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Mount Diablo Bird Alliance

The Quail

Volume 69, Number 3

March 2024

Next Monthly Program Meeting: Thursday, March 7, 7 PM

Mount Diablo Bird Alliance will meet Thursday, March 7 in the Camellia Room at the Gardens at Heather Farm.

Address:

The Camellia Room @ The Gardens at Heather Farms
1540 Marchbanks Drive, Walnut Creek, CA 94598

*As a conservation organization we encourage you to bring your own mug for coffee or tea.

Agenda:

6:30 PM Doors Open
7:00 PM Announcements
7:15 PM Refreshments and Raffle
7:30 PM Main Program: Birds of Palomarin

March Main Program: Birds of Palomarin

Larissa Babicz



After about five months of work, Larissa Babicz, former Point Blue Conservation Science Apprentice, completed **Birds of Palomarin**, a drawing showing all 78 bird species that were caught, documented, and released back into the wild during her 2022 spring/summer field research season at the Palomarin Field Station. It spans February through October, so includes some of spring migration, some of fall migration, and the full nesting season.

Larissa is often inspired by the things she sees in nature, and during her field seasons she sees a lot! When she thought of her experience at Point Blue's Palomarin Field Station, she couldn't really choose between all the cool birds she worked with! This, at least, was what first sparked the idea for the project. If she couldn't choose, why not draw them all?

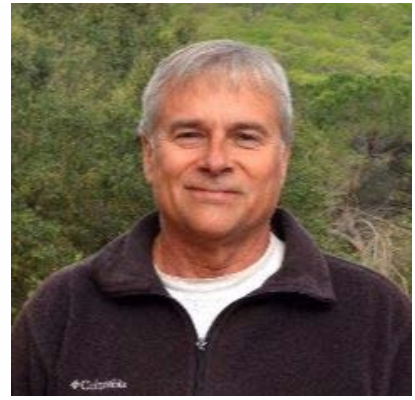
The plant species in the drawing are also part of the study she contributed to at Palomarin. They are plants she monitored throughout the season with her fellow apprentices for when changes like budding and blossoming happened throughout the

season: the timing of things, otherwise known as phenology. The birds are pictured in various feather phases or plumages – some are juveniles, some are adults, and she intentionally balanced males and females.



Drawing by Larissa Babicz

Jerry Britten, *MDBA President*



In January, I traveled to New Mexico with the specific goal of seeing and photographing all three species of American Rosy-Finch (Black, Brown-capped, and Gray-crowned). Decades ago, I'd seen the Brown-capped and Gray-crowned without taking photos, and the Black would be a new sighting for me. These finches winter atop Sandia Crest, about an hour northeast of Albuquerque, where a paved road leads to the 10,670-foot summit. Although the café/gift shop there has been closed for a couple of years, the Bird Alliance of Central New Mexico (formerly Central New Mexico Audubon Society) partners with the Cibola National Forest to maintain feeders for the mixed finch flock. In the depths of winter, this is likely the most accessible spot in the country to see all three species, which disperse to different summer ranges.

When I reached the summit around 8:30 AM, I realized I'd forgotten my heavy winter coat! Luckily, I had packed enough layers, boots, gloves, and a hat to stay warm in the mid-20s temperatures and 20+ MPH wind gusts. Using the building as a windbreak, I waited several hours for photo opportunities. The main flock of 50+ finches came and went, never lingering at the feeders long—but long enough for success on the first day. Nuthatches, Mountain Chickadees, and Gray-headed Juncos provided constant company.

I planned this as a multi-day trip to allow for potentially bad weather, so I had extra time. First, I drove a couple of hours south of Albuquerque to Elephant Butte Reservoir, where a Nutting's Flycatcher (a Mexican vagrant) had been reliably seen. Unfortunately, it disappeared the day before I arrived! Still, there were good sightings, including Verdin and Pyrrhuloxia. On the last day, I drove south again (but not quite as far) to the famous Bosque del Apache Wildlife Refuge. The highlight there was excellent views of Crissal Thrasher, an elusive desert bird I'd only glimpsed before.

Chapter News

Please find the announcement for our 4th Photo Contest later in this issue. It's now live; we look forward to your contributions!

Our last in-person meeting was a huge success – almost 70 people attended Robert Raffel's great program. Please join us for our next meeting on March 7th at Heather Farm Gardens. We need raffle items, so if you have something interesting you don't need, please bring it!

Last month I mentioned Rosalie Howarth stepping down from the Board (though she's still handling our social media). In fact, Janna Layton has stepped up to manage our Instagram account. Check it out – our handle is [mounddiabloirdalliance](#). Thanks, Janna, for helping!

Reminder: We still need volunteers for Education, Outreach, and Publicity/Social Media Chair positions, as well as Hospitality at our meetings. If you have time and interest, please contact us. Our next in-person meeting is a great place to start!

Stay safe, and get out there for the birds!



Crissal Thrasher, Bosque del Apache



Brown-Capped Rosy Finch, Sandia Crest

Photos by J. Britten

Membership Updates

Rochelle Fortier, *MDBA Membership Chair*

Welcome New Members! I want to give a warm welcome to the new members who joined in January: **Thomas Delfosse**, Livermore; **Elsa Fiore**, Walnut Creek; **Suzy Hall-Whitney**, Martinez; **Patricia Lichter**, Albany; **Eva Lumsden**, Martinez; **Theresa Rizza**, Walnut Creek; **Karl Snover**, Walnut Creek; and **Roberta Zallen**, Hercules.



I hope to see you at our in-person meeting in March!

2024 MDBA Photo Contest Underway

Jerry Britten, *MDBA President*

The 4th Mount Diablo Bird Alliance Photo Contest went live February 14, 2024.

The contest is open to MDAS members only except for the Youth category which is open to anyone under the age of 18.

The categories for this year's contest are:

- **Bird Beauty:** Close-up/Abstract/Focus on Color etc not fitting into the other main categories.
- **Birds and Humans:** Urban birds, birds on structures, birds and birders, etc. (no pet birds please).
- **Birds Dining:** Self-explanatory.
- **Birds in Action:** Flying, interacting, etc.
- **Youth:** We'd especially like to encourage young people 8-17 to enter, and they need not be members. Any type of bird photo can be submitted in this category.
- **Worst Bird Photo EVER:** We KNOW you've got a couple of these! Losers you still didn't delete for some reason. Extra points for humor.

No restriction on where the photos were taken.

Judges for this year's contest are Jerry Britten, Arnold Joe and Alan Krakauer.

Submissions are closed on May 1, 2024.

This is a casual, friendly competition; no special equipment or professional skills required (but use 'em if you got 'em). Pictures can be taken anywhere, on any date. Deadline is May 14. Winners and runners-up will be shared at the June members' meeting and in the Quail.

Click the "2024 Photo Contest" link at the top of the website www.mtdiablobirds.org to see official rules and entry link.



Winner of the 2023 International Category, Galapagos Mockingbird by Wayne Narr.

What is the Best Climate Message?

"Later is Too Late. Take Action for the Next Generation"

Juan Pablo Galvan, *MDBA Conservation*



📷 Floating homes and boats stranded on the dry bed of Puraquequara lake in Brazil amid severe drought in October 2023. Photograph: Edmar Barros/AP

It's Confirmed: Love for the Next Generation Is the Best Climate Message

To gain the broad public support needed for effective climate action, those who care about nature must connect with people on a personal level. New research ([HERE](#)) demonstrates that across countries, economic classes, and political parties, the message "later is too late" resonates most strongly. This outperforms messages about economic opportunity, fighting injustice, or even preventing extreme weather. Emphasizing the urgency of acting for the sake of our children and their future – ensuring they inherit a livable, desirable planet – is a powerful motivator.

Talk About “Improving”, “Better...”, Not “Ban” or “Phaseout...”

Focusing on limitations is a losing argument. Recent research also indicates that framing climate solutions in terms of "upgrading", "setting standards", "making solutions accessible", and "reducing dependency" is more persuasive than using words like "ban", "phaseout", or "mandate." Use this positive language when discussing climate action with your family, community, and local leaders. Check out the research [HERE](#).

The Amazon Is In Big Trouble. You Can Make A Difference.

Recent studies confirm that climate change is fueling a devastating drought in the Amazon ([HERE](#)). Without urgent action, a permanent shift is possible – from the world's largest rainforest to a dry savanna ([HERE](#)). Want to help? While donating to groups like the Rainforest Trust is valuable, taking action within your community is even more impactful.

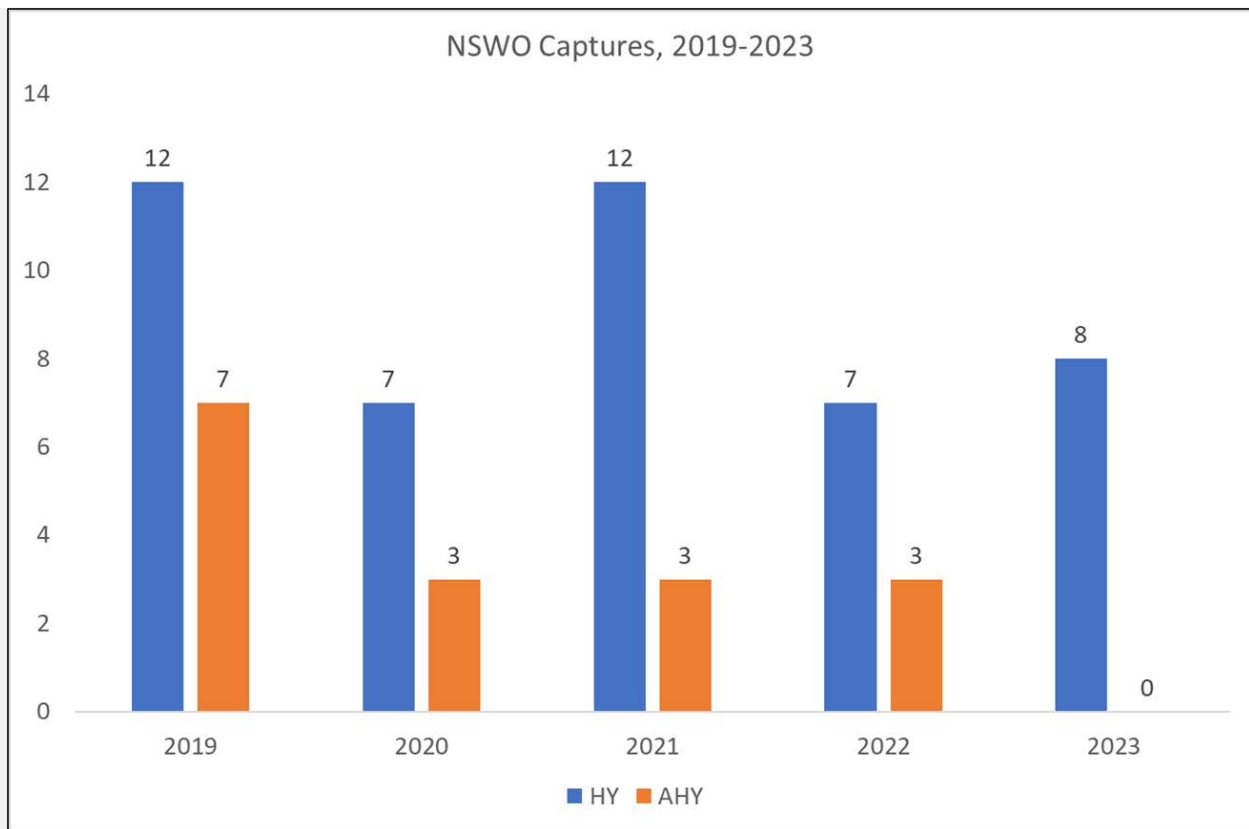
For example, clearing forests for cattle grazing is a major driver of Amazon destruction, and the US market consumes a significant portion of this beef ([HERE](#)). Talk to community leaders, grocery stores, family, and friends about this. Opting for chicken or plant-based protein offers delicious and healthy alternatives. When you do eat beef, make sure it's not sourced from the Amazon. Encourage your local stores to avoid purchasing beef from Brazilian companies, instead supporting the "upgrade" to California beef.

Summary of 2023 Northern Saw-Whet Owl Banding Project

Julie Woodruff and Jerry Britten

From early October into mid-November at our banding site in Las Trampas Regional Wilderness west of San Ramon, permitted banders and volunteers spent 18 nights in the field, 4 hours each evening starting at dusk, hoping to capture Northern Saw-Whet Owls (NSOW's) in mist nets. These enigmatic little owls are resident in the wooded hills of the east bay in low numbers, but we have proven (by recapturing at other locations) that a good percentage of our owls are migrating through in the fall. Our site is part of **Project OwlNet**, a NSOW banding program across North America that studies the movements of the species to understand the timing, pace, and intensity of their migration.

This year we only managed to capture eight NSOW's, along with one Western Screech Owl. These were all hatch-year birds (determined by pigmentation and uniform age of wing feathers). This is the lowest yearly number in our 5 years of banding, as shown in the graphic below, but the effort was still worthwhile. Most of the birds we capture every year are hatch-year birds (HY in the graph below, where AHY stands for after hatch-year, since it is impossible to determine the age of the owl after its first season). Also, the vast majority of the birds we capture are females (determined by weight, as they average larger and heavier than males), likely drawn in by a recording of a male calling, in the hopes that they will be fed by it!



Owls caught by year at the Las Trampas Banding Station

This fall we again offered a limited number of field trips to members. Those lucky enough to be in attendance during a capture were treated to closeup views of these fascinating creatures, that are quite unlikely to be seen otherwise. We will offer field trips again next fall, so stay tuned for the announcement of our schedule this coming September.



One of the Las Trampas Northern Saw-Whet Owls recaptured at Blue Lake California in 2022

Photo by Maycee Hash

From 50 Years Ago - *The Quail*, March 1974

Jerry Britten, *MDBA President*

This is of interest because there was an unconfirmed report of a Snowy Owl on Jan 31, 2024 at the Oakland Airport. The last time this bird was confirmed in the East Bay was 50 years ago, in February near the same place. This news was reported in the March 1974 issue below.

More Snowy Owls have turned up in the area. One at Bodega Bay Jan. 30 at least through Feb. 5, one on rooftops at Alameda South Shore Feb. 9-14, and one (possibly the one from Alameda) was in Berkeley Feb. 16 when it was seen on a telephone pole outside the International Bird Rescue Research Center. It is such a shame that so many of these lovely creatures have been shot in the state this winter. The more fortunate of those have been cared for and will be returned to their northern home. Even the stiff fines meted out to those who have been caught shooting Snowy Owls seems not to have stopped this highly illegal activity---these birds are a protected species.

Diablo Young Naturalists Is Here

Support This MDBA Program on Social Media



After a hiatus, the Young Birders Program is back on its feet and taking flight this spring as the Diablo Young Naturalists ([HERE](#))! Mount Diablo Bird Alliance volunteers will host 'pop-up' tables on different trails and parks in the area to connect with potential members and spread the word. Our goal is to encourage young people to get outdoors, appreciate birds, and develop an interest in the incredible range of plants, fungi, mammals, insects, and everything else the natural world has to offer.

You can help! If you're on Instagram, follow, like, and share content from 'diabloyoungnaturalists'. We'll also have a YouTube channel up and running later this month.

Know of any young people that might be interested in the group? Tell them to follow on Instagram so they'll know when we do events!

MDAS Trip Report

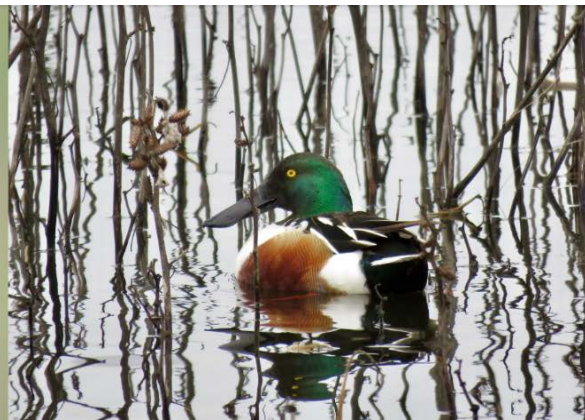
The Delta and Cosumnes Preserve

Matt Tarlach



California Towhee

Photo by Vicky Atkinson



Northern Shoveler

Photo by Isaac Aronow



Snow Geese

Photos by Vicky Atkinson



Golden-crowned Sparrow

Photo by Issac Aronow

Sandhill Crane

Photo by Issac Aronow

On February 3rd, a flock of fifteen birders set out for the California Delta, a rich environment that hosts millions of wintering birds. We met at Westgate Landing Regional Park near Terminous, where the small campground attracts sparrows and raptors. A Merlin was the highlight here. After climbing to the top of the nearby levee, we saw waterbirds swimming in the Middle River. From our high vantage point, we scanned distant flocks of Snow Geese, Tundra Swans, and Sandhill Cranes in the surrounding fields.

Continuing to the Woodbridge Ecological Preserve, we spotted a variety of ducks, including Northern Pintails, Northern Shovelers, and Green-winged Teal. We also had a close-up view of eight Wilson's Snipe out in the open. We learned that the collective noun for a group of snipe is a "walk," though it might be more fun to call them a "hunt of snipe."

Our primary destination for the day was the Cosumnes River Preserve, which straddles Franklin Road north of Thornton. The preserve features riparian woodland on the east and expansive restored wetlands on the west. Here we saw thousands of Snow Geese, including good views of three birds exhibiting the rare "blue morph" plumage. We also observed many duck species, with the highlight perhaps being a lone pair of beautiful Blue-winged Teal seen at fairly close range.

MDAS Field Trips

Matt Tarlach, *MDBA Field Trip Chair*



MDAS mounts dozens of Field Trips throughout the year, ranging from easy, accessible strolls around our local parks to longer outings, including some vigorous hikes. On each field trip, one or more leaders guides our group to the best hotspots, in the best season... but the bird-spotting is really a team effort. *Come birding with us!*

You can see the field trip checklists we've recorded since transitioning to electronic records [here](#).

To ensure that trips are not overcrowded, pre-registration through Eventbrite is required. MDAS members have priority with member sign ups opening as soon as the trip is announced in our newsletter. Non-members are welcome on our trips too! Registration opens to the public a week before the trip.

All registration closes *2 days before the trip*, so leaders can know how many to expect. If you won't be able to attend a trip that you've signed up for, please cancel via Eventbrite as *early as possible* to open that spot up for someone else!

Out of respect for our members and community, we continue to ask participants to take sensible precautions for everyone's health. MDAS events do not require carpooling, though participants are of course free to make their own arrangements.

Field trips are ranked according to difficulty:

Trail Rating 1: Easy. Little walking, under 1 mile, on smooth paths.

Trail Rating 2: Moderate. 1 mile or more, possibly some rough terrain.

Trail Rating 3: Challenging. Extensive walking and climbing on rough terrain!

We always need new trip leaders! Please contact our field trip coordinator, **Matt Tarlach**. If you'd like some guidance in leading trips, he might be able to pair you up with an experienced leader who can show you the ropes.

A Poorwill Quest!

Thursday, February 29, 6:00 PM - 7:30 PM



Common Poorwill

Photo by Jerry Britten

Hike up a fire road on the east face of North Peak in Mount Diablo State Park to see Common Poorwills as they forage for moths along the fire roads through the chaparral. They will be detected by their eyeshine from our lights.

This is a nocturnal hike. It is Trail Category 3 because, although only 2 miles round-trip, the road is quite steep and there is a stream crossing near the trailhead with the possibility of getting wet feet. Bring layers, wellington-type boots that can be stashed in the bushes after the stream crossing for normal hiking wear, and a flashlight/headlamp. Expect to be in the field for ~1.5 hrs.

Trail Rating: 3 --- Strenuous. Read trip details!

Elevation change: Substantial, steep in places, and we will be descending after dark.

Leader: Jerry Britten

Meet: GPS 37°53'58.7"N 121°52'24.5"W

Directions: From Clayton drive east on Marsh Creek Road. Turn right on Morgan Territory Road and go about out 1500', to a turnout on the right.

This field trip is limited to 5 Participants max, due to limited parking and the need for quiet.

Sign up [HERE](#).

Valle Vista

Monday, March 18, 8AM - Noon



Red-breasted Sapsucker

Photo by Isaac Aronow

A walk through various habitats at the EBMUD property usually allows us to see at least 40-50 species. Bring your EBMUD trail pass, if you have one. This property is at the upstream end of the Upper San Leandro Reservoir. If it has been raining, the first part could be a bit muddy but most of the route is on a gravel trail or a road.

Trail Rating: Category 2, Moderate

Elevation change: Some minor changes

Leader: Ted Robertson, 925-899-1872

Meet: Valle Vista Staging Area, Canyon Road

Directions: From SR 24 in Orinda, take Moraga Way to Moraga. From Mt. Diablo Blvd in Lafayette, take Moraga Road south to Moraga. At the Chevron station, go south 1 mile on Canyon Road to Valle Vista Staging Area.

This field trip is limited to 16 participants, with pre-registration required. MDBA members receive priority in registration but non-members are welcome, if we have enough spots.

Register [HERE](#).

Introducing the Birds of Heather Farm

Tuesday, March 26, 8:30 AM - 10:30 AM



White Breasted Nuthatch

Photo by Matt Tarlach

This event, which I'll try to hold monthly, is a casual bird walk meant to be beginner friendly. These walks will be promoted beyond MDBA, at Walnut Creek City Parks and Wild Birds Unlimited. Signups are limited to 10 to ensure beginners can receive personal attention.

Experienced birders from MDBA don't need to sign up in advance for this event! If you're a member and will come prepared to share your experience with new birders--- both members of our chapter and not-yet-members---please just come by! (Advance signup is still necessary for our other trips.)

Details [HERE](#).

North Briones

Tuesday, April 9, 8:30 AM - Noon



Red-tailed Hawk

Photo by Issac Aronow

This walk begins in oak woodlands with lots of spring wildflowers and birds. We then continue through grasslands ending at Sindicich Lagoons. We return the way we came, with about 3 miles round trip over hilly dirt trails. Bring liquids & a snack if you wish.

Trail Rating: Category 3 - hilly trails.

Elevation change: 300+ feet

Leader: Cheryl Abel, 925-957-6229

Meet: Parking area at the north entrance of Briones Regional Park.

Directions: Take Briones Road off Alhambra Valley Road and drive up this narrow, winding road, park at the end.

The field trip is limited to 15 participants. Participants must acknowledge the MDBA Liability Waiver.

Register [Here](#).

Orinda Connector Trail

Tuesday, April 16, 8 AM - 11:30 AM



Wilson's Warbler

Photo by Cassie Tzur

A walk through an EBMUD property requires a trail permit. If you have one, bring it with you. We'll walk downhill through riparian woods to San Pablo Creek, then across some open lands toward the face of Briones Dam. Wood Ducks are possible though hard to find; some spring birds will have arrived.

Trail Rating: Category 2-Moderate

Elevation change: Moderate

Leader: Ted Robertson, 925-899-1872

Meet: Trailhead at Camino Pablo and Bear Creek Road

Directions: Exit SR-24 at Orinda and turn north on Camino Pablo. Drive just over 2 miles to the intersection with Bear Creek Road. The trailhead parking is on the right, near the northeast corner of the intersection.

Due to limited space along the trail this field trip is limited to 12 participants.

Register [HERE](#).

March Gallery & Media



Life History of the Black Falcon with Dr. Steve Debus

See the full video [HERE](#)



An Asteroid Wiped Out Dinosaurs, Did It Help Birds Flourish?

Read the article [HERE](#).

Photo: Noah Isakov/ [Macaulay Library ML 405298031](#)



California Scrub-Jay / Deschutes, Oregon, United States

Photo: [Tom Rohrer / Macaulay Library ML 614711001](#)



Ruby-crowned Kinglet/ Carson City, Nevada, United States

Photo: [Lynn Duncan](#) / [Macaulay Library ML 614721482](#)

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Mount Diablo Bird Alliance

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