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# Mount Diablo Bird Alliance

## *The Quail*

Volume 71, Number 2

March 2026

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### **March Monthly Program Meeting: Thursday, March 5, 7 PM**

Mount Diablo Bird Alliance will meet Thursday, March 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.

**March Agenda:**

6:30 PM Doors Open

7:00 PM Announcements

7:15 PM Refreshments and Raffle

7:30 PM Main Program: *In the Shadow of the Bridge: Birds of the Bay Area*

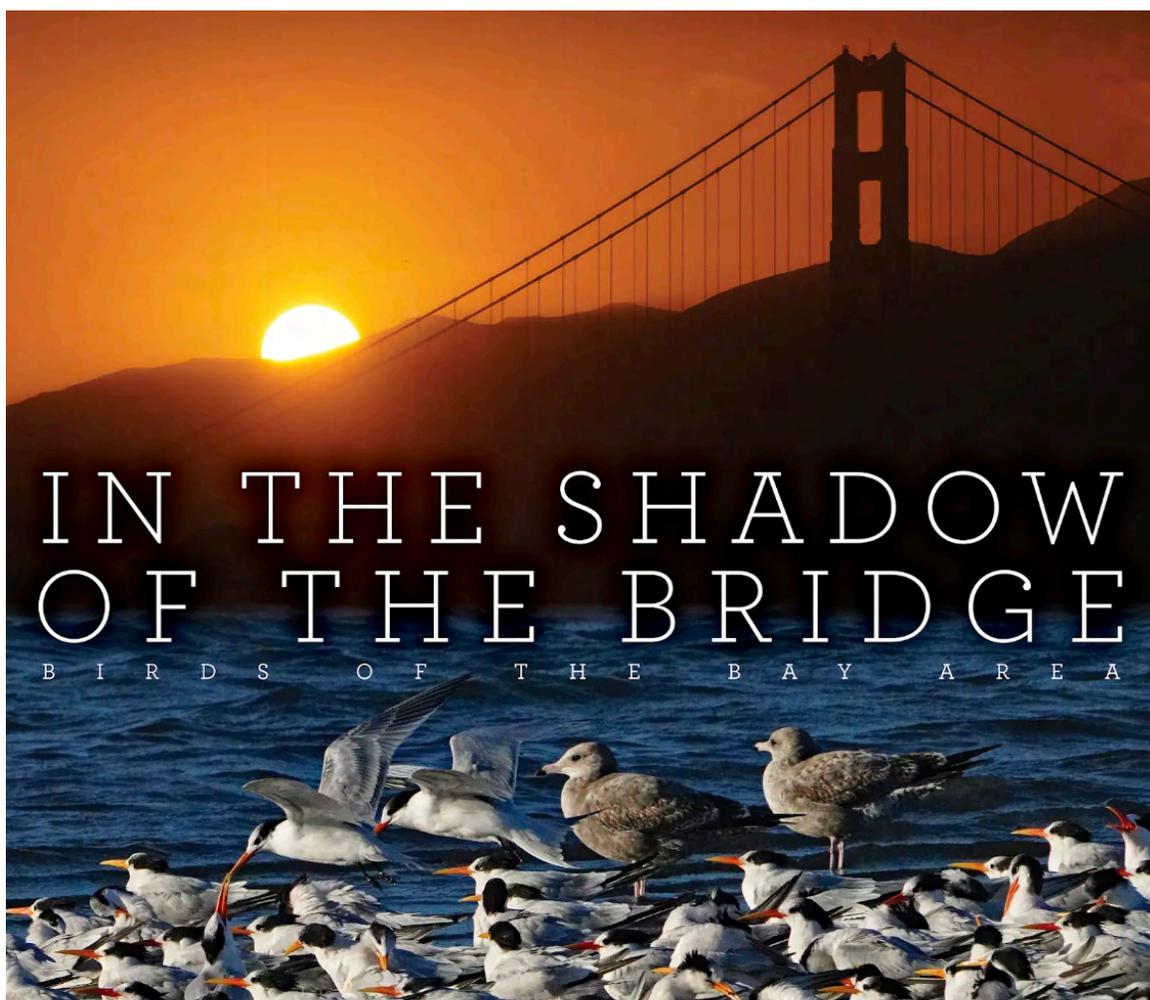
Our Raffle table's success relies heavily on your fantastic donations! We're on the lookout for awesome bird-related items or anything similar, like books, art, collectables, feeders, bird boxes, and camera equipment. Basically, anything you think someone might be interested in buying raffle tickets 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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## In the Shadow of the Bridge: Birds of the Bay Area

Dick Evans, Hannah Hindley, and Lishka Arata



PHOTOGRAPHS BY DICK EVANS  
TEXT BY HANNAH HINDLEY  
FOREWORD BY MARY ELLEN HANNIBAL



### Pacific Brown Pelicans

Photo by Dick Evans

Join photographer **Dick Evans** and essayist **Hannah Hindley** for an engaging presentation inspired by their new book, ***In the Shadow of the Bridge: Birds of the Bay Area*** (Heyday Books, 2025). Blending striking imagery with evocative storytelling, the authors will share their creative journey, highlight regional conservation successes, and offer practical tips for bird photography. They will also provide resources for those looking to deeper understand and protect our local avian populations.

Proceeds from the book benefit **Point Blue Conservation Science**. The organization's scientists—who guided Evans and Hindley throughout their research—will join the authors onstage for this special event. This talk invites readers, birders, and nature enthusiasts to explore the human and natural forces that make the Bay Area one of the most biodiverse birdwatching regions on the continent.

**Dick Evans** developed a passion for photography as a graduate student at Stanford University, maintaining his craft throughout a 47-year career in the global metals industry. Though his work took him across the globe, San Francisco remained his home base, where he now lives with his wife, Gretchen. Evans is the author or co-author of several acclaimed photography books, including *San*

*Francisco and the Bay Area: The Haight-Ashbury Edition, The Mission, and San Francisco's Chinatown.*

**Hannah Hindley** is a wilderness guide and award-winning writer. She is the recipient of the Thomas Wood Award in Journalism, the Ellen Meloy Desert Writers Award, and the Barry Lopez Prize in Nonfiction. A Harvard graduate with degrees in English and Evolutionary Biology, she also holds an MFA in Creative Nonfiction from the University of Arizona. Her environmental writing has appeared in *Bay Nature*, *The Sun*, and *Hakai Magazine*. Hannah's work focuses on the intersection of small creatures, vast landscapes, and the scientists dedicated to their study.

**Lishka Arata** is the Communications Manager for Point Blue Conservation Science, where she leads initiatives to engage the public in conservation action. She is dedicated to restoring the natural world and cultivating a sustainable future where human economies and ecological systems function in mutual harmony.

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## **Call for Officer Candidates: MDBA Board of Directors**

Alan Bade and Rochelle Fortier, *MDBA Nominations Committee*

The Mount Diablo Bird Alliance (MDBA) Board of Directors is seeking dedicated individuals to fill four key officer positions for the **July 2026 – June 2027** term: **President, Vice President, Treasurer, and Secretary.**

The Board meets via Zoom on the **second Thursday of each month at 6:45 PM** (September through June). As we approach this important election cycle, we invite current members to step forward and submit their names for consideration.

### **Key Dates:**

- **April Quail:** Announcement of the nominee slate.
- **May:** Official election held via email ballot.

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### **Summary of Officer Responsibilities**

- **President:** Presides over all MDBA meetings and appoints chairs for Board and Advisory committees (subject to Board approval). Serves as an *ex officio* member of all committees except Nominations. Directs and

supervises MDBA operations, prepares meeting agendas, and writes the monthly "President's Letter."

- **Vice President:** Assists the President and manages special projects as assigned by the Board of Directors or the President.
- **Secretary:** Maintains the official records of all Board meetings and performs other duties as required by the Board.
- **Treasurer:** Acts as custodian of MDBA funds, managing deposits and membership dues. Disburses funds as directed by the Board. Responsible for providing an annual report within 90 days of the fiscal year's end and providing financial updates at Board meetings.

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## Contact the Nominating Committee

If you would like to submit your name for consideration or have questions about a role, we would love to hear from you! Please reach out to:

- **Rochelle Fortier**, Nominating Committee Chair
- **Alan Bade**, Committee Member
- **Online:** Visit the **Contact Us** page at the Mount Diablo Bird Alliance website.

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## President's Letter

Janna Layton, *MDBA Publicity and Social Media 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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Hello, fellow bird enthusiasts! It's my turn to write this monthly President's Letter. I'm a fairly new Mount Diablo Bird Alliance board member. In January 2025, I joined as the Publicity & Social Media Chair, taking over for Rosalie Howarth, who continues to help with our **Facebook page**. I mainly focus on our **Instagram**, where I strive to reach new audiences about our organization and keep current members and community updated on our activities and bird-related news.

Our most successful post so far was **a call for volunteers** for Mount Diablo Interpretive Association's important Peregrine Team. Featuring a striking photo of

MDBA board member and MDIA volunteer Rosita Harvey holding a Peregrine Falcon chick for banding, the post garnered nearly 12,000 views. More importantly, it inspired approximately 30 potential volunteers to reach out and join the team!

In 2026 my goals for this role are to continue using social media to bridge the gap between nature lovers—both near and far—and to modernize our promotional materials. I currently coordinate MDBA's presence at local conservation events, such as the recent **Winged Migration Expo** in Vallejo and the annual **Martinez Beaver Festival**. My hope is to build upon our current foundation to create eye-catching visuals that instantly communicate the essential work MDBA performs. From bird-banding and nest box projects to field trips and the Christmas Bird Count, we have a rich story to tell.

If you have expertise in design or marketing and would like to offer suggestions or assistance, I would love to hear from you. Please feel free to reach out at [\*\*jannalayton@yahoo.com\*\*](mailto:jannalayton@yahoo.com).



Herb Long and Janna Layton tabling at the 2025 Martinez Beaver Festival

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## **Contra Costa Parks Under Threat from Fed Oil & Gas Leasing**

Juan Pablo Galván, *MDBA Conservation*



## **Two Million Acres at Risk – Say NO**

### **1. Protect Our Public Lands from Drilling!**

The federal government is proposing to open more than a million acres of California land to expanded oil and gas leasing. This proposal targets land adjacent to—and potentially even *within*—protected areas such as **Mount Diablo State Park**, **Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve**, and **Pinnacles National Park**.

How is this possible? In several cases, the federal government retains "split-estate" rights to underground minerals and resources, even if they do not own the surface land.

- **Take Action [HERE](#)**

### **2. Federal Erosion of Climate Change Policy**

What does the rollback of federal environmental authority mean for our future? How will these policy shifts accelerate the climate crisis, and what can you do to intervene?

- **Learn More [HERE](#)**

### **3. Choosing Reality Over Denial: Local Action for Global Impact**

While national strategies may currently ignore the realities of human-caused climate change, the threat to our planet's livability remains. Though progress at the federal level has stalled, states, counties, cities, and individual households can still drive significant change.

Join your neighbors in Contra Costa County who have chosen action and science over denial.

- **Join the Movement [HERE](#)**

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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 January: **Balprit Chima**, Clayton; **Kaitlyn Kawamoto**, Walnut Creek; **Pat Levy**, Concord; **Andrew Matthew**, Concord; and **Katrin and Mark Stapleton**, Walnut Creek. I hope to see you at our next program meeting!



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## Big Picture: Natural World Photography Competition

The **BigPicture Natural World Photography Competition** celebrates and illustrates the rich diversity of life on Earth, leveraging the power of imagery to inspire conservation and protection.

### The Opportunity

Submit your finest nature, wildlife, and conservation images for a chance to win a share of **\$12,300 in cash prizes**. Winning photographs will be showcased at the **California Academy of Sciences**, which welcomes more than one million visitors annually.

For more details, check [HERE](#).

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### Meet the 2026 Judging Panel

Our esteemed panel of experts brings a wealth of global experience to this year's competition:

- **Georgina Goodwin**
- **Sebastian Kennerknecht**
- **Thomas Nicolon**
- **Sophie Stafford**
- **Michelle Valberg**

- **Anand Varma**

**Note on the Photo Story Category:** > This specific category will be evaluated by **Jean-Gael Collomb** (CEO of Wildlife Conservation Network) in collaboration with the BigPicture team and Jury Chair **Suzi Eszterhas**.

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## **MDBA Trip Report**

### **Bridgeway Island, January 22**

Report by Trip Leader: Mona Lange



Horned Lark



Cedar Waxwing

Photos by Isaac Aronow

Despite foggy conditions during the first part of our trip, we spotted a total of **56 bird species** across two locations, including 41 at Bridgeway Island Pond.

### **Bridgeway Island Pond Highlights**

The morning was full of activity despite the mist:

- **Raptors & Waterfowl:** Two **Osprey** in flight and three **Blue-winged Teal**.
- **Songbirds:** Well over a hundred **Cedar Waxwings** feeding in a local tree, along with numerous **Marsh Wrens** and **Song Sparrows**.
- **The Reeds:** Many **Black-crowned Night-Herons** were tucked into the vegetation, and we heard the calls of two **Sora** from different directions.
- **Favorites:** Two brilliant male **Common Yellowthroats**—always a treat to see.

### **Bridgeway Lakes Community Park**

About a half-mile away, the birding remained excellent:

- **Cooperative Feeding:** We enjoyed watching several dozen **Double-crested Cormorants** swimming and diving in a large group, joined by two **Common Mergansers**.
- **Local Residents:** While we missed the reported Tropical Kingbirds, we had wonderful views of a **Red-shouldered Hawk**, an **American Kestrel**, and **Western Bluebirds**.
- **The Mystery Bird:** One "mystery bird" was identified with certainty only after we returned home and reviewed the photos: a young **Horned Lark**.

## **A Clear Finish**

When the skies finally cleared, we were treated to the sight of several skeins of **Greater White-fronted Geese** high above, flying in V-formations and vocalizing. It was a spectacular end to a great day!

eBird trip report [here](#).

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## **Bodega Bay, February 7**

Report by: Matt Tarlach



Photo by Cindy Roach



Photo by Isaac Aronow







Photos by David Spangler

On February 7, a dozen birders set out for our semi-annual journey to **Bodega Bay**. The day began pleasantly before turning a bit blustery, but the weather didn't stop us from spotting a diverse array of seabirds and waders throughout the bay.

### **The "Mystery" at Bodega Head**

Out at Bodega Head, the group experienced a moment of high excitement over a young gull. Initially, we were confident we had spotted a **Glaucous Gull**; however, upon further review and closer inspection, the bird was correctly identified as a **Glaucous-winged Gull**. Even without the rarity, it was an excellent study in identification!

### **Trip Totals**

It was a highly productive outing, with a total of **73 species** identified. This count includes several species of ducks spotted along **Highway 37** during the drive home.

Overall, it was a fantastic day of birding and camaraderie.

**Full Species List:** View the [eBird Trip Report Here](#).

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## **Pacheco Marsh, February 12**

Report by: Matt Tarlach



Western Meadowlark

Photo by Isaac Aronow

On a beautiful, almost spring-like afternoon, over two dozen birders visited **Pacheco Marsh** in hopes of spotting the **Short-eared Owls** that typically prowl the marsh near sunset.

While the owls remained elusive—perhaps preferring the cover of cloudier skies—the afternoon was far from quiet. We enjoyed watching several **Northern Harriers** and **White-tailed Kites** hunting over the grasses. The marsh was alive with the sound of countless **Marsh Wrens** and **Song Sparrows**, and we were treated to the calls of at least three **Sora**.

### **Acknowledgements**

A special thanks to trip leader **Ted Robertson**, and to **Ricardo** of the **John Muir Land Trust (JMLT)** for facilitating our visit and providing access to this wonderful habitat.

## 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 [mdbfieldtrips@gmail.com](mailto:mdbfieldtrips@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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## **Valle Vista**

Tuesday, March 3 (Reschedule from February 16), 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](mailto: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](#).

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## 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](mailto: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](#).

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## Birding Moorhen Marsh

Wednesday, March 25 *and* Sunday, March 29

8:30 AM - Noon, *either day*



Black-crowned Night Herons

Photo by Isaac Aronow

**Moorhen Marsh** in Martinez was one of the first water treatment facilities in the U.S. specifically designed to provide a healthy habitat for birds. Managed by the **Mountain View Sanitary District (MVSD)**, the marsh is home to many resident species and serves as a vital stopover for migrants. Because the marsh is only open by appointment, this is a unique opportunity to explore its several ponds.

*Note: This is not a two-day outing. We are offering identical outings on Wednesday and Sunday to accommodate various schedules.*

We'll meet at 8:30AM in front of the MVSD administration building, then proceed together into Moorhen Marsh. There will be a short introductory presentation on the birds we hope to see and on birding in general. Then we'll take a walk around the marsh, hoping to see and hear egrets, herons, warblers and wrens, with raptors and other species also possible. As we depart Moorhen Marsh we'll stop at Waterbird Regional Preserve, just across the freeway, where we'll use scopes to identify the variety of long-legged shorebirds, ducks, and more who winter there.

Binoculars will be available to lend. If you'd like to borrow a pair please contact the leader in advance, so we have enough on hand.

**Leader:** Matthew Tarlach, [MDBAFieldtrips@gmail.com](mailto:MDBAFieldtrips@gmail.com), Cheryl Abel and Elisa Fernandes-McDade.

**Hike Rating:** 1 - Easy. Under 1 mile on flat terrain. Unpaved paths, potentially muddy if it's rained recently.

**Meet:** In front of the MVSD administration building at 8:30AM. ***Please note*** that Moorhen Marsh is gated. If you're more than a few minutes late you won't be able to get in.

**Directions:** From I-680 northbound, exit at Pacheco Blvd, turn right onto Arthur Road and go under the freeway. At the end of Arthur Road, continue ahead and left through the MVSD gate. Follow the service road about half a mile and proceed through the tunnel under the freeway---watch for oncoming traffic! After emerging from the tunnel, the admin building will be on your right.

**Register [HERE](#)** for Wednesday March 25 or **[HERE](#)** for the same itinerary on Sunday March 29.

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## North Briones

Tuesday, April 7, 8:30 AM - 12:30 PM



Red-tailed Hawk

Photo by Isaac Aronow

This scenic walk begins in lush oak woodlands teeming with spring wildflowers and birdlife before ascending through open grasslands to the **Sindicich Lagoons**. The route follows a combination of fire roads and hilly trails for an approximately three-mile round trip, returning along the same path. Please be sure to bring plenty of water and a snack to enjoy along the way.

**Trail Rating:** 3 - Uphill climb.

**Elevation change:** 300+ feet.

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

**Meet:** Parking area at the north entrance of Briones Regional Park.

**Directions:** Take Briones Road south off Alhambra Valley Road and drive up the narrow, winding road. Park at the end.

The field trip is limited to 15 participants. Participants must acknowledge the MDBA Liability Waiver. Register [HERE](#).

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## Mitchell Canyon

Tuesday, April 14, 8 AM - 1 PM



Wilson's Warbler

Photo by Jerry Britten

We will explore **Mitchell Canyon** on the lower slopes of **Mount Diablo State Park**, where spring birdlife is at its peak. This walk offers the chance to spot a wide variety of seasonal arrivals, including **Warblers**, **Hummingbirds**, **Flycatchers**, and **Gnatcatchers**, among others. Along the way, we will also enjoy the vibrant spring wildflowers in full bloom.

**Trail Rating:** 3. 3+ miles on a potentially hot, dusty trail.

**Elevation change:** up to 400 feet

**Leader:** Sandy Ritchie, (925) 381-2514

**Meet:** Mitchell Canyon parking lot, Clayton.

**Directions:** From Ygnacio Valley Road in Concord, turn south on Clayton Road. Turn right onto Mitchell Canyon Road and drive past the quarry to the end.

Unless you have a State Parks pass a \$6 parking fee is required---bring exact bills.

This field trip is limited to 15 participants. **Register [HERE](#).**

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### **Black Diamond Mines**

Friday, April 17, 8 AM - 1:30 PM



Canyon Wren

Photo by Vicky Atkinson

This trip features a vigorous climb up a steep, rocky trail with an elevation gain of several hundred feet. Why take on the challenge? Because this location offers the best opportunity in our MDBA territory to see and hear the **Canyon Wren!** Please be advised that the footing can be tricky; sturdy shoes and a steady pace are recommended.

While there is no guarantee of finding these elusive wrens, the area is home to many other fascinating species, including the **California Thrasher**, **Rufous-crowned Sparrow**, and **Phainopepla**. At the very least, we will share an adventure in a stunning and historically significant landscape. Be sure to bring plenty of water and a lunch or snack to enjoy.

**Rating:** 3, steep rocky trail, potentially hot.

**Elevation change:** 600 feet

**Leader:** Matt Tarlach, [MDBAFieldtrips@gmail.com](mailto:MDBAFieldtrips@gmail.com)

**Meet:** Black Diamond Mines parking lot at the south end of Somersville Road.

**Directions:** Exit Hwy 4 at Somersville Road in Antioch. Drive south, enter the park gate and drive about 1 mile uphill to the last parking lot at the road's end.

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

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## Del Puerto Canyon

Tuesday, April 21, 9 AM - 3 PM



Western Kingbird

Photo by Isaac Aronow

We will drive through **Del Puerto Canyon** on the eastern side of the **Diablo Range**, searching for regional specialties such as the **Canyon Wren**, **Costa's Hummingbird**, and **Greater Roadrunner**.

Please be prepared for the elements, as it can get quite warm in the canyon. This excursion takes us further from modern conveniences than most of our outings, so be sure to bring a full lunch and plenty of water to stay hydrated throughout the day.

**Trail Rating:** 1 - This is mostly a car trip, with several easy walks.

**Leader:** Steve Buffi (925) 200-4555

Carpools should plan to leave at **7:30 AM** from Sycamore Valley Road Park and Ride. OR, meet on Del Puerto Canyon Road west of I-5 at **9 AM** at the Patterson Exit (Diablo Grande Parkway and Sperry Road) off I-5 (56 miles from Sycamore Valley Road). Take I-580 east to I-5 south.

There is no capacity limit on this trip. Carpooling is strongly recommended. Most meet at Sycamore Valley Road. Register **[HERE](#)**.

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**March Gallery & Media**

CornellLab   
Birds of the World

BOW Seminar:  
New hope for the  
endemic Grenada Dove

Featuring:  
Ryan Chenery of *Birding the Islands*  
A Caribbean conservationist



## Plight of the Caribbean Endemics Case of the Grenada Dove

See the full video [HERE](#)

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**These Birds Are of Different Feathers,  
But They Flock Together**



Read the article [HERE](#)

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Cassin's Kingbird / Las Cruzitas Ranch Santa Barbara, California, United States

Photo: **Keith Kennedy** / Macaulay Library ML 650788391

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California Gull / San Mateo, California, United States

Photo: [Michael Long](#) / [Macaulay Library ML 650926666](#)

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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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