

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 12 7:30 PM

Feathers and Flight: A Journey to The New World Tropics

By Benjamin Jacobs-Schwartz



Benjamin Jacobs-Schwartz

Plate-billed Mountain Toucan

The November 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.

International Bird guide, naturalist and photographer, Benny Jacobs-Schwartz will share his dazzling bird photos, captivating videos, and animated story-telling to bring a slice of the tropics to your screen!

Delving into topics of migration, tropical speciation, and biodiversity, this media rich journey will share some of the fascinating and unique birds that inhabit the new-world tropics.

Sure to both educate and entertain, this presentation will certainly leave you with a deeper understanding of exotic tropical birdlife and ecology, and knowledge about where some of our backyard birds spend their winters!

Benny owns and operates a bird guiding business and lifestyle brand called BIRDS by BIJS (pronounced Bee-jus). Working seasonally, Benny operates in a variety of locations, most recently taking him to coastal Alaska, Trinidad and Tobago and the Ecuadorian cloud forest.

NEXT MONTH'S SPEAKER:

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 10 7:30 PM

When Waterbirds Are In Crisis

By JD Bergeron

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The Rail

MARIN AUDUBON SOCIETY

Point Reyes National Seashore



National Park Service, Tim Bernat

Point Reyes National Seashore Elk

After reviewing the more than 1,000 comments on its Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), the National Park Service (NPS) made a regrettable decision about the long-term management of the National Seashore. The NPS choice of Alternative B, out of six alternatives, for management of the Seashore, is very troubling. The decision runs against 91% of the public comments received. It is truly a giveaway to ranching—forever. There is scant attention to wildlife except for protecting endangered species, which is required by federal and state law, and managing the elk. It appears that significantly more staff and money would be needed to manage and monitor the ranch leases, with the new diversifications, and the impacts of increased recreation activities. Adding to the concern are the adverse impacts to wildlife and habitats the increased recreational uses will bring.

There are 28,100 acres in use in the planning area. The new Subzones are:

- **Resource Protection Zone** consisting of 2,000 acres containing sensitive resources such as streams and creeks that would be excluded from ranching except for targeted cattle grazing.
- **Range Zone** consisting of 16,900 acres that are described as lands where grazing is compatible with resource protection. But this category includes lands with sensitive resources: rare plants, native wetlands, streams, forested areas, and

endangered species, and nearly all areas with slopes greater than 20%.

- **Pasture Zone** is 9,000 acres where no sensitive resources are known to exist. The lands are used for ranching and diversified activities.
- **Ranch Core Zone** is 220 acres composed of 2.5-acre buffers around developed complexes.

Strategies for managing ecological functions vary according to zones and leases and include a lot of monitoring and prioritizing, but not much enforcement action. The following staff responsibilities are listed for all zones:

- To protect natural resources, including wetlands, grasslands, scrub, forest and dune communities; identify community types, research and evaluate ecosystem connectivity; conduct management actions that promote habitat;
- To protect endangered and threatened species, follow Biological Opinions;
- For rare species and species of special concern, prioritize inventory and monitor to determine trends; take appropriate actions to protect species;
- Take appropriate action to protect sensitive species, if monitoring indicates threats to these species;
- Long-term declines in native animal and plant communities *could* trigger management actions; restore native species that have been severely reduced or extirpated *where feasible* (emphases added).
- To maintain a viable population of Tule elk, monitor movement patterns and population thresholds, and identify management actions such as habitat improvement (presumably including culling, although this is not mentioned);
- Ensure plant and animal communities persist: prioritize inventory and monitoring.

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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 |
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| 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

I hope you all are doing well. We're still working to bring you smooth-running and interesting Speaker Series programs and substitute Field Trips. Sometimes there is a glitch, but I'm sure you understand. We evaluate our activities in relation to the pandemic status and at every Board meeting. So far we don't see much changing until after the first of the year and probably beyond. The one in-person activity we are still holding is a workday at the Corte Madera Ecological Reserve site, where Martha Jarocki makes sure that volunteers stay properly distanced and have a chance to work outdoors benefitting habitat for wildlife. See information under Corte Madera on the Stewardship page.

In addition to our updated website—which we hope you are enjoying—we want to improve communication with our members in other ways. One is through our **Alert List**. Marin Audubon maintains a list of members and non-members to whom we send occasional Alerts for important events coming up, conservation matters that we want you to take action on, and last-minute changes in our planned field trips or programs. Until now, the list has only contained the names of people who signed up on our website to be on the list. It currently includes members and non-members. Our Board decided to add all of our members we have email addresses for, to the list on the assumption that

you would want to receive important messages from us. If we don't have your email address, you can sign up on the Homepage of our website. The form is at the bottom of the far-right column. If you do not want to receive our email alerts, there is a simple way to delete yourself, just click on the delete button at the bottom. We do not have email addresses for all of our members, so if you want to be sure you receive our notices, sign up on our website.

National Audubon has provided chapters with guidelines on conducting **Christmas Bird Counts** during the pandemic. The guidelines recommend against driving together in cars except with family groups, and not holding group dinners. We are still deliberating whether to cancel or support limited versions of the three counts we sponsor. See Ed Nute's article on page 6 for more information.

Good news! Governor Gavin Newsom has signed an Executive Order requiring that 30% of California's lands be preserved by 2030 to restore and expand biodiversity. Hats off to Governor Newsom and Audubon California, one of the organizations that advocated for this protection.

This newsletter will be reaching you either just before or perhaps just after Election Day. Bulk mail items are always delayed at election time. In either case, we are looking forward to a new era. If you haven't voted yet—vote for the birds!

Mapping the Breeding Birds of Marin County

By Juan García

Like any other atlas, a "breeding bird atlas" is in part a stack of maps. Each map represents a given area, such as a country, province, state, county, protected area, mountain, etc. Atlases often include maps representing key geographical features, such as vegetation, rainfall, and topography. In its original form, published in 1993, the *Marin County Breeding Bird Atlas* displayed a map of the county for each known or suspected breeder. Each of these species maps portrayed the grid system used to survey the county, and in each of the cells of the grid—known as "study blocks" or simply "blocks"—breeding information about the relevant species was displayed.

If the bird was not found to breed in a given block, that block appeared blank on the map. If, on the other hand, it was known or thought to breed there, a clear symbol was printed in the center of the block. These symbols represented the confidence of the observer in answering the question, Does the bird breed within the confines of that block? The possible answers: "Possible," "Probable," and "Confirmed." The answer itself had been arrived at through careful observation over weeks, months, or even years during the study period.

MCBBA2, the second iteration of this study, is fortunate to have a crack cartographer on

our team. William Wiskes lives in Novato and attends San Francisco State University, where he is earning a Master of Science degree in Geographical Information Systems (GIS). This is a highly specialized field that combines visual representations of geographic spaces with underlying databases that inform the features represented there. William came with the high recommendation of Siobhan Ruck, a veteran birder with strong ties to our county. William has already constructed a base map that replicates the original map used in the original study. He is next planning to build an interactive web map, high-resolution maps of each of our study blocks, and—this is the age we live in!—a phone app that will allow volunteers to find their location within their block.

In conversation over the last few months, I've been struck by how many non-birders in Marin County are interested in birds. Among everyday folk in general, there is a fund of goodwill towards birds that we can surely rely on for our conservation efforts. Birders can cultivate this sympathy by sharing their knowledge and experience. I would urge readers of *The Rail* to spread the word about the upcoming atlas project as a point of pride for our community and, in particular, for the Marin Audubon Society.

Point Reyes, continued from page 1

Special Strategies for Range, Pasture and Ranch Core Subzones:

- Identify authorized ranching activities and enforce rancher compliance;
- Incorporate relevant USDA and NRCS Practice Standards and mitigation measures and water quality practices required by the RWQCB;
- Set metrics and conduct monitoring.

Strategies for Resource Protection Subzone:

- Identify disturbance regimes that may need to be maintained by management, such as target grazing. May require increased management effort;
- Implement management actions such as targeted grazing.

Strategies for Scenic Landscape Subzone:

- Identify disturbances that may need to be maintained by management;
- Implement management actions such as grazing regimes and increase management efforts;
- Prioritize restoration activities including removing fencing, roads, wildlife barriers and attractants;
- Prioritize water quality improvement practices.

INCREASED RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES ENCOURAGED

Of further concern is the increase in recreational use that is encouraged by the Plan. The trail network would be expanded with the focus on expanding access, multi-use trails for hiking, biking (including e-bikes) and equestrian use. A mix of established and off-trail routes, loops and connections with other trails, with crossings over ranchlands are envisioned. This raises alarm about off-trail use impacts on adjacent habitats and wildlife (trampling of vegetation, intrusion into habitats, reduced habitat availability as wildlife try to avoid humans, etc., all of which have been observed in other publicly owned habitats).

Adaptive management strategies are cited to reduce impacts of increased recreation, and include: providing more information; expanding the range of visitor opportunities; managing access, through a broader range of tools (which are unspecified); and “partnering to provide safe multi-use for roads notably for bicycle use.” None of these actions have proven effective at reducing impacts elsewhere. Experience in other public lands has shown that increased uses result in increased impacts on natural resources as well as increased public safety impacts.

RANCH ACTIVITIES AND MANAGEMENT

“Diversification” allows production of silage; hay lag and hay would be allowed in the Pasture Subzone. Compost could be spread on lands where it originates. Other composting activities could be considered on a case by case basis in the Ranch Core Subzone also. Diversification also allows keeping up to 500 chickens, up to 50 sheep or 66 goats, with the number of cattle reduced by a fixed percentage in accordance with the number of goats and sheep. In the Ranch Core Subzone, up to 2.5 acres of crops not requiring irrigation is allowed as is the use of existing structures for farm stays. Animal manure can be spread in the 2.5 acre subzone in the Pasture and Ranch Core Subzones in compliance with waste discharge requirements of the State Water Quality Control Board. Fortunately, it appears that the Water Boards will maintain authority over water quality and water use, and water development projects would have to undergo further environmental review. It appears that increased water consumption is anticipated, and likely would be needed for adding chickens, goats and sheep.

Guidance for management of ranch activities relies heavily on Practice Standards developed and used by the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). The Practice Standards are technical guidelines for the conservation of soils, water, air, and related plant and animal resources. Other guidance will come from other environmental compliance documents including Biological Opinions from the US Fish and Wildlife Service and Regional Water Quality Control Board water quality certification.

NRCS Practice Standards exist for various water-related activities: road upgrade and decommissioning (unpaved roads are often the source of sediment in creek waters), improvements, fencing, water supply for livestock, stock pond restoration, waterway stabilization, and stream crossings. MAS has some experience with NRCS Practice Standards because NRCS holds an easement on our Simmons Slough property. NRCS seems to focus largely on agricultural lands in the Central Valley. Also, many of their practices appear to be associated on continuing agricultural practices. For example, their Spring Development Practice Standard is aimed at developing springs for cattle, not wildlife.

LEASES

Ranchers will be required to sign a lease, and the standard lease is provided for public



Cattle graze along Sir Francis Drake Boulevard at Point Reyes National Seashore

review. The lease lays out requirements such as on the use of chemicals, and requirements to protect wildlife as well as limits on the number of cattle, and diversification activities allowed. The lease calls for structural controls (pens, fences etc.) to “discourage or preclude” wildlife access, to protect crops and farm animals from wildlife. No other guidance is provided.

Leases require that Lessees allow the NPS staff onto properties, but we could only find requirements for one site visit per year by the NRCS and one by the NPS. With such limited monitoring on such large ranches, it is hard to comprehend how the NPS would even know that ranchers were complying with their leases. How would they know if a rancher was killing a bobcat for getting into a chicken coop, for example, or trapping and killing birds eating vegetable crops?

Eviction is the only enforcement option addressed in the lease, and there is no certainty that Lessees would be evicted even if they do not comply with lease requirements. Enforcement is at the discretion of the Lessor, i.e., the National Park Service. According to the standard contract language, if a Lessee fails to keep and perform any provisions of the lease, the lease shall become void *at the opinion* of the Lessor (section 32.1) with 30-day notice. If the Lessee does not cure the default, the *Lessor shall be entitled to expel the Lessee* (32.2). Should the Lessee become bankrupt, “the right of the Lessee shall be revoked, again *“in the opinion of the Lessor.”* So even in the presence of a gross violation of lease provisions, there is no requirement that Lessees be evicted. This decision is at the discretion of the NPS (emphases added).

Adding to the concerns is the question of how the budget for the significantly increased oversight, monitoring and hopefully enforcement will be funded. The park

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is already suffering from lack of maintenance and enforcement, as reflected in the condition of much infrastructure and habitats. We just don't see that the NPS will acquire the substantial increase in funds that will be essential for them to monitor and enforce all of the increased ranching activities allowed under this Plan. The staff report simply states that the funds will come from existing sources.

The revised Management Draft EIS describes the Plan as supporting "multi-generational ranching," but it is more like a "ranch-guarantee" plan. The Succession Plan follows succession through family members, but if no family member wants to continue in ranching, the next required step is to offer the opportunity to ranch the property to adjacent ranchers. If neighbors are not interested, the NPS will offer the opportunity to anyone. So there is not even a slim chance that any given property would or could be returned to a natural state—ever. This is the great tragedy. We could live with ranching now, if sometime in the future some or most of them were returned to nature.

In summary, it's a dark day for Point Reyes habitats and wildlife. It's not just control of the elk population that is troubling, it is also all of the other species that could be adversely impacted, or could be thriving if these public lands were managed for their benefit. But wildlife is taking a back seat to ranching with acceptance of the preferred Alternative B, which is designed to keep all ranches in operation forever. A National Park should not be subservient to ranching nor should it be depended upon for supporting the region's agriculture.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

The Plan needs a Consistency Determination from the Coastal Commission to proceed. Email the commission at the project's: **PointReyesManagementPlan@coastal.ca.gov**.

Tell them the Management Plan would not be consistent with the Coastal Zone Management Programs Reasons you can cite are: impacts on wildlife from habitat impacts and loss, water quality and quantity impacts from cattle and other farm animals.

SAN RAFAEL PLAN ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The City of San Rafael has scheduled two Planning Commission meetings to review the Draft General Plan 2040 and receive initial public comment. Chapters 1 through 9 will be reviewed on October 27 and the rest of the draft plan will be heard

on November 12. The EIR for the plan is expected to be released for public review soon. The goal of the process is to approve the Plan in March 2021.

When we review general plans, we typically focus on the natural resources remaining in the jurisdiction, particularly wetlands. We don't review or comment on developed areas unless they support areas of habitat.

Our quick review of the natural resources section in Plan 2040 indicates that policies are mixed. Policy C-1-3 calls for protecting wetlands, "unless it is not possible or practical." Mitigation would be required in a 2:1 ratio and of the same habitat type. There are many loopholes. It provides that the city may waive the compensatory mitigation if a "wetlands expert" (one can always find a consultant to support filling wetlands) says "that preservation would not result in a functioning biological resources"; or the city determines that they like the project better than the wetlands and that the wetland is small, i.e., less than 0.1 acre. In addition, Program C-1-4c supports the creation of mitigation banking sites in the city. MAS has opposed mitigation banks for some time because they support and encourage wetland fill. On the positive side, Program C-1.B supports our Tiscornia project.

A new program for the 85-acre Canalways site on the Bayfront is distressing. MAS has worked to protect this former bay site for more than 40 years. The parcel has never been filled and has been pumped. MAS has a long history of trying to protect Canalways. It is former open tidal waters and now looks like a hole in the ground because it has never been filled. It has been pumped for many years by the city after legal action by the property owners. The current plan calls for protecting the site and provides for some development along the western edge which is at a higher elevation. Plan 2040 would open the door for even more development based on a wetland jurisdictional delineation which is a concern because the property owners have been pumping water out to keep it dry for the past 20+ years. But the most surprising statement is that development of the site should be "economically viable for the property owners." We've never seen a General Plan that actually guarantees a property owner an economic benefit.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Especially if you live in San Rafael, you should be paying attention, read the plan and comment. You can find it by Googling San Rafael General Plan 2040, click on General Plan Documents in the left column. Submit comments to: **Barry.Miller@cityofsanrafael.org**.

CORTE MADERA INN TO BE HOTEL

The owner of the Corte Madera Inn is back with a new plan with a new name, Corte Madera Hotel. This new early planning approach, was presented to the community by the owner, Garret Giralou, and his consultants on October 7. In spite of the competition for airtime, (it was the night of the Vice Presidential debate), a number of residents were in attendance and commented. A major positive change for MAS is that the owner has committed to retaining the pond. Other commenters agreed.

The owner has a new approach, a new architect and a new team that is working toward a new design. The team reviewed how they are considering different architectural styles.

Most importantly to MAS, and to some other speakers at the meeting, the owner has committed to protecting the pond and building the new hotel around it. Several attendees spoke to appreciating its quietness and suggested raising the berm along the highway to block more noise. MAS commented about the importance of keeping the pond for the wildlife that depend on it, as well as for the enjoyment of people.

Marin Audubon has a history of working to protect the Corte Madera Inn pond (formerly Edgewater Pond) over probably the last 20 years, through several proposals to fill it in order to expand the hotel. The pond waters and adjacent vegetation host a colony of Black Crowned Night Herons that roost in the trees and forage along the pond edges. The pond and its adjacent vegetation are habitat for wintering waterfowl and shorebirds when the water level is low and the mud exposed.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

No time line is available yet, but there will be workshops before the Planning Commission in the not too distant future. Environmental review and possible approval will be done by the Planning Commission unless the Commission's decision is appealed to the Council.

FARALLONES

We're delighted to see the Ashy Storm-Petrel as the American Bird Conservancy's bird of the week for October 8 (<https://abcbirds.org/bird/ashy-storm-petrel>). Half of the world population of this at-risk bird nests off our coast on Southeast Farallon Island. They warn that the storm-petrel's population is declining. It is listed as endangered by the authoritative International Union for

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Conservation of Nature. Among the threats are the “unusually high rates of predation by over-wintering Burrowing Owls, which are attracted to the island by high numbers of non-native House Mice.”

The American Bird Conservancy and the Marin Audubon Society are among the many conservation organizations supporting the US Fish and Wildlife Service restoration plan for the Farallones to remove the mice, using a specially formulated rodenticide for conservation purposes. Some people have proposed contraception as an alternative method for eradicating the mice; however, this is not proven as a viable method of eradication. The commercial veterinary drug company Senestech produces ContraPest, a contraceptive drug developed for rats. Loretta Mayer, CEO of the drug company, addressed a recent Marin Conservation League meeting at which she explained that a contraceptive for mice is not currently available. She also said that she could develop and permit a contraceptive product for mice in a very short time. However, in a trade publication (www.pctonline.com/article/menopausal-mice-may-hold-key-to-control-breakthrough), she describes the

following regarding her product for rats: “It took us six years to get the formula just right,” Mayer said.” Plus, it took her a number of years to get it permitted.

In a separate article, Mayer addressed another problem that renders ContraPest ineffective at the Farallones. She said that fertility control does not work when eradication is required (<https://www.pctonline.com/article/loretta-mayer/>): “Fertility control is not a silver bullet, it is a tool and needs to be used in conjunction with a full program. It can be most useful as a stand-alone product in areas such as parks and zoos where lethal means are a concern, whereas more sensitive sites such as food plants that have zero tolerance for pests and may require faster, more complete eradication, fertility control works best as a complement to existing IPM protocols,” she explained.

Complete eradication is the only solution on the Farallones. ContraPest, or a similar formulation, would require that bait stations be maintained in perpetuity, which is infeasible on these craggy remote islands. According to Wikipedia (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SenesTech>), “ContraPest is a form of a birth control or contraceptive, not a sterilant, so a continuous

supply is required to maintain reduced populations.” (emphasis added).

The goal of the eradication plan is to restore the Farallones ecosystem to a more natural system. The presence of the introduced house mice is causing significant imbalance to the Farallones’ ecosystem and risking the survival of the rare Ashy Storm-Petrel and other species. The proposed US Fish and Wildlife Service plan is the only method proven to eliminate mice on islands. There simply is no other alternative that will work.

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 94105.

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 have been used to successfully remove rodents.

BIRDING PROGRAMS ON ZOOM

Migratory Waterbirds Featured in November Zoom Programs

Not wanting to compete with two major events in November—our national election and the Thanksgiving holiday—we will offer just two Zoom programs this month. Both will focus on migratory waterbirds. We hope these sessions will help you improve your waterbird identification skills and deepen your understanding of the challenges faced by their populations in the Bay Area, nearby parts of Central California, and other locations along the Pacific Flyway. These webinars are free and will continue to be offered on Wednesday evenings from 7 to 8:30 p.m.

How to Register: A separate registration is required for each program. Register on our new MAS website at www.marinaudubon.org where these programs are listed under the “Field Trips” section. At the top of each program listing, click on the Zoom program link, which will take you to the Webinar Registration Page. After registering you will receive a confirmation as well as two reminders prior to the program.

We are happy to report that most webinars will now be livestreamed on the Marin Audubon Facebook page ([facebook.com/marinaudubon](https://www.facebook.com/marinaudubon)). That means if you forget to sign up in advance or decide you’d like to join the program once it has started, you can do that, no problem. Additionally, if you miss the entire presentation, you can view it afterwards in the same location. Eventually we hope to also make these

recordings available on the Marin Audubon website.



IMPROVING HABITAT FOR CENTRAL VALLEY WATERBIRDS

Wednesday, November 11, 2020
7 PM to 8:30 PM
With Khara Strum

Did you know that over 50 percent of the potential habitat for migratory waterbirds in the Central Valley is also agricultural land? Farm fields might not be the first thing that comes to mind when you think of waterbirds, but here in California farmland is essential to supporting the millions of waterbirds that call the Central Valley home. Join Khara Strum for a tour of some of the ways Audubon California is working with farmers

and private landowners to support migratory waterbirds in the Central Valley.

Khara Strum is a Conservation Project Manager for Audubon California. For the last decade, Khara has worked with agricultural industry groups, private landowners, and government agencies to increase the habitat value of farmland for birds and other wildlife in the Central Valley of California.

DUCK IDENTIFICATION WEBINAR

Wednesday, November 18, 2020
7 PM to 8:30 PM
With Lisa Hug

There’s no time like now for sharpening your duck identification skills! The San Francisco Bay and other nearby areas are prime wintering grounds for ducks of the Pacific Flyway, with abundant opportunities beginning this month for viewing a wide variety of waterfowl. It helps to preview some of the species you’re likely to see in the field, especially the females, and Lisa will take us through the lineup of our beloved ducks. You might want to have your field guide on hand for reference.

Don’t hesitate to join us for these instructive tips for identifying ducks. Lisa is well versed in this subject, and we have resolved the connectivity issues that interrupted her first Shorebird Identification webinar in September. In February of 2019, many of us spent an amazing day indoors studying ducks with Lisa. This webinar will be a crash course by comparison but is sure to be excellent to bring you up to speed.

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! A little outdoor physical activity is good for a person's mood and overall wellbeing.

At Triangle Marsh we'll do the sheet mulching in preparation for planting, delayed recently due to bad air quality. Previous sheet mulching projects at Triangle have shown the value of that strategy. At the Corte Madera Ecological Reserve expansion project, we will deal once again with bristly ox-tongue and Harding grass. It's hard to get the very last plant, but we can keep it under control.

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: November 7, December 5

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

Corte Madera Ecological Reserve:

Second Saturdays: November 14, December 12

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

Rich Cimino, Catherine Cole, Bob Hinz, Gerry and Martha Jarocki, Ed Nute, Erika Parrino, Lowell Sykes, Doug Waterman

THANK YOU, DONORS

Deborah Ablin, Heather Bell, Mary Bicknell, William Clarke, Carl Blom, Jeffrey and Kate Colin, Jane Evans, Rick Fraites, Ted and Judy Frost, Karen Halversen, Mark Hansen, Peter and Linda Hoch, Robert Jensen, Lorraine Johnson, Sarah Karste, Katherine Look, Denise Loomis, Sarah Martin, Robert and Sandra Mauceli, Anne Menke, Russell Nelson, Jody Newman, JoAnne Powell, Hermna Roskopf, Joanne Shaw, Charles and Carla Stedwell, Leslie Stewart, Douglas Wallace, Doug and Joyce Waterman, Hilary Winslow, Dr. Periann Wood and Doug Wilson. ... and to John Klobas and family in memory of Terry Colborn

HABITAT STEWARDSHIP

BAHIA

In October we had a cluster of non-native trees removed from our property at the end of Bahia Drive: one huge eucalyptus, three black acacia, and three beefwood trees, a species native to Australia. They were originally planted by an adjacent resident to block views of what used to be a parking lot for residents' boats and RVs. Residents had to remove their vehicles when we purchased the property. Quite a few had been abandoned and the city of Novato was nice enough to have them removed for us. Since then, we've restored most of the property to tidal marsh and the trees have grown up to block what is now a view of marsh. These non-native trees provide little to no habitat for our native wildlife, so we will be looking into replacing them with native species.

CORTE MADERA ECOLOGICAL RESERVE RESTORATION SITE

Martha Jarocki continues workdays at our property and the Ecological Reserve lands. Lowell Sykes took over the September work day and the three folks who came, removed bristly ox tongue while maintaining social distance. Some people have been observed walking in the marsh, claiming that they were cleaning up trash. However, trash was not observed in the marsh before their access, and they left

when asked to. There is the concern that people walking through the marsh could damage the vegetation or wildlife.

The volunteer team had another excellent workday on the second Saturday in October 18, under cloudy skies and even some light mist. Two volunteers who had joined the team in August came again, Erica Parrino and Catherine Cole as did two MAS Board members, Bob Hinz and Meghan Kehoe. The volunteers mostly dug out bristly ox-tongue, and also took down a tall bloom of fennel on the northern section. The Ox-tongue is blooming and letting out seeds. Our volunteers bagged seed heads of both, and left the foliage.

Bob Hinz did a sweep of the main planted area and pulled dittricia, which blooms in this unusual time of year. There is a lot of it blooming in the locked area of the SMART property. We'll be in touch with SMART to get access to their property, which they've graciously given in the past.

Martha Jarocki further reported: "A pair of White-tailed kites watched us from the island. We have been seeing them there off and on since spring. Erica also spotted an American Kestrel, maybe a juvenile, also on a vantage point on the island. Bob and Rich Cimino did some birding as we ended the workday. The tidal area was busy with Killdeer and Curlews."

2020 Christmas Bird Counts

For many years Marin Audubon has sponsored three Christmas Bird Counts: Cheep Thrills (North Marin), Point Reyes and South Marin. This year, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, one or more of these counts may not be held. If a count is held it must abide by strict guidelines to keep people safe. Unfortunately flu season occurs during the December/January count season and the weather can be cold and miserable.

National Audubon has issued guidance which leaves the decision whether or not to hold a count up to the individual compilers. Certainly if the CBC is held there would have to be social distancing and/or masking and no car pooling except for members of a person's immediate family. Compilation gatherings would be out.

National advises that a decision to hold a socially distanced count must wait until November 15 to better understand the status of the COVID-19 outbreak situation in the local area. National notes that there will be little or

no impact on the scientific value of the CBC by missing one count season.

If you have participated in last year's CBC your count compiler will notify you of their decision whether or not the count will be held.

ALERT

DRONES ILLEGAL

Drones have been observed by our volunteers over the Corte Madera Ecological Reserve Marshes. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), which owns most of the marshes in Corte Madera, does not allow drones to be operated over their lands except by special permit for scientific purposes. If you see drones being flown over CDFW lands anywhere (they also own marshes at Bahia and along Highway 37) call the CDFW Secret Witness Program number CalTIP at **1-888-334-2238**. This will put you in touch with a warden.

MARIN BIRDLOG: SEPTEMBER 2020

By Noah Arthur



Alan D. Wilson, (CC BY-SA 3.0)

White-winged Dove

September is the month that we Marin birders live for, when our coast comes alive with colorful eastern warblers and other vagrants. But with Outer Point Reyes closed due to COVID-19 and road construction, September 2020 had fewer rarity reports than any previous September. Still it was our best vagrant month of 2020, with a profusion of rarities converging on Marin from all directions.

The flip side of this is that some other places got a lot more birder coverage than usual this year. Places like Pine Gulch in Bolinas, which kicked off the eastern warbler season with a **Blackpoll** on Sept. 1st (JP).

A relatively short-distance vagrant but exceedingly rare in Marin, a female-type **Phainopepla** in Woodacre on the 2nd (BB) was one of the rarest finds of the month and was subsequently enjoyed by many birders. Another major rarity on the 2nd, a **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** was at the Valley Ford wetlands (LC). A **Hammond's Flycatcher** was also at Rodeo Lagoon on the 2nd (WL).

Amazingly, two more **Buff-breasted Sandpipers** were hanging with Black Turnstones at Loch Lomond Marina on the 4th (WC). A surprisingly regular vagrant in recent years, but still an awesome bird for Marin, a **Mourning Warbler** was at Rodeo Lagoon on the 4th (BBr).

Probably the rarest bird of the month, documented with stunning close-up photos and confirmed by experts, a female **Ruby-throated Hummingbird** was discovered at a feeder in Tomales on the 5th (LC & CC). This phenomenal find represents the 4th record for

Marin and 21st for California as a whole.

Meanwhile on the 5th, an **Eastern Kingbird** was enjoyed by many birders at Rodeo Lagoon (WL & DW).

A **Yellow-breasted Chat** was at Rodeo Lagoon on the 6th (JM). A **Calliope Hummingbird** was found on the 6th at the Ruby-throated stakeout in Tomales (MB), and another was found in a closed location in Lucas Valley the next day (LC). Also on the 7th, a male **Summer Tanager** was in Bolinas (AP). The Ruby-throated spot continued to produce rarities as birders flocked there in the following days, including a **Red-eyed Vireo** on the 7th (DL) and a **Virginia's Warbler** on the 13th (KO).

The rare hummer show continued on the 9th with a **Black-chinned** at feeders in Fairfax (CC).

Yet another big-deal rarity was found by LC on the 11th, a secretive but noisy **Connecticut Warbler** in Muir Beach (LC).

Yours truly had a good warbler day on the 13th, with a **Tennessee** and two **Northern Waterthrushes** at Stinson Beach (NA). Earlier in the day a **Chestnut-sided Warbler** (LN) and a **Blackpoll** (KO) were found at Muir Beach. A **Canada Warbler** was at Muir Beach on the 14th (LC). Also on the 14th, a **Lawrence's Goldfinch** flew over Kirby Cove (MSa & LK).

Spizella season is getting underway by mid-September, and a **Brewer's Sparrow** was in Tennessee Valley on the 15th (AM). Also on the 15th, a **Yellow-breasted Chat** was in Muir Beach (BBr). The eastern rarity wave continued on the 16th with a **Red-eyed Vireo** was at the Inverness Tennis Court (BB), and a **Blackpoll** at Muir Beach (LC, LS, MS, & DE). A **White-winged Dove** was at Muir Beach on the 17th (JW).

The next new rarity didn't come until the 20th, with a **Blue Grosbeak** at Summer Valley (LS & JZ). Also on the 20th, a **Northern Waterthrush** was at Kehoe Beach, along with a **Lark Bunting** at the nearby Kehoe Ranch (NA).

Very rare anywhere on the California coast, a calling **Common Nighthawk** flew over LC's house on the 21st (LC).

An enigmatic exotic that is occasionally reported around Marin and may be breeding, an **African Collared-dove** was at Kehoe Ranch on the 23rd (RM).

The first **Tropical Kingbird** of the season was at Drakes Beach on the 24th (RC). Also on the 24th, a Philadelphia Vireo was found at Keys Creek Fishing Access south of Tomales (LS & MS). The eastern warbler tap turned on again on the 25th with a Chestnut-sided at Rodeo Lagoon (WC) and a **Blackpoll** at Pine Gulch (ME & MD). A **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** was at Indian Valley on the 25th (WW).

Rare at any season but especially so early, a **Rough-legged Hawk** was southeast of Abbotts Lagoon on the 26th (DH). A **Tropical Kingbird** was at Tomales Point on the 27th (ES). Out offshore on the 27th, a **Red-footed Booby** flew by a pelagic boat near Cordell Bank (LS, MS, LC, MB, & RC). This obscure tropical seabird represented only the 3rd or 4th record for Marin. Also on the 27th, a **Blue Grosbeak** put in an appearance at the Muir Beach overlook (DM).

Difficult-to-obtain permission to visit the closed Outer Point was secured for several birders on the 28th and 29th. These proved to be some of the best Outer Point days in recent years, with southeast winds bringing a **Painted Redstart** (NA) and **Hammond's Flycatcher** (LC) at the Fish Docks, a **Yellow-green Vireo** and **Black-throated Blue Warbler** (LC) at Nunes Ranch, and a **Philadelphia Vireo** (NA & LC) at the Lighthouse.

The only gull rarity of the month came on the 30th in the form of a winter-plumaged adult **Laughing Gull** at the Pine Gulch creek mouth (MD), continuing into October for other birders to enjoy.

Observers and Acronyms **BB**: Bob Battagin, **LC**: Lucas Corneliussen, **WL**: William Legge, **WC**: Wayne Cooper, **BBr**: Brian Browne, **CC**: Connor Cochrane, **DW**: David Wiechers, **JM**: Jennifer Morrow, **MB**: Mario Balitbit, **DL**: Derek Lecy, **AP**: Adam Pingatore, **NA**: Noah Arthur, **LN**: Larry Nigro, **MSa**: Mark Sawyer, **LK**: Logan Kahle, **AM**: Alex Merritt, **LS**: Lucas Stephenson, **MS**: Mark Stephenson, **DE**: Daniel Edelstein, **JW**: Jim White, **JZ**: Joseph Zeno, **RM**: Ron Mallory, **RC**: Reef Comer, **WC**: William Corns, **ME**: Megan Elrod, **MD**: Mark Dettling, **WW**: William Wiskes, **DH**: Daphne Hatch, **DM**: David MacKenzie



The Rail

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