



# Mount Diablo Bird Alliance

## *The Quail*

Volume 70, Number 7

September 2025

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### **September Monthly Program Meeting: Thursday, September 4, 7 PM**

Mount Diablo Bird Alliance will meet Thursday, September 4 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 we will not provide plastic or paper cups anymore.**

You will need to bring your own reusable mug for water, punch, or tea.

However, some reusable mugs will be available at the meeting.

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: Lime Ridge Open Space

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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## Lime Ridge Open Space

Ron Graydon



Photos by R. Graydon

**Ron Graydon** will present a program on the **Northern Concord** section of **Lime Ridge Open Space**. The presentation will cover the geologic formation of the **Diablo Range** and **Lime Ridge**, as well as the human history and ecological impact on the area.

Ron will also discuss the **Friends of Lime Ridge**, a volunteer group he founded to focus on the ecological restoration of the park. Their efforts include planting about 75 oak and buckeye trees, developing three native plant gardens, installing four bluebird nesting boxes, and conducting park clean-ups, nature walks, and invasive plant removals.

A lifelong environmental educator and activist, Ron has over 50 years of experience in the field. He holds a B.S. in Conservation of Natural Resources from U.C. Berkeley, where he focused on environmental education and impact analysis. After retiring, he was inspired to form the Friends of Lime Ridge while hiking daily near his home in the park.

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## President's Letter

Ariana Rickard, *MDBA Vice President & Program 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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### New Connections and Resources

We're excited about the renewed focus on chapter support from **Audubon California**. They've hired **Rachel Bailey** as the new Community Building Manager for all 48 chapters in California. We had the pleasure of meeting with her in June. She's currently traveling the state to meet with every chapter and learn about their programs and priorities.

To give her a taste of our local birding, we invited Rachel on a short hike in Mitchell Canyon during her Bay Area visit. Five board members—**Alan Bade**, **Matt Tarlach**, **Rochelle Fortier**, **Janna Layton**, and myself—joined her. We spotted **Acorn Woodpeckers**, **Spotted Towhees**, **Scrub Jays**, and **Bushtits**, and we saw many varieties of **Oak galls**.

We had a great time talking with Rachel, learning about her background, passions, and the work of other chapters she's visited. We also shared our own projects, programs, and concerns, including areas where we could use support. She's now sending a monthly newsletter to California Chapter Leaders, which is a great way to stay connected with the state office, the National Audubon Society, and other chapters. We're looking forward to a strengthened relationship and closer coordination with both Audubon California and the other Bay Area chapters.

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### Monthly Meeting Recordings

With the help of **Bruce Mushrush**, we've recently started recording and sharing our monthly membership meetings on YouTube. This is a fantastic option for members who can't attend in person. You can find these recordings on the **Monthly Programs** page of our website, under the **"Main Program recording archive"** section. Just scroll down and click on any program to watch the Zoom recording.

Take Action: Stop the CEQA Rollback!

You may have heard in the news that the Legislature passed and the Governor signed **Senate Bill 131 (SB 131)**, a bill that threatens community health, biodiversity, and our shared climate goals. It was rushed through, and even legislators who voted for it believe it needs to be "cleaned up."

We're asking for two significant changes to fix this bill:

1. **Add habitat to the definition of "natural and protected lands."** We're urging legislators to add lands important for **Natural Community Conservation Plans** and **Habitat Conservation Plans** to the definition. This is critical to ensure that the bill's exemptions avoid or mitigate impacts on important habitat for endangered and threatened species. Without this change, we could see a net loss of habitat, pushing declining species closer to extinction and undermining the state's **30x30** goal.
2. **Remove the "advanced manufacturing" CEQA exemption.** The bill vaguely defines "advanced manufacturing" as "processes that improve existing or create entirely new materials, products, and processes." This broad definition could include extremely risky facilities like those for nuclear, lithium compound, heavy metal, or battery manufacturing. These facilities are often built near communities already facing environmental injustices.

What You Can Do

**We need your help!** Please contact your state legislator and the Governor to demand these changes to **Senate Bill 131**. You can find your state assembly member and state senator's contact information [here](#).

Here are some talking points you can use:

I am writing to express my deep disappointment with the passage of **SB 131** despite concerns about the bill's impact on important habitat and overburdened communities. Please pass legislation before the end of this session to fix two key issues:

**Add habitat and lands important for Natural Community Conservation Plans/Habitat Conservation Plans to the definition of "natural and protected lands."**

- Habitat must be added to ensure that **CEQA** exemptions in **SB 131** avoid or mitigate impacts to important lands for endangered and threatened species. Without mitigation, California would see a loss of habitat, pushing declining species closer to extinction and directly undermining the state's **30x30** goal.

**Remove the "Advanced Manufacturing" CEQA exemption.**



- The bill's broad definition of "advanced manufacturing" could streamline harmful facilities, which are often sited near communities already facing environmental injustices. This is unacceptable.

We appreciate your assistance and support! We look forward to seeing you at our September membership meeting and hearing about your summer adventures.



Rochelle, Matt, Alan, Ariana, and Janna join Rachel Bailey from Audubon California on a bird walk in Mitchell Canyon

Photo by J. Layton

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## Community Science Opportunities, including a new one: Project Phoenix

Alan Bade, Community Science

There are many ways birders and **MDBA members** can contribute to bird-related community science. **eBird** is, of course, a primary resource. I encourage birders to explore what's being done with our collective birding data on the **eBird Science page**.

More targeted projects now use the **eBird** data collection platform for specific purposes. One is the **National Audubon Society's Climate Watch**. A few years ago, I wrote several articles for *The Quail* about this program and helped a few people set up routes. While interest has waned, the program is still available

for those who want to participate. Past *Quail* articles on this topic can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

A new and easier program looking for volunteers recently came to my attention called **Project Phoenix**. This project investigates the effects of wildfire smoke on birds, especially with the increased severity and frequency of wildfires. My understanding is that birders of any skill level are welcome.

Participants choose a convenient site, record what they find within a 10-minute period on a weekly basis during the season (July 1 to November 30), and submit an **eBird** list with **#projectphoenix** in the comments section of their checklist. This tag directs the checklist to the Project Phoenix researchers. You can choose a site at home or in the field.

Bird observations are evaluated alongside air quality data to determine how wildfire smoke is affecting birds. You can read their annual reports [here](#). An article from the *L.A. Times* on the project is also available [here](#).

Other well-known community science opportunities include **October Big Day**, the **Christmas Bird Count**, and **Global Big Day**. More on these will be in *Quail* issues closer to their respective dates.

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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 May, June and July: **Doris Blumenfeld**, Richmond; **John Graves**, Danville; **Whitney Grover**, Emeryville; **Brunell Gugelmann**, Richmond; **Richard Gugelmann**, Chapel Hill, NC; **Daniel Howard**, Walnut Creek; **Everardo Jaime, Jr.**, Danville; **Shiyu Luo**, Menlo Park; **Mylon and Samrina Marshall**, Vacaville; **Jayne Reynolds**, Pleasant Hill; **George Qin**, Hercules; **Kevin Shea**, Pleasant Hill; **Igor Skaredoff**, Martinez; **Cat Smith**, Walnut Creek; **Renna Ulvang**, Walnut Creek; and **Qulin Zhang**, Menlo Park. I hope to see you at our next program meeting!



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## Twain Harte Becomes an Official Audubon Bird Town

Rosalie Howarth





The Sierra Foothills town of Twain Harte has officially been designated an Audubon Bird Town. Over 40 hand-painted bird illustrations by local artists are now on display outside businesses, along walkways, and at the new downtown Meadows Park.

Visitors and residents can pick up a printed guide or download a map at the park to "Find the Birds." Most of the illustrations are true to size, ranging from a five-inch Mountain Chickadee to a four-foot Wild Turkey.

The Central Sierra Audubon Society (CSAS) collaborated with the local Chamber of Commerce, Community Services District, and Mother Lode Art Association to bring the project to life. Chapter members selected the birds, and more than 20 local artists volunteered to paint the colorful metal signs.

Fourth-grade students have already participated in field trips to "Find a Bird" as a nature activity. Gail Witzlsteiner, president of CSAS and a long-time Twain Harte resident, shared her enthusiasm, stating, "It was so fun to see the kids using their checklists and tuning into all the different birds."

"Teachers used smartphone apps to identify bird calls, and the kids found dozens of species, from ravens and Mourning Doves to quail, grosbeaks, and Black Phoebes," Witzlsteiner added. "This is what Audubon is all about—it's a catalyst to make people more aware of their environment."

Project supporters hope the Audubon Bird Town idea will catch on in other towns and become a feature people look for when they travel. To learn more, visit **[centralsierraaudubon.org](https://centralsierraaudubon.org)**.

*Lightly edited by Rosalie Howarth from an article by Amy Nilson in the Union Democrat, August 2, 2025.*

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## **Birds and Climate in the News: Obviously its Up to Us**

Juan Pablo Galvan, *MDBA* Conservation



# Scientists decry Trump energy chief's plan to 'update' climate reports: 'Exactly what Stalin did'

Ex-fossil fuel executive Chris Wright said administration is reviewing national assessments made by past governments



📷 The US energy secretary, Chris Wright: 'We will come out with updated reports on those and with comments on those reports.' Photograph: Nathan Howard/Reuters

The US energy secretary, Chris Wright, is facing growing criticism from scientists who say their “worst fears” were realized when Wright revealed that the **Trump administration** would “update” the US’s premier climate

## 1. Birds and Climate Change

One might assume that highly mobile animals like birds would be less susceptible to the negative impacts of climate change than other species since they can move much more easily than plants or small mammals. While it is true that birds can move faster and farther than other animals, they cannot outfly the impacts of climate change—no more than humans can escape it by cranking up the **AC**. With the U.S. government actively encouraging **policies** that harm the environment and birds in particular, both humans and our feathered friends are in big trouble.

## 2. Take Action Against Environmental Policy Change

If you're unsure where to begin keeping track of recent U.S. environmental policy changes, many **resources** are available. In recent years, many of the environmental improvements made over the last decade have been stopped or reversed. Things aren't going to get better just by worrying about it. We all need to take action.

Luckily, if you live in the Mount Diablo area, there are many opportunities to make a difference and get involved. You can start by exploring some of the **resources** available to you.

## 3. Take a Break, Get Inspired, and Act for the Climate

Want to learn how to help the climate while also taking a moment to relax and laugh? Try watching the documentary **Seaspiracy** on Netflix. You might even get inspired to make some delicious, plant-based dishes while learning how to get yourself and the planet in better shape.

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## Monterey Bay Festival of Birds - October 10, 11 and 12



Bird School Project is excited to celebrate the birds of Monterey Bay with the Festival of Birds during the second weekend in October! With lots of field trips and workshops to sign up for, there will be birding activities for everyone. Event listings will be available closer to the date, with tickets going on sale August 1st. Get your tickets **here**!

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# **MDBA Trip Report**

## **Point Reyes, May 31st**

Report by: Matt Tarlach

On May 31, eight birders met at **Drakes Beach** in **Point Reyes** for a day of birding. The morning fog eventually gave way to sunny skies and mild temperatures, though we contended with some gusty winds.

The lagoon behind Drakes Beach, which was constructed by the Park Service a few years ago, is proving to be a great success. Its maturing habitat is attracting an increasing variety of bird species. Here, we spotted a **Green Heron**, **Common Gallinule**, and a **Cinnamon Teal**, along with a late-migrating **Long-billed Dowitcher**. In the nearby willows, we heard the songs of a **Swainson's Thrush** and a **Wilson's Warbler**, with a distant **Wrentit** calling from behind them. In the bay, we saw **Surf Scoter**, **Common** and **Pacific Loons**, cormorants, and about 30 **Brown Pelicans**—the latter being an especially welcome sight given the pressure this species has faced locally over the past year.

As we drove toward the outer Point, a **Great Horned Owl** was spotted roosting near **B Ranch**. At the **Fish Docks**, we confirmed a **Red-throated Loon** to complete our "loon trifecta" and saw several other species. The wind was fierce at the lighthouse, but we braved the gale to watch the huge breeding colony of **Common Murres** on the cliffs below, as **Ravens** and **Red-tailed Hawks** soared above.

After lunch, we headed inland to a sheltered spot near **Inverness Park** called **Whitehouse Pool**. Our hope was to find a **Yellow-breasted Chat** that a few of us had heard singing there earlier. While the chat didn't reappear, the tranquil location was a nice change from the blustery Point. **Karen** spotted an **Allen's Hummingbird** and a **Cedar Waxwing**, and we had excellent views of a **Yellowthroat**.

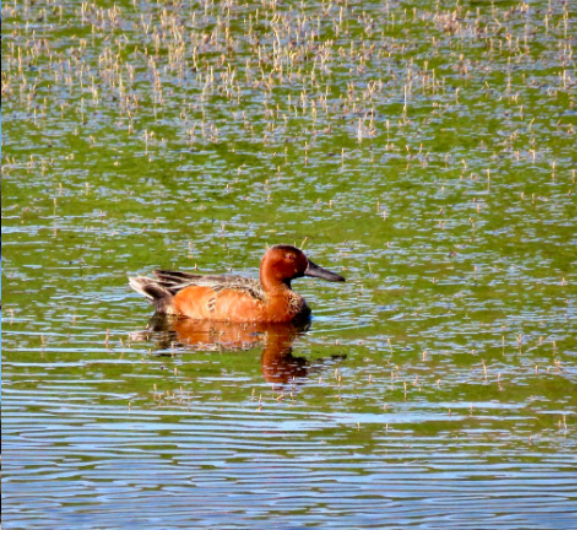
Final species tally: 60, counting the dowitcher that we could not all agree was either a Long-or Short billed. Trip Report [here](#).





Photos by Cassie Tzur





Photos by Isaac Aronow

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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 [mdbafieldtrips@gmail.com](mailto: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.

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## **Drakes Beach and Pt. Reyes National Seashore**

Sunday, September 7, 8:30 AM - 2:30 PM



Virginia Rail

Photo by Maren Smith

Point Reyes is one of the premiere birding locations in Northern California, a great spot to find rarities during migration. We'll meet at Drake's Beach, where there is excellent birding and a comfort stop, and then head out to the "fish docks." We

may skip the lighthouse overlook on this trip and see if that time can be better spent elsewhere.

Bring water and lunch as this area is remote.

**Trail Rating:** Category 2 – some walking on paved roads and groomed trails with significant grade.

**Elevation change:** 150 feet

**Leader:** Matt Tarlach, ([email](#)), 925.482.6129

**Meet:** Kenneth C. Patrick Visitor Center, 1 Drake's Beach Road, Inverness, CA 94937

**GPS Coordinates:** 38.027828257127936, -122.96201741318059

**Directions:** Depending on your starting point, take the best route to highway 101 north of San Rafael. From 101, take Lucas Valley Road to Nicasio. At the reservoir turn left. Follow signs to Point Reyes Station, and when you get to town turn left onto US-1. After passing through town (the Bovine Bakery is a traditional stop for breakfast pastries), turn right from US-1 onto Sir Francis Drake Blvd and follow it for 15 miles to Drakes Beach Road. Turn left and continue down Drakes Beach Road to the parking lot at the end. Leader will be parked near the visitor center.

Due to limited parking at several stops on the Outer Point, this field trip is limited to 12 participants. Sharing a car is helpful! There's room to leave extra cars at the Drake's Beach meeting point

Register [HERE](#).

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## Vaux's Swifts at McNear Brickyard, San Rafael

Wednesday, September 11, 5:30 PM to 7:30 PM





**Leader:** Maureen Lahiff, ([email](#)), 510.484.6529

Vaux's Swifts migrate south along the Pacific Americas Flyway each fall, and one of their few known stopping points in Northern California is McNear Brick and Block in San Rafael. At sunset on many September and October evenings as many as 20,000 swifts mass and fly into the decommissioned brickyard chimneys to spend the night. It's an unforgettable sight!

**Hike Category:** 1. This is essentially stationary observing, so there is very little walking, but a lot of standing. Those who find a portable stool or lawn chair helpful are welcome to bring one.

Check for more details and sign up [HERE](#).

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## Mt. Wanda

Saturday, September 13, 8 AM - 11:30 AM



This hike is particularly well-suited for beginning birders.

Mt. Wanda is part of the John Muir National Historic Site. We will hike through oak woodlands and oak savannah habitats, ascending a rugged fire road that includes one steep section. We will then take a single-track trail back to the fire road, for a total distance of about 2.5 miles. We anticipate excellent views of Acorn Woodpeckers and will likely also see Red-tailed and Red-shouldered Hawks, Towhees, and Oak Titmice.

**Leader:** Cheryl Abel, 925-957-6229

**Hike Rating:** 3, Vigorous (by birding standards). Approximately 2.5 miles on fire roads and single-track trails, with a 475' elevation gain.

**Meet:** The parking lot at the Mt. Wanda Trailhead, at the intersection of Alhambra Avenue and Franklin Canyon Road in Martinez.

**GPS:** 37.98916055076219, -122.12963777237545

**Directions:** From westbound Highway 4, take the Alhambra Avenue exit in Martinez. Turn left to go back under Highway 4. Franklin Canyon Road is the next right, and the parking lot is immediately on the left side of Franklin Canyon Road. Please bring water and binoculars.

This hike is limited to 15 participants. By registering, participants acknowledge the MDBA Liability Waiver (available during registration).

Sign up [HERE](#).

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## Lime Ridge

Saturday, September 20, 8:00 AM - 10:30 AM



American Kestrel

Photo by Wayne Regelmann

Join the Friends of Lime Ridge for this special walk to introduce Mount Diablo Bird Alliance members to this unique area right in our backyard.

No sign-up is required. Meet at the public parking lot off Treat Boulevard at 8 a.m.

**Leaders:** Matt Tarlach and Ron Graydon (Friends of Lime Ridge)

**Hike Rating:** 2, moderate. The walk is about one mile on gravel roads with some inclines.

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## Coyote Hills, Fremont

Sunday, September 21



White-tailed Kite

Photo by Alex Cho

As the *Quail* goes to press, dates and details for this exciting trip are still to be determined. Check the link [here](#) for updated info and to sign up.

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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.

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## September Gallery & Media



### MDBA June Membership Meeting Recording

See the full video [HERE](#)

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## The Bird and The Tree

See the full video [HERE](#)

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## These Beautiful Birds Form Something Like Lasting Friendships

Read the article [HERE](#)

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Blue Grosbeak / San Bernardino, California, United States

Photo: **Gavin Aquila** / Macaulay Library ML 640192596

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Scaly-breasted Munia / Alameda, California, United States

Photo: **Monica P** / Macaulay Library ML 640157579

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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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