



THE Clapper Rail

MARIN AUDUBON SOCIETY

Southern Marin Christmas Bird Count — December 26, 2009

The Christmas Bird Count for Southern Marin County will be held on Saturday, December 26, rain or shine! If you haven't yet signed up, there is still time. Just go to MarinAudubon.org and click on the "Southern Marin Christmas Bird Count" link for more information and a signup form. For additional info call Dominik Mosur at 415/786 2768.

Last year 113 people took part in the Dec. 27, 2008 Christmas Bird Count. They spent a total of 300 hours, braved a low temperature of 33°F and a high of 45°F to report 174 species. The Compilation Dinner will follow (see page 7). We hope to see you there!

SPEAKER SERIES

Free and Open to the Public

Richardson Bay Audubon Center
376 Greenwood Beach Road
Tiburon, California 94920
Information: 415/388-2821

FRIDAY, JAN 8 8 PM

Amazing Tales of Migrating Shorebirds

With Bob Lewis

The Bay Area is a critical habitat for many migrating shorebirds.

Bob's talk will look at some amazing shorebird migrations and how and why they do it. He'll speak on how scientists study the migration phenomenon, how it fits into the shorebird's annual breeding cycle, and what this behavior looks like worldwide.

Since 1993, Bob has taught adult birding classes at Albany Adult School and the Oakland Museum.

Although retired from the Golden Gate Audubon (GGAS) Board of Directors, he remains on its education committee. A co-compiler with Dave Quady of the Oakland Christmas Bird Count, he is president of the Farallon Islands Foundation. His life list: more than 3,700 (out of the approximately 9,750 birds worldwide).

FRIDAY, FEB 5 8 PM

Wildlife Photography

With Suzi Eszterhas

Suzi is an extraordinary photographer who shares her skill with the world.

Her photos are published in books and magazines, even the covers of TIME and AFRICA. She also leads instructional photography tours with names like: "Wildlife India, Botswana Predators" and "Madagascar Lemurs and Reptiles." She is also a Fellow of the International League of Conservation Photographers.

You could pay to join one of her tours, or you can see her marvelous work for free, by coming on February 5. 

MAS Prepares to Acquire Lands Along the Petaluma River

Marin Audubon is thrilled to announce that we have just signed an agreement to purchase a stunning 60-acre property in unincorporated Novato, on the Marin-Sonoma border.

Located at the confluence of San Antonio Creek with the Petaluma River, the property straddles San Antonio Creek and supports a spectacular array of habitats. These habitats include tidal marsh fringes along the banks and at the mouth of the creek, plus 25 acres of historic tidal marsh that is part of the Petaluma Marsh. At approximately 2,000 acres, the Petaluma Marsh is the largest salt marsh in the state that has never been diked. In addition, there are seasonal wetlands and a small oak-studded hill that was once an island in the bay before dikes were placed around tidal marshes to create agricultural lands.

The location of the property, between two major areas of publicly-owned (California Department of Fish & Game) lands, increases its value for wildlife. This purchase will create a continuous corridor connecting the Petaluma Marsh with other Fish & Game-owned lands to the north and south. The varied habitats support upland species as well as herons, egrets, endangered California Clapper Rail, other special status species, and native fish including steelhead.

The property also presents opportunities for restoration of both seasonal and tidal wetlands. Remnants of development on the property could be removed to enhance the habitat value.

Marin Audubon and Marin Baylands Advocates, our partner in bayland acquisitions, are planning a major effort to raise the funds to acquire and restore this property. If you would like to be a part of this important acquisition, send your contribution to the Marin Baylands Fund at the Marin Community Foundation.

Thank you. 



RICHARD BOHNET

View from the Hill

HABITAT STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

We are getting our properties ready for the upcoming rains and need to remove invasive non-native plants such as ice plant, *Dittrichia* or stinkwort, and radish. If you are interested in these work days, or would like to be notified if additional dates are chosen later, please contact Bob Hinz at 415/383-8688.

TRIANGLE MARSH: SAT. JANUARY 2

BAHIA: SAT. JANUARY 9, SUN. JANUARY 17, & SAT. FEBRUARY 13



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BOARD OF DIRECTORS

All phone numbers are in the 415 area code unless otherwise noted. Questions? Please contact the committee chair.

President Barbara Salzman 924-6057
Vice President Lowell Sykes 388-2821
Secretary Mariah Baird 456-3355
Treasurer Josephine Kreider 381-1910
Finance Chair Greg Block 479-8254
Conservation Phil Peterson 898-8400
Barbara Salzman 924-6057
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Field Trips Helen Lindqvist 789-0703
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Programs Lowell Sykes 388-2821
Special Projects Jude Stalker 668-1242
Nominating Josephine Kreider 381-1910
Volunteers Bob Hinz 383-8688
Property Mgt. Ed Nute 457-9241
Publicity
BAAC Reps Lowell Sykes 388-2821
Barbara Salzman 924-6057

DIRECTORS MEETINGS

Meetings open to members.

7:30 PM, first Tuesday of the month
Richardson Bay Audubon Center
376 Greenwood Beach Road
Tiburon, California 94920

MAS telephone: 721-4271

Marin Audubon Society is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization. All memberships and contributions are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law. *The Clapper Rail* is published ten times a year by the Marin Audubon Society on 100% recycled paper. Edited by Nancy Okada, 987-8800, nxokada@yahoo.com; layout by Sue Morrison, and assisted by David Weinstock, and other members of MAS. Deadline is the first of each month.

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MISSION STATEMENT

To conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds and other wildlife and their habitats for the benefit of humanity and the earth's biological diversity.

Web site: www.marinaudubon.org
Northern Calif. Bird Box: 681-7422
(Provided by Golden Gate AS)

TO JOIN NATIONAL AUDUBON:

Log onto www.audubon.org or contact
National Audubon Society
700 Broadway, New York, NY 10003
212/979-3000

DONATIONS APPRECIATED!

Marin Audubon Society welcomes gifts of funds, stock, or property, and bequests in general, or in honor or memory of someone. Gifts may be directed to any MAS project. Unspecified gifts of more than \$100 will be placed in the Endowment Fund for conservation, the protection of wildlife species and the preservation and enhancement of wildlife habitats. Since MAS is an all volunteer organization, 100% of your donation goes to its projects. All gifts are tax deductible and will be acknowledged in *The Clapper Rail*, as well as personally on behalf of the Society. Checks should be made out and mailed to: Marin Audubon Society, P.O. Box 599, Mill Valley, CA 94942.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By Barbara Salzman

We apologize for failing to include the phone contact information for signing up for the Christmas Bird Count in the December *Clapper Rail*. We are hopeful this issue will be delivered prior to the count day on December 26, and if you want to join a team, please call Dominik Mosur at 415/786 2768 or go to our web site marinaudubon.org AND click on CBC. Also call Mary Anne Cowperthwaite if you wish to join us for the dinner at 415/453-2216.

I made a major omission in the list of people to thank for their work on the Christmas Bird Count. Harrison Karr is a long time Marin Audubon member and former board member. Harrison stepped up several years ago to guide us when we needed a volunteer to chair for this important event. This year he has continued to play a leadership role by helping our new chairperson, Dominik Mosur, learn the ropes. Thank you, thank you Harrison. And thank you again, Dominik Moser, Roger Harris, Meryl Sundove, Dianne Sierra, Mary Anne Cowperthwaite, and Jo Kreider.

Nancy Okada has decided to resign from her board position as Publicity chair. During her time on the board, Nancy took on many challenging tasks, including chairing the Mother's Day Barbecue for the past two years. Her energy and willingness to help will be missed. We are pleased she will continue as editor of the *Clapper Rail*. Thank you Nancy.

Members who are interested in serving on Marin Audubon's board are encouraged to contact one of the Nominating Committee members (Phil Peterson, Jo Kreider and Ed Nute) for more information. Their contact information is on the left of this page.

Our year-end appeal letter went out in early December. This is our major appeal, with donations supporting all of our activities, education, field trips, conservation, property stewardship and administration. The letter has information about our activities and how your gift will be used during the coming year. Remember that we are an all-volunteer organization. All your donations go directly to support local habitat protection and activities in which you can participate. We hope you give generously.

Looking for some fun while helping wildlife? We need volunteers for a major planting effort at Bahia as soon as the rainy season begins. Please check the list of currently scheduled volunteer days on the front page in the Habitat Stewardship section, as well as on the Field Trip page (page 3). Check our website after the rains begin for additional days.

I hope everyone is enjoying the holiday season. May you all have a healthy and joyous new year, and have a chance to enjoy our wonderful overwintering migratory birds. 

CONSERVATION

By Barbara Salzman

Marin Audubon Conservation Committee reviews critical environmental issues related to wildlife habitats and comments to cities, agencies, and other jurisdictions. To attend, call Barbara Salzman at 415/924-6057.

WIND POWER – MORE STUDY NEED ON LOCAL BIRD AND WILDLIFE IMPACTS

The Marin County Planning Commission is revising the county's development code to expand standards regarding development and operation of Wind Energy Conversion Systems (WECS). Intended to implement Countywide Plan policies which strongly endorse alternative energy sources to reduce consumption of utility-supplied electricity, the new ordinance would apply to all county areas, except floating homes.

The commission held its first workshop in late November, with the next scheduled for January 11. Omissions, discrepancies and other problems identified at November's workshop by both commissioners and audience members, will result in changes in the next draft.

Three categories of WECS are described in the draft code: small WECS (of up to a height of 200 feet or 10 feet above roofline for rooftop mounted wind turbines), large WECS on larger lots only in agricultural zoning, and community-based WECS (a category to be used by non-profits and governments). The county intends to encourage community-based WECS by proposing less restrictive requirements.

The draft code's specific requirements (turbine color and distances from property lines, ridge tops,

Your Action is Needed!

Attend and testify at the January 11 hearing or send comments to the commission through:

Don Dickenson, Chairman
Marin County Civic Center
3501 Civic Center Drive
San Rafael, CA 94903

Please feel free to express your concern about any of the issues noted in this article. Make sure to **check with the Planning Department on the date**, as staff may need more time to address the issues that were raised and the hearing may be delayed.

and structures) are designed to protect people from noise and visual impacts. The environmental concerns, expressed by MAS and other conservation organizations at the meeting, are about potential impacts to wildlife — particularly birds and bats.

Three specific aspects need to be addressed: absence of information about existing conditions (including wildlife use and habitats), failure to adequately identify potential impacts, and lack of

Continued on page 6

MAS FIELD TRIPS

Open to the public

Bring lunch, field guide, and binoculars. Information, weather check, and accessibility: Helen Lindqvist at 415/789-0703 or 415/306-2325 (cell).

LAS GALLINAS STORAGE PONDS

Thursday, Jan 7

8:30 AM to 12 NOON

With Len Blumin

Join Len on this morning birding walk at the storage ponds. Some of our feathered fall visitors will have arrived to join the resident ones that stay all year round.

From Hwy 101 in San Rafael, take the Smith Ranch Road exit, go east to the McInnis Park entrance, turn left immediately after crossing the railroad tracks and go to end of road to the Las Gallinas Storage Ponds' parking lot. Meet the group by the bridge just past the parking lot.

SHOLLENBERGER PARK to ELLIS CREEK, PETALUMA

Sunday, Jan 17

8:30 AM to 1 PM

With Peter Colasanti

This wildlife preserve is a city park with a diversity of wetland habitats – saltwater and freshwater marsh and tidal mudflats. It offers a good variety of birds, including Blue-winged Teal, Virginia Rail, yellowthroats and moorhens.

North on Hwy 101 to the second Petaluma exit (Rte 116, Lakeville Hwy). East one mile to South McDowell Blvd (4th traffic light) and turn right. Take the 3rd right onto Cader Lane and into the parking lot. Meet Peter and the group on the path at 8:30 AM. We shall shuttle cars to Ellis Creek, so the walk will be one-way. Bring binoculars and a spotting scope. Heavy rain cancels.

COSUMNES RIVER PRESERVE & SUNSET CRANE "FLY-IN"

Saturday, Jan 30, 2010

With Terry Colborn

Join us at 1,500 acre Cosumnes River Preserve. After a morning walk of about one mile on a flat trail, we'll eat lunch on the deck at the Visitor's Center and spend time scoping the impoundments opposite the Visitor's Center that host a significant number of waterfowl plus several large winter ponds with a resident Peregrine Falcon. Next up, we'll head to Staten Island Road, winter home to thousands of Sandhill Cranes. The birds feed in the nearby recently harvested rice and cornfields, and move to roost in the wetlands by late afternoon, early evening. The sight and sound of hundreds of Sandhill Cranes coming into roost at sunset is a sight to behold.

Meet Terry Colborn at 9 AM at Cosumnes River Preserve Visitor's Center parking lot. From Hwy 101 in Novato, take Hwy 37 to I-80 east; at Fairfield/Suisun City turn onto Hwy 12 (southeast) and continue to Hwy I-5, near Lodi. Go north on Hwy I-5 approximately 13 miles to the Twin Cities Road exit. Travel 1 mile east, turn right (south) on Franklin Blvd and drive 1.7 miles to the Cosumnes Preserve Visitor's Center on your left. Travel time from Marin County is approximately 2 hrs. Bring binoculars and scope, lunch, water, snacks, wear comfortable footwear and dress in layers. Heavy rain cancels. For more info: call Terry at 916/705-8991 or email tlcgdc@aol.com.

MAS WORK PARTIES

TRIANGLE MARSH WORK PARTY

Saturday, Jan 2

10 AM - 1 PM

First Saturday of each month. Bring your weed clippers, gardening gloves and weed wrenches/pullers for a day of fun. For details call Bob Hinz at 415/383-8688.

BAHIA WORK PARTY

Saturday, Jan 9, Feb 13

Sunday, Jan 17

10 AM - 1 PM

The Bahia work days will be the second Saturday of each month. Please call Bob Hinz for details and directions at 415/383-8688.

NON-AUDUBON EVENTS

BRUCE BAJEMA MEMORIAL BIRD WATCHING SOCIETY

AT LAS GALLINAS STORAGE PONDS

Thursday mornings

8:30 AM

The Bruce Bajema Memorial Bird Watching Society is an informal group, formed to carry on the tradition of birding enthusiasm that Bruce Bajema was known for when he led walks at Las Gallinas Storage Ponds. Please join them on Thursdays when there are no Marin Audubon sponsored walks. Walks start at 8:30 AM on Thursday mornings, weather permitting. Please bring water, sun protection and comfortable shoes. Look for us in the parking lot or near the bridge. For further information, email Brucewalks@gmail.com.

GRAY LODGE, FEATHER RIVER AND THE SACRAMENTO NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

By Sande Chilvers

On a cold, wind-whipped day, a stalwart group of birders followed leader Bruce Deuel around Gray Lodge on Saturday, December 5 — his 34th annual field trip for the Marin Audubon Society!

Snow Geese, Ross's Geese, Greater White-fronted Geese and ducks galore (American Wigeons, Buffleheads, Pintails, Shovelers, Green-winged and Cinnamon Teal, Gadwalls) were in the pond next to the parking lot. Circling around the pond we were treated to a few blue-morph Snow Geese, Common Moorhens, a Great-horned Owl, White-faced Ibises, and a great many raptors. On one end of the pond River Otters were terrorizing the American Coots. We spotted a Belted Kingfisher nearby and flushed an American Bittern.

On our drive toward Sutter Buttes we spied our first Golden Eagle. Back at Gray Lodge a lingering "Technicolor" dusk was the backdrop for the evening fly-out of thousands of Snow Geese, Ross's Geese, innumerable silhouetted ducks and Black-crowned Night Herons. Flying in the opposite direction overhead — Sandhill Cranes gave their rattling call. In the rushes Red-winged Blackbirds serenaded.

On Sunday, December 6, we met in Oroville and birded the levee along the Feather River. Best birds were a female Phainopepla, a Red-breasted Sapsucker, a juvenile Bald Eagle and a juvenile Peregrine Falcon harassing

an Osprey over the river. On the river, Common Mergansers, Common Goldeneyes and Buffleheads shared space while a Belted Kingfisher worked the banks. At the Thermalito Afterbay we saw Common Loons, Canvasbacks, Redheads and all five kinds of grebes for these parts. We saw Wilson's Snipes and American Pipets in a field on our way to the Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge, and an adult Bald Eagle flew overhead.

The Arctic wind continued at the refuge and kept the birds away from the viewing platform, but we did see two male Ring-necked Pheasants and, surprisingly, a Yellow-billed Magpie. On the auto tour at the refuge notable birds were Lesser Scaup, a Cackling Goose, another Golden Eagle, more Common Moorhens, a Ring-necked Duck and Tundra Swans.

In all, 113 species were spotted by our group. Bruce's Trip #34 for MAS was another successful event, and he made it look easy.



Birds in flight at Gray Lodge

BOB CHILVERS

PROPERTY STEWARDSHIP

BIRD USE AT BAHIA

The first of the avian surveys required by regulatory agencies took place November 17. Volunteer observers Jules Evens, Jim White, Mary Anne Flett, Len Blumin and Don Rienberg tallied 2,795 birds.

The highest number of species counted included: White Pelican (13), Double-crested Cormorant (70), Gadwall (34), Mallard (100), Northern Shoveler (789), Northern Pintail (68), Canvasback (48), Greater Scaup (568), Semi-palmated Sandpiper (107), Western Sandpiper (456), Least Sandpiper (468), Dunlin (509), Peep sp. (130), and Snowy Egret (14). Thank you Mary Anne, Jules, Jim, Len, and Don.

While birds are clearly enjoying the habitat we have restored, some human users seem bent on destroying it. A sign that we installed — explaining the lands are being protected as habitat and asking people to stay out — was recently shot full of bullet holes (see photo below).

As we wait for the rain to come so we can begin revegetation, we have spent workdays removing iceplant and other invasives.



JUDE STALKER

Marin Audubon sign damaged

A Special Thanks

A big thank you to Goodman Building Supply in Mill Valley for donating an assortment of gardening gloves for our volunteers to use in restoration efforts. The gloves will come in very "handy".

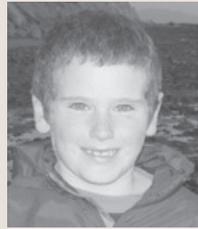
Thank you to Casey Falvey at the Center for Volunteer & Non Profit Leadership for including the habitat restoration at Bahia as one of their 'FLEX program' projects. Casey is very supportive and is doing great work in recruiting volunteers to help us out at Bahia. We are grateful for this ongoing partnership.

— Jude Stalker

JUNIOR BIRD WATCHERS CORNER

By Wendy Dreskin

Two second graders at Bacich Elementary School became Junior Bird Watchers this month.



Parker Leopold now has 23 birds on his life list. His favorites so far were the male Northern Shoveler and the male Green-winged Teal. His wish is to see his first Osprey!



Pierre Beaurang was excited to see a perched Red-tailed Hawk at his school the day he became a Junior Bird Watcher. Maybe it came by to wish him luck with his test!

PHOTOS: WENDY DRESKIN

If you know an individual child or a teacher who would like to participate, please have them go to www.marinaudubon.org and click on Junior Bird Watcher. Questions? Call Wendy at 415/457-3949.

MARIN AUDUBON THANKS THE FOLLOWING FOR THEIR GENEROUS DONATIONS:

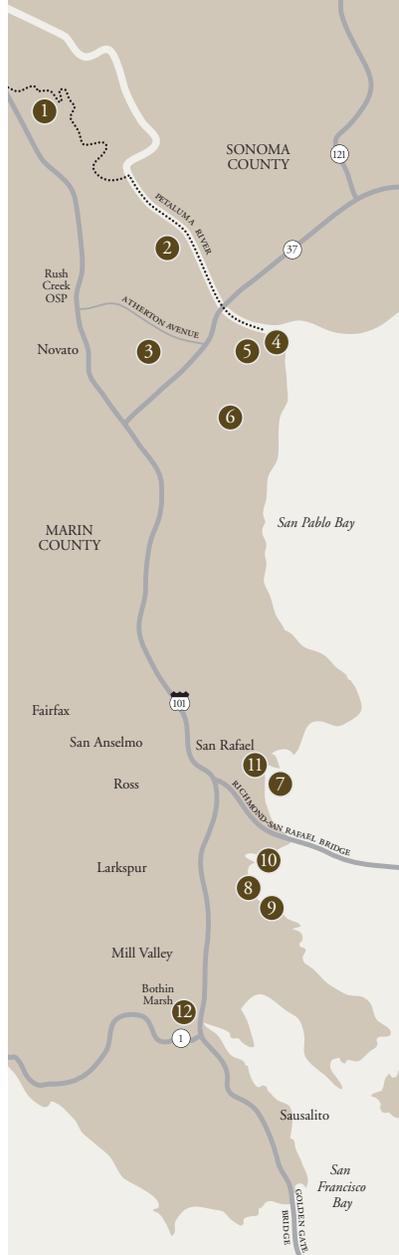
Julie Allecta, Nancy & John Kling, Deborah Ablin, Bud Alderson, Joyce & David Applen, Mariah Baird, Ankie Bajema, Jane Ann Barger, Barbara Benson, Mark & Beverly Birnbaum, Dewitt Bowman, Neil Brandt, Charles Brousse, Beatrice & Mark Brown, Henry Chaikin, Mary Anne & James Cowperthwaite, Frank Cox, Thomas Delebo, Wendy & William Dreskin, Fischer Family Fund, Shirley Fischer, Dennis & Pam Fisco, Barbara Ford, Mark H. Forney, Alan & Anita Frank, Lewis Fredrickson, Carmel Friesen, Kay Gillis, Mary Gleim, Jim Gonsman, Richard Greenwald, Glenda Griffin, Ron & Belle Guelden, Erika W. Harris, Frederick & Patricia Holden, Ken Howard, Elizabeth Huning, Norma & Lowden Jessup, Carvel & Karen Johnson, Patricia L. Kampmeier, Josephine Kreider, Richard Leonards, Nina Lilienthal-Murphy, Janice N. Lum, Marin Community Foundation, Hersh Markusfeld, Edwin & David Mayer, Marilyn McGovern, Gerald Moore, Linda Nicoletto, Kathleen & Chin-Tzu Peng, Jessie Peterson, Phil Peterson, Stacey Pogorzelski, Donald Reinberg, Walter & Joan Rentsch, Susan & John Ristow, Carol B. Schwartz, Jean Starkweather, Walter Stone, Peter and Marie Sullivan, Judith Tardy, Stephen & Britt Thal, Bruce & Phyllis Thompson, Gary Thompson, James D. Tustin, Joan Vaughan, Henry Wachs, Janice Wright

THANKS TO OUR VOLUNTEERS:

Conner O'Sullivan, Simone Gannage, Celene Barbier, Bud Alderson, George & Charles Lightfoot, Lilo Petrocitto, Julian Eggebrecht, Megan & Jubel Hirschfeld, Vicky Van Meter, Bob Hinz, Lowell Sykes & Jude Stalker

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS:

Names Kim Bertotti, Charlotte Brown, Brown Cannon, Jane Chamberlin, Judith Conley, Michelle Creasy, William Culp, Karen Dibblee, Roberta Downey, Nancy Dunbar, Thomas Giordano, Lisa Glaser, Gloria Goldsmith, Scott Gollan-Holt, Kimberley Grant, Megan Harvey, Bill Jones, Kay Karchevski, David King, Sara Kukov, Maggie Lang, Mark Langer, A. Lib, Beverly Lithgow, C. Lyons, Rita McClain, Jeff McKay, Tina Menzies, Amy Miles, Gail Miller, Betty Mitchell, Karen & John Nygren, Anjani O'Connell, Don Olds, Barbara Reid, Peggy Rivette, Rosemary Robinson, Doug Sanders, Eric Seidler, Diana Settle, David Slopak, Margaret Smith, Alice Caldwell Steele, Cathi Sullivan, Georgina Szabo, Da Vid, Steve Voss, Sherry Watson, Elan Whitney, David Woody



MARIN AUDUBON PROPERTIES

1. Petaluma Marsh	180 acres
2. Bahia	60 acres
3. Simmons Slough	162 acres
4. Norton Avenue Pond	2 parcels
5. Black Point Parcels	2 parcels
6. Arroyo San Jose	2 parcels
7. Tidelands at Murphy's Rock	34 acres
8. Corte Madera Marsh	1.8 acres
9. Triangle Marsh	31 acres
10. San Clemente Creek	4.34 acres
11. Tiscornia Marsh	20 acres
12. Arroyo Corte Madera del Presidio	2 acres

GUESS WHO?

Bird of the Month

By Meryl Sundove and Roger D. Harris

The LBJ (little brown job) that is this month's bird is arguably among the most ubiquitous bird species in the world, found throughout temperate regions globally, especially places that have been subjected to British colonialism.

Our bird has a simple – some would say monotonous – song, repeated with no particular rhythm, beginning, or end. It chatters all day long and year-round. Its song resembles the stereotypical “cheep” of bird vocalizations used in cartoons.

Our bird is not a native American species but originates from Eurasia and North Africa. Initially a hundred birds of our species were purchased for \$200 from England and released in Brooklyn, New York, in 1851. Aided by additional introductions, a remarkable adaptability to co-exist with humans, and a high reproductive potential, the species rapidly spread throughout the US, north to British Columbia, and south to Central America, expanding from the small founding population to an estimated continental population of 150,000,000 by 1943.

As a close commensal with humans, our bird was able to fill a niche that no native species occupied. Our birds thrive in human modified environments like farms with cereal cultivation and/or livestock as well as urban gardens where there is safety, places to nest, and plenty of food. Indeed, our bird is virtually never found far from human habitations.

In the horse and buggy era, the original hope was that our bird would help control flies attracted to horse droppings in the cities. But our bird feeds mostly on grains and weed seeds, although they require an abundance of insects to feed their nestlings during the breeding season. Soon our species was considered a pest. They have messy nesting habitats and aggressively take over nest sites used by native birds like bluebirds and swallows, where they compete for nest cavities.

Despite their ability to co-exist near human habitations, population declines have been noted recently in both their native and their introduced ranges. Although still one of the most common birds in North America, overall numbers have decreased due to changes in farming practices like the switch to monoculture crops and increased use of pesticides. In England, a decline of our bird has been noted in towns and cities. Studies suggest such contributing factors as conversion of front

gardens for parking and loss of woody shrubs and trees have resulted in too few insects available in the summer for the adult birds to feed their chicks.

On the Southern Marin Christmas Count, numbers of this month's bird are highly variable with no apparent trend, ranging from high count of 470 in 2002 to a low count of 61 in 2005. In the count area the authors participate in, downtown Mill Valley, it is hard in some count years to find even one of this species despite an abundance of habitat (i.e. houses).

Interestingly, the sizes and shapes of our birds vary with their geographic distribution. The smallest sized birds are along the Louisiana and southern California coasts, with the largest birds in Canada, the Rocky Mountains, and Great Plains. This pattern of variation conforms to Bergmann's Rule, which correlates latitude with body mass. Shape (i.e., body core to limb measurement ratio) varies following Allen's rule, which correlates relatively short limbs with cool locations and relatively long limbs with warmer locations.

This month's bird looks superficially like our New World sparrows (family Emberizidae) but has shorter legs, heftier body, and a stouter bill. It is not closely related, however. It is in the family Passeridae (Old World sparrows).

The male is easily identified by its black bib. The bigger the bib, the greater is the success of the individual male in attracting females. Apparently a big black bib is a signal of fitness to prospective mates. Initially the male acquires fresh feathers in the fall with its pre basic molt. However, the black bib feathers are then tipped with white. During the winter, the white tips wear off exposing a solid and (apparently) sexy black bib. In fact, a recent study revealed that some males actively pick at their bib feathers in the winter in preparation for the spring breeding season.

The drably streaked female House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) in mottled tones of gray and tan has fooled many a new birder as she lacks much of a defining pattern and is truly a LBJ. When first introduced to North America it was called the English Sparrow. 

SIGNATURE GATHERING BEGINS FOR “THE CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION TRUST FUND ACT OF 2010”

The California Parks Foundation has filed a proposed statewide ballot to create a stable funding source (the California State Parks Trust Fund) to protect state parks and wildlife from budget-cut funding reductions. Marin Audubon has signed on as an endorser.

The measure would establish an \$18 surcharge on vehicle license fees. The money would be put in a Wildlife Conservation Trust Fund where it could be spent only on state parks, urban river parkways, wildlife, natural lands and ocean conservation programs. Vehicles would receive free, year-round admission to all state parks.

The petition drive will begin in early January and continue through mid-March. For more information and/or if you are interested in volunteering to collect signatures to qualify this measure for the ballot, please contact North Bay Coordinator, Ann Thomas 415/924-9559.

California parks support extensive wildlife habitat. Currently thousands of acres are closed and risk wildlife and habitat destruction, crime, vandalism and the additional concern of parklands being sold.



Pelicans at Bahia will be one of the sites to be seen during the Flyway Festival

LEN BLUMIN

VOLUNTEER NEEDED

The Marin Audubon Society is seeking a volunteer to do the clerical tasks related to membership matters. Familiarity with Microsoft Excel is necessary. The job entails keeping the membership list current, and mailing out renewal notices and other membership-related correspondence. If you are interested in helping us this way, please call Bob Chilvers at 415/444-0875.

OTHER CONSERVATION ACTIONS TAKEN THIS MONTH:

LOCAL COASTAL PLAN

The Marin County Planning Commission's workshops on the Local Coastal Plan (LCP) continue. This month MAS testified before the Commission asking no additional trails be constructed in West Marin. Trails adversely impact wildlife because the required removal of vegetation destroys habitat. Trails guide people into remote wildlife areas — bringing noise, odors, and litter. People straying off trails and/or letting dogs run off-leash present additional threats to these already strained habitats. Owners of agricultural lands also objected to increased trail construction because of management problems they present.

Marin County Open Space District has more than 150 miles of trails, not including those on lands owned by the state and federal governments, water districts and other public agencies.

DUBAI STAR OIL SPILL

MAS submitted comments urging increased compliance and enforcement of existing state law. California regulations (14 Cal. Code Regs. 844.3) require, during fuel transfers, that captains either pre-boom the vessel or have booms on hand to respond to a potential spill within 30 minutes.

Neither was in place when, during a fuel transfer on October 30, the Dubai Star spilled 400 to 800 gallons of oil into San Francisco Bay. It took six hours before a boom was placed to contain the spill. This was in direct violation of state law.

We urged the enforcement of existing regulations and that immediate action be taken to ensure vessels transferring fuels in the San Francisco Estuary comply with the law. Heavy fines should be levied for violations.

If you would like to comment, send to: Steve Edinger, Administrator
California Department of Fish & Game
Office of Spill Prevention and Response
1700 K Street, Suite 250
Sacramento, CA 95814

“STATE OF THE STATE’S WETLANDS” REPORT

This report, produced by California's Natural Resources Agency, summarizes the importance of wetlands, what we know about them, and progress made by many state agencies, public and private partnerships to protect and restore wetlands. According to the report, California has made substantial progress over the last ten years in identifying, acquiring, restoring and enhancing wetlands. The state currently has approximately 2.9 million acres of wetland — roughly one-tenth of the wetland areas of two centuries ago. Significant stressors, such as urban and agricultural development, continue to affect California's wetlands.

To continue these gains, the report recommends: coordinating wetland programs and standardizing wetland monitoring and assessment procedures; adopting a common approach for wetland identification and classification; improving management and monitoring; sharing data with the public; supporting the use of wetlands to sequester carbon; considering long-term costs when putting together future bond measures; and increasing support for state/private partnerships.

MAS submitted comments recommending: adoption of a standard wetland definition inclusive of all wetland types (particularly those the Army Corps of Engineers no longer claims jurisdiction over); use of standardized assessment with a revision of CEQA to ensure that assessments (that a wetland is of “low” quality) not be used to justify filling wetlands; assurance that all wetlands lost to development are adequately mitigated; and increased enforcement to ensure that existing wetlands are not destroyed or degraded.

We expect the report to be revised to address public comments. The month-long comment period ended October 30, 2009. 



DAVID WEINSTOCK

House Sparrow

CONSERVATION

Continued from page 2

post-construction requirements regarding monitoring and removal of WECS that are causing problems.

The ordinance recognizes WECS impact on birds and bats by restricting building near streams and wetlands, but focuses on nesting and roosting areas and on endangered species. No information about migration corridors through the county and where bird strikes are likely to occur is provided. Marin is a major movement corridor for raptors and, as we have learned from Altamont and other East Bay locations, the potential for raptor losses is great. The staff report actually minimizes the significance of potential impacts by stating more birds are killed either by cats or by flying into buildings. MAS pointed out that this use of statistics does not negate the impacts of WECS. In fact, WECS impacts would add to the cumulative impact humans have on wildlife.

MAS recommended the county develop a map identifying where raptors are likely to occur. Existing maps show high wind areas, but lack background data describing where raptors travel, soar or hunt.

Potential impacts to raptors and other species need to be identified and standards developed to evaluate the significance of these impacts. Instead, WECS applicants hire consultants to identify natural resources, impacts and evaluate their significance. MAS knows, from long experience, that consultants can be found to advocate almost any position. The county should have objective information regarding permit approval and/or hire consultants directly (with the applicant paying, of course) to evaluate the impact potential.

Finally, specific recommendations are needed for monitoring wind turbines after they are installed, as well as procedures for taking problem turbines out of service. There should be a required shut-down of turbines shown to cause significant loss of birds.

Bird and bat collisions can be expected from individual WECS and the potential for bird impacts increases as the number of WECS increases. We have learned at Altamont (MAS is one of several Audubon chapters involved in the lawsuit over bird kills at that site) that without a provision for removing high-impact turbines, there is no effective way to control or stop their use. Further, because the county is proposing to approve this code change with a Negative Declaration, there will be no analysis of potential cumulative impacts. 

MARIN BIRDLOG - NOVEMBER 2009

By Rich Stallcup

November, as always, was tame compared to September and October and only the usual unusual bird species were reported.

Red-necked Grebes are to be expected on Drake's Bay in mid-winter but since that is about the southern end of their normal range, individuals farther down the coast are extralimital. One was on Rodeo Lagoon 11/8 (WL).

Twelve **Tundra Swans** flying over the Marin Headlands 11/28 (DM,PS) were a bit early for an appearance on the coast. An **Oldsquaw** (senior native-American female) was on Tomales Bay 11/10 and on for a week (JE). They are regular in tiny numbers at this latitude. **Hooded Mergansers** are more numerous and much more reliable. They began to become obvious in late October then six were at Marin City and two at the San Geronimo Golf Course 11/2 (both BB). Fourteen at the hole #7 pond 11/27 (BB,JE) is about as big as that flock ever gets.

The usual few **Ferruginous Hawks** were scattered over grasslands (m.ob). A **Broad-winged Hawk** at Hawk Hill 11/16 (EB) was late for a migrant but at least seven individuals have successfully overwintered in Marin. (None have done so for many years.) **Bald Eagles** continue as year-around residents in the county but two youngsters heading north over the Marin Headlands 11/15 (KW) were clearly migrants. Where might they have hatched? As usual, two or three **Prairie Falcons** were found along with about ten **Merlins** and many **Peregrines**.

A **Sandhill Crane** high over Rodeo Lagoon 11/29 (WL) was definitely lost. There are only about six sanitary records for Marin, all-time. One of those was on the Giacomini pasture for the greater part of a whole winter.

Considering the fact that anchovies were virtually and really absent from the nearshore Pacific in the fall of 2009, it was astonishing to have **Elegant Terns** here so late. Six were still at Bolinas 10/30 (RS,NB) and another at Sausalito 11/3 (BB).

The status and distribution of **Short-eared Owls** here has been enigmatic since they ceased to be fairly common (for an owl) about 20 years ago, so documentation of each encounter is of value. One was seen near the Green Gulch Zen retreat above Muir Beach 11/7 (DM).

Probably the last **Tropical Kingbird** of the year was near the public parking lot for Point Reyes Lighthouse visits 11/3 (B & JM) and a **Nashville Warbler** was at the Wildlife Gallery in Bolinas 11/5 (KH). Nashvilles average about one per winter in Marin.

PELAGICS – Our pelagic (way out in the ocean) trip 11/15 encountered these animals: Laysan Albatross – 2, Black-footed Albatross – 64, Northern Fulmar – 600, Pink-footed Shearwater – 13, Buller's Shearwater – 9, Sooty – 8 and Short-tailed Shearwater – 5, unidentified dark shearwater – 5, Pomarine Jaeger – 4, Black-legged Kittiwake – 10, Bonaparte's Gull – 550, Red Phalarope – 4500, Rhinoceros Auklet – 55, Cassin's Auklet – 270, Blue Whale – 8, Humpbacks – 40, five species of pinnipeds and four of small cetaceans.

REPTILIA – A couple of unusual reptilian events happened. In mid-October, two young **Rubber Boas** were found together in Inverness (MB,MR). This native snake is a scarce and usually nocturnal denizen of coastal coniferous forest. This connection was excellent just because of the excellent connection and for the late date.

In late October an **Olive Ridley** (sea turtle) crawled ashore on Stinson Beach. It was dehydrated and hungry so was sent to San Diego for rehab by turtle people. This was the third individual of this species to be detected on the Marin waterfront. The last one was a healthy young male that hauled-out on Shell Beach, Tomales Bay in 2002. He probably sent himself back to more tropical waters.

OBSERVERS and ACRONYMS

EB-Eddie Bantly, **BB**-Bob Battagin, **LB**-Len Blumin, **MB**-Mark Butler, **HC**-Heather Cameron, **GC**-Graham Chisholm, **JE**-Jules Evens, **DF**-Deborah Fitzpatrick, **GGRO**-Golden Gate Raptor Observatory, **KH**-Keith Hansen, **DH**-Diana Humple, **WL**-William Legge, **DM**-Debra Maier, **B&JM**-Bunkie & Jeff Mangum, **NM**-Natalie McNear, **m.ob**-many observers, **DM**-Dominik Mosur, **NB**-Native Birds Field Group, **PRBO**-Point Reyes Bird Observatory Conservation Science, **DR**-Don Reinburg, **MR**-Mary Anne Rotella, **MRu**-Maggie Rufo, **PS**-Paul Saraceni, **RS**-Rich Stallcup, **KW**-Ken Wilson. 

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT COMPILATION DINNER SATURDAY, DECEMBER 26, 2009

Join us at our COMPILATION DINNER following the Christmas Bird Count (see page 1). Whether you reserve a dinner or bring your own, everyone on the count is encouraged to come.

The dinner will be held after the count from 5:30 - 8:30 PM (doors open at 5 PM) at the Tamalpais Valley Community Center, Mill Valley. **Reservations required for the catered dinner** (pasta, green salad, garlic bread, coffee or tea). Cost: \$12. Please pay at the door.

To keep with our dessert potluck tradition, we encourage everyone to bring something sweet to share.

BE "GREEN": In order to minimize waste, please bring your own plate, cup, cutlery and napkin. Thank you!

DIRECTIONS:

From Hwy 101 take Stinson Beach exit, which turns into Shoreline. Follow around the bend to Tennessee Valley Rd (at the fruit stand) and turn left. Go 1/4 mile to Marin Ave and turn right, then make an immediate left into the Center parking lot.

TO RESERVE A DINNER:

Email jcowper993@aol.com or mail your NAME(s), EMAIL and MAILING ADDRESS and PHONE NUMBER to Mary Anne Cowperthwaite, 141 Oak Avenue, San Anselmo, CA 94960. Questions? Call Mary Anne at 415/453-2216.

A Thank You Note From the Editor:

I'd like to take this opportunity to say "Thank you!" to my hardworking team members who help me get out each *Clapper Rail* — and have for the past three years!

The biggest "thank you" goes to Sue Morrison, our always cheerful, hardworking and most important graphics gal who helps me put the newsletter together each month. I really couldn't do it without her! Thanks Sue!

Thanks also to my "proofing team" of Mary Anne Cowperthwaite and Nancy Bohnet, who catch phrases that don't make sense and double-check spelling and punctuation before each issue prints. Thanks also to Mary Anne for coordinating and proofing the Birdlog! And a "thank you" to Susan Ives for editing Barbara Salzman's texts.

Dear Readers: It's fun to put together *The Clapper Rail*! If you are interested in helping or joining our newsletter team, please contact me at nxokada@yahoo.com or 415/987-8800! Happy Holidays!

Nancy Okada
The Clapper Rail editor



THE Clapper Rail

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More information at <http://www.eacmarin.org>

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The success of Marin Audubon Society's work depends greatly on its Chapter members. We work collaboratively with the National Audubon Society on issues of mutual concern, but very little of our funding comes from the NAS. The Marin Audubon Society relies on local support for our habitat protection efforts, conservancy advocacy, birding field trips, educational Speakers' Series, and publication of *The Clapper Rail*. Chapter members also have the opportunity to support and participate in the acquisition, restoration and

enhancement of open space in and around Marin County, which will remain undeveloped habitat and open space in perpetuity. Our members' ideas, values and resources help us shape our agenda and carry out our goals and mission. We are confident you will find that being a Marin Audubon Society Chapter Member is worthwhile.

If you are not already a Chapter member, please consider joining the Marin Audubon Society, and urge your friends, neighbors and relatives to join us too.

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Please make check payable to Marin Audubon Society and mail with this coupon to:

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