journal of the Arkansas Academy of Science*, vol. 74, article 17.**

My original eBird checklist is [HERE](#).

This was a fun interaction for me. My work has been published many times before in Physics and Engineering journals, but never in a Natural History journal. It is

also a good demonstration of the importance of eBird data and how it is used by the wider scientific community. I hope you enjoy this short read.

In chapter news, our annual fundraising campaign at the end of 2020 surpassed our 2019 results by a few percent, which was surprising to us considering the pandemic. We are grateful for the generosity of our members. Also, the chapter is participating in Climate Watch, a community science data collection initiative through National Audubon that aims to better understand the effects of climate change on specific bird species. Our local effort is being led by Alan Bade. See how to sign up and participate [in this issue](#).

Stay safe, and get out there for the birds!

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## Welcome, New Members!

Laurie Baker, Antioch

Peter Belden, Pleasant Hill

Kay Lija, Walnut Creek

Lois Schneider, Concord

Ann Borba, Walnut Creek

Karel Baloun, Lafayette

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## Recap of the 2020 Christmas Bird Counts

Jerry Britten, *MDAS President*

Mt. Diablo Audubon has been conducting a **Christmas Bird Count** (CBC) in Central Contra Costa County continuously since 1955. Our East Contra Costa County count started in 2000 and has continued without interruption. The ongoing pandemic caused us to carefully consider whether we could continue this tradition. In fact, a number of local Audubon chapters canceled their counts. But, by modifying our protocol to comply with local isolation guidelines, we decided to continue the count. A few other local chapters did so as well. Our COVID-19 protocol included: 1) only individuals or members of the same family could walk trails, and 2) post-count meetup via Zoom rather than in-person. The first restriction severely affected participation, but we added new routes within the central count circle, and many leaders subdivided their routes on both counts to help keep participation levels up.

Also, for the second year we used **eBird** to compile the results by having participants share their checklists with a master compiler eBird account. This makes it tremendously easier to compile and report results and to check for double counts and route duplication.

Below is a summary of the counts:

	<b>East County</b> 12/16	<b>Central County</b> 12/19	
<b>Field Participants</b>	23	43	
<b>Feeder Watchers</b>	1	9	
<b>Total Checklists</b>	40	76	Only 4 paper lists!
<b># Species</b>	149	<b>161</b>	Most in history of count.
<b># Birds</b>	36,707	<b>37,662</b>	Highest since 2000.

### **East County CBC 12/16/2020**

The number of species seen was a little above the running average, while the number of birds (36,707) was about average. Skeins of geese were flying over participants in far East County all day. An Eastern Phoebe was sighted on private land at Holland Tract, a first for either count for this species. Other birds seen that are rare for this count included Canyon Wren at Vasco Caves Preserve, Cinnamon Teal and Red-breasted Merganser at Clifton Court Forebay, and a Red-breasted Nuthatch at a backyard feeder in Discovery Bay, the only feeder-watcher in this count. This brings up a point—we need more of these in East County! For example, we've only had Chestnut-backed Chickadee twice on the eastern count, but I expect we would have them regularly if we had more feeder-watcher participation. So, if you or someone you know lives in Brentwood, Discovery Bay, Oakley, or somewhere else in East County, please consider participating as a feeder-watcher this year.

Creekside Park in Brentwood, a perennial hotspot in East Contra Costa County, yielded a number of good birds for the count, including Purple Finch, White-throated Sparrow, and Western Tanager. However, during count week, defined as +/- 3 days of the count, the following rarities were seen at this park and not here or anywhere else on count day: Black-throated Gray Warbler, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Brown Creeper, Townsend's Warbler, Chipping Sparrow, *Plumbeous Vireo*, and *Hammond's Flycatcher*! The italicized birds have never been reported on the count. This shows that you never know what will show up at this hotspot, and that we probably want to start birding it in shifts!

Below are a couple of photos from the Eastern Count. Also, a PDF of the countdown list of this count is [HERE](#). To the right of the species in this report is the number of years of the count the bird has been seen, and an X adjacent to it represents that it was seen on the 2020 count.



Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Vasco Caves

Photo: Jerry Britten



Hutton's Vireo, Los Vaqueros Walnut Trail

Photo: Jerry Britten

## Central County CBC 12/19/2020

The species total for the central count (161) was the highest in the 65-year history of the count. The number of birds seen was the highest since 2000. This is somewhat surprising considering the relatively few numbers of participants and the foggy conditions experienced at low elevations that day, but a number of factors were in our favor as well. As with the East County count, many flyover skeins of geese contributed to numbers of Snow Goose, not often seen on this count. For the first time in several years, we had access to MOTCO, the active part of the Concord Naval Weapons Station. This rich tidal habitat yielded a number of somewhat rare birds including Short-eared Owl, Rough-legged Hawk, Semipalmated Plover, Marbled Godwit, and Black Rail. A number of good birds were found only on routes that have not been birded consistently for many years, including Townsend's Solitaire, and Canyon Wren on the back side of Black Diamond, and House Wren, and Sharp-shinned Hawk in Donner Canyon in Mount Diablo State Park. Chipping Sparrow now appears to be a regular in winter near Grayson Creek in Pleasant Hill. Mallard Reservoir and the adjoining Marathon refinery property yielded uncommon birds such as Redhead, American Bittern, Red-necked Grebe, and Black-bellied Plover. Finally, the importance of using home backyard feeders cannot be overstated. The only Townsend's Warbler of the count was in Dal Leite's yard, while Alan Bade's yard contained one of only two White-throated Sparrows. The only expected bird that was missed on this count was Rock Wren.

The countdown list of the Central County CBC is [HERE](#). The count was also featured in the [January issue of the Diablo Gazette](#), thanks to MDAS member Jill Hedgecock. A couple of photos from this count are below.



Bell's Sparrow, White Canyon

Photo: Scott Hein



Pine Siskin

Photo: Robert Raffel



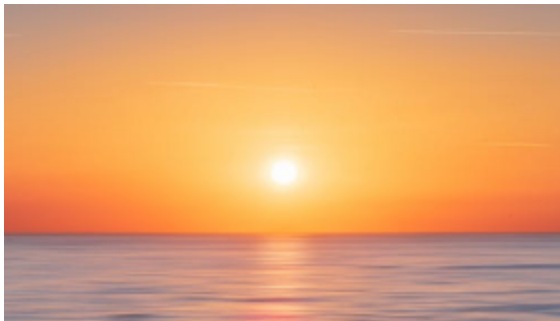
As an aside, some points of interest came up during my search of the Audubon CBC database to see if we had a record result. In the 1970s for example, typical species numbers were 130–140, but the total number of birds was often greater than 50,000, and in 1978 topped 108,000! It was not unusual back then to record 10,000–20,000 each of Northern Shoveler and Northern Pintail. It is unlikely that these numbers will routinely be seen again in our area. Also, larger numbers of blackbirds and robins were the norm. As for species, while some have disappeared from Central County over time (Ring-necked Pheasant comes to mind), on the whole, birds have come into our area more than have left, for a variety of reasons. These include established populations of feral birds (Mute Swan), range expansion (Great-tailed Grackle), or combination of introduction/range expansion (Wild Turkey, Eurasian Collared Dove). We also must consider relatively recent splits that have added new species from thin air (Cackling Goose from Canada Goose, for example).

The 2021 counts are tentatively scheduled to be Wednesday December 15 (Eastern County) and Saturday December 18 (Central County). We are confident that participation will return to normal, so mark your calendars!

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## On Climate Change, To Quote Star Wars, There's "A New Hope"

Juan Pablo Galván, *MDAS Conservation Chair*



Things are different in a lot of ways from a few months ago. Whereas before it was impossible, now there's a real chance for significant positive action on climate change. But everyone, at all levels, will need to be involved.

Check out just a few of the ways below.

1. **Become a UC-Certified California Climate Steward.** Modeled on the Certified California Naturalist Training Program that got started about five years ago (which itself was modeled on the Master Gardener training program), signing up to become a Climate Steward will give you resources, training, and contacts to become an effective agent for positive change. Click [HERE](#) to get more info on the various training programs offered around the state and to sign up. If courses are full, be

patient and sign up to get updates. The program is new and expanding.

2. **Join Audubon's Climate Watch Project.** According to Audubon's 2019 climate change report, "***Survival By Degrees***", up to two-thirds of North American birds are vulnerable to extinction due to climate change. The good news is that there are plenty of opportunities to protect birds from this existential threat. A great way to help is by joining Climate Watch. Click **HERE** to learn more and email **communityscience@mtdiabloaudubon.org** to sign up.
3. **Know the Latest, and Spread the Word.** 2020 is tied with 2016 as the warmest year on record (read more **HERE**). NASA released a great one-minute video showing just how much hotter the world now is compared to 140 years ago (click **HERE** to watch). Share this info, and opportunities to take action, with friends, family, decision-makers—everyone.
4. **See How You and Your Neighborhood Stack Up.** Click **HERE** for an interactive carbon footprint map of the Bay Area that shows how much your neighborhood, city, and region contribute to climate change. The darker red areas emit the most carbon, and the blue areas the least. To save the climate, everyone needs to reduce their carbon footprint and make it as small as possible. What's your carbon footprint? Click **HERE** to find out.
5. **Make Your Home a Climate Smart Home.** Everyone's spent a lot more time at home over the past year than they planned. Take some quick and easy steps to make it energy efficient, which reduces power needs and helps fight climate change. Click **HERE** to start.

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## **Flooding Hits Our Conservation Friends In Chiapas—Can You Help?**

Juan Pablo Galván, *MDAS Conservation Chair*

I'm sure you know that many of the birds we love to see in the Diablo area don't spend the whole year here. Many species, including favorites like Western Tanager, Lazuli Bunting, and Black-headed Grosbeak migrate far to the south. The most important wintering areas for Mount Diablo species are México, Central America, and northern South America.

To help protect Mount Diablo's migratory birds, in 2019 Mt. Diablo Audubon Society began supporting conservation organizations working to monitor, protect,

and restore birds and their habitats in important wintering areas. One of these groups, **Monitores Comunitarios Siyaj Chan**, can really use your help right now.



Siyaj Chan monitor

Siyaj Chan is composed of members of Maya communities in the Lacandón jungle in the southeast Mexican state of Chiapas, bordering Guatemala. They monitor birds, run ecotourism tours, and discourage activities that harm birds, like illegal logging, poaching, and illegal fishing. They help protect many tropical species of birds, but also many migratory species that breed in the US.

This past fall, a huge flood swept through the region and damaged their headquarters and equipment. While they continue their conservation work, they have lost binoculars, digital cameras, lenses, and associated equipment (memory cards, data cables, etc.). You can visit and follow their Facebook page [HERE](#) to see some of their beautiful photos and read about their work (in Spanish).



Community of Frontera Corozal and Siyaj Chan offices submerged due to flooding of the Río Usumacinta.

If you have some items like these that are in good condition that you would like to donate, please email [conservation@mtdiabloaudubon.org](mailto:conservation@mtdiabloaudubon.org) to arrange an equipment donation pick-up. If you don't have equipment but would still like to support Siyaj Chan, please visit their PayPal site [HERE](#) to make a financial contribution to their conservation work (amount is in Mexican Pesos; \$1 US Dollar = \$20 Pesos).

Photos taken by members of Siyaj Chan

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## Helping Birds Stay Healthy

Mike Eliot, *MDAS Member-at-Large*

If you are seeing lethargic or dead birds at your feeders or in your yard recently, it may be due to salmonella bacteria. The current irruption of Pine Siskins in our area has brought in large numbers of birds that may be infected. Sick birds keep feeding and their droppings can infect other birds.



It is important to keep feeders clean to help prevent spread of diseases. If you see a sick or dead bird near your feeders, you should take the feeders down, clean with 10% bleach solution, rinse thoroughly, dry, and fill with fresh food. If the problem persists, take your feeders down for about two weeks and repeat the cleaning process.

Mold and bacteria grow rapidly on many types of bird food when wet or damp. If food has gotten wet, and you can remove it within one day, dry it on a sheet pan

and put it back in the feeder. If it smells musty or is clumping, it is best to discard and replace with fresh food.



Birds often expend 10% of their body weight each night staying warm in cold weather, so use high-energy foods during winter such as suet and nuts. Feeders will empty faster when it's cold, so make sure you have an adequate supply and keep feeders full.

Hummingbirds this time of year also have few natural sources of nectar from flowers, which they need to maintain their high energy levels. So, consider putting up one or more nectar feeders.

Keep a good source of water for drinking and bathing. Wild birds bathe regularly, even in the cold, because clean feathers insulate their bodies. Clean and put up nest boxes in winter, also, because birds may use them for protection against weather.

Mike Eliot

**Wild Birds Unlimited, Pleasant Hill**

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## **The Mt. Diablo Audubon Society Photography Contest Returns on Valentine's Day!**

Rosalie Howarth, *MDAS Publicity & Social Media Chair*

Krista Vossekui, *MDAS Education Chair*

We know you did an awful lot of solo birding last year; perhaps you'd like to share some of your best photos? Or maybe you're hoping to get out more often when conditions improve, and add some new shots to your gallery! Either way, you can enter the "**Great MDAS Photography Competition 2021**" via the MDAS Photo Contest website link, which goes live Feb. 14th at [www.mtdiabloudubon.org](http://www.mtdiabloudubon.org).

We'll have some new categories this year, including:

- **Bird Families**—parents and their offspring
- **Birds Feeding**—birds eating insects, seeds, berries, etc.
- **Bird Bloopers**—your very worst bird photos ever!

And like last year, we'll show the winners and 4 runners-up in each category, so you can see a bonanza of terrific bird moments captured by your fellow MDAS members.



**2020 Photo Contest Winner**

Species: Green Heron

Photographer: Sharon Anderson

Location: Walnut Creek

*"The colors are spectacular, the framing is beautiful and there is ACTION!"*

Photos taken anywhere in California, at any time, will qualify for gift card prizes. We'll present all the finalists in a slide show at the June Membership Meeting.

**2020 Photo Contest Winner**

Species: Black-necked Stilts

Photographer: Hema Shah

Location: Martinez Marina

*"The balanced but syncopated composition make this one worthy of wall art!"*



So, start sorting through those photos now, and look out for the announcement and official rules on the website starting this Valentine's Day!



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## **The Great Backyard Bird Count Is Coming!**

Alan Bade, MDAS Community Science Advisory

# The Great Backyard Bird Count



Art by Charley Harper

The **Great Backyard Bird Count** is coming! On February 12–15th, birders all over the world will count birds for four days to provide an important snapshot of where birds are right before their migrations. We may not be able to bird together on MDAS field trips, but we can still contribute to science meaningfully from home or on our personal birding trips.

The GBBC was started in 1998 and went global in 2013. 2020's **results** show a new record number of 268,674 participants who counted 27,270,156 birds in nearly 250,000 checklists and identified 6,942 species in 194 countries. Data collection on this massive worldwide scale is simply impossible without enlisting the help of many thousands of community scientists!

Events like the GBBC greatly enhance bird population data from other community science programs such as **eBird**, **FeederWatch**, and the **Christmas Bird Count**. As our climate changes, consistent large-scale data collection helps scientists understand where birds are right before migrating. The GBBC also educates and raises awareness of birds in a fun, interactive way for new audiences.

Once this event begins, results can be observed in real time. On the program website participants can explore maps and charts that show what others are reporting during and after the count.

It's **easy to participate!** Participants are asked to count birds for as little as 15 minutes (or as long as they wish) on one or more days of the four-day event and then report their sightings online. Additional tools are available **HERE**. Anyone can take part in the GBBC, from beginning birders to experts, from your backyard, or anywhere in the world. If you are an eBird user, simply report your observations as usual, as eBird and the GBBC are completely integrated.

The 24th annual GBBC will be held Friday, February 12 through Monday, February 15, 2021 and is sponsored by **Wild Birds Unlimited**. MDAS encourages its members to contribute to this important community science project.

## Winter 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.



Sandhill Crane

Photo: Liam Wolff/Macaulay Library at the [Cornell Lab of Ornithology \(ML91690991\)](#)

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 winter. 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 February 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 **Grizzly Island Wildlife Area**. If there are flooded fields, many wintering ducks will be visible from the road. The wide-open spaces may have raptors, including Red-tailed and Ferruginous Hawks. Tule Elk may also be seen. The site **Suisun Marsh Natural History Association** has links to additional information at the bottom the page. 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.

**Cosumnes Preserve** includes seven land-owning partners, which include **The Nature Conservancy, Bureau of Land Management,** and **California Department of Fish & Wildlife**. Cosumnes is yet another of the great Northern California habitats for wintering waterfowl and Sandhill Cranes. Another nearby hot spot for Sandhill Cranes is **Woodbridge Road**. Drive the length of this east-west road for views of Tundra Swans, Snow Geese, Greater-white Fronted Geese, and Sandhill Cranes. If one visits later in the afternoon, the sunset offers spectacular colors and the sounds and sights of the birds flying in and settling for the night. No Lands Pass is needed to drive the road.

A final thought for wintering waterfowl and cranes is to travel farther south in the Central Valley. MDAS has offered a field trip to Santa Fe Grade Road and **Merced National Wildlife Refuge** for many years. By visiting later in February after hunting season has ended, thousands of birds are still present.

## Bodega Bay

Remembered as the location of Alfred Hitchcock's famous movie, *The Birds*, Bodega Bay really is famous for all the birds hosted during the winter. Brant, Common Loons, Red-necked Grebes, waterfowl, and shorebirds visit the harbor at Bodega Bay. Other more pelagic birds may be visible on the ocean from Bodega Head. One may drive around the harbor on Bay Flat and Westshore Roads. Numerous places to pull over are readily available for viewing birds on the harbor waters. Bodega Bay is an active fishing community, but there are limited opportunities for dining during the COVID-19 pandemic. **Doran Beach Park** is operated by Sonoma County Regional Parks and has an entry fee.

## **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:

- **Sunol Regional Park**
- **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.

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## **Climate Watch Update**

Alan Bade, *MDAS Community Science Advisory*

MDAS is happy to announce that we are participating in Audubon's **Climate Watch** program! This community science program was introduced in 2016 and is designed to test whether projections of range shift are accurate in Audubon's study **Survival by Degrees**. Climate change is projected to put 389 species of birds at increasing risk of extinction, nearly two thirds of North America's species.

In last December's issue of *The Quail* I wrote an **introductory article on Climate Watch**. As MDAS's Community Science Coordinator, I am learning how to use the

mapping tools and help members set up routes for their chosen species. These routes are placed within the survey's 15km squares in appropriate habitat, have at least 12 survey points 200m apart, and are conducted between January 15th–February 15th and May 15th–June 15th. These time periods correspond to wintering and breeding seasons for the target species. We do ask that members accept a COVID liability waiver to participate. I will email the link to anyone who would like to participate. Just send me an email at [communityscience@mtdiabloaudubon.org](mailto:communityscience@mtdiabloaudubon.org).

So far, participation is higher among East Coast Audubon members, but we are trying to help reverse this trend! You can explore results from Climate Watch surveys in the interactive online reporting tool map [HERE](#) and see the first peer-reviewed study using Climate Watch results [HERE](#).

We encourage MDAS members to put their birding skills to fun conservation use by gathering data in community science programs such as Climate Watch.

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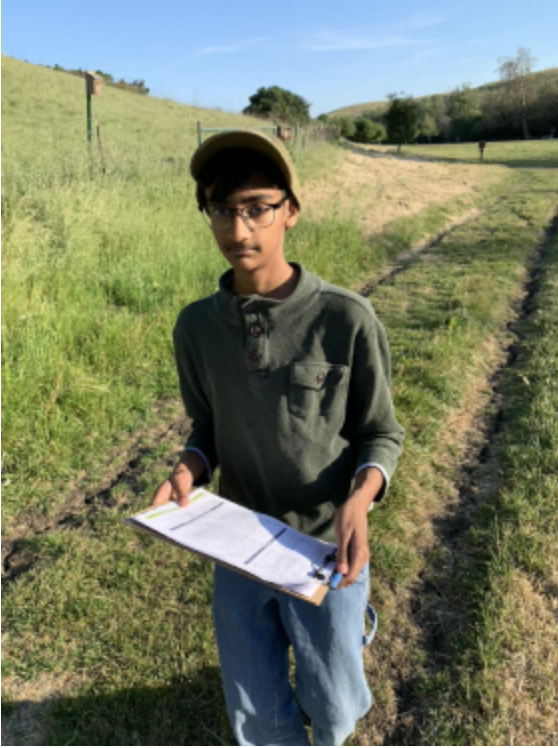
## ***Knowing Kindness***

Nitish Ramani

*Editor's Note: Nitish Ramani is a sophomore at American High School in Fremont, CA. Having accompanied his father on bird photography field trips when he was younger, Nitish was excited to pursue an opportunity to volunteer to monitor Bluebird nestboxes in Garin Regional Park in 2019. As part of an English project last year, Nitish wrote an essay about his experiences as a nestbox monitor and how those experiences have changed him as a person.*

In the poem “*Kindness*,” Naomi Shihab Nye explores the theme of kindness and how one has to experience sorrow from loss before they can develop kindness. The poem states that “*Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside, you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.*” This theme also relates to my life because I had never realized my sensitive side until I started volunteering to help bluebirds. I have realized that I have a compassionate side, learned time management, as well as understood and accepted the realities of life. No change I have experienced in the past year has been more enlightening than involving myself in the bluebird monitoring activity.

Firstly, I have realized the compassionate side in me. I have discovered that there is a lot of satisfaction from helping nature, and that I care a lot for birds. The monitoring visits started as a normal weekly activity, where my dad and I went to the Garin Regional Park in Hayward to monitor and take care of bluebirds and other songbirds. Once, as I was checking the dozen nestboxes, I saw the light



blue colored bluebird eggs and was struck with a wave of joy. When I saw the cute, small, brown hatchlings cuddling together, I became very glad and felt a sense of pride that I helped those hatchlings have a safe nesting environment. I also realized I had a newfound anxiety about their well being and safety.

I have also learned time management. I have learned to adhere to a schedule, as well as to balance between my school and my volunteer activity. I made a commitment to visit weekly on Fridays so that I would be able to gauge and record

the problems the birds faced. I also made the commitment because if I missed a day, there might have been a threat of predators to the birds, and the recorded data would have been inconsistent. I have understood how to prioritize activities during volunteering to make the most of it.

Lastly, I have understood and accepted the realities of life. After I experienced the joy of seeing new hatchlings, I was forced to understand the sadness of seeing some young ones not make it. I was checking the boxes, seeing the cute hatchlings reacting to their parent's arrival. Then, when I neared the next nestbox, I picked up a pungent smell, which I then realized was the smell of death. I opened the nestbox for my fears to be confirmed, as one of the hatchlings had died. It was only then, when I saw the dead bird, that I was able to have kindness towards the birds. This reminded me of the quote *"What you held in your hand, what you counted and carefully saved, all this must go so you know how desolate the landscape can be between the regions of kindness."* Within a few weeks, I was also able to marvel at seeing young ones fledge to fend for themselves.



Surely, I have never experienced a change as enlightening as monitoring to help bluebird recovery. Just as the poem, *"Kindness,"* portrays, I have learned that after you experience sorrow, kindness *"goes with you everywhere Like a shadow*

or a friend.” I will remember this volunteering experience and all that it has taught me.

Photos: Upper left - Nitish Ramani, lower right - Nitish Ramani and his father, Rajesh, at a nest box

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Georgette Howington, Assistant Director of **California Bluebird Recovery Program (CBRP)**, submitted Nitish's essay for *The Quail* this month. CBRP offers personalized training if you wish to become a nestbox monitor volunteer.

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## Events

### **Bird, Nest, Nature**

October 13, 2020–February 7, 2021



Bird, Nest, Nature is a juried and invitational exhibition featuring over 150 local, national, and international artists inspired by the exquisite beauty of creatures of flight. 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.

**View and shop for the work in this exhibition at: [bgviewingroom.org](http://bgviewingroom.org).**

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### **Raptors In Winter**

February 4, 11, 25, 2021



## Three Zoom presentations with detailed suggestions for individual field observations.

Year-round resident hawks, falcons, and eagles of the greater Bay Area and the Central Valley are joined by a number of wintering migrants (including Ferruginous and Rough-legged Hawks). We will explore the rhythm of their lives and discuss identifying juveniles and adult birds, including birds in flight. This class focuses on raptors that are diurnal (active during the day).

One of the nice things about raptors is that you don't have to be on scene at daybreak to get good looks at these birds, so you can travel a bit further afield. It is rewarding to travel to eastern Alameda and Contra Costa, and Napa, Solano, and Sonoma counties to look for diurnal raptors.

<b>Date:</b>	February 4, 11, 25, 2021
<b>Time:</b>	7:00 PM–9:00 PM
<b>Location:</b>	Zoom online meeting
<b>Instructor:</b>	Maureen Lahiff
<b>Cost:</b>	\$75 GGAS members, \$110 non-members
<b>Registration:</b>	<a href="#">Click here to register online</a>

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## Birds Of Owens Lake: Changes & Trends

February 19, 2021



## Join us for an exclusive evening exploring the birds of Owens Lake

**Friends of the Inyo** is proud to present an exclusive virtual event featuring Rich Cimino, an international birding expert and professional guide with 50 years of experience, and local photographer and popular Owens Lake Bird Festival leader, Martin Powell.

Learn about the birds that stop at Owens Lake as they travel the globe. Rich will be sharing his knowledge and trends he's seeing, with the help of beautiful photos taken by Martin who will offer commentary and backstory on his stunning images.

**Date:** Friday, February 19, 2021  
**Time:** 6:30 PM–8:00 PM  
**Location:** Zoom online meeting  
**Presenters:** Rich Cimino and Martin Powell  
**Cost:** \$20 Donation  
**Registration:** [Click here to register online](#)

## February Gallery

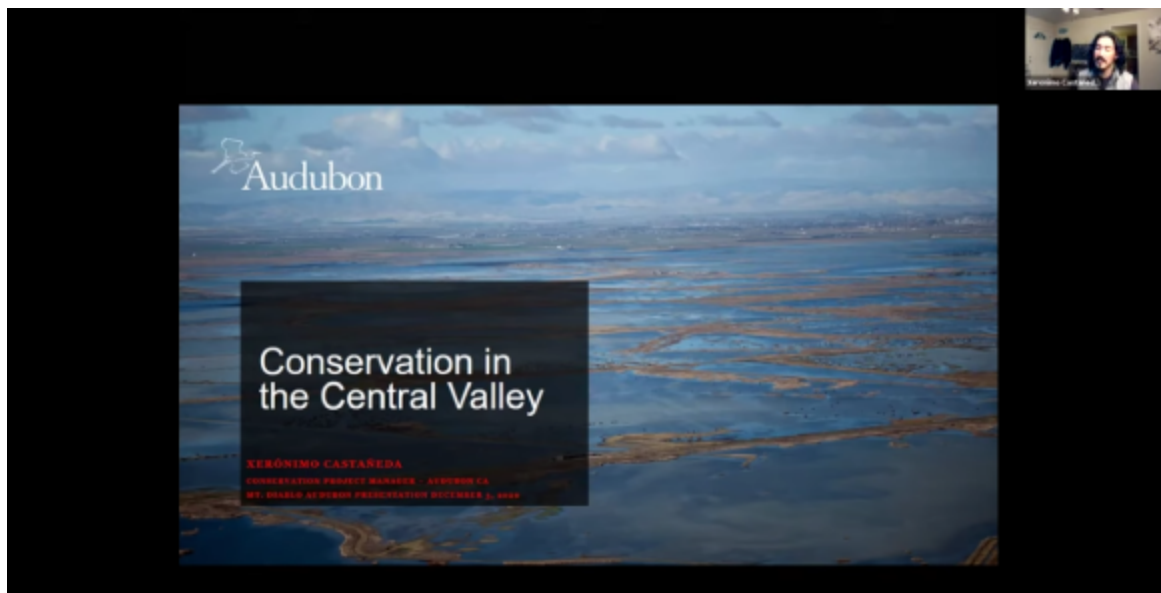


**Contents**

- Northern saw-whet owls and Project Owl-net
- Study Methods
- 2019-2020 Results
- Future Research

Mt. Diablo Audubon Society

MDAS December 3 Monthly Program Meeting:  
Julie Woodruff provides an update on her Northern Saw-whet Owl banding project.  
View the entire virtual meeting [HERE](#).



Audubon



**Conservation in the Central Valley**

XERÓNIMO CASTAÑEDA  
CONSERVATION PROJECT MANAGER, AUDUBON CA  
800.848.6800

MDAS December 3 Monthly Program Meeting:  
Xerónimo Castañeda provides an update on conservation in California's Central Valley and the

## MDAS 2020 Christmas Bird Counts

(we have conducted a count since 1955)

- COVID-19 Protocol: only individuals or members of same family could walk trails.
- Subdivided routes and added new ones to keep participation levels up.
- Compiled in eBird (Thanks to all who submitted checklists this way!)

	East County 12/16	Central County 12/19	
Field Participants	23	43	Skeleton crews
Feederwatchers	1	9	
Total Checklists	40	76	Only 4 Paper Lists (!)
# Species	149	<b>161</b>	Most in history of Count
# Birds	35805	<b>34582</b>	highest since 2000

MDAS January 7 Monthly Program Meeting:  
Jerry Britten, MDAS President, presents the results of the 2020 Christmas Bird Counts.  
View the presentation [HERE](#) and view Jerry's CBC report in this issue [HERE](#).



MDAS January 7 Monthly Program Meeting:  
Karla Bloem presented a *Real Life Great Horned Owl Soap Opera* that she's witnessed over the past 15 years. Pictured above is Alice, the now-retired matriarch of the owl ambassadors at the



## International Owl Center.

Although MDAS was not able to record this presentation, there is an ongoing series of virtual owl expert presentations from IOC that you can browse [HERE](#).

Photo: Sue Fletcher



Student fieldwork and internships at Salton Sea

Photo: Audubon Salton Sea



Microinvertebrate and water surveys at Salton Sea

Photo: Audubon Salton Sea



Black-necked Stilts at Salton Sea

Photo: Ryan Llamas



Bombay Beach wetland at Salton Sea

Photo: Frank Ruiz

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### **Mt. Diablo Audubon Society Leadership**

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