



# THE Clapper Rail

MARIN AUDUBON SOCIETY

## SPEAKER SERIES

Free and Open to the Public

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

**FRIDAY, MAR 5 8 PM**

**Take Refuge in our Wildlife Refuges**  
With Giselle Block

The San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge Complex consists of seven National Wildlife Refuges, located from the shores of San Pablo Bay south to Monterey Bay. They include tidal marsh, islands, sand dunes and other unique environments that support a rich array of wildlife. All of these refuges support endangered species populations or significant migratory and breeding bird populations.

Join Giselle Block, a biologist within the SF Bay Complex, as she takes you on a tour of these seven refuges and then zooms in on the environments and wildlife of two nearby sites – the San Pablo Bay National Wildlife Refuge and Marin Islands National Wildlife Refuge.

**FRIDAY, APRIL 2 8 PM**

**Bird Singing: The Ecology of Birds' Songs & IDing Them** By Ear  
With Daniel Edelstein

Why do birds sing? How? When? Why does "pishing" work like a magnet to coax birds closer into view?

A biologist, bird tour guide and bird surveyor for rare species, Daniel will answer these questions, discuss the ecology of singing birds and teach you how "song memory phrases" (mnemonic phrases) and other techniques can help you better identify bird songs in the field.

This shortened presentation of Daniel's popular "Bird Singing" college class will have you singing its praises! An experienced birder for 30 years, he teaches at Oakland's Merritt College and does environmental consulting. A former MAS board member, see his 200+ "song memory phrases" and "10 Top Tips For Improving Your Birding By Ear" at: <http://www.warblerwatch.com> and his blog: <http://warblerwatch.blogspot.com>.

## Threats To Corte Madera Marshlands Put Clapper Rails At Risk

By Barbara Salzman

As noted in last month's newsletter, even though a property is acquired by an agency or organization that protects habitat this does not guarantee its resources will be protected. At the Corte Madera Ecological Reserve, for example, a number of activities are degrading or destroying wildlife habitats.

Until a few years ago, the Corte Madera Ecological Reserve's population of California Clapper Rails (CCRs) held relatively steady. About 50 of the birds were counted in 2006. But the population today stands at only about ten. The survival of these birds is tied to tidal marshes. They forage in mudflats and along sloughs, nest in vegetation, and hide under plants to avoid being caught by raptors. CCRs leave the marsh only during very high tides to seek cover on adjacent high ground. But human activities at and around the Reserve are impacting tidal marsh habitats and threatening the CCRs themselves.

The Reserve's marshes and the CCRs that depend on them are at risk from a number of activities that are currently taking place in the Reserve.

### RESERVE HISTORY

The Corte Madera Ecological Reserve encompasses approximately 300 acres of marshland and five acres of uplands south of Corte Madera Creek and the Greenbrae Boardwalk. In 1975, largely due to efforts by activist Lee Miller and Marin Audubon Society, the state designated the former Heerdt Marsh (named after the previous owner) as an Ecological Reserve, affording it the highest level of state protection. This designation permanently shielded the area from development and placed it under the management of the state Department of Fish and Game (DFG).



RICHARD BOHNET

### California Clapper Rail

The 95-acre Heerdt Marsh is one of only a few tidal marshes in the bay that has never been diked. This part of the Reserve also includes approximately five acres of uplands, created by placing fill on marsh many years ago.

More acreage was added to the Reserve later. The approximately 150-acre former Muzzi Marsh (named after the former owner who diked it just prior to the

*Continued on page 6*

## HABITAT STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

There are only a few weeks left in the planting season here in our Mediterranean climate. We have been planting rhizomes of native grass and other plants at Bahia, and there is more to transplant. We continue to remove invasive plants at Triangle marsh and will soon begin that effort at Bahia. Do join us for one of our work days listed below. To be placed on our email notification list or to get more information, call Bob Hinz at 415/383-8688 or email [rbrthnz@comcast.net](mailto:rbrthnz@comcast.net). WE NEED YOUR HELP NOW. Please check the MAS website for additional dates.

TRIANGLE MARSH: SAT. MARCH 6 FROM 10:00 AM-1:00 PM

BAHIA: SAT. MARCH 13 FROM 10:00 AM-1:00 PM

### IN THIS ISSUE

President's Message	2
Field Trips	3
Jr Bird Watchers	4
Bird of the Month	5
Birdlog	7

## 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
Earthshare	Jude Stalker	668-1242
Legal		
Field Trips	Helen Lindqvist	789-0703
Membership	Bob Chilvers	444-0875
Fundraising	Richard Bohnet	331-3217
Programs	Tracy Corbin	722-6592
Special Projects	Jude Stalker	668-1242
Nominating	Phil Peterson	898-8400
Volunteers	Bob Hinz	383-8688
Property Mgt.	Ed Nute	457-9241
Publicity	Barbara Ford	388-7233
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.

©2010 Marin Audubon Society

## 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](http://www.marinaudubon.org)

**Northern Calif. Bird Box:** 681-7422

(Provided by Golden Gate AS)

## TO JOIN NATIONAL AUDUBON:

Log onto [www.audubon.org](http://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 need a chairperson for the Mother's Day Barbecue. For some fifty years, Marin Audubon has hosted the Mother's Day Barbecue, which provides an opportunity for our members and the public to enjoy good food, Audubon friends, the wonderful outdoors at Volunteer Canyon, and the nesting heron colony at Audubon Canyon Ranch. This popular event may be cancelled for lack of a chairperson. The procedures are well honed and we have volunteers to help with necessary tasks, but we need a volunteer to coordinate the event. For information, please call Barbara Salzman at 415/924-6057.

We welcome Barbara Ford back to the MAS Board. Barbara previously served as a board member 18 years ago. She will be filling a partial term as Publicity Chair, getting our Speaker and Field Trip information to the newspapers. Barbara lives in Mill Valley, and is a retired elementary school teacher, and long-time birder.

We are thrilled to be able to sponsor Meryl Sundove's Spring Birding Class again. Meryl is a knowledgeable birder and inspiring teacher. If you haven't attended one of her classes before, you should hurry and sign up as her classes fill up quickly. See page XX for information on registration.

Volunteer opportunities abound at MAS. Our Nominating Committee is seeking potential board members. Three-year terms begin in June. If you are interested or would like more information, contact our Nominating Committee members: Phil Peterson, Ed Nute, or Jo Kreider.

In March, our window to plant native species on our lands will end for the season. We need your help

before the dry season begins. See Work Day dates on page X. The more volunteers who join us for work days, the more habitat we can improve.

As one of the founding organizations of Audubon Canyon Ranch, we join with three other Audubon chapters to provide volunteers to greet visitors to the Ranch during open season. See the box on page XX for MAS's dates. It is an enjoyable day at the Ranch with an opportunity to visit the heron rookery.

Have you visited our new website? [www.marinaudubon.org](http://www.marinaudubon.org). It offers information about birds, Marin Audubon, our accomplishments, activism, and events. Beginning this month, we offer our newsletter online as well as in hard copy. To change to an electronic transmittal instead of a hard copy, simply email Bob Chilvers at [chivers-law@comcast.net](mailto:chivers-law@comcast.net). You will be notified via email when the newsletter is posted online. If you prefer to continue receiving a hard copy, that's fine, too. Another new feature of our website is the ability to communicate directly with us. We're interested in receiving your comments and suggestions. You can send them to me at [bsalzman@att.net](mailto:bsalzman@att.net) or Richard Bohnet [rhbohnet@earthlink.net](mailto:rhbohnet@earthlink.net).

Thank you Richard Bohnet for shepherding the revamping of the website and our webmaster, Charles Fox.

Finally, a huge thank you to Board Member Jude Stalker who has spent many hours this month trying to finalize protocol for a monitoring program required by our Estuary 2100 grant from the EPA. Without her help, we would probably have had to forego the grant, which is funding three years of planting, and weed removal on our Bahia property. 

# 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.

## IS RICHARDSON BAY BEING DAMAGED BY UNAUTHORIZED USES AT WHALER'S POINT?

A hearing before the Marin County Board of Supervisors is planned, but is as yet unscheduled, to allow Jack Krystal, the owner of the Whaler's Point property to request that some or all of the unauthorized uses on the property be allowed. Whaler's Point is on Richardson Bay between the shoreline office building and the heliport, near Highway 101. Unauthorized uses include offices and trailers not connected to sewers, barrels with unknown contents and other debris. County enforcement staff has notified Jack Krystal to remove the unauthorized uses, and their recommendation should be supported.

What you can do to help: Check the agendas for the Supervisors' meetings for end of February and early March. Attend the Supervisors' hearing or write urging the Supervisors to require the owner to remove

all unauthorized uses and clean up the site; Write: Judy Arnold, President, Board of Supervisors, Marin County Civic Center, 3501 Civic Center Drive, San Rafael, CA 94901.

## SIGNATURE GATHERERS NEEDED TO BRING PARKS AND WILDLIFE FUNDING MEASURE TO BALLOT

Volunteers are needed to gather 475,000 signatures statewide to qualify a ballot measure establishing a stable funding source to protect state parks and wildlife. Supporters of the measure have until April 15 to qualify the California State Parks and Wildlife Conservation Trust Fund of 2010 for the November ballot.

The measure asks voter approval to establish an \$18 surcharge on vehicle license fees to be spent only on state parks, urban river parkways, wildlife, natural lands, and ocean conservation programs. Vehicles

*Continued on page 7*

## 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, Mar 4

8:30 AM to 12 NOON

With Len Blumin

Come join Len to check out the variety of waders and other waterbirds that are now here for our mild winter! Several raptors are always seen flying over this large marshy area, too!

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.

### BIRD WALK IN MARTA'S MARSH

Sunday, March 14

9 AM - 11 AM

With Meryl Sundove and Roger Harris

Join Meryl and Roger on a bird walk in Marta's Marsh in Corte Madera. This field trip often affords a look at and a listen to the namesake of the Marin Audubon Society's newsletter, the endangered California Clapper Rail. Meryl and Roger have been studying the marsh for over 20 years.

Walking the levee around the marsh makes it possible to get good looks at a variety of shore and water birds. This walk is timed with the incoming tide that pushes the feeding shorebirds off the exposed bay mudflats into the mudflats in the marsh for closer views. Marta's Marsh is a great place to learn about marsh processes, watch shorebird behavior and practice identifying shore and water birds. Beginners welcome.

Depending on the weather the levee can be damp so wear appropriate shoes, bring layers of clothes, and, of course, a bird book and binoculars (scope if you have one). There are no bathroom facilities at the marsh. Steady hard rain cancels.

Directions to Marta's Marsh: From Hwy 101 take the Corte Madera Paradise exit. Come east toward the bay and curve right onto Paradise Drive and continues past the Highway Patrol office. At the second stop light turn left on Harbor Drive, then right on Yolo and left on Channel, a dead end road. Park at the end of Channel.



### LAKE LAGUNITAS AND ENVIRONS

Saturday, March 6

8:30 AM to 1 PM

With Neill Fogarty

Come join us for a morning's birding in this interesting lake area of the Mt Tamalpais Watershed. The local birds will be singing and a few spring arrivals may be on the scene. Some of the winter residents may be singing before they leave. Expect to see a good variety of birds including Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Bewick's Wren, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Cedar Waxwing, several species of woodpeckers such as Acorn, Downy, Nuttall's and possibly Pileated and some raptors like Red-shouldered Hawk and osprey patrolling overhead. Various lake species may be seen such as Hooded or Common Merganser, Ring-necked duck, Bufflehead and Ruddy Duck and if we are really lucky, a Bald Eagle at Bon Tempe Lake harassing the ospreys for their fish!

This is a fee area: \$8 per car. To carpool, meet in Fairfax by the Java Hut (across from the P.O.) at the west end of Albertson's on Center Boulevard at 8:30 AM. Otherwise meet the group in the Lake Lagunitas parking lot at 9 AM.

From Hwy 101 in Greenbrae, go west on Sir Francis Drake Blvd to Fairfax and turn onto Broadway (which parallels S.F.D.) From there turn left onto the Fairfax-Bolinas Rd, follow up the mountain, take another left onto Sky Oaks Rd which leads to the lakes. After you have paid the entrance fee at the Pay Station (small notes for machine) continue approx. 1½ miles to the Lake Lagunitas parking area.

## MAS WORK PARTIES

### TRIANGLE MARSH WORK PARTY

Saturday, Mar 6

10 AM - 1 PM

We meet the first Saturday of each month. Bring your weed clippers, gardening gloves and (if you have them) weed wrenches/pullers for a day of fun. For details call Bob Hinz at 415/383-8688.

### BAHIA WORK PARTY

Saturday, Mar 13

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

### MARIN COUNTY OPEN SPACE DISTRICT

With Jude Stalker

Sunday, March 28

10 AM - 2 PM

*All About Wetland Restoration at Bahia*

The tidal wetlands of the Petaluma River are critical habitat for a variety of plants and animals. Wetland Ecologist Jude Stalker will explain how this marsh at the east end of our Rush Creek Preserve is being restored.

Meet at the end of Bahia Dr, Novato.

If you have questions or desire additional information, contact Naturalist David Herlocker at 415/499-3647, or [dherlocker@co.marin.ca.us](mailto:dherlocker@co.marin.ca.us).

### 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](mailto:Brucewalks@gmail.com).

**On The Web:** Although we do our best, sometimes we are unable to include all the wonderful information that comes to Marin Audubon. Please check our website for more fantastic items, which include a photo of the happy participants at a recent Bahia work party and a wonderful summary and photos of the January 2010 Consumnes field trip (<http://marinaudubon.org/events/eventdocs/MAS%20Consumnes%20Trip%20Report%202001.30.10%20with%20images.pdf>). -- Ed.

# VOLUNTEERS NEEDED TO HOST AT AUDUBON CANYON RANCH

April 4 (Easter), April 24, 25, May 22,  
May 23, June 5, June 6, July 3, July 4

The four supporting Bay Area Audubon Chapters traditionally provide hosts during the time Audubon Canyon Ranch is open for public visitors. Hosting is an easy way to help out Audubon Canyon Ranch, meet nature-loving visitors, and enjoy a day outside with the birds. Hosting does not require any previous training or special skills.

Hosts welcome visitors to the Ranch, help them park, give them a map, and ask for donations, amongst other things. Hosts work from 9:15 to 4:15 with breaks for lunch, hiking and visiting the heron rookery. What hosts really are, though, was perhaps best said by Audubon Canyon Ranch's first naturalist Clerin Zumwalt who wrote, "[Hosts] are the face of the Ranch, the first contact for most people, and they add an open friendliness to the Ranch".

A perk of hosting is the opportunity to stay overnight at Volunteer Canyon. Please contact Claire Seda at ACR (415/868-9244, ext 22) before your host date, if you are interested in spending the night.

Sign-up to host by contacting MAS Volunteer coordinator, Bob Hinz at 415/383-8688. 

## JUNIOR BIRD WATCHERS CORNER

By Wendy Dreskin



**Jack Calderon** is in kindergarten at St. Rita School. His favorite birds are Bald and Golden Eagles "because they're big!"



**Sydney Sarran (top) and Ryan Trimble (bottom)** were kindergarten Junior Bird Watchers at St. Rita's last year and just passed the first grade Junior Bird Watcher test. The day's lesson was about coots - which just happens to be

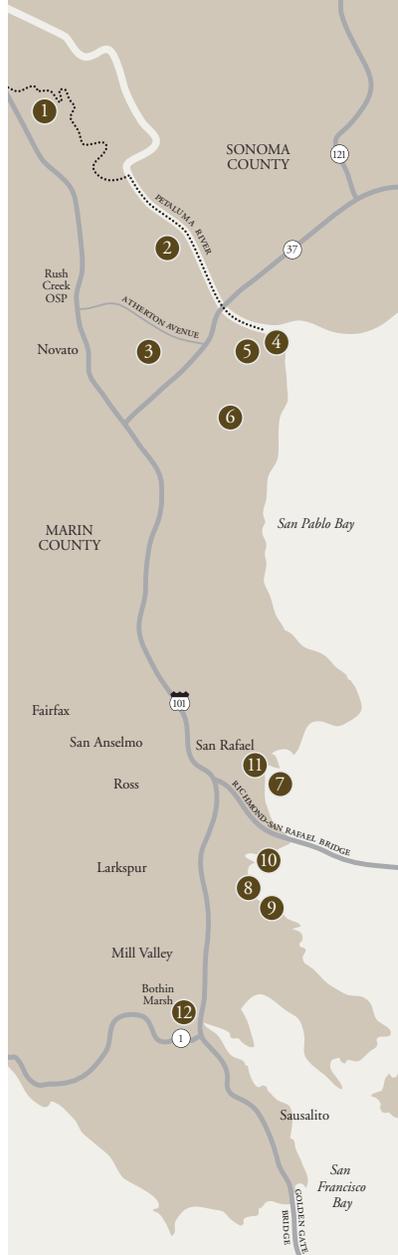


learned in the first grade. Sydney's fact about the coot was, "It shows the white under its tail when there's danger." Ryan was impressed by the fact that a four-day-old coot can grab another coot with a foot and then jab it with its beak, pushing it onto its back and eventually under water.

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](http://www.marinaudubon.org) and click on Junior Bird Watcher. Questions? Call Wendy at 415/457-3949. 

**MAS will have their Annual Meeting and election of Board of Directors May 4th. Suggestions for nominating directors can be submitted to the Nominating Committee Chairperson, Phil Peterson, by email at [phil222@comcast.net](mailto:phil222@comcast.net) or 415/828-4780.**



### 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    |

## POINT REYES BIRDING & NATURE FESTIVAL

From April 23 -26, the first Point Reyes Birding and Nature Festival will offer walks, presentations, classes on birding, butterflies, wildflowers, and other nature subjects with our beloved local experts: Rich Stallcup, Jules Evens, Lisa Hug, David Wimpfheimer, Steve Howell, Sarah Allen, Keith Hansen, Allen Fish, Ron LeValley, and David Herlocker. Plus, a very affordable boat trip to Cordell Bank to see pelagic birds and marine mammals on April 26 (weather permitting). Don't forget to register ([www.pointreyesbirdingfestival.org](http://www.pointreyesbirdingfestival.org)) and tell them Marin Audubon sent you!

Register now at:  
[pointreyesbirdingfestival.org](http://pointreyesbirdingfestival.org)



2010  
**Point Reyes  
Birding & Nature  
Festival**

APRIL 23, 24, 25, 26

GUESS WHO?

# Bird of the Month

By Meryl Sundove and Roger D. Harris

As you may recall, last month we described a native land bird species that is highly colonial, nests almost exclusively on human-made structures, and whose population and range have expanded with the spread of human development. However, we did not get around to revealing its identity.

So why did our species evolve to become colonial? As with all questions regarding evolutionary causes, we can only speculate. Coloniality may have evolved initially to facilitate efficient social foraging for their patchily distributed prey of flying insects. Or birds might have first grouped their nests close together because of the scarcity of natural nest sites and then subsequently evolved to take advantage of the benefits of group living.

In pristine times, the bird of the month nested in the foothills and lower elevations of the Sierra Nevada, Cascade, and Rocky mountains, where they placed their nests underneath horizontal rock ledges on the sides of steep canyons. Specifically, nest sites must have a vertical surface protected by an overhang, be near open areas for foraging, and have a good supply of mud nearby. Use of this specialized and rare nesting niche may have driven the development of colonial behaviors.

In the past 100 years or so, the bird of the month has expanded its range across the Great Plains and into eastern North America with widespread construction of bridges, culverts, and buildings, which provide alternative nesting sites. New colonies appear each year in new areas. Our species is tolerant of some disturbance by humans unless their access to nests is blocked, nests get wet and fall, or nests are knocked down by humans who are intolerant of the noisy birds and their guano.

Our species presents a paradox for conservation. While some human activities have increased their numbers by creating nesting sites, other human developments have impacted native habitat reducing the number of nests sites and prey.

Constructing their nests out of mud frees our bird from the constraint posed by limited number of available nest holes in trees, banks, or cliffs as with other cavity-nesting birds like woodpeckers and Tree Swallows (*Tachycineta bicolor*). This lack of restrictions might have assisted it to invade food-rich habitats previously found inhospitable for nesting.

The pair chooses a colony site first and then establishes ownership of an existing nest or of a space suitable to build their nest. Nests are placed at a 90 degree juncture of a vertical wall and a horizontal overhang. Successive arrivals often build nests directly below the first layer of nests, offsetting the nests slightly in a honeycombed pattern. They avoid painted wood and prefer concrete walls and unpainted wood where the mud they use attaches better.

Both sexes build the nest, gathering mud in their bills from wet areas along streams or temporary puddles, usually within a short distance from the colony. The bird brings a mud pellet back and molds it onto the nest with a shaking of its bill. They add dry grass stems to the inside as a lining when the nest is about three-quarters done. Neighbors steal mud and grass from each other when nests are left unattended. Construction takes a total of about 24 hours spread over a period of several days. The average nest contains 900-1,200 individual mud pellets brought with many, many trips, one at a time. The end result is a gourd-shaped mud structure with a narrow entrance.

This shape nest retains heat. The inside is generally warmer than the outside temperature at night and in the early morning. Inside and outside temperatures can range as much as 44° F. Humidity is generally greater inside than outside the nest. The nest offers protection against

wind chill and rain. Having a narrow opening also adds potential protection from predators.

Our birds commonly reuse old nests from the previous years, repairing the nest if necessary. Upon arrival at the breeding colony, birds fight for the existing suitable nests from previous years. Fighting is more intense for nests in the center of the colony than nearer the periphery where nests would be more vulnerable to predators.

Both sexes share incubation equally. Insulating properties of the enclosed nest allow moderate egg and chick “neglect” without serious consequences, giving parents more time to search for their ephemeral food source of flying insects. One of the biggest mortality factors is cold weather, which reduces the availability of flying insects. Weather related starvation is probably the most important cause of mortality during the breeding season.

Perhaps by now you have guessed our bird of two months is a species of swallow. Most swallows of this species winter far south in Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Argentina.

According to folklore, our birds have returned to nest every spring at the Mission San Juan Capistrano in Orange County. In 1939 a popular radio program was broadcast live from the Mission and announced the arrival of the swallows. This inspired Leon Rene to write the song “When the Swallows Come back to Capistrano” in tribute. The song spent weeks at the top of the hit parade chart and was recorded by The Ink Spots, Glenn Miller, and Guy Lombardo.

*When the swallows come back to Capistrano  
That's the day you promised to come back to me  
When you whispered, "Farewell," in Capistrano  
'twas the day the swallows flew out to sea*

The sad news is the swallows have hardly been seen at the Mission in recent years. Locals have tried ways to lure the swallows back to the Mission, have consulted with specialists, installed ceramic nests, played recordings of swallow vocalizations but nothing has worked. So as we said last month, our bird does not regularly return to the Mission San Juan Capistrano. Our swallow is the Cliff Swallow, *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*. 

## CHAIRPERSON NEEDED FOR MOTHER'S DAY BARBECUE

See President's letter. For more information,  
PLEASE CONTACT BARBARA SALZMAN at  
415/924-6057 or [bsalzman@att.net](mailto:bsalzman@att.net).

# CLAPPER RAILS AT RISK

*Continued from page 1*

creation of the Bay Conservation and Development Commission some 40 year ago), Marta's Marsh, and several other small marshes to the south were later acquired as mitigation for wetlands filled to build the Village Shopping Center. The former Muzzi Marsh surrounds a 72-acre diked parcel, owned by the Golden Gate Bridge Highway and Transportation District. The District used the 72 acres as a disposal site for material dredged to construct the Larkspur Ferry Terminal.

In 1999, in one of our first marsh restoration projects, MAS dug a channel through the five acres of fill on the Reserve to create a high tide refuge island for CCRs and restore marsh. Today, the DFG allows public access through the uplands to the marsh, and permits small boat use.

## SHORELINE EROSION

The former Heerdt Marsh is slowly eroding, exacerbated by the wake from the Larkspur ferry. Natural waves and the wake generated by the ferry lap against the exposed bank of the marsh and are gradually eating away at the mud and substrate, causing the vegetation to collapse into the bay.

## SEDIMENTATION OF MARSH CHANNELS

A resident of the Greenbrae Boardwalk constructed a dam across a tidal slough near his house, blocking water flows to the slough. The blockage is causing siltation of the slough. A recent report by hydrologists Philip Williams and Associates on an erosion control project at the Greenbrae Boardwalk, documents the dam and its adverse impact on the tidal slough, and recommends the dam be removed. Tidal sloughs are the primary foraging habitat for CCRs.

## PATH WORN THROUGH THE MARSH

People have been walking through the Heerdt Marsh to the bay, trampling plants from the upland to the marsh edge. Kite boarders, in particular, use this route, and have been seen walking across the marsh and laying out their equipment on the marsh in preparation to launch. A trail has been worn a large swath at the marsh edge is now barren of vegetation. CCRs depend on marsh vegetation for cover, foraging, and nesting.

## CENTRAL MARIN FERRY CONNECTION PATH

The Transportation Authority of Marin (TAM) is planning to continue the path from the Cal Park tunnel across Corte Madera Creek and to the south. The project, the Central Marin Ferry Connection, has been in the planning for several years, apparently with input from the bicycle community but not the environmental community. Where and how the path would cross the creek is unclear. But TAM's preferred alignment, once the path reaches the south bank, is on the former railroad right-of-way levee.

This north-south levee is along the west side of the former Heerdt marsh and other parts of the Reserve. Currently, TAM is planning the path to Wornum Drive, but some of their maps show it extending much further south. A path extending to Wornum Drive would have a number of impacts. It would direct many more people to the marsh area than currently use it, and would require filling seasonal and possibly even tidal wetlands along the length of the path. It would cover adjacent uplands that are currently or potential high tide refuge for CCRs. Activity on a wide path adjacent to the CCR habitat could limit the bird's use of the marsh.

It is not clear that there would be sufficient space to build a path without filling marsh. Furthermore, there is a more environmentally sound place for the path along the current bike path and the frontage road, which bicyclists already use.

## UNLEASHED DOGS

The levees are extensively used by dog-walkers. Dogs, more often than not, are off-leash. It is a popular location for professional dogwalkers who commonly bring five or more dogs and allow them to run off-leash on the 72-acres of Bridge District's land and even in the tidal marshes.

The southern half of the 72-acres is diked seasonal wetland while the northern half is a mix of wetlands and uplands invaded by Harding grass and pampas grass. This has become known as an off-leash dog area, attracting people with their dogs from as far away as the East Bay. There is no enforcement nor are there signs to indicate dogs must be leashed. When not disturbed by off-leash dogs, the seasonal wetland provides habitat for shorebirds and waterfowl during high tides.

## PG&E BOARDWALKS

Several years ago, PG&E replaced six narrow boardwalks to their towers with boardwalks that are probably three times wider than the former boardwalks. The towers stretch out in a north-south pattern across the marsh. All but one of the boardwalks lack barriers to prevent people from walking on them. Without barriers, they are an open invitation for people to walk out over the marsh and sloughs, impacting CCRs by their presence.

## MARTA'S MARSH

Bounded on the south by San Clemente Creek, Marta's Marsh is now a tidal marsh as a result of erosion breaching a levee about ten years ago. CCRs now use the marsh, but dogs allowed to run loose are impacting them.

## WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Clearly, these activities are having significant, cumulative impacts on the Ecological Reserve and its CCRs and will continue unless changes are made. Remedies will take time and education. We will need to depend on people's willingness to change their behavior once they learn about the adverse impacts of their activities.

We are discussing the problems and options for solutions with the DFG, Town of Corte Madera, Golden Gate Bridge District, regulatory agencies, and users.

If you are concerned about the impact of dogs on the Reserve, we encourage you to write the Town of Corte Madera, 300 Tamalpais Drive, Corte Madera, 94925, and the Golden Gate Bridge Highway and Transportation District, P.O. Box 9000, San Francisco, CA 94129. Comments on impacts to CCRs and Ecological Reserve lands should be directed to the Dept. of Fish & Game, P.O. Box 47, Yountville, CA 94599.

Anyone who would like to work on this issue with us to protect this Reserve and its CCRs, please call Barbara Salzman 415/924-6057. 

## MARIN AUDUBON THANKS THE FOLLOWING FOR THEIR GENEROUS DONATIONS

Jeanne Cohn, Daniel & Lee Drake, Drakes Bay Fundraising Inc., Donna Franzblau, Betty Gandel, Madelon & Gerald Halpern, Newton Harband, MD, John & Ida Baugh Harrington, Joanne Heffelfinger, Donald W. Leonard, Claudia Mason, Donald W. McLeod, Patrick Murray, Frank & Lois Noonan, Earle & Elizabeth Owen, Richard Pavek, Proof Lab Surf Shop, Purple Lady/Barbara J. Meislin Fund, Marianna Riser, Carlo Rocca & Susan Flagg, Sandra F. Rodgers, Kevin Stockmann & Sharon Barnett, Robin R. Sweeny, Jeanne and Peter Tymstra, United Way of the Bay Area, Victoria & John Welisch, Dianne Ziola & Ian Tait, Dina Zvenko

## IN MEMORY OF GAIL ELFELDT

Deb Alan

## THANKS TO OUR VOLUNTEERS AT BAHIA

Jan. 22: Prem Mcmurdo, Deb Ablin, Barbara Salzman & Jude Stalker  
Jan. 23: Jane Gibson, (Heddy, James, Teagan, Braden, Ellah & Keelie Chapman), (Patti, Jon, Abigail & Evan Dion), Paul & Brianna Breimayer, Conner Hansen, Lowell Sykes & Jude Stalker

## AND AT TRIANGLE MARSH

Debbie Ablin, Lowell Sykes, Robert Hinz



Cliff Swallow

RICHARD PAVIK

## Meryl's Class

# Spring Birds & Their Songs

Join the **Spring Birds and their Songs** class and tune into the varied chorus of birds nesting in the Bay Area. Once you clue into bird songs the enjoyment of spring will be forever heightened. Sign up early as this class fills quickly.

Naturalist **Meryl Sundove** & biologist **Roger Harris** teach the class for beginning and intermediate bird watchers who want to use calls and songs to help identify birds.

Class consists of a Thursday evening presentation with slides and bird songs (April 29 from 7-9 PM at the Richardson Bay Audubon Center) and two early morning field trips (Saturday, May 1 and a dawn chorus on Saturday, May 8)\* designed to get you outdoors practicing what we learned in class. The dawn chorus field trip starts a few minutes before dawn. If you have never experienced the spring dawn chorus you are in for a treat.

Fee: \$65 non-Audubon members/\$60 Audubon members. Two Audubon members from the same household - \$110. For information, call Meryl Sundove, 415/927-4115 or [msundove@comcast.net](mailto:msundove@comcast.net). To register, send the form and a check to the address below.

\*Saturday, May 15 will be a rainy day make-up date in case of a rained out field trip.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Audubon Member: yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Please make checks out to: Marin Audubon Society, Box 599, Mill Valley, CA 94942.

## CONSERVATION

*Continued from page 2*

subject to the surcharge would receive free, year-round admission to all state parks. Eighty-five percent of the funds would go to state parks with the balance to state wildlife and ocean protection agencies. Fifty state parks are designated by National Audubon as Important Bird Areas. MAS has joined with many Audubon chapters and California Audubon in endorsing the ballot measure.

To volunteer to collect signatures to qualify this measure for the ballot, or for more information, contact North Bay Coordinator Ann Thomas 415/924-9559. 

## MARIN BIRDLOG - JANUARY 2010

*By Rich Stallcup*

January is usually a matter of routine for Central California birders who mostly admire the waterfowl show and relocated rarities that turned up on Christmas counts. January 2010 saw heavy rain from 1/18 through 1/26 and such events always cause movement for aquatic birds – especially waterfowl, as some foraging opportunities shut down as others open up. A few *new* rare birds were reported.

A **Red-throated Loon** was on Nicasio Reservoir 1/20 (BB). It was the sixth one ever found on Marin's interior "lakes" compared to only one Common Loon. Commons far outnumber other loon species inland everywhere else.

A male **Tufted Duck** found at Abbott's Lagoon 12/19 (AK) stayed at least until 1/15. Twenty-six **Mute Swans** at the Rush Creek wetlands on 1/22 (HC) were the most ever seen in Marin away from Chileno Valley Reservoir.

The Marin/Sonoma Mute Swan population numbers between 110 and 140. Here is their story: I first noticed feral Mute Swans with partly grown cygnets on a farm pond near Two Rock in 1985 and have watched their spread ever since. I have documented successful wild nesting of this (European) species each and every year. I made a point of looking for family groups for a couple of years but since at least 1990 one could hardly bird here in summer and **NOT** see them.

The "wild" population is now between 110 and 140 but a coordinated census is needed. The number has grown slowly over years. In May of 2003, I submitted this report to the California Bird Records Committee asking if Mute Swan might be added to the State List as an established exotic. Committee rules for an addition of this sort are two: 1) The species has to have propagated in the wild each and every year for 15 consecutive years. 2) The population has to have increased and spread geographically. We have everything but the "spread" – as so far, the birds have stayed put (RS).

Three **Pacific Golden Plovers** at the RCA Station, Point Reyes 1/10 (EB) was but a shadow of their prior winter presence on the Point when farming was part of the agriculture and there were plowed fields. Some may remember 28 in one flock.

Keith Hansen found a young **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** 1/3 and an **Eastern Phoebe** 1/24 while riding his bike along the road to Bolinas. Great birds for his no-negative-footprint "Big Marin Year!" A **Northern Waterthrush** reported near the Pine Gulch Creek mouth at Bolinas 1/15 (JM) could not be refound but, then, it's a jungle in there.

A **Large-billed** (Sanannah) **Sparrow** at lower Abbott's Lagoon in early January (m.ob) was a first for Marin but this taxa has been identified in San Mateo, Alameda and San Joaquin Counties (one each). This is a unique bird and may soon be promoted to species rank.

**White-throated Sparrows** are probably more frequent here than anywhere in the west and are more often in forested areas than those more open. Several individuals often gather at favored feeders. Three in an exclusive, private flock at Shield's Marsh on Tomales Bay 1/7 (RS,HC) were apart from many other *Zonotrichia* nearby.

As usual, signs of spring in January include the first **Allen's Hummingbirds** back from Mexico and **Tree Swallows** already dancing around at nest boxes.

### OBSERVERS

Kerry Wilcox, Jim White, Rich Stallcup, Maggie Rufo, Don Reinburg, PRBO Conservation Science, Melissa Pitkin, Dominik Mosur, Jeff Miller, Natalie McNear, many observers, Deborah Maier, Len Liu, William Legge, Andy Kleinhesselink, Diana Humple, Keith Hansen, Deborah Fitzpatrick, Jules Evens, Heather Cameron, Len & Patti Blumin, Bob Battagin, Eddy Bantly. 



# THE Clapper Rail

MARIN AUDUBON SOCIETY

Box 599 | MILL VALLEY, CA 94942-0599

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

TIME VALUE

NONPROFIT  
ORGANIZATION  
U.S. POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
SAN RAFAEL, CA  
PERMIT NO. 87

**ALERT – Saturday, FEB 27**  
**CAPAY VALLEY — 8:30 AM to 3 PM**

(Times for this field trip were omitted in last newsletter.)

**SAVE THE DATE**

**April 23-25 Point Reyes Birding Festival**  
More information at <http://www.eacmarin.org>

Printed on 100% recycled paper

Dear *Clapper Rail* readers,

This March 2010 *Clapper Rail* newsletter will be the final newsletter Sue Morrison and I will produce.

We have enjoyed working on the *Clapper Rail* since Feb 2007. We want to also express our sincere thanks to Mary Anne Cowperthwaite and Nancy Bohnet for their help proofing each issue every month.

Nancy Okada & Sue Morrison

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.

## Join or Make a Donation to the Marin Audubon Society

- Please enroll me as a Local Chapter Member
- Renewal     New Member
- \$1,000 Benefactor     \$500 Patron     \$100 Sustaining
- \$50 Sponsor     \$25 Basic     Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Please accept my donation in the amount of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

STREET ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_ EMAIL ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

This is a gift membership from \_\_\_\_\_

Please send me *The Clapper Rail* by email only.

To pay by check send your check payable to Marin Audubon Society along with this form to the address below. To pay by credit card please fill in the following and send this to the address below.

VISA                       MASTER CARD

NAME OF CARD HOLDER \_\_\_\_\_

CREDIT CARD NUMBER \_\_\_\_\_ EXPIRATION DATE \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_

MARIN AUDUBON SOCIETY - MEMBERSHIP

PO BOX 599

MILL VALLEY CA 94942

NOTE: We do not give your name to other organizations.

You can also join or make a donation on our website using your credit card or PayPal. Please go to [www.marinaudubon.org](http://www.marinaudubon.org).

Membership in the Marin Audubon Society does not include membership in the National Audubon Society. For information on the National Audubon Society, please go to [www.audubon.org](http://www.audubon.org).