



Roger Harris

**Red-shouldered Hawk**

The February 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.

Many of our common Marin County birds, whose abundance we now take for granted, were rare or absent only three-quarters of a century ago. Since the beginning of the Southern Marin Christmas Bird Count in the 1970s, for instance, Red-shouldered Hawk detections have increased tenfold. Habitat restoration and maturation, conservation efforts, and cultural changes in the behavior of individual bird species have all contributed to shifting — and, for Marin, generally increasing — bird populations.

Our speaker, Roger Harris, will unpack the evolving dynamics of avifaunal population change using data from Christmas Bird Counts, the Marin County Breeding Bird Atlas, and a variety of other sources. Roger is a Certified Wildlife Biologist and a longtime member of the Marin Audubon Society. Once the pandemic resolves, he hopes to return to leading international eco-tours for the Oceanic Society and field trips for us.

**NEXT MONTH'S SPEAKER:**

THURSDAY, MARCH 11 7:30 PM

**Birding by Kayak Along the Russian River**

By Miles and Teresa Tuffli

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# The Rail

MARIN AUDUBON SOCIETY

## U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Fails to List Two Qualified Species



Elyse Overnick

**Northern Spotted Owl Denied Reclassification**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has announced that reclassification of the Northern Spotted Owl (NSO) from threatened to endangered species is warranted but precluded by higher priority proposals to determine status of other species. NSO was listed as a threatened species in 1990. The Environmental Protection Information Center petitioned for the NSO to be listed as endangered in 2012. Habitat conditions have worsened for the NSO and the population has continued to decline in the last almost 10 years NSO has been waiting for reclassification.

The largest of the three subspecies of spotted owl, NSO inhabits structurally complex forests originally from southwestern British Columbia into Northern California. Relative to other owl species, NSO is long-lived, has a long reproductive life span, and invests significantly in parental care. NSO are now extirpated or uncommon through most of its historic range, including southwestern Washington and British Columbia. Marin County is their southernmost boundary.

Habitat loss from timber harvesting was the primary cause of the listing of NSO as threatened. While habitat loss continues to be a major factor, now climate change and wildfire are recognized as stressors and, to a minor amount, insect and forest disease

are also contributing. The most recent NSO demographic study (Dugger et al 2016) found that currently non-native Barred Owl are having the largest negative impact on NSO through competition for resources. Originally an east coast species, Barred Owl has expanded its range, is a more aggressive species, and now is competition with NSO for prey resources.

Studies have found a significant rate of decline in the NSO population. Since 2011, the rate of decline has noticeably increased. Several long-term monitoring studies have revealed that NSOs have declined more than 70 percent since 1990, increasing the risk of extinction risk, particularly in Washington and Oregon.

Regulatory mechanisms on non-federal lands, and habitat protection and restoration on federal lands, have not prevented the continued decline of NSO nesting, roosting and foraging habitat. Cumulative effects of climate change, severe wildfire, pest management and past management practices are changing forest ecosystems, and the expansion of the Barred Owl is further reducing the capacity of suitable habitat to support NSO.

After assessing the scientific and commercial  
*continued on page 5*

**POINT REYES MANAGEMENT PLAN HEARING DELAYED**

One week prior to the date of the scheduled Consistency Determination hearing before the California Coastal Commission, the Commission and Seashore staff have notified interested parties that the hearing will not occur on January 14th. A new hearing date will be announced once it is scheduled. No additional information was provided. Commission staff requests that correspondence continue to be addressed to the [pointreyesmanagementplan@coastal.ca.gov](mailto:pointreyesmanagementplan@coastal.ca.gov).

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

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

Members can receive *The Rail* electronically instead of a hard copy by emailing [membershipsecretary@marinaudubon.org](mailto: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

Happy New Year! It is with great relief and hope that we can now move forward with the new administration and the new vaccines. I have great expectation that things will improve in 2021. But we're not out of the woods yet. There are still challenges to be met and obstacles to be overcome before we get back to our normal activities and lives. For Marin Audubon, we still need to be cautious and wait for a time before we can return to having outdoor field trips and indoor programs together.

In addition to a new year, we have new bookkeeper. Sabra Drohan, the bookkeeper who has assisted our Treasurer for the last year, has taken a permanent job. Our new treasurer is Laura Peters. Our best to Sabra. Welcome to Laura.

Our Nominating Committee is beginning its work. If you'd like to know more about our Board and supporting our work by taking

a Board position, contact Committee Chair Doug Waterman, or Committee Members Jude Stalker and Elyse Omernick. Specific needs we have include Secretary, and Field Trip Chairs. See page 3 for more information.

A huge thank you to all of the generous contributors to our winter appeal. Donations to this appeal are critical to our work as it is the major fund raiser to support our operations and basic programs, such as this newsletter, our programs and Field Trips. If you haven't given yet, it is not too late.

I'm looking forward to the return of a sane and stable government, to the restoration of our environmental regulations and laws to protect our environment, eliminate or significantly reduce further loss of habitats and begin to deal with climate change. And, I'm looking forward to getting back to our outdoor activities.

## THANK YOU, DONORS

Tom Anderson, Joyce & David Applen, Holly Bacuzzi, Suzanne Badenhop, Katherine Ballinger, Timothy Behr, Robert Belichick, Charles Bennett, Rhonda Bennon, Mark & Beverly Birnbaum, Donald Bixby, Kimberly Blue, Andrew Bollen, Madeleine Boshart, DeWitt Bowman, Julianne Brand, James Brogan, Amy and Mark Brokering, Deborah Brown, Geraldine Brown, Priscilla Bull, Steve Capper, Becky Carlucci, Paul and Christine Chasnoff, Beverly Cherner, William Clarke, Jill & Collin Cochran, Glenna Coleman, Dayton Coles, Richard Colsky, Michael Concannon, Glenda Corning, Mary Anne Cowperthwaite, Frank Cox, Suzannah Dameron, Carol and Donald Davis, Gwen Davis, Paula Dawson, Nona Dennis, Laura Disterhoft, David & Kristine Donadio, Deborah Dorosin, Carl Duisberg and Donna Lindskog, Jane Evans, Laurel Feigenbaum, Deirdre Fessessy, Zachary Finley, James Foley, Mark & Beverly Forney, James Forsell, Dr. Gretchen Frantz, Richard Gale, Roberta Geering, Nina Geneson, James Gibbons, Doreen Gluckin, Fred Goff, Carl and Donna Gowan, Martin Griffin, Maureen Groper, Julia Haimowitz, Glenn Harcourt, Erica Harris, Hope Lab Foundation, Daphne Hatch, Tom Hendricks, David Herrema and Victoria Van Meter, Sheila J Hershon, Sarah Evers, Gretchen Hoskins, Douglas Howell, Suzanne Huang, Kurt Huget, Beth Huning, Lynn Hunt, Victoria Jackson, Laura Jerrard, Pat Kaiser, Dan Kalb, Laura Kaplanis, John Kay, Colin Kennedy, Debbie Kern, David Kimball, Elizabeth King, William Klenne, MD, Mark & Jane Knowles, Paul Kryloff, William Kuhr, Rama Kumar, Mary and Mark Kyle, Lelia & Larry Lancot, Suzanne Lang, Richard and Dee Lawrence, Joanne Lee, Bill Lenarz, Linda Levey, Allison Levin, Jeff Levin, Judy Lichterman, Ann Linder, Peter Logan, David Long, Carolyn Losee, Mary H Love, Frank Lowe, F.R. and Anita Lowe, Patricia Lowrie, David MacKenzie, John and Nancy MacPherson, Anne Maczulak, Sarah Martin, Joseph Major, Daphne Markham, Vivian Mazur, Linda McCann, Sharon McCloskey, Morton McMichael Jr., Prem McMurdo, Jane Medley,

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## February Webinars Continue Focus on Breeding Bird Atlas and Citizen Science

Our Wednesday evening Webinar series continues with two programs this month – one covering the amazing high-tech maps being developed for use in our breeding bird atlas project and the other focusing on the important work of citizen scientists to be shared by well-known Bay Area author, Mary Ellen Hannibal. **The first program on February 3 with Will Wiskes will be an afternoon presentation from 4:00 PM to 5:30 PM rather than a customary evening event.** Each Webinar will begin with a one-hour program to be followed by a time for questions and discussion.

While extensive behind-the-scenes planning for the Marin County Breeding Bird Atlas II sponsored by Marin Audubon has been going on since April 2020, our upcoming webinars described below help launch this exciting and important project into full public view for the first time. These programs, along with those presented in our January Webinars, give Bay Area birders along with those more generally interested in conservation issues an opportunity to learn about the science underpinning our breeding bird atlas work and the importance of citizen science in our bird conservation efforts. Specific training sessions for those who sign on as participants will be held on later dates.

Register now for these important programs. We hope you will participate as a citizen scientist in this worthwhile project and/or by making a donation to support this collaborative work in support of Marin birds. Watch for more information on these topics in the weeks ahead.

**How to Register:** A separate registration is required for each program. Register on our new Marin Audubon website at [www.marinaudubon.org](http://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.

Beginning with our January presentations, you will be able to view a recording of any Field Trips webinar you missed through a link provided on the MAS website Field Trips page. 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 consider joining the program once it has started, you can do that, no problem. Additionally, if you miss the entire presentation, you can view it afterwards either on the MAS website or on Facebook.

### GIS IN CONSERVATION

Wednesday, February 3, 2021

4 PM to 5:30 PM — NOTE EARLIER

STARTING TIME

With William Wiskes

Like every atlas project, the Marin County Breeding Bird Atlas will feature, at its core, a series of maps that track the distribution of our nesting birds. Join us for a fascinating exploration of high-tech map-making with William Wiskes. William will talk about the pleasures and pains of creating maps for a modern breeding bird atlas. He will focus especially on three classes of maps that he is developing for the Marin County BBA project: conventional paper (printable) maps, an interactive web-map, and a phone-based app that volunteers can use in the field.

William Wiskes, GIS Specialist, is the staff cartographer of the new Marin County Breeding Bird Atlas. He is currently a master's degree candidate at San Francisco State University. An excellent field ornithologist, William has worked on numerous projects in conservation biology, including, among others, field studies of raptors, Pacific Wren, and Black Rail.

### CAN CITIZEN SCIENCE SAVE US?

Wednesday, February 17, 2021

7 PM to 8:30 PM

With Mary Ellen Hannibal

Citizen science is an old/new practice of direct observation of nature by amateurs. Today the practice is turbo-charged by smartphone technology and vast computing power. It is needed as never before, because plants and animals are disappearing too fast, and Earth is undergoing a mass extinction. The good news is that citizen science is a concept, a format, and a tool for addressing environmental problems at a local level, including the urban environment. In this talk I'll go over some of the basics of citizen science and focus on local projects that make a difference.

Mary Ellen Hannibal is an award-winning author. Her book *Citizen Scientist: Searching for Heroes and Hope in an Age of Extinction* was named a best book of 2016 by the San Francisco Chronicle and won a Nautilus book award. She frequently contributes to Bay Nature, Nautilus, the New York Times, and Science magazines. Her Stanford TEDx talk addresses citizen science in general: Can Citizen Science Save Us? (<https://tedx.stanford.edu/lineup/mary-ellen-hannibal>) Her most recent TED addresses How you can help save the monarch butterfly, and the planet ([https://www.ted.com/talks/mary\\_ellen\\_hannibal\\_how\\_you\\_can\\_help\\_save\\_the\\_monarch\\_butterfly\\_and\\_the\\_planet?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/mary_ellen_hannibal_how_you_can_help_save_the_monarch_butterfly_and_the_planet?language=en)).

Bill Keener

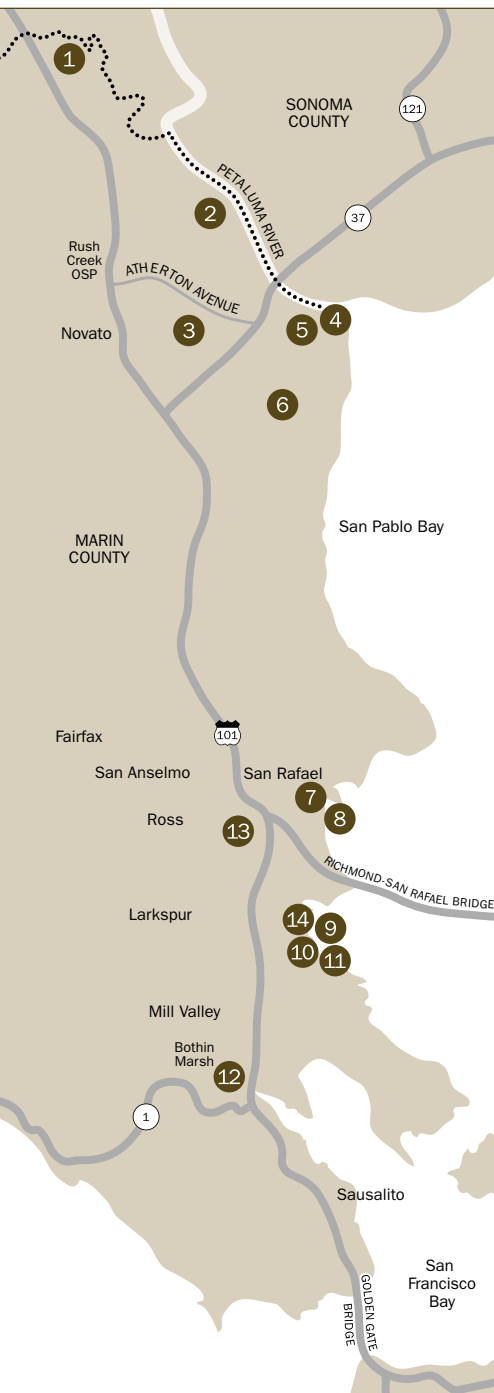
### Marin Bald Eagles

## Bald Eagles Return to the San Francisco Bay

Not since the 1800s have Bald Eagles nested along the San Francisco Bay, according to Allen Fish, director of the Golden Gate Raptor Observatory. So, it is a momentous occasion for eagles to nest along the shoreline: one in northern Marin, another in southern Marin that successfully fledged young last breeding season, and a third in the South Bay. Reports of the eagles' activities are circulating in social media. Marin Audubon is monitoring the situation to ensure that protective measures for the Marin birds may be implemented as needed.

## Interested in Joining MAS Board?

Marin Audubon Society's accomplishments in preserving and restoring precious natural habitats has been prominently displayed in this Newsletter and other environmentally concerned publications. But there is always more that needs to be done. For MAS, the impetus for creating new projects and confronting ongoing challenges starts with the Board of Directors. At this critical time when climate change and destructive development still threaten habitat, the stronger the Board is the more effective it can be. Our Board of Directors are totally staffed with volunteers and we invite anyone seeking to deepen their involvement with our efforts and concerns to consider joining us. If you are interested in learning more, please contact: Doug Waterman at 415/506-4675.



#### 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	2 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

## CONSERVATION

### FARALLON ISLANDS UPDATE

The consistency determination hearing before the California Coastal Commission for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's invasive house mouse removal plan is fast approaching its expected March date. Marin Audubon and many other conservation and scientific organizations support this plan to restore the islands to a more natural state.

The restoration plan for the Farallones has been carefully developed by scientists, who have been working on it since 2004. It involves a one-time use of rodenticide in two applications. Rodenticide has been used successfully to remove invasive rodents and restore native ecosystems on some 600 islands throughout the world. In fact, it is a scientific consensus that this is the *only* effective method and as well as being the environmentally least impacting.

However, certain opponents continue to disseminate erroneous information about the plan for the Farallones and promote infeasible alternatives. Here are responses to some of their claims (in italics).

*Claim: Capturing the six to eight owls that arrive on the islands annually combined with using a mouse anti-fertility product can solve the problem.*

Response: Removing owls, which impact storm-petrels, would still leave the invasive mice present and impacting other resources. In addition, owl removal is not a permanent solution but would have to be done in perpetuity.

More problematical is the proposed use of a mouse anti-fertility chemical, which has not yet been developed. If such a product could be developed – and there are major technical reasons why it has not been – it still would take years for it to be field tested and approved by the environmental agencies. But the biggest obstacle is the one admitted by the drug company entrepreneur with ContraPest, Loretta Mayer. She notes that contraception only works for control and not for removal.

An anti-fertility chemical has been promised for years. Even if there were one, it would not be effective because there is no assurance all the mice would eat the contraceptive bait. If even one female refuses the bait, the problem would continue. To be effective, a contraceptive chemical must be ingested at the proper dose, which is easy to achieve in laboratory conditions but almost impossible to be done in a large-scale field situation. If the mouse ingests too much, it can be toxic; too little, it can be ineffective. And as with any birth control drug, it must be ingested regularly with no days skipped.

So, bait stations would have to be maintained forever. And even if all the craggy island terrain were accessible, which it is not, regularly maintaining the over 1000 stations required to cover the area would be so disruptive to breeding birds and marine mammals that the cure would be worse than doing nothing.

*Claim: The to-be-developed anti-fertility chemical would have a half-life of less than one minute in the animals that consume it.*

Response: This is untrue. In fact, because any anti-fertility chemical would be administered at bait stations where the dose cannot be controlled, the chemical will likely have toxic impacts on the mice according to veterinary doctors.

*Claim: The rodenticide would have to be distributed for three months as the gulls would return to their nesting territories; even if hazing were successful up to 3,000 gulls could ingest the poison and die.*

Response: The project would be conducted in the fall, before spring nesting season, when gulls are present in low numbers. Hazing is a term that covers multiple activities (noise making, detonating fire crackers, etc.) designed to frighten birds away. Extensive testing of hazing methods has been conducted on the islands and the results have been positive.

*Claim: The ingredients in the rodenticide proposed for use on the islands are the same as the Brodifacoum used on the mainland, though the preparation of the pellets is slightly different.*

Response: The difference is not in the ingredients, but in the application. Use on the mainland is indiscriminate, distributed to kill rodents in many backyards and farmlands, whereas application on the Farallones will be carefully planned, executed, supervised, monitored with mitigations implemented.

In contrast, application on the Farallones is one-time, carefully planned, executed, supervised, and monitored with mitigations implemented. The same recent state law, which banned the use of the rodenticide on the mainland, specifically allows its use for conservation purposes on islands. And the EPA has specifically approved the conservation formulation for islands. In fact, some of the scientists who have been leading advocates of banning the rodenticide on the mainland have also been advocates of the Farallones Plan.

In summary, if there were an effective non-toxic alternative to remove the invasive mice that are endangering the Farallones, we would certainly support it and we have no doubt the

*continued on page 5*



## Farallon Islands Update

*continued from page 4*

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service would use it. We would prefer to not use rodenticides but there is simply no other effective way to restore the ecosystem of the Islands.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Sign up to speak at Open Time at the Commission's February meetings; speak at the scheduled hearing in March (date not yet known) or send your comments to the dedicated email [farallonislands@coastal.ca.gov](mailto:farallonislands@coastal.ca.gov) or to the Commission's new address: 455 Mission Street, San Francisco CA 94105. Use any of the points above or from the Zoom presentation. For more information see Point Blue Conservation Science's website or MAS's website under "Conservation."

## U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

*continued from page 1*

information, the Service found that these stressors, particularly the non-native barred owl combined with wildfire, are of such imminence, intensity, and magnitude that the NSO is now in danger of extinction throughout its range. Therefore, reclassification of NSO as endangered is warranted, but is precluded by other high priority proposals, in particular statutory, court-ordered, or court approved actions and final listing determinations. The Service reports it does not have sufficient resources to complete the proposed relisting.

The size and costs of the workload has far exceeded the available resources needed for listings for more than two decades. The Service cannot exceed the annual funding cap, placed to ensure the Service does not spend all of its funds on this category of actions, and so has been compelled to find that action on some species is precluded.

The Service has assigned a listing number of 3 to NSO, indicating that the magnitude of threat is high and those threats are imminent. The Service will continue to accept additional information from government agencies, scientists or any other interested parties and reevaluate the NSO conditions on an annual basis until the petition is either withdrawn or completed.

To make matters worse for NSO, just before the end of its term, the Trump administration removed 3.4 million acres across Washington, Oregon and California from

protected habitat for the NSO. The action grew out of settlement of a suit brought by a lumber association over lands the Service had deemed essential to the owl's survival. The companies claimed that removal of the land from their use would result in calamitous economic losses for them. The final rule admits that it is not based on scientific analysis but it says "the Secretary as exercised his discretion to remove critical habitat based on the best scientific and commercial data available." Conservationists disagree and point out that the rule is unsupported by the Service's own evidence.

### MONARCH BUTTERFLY

The Service reached a similar conclusion for second species of importance in Marin — the Monarch Butterfly: that adding the Monarch Butterfly to the threatened and endangered species list is warranted but precluded by work required for higher-priority listing actions. With this decision, the butterfly



Alice Caon

becomes a candidate species for endangered listing. Its status will be evaluated every year until it is no longer a candidate.

The Service received a petition to list the species in 2014 and in 2016 began an in-depth status looking at the global population as well as focusing on monarchs in North America where 90% of the world's population occurs. The Western Population, located in California, has shown a more precipitous decline than the Eastern Population: dropping from about 1.2 million to fewer than 30,000 in 2019 and fewer than 2,000 in 2020. Threats to monarchs identified by the Service are habitat loss, climate change, and exposure to pesticides.

Two-long distance monarch populations exist in North America: the Eastern Population, and Western Populations which continue to occupy and breed in warmer climates throughout the summer with the final

generation making the return trip to their wintering in Mexico and Coastal California. Unlike previous generations which complete their life cycles in four weeks, the "super generation" monarchs live for six to eight months and may travel thousands of miles to return to their grounds. These monarchs then make the multi generational migration the following spring. Monarch's feed on nectar from flowers and lay their eggs exclusively on milkweed, which is the sole source of food for the monarch caterpillars.

As with the NSO, the Service found that listing of the monarch is warranted but precluded because it does not have resources to complete the listing process due to the need to focus on higher priority listings. The Service assigned Monarchs a rank number of 8 indicating a magnitude of threats are moderate and those threats are imminent.

Currently 161 species are higher than Monarchs on the work plan list than Monarchs. The status will be reviewed annually until the agency undertakes a proposal or undertakes a non-warranted finding.

Conservation efforts to save the Monarch are ongoing across the U.S. Organized actions include the Monarch Joint Venture, Habitat Working Groups and work on agricultural lands.

### WHAT IS MAS DOING FOR THESE SPECIES

MAS is working to save both species. We have advocated for protection of NSO habitat for many years, including two lawsuits against the county to protect habitat on OSD preserves. We also have an outreach program underway to notify residents living within a half-mile radius of a known NSO nest site of the presence of the nest, without identifying the specific nest site. We provide residents with information on NSO life cycles, habitats, status, as well as about Barred Owls, and who to contact if problems occur or a barred Owl is observed.

For Monarchs, we have planted narrow-leaf milkweed on our Simmons property to provide habitat for monarchs and we are expanding this program. We are in the process of planting additional milkweed on California Department of Fish and Wildlife property at Bahia. A Monarch Working Group has also been established to address Monarch lands in Marin. Email Ed Nute for information.

We are investigating further action, possibly legal, now that the administration has changed and conditions have worsened, particularly for Northern Spotted Owls.

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## HABITAT STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

The planting season is coming to an end, but the lack of rain has slowed the work. There will probably be some plants still to put in the ground at Triangle on the first Saturday of February. Beyond that, for both the Ecological Reserve and Triangle we will be removing Harding grass and some other non-native perennials. The annual weeds have germinated but they will be too small for us to be concerned with them in February.

Our volunteer days remain on the schedule. They are good opportunities for students who need community service hours. Staying a healthy distance apart from each other outdoors on our volunteer days is easy, so don't let that concern keep you away! A little physical activity is good for a person's mood, and if it does good for the environment, it is doubly good.

Act locally and join us on a workday. We all make a difference.

### Volunteer Workdays

#### Triangle Marsh, East Corte Madera:

First Saturdays: February 6, March 6

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: February 13, March 13

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 at Bahia, contact Jude at judestalker@gmail.com.

## THANK YOU, STEWARDSHIP VOLUNTEERS

Debbie Ablin, Rich Cimino, Bob Harlow, Bob Hinz, Martha and Gerry Jarocki, Ed Nute, Denise Pepp, Lowell Sykes, Kallen Wank

## ALERT

### Report Barred Owl Spottings

Barred Owls have extended their range to the west coast and have been seen in Marin. There is increasing concern about their impact on Marin's Northern Spotted Owl population. Barred Owls are larger, more aggressive and occupy the same habitat type as Spotted Owls. See contact list at <https://marinaudubon.org/2020/09/01/alert-report-barred-owl-spottings>.

## HABITAT STEWARDSHIP

### BAHIA

Marin Audubon was pleasantly surprised. We've had lots of new plants installed in January. The On Point Land Management (OPLM) crew will be planting a total of 180 coyote bush (*Baccharis pilularis*) and 180 California sage (*Artemisia californica*) on a section of the levee along the Eastern Peninsula. The purpose of this planting is to convert the habitat from invasive radish to native species to improve habitat. Fortunately, as we go to press, it is raining. The upper sections of the levee were too dry to plant in early January, and so we delayed finishing the planting until after there is more rain. We have no choice but to trust there will be more rain.

### Conservation

*continued from page 5*

### IT'S GENERAL PLAN UPDATE TIME

Novato certified its General Plan (GP) two months ago; Sausalito is in the final review phase for its GP; San Rafael has just released the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) on its Draft GP (see below) and Larkspur is about to begin work on the EIR for its Draft GP. Tiburon's GP is just beginning and a draft is expected to be released in about a year.

**The City of Larkspur** has distributed a Notice of Preparation announcing that they are preparing a Program EIR on its Draft GP 2040 and they are soliciting scoping comments, i.e. comments on the "scope and significant environmental issues, mitigation measures (if needed) and reasonable alternatives to be explored" in the EIR.

The Draft Larkspur GP contains policies designed to protect native habitats, particularly those providing habitat for federally listed special status species. However, many implementing programs are vague, qualified and weak. Below are some of the policies (*in bold*) of concern identified in our early review and our comments:

- *Action program ENV 1.1a calls for identifying state and federal special status species.* Information on state and federal species is available and their location in Larkspur is generally known. The EIR should identify endangered and special status species and how their habitats would be protected.
- *Policy ENV-1.2 Protect and enhance native plant communities.* The native plant communities should be identified, including Coast redwoods, Coast live oaks, other native oaks, wetlands and streams.
- *Policy ENV 1.4 Instead of "support restoration projects" initiated by others,*

Last year we also planted a section of the levee, and those plants have been tended by OPLM during the summer and are doing quite well. Next year we plan to install many more plants than we have so far. A significant increase in the number of plants will be possible through a major donation.

In addition, OPLM also planted 1,000 Creeping Wildrye (*Elymus triticoides*) and 100 (*Juncus patens*) in the seasonal wetlands in the flat areas of the Central Peninsula. We have planted Creeping wildrye over the last four years with the goal of eventually populating most of these seasonal wetlands with native plants.

the EIR should, in addition, provide for the city to initiate and undertake habitat restoration projects on its own. And rather than "*Recognize the value of heritage trees*" should read "Protect native heritage trees." Heritage trees should be described and how they would be protected should be stated.

- *Policy ENV 1.5 "Endeavor to preserve and enhance wildlife habitat, including watercourses and riparian areas and control human use..."* "Endeavor" should be deleted, so that it reads "Preserve and enhance wildlife habitat".
  - *Policy 2.1 "Develop Creek, Shoreline and Wetland Master Plan"* There is no reason to put off protecting these resources for a plan that might never be produced. Policies to protract these resources should be included. The Creeks and wetlands in Larkspur are known.
  - *Policy ENV 2.2 "Avoid, if feasible, or mitigate impacts to shoreline wetlands/ riparian areas..."* The "if feasible" should be deleted.
  - *Action Program ENV 2.2b "Preserve and/or enhance buffer or transition zones between shoreline and wetland areas and inland..."* The purpose and characteristics of the buffer/transition zones should be stated. They should be at minimum 20 feet wide in developed areas and in undeveloped areas should be wider. Buffers should be vegetated with native plants that provide cover, foraging and nesting habitat for native wildlife where appropriate.
  - *Action program, 2.5 "Limit construction activity within shoreline, wetland and riparian areas and any established setbacks."* These activities should be "avoided" not
- continued on page 7*



# MARIN BIRDLOG: DECEMBER 2020

By Noah Arthur

December is the peak of winter birding in Marin, usually producing an exotic array of vagrants, seasonal rarities, and uncommon winter visitors. This December looked a little different, with many of our Christmas Bird Counts canceled due to COVID-19, but there were still numerous rare finds including some real “mega-rarities.”

The first good find of the month was an out-of-season **Caspian Tern** at Pacheco Pond on the 1st (BB), one of an increasing number that have been wintering in our area in recent years. A **Townsend's Solitaire** at Alpine Lake on the 2nd (CC), especially unusual away from the species' usual Marin winter stronghold on Mount Tam.



Dick Daniels (CC BY-SA 3.0)

Chuck-will's Widow

A 1st-fall male **Black-and-white Warbler** was in Muir Beach on the 3rd, accompanied by an off-season **Wilson's Warbler** (DS). Especially rare in winter, two **Lesser Yellow-legs** were at Rush Creek on the 3rd (CP, PD, SS, & WC). Also on the 3rd, a young female **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** was found at Scottsdale Pond in Novato (JM & RF).

An astounding rarity for California, a **Chuck-will's-widow** was discovered roosting in a Bolinas front yard on the 7th (MD). It was not reported at the time due to COVID-19 concerns. This large, exotic-looking Eastern nightjar is an exceedingly rare vagrant in California, with the Bolinas bird being only a 4th state record. This is probably the rarest find

of all of 2020 in Marin.

A **Prairie Falcon** lorded over Las Gallinas from atop a transmission tower on the 7th (DM). Another **Caspian Tern** was at Lawson's Landing in Tomales Bay on the 9th (LS & MS), and a wintering **Western Tanager** was in DL's yard in San Rafael on the 12th.

One of only a few Marin records, a male **Rusty Blackbird** was along Pepper Rd. on the 12th (LH). A classic December rarity for our area, a **Nelson's Sparrow** was found along Tomales Bay Trail on the 14th (TB & ZM), subsequently enjoyed by many other birders.

One of the best birds of the month came on the 17th, during one of the few Christmas Bird Counts that wasn't canceled. Birders covering Redwood Landfill in Novato found an adult **Taimyr Gull** (NA, LH, & LSy) — a distinctive East Asian gull that eBird classifies as a subspecies of Lesser Black-backed. (Some authorities consider it part of a different species, Heuglin's Gull.) Though a first for Marin, this is the same individual that has been seen at Shollenberger Park in Sonoma Co. for several winters (first found by yours truly in December 2016). It is one of only four North American records of the taxon.

An **American Dipper** was first found at the Leo T. Cronin Fish Viewing Area on the 18th (LN), and subsequently enjoyed by a great many Marin birders.

Yet another **Caspian Tern** was at Stafford Lake on the 18th (SC), and an unseasonable **Pacific-slope Flycatcher** was found in Bolinas on the 19th (LS & MS). A **Townsend's Solitaire** was at their usual spot on Mt. Tam on the 20th (JP). A hybrid **Red-naped x Red-breasted Sapsucker** was in DK's yard on the 22nd, and yet another subtle hybrid, this one a **Myrtle x Audubon's Warbler**, was in DL's yard on the 23rd.

An impressive total of 11 **Thick-billed Fox Sparrows** were counted at their winter haunts on Mt. Tam on the 24th (CC). And a seasonally-rare **Black-headed Grosbeak** was in Inverness on the 30th (RP).

Observers and Acronyms **BB:** Bob Battagin, **CC:** Connor Cochrane, **DS:** Dan Singer, **CP:** Carla Parkinson, **PD:** Patricia DiLuzzio, **SS:** Sylvie Silverstein, **WC:** Wayne Cooper, **JM:** Joe Morlan, **RF:** Robbie Fischer, **MD:** Mark Dettling, **LS:** Lucas Stephenson, **MS:** Mark Stephenson, **DL:** Derek Lecy, **PP:** Peter Pyle, **DM:** Dominik Mosur, **TB:** Theadora Block, **ZM:** Zack Mikalonis, **WW:** William Wiskes, **CM:** Catherine Merritt, **NA:** Noah Arthur, **LH:** LISA HUG, **LSy:** Lowell Sykes, **LN:** Larry Nigro, **SC:** Scott Carey, **JP:** Jeff Perkins, **DK:** Durrell Kapan, **RP:** Richard Plant

## General Plan Update

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just limited. “Established setbacks” should be defined.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Access the Draft Program General Plan on the Larkspur Website. Submit written comments by 5 PM on February 4 to: Neal Toft, Planning Director, City of Larkspur, 400 Magnolia Ave., Larkspur, CA 94939 or [ntoft@cityoflarkspur.org](mailto:ntoft@cityoflarkspur.org). Feel free to use the information above.

**San Rafael** Further along in planning is the San Rafael GP. The city has released a Notice of Availability of a Draft EIR on the Draft San Rafael General Plan and also announcing a Planning Commission zoom hearing on the EIR on Tuesday March 9 at 7: 00 PM.

We discussed environmental issues we found in the Draft GP in the January *Rail*. The NOP advises that comments should focus on whether the EIR is sufficient in its discussion of “possible impacts to the environment, ways in which potential adverse impacts can be avoided, or minimized through mitigation measures.” We would add that you should provide information that is missing or incorrect in the Draft EIR.

The Plan focuses on development allowing 2,260 new residential units, most in the downtown area. The NOP identifies significant effects in a number of categories including air quality, greenhouse gas emissions, transportation, and air quality. Biological Resources is on their list of less than significant impacts. Impacts on Biological Resources are identified as less than significant. We disagree.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Written comments are also due on March 9. Email comments to [Barry.Miller@cityofsanrafael.org](mailto:Barry.Miller@cityofsanrafael.org). The Draft EIR can be found at: [www.cityofsanrafael.org/general-plan-ceqa](http://www.cityofsanrafael.org/general-plan-ceqa).



Shyamal (CC BY-SA 3.0)

Taimyr Gull



# 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](http://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](http://www.audubon.org/join).

The best option for the birds: Join MAS **and** NAS.

## Join or Donate to the Marin Audubon Society

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