



Mount Diablo Bird Alliance

The Quail

Volume 70, Number 10

December 2025

**December/January Monthly Program Meeting:
Thursday, December 11, 7 PM and Thursday, January 8, 7 PM**

Mount Diablo Bird Alliance will meet on the **second Thursday** in December, **December 11** 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.

December Agenda:

6:30 PM Doors Open

7:00 PM Announcements

7:15 PM Refreshments and Raffle

7:30 PM Main Program: So Many Ways To Be A Bird

Mount Diablo Bird Alliance will meet on the **second Thursday** in January, **January 8** in the Camellia Room at the Gardens at Heather Farm.

January Agenda:

6:30 PM Doors Open

7:00 PM Announcements

7:15 PM Refreshments and Raffle

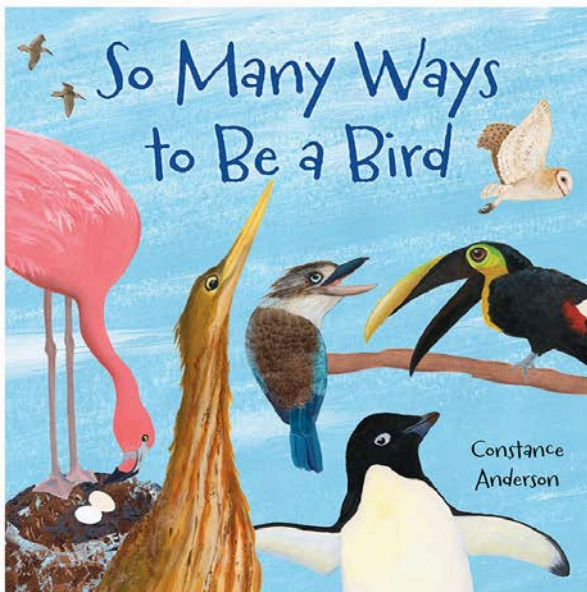
7:30 PM Main Program: The Importance of Islands to Avian Evolution

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 and we will try and arrange a pickup from local addresses.

So Many Ways To Be A Bird

Constance Anderson



Constance Anderson

Bring your inner child to the December program as Constance Anderson discusses her newest book, **So Many Ways To Be a Bird**. As an award finalist for children's non-fiction, this book explores the surprising world of bird adaptation, where each egg, beak, and wing has a unique story.

The book reveals how birds have brilliantly adapted to a changing environment over time, resulting in an incredible variety of sizes, colors, wings, nests, eggs, beaks, feet, and feathers. Constance's vibrant collage illustrations help readers identify birds and inspire a desire to protect them.

So Many Ways To Be a Bird follows Constance's previous titles: **A Stick Until**, a picture book and science journal about animal tool use; and **Smelling Sunshine**, which celebrates the connection between people of diverse backgrounds through the simple act of hanging laundry with a loved one.

Join us as author, illustrator, and naturalist Constance Anderson shares her love of birds and her desire to connect people to one another and the environment.

Promo [video](#).

The Importance of Islands to Avian Evolution

Bob Lewis



Bornean Bristlehead



Palmchat



Eastern Crested Berrypecker

Photos by B. Lewis

Islands play a pivotal role in both the evolution of new avian species and the extinction of others. Because islands are isolated landmasses, species that arrive there evolve separately from their parent groups, eventually becoming unique through genetic drift. However, because island species are restricted to small areas with limited populations, they are highly susceptible to natural disasters—such as hurricanes, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, and rising sea levels—as well as human-caused pressures. This talk focuses on the issues unique to islands and how we might protect these vulnerable species.

Bob has taught birding classes in the Bay Area for over 25 years and is an avid traveler, specifically seeking out islands in search of birds. He is a board member of the Farallon Islands Foundation, an organization dedicated to fostering life on islands. He has visited many of the world's major biodiversity hotspots, including Madagascar, Borneo, Hawaii, Indonesia, New Guinea, New Zealand, and Cuba.

President's Letter

Steve Buffi, *MDBA Treasurer*

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!**

It is the Treasurer's turn to write the monthly letter. The Mount Diablo Bird Alliance is still seeking a President; please let the Board know if you are interested in leading this great organization.

Project FeederWatch has kicked off in our household. We are in our third weekend of recording observations, though it has been quiet compared to last year. The mild fall weather may be affecting the number of birds. If you would like to participate, search for "FeederWatch" online to learn more.

Next month, MDBA will conduct two Christmas Bird Counts on December 17 and December 20, 2025. You can find more details regarding the Counts in this newsletter.

Happy Birding!

The Bird Counts of Christmas

Julie Starr, *CBC Co-coordinator*

I've been thinking about the Christmas Bird Count for months without really thinking about *Christmas*. But the appearance of the seasonal retailer selling trees, wreaths, and garlands across from Moraga Commons has changed that. Now I'm imagining eggnog, pageants, and "The Twelve Days of Christmas."

Have you noticed that almost all the gifts in that song are birds and people? In the spirit of the season—and the Audubon Society's tradition dating back to 1900—here is our own version of the **Twelve Days of the CBC**:

- **Partridge in a Pear Tree:** Unlikely. But you could certainly see a California Quail in a tree.
- **Turtle Doves:** We'll swap these for Mourning Doves, Eurasian Collared-Doves, Band-tailed Pigeons, and Rock Pigeons.
- **French Hens:** *D'accord*, but we don't count domestic chickens.
- **Calling Birds:** Very countable! We tally flocks of blackbirds, robins, and waxwings, plus any individual bird you hear (even if you don't see it).
- **Geese a-Laying:** Wrong time of year for laying, but the right time for counting.
- **Swans a-Swimming:** Count 'em.

- **Maids, Pipers, Drummers, Ladies and Lords:** We welcome anyone who wants to count with us!
- **Golden Rings:** Those must be our Count Circles.

About the Counts The Mt. Diablo Bird Alliance (MDBA) held its first Central County count in 1955 and added the East County count in 2000. Each count takes place within a 15-mile diameter circle.

- **Central County:** Centered north of Ygnacio Valley Road (Concord, Clayton, Walnut Creek).
- **East County:** Centered north of Hwy 4 (Brentwood, Byron, Discovery Bay).

Join Us We rely on over 80 volunteers to cover these routes. The data we gather is vital for the National Audubon Society to identify trends and influence legislation.

- **Central County CBC:** Saturday, December 20
- **East County CBC:** Wednesday, December 17

Feeder watchers are welcome (please notify us so we can include your data). Post-count dinners have been reinstated—details coming soon!

More info [here](#).

New Members

Rochelle Fortier, *MDBA Membership Chair*

I would like to give a warm welcome to the new members who joined in October: **Karen Cauayani**, Sutter Creek; **William Guthreau**, Concord; and **Ilenna de Young**, Brentwood. I hope to see you at our next program meeting!



Save the Dates for Two Upcoming Bird Festivals

Save the Dates

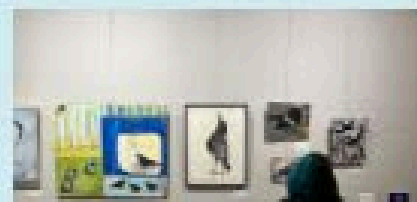
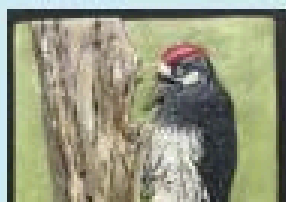
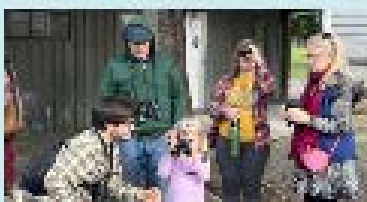


The 26th Annual Snow Goose Festival of the Pacific Flyway!

January 22 – 25, 2026

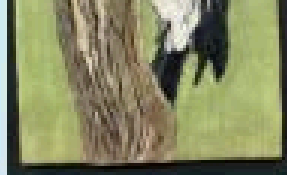
Patrick Ranch Museum - Headquarters

The Sandhill Cranes are calling; heralding the great gathering of winter birds in the northern Sacramento Valley. Join us on four days of action-packed field trips with experienced trip leaders, and more.





**FIELD TRIPS, WORKSHOPS,
EXHIBITS & ACTIVITIES**
Patrick Ranch Museum



**BANQUET & KEYNOTE
SPEAKER**
Bell Memorial Union
Chico State
Kate Marianchild, author of
Secrets of the Oak Woodlands



"PERCH, FLUTTER, SOAR"
**ART EXHIBIT
& RECEPTION**
Museum of Northern
California Art
(monca)

Registration begins in early December

If you have any questions, you can reach us at

info@snowgoosefestival.org

or by calling the Festival Office at 530-592-9092

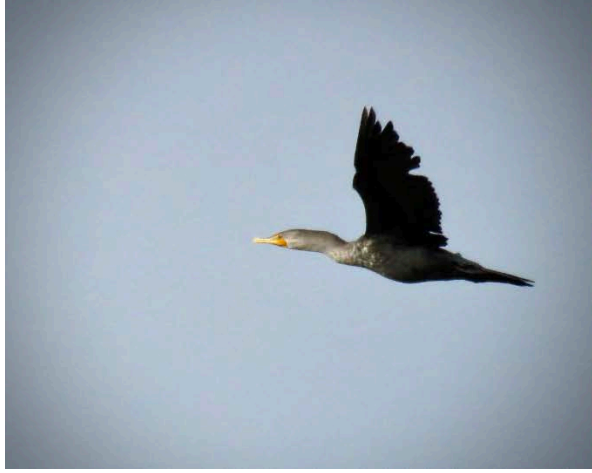
The Morro Bay Bird Festival is January 15 - January 19. Information can be found [here](#).

The Snow Goose Festival is in Chico from January 22 - January 25. Information can be found [here](#).

MDBA Trip Report

Pacheco Marsh, November 17

Report by: Matt Tarlach



Double-crested Cormorant



Northern Harrier (Male)

Photos by Isaac Aronow



Killdeer



Northern Harrier (Female)

Photos by Alan Bade

On November 17, about a dozen **intrepid** MDBA members and guests **faced** breezy showers to explore the new Pacheco Marsh Preserve. Managed by a partnership between the John Muir Land Trust and Central San, this **120-plus-acre** property—located near the point where Walnut Creek meets Suisun Bay—has recently been transformed from a post-industrial site into a thriving habitat. It now supports many species, including birds and the endangered Salt Marsh Harvest Mouse.

While our group did not spot any mice, **we** enjoyed wonderful, repeated views of harriers, kites, **and** Savannah and Lincoln's Sparrows. **Luckily, we only encountered rain a few times!**

Checklist [here](#).

Lodi Lake/Woodbridge Road, November 19

Report by: Mona Lange



Wood Duck

Photo by M. Lange



American Kestrel

Photo by Isaac Aronow



Various Geese

Photos by I. Aronow

Visiting Lodi on November 19, a cloudy but comfortable day, a dozen MDBA birders tallied a total of 67 different species across three locations. We observed 40 species at the Lodi Lake Nature Area and 45 along Woodbridge Road.

Highlights at the Lodi Lake Nature Area included many Wood Ducks, a Sharp-shinned Hawk, and great looks at a Hermit Thrush and an Orange-crowned Warbler. Of course, it is always nice to see Downy and Nuttall's Woodpeckers. We also spotted some non-avian wildlife, including quite a few squirrels (specifically our Western Gray Squirrel) and some Black-tailed Deer.

Along Woodbridge Road, we found excellent raptors, including Red-shouldered Hawks, Red-tailed Hawks, and a few White-tailed Kites. Farther down the road, we saw spectacular numbers of Snow Geese (including Ross's), Cackling Geese, Greater White-fronted Geese, and Tundra Swans. Large numbers of Wilson's Snipe were in the muddy areas, along with Long-billed Dowitchers and Least Sandpipers. To cap off a great birding day, Sandhill Cranes started vocalizing and flying overhead toward the end of the trip.

Trip report [here](#).

MDBA Field Trip Announcements

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.

Staten Island Road

Thursday, December 11, 2 PM - 5 PM



December is the prime time to witness the spectacle of Sandhill Cranes along Staten Island Road in the Sacramento River Delta. Sightings of Snow Geese, Greater White-fronted Geese, and a variety of other waterfowl are also virtually assured.

This trip is timed to spend a couple of hours viewing the grazing flocks before the **hoped-for** sunset flight **to** their night roosts. This is a must-see annual winter field trip. We will drive slowly along Staten Island Road and stop at the best roadside locations to set up our scopes.

Leader: Randy Huey 925-518-8439

Hike Rating: 1 - Easy. Little Walking.

Meet: Important! Eventbrite shows this trip located at Heather Farm but we will NOT be meeting there! That's just MDBA home base.

We will assemble our car caravan at 2PM at the silo barn parking lot on the right

side of N. Staten Island Road (a quarter mile after turning off of Walnut Grove - Thornton Road onto N. Staten Island Road).

GPS for the meeting point: 38.2188471950274, -121.50012206138071

Register [HERE](#).

Oakland: Lake Merritt and Arrowhead Marsh

Friday, January 2, 8:30 AM - 2 PM



Photo by Beth Branthaver

Winter ducks and other birds are easily viewed from the sidewalk at Lake Merritt. notably, the lake is one of the few places in the Bay Area where Barrow's Goldeneyes can be found. Please note that an entry fee is usually required to park past the gate near Children's Fairyland.

We will move to Arrowhead Marsh before 10:00 AM, arriving in time for the King Tide. While **Ridgway's Rails** are a primary highlight here, we expect to see many other species as the high water pushes them into view. A visit to Garretson Point will follow. Please bring lunch and drinks. This trip is appropriate for birders of all experience levels, including beginners.

Leader: Sandy Ritchie, (925) 381-2514

Hike Rating: 1 - Easy.

Meet: Lake Merritt parking lot off Bellevue Avenue, 8:30 AM

Directions: Take SR 24 to Oakland and I-980, take 27th Street exit and turn left.

Cross Broadway and Harrison, then join Grand Avenue. Turn into park at Children's Fairyland (fee possible) and follow around to parking lot entrance on right between boathouse and aviary.

GPS for meeting point: 37.80631305974147, -122.25644134214993

This trip is limited to 15 participants.

Register [HERE](#).

Putah Creek

Tuesday, January 6, 9 AM - 2 PM



Photo by Issac Aronow

This trip offers a prime opportunity to observe a diverse array of bird life along Putah Creek and Lake Solano. Target species include **Osprey**, **Lewis's Woodpecker**, and **Phainopepla**, as well as waterfowl such as **Barrow's Goldeneye** and **Hooded Merganser**.

Please dress warmly; this area is known for being cold and windy. Bring lunch. The exact itinerary will be determined on the day of the trip. Heavy rain cancels.

Trip Leaders: Maren Smith, 925-322-9477, and Susana de Trapaga

Hike Rating: 1, Easy.

Elevation change: Minor

Meet: 9 AM at the large gravel pull-out on the right side of Putah Creek Road,

west of the Lake Solano dam.

GPS: 38.489104513137754, -122.01167874098729

Directions: From the Bay Area, take I-80 East toward Vacaville and take **Exit 51A** (Cherry Glen and Lagoon Valley Roads). Turn left to cross over the freeway, heading north. Drive approximately 1 mile on Cherry Glen Road to the stop sign, then turn left onto Pleasants Valley Road. As you drive the next 12 miles, keep an eye out for **Yellow-billed Magpies** and raptors. Finally, turn right onto Putah Creek Road and drive about 1.2 miles to the large gravel parking turnout on the right (look for “No Camping, No Dumping” signs).

Note: The drive is about one hour from the Walnut Creek area. Please bring **\$8 cash in exact bills** for the parking fee!

Limited to 20 participants. All field trips require registration and participants must acknowledge the MDBA liability waiver.

Register [HERE](#).

Bridgeway Island Pond, West Sacramento

Thursday, January 22, 9:15 AM - 1 PM



Bridgeway Island Pond in West Sacramento is a low-key birding hotspot that offers fairly close views of an assortment of waterfowl and shorebirds. In past years, it has been a reliable location for **Blue-winged Teal**, **American Avocets**, **Cinnamon Teal**, and **Sora**.

Access is easy, featuring a mostly flat, grassy area. Minimal walking is required; we will primarily be standing and observing from different vantage points along the pond. Afterward, we will make a second birding stop, to be determined based on the weather (last year, we visited the California Raptor Center in Davis). This is an excellent trip for beginning birders!

Leader: Mona Lange, 510-414-2959

Hike Rating: 1 - Easy.

Meet: the McDonalds at 2244 Lake Washington Blvd. in West Sacramento at 9:15 AM for a restroom stop, proceeding to the pond by 9:30.

Directions: Take 80 East toward Sacramento. Exit at Enterprise and Harbor Blvd (exit 81) and go Right. Take the 2nd Left to Industrial Blvd. After a few miles Industrial Blvd changes its name to Lake Washington Blvd. Make a Left on Southport Parkway and then first left to enter the shopping center. Another first Left then leads to the McDonalds.

GPS for the **9:15** meeting point at McDonalds: 38.556747929224194, -121.5399085526047

After McDonalds we'll go back out to Southport making a Right onto it. Going a few more miles, make a Right on Oakland Bay Drive. First Right onto Bowen Island street which changes to Solomon Island Rd as it goes around the corner. First Right takes you to where we'll park for the pond, on Pender Island Street. We may have to park in the neighborhood also.

GPS for the Pond, where we expect to arrive by 9:30: 38.540701884803845, -121.57782606798398

This trip is limited to 12 participants of any experience level, including beginners.

Register [**HERE**](#).

December Gallery & Media

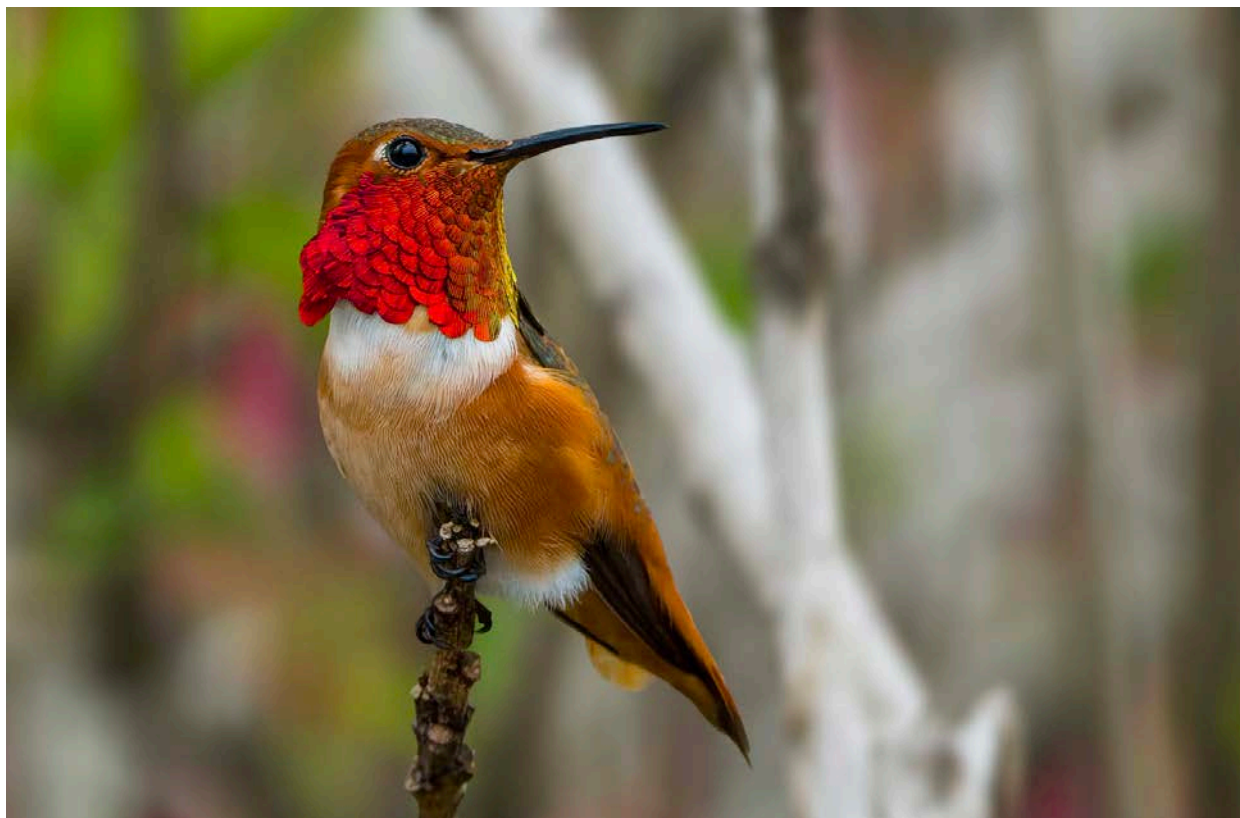


In Search of The Northern Cassowary

See the full video [HERE](#)

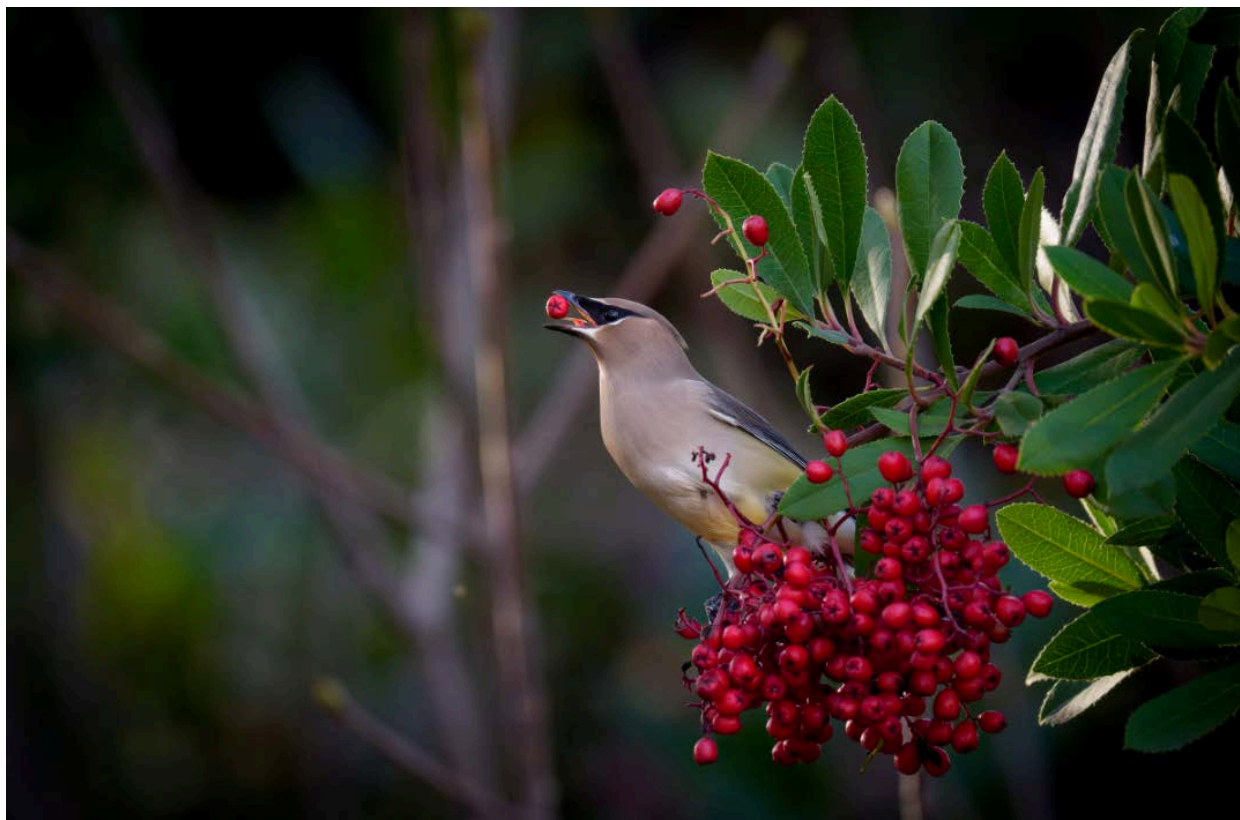
In Washington, Birds Are Giving 'Yelp Reviews' of Forest Restoration Work





Allen's Hummingbird / San Diego, California, United States

Photo: [Ruslan Balagansky](#) / [Macaulay Library ML 645356863](#)



Cedar Waxwing / Santa Clara, California, United States

Photo: [Amanda Newlove](#) / [Macaulay Library ML 645333824](#)

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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