



# Mount Diablo Bird Alliance

## *The Quail*

Volume 70, Number 8

October 2025

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### October Monthly Program Meeting: Thursday, October 2, 7 PM

Mount Diablo Bird Alliance will meet Thursday, October 2 in the Camellia Room at the Gardens at Heather Farm.

#### **Address:**

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

**Please note that MDBA no longer provides disposable cups at our meetings.**

If you would like to enjoy water, punch, or tea, please bring your own cup.

We will have a few reusable cups available if you need one. We appreciate your cooperation.

#### **Agenda:**

6:30 PM Doors Open

7:00 PM Announcements

7:15 PM Refreshments and Raffle

7:30 PM Main Program: Woodpeckers - A Year in the Life of North American Woodpeckers

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. Your generosity is greatly appreciated!

If you have such items but are unable to attend meetings, please contact [info@mtdiablobirds.org](mailto:info@mtdiablobirds.org) and we will try and arrange a pickup from local addresses.

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## **Woodpecker: A Year in the Life of North American Woodpeckers**

Paul Bannick







Paul's program is based on his new book, ***Woodpecker: A Year in the Life of North American Woodpeckers***. In both the program and the book, award-winning photographer **Paul Bannick** uses his intimate yet dramatic images, up-to-date science, and **firsthand narratives** to explore the lives of North American Woodpeckers through four seasons. These seasons include: **courtship, mating, and nesting** in spring; **fledging and feeding of young** in summer; **dispersal and gaining independence** in fall; and, finally, **winter movements and survival**. His exploration of these impactful birds and their habitats covers species from the **Arctic** through **southern Mexico**, including those of the **Caribbean Islands**.

Bannick's **striking images** reflect the woodpeckers' shared behaviors as well as some surprising exceptions and adaptations. More than just a backdrop, the varied habitats **reveal** wildly rich stories of their own.

***Woodpecker: A Year in the Life of North American Woodpeckers*** is a stunning follow-up to Bannick's award-winning title, ***Owl: A Year in the Lives of North American Owls***. It gives bird lovers yet another gorgeous photographic tribute, engaging natural history, and a compelling call to preserve the habitats that sustain these most iconic of birds.

Paul Bannick is an award-winning author and photographer who creates images to inspire **education and conservation**.

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## President's Letter

Rochelle Fortier, *MDBA Membership Chair*

**Jerry Britten** is no longer the President of the Mount Diablo Bird Alliance as he's now settled in his new Arizona territory. The board's decided to rotate presidential duties, so you'll hear from a different board member in each issue of **The Quail!**

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MDBA Donation to California Bird Atlas

**Forty-four** states across the United States have already produced a statewide breeding bird atlas, but California has yet to create one. A new nonprofit, the **California Bird Atlas**, was recently established with the mission of producing this essential statewide resource. Mr. **Van Pierszalowski**, the Executive Director, presented at an MDBA Board meeting, and the Board subsequently voted to give a **\$10,000** donation to this worthy cause. Once the atlas is completed, the data will guide future decision-makers on conservation efforts for birds. For more details, see **Juan Pablo Galván's** article below.



## Oak Galls and Habitat Restoration Volunteer Efforts

The oak trees at **Heather Farm Park** have thousands of small, red cone galls on their leaves! Different species of tiny wasps lay eggs on the leaf or stem. After the larva hatches, the oak tree responds by forming a specific type of gall. Woodpeckers will drill into a round gall, grab the larva, and feed it to their young. **Janna Layton**, one of our board members, took the photo below of an adult **Downy Woodpecker** with its fledgling waiting for food in **Heather Farm Park**! Other birds, such as **Oak Titmice** and **nuthatches**, also use galls as a food source.

The fact that oaks are an important species for providing food for birds—not only with acorns but also through gall production—relates directly to habitat restoration in the park. The **City of Walnut Creek** chose to plant oak trees in new areas of **Heather Farm Park** because of the importance of these trees for birds and wildlife. These new trees will also replace others that will be removed to make way for the new **Community Center**.

In **Contra Costa County**, many organizations engage in habitat restoration or enhance existing habitat for birds and other wildlife. People working together over months and years make a significant difference. If you'd like to volunteer, here is a sample of local groups:

- **Friends of Lime Ridge** focuses on the ecological restoration of the park by planting oak and buckeye trees, maintaining native plant gardens, removing invasive plants, and conducting park clean-ups.
- **Walnut Creek Open Space Foundation** works on habitat restoration in the Walnut Creek Open Space areas of Acalanes Ridge, Lime Ridge, Shell Ridge, and Sugarloaf. It offers opportunities for planting oaks, watering, restoring grasslands, restoring ponds, invasive plant removal, and propagating plants.
- **Save Mount Diablo** has many different properties where volunteers engage in planting, watering, habitat restoration, creek cleanups, non-native plant removal, debris removal, fence building, trail construction, and other work.

I hope you can find some time to volunteer! Until the next issue of *The Quail*, Happy Birding and Get Out There for the Birds!





Valley Oak with Red Cone Galls

Photo by R. Fortier





Downy Woodpecker with Fledgling

Photo by Janna Layton

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## **Mount Diablo Bird Alliance Becomes Founding Partner of First-Ever State Breeding Bird Atlas**

Juan Pablo Galván, *Conservation*





Forty-four other states have a breeding bird atlas that covers their entire territory, but **California doesn't**. While the state has long led the way on a number of environmental issues, from protected areas to confronting the climate crisis, California still lacks a comprehensive baseline on its breeding birds. This baseline is one of the clearest indicators of overall **ecosystem health**.

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Founding Partnership: The California Breeding Bird Atlas

That is why we are very proud to announce that the **Mount Diablo Bird Alliance (MDBA)** is a founding partner of the first-ever statewide breeding bird atlas effort. This ambitious project will begin on the first day of next year and is scheduled to last five years.

This huge undertaking will involve volunteers, employees, academics, professional biologists, data experts, and, of course, amateur birders from every corner of California. Millions of dollars will be dedicated to this project.

Together with many other local bird alliance and Audubon chapters, the **Mount Diablo Bird Alliance has provided \$10,000 in support**. This contribution will secure essential research support, fund a customized, atlas-specific **eBird** portal

solely dedicated to the project, and allowed us to secure the **California Quail** as our sponsored species for this statewide bird research and conservation action.

An official public announcement will be made in **mid-October** to formally launch the Atlas. We will keep you informed about this exciting news! This effort is only possible because of your support!

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## New Members

Rochelle Fortier, *MDBA Membership Chair*

I would like to give a warm welcome to the new members who joined in August: **Emily Cheng** and **Ken Shih**, San Francisco; **Daphne Dale**, Lafayette; **David Edelson**, Berkeley; and **Nonie** and **Glenn Plizga**, Pleasant Hill. I hope to see you at our next program meeting!



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## Mount Diablo Bird Alliance Officer Responsibilities

Ariana Rickard, *Vice President*

As we continue our search for our new **President**, we thought it would be helpful for our members to understand the various roles and responsibilities of our current board members. Below is a summary of each board member's duties. All vacant positions bolded and italicized.

Executive Officers:

### ***President***

- Shall preside at all **MDBA** meetings.
- Shall appoint chairs of all Board and Advisory committees, subject to approval by a majority vote of the Board.
- Shall be an ex officio member of all Board committees, except for the nominating committee.
- Shall direct and administer the affairs of **MDBA** and supervise all phases of its work.
- The President may designate any officer or Board member to preside at **MDBA** meetings if the President is unable to do so.
- Prepares the board meeting agenda and facilitates the meeting.
- Writes the monthly President's letter.

## **Vice President**

- Shall assist the President in the performance of their duties.
- May be assigned special projects by the Board of Directors or the President.

## **Secretary**

- Shall keep a record of all **MDBA** Board meetings.
- Shall perform such other duties as the Board of Directors may require.

## **Treasurer**

- Shall have custody of the funds of **MDBA** and shall deposit all such funds as the Board of Directors may designate.
- Shall receive all membership dues.
- Shall disburse the funds of **MDBA** as directed by the Board of Directors.
- Shall render an annual report to **MDBA** within **90 days** of the close of the fiscal year.
- Shall give an accounting of funds and transactions at Board meetings and whenever the Board of Directors may require it.

## Committee Chairpersons and Other Roles:

### **Conservation Chairperson**

- Shall be in charge of all conservation matters pertaining to the goals of **MDBA**, including legislative action activities.

### ***Education Chairperson***

- Shall organize educational activities, such as birding classes and outreach to schools and the community, to promote birds, ecology, and conservation.

### **Field Trips Chairperson**

- Shall develop a schedule of field trips and designate the leaders for the trips.
- Shall ensure that field trips are announced to the membership via **The Quail** and other media.
- Shall recruit, encourage, train, and assist field trip leaders as needed.
- Shall report on these outings by forwarding trip reports to **The Quail** and **MDBA** social media.

### **Membership Chairperson**



- Shall welcome new members and guests.
- Shall maintain and update the membership database.
- Shall notify existing members of expiring memberships (via email and postcards).
- Shall update and create membership marketing materials.

### **Programs Chairperson**

- Shall arrange programs and birding information consistent with the aims and purposes of **MDBA**.

### **Publicity and Social Media Chairperson**

- Shall supply the print news media and social media platforms with information concerning the activities of **MDBA**.

### **Quail Editor**

- Shall be responsible for the publication of the chapter newsletter, **The Quail**.

### **Sales Manager**

- Shall handle sales and inventory of publications and merchandise.
- Shall conduct raffles and silent auctions at membership meetings.
- Shall maintain financial records of sales and transfer all receipts to the Treasurer.

### **Young Birders Club Chairperson**

- Shall mentor young birders through field trips and meetings.

### **Christmas Bird Count Chairperson**

- Shall coordinate the annual **Christmas Bird Count**.

### **Community Science Chairperson**

- Shall promote projects in which volunteers monitor birds and gather data.

### ***East Bay Birding Email Group Chairperson***

- Shall administer the **East Bay Birding Email Group**.

### **Hospitality Chairperson**

- Shall be in charge of refreshments served at general and special meetings.

### **Legislative Action Chairperson**

- Shall work with the Conservation Chairperson to promote activities concerning legislation involving birds and conservation.

### ***Outreach Coordinator***

- Shall publicize chapter activities and recruit volunteers for these activities.

### **Web Editor**

- Shall coordinate the maintenance of the **MDBA** website, including posting monthly field trips to the event calendar, posting the monthly **Quail** newsletter, and occasional content updates and fixes.
- Shall assist with the annual photo contest, including updating the photo contest details on the website, receiving entries via email, organizing entries for judging, and compiling results.

An **Honorary Advisor** position may also be created as appropriate.

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## **Hawk Hill Update**

Matt Tarlach, *Field Trip Coordinator*

Members visiting **Hawk Hill** in Marin County to witness the fall raptor migration should be advised that the summit area is closed to the public this year due to **construction**. The long-running **Hawkwatch** is still taking place, but only official volunteers in that program are permitted access to the top of the hill. Our **MDBA** field trips to Hawk Hill will resume next year.

More info [\*\*here\*\*](#).

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## Birding with Veterans

Matt Tarlach, *Field Trip Coordinator*

A therapist with the **Veterans Administration (VA)** has contacted our chapter, inquiring about assistance with his program to help veterans enjoy **positive outdoor experiences** through birding. If you'd like to support our military veterans by sharing your experience with birds and the natural world on short local outings, contact **Field Trip Coordinator, Matt Tarlach**.

This potential partnership is still in the **conceptual stage**, and your input would be very welcome.

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## Email Group!

**Mount Diablo Bird Alliance (MDBA)** members are invited to join our exclusive email group.

Members who seek a little more connectivity in between meetings and issues of *The Quail* can use the group to share local sightings, reminders about field trips and conservation opportunities, and local bird-related news. At this time, the message traffic amounts to only a few emails per week.

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### How to Join

This is an optional group for our members only—you did not get signed up automatically when you joined MDBA.

Click this **link** to join the group. If you don't already have an account at Groups.io, click **this** link to create one. It's free!

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## MDBA Trip Report

### Drakes Beach and Point Reyes, September 7

Report by: Matt Tarlach

The forecast called for **overcast skies and a light drizzle**, but it turned out to be a **beautiful day!** It was **sunny from the start**, with mild temperatures and a light wind.

At **Drake's Beach**, we spotted a **Virginia Rail** and a **Green Heron**, along with many **Common Yellowthroats**. The lagoon created behind Drake's Beach by the Park Service a few years ago has **grown in beautifully** and appears to be enriching the entire ecosystem.



Off Drake's Beach, in the far distance, we saw a string of **Cormorants** flying east to west across **Drakes Bay**—the line of birds sometimes seemed **endless**. There were probably **1,000 birds or more**. Closer in, we had **Heermann's Gulls** on the beach, along with **Surf Scoters**, a **Pacific Loon**, and a **Western Grebe**.

At the **Fish Docks**, we spotted several **Red-throated Loons**, including a nice view of one clearly showing its wine-red throat. Otherwise, birding here was slow, perhaps because migrating birds don't linger when the weather is fine.

In a pond beside the road, we had several **Red-throated Phalaropes**.

After lunch, a few of us continued to **Five Brooks**, south of Olema along Highway 1. It's a pleasant walk around the pond there, and we added **American Wigeon**, **Olive-sided Flycatcher**, **Western Flycatcher**, **Downy Woodpecker**, **Acorn Woodpecker**, and **Swainson's Thrush**. Twice we thought we heard a **Pileated Woodpecker**, but we never saw it nor positively identified the call.

We ended the day with **60 species**.

Ebird report [here](#).

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## **Vaux's Swifts @ McNear Backyard, September 11**

Report by: Matt Tarlach



Photos by M. Tarlach

On **September 11, 2025**, eight **MDBA** members traveled to **San Rafael** to watch migrating **Vaux's Swifts** return to their roost in the century-old chimneys there.

Over the course of **forty minutes** around sunset, we watched at least **21,000** of the tiny birds swirl and dive. At times, the collected birds looked like a vortex of smoke, descending into the chimney rather than rising from it.

*This count was determined by the expert bird-counters present, who monitor this phenomenon every evening throughout the migration season.*

Thanks to **Maureen Lahiff** for guiding us and to the **McNear family** for allowing access to this site.

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## **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 [mdbafielddtrips@gmail.com](mailto:mdbafielddtrips@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.

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## **Jewel Lake, Berkeley**

Wednesday, October 1, 8 AM - 11 AM



Wilson's Warbler

Photo by Jerry Britten

An easy walk along Wildcat Creek and around Jewel Lake in Tilden Park. We're scheduling this trip a little later in the season than in past years, which should give us a better chance of spotting Varied Thrushes, Golden-crowned Kinglets, and other wintering birds.

This trip is especially great for beginners! Please bring binoculars if you have them. If you need to borrow a pair, contact the leader in advance so he knows to bring some for you.

**Leader:** Matt Tarlach, 925-482-6129

**Hike Rating:** 1, Easy. One mile (or a bit more) of easy walking on flat paved and gravel trails.

**Elevation Change:** N/A

**Meet:** Parking lot at the end of Central Park Drive in Tilden Regional Park.

**GPS:** 37.90845590409606, -122.26411344372674

**Directions:** Take Highway 24 and exit at Fish Ranch Road. Turn right and go up the hill for 0.7 miles. Turn right onto Grizzly Peak Boulevard and follow it for 4.1 miles. Turn right onto Muir Way, then left onto Park Hills Road. Shortly after this turn, the road forks; bear right to stay on Park Hills Road. Watch for signs for "Little Farm," which is near the meeting point. Park Hills Road ends at Wildcat Canyon Road; turn right onto Wildcat Canyon, then immediately left onto Central Park Drive. Continue for about 1 mile on Central Park to the parking lot at the end, which is our meeting point.

Sign up [HERE](#).

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## Albany/Berkeley Shoreline

Wednesday, October 15, 10 AM - 1 PM



Clark's Grebe

Photo by Beth Branthaver

Our target birds will be shorebirds and possibly early-arriving loons, grebes, and bay ducks.

Our first stop will be to look for shorebirds on the mudflats at the Albany State Marine Reserve, off Buchanan Street. Meet the leader here at 10:00 a.m. If you have a spotting scope, please bring it. The leader will bring two scopes to share. This is a great trip for beginners.

**Trip Leader:** Ted Robertson, 925-899-1872

**Hike Rating:** Category 1, Easy. Less than 1 mile of walking on level trails.

**Directions:** Take SR 24 to I-580 West. Take the Buchanan Street exit (#13A), turn left on Buchanan Street, go under the freeway, and after half a block, parallel park on the right, across from the mudflat.

**GPS for meeting point:** 37.88949774217445, -122.3114975067703

After an hour or more of scanning for shorebirds, our second stop will be the Berkeley Meadows, which is part of McLaughlin Eastshore State Park, opposite the Berkeley Marina.

From the first meeting point on Buchanan Street, make a U-turn to head back to the freeway. Turn right onto the I-80 W/I-580 E ramp toward Oakland/San Francisco. Take the second exit (#11), the University exit toward the Berkeley Marina. Turn left onto University Avenue. At the traffic circle, take the first exit onto Marina Boulevard. In 0.2 miles, park in the dirt lot on the right side of the road.



After walking around Berkeley Meadows, we will have an optional third stop for birding and lunch at the Seabreeze Market, at the corner of University Avenue and W Frontage Road. For this optional stop, you can park behind the market.

It may be cold and windy, so please dress in layers and bring money for an optional lunch.

Register [HERE](#).

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## Alameda Hotspots

Saturday, October 18, 8:30 AM - 1 PM



Long-billed Curlew

Photo by Maren Smith

Alameda has several good spots for shorebirds. We'll meet at Elsie Roemer Bird Sanctuary, then proceed by caravan to additional spots such as Ballena Bay, Crab Cove, and/or Encinal Beach. Exact itinerary to be determined based on conditions.

**Hike Rating:** Easy. Limited walking over mostly-level paths at each of the planned spots.

**Leader:** Mona Lange, 510-414-2959, and Matt Tarlach, [mdbafieldtrips@gmail.com](mailto:mdbafieldtrips@gmail.com)

**Meeting Point:** Meet at the observation deck at Elsie Roemer Bird Sanctuary,

near the intersection of Broadway and Shoreline in the city of Alameda

**GPS:** 37.75308612136384, -122.24791837292823

Parking is on the street. There are public restrooms about 250 yards away, or at the nearby McDonald's.

This trip is limited to 15 participants. Participants acknowledge the MDBA Liability Waiver (available during registration).

Register [HERE](#).

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## October Gallery & Media



### How can Puffins Fly Both in the Air and Underwater

See the full video [HERE](#)

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## Protecting Birds While Honoring 9/11



Read the article [HERE](#)

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Northern Red Bishop / Santa Clara, California, United States

Photo: [Alice Church](#) / Macaulay Library ML 641839306

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American Barn Owl / Monterey, California, United States

Photo: **Stephen Davies** / Macaulay Library ML 641751483

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If you'd like to stay in touch more than once a month, sign up for our private email **discussion group**!

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**Mount Diablo Bird Alliance**

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