

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 8 7:30 PM

Birds of the Sierra Valley

By Bob Lewis



Bob Lewis

American Bittern

The October Speaker Series program will be a Zoom meeting. Visit the Speaker Series page on the MAS website for information on joining the Zoom meeting electronically.

For more than 20 years, Bob Lewis has been leading birding trips to the Sierra Valley, often staying to photograph the birds and he sees. At the headwaters of the Feather River, the valley is a magnet for birds and the surrounding mountains provide additional habitats.

Bob will take us to some of his favorite places and show us the birds that live there, along with a few other creatures. He has often been asked where his favorite birding spot is and Sierra Valley ranks high on the list.

Bob trained as a chemist, but his second career is very avian. He's served on the Golden Gate Audubon Society (GGAS) board where he led the Adult Education Committee. He's an award-winning photographer and world traveler, and frequent public speaker on avian topics at libraries and Audubon Societies. He has co-taught Master Birding, Avian Evolution and Bay Area Birds for GGAS, and his bird life list stands at 5,059.

NEXT MONTH'S SPEAKER:

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 12 7:30 PM

Feathers and Flight: A Journey to The New World Tropics

By Benjamin Jacobs-Shwartz

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The Rail

MARIN AUDUBON SOCIETY

Introducing MAS's Updated Website

We're pleased to announce the launch of Marin Audubon's updated and improved website — going live on Wednesday, October 7, 2020.

Over the past year, we've been working to upgrade and expand our website. We've finally finished, and are excited to share it with our community and beyond! While the basic design is similar to our previous website, you will see the following improvements:

- Reformatted site for a better experience on all size screens
- Upgraded Home page
- New pages dedicated to Stewardship and Restoration
- Improved Field Trip page
- Upgraded Volunteer page providing for easy volunteer signups
- Expanded Property and Conservation pages
- New photos on Volunteer, Property, and Stewardship pages

These revisions are intended to make it easier for our members to participate in our field trips and programs, as well as to keep our members and the public better informed about Marin Audubon's current activities, our work and accomplishments, and conservation issues to protect wildlife and habitat.

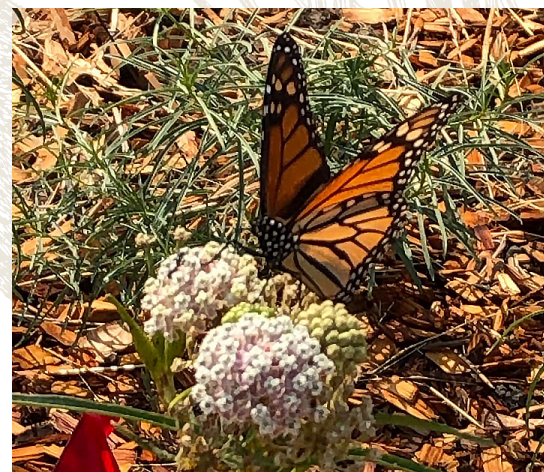
We hope you will find our updated website easier to navigate, more informative, and enjoyable to use. From our management perspective, it will be easier for us to make changes, which means we can bring you current information and updates more efficiently and faster. A very special thank you to Martha Jarocki who has been a dedicated partner in the upgrade through the past year, and Jane Medley, whose diligent attention has made the field trip page user-friendly.

We are thrilled to finally share our new website with you!

We Had a Visitor at Deer Island

On Saturday, August 29 at about 2 PM while watering, we observed a monarch visiting Marin Audubon's milkweed patch and nectaring on the flowers. This is the first time a monarch has been observed at this site. Hopefully it laid some eggs — we will see. It is amazing how this little insect can find a 0.01 acre of patch of milkweed out of thousands of acres without any milkweed in eastern Novato.

This is the second year of Marin Audubon's demonstration patch of milkweed and nectar plants on the Simmons' property behind the Deer Island Storage in Novato. Last winter the Marin Chapter of the California Native Plant Society donated 160 milkweed seedlings, which our volunteers planted on a dreary day in January. Ed Nute and his daughter Kristin have been watering the milkweed just about every week to get it established. Recycled water is delivered to a 1,550-gallon water tank which was installed on the property.



Ed Nute

Milkweed is the host plant for monarch butterflies. Most milkweed plants have survived at the Deer Island patch and some are flowering and setting seed. Milkweed seeds form in a pod which splits open when it matures and the seed

continued on page 7

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Phone numbers are in the 415 area code unless otherwise noted. Questions? Please contact the appropriate Board member.

President	Barbara Salzman 924-6057
Vice President	Lowell Sykes 388-2821
Secretary	Ann Thomas 914-9559
Treasurer	Ann Thomas 914-9559
Conservation	Phil Peterson 828-4780 Barbara Salzman 924-6057
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Outreach, Website	Elyse Omernick 694-2320
Speaker Series	Doug Waterman 415/506-4675
Special Projects	Jude Stalker 680-6291
Nominating	Doug Waterman 415/506-4675
Editor, <i>The Rail</i>	Doug Wallace 310-1693
Property Management	Ed Nute 669-7710
Volunteer Coordinator	Meghan Kehoe 209-769-8862
BAAC Reps	Lowell Sykes 388-2821 Barbara Salzman 924-6057

DIRECTORS MEETINGS

Meetings open to members. If you wish to attend please call 924-6057.

6:30 PM, First Tuesday of the month
Richardson Bay Audubon Center
376 Greenwood Beach Road
Tiburon, California 94920

MAS telephone: 721-4271 (for messages only)

Marin Audubon Society is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization. All memberships and contributions are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

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Website: www.marinaudubon.org

Members can receive *The Rail* electronically instead of a hard copy by emailing membershipsecretary@marinaudubon.org.

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 \$500 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 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.

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.

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

By Barbara Salzman

This past month our Board has been focusing on our operations and guidance documents so we can function smoothly. We have approved our budget, reviewed and updated our Policies and Procedures, including a revised and simplified Document Destruction and Retention policy based on California law. We're also preparing our Annual Plan to guide our work for the coming year. As always, our focus is on protecting and restoring habitat, which benefits wildlife as well as people.

We've had some welcome contributions. They come at a time when future donations are uncertain due to the national economic decline. A special thank you to very generous donors: the RHE Foundation for its grant of \$10,000 to support our operations, and Mary Love for her donation of \$25,000 to support our habitat stewardship program. This donation will enable us to order additional plants to be grown, installed and maintained at Bahia and Simmons and other habitat enhancements we are still formulating. We also thank Todd Denman for the donation of his car through the CARS program through which MAS receives a portion of the proceeds and the donor gets a tax write off (see how to donate on [page 7](#)).

Election day will soon be upon us. As a 501(c)(3) organization, MAS is prohibited by law from taking a position on political candidates, but we can urge you to vote and vote early in the critical national election. We are hoping for an improved environmental

climate. There are also important local elections for the MMWD Board seats in Tiburon and in San Rafael, which is now an open seat because Armando Quintero has been appointed State Parks Director. MMWD owns and manages significant acreage of watershed lands on and around Mount Tamalpais. So make protecting the environment an essential motivation as you vote. Vote for the environment!

As restrictions are eased on public activities, (hair dressers, gyms and restaurants), we don't see much changing in our operations in the foreseeable future. We expect to continue Speaker Series programs on Zoom and substitute Zoom workshops for outdoor field trips, probably through the end of the year at least. On the upside, the Zoom field trips and programs are attracting attendees in numbers far beyond what can be accommodated on field trips. But we still miss seeing each other in person! Although the personal interactions are missing, we are able to learn about birds in a more focused way and we can see others who show themselves on Zoom. We're also holding our Conservation Committee meetings on Zoom. If you would like to join us, call or email Barbara Salzman.

The Final EIS for the Pt. Reyes National Seashore General Management Plan was released just as *The Rail* was in production. We will have our analysis next month.

Stay safe, wear your mask and keep your distance, and please join us for the activities we are offering for you to connect you with nature.

MARIN BIRDLOG: AUGUST 2020

By Noah Arthur

The hot, dry days of August bring rare shorebirds to the California coast, and the first rarity of the month was a classic August shorebird, a juvenile **Semipalmated Sandpiper** at Abbotts Lagoon on the 1st (LS, MS, & JZ). This was followed by another **Semipalmated Sandpiper** on the 4th at the Valley Ford Wetlands (RO).

A female **Rose-breasted Grosbeak**, likely a bird that overwintered nearby, was in Woodacre on the 6th (BB).

Probably one of North America's most stunningly beautiful avian plumages, a breeding-plumaged adult **Franklin's Gull** showed up with the gull flock at Rodeo Beach on the 7th (WL).

The long-staying **Black Vulture** floated over Giacomini Wetlands on the 10th (EL), and another sighting of it was in San Rafael on the 16th (DL).

Another **Semipalmated Sandpiper** at Abbotts Lagoon on the 14th (JP) was almost certainly a new individual. A male **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** on the 18th was the first record for Nicasio Reservoir (BB), and another **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** was in Corte Madera on the 24th (JP). On the 21st a male **Summer Tanager** was at Pine Gulch in Bolinas (EG).

A **Ruff** showed up at Valley Ford Wetlands on the 27th (JP), and another **Ruff** at Rodeo Lagoon on the 28th (WL), both subsequently enjoyed by many birders.

Very unusual for summer in Marin, a **Snow Goose** flew over Corte Madera on the 31st with a flock of Canadas (BB).

Observers and Acronyms **LS:** Lucas Stephenson, **MS:** Mark Stephenson, **JZ:** Joseph Zeno, **RO:** Rob O'Donnell, **BB:** Bob Battagin, **WL:** William Legge, **EL:** Evan Lipton, **DL:** Derek Lecy, **JP:** Jeff Perkins, **EG:** Eugene Gregor, **BB:** Brian Browne



Franklin's Gull

Joe Bailey/Macaulay Library at the Cornell Lab (ML5259551)

New Birding Programs Continue on Zoom!

Note: After a somewhat rocky start to our debut webinar on shorebirds last month, we are now better prepared to manage the technical aspects of our programs and hope you will participate again, even if you were frustrated in September — please give us another chance!

As we continue to shelter in place, we invite you to join us for one or more of our upcoming Webinars focused on raptors. Why not take advantage of this opportunity to deepen your understanding and appreciation of these charismatic aerial predators? Presentations will be made by respected local naturalists and scientists, friends to many in our birding community. Fall is a good time to view raptors in Marin, and when the smoke finally clears, these programs might just inspire you to get out in the field and sharpen your identification skills.

Our October calendar features four programs on consecutive Wednesday evenings — October 7, 14, 21, and 28. Each program will be scheduled from 7:00 to 8:30 PM, and begin with a one-hour program to be followed by a time for questions and discussion. Check at the bottom of each field trip listing to access the sign-up links for each program. Please note you will need a Zoom account (free for basic service) in order to register, and you will need to sign up separately for each program. All programs are free, but registration is required and will soon be available at www.marinaudubon.org.

DIURNAL RAPTORS OF MARIN

Wednesday, October 7, 2020

7 PM to 8:30 PM

With Shannon Burke

From colorful kestrels to enormous eagles, diurnal raptors are charismatic birds of our landscapes. Perched at the top of the food web, these species take advantage of different habitats and use various strategies to hunt. We'll explore how these behaviors, along with distinguishing field marks, can help in identifying our local species as we discuss some of the life history stories that make each unique.

Marin County Parks Naturalist Shannon Burke, known for her expertise in a variety of natural history fields (some animal, some plant), has a special interest in raptors and worked for a number of years as a volunteer for the Golden Gate Raptor Observatory. She skillfully combines her considerable field identification skills with substantial knowledge of animal behavior to create outstanding programs.

THE BIOLOGY OF OWL VOCALIZATIONS – WHAT ARE THEY TALKING ABOUT?

ZOOM PROGRAM

Wednesday, October 14, 2020

7 PM to 8:30 PM

With Joe Mueller

The sounds of owls talking late into the night may seem mysterious, but there are solid biologically accepted reasons for their diversity of vocalizations. The variations have much to do with how owls have evolved, becoming the dominant nocturnal avian predators. Join Joe for an introduction to owls with a focus on the exploration as to why owls have evolved such a plentiful repertoire of hoots, howls, wails, screams, whistles, yelps, shrieks, barks, whines, and whinnies.

As a Professor of Biology for 30 years Joe has been teaching a rich diversity of courses ranging from ornithology to marine invertebrate zoology as well as leading field courses from the Alaskan tundra to Costa Rican tropical rain forests. His teaching style has developed from a view of life focused on systems thinking, and how interrelationships make

up the essential nature of life. He developed and coordinates the Natural History Program at College of Marin, and is the 2008 recipient of the Terwilliger Environmental Education Award.

THE NATURAL HISTORY OF OSPREY IN MARIN COUNTY: COLONIZATION AND POPULATION GROWTH

Wednesday, October 21, 2020

7 PM to 8:30 PM

With Jules Evens

Since the establishment of a nesting colony of Osprey at Kent Lake beginning in the mid-1960s, the local population grew exponentially, but only over the next three decades. Beginning in the mid-1990s, the numbers leveled off and then began to decline somewhat. This presentation will trace the dynamics of that founding population, discuss the reasons for its local decline as well as the population's expansion in the greater Bay Area.

Born and raised in New England, Jules lived with his family and worked as a wildlife biologist in western Marin County for over three decades. He currently lives in coastal Oregon but returns to Marin for field work and friendships. His primary research focuses on tidal wetlands, avian population trends, and species at risk. He has written three California Natural History Guides: *The Natural History of the Point Reyes Peninsula* (3rd ed. 2008), *An Introduction to California Birdlife* with Ian Tait (2005), and *Birds of the Northern California Coast* with Rich Stallcup (2014).

RED TALES, HAWKISH BEHAVIORS, AND MIGRATORY STORIES – REVELATIONS FROM THE GGRO'S FIRST 35 YEARS

Wednesday, October 28, 2020

7 PM to 8:30 PM

With Allen Fish

Each fall, tens of thousands of birds of prey funnel overhead at the Marin Headlands, the largest known raptor migration along the Pacific Coast. In the early 1980s a few Marin citizens started conducting counting and banding studies on the flight, studies that drew many volunteers. This soon evolved into the Golden Gate Raptor Observatory, a full-fledged program of the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy in cooperation with the National Park Service.

Today, the GGRO is part of a broad program of community science and ecological stewardship coordinated by the Parks Conservancy, including ONE TAM and the Native Plant Nurseries.

Now 35 years old, with four staff and 240 volunteers, the GGRO is the only barometer of migrating raptor populations in California, providing population trends and migration locations for up to 19 species of hawks, kites, falcons, eagles, osprey, vultures, and harriers. Along with keeping an annual pulse on California's raptors, the GGRO has forged long-term relationships with local biologists. These experts study a range of stressors on the wild birds of prey we have in hand, among them, diseases, parasites, rat poisons and other toxins.

Come join us for an entertaining discussion of the GGRO, Migratory Story and all things raptor. GGRO director Allen Fish will delve into the best stories from Hawk Hill, as well as the unique meaning of 2020 for long-term bird monitoring. For many Bay Area birders, Allen needs no introduction. The GGRO's first director, he was hired in 1985. With a background in evolutionary ecology and conservation biology from UC Davis, Allen has a particular interest in bird population responses to urban development, climate change, and other human pressures. His presentations always manage to inform and entertain audiences. This program will no doubt continue that tradition.

© Mark de Blok



MAS and the Mill Valley Film Festival Present "The Warden"

Marin Audubon Society is partnering with the Mill Valley Film Festival on the presentation of the new film, *The Warden*.

The Warden (Netherlands, narrative feature, dir. Threes Anna) For almost half a century an old man has been the warden of a bird sanctuary on a tiny island in the middle of the ocean. One day he receives notice that his posting will be discontinued. His happy life—in and alongside nature—comes to an abrupt end. But the warden refuses to accept his dismissal. Determined not to leave, he decides to fight back in his own way.

— North American Premiere

As the Festival is being presented online this year, *The Warden* will have an available streaming window of October 9-18, meaning patrons can purchase and watch the film via the festival's streaming platforms during that period of days. Tickets went on sale Sunday, September 27, 2020 at 12 noon and can be purchased at www.mvff.com/tickets. There you can find further box office and streaming information.

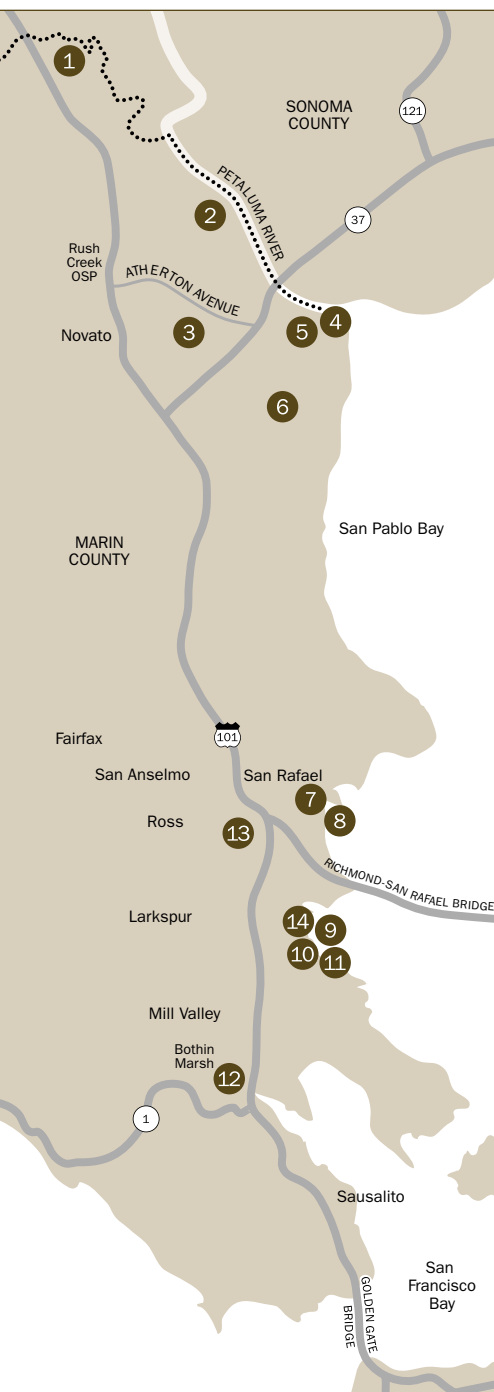
The 43rd Mill Valley Film Festival, presented by the California Film Institute, is an eleven-day festival boasting the year's best films from all corners of the globe, presented online through the Festival's new CALFILM channel and at the Festival's studio-grade drive-in cinema located at the beautiful Lagoon Park – Marin Center!

BENEFIT MAS

Make your next Amazon order through AmazonSmile and Amazon will donate 0.5% of the price of your eligible purchases to MAS. For information, visit <https://smile.amazon.com/ch/94-6076664>.

CONSERVATION

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



MARIN AUDUBON PROPERTIES

1. Petaluma Marsh Expansion Site	180 acres
2. Bahia	60 acres
3. Simmons Slough	144 acres
4. Norton Avenue Pond	4 parcels
5. Black Point Parcels	many parcels
6. Arroyo San Jose	2 parcels
7. Tiscornia Marsh	20 acres
8. Tidelands and Murphy's Rock	34 acres
9. San Clemente Creek Tidelands	4.34 acres
10. End of Channel Drive	?? acres
11. Triangle Marsh	31 acres
12. Arroyo Corte Madera del Presidio	2 acres
13. Cal Park	<1 acre
14. Corte Madera Ecological Reserve Expansion Site	5.2 acres

RESTORATION PLAN FOR THE FARALLONES MISREPRESENTED

Much misinformation is being circulated about the Farallones in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) plan to restore the Farallones by removing introduced house mice. An example is an article in the recent issue of the Sierra Club's Bay Chapter newsletter contained a number of inaccuracies. The most troublesome is the impression conveyed by the article that contraception is a viable alternative for eradicating the introduced house mice from the Farallones. It is not.

As the article acknowledges, a mouse contraception product does not exist at this time. A rat contraception product does exist, but it is administered in drinking water. Rats consume a lot of free water, but mice get much of their water from the moist food they eat and would not drink much, if any, of the water.

Consequently, a solid contraceptive product would have to be first invented for mice. If one could be produced, it would have to be tested, undergo environmental review, and be permitted — all of which would need to occur before it could be used on the Farallones. As we know from reviewing CEQA documents and from preparing them for our own projects, that can take years to prepare.

Even if a contraceptive product specifically for mice existed that has been proven to work, it would only control the mouse population, not eradicate it. Substances that prevent contraception must be consumed regularly to be effective. It would have to be distributed around the islands, probably in perpetuity. This would be extremely costly and problematic, if not impossible, to implement. Bait stations would have to be set up and refilled regularly. This would interfere with the breeding birds and mammals on the Farallones, which would defeat the purpose of trying to restore its internationally important breeding seabird habitat.

In short, contraceptives might work in barns and agricultural fields, where control could suffice, but not on islands where eradication is essential.

And the article incorrectly infers that California Assembly Bill 1788 would prohibit the use of the rodenticides on the Farallones. AB 1788 Section C.2. 12978.7(2) lists a number of activities that are exempt including (e) (4): "The use of any second-generation anti-coagulant rodenticides for the eradication of nonnative invasive species inhabiting or found to be present on offshore islands in a manner that is consistent with all otherwise applicable



Ashy Storm Petrel

Glen Tepke, www.phase.com/graphic

federal and state laws and regulations." In addition, the article distorts the actual quantity of rodenticide that will be applied on the island: out of all the bait, the rodenticide itself will total less than 1.2 ounces.

The article also incorrectly claims that Burrowing Owls eat seabird eggs.

Coastal Commission schedule: We've learned that the Coastal Commission will delay the Consistency Determination for the USFWS Mouse Eradication Plan for the Farallon Islands. Commission staff want additional information that the Service cannot produce by the deadline for the November meeting. The hearing will take place after the first of the year.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

The Commission still needs to hear from you. Commission staff have set up a dedicated email address: farallonislands@coastal.ca.gov, or send comments to the Commission's new address: 455 Mission, Suite 300, San Francisco, CA 904105

Tell the Commission that the project is consistent with the Coastal Zone Management Program, the purpose of which is to maintain and restore the ecosystem of the islands. This has been the experience on hundreds of other islands where rodenticides also have been used to successfully remove rodents. For more information and to see a documented experience at Anacapa Island off the Southern California Coast, visit Point Blue's and MAS's websites.

ANCHOR-OUT UPDATE

After taking August off, the Richardson Bay Regional Agency (RBRA) met on Zoom on September 10 to present the Transition Plan and related Safe and Seaworthy program. The Plan is clear and well written, and most of its provisions would have beneficial results for

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Anchor-out Update

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water and shoreline safety, but the provisions are basically the same as were presented to BCDC's Enforcement Committee. It outlines standards focused on vessel safety and operator experience that will have to be met to be granted Legacy status. Legacy designation would allow certain anchor-outs to stay for an indefinite time. The Plan's major deficiency is the failure to set a deadline for anchor-outs to leave the Bay which, as we pointed out, should be five years as required by BCDC's Enforcement Committee.

Marin Audubon and a few others urged moving the anchor-outs from the Bay, and supported its programs designed to help folks to transition to land. But the majority of the time was taken up with testimony from anchor-outs and their supporters. In an obviously orchestrated performance about ten anchor-outs, who apparently did not have connection to Wi-Fi or a computer, spoke from a parking lot taking turns on a single device. About eight spoke from other locations. They spoke in opposition to the RBRA Transition Plan expressing a range of emotions. Some pleaded for their homes to not be taken, some accused the Harbormaster of taking their boats illegally and threatened him with physical harm if he came to their boats again, some expressed empathy for anchor-outs and cited the pandemic to support taking no action, some lashed out against "elite, wealthy" on-shore residents, and some claimed their right to live on the Bay, with one stating that living on the Bay benefits him because it is "free."

The testimonies were not entirely unexpected and will have to be dealt with and worked through. This testimony was similar to public testimony made when the RBRA was established 35 years ago. As can be seen from testimony at this meeting and many others over recent years, the anchor-out population is a mix ranging from folks who need financial assistance, some who are engaging in criminal activities, some who are skilled mariners and others who are not. The RBRA needs to continue to reach out and to work diligently to work toward protecting the bay.

HIGHWAY 37 TRAFFIC CONGESTION RELIEF PROJECT DRAFT EIR/EIS

Caltrans has begun environmental review for a project that is intended to provide congestion relief at peak traffic times, and increase vehicle occupancy for the section between Mare Island and State Route 121. The environmental document will comply with both the California Environmental Quality Act

and the National Environmental Policy Act. The document is intended to be an interim solution to address traffic congestion using small fixes, before funding can be found for the entire Highway 37 corridor, which includes Marin.

Three alternatives will be evaluated in the EIR/EIS: Alternative 1) has three directional lanes — two in the peak direction and one in off-peak — with a moveable center median barrier, similar to the Golden Gate Bridge; Alternatives 2) and 3) would have four lanes either part or full time. Alternative 2) uses the existing shoulders as an HOV lane for users during peak traffic times in the peak direction, and a shoulder for the non-peak direction. Alternative 3) uses the existing shoulders as traffic lanes. One lane in each direction would remain a general traffic lane while an additional lane would be added for HOV use during peak periods, to provide an incentive for shifting from single occupancy vehicles. Signs would manage traffic in the lanes. Alternative 1) has the narrowest roadway width at 54 feet. Alternatives 2) and 3) would be 58 to 60 feet wide.

We raised the following issues to be addressed in the DEIS/EIR: the location and acreage of the multiple small areas along the length of the roadway that would have to be filled to provide a stable road surface, including how much would be wetland fill; the location of culverts that would have to be replaced or stabilized with fill, and the wetlands impacts from culvert improvements; and proposed mitigation for the wetlands that would have to be filled for the road widening and for culvert improvements. We also asked whether there are significant safety differences between the alternatives and that cumulative impact be addressed.

With the narrowest width, it is presumed Alternative 1) would require the least amount of fill and, therefore, appears to be the least environmentally damaging alternative.

FERN MATTERS

FERN, the Fire and Environment Resilience Network, will be reviewing the projects submitted to the Marin Wildfire Protection Authority by the various jurisdictions, working on best management practices, reviewing projects and CEQA documents, offering constructive recommendations, attending and participating in Authority meetings and related committee meetings and commenting on projects and related meetings.

An example of FERN action is a letter recently sent on behalf of FERN member organizations (Marin Audubon Society, California Native Plant Society and the Environmental Action Committee of

West Marin) to the Southern Marin Fire Department, expressing our concern about the mowing of 1 to 1.5 acres within threatened plant habitat on Marin County's Ring Mountain Preserve. In the process of mowing defensible space, approximately 1,000 feet beyond the normal defensible space was also mowed along with a 50-foot swath centered on Reed Ranch Road.

Ring Mountain is renowned for its rare serpentine soil and rare plants. According to the California Center for Natural History, 2008, "Ring Mountain is a geological, botanical, and conservation wonder." Two extremely rare plants, the threatened Marin Dwarf Flax (*Hesperaloe congestum*) and the rare Tiburon buckwheat (*Eriogonum luteolum* or *caninum*), both annual species, were among the grasses along the roadside and were flowering and/or in fruit/seed at the time of the mowing. The wholesale destruction of these reproductive structures is likely to lead to a decline in the populations of these species.

Plant communities also provide nesting and foraging habitat for migratory birds that are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

The mowed area also lies within the protected plant communities: coastal terrace prairie and serpentine bunchgrass grassland, both imperiled within the state. Not only has the seed production of listed species in the mowed area been destroyed for this year, but the action also opened the disturbed area, leaving it vulnerable to invasion by non-native species.

To add to our dismay, according to fire experts, the grassland poses a low fire risk and there is nothing much to be gained from mowing the grasses in this area. These grasslands grow lower to the ground than common Marin annual grasslands. Three to five years of monitoring and possible remedial action will be needed to reduce the chance of further impacts to the mowed area by non-native plants invading the damaged area.

FERN has asked the Fire District to educate its staff about the sensitive natural resources in its jurisdiction, to provide adequate oversight of its on-the-ground employees to ensure this does not happen again, and to assist the Marin County Open Space District, which owns the Ring Mountain Preserve, with any needed restoration or remedial work.

FERN organizations are working together to ensure that Marin's natural resources are protected as the Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority and FireSafe Marin work to reduce fire risk.

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HABITAT STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

Our volunteer days remain on the schedule. Staying a healthy distance apart from each other on our volunteer days is easy, so don't let this keep you away!

There are two late summer non-native annuals, stinkwort and *Salsola soda*, to control at this time of year. At Triangle Marsh we'll prepare for planting in the winter by sheet mulching an area on the berm. That will cover two of the more troublesome non-native perennials, bristly ox-tongue and Harding grass. Those same species will be the center of our attention at the Corte Madera Ecological Reserve expansion property.

Extra time on your hands? A student who needs community service hours? Act locally and join us on a workday. We all make a difference.

Volunteer Workdays

Triangle Marsh, East Corte Madera:

First Saturdays: October 3, November 7

Meet at 10 AM on Paradise Dr. directly across from the Ring Mountain trailhead near the Montessori School.

Corte Madera Ecological Reserve:

Second Saturdays: October 10, November 14

Meet at the end of Industrial Way.

For up-to-date information, contact Martha Jarocki, marthajarocki@gmail.com or phone 415/461-3592.

Bahia, Novato:

If you'd like to help, please contact Jude at judestalker@gmail.com.

THANK YOU, STEWARDSHIP VOLUNTEERS

Dave Chenoweth, Rich Cimino, Bob Hinz, Gerry and Martha Jarocki, Ed Nute, Lowell Sykes, Vickie Vann, Doug Waterman

THANK YOU, DONORS

Deborah Brown, Donal Brown, Arthur Campodonico, William Clark, Todd Denman, Daniel Drake, Robert Fallat, Fischer Family Fund, Kathleen Foster, Inge Fraser, Rick Fraites, Nancy Frost, Beth Huning, Christina Jaqua, Angela Jane Kerby, William Lary, Carol Maddison & Don Higgins, Mary H T Love, Sarah Martin, Erald Meral, Kate Merriman, Ron & Betsy Miewiarowski, Ruth Neuweiler, Frank Noonan, Diane Parish, RHE Foundation, Marianne Riser, Kathryn Van Dyke, David Wiechers

HABITAT STEWARDSHIP

BAHIA

The plants installed last winter are doing well at Bahia. Crews from On Point Land Management continue to water every two weeks.

Thanks to the generous donation for our properties (see President's letter) we will be able to purchase more wetland plants and have them planted, continuing our work to create wet meadow habitat on the Central Peninsula, and shrub habitats along the levee sides.

The homeowners association will be repainting their bridge/culvert structure. We visited the site with their contractor to review the project and its possible impact on adjacent vegetation. We recommended protecting the native gumplant (*Grindelia stricta*), a very healthy stand of which is growing on the out-board side of the bridge.

CORTE MADERA RESTORATION SITE

Watering continued at Corte Madera on the first Saturday in September—in spite of the heat. Our volunteer waterers are Lowell Sykes, Martha and Jerry Jarocki, Ed Nute, Dave Chenoweth, Doug Waterman, and Rich Cimino. We thank you for your dedication.

We also have data on bird use from a report on the bird surveys Rich Cimino has been conducting from the overlook for about a year. And he has observed 68 species to date. He's seen a number of fall migrants this month: Long Billed Curlew, Least Sandpipers, Savanna Sparrows and Killdeer. Rich advises that in the winter months it is a good location to look for American Pipits and Whimbrel. This past spring a pair of White-tailed Kites nested on the property. Rich observes: "It is also interesting to watch the vegetation slowly taking over the restoration site." Yes, just as we anticipated with our restoration project, pickleweed is indeed colonizing the area we lowered to restore to marsh.

PETALUMA MARSH

One of our earliest tidal marsh restoration projects was restoring 100 acres of tidal marsh on a 182-acre property we purchased from Waste Management Inc. We're pleased to report that things are going well on the marsh and adjacent upland habitat.

The Creeping Wild Rye (*Elymus triticoides*) planted along levee looks great; Coyote Brush (*Baccharis pilularis*) is doing great and growing; Marsh Baccharis (*Baccharis glutinosa*) planted in patches is doing great and spreading; several patches of Alkali Heath (*Frankenia salina*) are growing high up on levee; Gumplant (*Grindelia stricta*) is found on the MAS levee that runs



Jude Stalker

MAS's Petaluma restored marsh

parallel to the SMART tracks; Pickleweed (*Salicornia pacifica*), Cordgrass (*Spartina foliosa*), Saltgrass (*Distichlis spicata*) and alkali bulrush (*Bolboschoenus maritimus* formerly *Scirpus maritimus*) in marsh at the edge of the levee are doing really well; and a lot of Cordgrass (*Spartina*) has established on the constructed islands within the marsh. There are lots of rodent burrows, runs and animal tracks running through the levee and bench areas.

But alas, things are not perfect. There are some non-native plants: Italian Rye (*Festuca perennis* formerly *Lolium multiflorum*) in a solid mat covering most of the flat bench. There is quite a bit of Pepperweed (*Lepidium latifolia*), an extremely invasive plant; lots of fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*), a few patches of Yellow Star Thistle (*Centaurea solstitialis*), Mallow sp., and dried wild radish (*Raphanus sativus*) and mustard (*Brassica* sp.) on the levee. While these are all invasive species, the number and diversity of native species is impressive considering the difficulty we had getting anything to grow for many years after the marsh restoration due to high sulfide levels in the soil. Elymus, a native grass that is known to outcompete invasive plants, may eventually spread out and take over the levee bench and levee sides.

Credit nature for the gradual evolution of this site. Over time rain appears to be successfully leaching the high salt levels from the soil, allowing plants to grow.

TRIANGLE MARSH

On a warm first Saturday stewardship day in September with extremely hot days in the forecast, volunteers watered the young blue elderberry and western goldentop (*Euthamia occidentalis*). They also looked for stinkwort (*Dittrichia graveolens*) in the usual area and, after several years of pulling it, were pleased to find none.

Stewardship at Home – Messy is Better

Fall is the time for yard work. Breeding season is past so there is no danger of destroying nests when you trim your trees and shrubs. If you want to make your yard a welcome haven for resident and over-wintering birds, leave your leaves. As you do your yard work remember that neat and tidy offers little for birds or other wildlife. Messy is better!

Leave leaves — leaves cover and protect the soils, decompose, enrich soil and become more soil. Leaf mulch supports insects, which are important food source for ground foraging birds, as well as invertebrates and other native creatures that are important in the food chain. So instead of putting leaves in your green can, recycle them to benefit the environment on your own property. Make sure to leave them away from your house and not in a deep pile. I am told by fire inspectors that leaf litter should be three inches deep. Different fire districts vary somewhat in the standards they enforce.

Consider creating a brush pile — National Audubon suggests building brush piles because of their benefits for wildlife. Brush or stick piles are great hiding places from predators, they shelter birds from inclement weather, and provide refuges for other wildlife such as snakes and lizards. Brush piles will settle and decompose over time, but here in the West they are not approved by fire departments. If you have space to pile up your downed sticks away from your house you might consider constructing a

brush pile. If you see a pile of sticks in Marin woodlands, take care! It may be a Dusky-footed Woodrat den. Dusky-footed Woodrats are interesting little creatures and the main food item for Northern Spotted Owl.

In the west, winter rainy season is time to plant. Get plants in the ground as soon as there is a substantial rain. This will allow plants to be in the ground with wet/moist soils for the longest time to establish, giving them the best chance of survival. Plant native species suitable for your neighborhood. The right choices will depend on whether you live in the cooler moist climate of South Marin, hotter North Marin or Tiburon, flatlands, oak woodlands, near a stream habitat, in redwood or mixed woodlands with lots of shade, or on the north side of hills or south-facing lands that get full sun. Where your house is makes a difference. Plants need the right climate, soil type, and amount of sun or shade.

Do not use rodenticides to get rid of mice or rats. Rodenticides are not only fatal for rodents but they are also fatal for raptors and other wildlife that feed on the rodents that have consumed the rodenticide.

Our native plants have evolved together with native wildlife. Native plants provide native birds and other wildlife with the food and cover they need, and you will be rewarded with a delightful yard and rich diversity of native wildlife.

Monarch at Deer Island

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blows off in the wind carried by its attached floss — like dandelion seeds.

Wild turkeys seem to be a bit of a problem at this site. They leave feathers and scat. The turkeys were introduced in California for

hunters. At our milkweed patch they scratch for bugs in the mulch and seem to nibble on some of the milkweed. However, milkweed is poisonous to most animals so much of the milkweed still appears to be healthy.

Another problem has been the little orange oleander aphids, *Aphis nerii*. These aphids came in with the non-native oleander bushes, which are also poisonous and planted liberally along roads and median strips because they have pretty flowers. These little orange vampires suck the life out of milkweed plants. So far, we have been able to control them by squishing them with our fingers.

This winter Marin Audubon will be expanding its milkweed plantings and start a new patch on the Bahia property at the end of Bahia Drive. Hopefully with more patches we can attract more monarchs and provide them with host plants. We will need volunteers for the planting this winter so let me know at e.nute@nute-engr.com. In the meantime, if you see a monarch butterfly you should report your observation on www.MonarchMilkweedMapper.org.

Conservation

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CORTE MADERA FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT PROJECT

Finally, removal of the environmentally damaging concrete channel on Corte Madera Creek is in sight. Since its construction by the Army Corps of Engineers, the channel has not only been a visual blight, it's been disastrous to fish and birds, and has not even worked for flood prevention.

In addition to removing the concrete channel from Stadium Way down to the natural channel, the project would have other environmental benefits, including removal of the fish ladder, which has long been a trap for fish, and installing larger resting pools to enhance fish habitat. To address flooding, the project will construct taller floodwalls, restore a natural channel in Frederick Allen Park in Ross, and install a storm-water pump station to control flooding in Granton Park. A public access path with steps down to the creek is also planned.

Objectives of the project include: reducing flood risk, benefitting the environment, and improving operational reliability, all in a fiscally responsible manner.

The project sponsor, Marin County Flood Control and Water Conservation District, will be preparing an Environmental Impact Report (EIR). The deadline for submitting scoping comments is before this newsletter will be published. There will be other opportunities for the public to comment on the Draft EIR, when it is produced, and then again when the project is approved. Other project stakeholders are the Town of Ross and Friends of Corte Madera Creek Watershed.

MAS has submitted scoping comments requesting that the EIR address impacts of stairs down to the creek, floodwalls with patterns that provide habitat and a reduced project alternative be discussed, also.

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The Rail

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We invite you to become a Chapter-Supporting member of Marin Audubon Society (MAS) to support our important habitat protection and restoration work, conservation advocacy, our full calendar of birding field trips and speakers and our newsletter, *The Rail*. Marin Audubon is a chapter of National Audubon (NAS). However, becoming a **Chapter-Supporting Member** of MAS is separate and distinct from a membership in NAS. While MAS works with NAS on issues of mutual concern, we are a separate non-profit Section 501(c)(3) all-volunteer organization. Marin-based NAS members do receive this MAS newsletter, *The Rail*, however we encourage all NAS members to also become Chapter-Supporting members of MAS to support our local work. Very little of our funding comes from NAS, and we rely on our MAS Chapter-Supporting members and donors to help us fund our land acquisitions, restorations, habitat protection, conservation advocacy, this newsletter and our local programs.

If you're not already a Chapter-Supporting member, we urge you to join MAS and urge your friends, neighbors and relatives to join us, too.

You can join MAS or make a donation on our website using your credit card or PayPal by going to www.marinaudubon.org. Alternatively, you can join by filling out this form and sending us your payment by mail.

IF YOU ARE LOOKING TO JOIN NATIONAL AUDUBON FOR THE FIRST TIME

MAS will receive 100% of your initial membership if you enter **MAS's chapter code C04** on your application. To join, go to www.audubon.org/join.

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