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Mount Diablo Bird Alliance

The Quail

Volume 71, Number 1

February 2026

February Monthly Program Meeting: Thursday, February 5, 7 PM

Mount Diablo Bird Alliance will meet Thursday, February 5 in the Camellia Room at the Gardens at Heather Farm, 1540 Marchbanks Drive, Walnut Creek, CA 94598.

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.

February Agenda:

6:30 PM Doors Open

7:00 PM Announcements

7:15 PM Refreshments and Raffle

7:30 PM Main Program: *Alcatraz Island – A Climate Refuge for Seabirds*

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.

Alcatraz Island - A Climate Refuge for Seabirds

Julie Thayer



Photos by Zoe Burr



Photo by Farallon Institute

Alcatraz Island's **Brandt's Cormorants** moved into San Francisco Bay in the early 1990s during a coastward population shift. Alcatraz is now one of the largest Brandt's Cormorant breeding colonies, and one of only two estuarine colonies. Alcatraz seabirds, including Pigeon Guillemots and Western Gulls, have been outperforming their ocean counterparts despite a high level of human disturbance in this urban setting. The bay hosts a large anchovy population and demersal fish

nursery, with strong tidal currents and the river plume into the ocean concentrating prey for seabirds and other predators. The Farallon Institute is working to mitigate anthropogenic stressors to support this important colony and increase seabird resilience to climate change.

Julie Thayer has worked in the California current marine ecosystem for three decades, with a brief hiatus on the north coast of Brazil. She studied at the University of California at Santa Cruz/Long Marine Lab and UC Davis in Marine Biology and Ecology. Thayer has done field research on Alcatraz seabirds, studying population changes, diet, productivity, and human disturbance since 1997.

Help Pass the Local Communities and Bird Habitat Stewardship Act (H.R. 3276)

Rochelle Fortier, *MDBA Membership Chair*

The **Local Communities and Bird Habitat Stewardship Act (H.R. 3276)** is a critical piece of bipartisan legislation that directly addresses the steep decline in North American bird populations—down by **3 billion birds** since 1970.

By focusing on urban and suburban areas, this bill ensures that the places where we live, work, and play also serve as vital stopover and nesting grounds for migratory and resident birds.

Why This Legislation Matters

Urban landscapes are not just "concrete jungles"; they are part of a vast network of migratory flyways. This bill bridges the gap between federal conservation goals and local action.

- **Dedicated Funding:** It authorizes **\$1 million annually** (Fiscal Years 2026–2032) specifically for the **Urban Bird Treaty program**, managed by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.
- **Empowering Local Leaders:** It creates a federal grant program accessible to municipal, tribal, and academic entities, as well as NGOs and community groups.
- **Holistic Conservation:** Projects aren't just about planting trees; they focus on removing invasive species, restoring native flora, and reducing urban hazards like building collisions.

Benefits Beyond Birds

Improving urban bird habitats creates "Green Infrastructure" that provides tangible benefits for humans as well:

- **Climate Resilience:** Mitigation of "urban heat islands" and improved flood resilience through increased vegetation.
- **Public Health:** Better air quality and expanded green spaces for recreation and mental well-being.
- **Economic Impact:** Birdwatching is an industry enjoyed by over **96 million Americans**, generating roughly **\$279 billion** in annual economic output.

How to Take Action

You can urge your Representative to support H.R. 3276 by using the **National Audubon Society's Action Center**. Bipartisan support is the key to passing this bill, which was reintroduced in May 2025 by **Rep. Debbie Dingell (D-MI)** and **Rep. Ben Cline (R-VA)**.

Take Action Here: [Audubon Society - Protect Urban Habitats](#)

President's Letter

Alan Bade, *MDBA Board Member at Large/Community Science*

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!**

Greetings, Birders! The MDBA Board is currently rotating the President's role on a monthly basis, and I am honored to take the helm this month. While I am technically an at-large board member, my primary passion is encouraging **community science**, which will be the focus of my update.

Our chapter and individual members contribute to avian science in several vital ways.

The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC)

One major event is just around the corner! February is a transition month; birds are poised to begin their northward journeys, and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology is

hosting the **Great Backyard Bird Count from February 13–16, 2026**.

Birders worldwide will count for four days to provide a critical snapshot of avian populations just before migration. Last year's impact was staggering: **807,813 participants** across 217 countries submitted **387,652 checklists**, documenting **8,078 species**. This data is most meaningful when gathered at such a massive scale. Please submit your observations to eBird during the event!

- **How to participate:** birdcount.org/participate

California Breeding Bird Atlas

Join the **California Breeding Bird Atlas**! This project utilizes a custom-made eBird interface developed with the Cornell Lab. While MDBA conducted a major atlas effort for Contra Costa County in the 1990s and 2000s, this is the first **statewide** atlas for California. You can contribute by sharing your checklists with the project. While paid surveyors cover remote areas, the observations of everyday eBirders provide the backbone of the data.

- **Get started:** ebird.org/atlascalifornia/about/start

Chapter Efforts: MAPS & Owl Banding

We are proud to sponsor a **MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship)** banding station at the Galindo Creek Field Station (CSU East Bay, Concord). This is the first MAPS station on Mt. Diablo—a crucial migratory stopover—and it offers invaluable hands-on experience for students and volunteers.

Additionally, for over five years, we have sponsored a **Northern Saw-whet Owl** banding station on EBRPD lands. Last season, we moved back to Las Trampas Regional Park, where we netted 17 owls (16 Northern Saw-whets and one Western Screech Owl). I am currently working with an Eagle Scout candidate to build nest boxes for Julie Woodruff to place at the Pepperwood Preserve in Santa Rosa.

Wood Duck Box Program

Our Wood Duck program continues to thrive with approximately 50 boxes monitored at EBMUD's San Leandro and San Pablo reservoirs. We recently welcomed three new boxes constructed by Eagle Scout Justin Cheema. **We are currently seeking additional volunteers** to help check boxes during the nesting season! If interested, please email me at communityscience@mtdiablobirds.org.

Tricolored Blackbird Success

In April 2025, MDBA participated in the statewide **Tricolored Blackbird Survey**. The results were encouraging:

- **Statewide:** An estimated 229,000 birds (a 5% increase over 2022).
- **Contra Costa County:** 6,120 birds (up from 635 in 2022).
- **Alameda County:** 7,320 birds (up from 3,210 in 2022).

These increases stem from better access to restricted sites and improved habitat conditions. At one CCWD location—where MDBA placed acoustic recorders for a Point Blue/UC Davis study—we even witnessed a Peregrine Falcon strafing the active colony!

Get Involved

Other ways to contribute from home or in the field include:

- **Project FeederWatch:** feederwatch.org
- **Climate Watch:** Contact me to get started with this National Audubon program.
- **Christmas Bird Count (CBC):** Stay tuned for reports from our compilers.

We live in an era where it is easier than ever to contribute significantly to avian science simply by going birding. I hope to see you out in the field!

Good Birding!



Photos by A. Bade

Worried About the Planet? Taking Action is the Antidote

Juan Pablo Galván, *MDBA Conservation*

When environmental news feels overwhelming, the best remedy is to roll up your sleeves. Here are three high-impact ways you can contribute to bird conservation and habitat protection right now.

1. Advocate for Urban Sanctuaries

The Local Communities & Bird Habitat Stewardship Act (H.R. 3276) Most people think of conservation as something that happens "out there" in the wilderness, but our cities are vital stopovers for migratory birds. This bipartisan bill provides federal support to turn our urban neighborhoods into healthy, green corridors.

- **The Goal:** Restoring native plants, reducing building collisions, and creating urban heat resilience.
- **Action:** Click [HERE](#) to tell your Representative to support H.R. 3276.

2. Put Your Birding to Work

The California Breeding Bird Atlas (CBBA) We are currently in the midst of the first-ever comprehensive survey of California's breeding birds. Even though it's winter,

species like Great Horned Owls and Anna's Hummingbirds are already beginning their nesting cycles.

- **The Goal:** To map the distribution and status of every bird species breeding in the state to guide future conservation.
- **Action:** You can use your standard eBird account to participate. Click [HERE](#) to learn how to identify and code breeding behaviors.

3. Defend the "Safety Net"

Protect the Endangered Species Act (ESA) The ESA is the most effective tool we have for preventing extinction, yet its protections are frequently under threat of being weakened or rolled back. When we lose these protections, we lose the ability to recover vulnerable species like the California Condor or the Snowy Plover.

- **The Goal:** To ensure science-based protections remain the gold standard for wildlife management.
- **Action:** Stay informed on current legislative threats and learn how to raise your voice [HERE](#) and [HERE](#).

New Members

Rochelle Fortier, *MDBA Membership Chair*

I would like to give a warm welcome to the new members who joined in November and December: **Carol Abdelfattah**, Richmond; **Dennis Donovan**, Walnut Creek; **Mala Nagarajan** and **Vega Subramaniam**, Dublin; **Christopher Ortega**, Bay Point; **Sean** and **Sarah Parnell**, El Sobrante; **Louis Pilastro**, Danville; and **Tom Zundel**, Orinda. I hope to see you at our next program meeting!



A Heartfelt Thanks to Our Donors

Rosemary Nishikawa, *MDBA Sales Manager*

It is with much gratitude that we acknowledge the generous donations of birding books and equipment from our members and their families. These contributions

provide immense value to our organization, supporting both our educational initiatives and our monthly raffles.

We currently have a wonderful selection of books available on the **Raffle Table**, ranging from international guides to essential references for the Bay Area, California, and the United States. We encourage everyone to stop by and see what's new!

We extend our sincere thanks to:

- **Rosita Harvey**, for the extensive collection from the library of the late **Hugh Harvey**.
- **The family of Tracy Farrington**, for their donation of books, binoculars, and a viewing scope.
- Long-time members **Janet Goodman** and **Eugenia and Gary Larson**, for their thoughtful contributions.

These resources will continue to provide education and enjoyment to the MDBA community for years to come.

Fun Volunteer Opportunity: MDBA Sales & Raffle Manager

Rosemary Nishikawa, *MDBA Sales Manager*

Mount Diablo Bird Alliance is seeking an enthusiastic volunteer to take over the role of **Sales & Raffle Manager**. This is a highly social, rewarding position that brings a lot of energy and joy to our monthly meetings. If you love interacting with fellow birders and want to help support our chapter's mission, this role is for you!

What the Role Entails:

- **Meeting Presence:** Attend our monthly meetings, arriving early to set up the raffle and merchandise tables.
- **Inventory Management:** Bring and display donated raffle items, as well as our "Free Items" table.
- **Sales & Merchandise:** Manage the sale of MDBA gear (hats, cups, patches), Federal Duck Stamps, and occasionally the *Breeding Bird Atlas* books.
- **Financial Oversight:** Handle ticket sales and merchandise payments during the pre-meeting social hour.

- **Wrap-up:** Briefly pack up sales items at the conclusion of the meeting.

Why Join Us?

This position starts immediately and offers a front-row seat to our community. You are also encouraged to **recruit a co-volunteer** or friend to help manage the table with you, making it a great team effort! If interested, please reach out to **communityscience@mtdiablobirds.org**.

Bonus Opportunity: For those looking to get more involved in the leadership of our chapter, this position also offers the **option to serve as a member of the MDBA Board of Directors**.

California Bird Atlas eBird Website Now Live!

Rochelle Fortier, *MDBA Membership Chair*



As of January 1st, the **California Breeding Bird Atlas (CBBA)** eBird project website is officially live. This community-powered initiative aims to document breeding birds across the entire state. The data gathered will provide the scientific foundation for habitat protection, restoration, and long-term conservation planning for decades to come.

Join the Project

All birders are invited to participate in this historic effort. To get started, visit the new **California Bird Atlas eBird website**. Simply click “**Join Project**” (or “Log In to Join Project”) to begin contributing your checklists directly to the Atlas.

How to Submit Your Checklists

Contributing is easy, whether you are in the field or at your desk:

- **Via Mobile App:** The Atlas is fully integrated into the standard eBird mobile app. For a step-by-step guide, watch this **Quick Start Tutorial video**, which provides a brief overview of submitting your first Atlas checklist.
- **Via Web Browser:** You can also submit data by entering observation details directly on the **CBA eBird site**.

Breeding Codes: The Key to Success

The most important part of "Atlasing" is observing and recording **breeding behaviors**. eBird uses specific codes to categorize these observations, ranging from "Possible" (e.g., a bird in suitable habitat) to "Confirmed" (e.g., a bird carrying nesting material or feeding fledglings).

Resources and Guidance

Please visit the **About the Atlas** page for comprehensive resources, basic guidance, and everything you need to begin contributing to this statewide initiative.

Winged Migration Expo



The Winged Migration Expo will be happening on Saturday, January 31 and Sunday, February 1 at Mare Island in Vallejo. The Expo will include talks, demonstrations and field trips. See [HERE](#) for details.

MDBA Trip Report

Sacramento/Colusa National Wildlife Refuges, December 6

Report by: Matt Tarlach



Photos by Isaac Aronow

On December 6, several MDBA members spent the day birding the Sacramento and Colusa National Wildlife Refuges. Despite the cool and overcast weather, the group had a wonderful time exploring these premier wintering grounds.

The day's highlights included a majestic pair of Bald Eagles and an unusual flock composition: hundreds of Ross's Geese mingled with only a few Snow Geese—the

exact opposite of the proportions we typically observe in the Delta. The "bird of the day," however, was a truly unexpected guest: a Greater Roadrunner!

For a full list of sightings, you can view the eBird trip report [here](#).

Lake Solano/Putah Creek, January 6

Report by: Matt Tarlach



Cooper's Hawk

Photo by Pam Lorenz



Phainopepla

Photo by M. Smith



Blue-gray Gnatcatcher

Photos by Malathay Sethuraman



Barrow's Goldeneye and Common Goldeneye

Photo by Jim Arth

Leaders: Maren Smith and Susana de Trapaga

Grateful for a reprieve from the recent heavy rains, 22 birders gathered under overcast skies to explore the Lake Solano and Putah Creek area. Fortunately, the sun eventually emerged, brightening our first trip of the new year and helping us tally a total of **65 species** for the day.

Highlights Along Putah Creek Road

The "lake" sections along Putah Creek Road were incredibly productive. Highlights included:

- **Barrow's Goldeneye:** A pair was spotted expertly foraging among their more common relatives, the Common Goldeneye.
- **Waterfowl & More:** A pair of Ring-necked Ducks, numerous Common Gallinules, and plentiful Buffleheads rounded out the aquatic sightings.
- **Mammal Bonus:** We were also treated to a brief flyover by a **Bald Eagle** and views of three playful **River Otters**.

Exploration of Lake Solano County Park

The park itself offered a diverse array of woodland and riparian species:

- **Raptors:** A vocal pair of Red-shouldered Hawks, a Cooper's Hawk, and a Sharp-shinned Hawk (seen by some members of the group).
- **Woodland Species:** A Hairy Woodpecker, Green Herons, and an abundance of Ruby-crowned Kinglets and Yellow-rumped Warblers.
- **Fan Favorites:** Both male and female **Phainopeplas** made an appearance, along with handsome **Hooded Mergansers**, two flitty Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, and the resident colorful peacock in the campground.

Full Species List: View the [eBird 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.

Woodbridge Road & Sandhill Crane Fly-In

Sunday, January 25, 3:30 PM - 6 PM



Sandhill Cranes

Photo by Sharon Anderson

This **outing is especially appropriate for members with mobility issues.**

We will meet volunteer docents from the Lodi Sandhill Crane Association at **3:45 PM** at the **South Unit** of the Woodbridge Ecological Reserve near Lodi. They will introduce us to the various waterfowl and shorebirds that winter in the region.

Approximately 90 minutes before sunset, we will transition to the viewing blinds overlooking the roosting area. There, we will witness the spectacular sight of hundreds of Sandhill Cranes flying in for the evening.

This trip is open to MDBA members of all experience levels. We have specifically selected this location for its accessibility:

- **The South Unit Platform:** Located approximately 40 yards from accessible parking via a short, ADA-compliant ramp.
- **The Blinds:** A short walk over level ground from the parking area.
- **Facilities:** Vault toilets are available at the South Unit.

MDBA Trip Coordinator Matt Tarlach will arrange a carpool for those who prefer not to drive the distance (approximately one hour from Heather Farm) or drive back after dark.

- **To join the carpool:** Please email Matt ASAP after registering so we can determine if a minivan rental is necessary.
- **Personal Driving:** If driving yourself, please consider carpooling with a friend, as parking is limited to approximately 14 vehicles.

Leader: Matt Tarlach (MDBAFieldtrips@gmail.com)

Hike Rating: 0 (A few very short walks over flat terrain).

Meeting Point: Carpool meets at Heather Farm. Individual drivers meet at 3:45 PM at the South Unit.

GPS Coordinates: 38.15775, -121.44355

Weather: This event goes rain or shine. The blinds are open and unheated; please dress in warm layers to sit outdoors for 90 minutes.

- **Membership:** Due to capacity limits, this event is for MDBA members only. Members may bring one guest; please contact the leader for additional guest requests.
- **Children:** If bringing children, please ensure they are comfortable sitting quietly in a cool, outdoor environment for over an hour.
- **Lands Pass:** While there is no fee for the event or carpool, **every attendee must possess a valid CA DFW Lands Pass. [Purchase your pass here.](#)**

AND also Register [Here.](#)

Note: If the event is marked "Sold Out," please join the waitlist, as spots frequently open up due to cancellations.

Bodega Bay

Saturday, February 7, 9:30 AM - 3 PM



Photo by Pam Lorenz

Why do we make the journey to Bodega Bay? To see loons—Common, Pacific, and Red-throated—at close range. To see Brant, the unique sea geese that winter here. And to see Double-crested, Brandt's, and Pelagic cormorants side-by-side to sharpen our identification skills. This trip is perfect for birders of all levels and those new to Northern California.

We will meet at **9:30 AM** on the deck behind **The Tides Wharf & Restaurant**. From there, we'll drive out to Bodega Head, followed by stops at Porto Bodega and other points around the bay. Our precise itinerary will be determined by the day's tides and conditions.

Essential Information

- **Weather:** Expect the typical Northern California coast—damp, cool, and breezy, regardless of the forecast. Please dress in layers.
- **Food:** Bring a lunch, as we will gather for a picnic near Bodega Head.
- **Facilities:** Restrooms are available at the meeting point, with pit toilets located at several stops along our route.
- **Carpooling:** A carpool location will be announced. Given the distance and limited parking at the reserve, carpooling is highly encouraged—either from our home base or once we depart from The Tides.

Leader: Matt Tarlach (mdbafieldtrips@gmail.com)

Hike Rating: 1 – Easy, with little elevation change.

Meet: Behind The Tides Restaurant, Bodega Bay.

Directions: Take **US-101 North** to Petaluma. Exit at **Washington St.** and head southwest. Washington becomes **Bodega Ave**, which turns into **Petaluma-Valley Ford Rd**, eventually merging into **CA Hwy 1**. Follow Hwy 1 into Bodega Bay. After passing the *Inn at the Tides*, you will see *The Tides Restaurant* on your left.

GPS Coordinates: 38.32887, -123.04502

Travel Time: Approximately 2 hours from Walnut Creek.

Register [Here](#).

The Delta including Cosumnes Preserve

Wednesday, February 11, 8:45 AM - 2 PM



Red-winged Blackbird

Photo by Mona Lange

Join us as we explore several prime locations across the Delta, seeking out the region's iconic winter visitors. We will take a few short-to-medium walks at various sites, with a primary highlight being the renowned **Cosumnes River Preserve**.

Our goals for the day include spotting **Tundra Swans**, **Sandhill Cranes**, various **raptors**, and **grassland birds**.

Trip Details

- **Preparation:** Please bring a lunch and a beverage.
- **Weather:** The trip will proceed in light rain, so please bring appropriate waterproof gear.
- **Activity Level:** Expect a few short-to-medium walks over generally flat terrain.

Leader: Mona Lange

Hike rating: 1 - Easy.

Elevation change: Minor

Meet: 8:45 AM in Westgate Landing Park at end of Glasscock Road.

GPS Coordinates: 38.12455685348655, -121.49006201506424

Directions: Take SR 4 to Antioch Bridge, go north on SR 160 along river to Rio Vista bridge. Turn right on SR 12 for 11.5 miles. East of Terminous, turn right onto the exit to Glasscock Rd. The road will go under the bridge. Turn left onto Glasscock Rd. proper and continue to the park at the end. After meeting at Westgate Landing and a quick check of the area within view, we'll continue towards Thornton.

Note: This field trip is limited to 14 participants. All trips require registration and participants must acknowledge the MDBA liability waiver, available during registration.

Register [HERE](#).

Sunset Birding at Pacheco Marsh

Thursday, February 12, 3 PM - 6 PM



Great-horned Owl

Photo by Matt Tarlach

Pacheco Marsh is a vibrant, newly restored habitat managed by the John Muir Land Trust. While it hosts a diverse range of species, it is especially renowned as a premier location to spot **Short-eared Owls** near sunset.

We will walk along level paths in search of marshland birds, including various ducks and rails, with the hope of seeing owls in flight as the sunset approaches.

Trip Details

- **Terrain:** Level paths; easy walking.
- **Preparation:** Located on the edge of Suisun Bay, the marsh can be significantly cooler and breezier than inland locations. Please dress in warm layers.
- **Facilities:** A restroom is available at the trailhead.

Note: I know the image above is not a Short-eared Owl! I haven't captured an image of our target bird on this outing - yet! - MT

Leader: Ted Robertson, tedr@berkeley.edu

Hike Rating: 2 - Walking of a little over a mile on smooth, level paths.

Meet: Pacheco Marsh Preserve, Waterfront Road, Martinez.

Directions: I-680 north to Marina Vista exit. At the light, turn right, and proceed 1.4 miles to Pacheco Marsh on the left.

GPS Coordinates: 38.030855340180295, -122.08804788860651

This trip is limited to 24 participants, and will be cross-promoted with JMLT --- so sign up early to ensure your spot. Register [HERE](#).

Valle Vista

Monday, February 16 (President's Day), 8 AM - Noon



Red-breasted Sapsucker

Photo by Isaac Aronow

A walk through the diverse habitats of this EBMUD property typically yields a list of 40–50 species. Situated at the upstream end of the Upper San Leandro Reservoir, this location offers a wonderful variety of birds and is an **excellent outing for beginning birders**.

Trip Details

- **Terrain:** Most of the route follows a gravel trail or road. However, if there has been recent rain, the initial section can be quite muddy; please wear appropriate footwear.
- **Requirements:** Please bring your **EBMUD Trail Pass** if you have one.
- **What to Expect:** A steady, enjoyable pace suitable for all skill levels.

Leader: Ted Robertson, tedr@berkeley.edu

Hike Rating: 2, Moderate. About a mile and a half walk, possible patches of mud, some short inclines.

Meet: Valle Vista Staging Area, Canyon Road

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

GPS Coordinates: 37.82230052053301, -122.13798507376949

This field trip is limited to 16 participants. Register [HERE](#).

Sunday at the Sewage Ponds (Las Gallinas)

Sunday, February 22, 8:30 AM - 1 PM



Photo by Linda Kwong

The Las Gallinas Sanitary District maintains a complex of water treatment ponds that serve as a magnet for migratory waterfowl. During the winter months, dozens

of species can be found here, making it an exceptional location for birders to observe a diverse mix of Northern California wildlife.

Sharpen Your ID Skills

This outing is an excellent opportunity for **beginners** to practice identifying similar species in close proximity. We will look for:

- **Geese:** Comparing Canada Geese and Cackling Geese.
- **Grebes:** Distinguishing between Horned and Eared Grebes.
- **Egrets:** Observing Snowy and Great Egrets side-by-side.
- **Rarities:** If we are lucky, we may spot less common species like the **Eurasian Wigeon** or **Least Bittern**.

Trip Details

- **Equipment:** If you have a **spotting scope**, please bring it along, as they are very helpful for viewing birds on the open ponds.
- **Weather:** It is often significantly colder at the ponds than it is farther inland; please dress in warm layers.
- **Facilities:** There is one portable restroom at the trailhead. **No drinking water is available**, so please bring your own.

Leader: Elisa Fernandes-McDade, elisa.fernandesmcdade@gmail.com

Hike Rating: 1 - Easy. Mostly level paths, up to 1 mile walking

Meet: Las Gallinas Reservoir Birding Loop on Smith Ranch Rd., San Rafael, CA.

Directions: Take I-580 West toward San Rafael. Go over the San Rafael Bridge. Then, merge onto US-101 North. Stay on the 101 for 4.5 miles, then take Exit 456 onto Smith Ranch Rd. Stay on Smith Ranch Rd. for 1.5 miles until you reach a small parking lot on your left before the small reservoir building. There is a portable restroom and a bridge leading to the trailhead there.

GPS Coordinates: 38.025632105791466, -122.51775182773106

This event is limited to 15 participants. Register [HERE](#).

Contra Costa City Parks

Wednesday, February 25, 8:30 AM - Noon



White-breasted Nuthatch

Photo by Matt Tarlach

This is a great outing for beginning birders!

Starting at Heather Farm Park in Walnut Creek, we will walk around the large, natural pond. From there, we will carpool to two or three other area parks, to be determined on the day of the trip based on local bird activity.

Leader: Randi and Herb Long (hrlong13@sbcglobal.net)

Hike Rating: 1 – Easy. Mostly level paths, up to 1 mile total walking.

Meet: The wooden railing at the natural lake in Heather Farm (not the pond surrounded by concrete).

Directions: From Ygnacio Valley Road, turn into the park on North San Carlos Drive (located east of John Muir Hospital; the intersection has Shell and Chevron stations). Drive to the stop sign past the community building and turn left into the parking lot. The wooden railing is straight ahead.

GPS Coordinates: 37.92123253937827, -122.04360842199883

This event is limited to 14 participants. Register [HERE](#).

Winter Waterfowl in Walnut Creek

Friday, March 13, 9 AM - 11 AM



This is a fantastic outing for beginning birders! Heather Farm is a vibrant pocket of wildlife habitat nestled in suburban Walnut Creek. Its diverse mix of riparian, oak woodland, and wetland habitats attracts a wide variety of winter visitors.

What We'll See

We will look for seasonal highlights, including:

- **Waterfowl:** The handsome **Bufflehead** (pictured) and **Ring-necked Ducks**.
- **Woodland Species:** **Northern Flickers** and other resident and migratory birds.

Trip Details

- **Location:** Walnut Creek.
- **Experience Level:** All levels welcome; especially geared toward beginners.
- **Terrain:** Generally flat, paved, or well-maintained paths.

Leader: Elisa Fernandes-McDade, elisa.fernandesmcdade@gmail.com

Hike Rating: 1 - Easy. Under a mile walking total, mostly on paved paths.

Meet: The Natural Lake in Heather Farm (not the pond surrounded with concrete.)
Meet at the lookout below the parking lot.

Directions: Turn into the park on North San Carlos Drive from Ygnacio Valley Road. This is east of John Muir Hospital, the intersection has a Shell and a Chevron gas station. Drive to the stop sign past the community building and turn left into the parking lot. The wooden railing is straight ahead.

GPS Coordinates: 37.92123253937827, -122.04360842199883

The field trip is limited to 12 participants. Register [HERE](#).

Contra Loma Regional Park

Thursday, March 19, 8:30 AM - 1 PM



American Bittern

Photo by Isaac Aronow

We will explore the reservoir, Loma Island, and the surrounding grassland areas. Participants can expect to see a wide variety of species, including waterfowl, woodland, riparian, marsh, shore, and grassland birds. Please dress in layers and bring lunch and drinks for the day.

Leader: Mona Lange

Hike Rating: 2 – Moderate. We usually walk just over a mile. Elevation change is minimal, with optional excursions of up to 200 yards over turf.

Meet: Contra Loma Regional Park at the Channel Point Parking Lot.

Directions: From Hwy 4 in Antioch, head south on Lone Tree Way. Continue south to Golf Course Road and turn right. Follow Golf Course Road to Frederickson Lane, turn right, and continue into the park past the entry kiosk (fee required). Turn left and park in the first lot on the right: the Channel Point Parking Lot.

GPS Coordinates: 37.97200543351621, -121.82718089904367

This field trip is limited to 15 participants. All participants must acknowledge the MDBA Liability Waiver during registration.

Register [HERE](#).

February Gallery & Media



How Do Birds Stay Warm in Winter?

See the full video [HERE](#)

He Studied Why Some Female Birds Look Like Males



Read the article [HERE](#)



Mandarin Duck / Santee Lakes, San Diego, California, United States

Photo: [Allie Cellar](#) / [Macaulay Library](#) ML 648901509



Townsend's Warbler / Coast Road, Santa Cruz, California, United States

Photo: [Tino Castillo](#) / [Macaulay Library ML 648743709](#)

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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