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Mount Diablo Bird Alliance

The Quail

Volume 69, Number 9

October 2024

Next Monthly Program Meeting: Thursday, October 3, 7 PM

Mount Diablo Bird Alliance will meet Thursday, October 3rd 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: Wildlife Photography

Our Raffle table's success relies heavily on your fantastic donations! We're on the lookout for awesome bird-related items or anything similar, like books, art, collectables,

feeders, bird boxes, and camera equipment. Basically, anything you think someone might be interested in buying raffle tickets for.

Feel free to bring your donations to our meetings. Your generosity is greatly appreciated!

Wildlife Photography

Vishal Subramanyan



Mountain Lion

All photos by V. Subramanyan

Vishal Subramanyan will share some of his amazing photos and the techniques he uses to capture remarkable images. Vishal is a 21 year old wildlife photographer and undergraduate at the University of California, Berkeley. Using camera traps, telephoto lenses, and other photography techniques, he aims to capture unique imagery that raises awareness about conservation and inspires community action. With an academic background in ecology, he integrates science into his storytelling efforts, using his knowledge of the animals and environments to create compelling stories.

Vishal has been photographing since he was 14 years old, when he went on a trip to Alaska with his dad. He had always wanted to see the bears fishing salmon, and immediately got hooked onto photography when he picked up a camera there. Since then, he has been working on conservation stories across California. His work with bobcats in the Bay Area has earned him both local coverage and international recognition.

An important part of his work is directly engaging with his community. Vishal regularly gives speaking engagements in the Bay Area and beyond, where he's able to connect with a wide audience of nature lovers. With a community of over 100,000 followers on social media, he's been able to share stories of California's wildlife with global audiences.

Currently, he is in his final year of university, and is collaborating with the National Park Service, UC Berkeley, National Geographic, and local non-profits on various science and storytelling projects across the state.

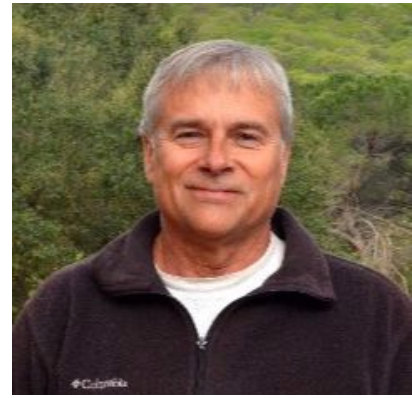


President's Letter

Jerry Britten, *MDBA President*

Like many of you, I'm sure, I keep a yard list of birds I've seen or heard on our property over the years. It is now up to 115 species. New visitors this year were a surprising Rock Wren at the top of our hill, a transient that I was lucky to notice, and Hooded

Orioles, several of which hung out for weeks, feeding from an immense flowering agave that supported many orioles and other birds this past summer. It is always exciting to record new species, as well as to anticipate the return of migrants, wintering birds, and breeding birds that arrive in the spring.



Some of my most notable sightings in the yard over the years were a Pileated Woodpecker for a few minutes in June 2015, a small flock of Red Crossbills that visited for several weeks in the spring of 2020, a Yellow-breasted Chat in spring 2020 and again in 2024, and a gorgeous male Rose-breasted Grosbeak in July 2022. I've even seen an escaped Lilac-crowned Parrot several times over the years that has become associated with crows and flies overhead making a respectable imitation of a crow's caw.

In Chapter news, we extend our sincerest condolences to Rosita Ortega Harvey and her family on the passing of one of our dearest members, Hugh Harvey. Please see the write-up about Hugh by Rosalie Howarth in this issue. But, we are happy to learn that Rosita has agreed to continue as Hospitality Director for our monthly meetings.

Speaking of monthly meetings, we are going to be phasing out supplying disposable cups for punch, coffee, etc., and will be offering durable logo cups of some sort to attendees, starting in 2025. Please get yourself into the habit of bringing your own beverage container to the meetings! Due to a scheduling conflict with the venue, our December monthly meeting will be on Thursday, December 12th, instead of the usual first Thursday of the month. We will, of course, send out reminders in the November Quail and by other means.

Thanks for reading, and get out there for the birds!



Hooded Oriole, home. Photo by J. Britten

MDBA Annual Treasurer's Report - 2024

Steve Buffi, *MDBA Treasurer*

The Mount Diablo Bird Alliance (MDBA) is thriving! Thanks to your generous support, we've had another successful year with a strong fundraising drive and growing membership.

Your contributions directly fuel our mission to connect people and birds. We use your donations to fund a variety of programs and resources, including:

- **Monthly educational programs**
- **Our informative newsletter, *The Quail***
- **The annual Christmas Bird Count**
- **Our website**
- **Donations to organizations that align with our mission, such as land trusts, bird rehabilitation programs, and educational initiatives**
- **Community Science Projects for Owls, Wood Ducks, Tricolored Blackbirds and more**

Every dollar you donate makes a real difference in our community.

To ensure our long-term financial stability at the start of the 2020-2021 fiscal year, the MDBA Board decided to implement a new financial strategy. Our General Fund is now divided into two parts:

- **Reserve Fund:** Holds funds to cover one year of operating expenses (excluding donations).
- **Excess Fund:** Supports increased donations to other bird-focused organizations. Currently, the Board aims to retain \$20,000 in this fund and will continue making donations until this level is reached.

Your continued support allows us to make a positive impact on our local bird populations and their habitats. Thank you for being a part of the MDBA community!

July 2023 – June 2024

| Funds | Revenue | Expenses | Net | Fund Balance 7/1/2024 |
|--------------------|-----------|-----------|-------------|--------------------------|
| General | 28,311.17 | 18,764.01 | 9,547.16 | - |
| Reserve | - | - | - | 20,000.00 |
| Excess | 92.77 | 23,350.12 | (23,257.35) | 66,501.74 |
| Total All Funds | 28,403.94 | 42,114.13 | (13,710.19) | 86,501.74 |

Membership Updates

Rochelle Fortier, *MDBA Membership Chair*

Welcome New Members! I want to give a warm welcome to the new members who joined in August: **Matthew and Trisha Brown**, Clayton; **Julio Mulero**, Palo Alto; **Anna Sekera**, Walnut Creek; and **Madison Tolan**, San Diego. I hope to see you at our next program meeting in October!



Remembering Hugh Harvey

Rosalie Howarth with Rosita Harvey



Photo by Rosita Harvey

With great sorrow, we received the news of Hugh Harvey's passing on August 19th. His loss leaves an aching void in our chapter. He was a unique character; a super-sharp birder with a big warm heart. Everyone who ever met Hugh remembered him.

Hugh was a member of our chapter for 36 years, joining in 1988. The next year, he brought his new bride to her first meeting, and we've been fortunate to have Rosita Ortega Harvey with us ever since as a devoted member and a dedicated volunteer.

Hugh led field trips for 25 years and sat on our board of directors for 20 years. He served as Field Trip Chair for 16 years. He took part in countless CBC's and volunteered for bird surveys at various locations, including the Least Tern colony in Alameda. He took part in the No Child Left Inside program in Contra Loma and supported the Peregrine Team in Pine Canyon. He led additional Birdwalks for Wild Birds Unlimited in its early days. For his extraordinary service, Hugh was awarded National Audubon's "Great Egret Award" at a chapter meeting two years ago.

Hugh was also a conduit to the early days of our chapter, which was founded some 71 years ago. He knew many of the original and heritage members: people like Bob Wisecarver, the legendary barn owl and bat box builder; Al McNabney, for whom McNabney Marsh is named; famed painter and founding member Harry C. Adamson; and Jean Richmond, whose copious field notes from the 1970s we are in the process of digitizing for Cornell.

Even before he retired from his career in the Merchant Marines in 2007, Hugh supported older members of the chapter by planning birding trips for them almost every Tuesday – he called them his "Tuesday Girlfriends." These were some of the feisty long-time ladies who established and grew our chapter, contributed to its financial stability, and founded many of its traditions, such as the annual Yuba Pass weekend trip. Hugh connected us to our chapter's history with detailed stories about legendary members, rare sightings, and tussles with city and county agencies on environmental issues.

Hugh lugged his heavy scope along on many field trips and encouraged shy newbies to peer through it. He insisted that children be allowed to look first. He patiently helped new birders spy the elusive bird in heavy foliage. He encouraged anyone who showed interest in attending chapter meetings. He 'sparked' many a new birder.

Rather than one Life List, Hugh had many lists, each with its own rules and regions. He had a U.S. list that numbered 700 species...but that was only for the continental 49. Hawaii was on a separate list. Together, Hugh and Rosita traveled

to 46 U.S. states and Canada, as well as to Chile, Mexico, Ecuador & the Galapagos, Cuba, Costa Rica, Bolivia, and Peru. His lists include only indigenous birds; he never tallied introduced species. Rosita keeps finding new lists, but she hasn't yet found "one list to rule them all."

But for any bird on any list, he could tell you the date and time he first saw it, the exact location, and who was with him at the time. He had a photographic memory for birds, butterflies, insects; any and all wildlife he encountered.

Hugh kept a list for Heather Farm Park which numbered 118 species over 30 years. A small group of birders regularly encountered him on his daily walks around the Nature Lake at the park; the "mostly natural pond," as he referred to it. He always traveled counter-clockwise on these circuits.

Hugh could be spotted clear across the lake, with his signature pink cap for breast-cancer awareness, and his vintage green Schwinn bicycle...which he had owned since he was 10 years old! Same bike for 64 years. Rosita would joke: "That bike is as old as I am!" We'd cross paths with him at the Observation Deck, at Big Oak Beach, at the Boat Ramp, or along Sparrow stretch (formerly Sparrow Corner) where he would scatter seed during White-crowned season. He'd tell us whether it was a 5-heron species day, or a rare 7-sparrow day. He'd report the kildeer nesting on ball field 4, and whether the Queenfisher (his nickname for the female Belted Kingfisher) was chittering on the island. We'd tell him whether the Caspian Tern had been patrolling the lake or if the Osprey had turned up. He'd show us the nests that he and Rosita discovered: the hanging bushtit socks, the hummer in the willow at the concrete pond, the Nuttall's hole in the old oak at Gallinule Gap. And we all tracked sightings of the improbable Tropical Kingbird for five years in a row until it finally disappeared for good.

We all loved Hugh's gently humorous emails and postings on East Bay Birds. He steadfastly refused to own a cell phone or go near social media, but shared by email many interesting bird stories from various sources.

We'll all miss Hugh at Heather Farm. But on certain mornings, maybe the cold frosty ones when the tule mist shrouds the water, perhaps we'll catch a glimpse of a pink hat or a green fender disappearing behind the reeds, and we'll know that Hugh is once again circumnavigating the "mostly natural pond"...

...Counter-clockwise, of course.

From 50 Years Ago - The Quail, November 1974

Jerry Britten, *MDBA President*

This snippet highlighted a study that banded and tracked Canada Geese. The population of this species going from an endangered species in 1962 to, in some places, a nuisance species, is a remarkable conservation success story. I wonder if anyone bands and tracks Canada Geese anymore...

COLOR-MARKED CANADA GEESE wearing neck bands, black on orange in color, are part of a study to ascertain range and distribution of the breeding population of geese using the Umatilla NWR portion of the Columbia River. The bands carry a 2 letter and 2 number code. Information pertaining to sightings or recoveries of these birds should be reported on Federal Form 3-1807 to Bird Banding Laboratory, Office of Migratory Bird Management, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Laurel MD 20810. Or by card or letter to Oregon Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit, Nash Hall, Oregon State Univ., Corvallis, OR 97331. Include name and address and, if possible, date of sighting or recovery, location; type of recovery (sighting, hunter kill, etc.); activity of bird (feeding, nesting, migrating, etc.). Any assistance in relocating these birds will be most appreciated.

Memorial for Jim "Doc" Hale

November 3rd, 1 PM - 3 PM

Alan Bade



Photo by A. Bade

In October 2023, Jim "Doc" Hale passed away. Jim (or Doc, as many of us called him) was a professional vertebrate zoologist and wildlife biologist. He worked as an ecological consultant for over 47 years throughout California. His vast knowledge, experience, and infectious enthusiasm for our local fauna and flora were deeply inspiring to many trying to preserve it.

I met him a few years ago when large adult (24" to 40") Chinook salmon were running up our local creeks during strong winter storms. A group of us was enlisted to document them through photography and fishing (legally, with barbless hooks, catch and release) to confirm the species. This was a continuation of work that Doc and others had done for many years in an effort to make our local creeks more hospitable to anadromous fish. Doc was interested in (and taught us about) everything we saw, from the smallest invertebrates to crayfish, birds, and, of course, the magnificent fish.

I encourage anyone who wants to learn more about Doc to read this [remembrance](#) on Save Mount Diablo's website and his [obituary](#) from the East Bay Times.

A memorial is planned to celebrate Doc's life. Register [HERE](#). He will be greatly missed.

2024 Northern Saw-whet Owl Banding Schedule

Jerry Britten, *MDBA President*

Our ongoing Northern Saw-whet Owl banding project will be moving to a new location this year, in Briones Regional Park near Springhill Access, in hopes of increasing the number of owls captured, banded, and studied. We will once again be offering field trips on a limited basis, where guests can join members of the banding team for an evening under the stars and a chance to get up close and personal with these tiny, charismatic owls, along with other nocturnal creatures such as Western Screech-Owls.

Visitors must be able to hike up a short, steep hill on uneven terrain, sometimes in cold weather. Due to the nature of the program, guest participation is limited to a maximum of five people per outing. Bring layers of clothing, snacks, water, a flashlight, and a portable chair.

Please reach out to Master Bander **Julie Woodruff** to reserve your spot and get directions to the site! The following dates and times are available (although subject to change). **Rain or windy conditions cancel!**

2024 Northern Saw-whet Owl Banding Field Trip Schedule. Maximum 5 Participants per date.

| Date | | Time |
|----------------|--|---------------|
| Saturday 10-19 | | 18:30 - 22:00 |
| Friday 10-25 | | 18:30 - 22:00 |
| Friday 11-1 | | 18:30 - 22:00 |
| Friday 11-15 | | 17:00 - 21:00 |

Walnut Creek Watershed Planning Event

Alan Bade, *Community Science*



You are invited to a Watershed Planning event in Pleasant Hill!

The Contra Costa Resource Conservation District, the Contra Costa Flood Control & Water Conservation District, and the Walnut Creek Watershed Council are working together with community stakeholders to create a Watershed Restoration Plan for the Walnut Creek Watershed. Pleasant Hill's creeks include Grayson Creek and tributaries, Murderer's Creek, and the old Walnut Creek in the Ellinwood area.

The Walnut Creek Watershed Restoration Plan will identify potential restoration opportunities in and near creeks and wetlands to improve natural habitats for birds, fish and other wildlife, improve water quality, reduce fire risk, minimize maintenance, and increase opportunities for the public to connect to nature. The creek and wetland opportunity sites we identify will help guide restoration activities in the watershed for the next 20-30 years.

We seek your input! Come join us to learn about these efforts and provide feedback. Please RSVP [HERE](#).

DATE: Monday, October 7, 2024

TIME: 3:00 PM - 5:00 PM

ADDRESS:

Pleasant Hill Community Center (McHale Room)
320 Civic Drive
Pleasant Hill, CA 94523

For more information, contact **Alan Bade**.

MDBA Trip Report

Point Reyes

Matt Tarlach



Great-horned Owl



Barn Owl

Photos by Julio Molero



Virginia Rail

Photo by Maren Smith



Heermann's Gull

Photo by Julio Molero



Coyote



Elephant Seals

Photos by Maren Smith

On September 7, a dozen MDBA members and guests ventured to outer Point Reyes, a prime birding hotspot during migration season. Though fog obscured the lighthouse, we spotted some excellent birds at the restored lagoon at Drake's Beach, including three Virginia Rails foraging in the open. Owls were another highlight, with sightings of three Great Horned Owls and two Barn Owls.

Tilden Park

Matt Tarlach



Hermit Warbler



Black Phoebe



Spotted Towhee

Song Sparrow

All Photos by Becky Matsubara

On Monday, September 9, a dozen early-rising birders gathered at Tilden Park in search of migrant passerines. We were rewarded with excellent close-up views of a Hermit Warbler, among many other birds. Though the rare Hooded Warbler recently reported there eluded us, we remain hopeful for next time!

Mt. Wanda

Cheryl Abel



Chestnut-backed Chickadee

Acorn Woodpecker



American White Pelicans



Great-horned Owl



All Photos by Kannan Soundararajan

A lovely morning on Mt. Wanda was enjoyed by 16 birders including an enthusiastic couple visiting all the way from India! Acorn Woodpeckers were everywhere so everyone got good looks at them. A flock of American White Pelicans flew overhead. The highlight for most was seeing a Great Horned Owl roosting along the ravine section of the Nature Trail. It was a life bird for the couple from India. Heading back down toward the trailhead we found a flock of Bushtits feeding on the last of the berries on a

poison oak vine. Last, but not least, a coyote made a quick appearance near the trailhead. 26 species of birds were seen or heard on the walk.

MDBA Field Trips

Matt Tarlach, *MDBA Field Trip Chair*



Update from the Field Trips Coordinator

MDBA mounts dozens of Field Trips throughout the year, ranging from easy, accessible strolls around our local parks to longer expeditions to more distant sites, and 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. MDBA members have priority, with member sign ups opening as soon as the trip is announced in our newsletter. Non-members are welcome 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.

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!

Out of respect for our members and community, we ask participants to take sensible precautions for everyone's health when carpooling and sharing spaces.

We always need new trip leaders! It's fun, and a meaningful contribution to our chapter's mission of education and outreach. Please contact our Field Trip Coordinator, Matt Tarlach, at mdbafieldtrips@gmail.com

If you have a favorite birding spot you'd like to share with your fellow members but would like some help leading the trip, Matt can probably pair you up with an experienced trip leader.

If you're looking for still more bird-related outings in our area, the East Bay Regional Park District holds a variety of events. Go to their Birding page [here](#) and click View Activities.

Introducing the Birds of Heather Farm

Monday, October 14, 8:00 AM to 10:30 AM



White-breasted Nuthatch

Sign up [HERE](#)

Heather Farm Park in Walnut Creek is an underrated birding spot, home to dozens of resident species. We'll hope to see some migrating birds as well! We'll meet at the overlook of the Natural Lake, west of North San Carlos Drive, about 100 yards beyond the community center.

At 8:00AM an experienced birder or two will be on hand to demonstrate how to properly use binoculars, and to discuss birding guidebooks and apps. We'll be scanning the lake to see which ducks and other birds might be arriving to spend the winter. When we're good and ready, we'll set off on a walk around the lake and adjacent Nature Area---an easy stroll of about half a mile on level, accessible trails. Along the way we'll hope to see and hear sparrow, finch, woodpecker and warbler, along with nuthatch and dove. Wrens, thrushes, herons, and raptors are often found here too... though in birding, as in life, nothing is guaranteed! Our guides will explain what features on the birds to look for, to begin to tell one from the other.

We should be done around 10:30. Birders of all experience levels are welcome! Bring binoculars if you have them; we'll also have a few pairs to borrow.

Hike rating: Category 1 -- about 1/2 mile total walking, mostly on accessible trails

Elevation change: 0 ft

Leader: Matt Tarlach, 925-482-6129, mdbafieldtrips@gmail.com

Meet: Natural Lake at Heather Farm Park

North San Carlos Drive

Walnut Creek, CA 94598

GPS: 37.921260813409184, -122.04358260674651

Alameda Hotspots

Saturday, October 26, 8:30 AM - 1 PM



Long-billed Curlew

Photo by Maren Smith

Register [HERE](#)

Alameda has several good spots for shorebirds. We'll probably visit Elsie Roemer Bird Sanctuary, Ballena Bay, and Crab Cove, with the exact itinerary to be determined. Meeting point will be in Alameda; registered attendees will be notified of the exact starting point and other details by email, a day or two before the trip.

Hike Rating: Easy

Elevation change: N/A

Leader: Mona Lange

Meet: Elsie Roemer Bird Sanctuary

Broadway and Shoreline

Alameda, CA 94501

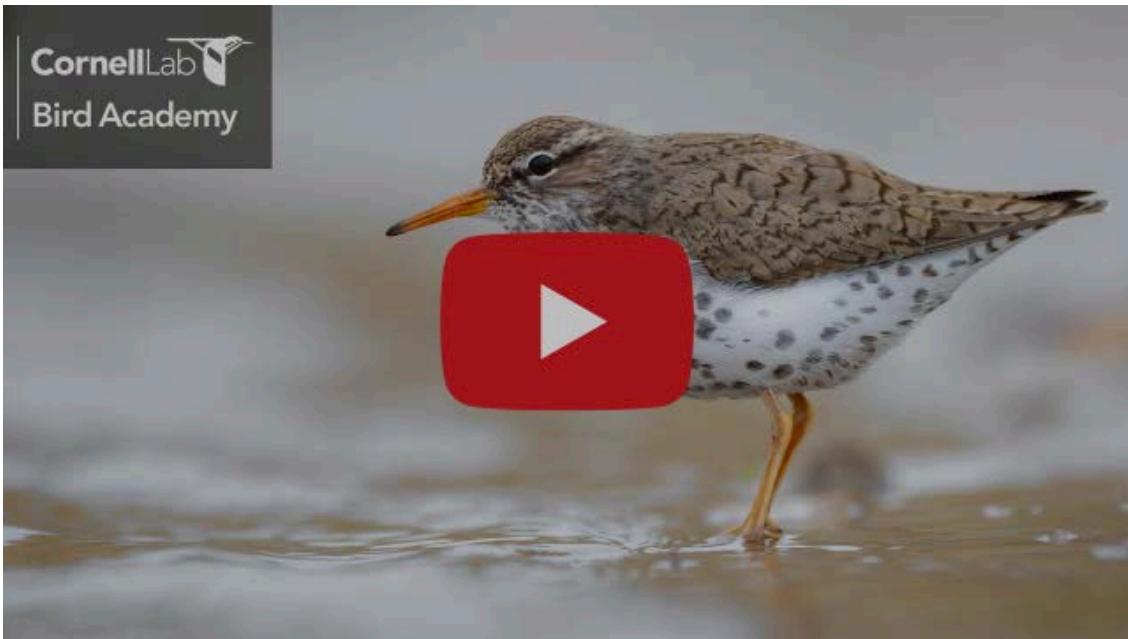
This hike is limited to 15 participants. Participants need to acknowledge the MDBA Liability Waiver, available during registration.

Hawk Hill CANCELLED



Unfortunately, a planned trip to Hawk Hill in Marin has been cancelled. If you'd like to watch for raptors there mid-September through late October is prime time! The hours from 11am to 2pm are usually best, depending on weather. Consider using our new MDBA email group to connect with other members and arrange your own outing: <https://groups.io/g/Mt-Diablo-Bird-Alliance>

October Gallery & Media



Keys to ID: Spotted Sandpiper

See the full video [HERE](#)



Get to Know the Misunderstood Canada Goose

Read the article [HERE](#)

Photo: Daniel Jauvin / [Macaulay Library ML 52523161](#)



Tropical Parula/ Los Angeles, California, United States

Photo: [Dorian Charnis / Macaulay Library ML 623783727](#)



Mountain Chickadee / Salt Lake, Utah United States

Photo: [Katharine Spencer](#) / [Macaulay Library ML 623824627](#)

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Mount Diablo Bird Alliance

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