

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 8 7:00 PM

Snowy Plovers

By Matthew Lau, National Park Service



Matt Lau, NPS

Queen of Limantour

Register for this month's program on the MAS website's Speaker Series page.

Point Reyes National Seashore has incredible biodiversity and hosts many listed species. There is a small but locally significant breeding population of western snowy plovers, which is federally listed as Threatened and California state listed as a Species of Special Concern. The local breeding population size has been gradually increasing over the past half decade due to intensive management and monitoring. Snowy plover recovery still has significant roadblocks, but with continued research and management strategies, plover biologists remain hopeful. Matt will discuss the fascinating breeding biology of western snowy plovers, cover local conservation issues they face, and review population trends and ongoing research at Point Reyes National Seashore

Matt is a wildlife biologist with Point Reyes National Seashore and leads the management and monitoring program for western snowy plovers. He has worked with snowy plovers for over a decade, at Point Reyes National Seashore and in northern California while working on his master's degree at Cal Poly Humboldt.

THURSDAY, MARCH 14 7:00 PM

Avian Diversity

By Jordan Boersma, Cornell Ornithology Lab



The Rail

MARIN AUDUBON SOCIETY

CAL FIRE Proposes to Remove Bird Habitat on a Massive Scale

CAL FIRE admits that removing 250,000 acres will be ineffective in protecting life and property from wind-driven fires.

CAL FIRE just issued the 4th iteration of a draft "Environmental Impact Report" since 2013 on their Vegetation Treatment Program (VTP) for fire prevention activities. The VTP is massively expanded – CAL FIRE now wants to "thin" or remove, by various means, 250,000 acres per year of native vegetation, including chaparral and globally endangered coastal sage scrub required by a federally threatened bird, the Coastal California Gnatcatcher instead of 50,000 per year as in previous plans.

They base this on Executive Orders by the Governor, yet there is no underlying scientific rationale.

Very importantly, CAL FIRE now admits that these massive treatments will be ineffective in protecting life and property from wind-driven fires. Fires in California forests may be driven by fuel accumulation, especially on the forest floor, which can accumulate after years of fire suppression. In contrast, Southern California fires are largely driven by high velocity Santa Ana winds which usually blow in the fall.

The CAL FIRE VTP has now been entirely repurposed for non-wind-driven fires, even though these typically come under early control by firefighters and cause only a fraction of the damage in comparison. It is a solution in search of a problem, at great environmental cost. While the new draft EIR proposes more biological mitigation for impacts than previous versions, this remains inadequate. The treatments will leave vast areas susceptible to invasion by non-native weeds, making the landscape more rather than less flammable.

The Endangered Habitats League (EHL), a conservation group in Southern California, anticipates litigation in hopes of scaling back this program so that it is smaller, more strategic and effective, with a closer focus on proximity to communities, and less of a "blank check."

Reprinted from Audubon California Blog

Editor's note: MAS is investigating actions we can take to help protect these threatened habitats. Fires in Marin are wind-driven, so our habitats are also at risk.

MCBB Atlas II - Blockbuster Year Ahead for 2024

The arcing display flights of Anna's hummingbirds and the duetting of **Great Horned Owls** at dusk (and dawn) signal that Marin's breeding bird season is revving up. As we begin year four of Marin's second Breeding Bird Atlas, our focus turns to completing unclaimed blocks and those that remain unfinished from last year. Under the sponsorship of the Marin Audubon Society, this citizen-led project is a continuation of a milestone effort completed forty years ago by Dave Shuford and Point Blue Conservation Science (then Point Reyes Bird Observatory). Starting this year, we will incorporate

some tried and true strategies for surveying unclaimed blocks or those with little to no data. "Blockbusting" is an activity used to survey unclaimed blocks in a shorter time frame. This technique was used to collect data for the first Atlas and we plan to share details about how we will be blockbusting in future issues of the Rail newsletter. Check the *Data Explorer* section of our Atlas website to view unclaimed blocks or blocks with limited breeding bird data. Several more remote areas of Point Reyes National Seashore need surveys, a great way to couple your 2024 fitness goals *continued on page 4*

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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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Meetings open to members. 6:30 PM, First Tuesday of the month. Meetings are currently held online via Zoom. If you wish to participate please call 924-6057.

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

A huge THANK-YOU to all volunteers who helped survey on one or more of the three Christmas Bird Counts MAS sponsors: Southern Marin, Pt. Reyes, and Cheep Thrills. It was a good day for all counts, although numbers and species were low. See page 5 for reports on the Cheep Thrills and the Point Reyes Christmas Bird Counts. Bob Hinz, Compiler for the Southern Marin Count, does not yet have sufficient information from the volunteer counters to put together a report. So look for a report about the Southern Marin Count in next month's newsletter.

A special thank-you to Alison Pence, who coordinated the Southern Marin count, and her helpers, Jeanne Lavin, Rona Weintraub, and Martha Jarocki. Alison did a super job putting teams together and planning the compilation dinner, including obtaining donations from Good Earth and Whole Foods in Mill Valley, and Trader Joe's in Corte Madera. Thanks also to the new MC for the compilation, Josiah Clark, who is the owner of Habitat Potential, the contractor doing our planting at Bahia. And we were pleased with reporter Guiseppe Ricapito's front-page article in the Marin IJ, which featured photos of Board members Roger Harris, Ellena Ochoa and Horacio Mena.

Another huge thank-you to all who donated to our winter appeal. Your generosity will make it possible for us to continue our programs and many activities as well as *The Rail*, our newsletter published 10 times a year.

It's time again to focus on next year's Board. Our Nominating Committee will begin its work identifying nominees who will continue to expand our field trips, property maintenance, and the many other activities we have. See box on bottom right.

It's also a busy time for MAS and others with many activities focusing on protecting the threatened Northern Spotted Owl (NSO). With the official beginning of the NSO nesting season on February 1, we'll again be sending out advisory letters and information to neighbors within a quarter mile of known NSO nests. The packet outlines the importance of protecting the owls, how to be a good neighbor to support their nesting success, laws protecting the species, what you can do if you witness behavior that endangers the nesting birds, and threats from the barred owl (BO). Additionally, in coordination with the Marin County Open Space District, we'll be continuing and, after learning from last year, working to improve the docent program begun last year. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's comment deadline on their Barred Owl Management Plan and its Draft Environmental

Impact Report is approaching as we go to press. We'll be commenting in support of the Plan, emphasizing the importance of an active program to remove BOs from Marin County. This was the focal message of the January Speaker Series program by Taylor Ellis, Pt. Reyes National Seashore biologist, that there are not many BOs in Marin. So to protect the NSO, only a few a year will need to be removed. In most other NSO habitat areas, the BO populations are so large that to protect the NSO would require the removal of many BOs. Taylor emphasized the importance of protecting Marin's NSO, because this is the only place where they are holding their own. This does not mean there are no threats to the NSO here, only that the major threats, logging and large populations of BO, are not present here. Another positive aspect is that in Marin, the NSO utilizes a broader variety of habitats – redwood, Douglas fir and bishop pine forests, and even bay and oak woodlands. Taylor reported that there were 120 known nests last nesting season.

I hope you're getting out to enjoy our over-wintering water birds. We're pleased to have added a field trip to Loch Lomond Marina on March 21 for beginners. Roger Harris expert birder and biologist, will be the leader.

REPORT OWL OBSERVATIONS

If you see a Northern Spotted Owl (*Strix occidentalis caurina*) or a Barred Owl (*Strix*) you are encouraged to report the observation to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's owl observation database at owlobs@wildlife.ca.gov.

Join Us!

Our Nominating Committee is looking for interested members to join our Board of Directors. If you would like to help expand our field trip program, outreach activities or have a legal background, we want to hear from you.

To learn more about becoming a Board Member, please contact a Nominating Committee member: Ellena Ochoa, Chair, volunteercoordinator@marinaudubon.org, Mike Anderson, 415/990-9784 or Doug Waterman, 415/506-4675.

MAS FIELD TRIPS

Open to the public

MAS is providing a full schedule of free field trips for the 2023 season.

Advance registration is required for most of our trips, nearly all which have size limits to prevent overcrowding. Registration will open 10 days prior to the trip date on the Marin Audubon website's Field Trips page.

Trips can fill up quickly. Please register early to make sure you get a spot. If you won't be able to attend a trip that you have registered for, please use the "contact organizer" button on the Ticketbud trip description page so that the spot may be opened for someone else. If a trip is closed when you try to register, use the "contact organizer" button and request to be put on the waiting list.

Recently Ticketbud has not opened for trip signups precisely at 8 AM. This has led to confusion among would be participants who assumed the message "There are no tickets available at this time" means the trip is already sold out, but it isn't, so please try to sign up again a minute or two later. Ticketbud is working on the problem.

THE PONDS AT THE LAS GALLINAS VALLEY SANITARY DISTRICT (LGVSD)

San Rafael

Thursday, February 1, 2024 and

Thursday, March 7, 2024

8:30 AM to noon

With Sande and Bob Chilvers

No registration required. All participants are welcome to join this trip.

Join old friends and meet new ones on our regularly scheduled walks on the first Thursday of the month at Las Gallinas. We welcome bird enthusiasts of all levels, especially beginning birders, on this leisurely walk around the ponds. Special thanks to Bob and Sande Chilvers for volunteering once again to lead our monthly walks in search of waterfowl, waders, songbirds, raptors, and shorebirds. Among other birds, we will see various species of rails, swallows and teals.

With overwintering birds present, we are likely to spot some interesting species, so come assist in our search. We all help each other to find and identify the birds, and there are usually several experienced birders to assist. You don't even have to arrive on time because we spend the first 30-60 minutes studying the birds around the first pond, and our group is easy to find.

DIRECTIONS: Hwy 101, exit at Smith Ranch Rd. Drive east on Smith Ranch Rd toward McInnis Park. Turn left immediately after crossing the railroad tracks and drive about 0.5 mile through the LGVSD gates and into the parking lot at the end of the road. Meet the group by the bridge just past the parking lot. There is an outhouse in the parking area for public use or you can use the bathrooms at nearby McInnis Park.

SAUSALITO/MILL VALLEY/STRAWBERRY Birding in Marin, Season 9 – Trip 2

Saturday, February 3, 2024

8:30 AM to 3:30 PM

With Jim White and Bob Battagin

Registration required. Registration opens Wednesday, January 24 at 8 AM on the MAS website's Field Trips page.

We are going to explore the bay from the Sausalito water front to the Golden Gate and Richardson's Bay around to Strawberry Point and on to Blacky's pasture in Tiburon. Many

ducks, loons and grebes winter on the bay waters and we may find close comparative looks at similar species pairs like **Eared** and **Horned** or **Clark's** and **Western Grebes**, of **Red-throated**, **Pacific** and **Common Loons** or **Greater** and **Lesser Scaup**. We are likely to find some shorebirds too, perhaps a **Spotted Sandpiper** or a rather rare **Wandering Tattler**.

Herring runs happen around this time of year and if we are lucky they will still be numerous. Herring deposit large numbers of eggs on eelgrass, which water birds, especially gulls, love to feast on. Last year near this time I think that 10 species of gulls were located. So brush up on your gull IDs and join Bob and me along the shore.

DIRECTIONS: Meet at the east end of Harbor Dr. Handicap Accessible. We will park where the birding is close, near level and smooth. Thanks to enlightened development planning, Harbor Dr and the rather posh Strawberry spit have fine public shoreline paths.

WINTER BIRDS OF THE DELTA BOAT TRIP

Sunday, February 4, 2024

8:40 AM to 4 PM

With David Wimpfheimer

This very popular trip is being held on Sunday, February 4, 2024. After meeting at 8:40 AM for sign in and instructions, we'll depart from the Antioch Marina at 9 AM. As we enter the San Joaquin River, we'll be keeping an eye out for overwintering birds and many marine (or other) animals that happen to show up. Heading east, we enter a number of the smaller sloughs and waterways with views out over the flooded agricultural fields that provide a refuge for flocks that nest in the north but winter here.

TOMALES BAY STATE PARK

Wednesday, February 28, 2024

10 AM to 1 PM

With Rich Cimino

Registration required. Registration opens Sunday, February 18 at 8 AM on the MAS website's Field Trips page.

As we bird the trails of the State Park on this field trip we will also discuss the Forest Health and Fire Resilience management plan for the California State Parks.

We will meet at the parking area on Pierce Point Rd just 0.1 mile before the

entry to Tomales Bay State Park.

Rain cancels. Dress in layers.

DIRECTIONS: From 101, Take Lucas Valley Rd, Nicasio Valley Rd, Pt. Reyes – Petaluma Rd and Sir Francis Drake Blvd 6.4 miles to Pierce Point Rd. Entrance will be on the right. The parking lot in Tomales Bay State Park costs \$8, pay by card only.

MOUNT TAM & CORTE MADERA MARSHES Birding in Marin, Season 9 – Trip 3

Saturday, March 2, 2024

8:30 AM to mid afternoon

With Jim White and Bob Battagin

Registration required. Registration opens Wednesday, February 21 at 8 AM on the MAS website's Field Trips page.

Mount Tamalpais, rising like an icon above Marin, hosts some birds uncommonly seen in the rest of the county such as **Pileated Woodpecker**, **Red-breasted Nuthatch**, **Purple Finch**, **Red Crossbill**, and in the winter, one or two **Townsend's Solitaire** (TOSO).

About twenty years ago our friend Dave MacKenzie discovered a TOSO feeding on mistletoe berries in some Sargent Cypress trees along the trail to Barth's retreat and the bird or its children have returned every year since! But the trail, built by the CCC, (California Conservation Corp), back in the 1930s has not withstood the test of time quite as well. So, if you are up for a vigorous though short (3.5 miles) hike, join us to see what we can find.

After our lunch break back at Rock Springs with fine picnic tables and a restroom, we intend to drive down to sea level to look at the Corte Madera marshes. This area is very birdy, so depending on the tidal height, we expect to see a lot of birds there. Wintering shorebirds are gearing up for the return to their arctic nesting grounds, so we may be able to see how **Black-bellied Plovers** got their name. As the shorebirds molt into their breeding plumage, if we are diligent, we might even be able to tell the two **Dowitcher** species apart.

DIRECTIONS: Meet at Rock Springs at 8:30 AM. From Hwy 1 in Stinson Beach or up 3.3 miles from Tam Junction, take Panoramic Dr to its crest then go uphill 1 mile on Pantoll Rd to the Rock Springs parking lot.

JOIN KING TIDES EVENT

The California King Tides Project, a project of the California Coastal Commission, was established to help us visualize future sea level by observing the highest tides of today. You can help by taking and sharing photos (<http://tinyurl.com/4a37f89j>) of the shoreline during King Tides to record the changes to our coast and estuary and/or by participating in one of the King Tide events that are taking place around the Bay.

If observing on your own, be cautious, respect the power of the ocean, and don't disturb shorebirds that may be farther upland than usual because their tidal marsh and mudflat habitats are covered with tidal waters.

The City of San Rafael is hosting the event below. Contact Kate Hageman at kate.hagemann@cityofsanrafael.org for more details.

KING TIDE DAY, SAN RAFAEL DÍA DE LAS MAREAS REALES

February 10, 10 AM to 1 PM

Boro Community Center
50 Canal Street, San Rafael

Presented by Canal Alliance, City of San Rafael, UC Berkeley, Marin Audubon Society, Canal Arts, and the Multicultural Center of Marin.

Have fun and join neighbors and local scientists in taking pictures to measure the flooding in your community. Participants will go in teams to low-lying spots on the waterfront to help document King Tide impacts. The information and photos you collect will help the community prepare for sea level rise. Waterproof boots are recommended. Please register in advance for this free event at bit.ly/kingtideday2024.

A short walk explaining the project around the Tiscornia Marsh site from 12:30 to 1 PM.

Invitamos a los vecinos a reunirse durante las mareas más altas del año, conocidas como Mareas Reales, para recolectar datos sobre el riesgo de inundaciones en el vecindario de El Canal. Los participantes se dirigirán a la orilla de la bahía con "kits de ciencia ciudadana" para ayudar a medir los datos de inundaciones en varios lugares. Los datos que se recolecten informarán las acciones que nuestra comunidad tomará para prepararse ante el aumento del nivel del mar. Por favor, registrarse para este evento gratuita, bit.ly/kingtideday2024.

Marin County Breeding Bird Atlas II

continued from page 1

with your support of the Atlas.

There are a myriad ways that you can contribute to the success of the Atlas project whether it be as block leaders, volunteer field observers, blockbusting, or through the submission of incidental breeding observations through the project website. The incidental



Creative Commons/Shutterstock

Lawrence's Goldfinch

form is a tool anyone can use to submit observations of any raptor, hummingbird and owl "high probability" breeding behavior before April 15. This tool can be used by volunteers and members of the public to contribute sightings, and for block leaders to

contribute sightings outside official surveys on their or other blocks. If you are skilled at identifying Marin bird songs, please reach out if you would like to contribute to the Atlas.

While most of our work is volunteer-led, your generous donations help us fund a part-time project manager to assist with data management, production of the 2024 annual report, and other technical Atlas needs. Your donations also keep the Data Explorer current so that you and our volunteers can track the weekly and monthly progress of the Atlas thanks to the platform curated by William Wiskes. We are grateful to the Marin Audubon Society for their continued generous support of the Atlas and to so many of you who have contributed your time and resources to the Atlas. If you would like to donate to the Atlas, we have set up several ways for you to contribute: via Paypal on the Atlas page, checks can be made to the Breeding Bird Atlas and sent to: *Marin County Breeding Bird Atlas, c/o Daphne Hatch, 67 Pinheiro Circle, Novato CA 94945* or you can contact Daphne Hatch at daphnehatch@gmail.com if you are considering a donation through a donor-advised fund. We are so grateful to all of our donors!

We confirmed breeding for five more species in 2023, **Cassin's Vireo**, **Common Merganser**, **Common Murre**, **Lawrence's Goldfinch**, and **Ruddy Duck** bringing the total number of confirmed breeding species to 137. To see results for all species, we encourage you to go to the *Data Explorer* section of our website (marinaudubon.org/birds/marin-county-breeding-bird-atlas) to look at any species of personal interest to you, to explore the Atlas results more broadly, and to see what blocks are available for this spring.

HERRING SPAWN STATUS

By Josiah Clark

The first nearshore spawn of the season happened today at Point Richmond, Miller Knox area. It is in the early stages with very little roe deposited, so attracting few gulls as of yet. It can be expected that on the coming low tides, the gull activity will increase. Upon talking with old timers, they suspect this particular spawn is likely to last two or three days.

As for Marin, there has been a lot of staging of Herring in Richardson Bay/Sausalito, and probably some deep waters spawns on eelgrass, but nothing nearshore to keep big gull numbers around. The Tiburon herring runs that include the rocky shores of elephant rock, paradise state park and gated communities nearby area are other Marin herring spawning sites that have not happened yet this year. With the combination of the date, recent rain and king tides birders should be on the lookout for this historic Marin spawning site to go off for real. The only other Herring spawning site in Marin County is in Tomales Bay and I haven't heard of an onshore spawn there yet either.

Herring have historically been among the most important and abundant food resources



Casey Arnold

Herring roe on seaweed

in San Francisco Bay for a wide range of birds and other wildlife. The best years of breeding success of our surf scoters and bay ducks that breed in Alaska has been directly correlated with years that had the most herring biomass.

These once hyper abundant fish also used to support the last large commercial fishery San Francisco Bay. The collapse of this fishery is an indication of greatly declining numbers. Even with zero commercial fishing pressure, the fisheries seems not to be recovering. This collapse was not due to overfishing but rather appears to be caused by changes in environmental conditions.

Birders and conservationists should take note and enjoy this most remarkable wildlife phenomenon that happens on San Francisco Bay while we have it.

CHEEP THRILLS 2023 CBC

By David Sexton and Susan Kelly, Compilers

The 13th annual Cheep Thrills Christmas Bird Count (CBC) took place on Thursday, December 14, 2023. Conducted under dry skies and nearly ideal conditions, it was a huge success. We observed 164 species and 62,193 total birds. The only other year we observed that many species was on our first count, in 2011. Rich Stallcup's participation and advice had much to do with that. Cheep Thrills is dedicated to Rich.

Our total bird count (62,193) was the second highest ever. The only year that exceeded it was 2020, when Peter Pyle counted 26,135 birds at Rush Creek, including 14,300 **Western Sandpipers**, 2,200 **Least Sandpipers**, and 5,502 **Dunlin**. In 2023 the Black Point group, led by Mary Anne Flett, observed nearly as many small shorebirds and a total of 28,530 individual birds. While Peter and Mary Anne are professional ornithologists, our other 67 volunteers (including several other professionals) also did a wonderful job - as always - and we thank them all.

The most common birds, seen by ten or more groups in 2023, were:

COUNT	SPECIES	13-YEAR AVERAGE
2,378	Red-winged Blackbirds	2,277.8
2,053	European Starlings	2,885.4
1,588	White-crowned Sparrows	1,343.6
1,472	House Finches	1,252.6
1,121	American Crows	1,434.4
1,029	American Robins	1,962.2

A few new birds for the count are the **Rusty Blackbird**, found by Logan Kahle for the West Petaluma area and **Yellow-headed Blackbird**, seen by both Rich Cimino's group at Olompali and Bob Battagin's group at Nicasio.

It was a good year for eagles with a total of five **Golden Eagles** and six **Bald Eagles**. Observations were made by Peter Colasanti at Lakeville, David Wimpfheimer with the Hicks Valley group, Dave Shuford with Stafford Lake, Bob Battagin with Nicasio, Lowell Sykes at Petaluma Marsh, Jim White at Rush Creek, Heather Cameron at Bahia, and Todd Plummer at Mount Burdell.

Find our data for 2023 and all previous years here: cheepthrillscbc.blogspot.com.

POINT REYES 2023 CBC

By David Wimpfheimer, Co-compiler

Two hundred and two people participated in the 53th Point Reyes Christmas Bird Count (CBC) on Saturday, December 16, 2023. This is the

largest turnout we've had in years. That level of support and wonderful dry weather helped us find 194 species and 99,179 total birds.

Some waterfowl were at low numbers. Only 229 **Brant** were found, the lowest total since the 1980s. This may be a result of the species now wintering further north of Point Reyes. **Canvasback** was missed for the first time, while only 30 **Gadwall** and 217 **Ruddy Ducks** were found. The latter was an all-time low. This decrease in waterfowl seems to be a continuing trend.

More than 6,000 **Brown Pelicans** were found, over five times their previous high.

In many years more, **Peregrine Falcons** are found on the Point Reyes count than any other in the country. This year, inexplicably, only about ten were found. This total is less than half of our usual total.

Eighteen **Bald Eagles** were observed. The increase in this formerly endangered species over the last twenty years has been documented previously. While the number of eagles has increased we have also detected a decrease in the number of **Osprey**, fewer than ten were tallied, the smallest number since the 1980s. This relationship has been documented by other scientists previously. Other raptors, including **Rough-legged Hawk**, were reported in good numbers.

Here are some of the highlights. Eight **Long-tailed Ducks** were seen at Abbotts lagoon, Limantour and Tomales Bay. Four dark shearwaters, either **Sooties** or **Short-tailed** were detected off the ocean beaches.

A juvenile or first-cycle **Glaucous Gull** was seen at Abbotts Lagoon, presumably the same bird was also seen at Kehoe Beach. 2,502 and two **Short-billed Gulls** were observed, a record. Strangely, only 197 **California Gulls**, an all-time low, were counted, by far the lowest total ever.

A **Selasphorus hummingbird**, possibly an **Allen's** was seen near Limantour.

A large number of swallows were observed; 139 **Tree** and five **Violet-green Swallows** were record or near record totals.

In the dark forests along the Inverness Ridge, keen observers heard and saw a **Winter Wren**, carefully separating it from the similar Pacific Wrens.

Seven **White-breasted Nuthatches** were seen, a record. While this species is common in the eastern part of Marin, it is not at Point Reyes. It has been seen with more frequency the last several years.

An astonishing 11 **Lapland Longspurs** were seen by the Abbotts Lagoon team.

On both sides of the Giacomini wetlands a total of 66 **Swamp Sparrows** were found. This

uncommon species is usually recorded on our count, but such a high number was unprecedented. Certainly, the high tide that day contributed to such a high total being detected. An even more uncommon sparrow, a **Nelson's Sparrow** was also seen on the edge of those restored wetlands.

In the riparian jungles of Olema Marsh near White House Pool, two of our young birders found a **Black** and **White Warbler**.

THANK YOU, DONORS

Bud Alderson, Michael & Shelley Anderson, David Bayne, Judith Bell, Beverly Birnbaum, Kay Bolla, The Llavonne Blasche Trust, Faith & Stephen Brown, Deborah Brown, Priscilla Bull, Anthony Campodonico, Samuel Chase, Julia Clarke, Cheryl Coles, Ruth Collins, John Davis, Paula Dawson, Kristine Donadio, Margaret Duffy-Ward, Daniel Dunn, The Harrison Family, Mary Ann Flett, Kathleen Foster, Rick & Dee Fraites, Lewis Fredrickson, Barbara Freitas, Wendy Friefeld, Ann Frivold, Susan Gertman, Doreen Gluckin, Carl & Donna Gowan, Betsy Gullickson, Glenn Harcourt, Daphne Hatch, W. Kurt Hauser, Susan Helfrey, Gretchen Hoskins, Christine Jaqua, Martha Jarocki, Durrell Kapan, Madeline Kellner, Robert Kennis, Daniel & Sarah Kushner, Lelia & Larry Lanctot, William Legge, Julia Liss, David Long, Mary Love, Marion Love, Bruce & Carolyn Lowenthal, Eleanor Malinowski, Ron Mallory, Robert Mathew, Sharon McCloskey, John Kirk McDonough, Morton McMichael, Regina Milavec, Kari Mueller, Marianne Nannestad, Ellena Ochoa, Phil Peterson, Jessie Powell, Kate Powers, Douglas Pringle, Gregory Rice, Jordan Rinker, Dennis Rodoni, Susan Ryan, Christine Solomon, Elizabeth Schiff, Elizabeth Schriock, Melina Shepherd, E. Shibata, Steven Sicher, Jill Sideman, William Clark Stanton, Elizabeth Theiss, Marilyn Tiaven, Arlin Timberlake, Jean Tymstra, Debra Wadford, Margaret Wagner, Gretchen Wallerich, Sandra Weiss, John & Catherine Yee

WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS

Kelsey Bechelli, Carol Braddock, Julia Clarke, Don Fordham, Ellen Gilliam, Michael Green, Vicki Harms, Deborah James, Howard Keen, Christine Krause, Katherine Powers, August L. Reader, Melina Shepherd, Sue Silkworth, Hannah Williams, Bonnie Wilson

Habitat Stewardship

HABITAT STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

Radish is gone. *Dittrichia* is gone. Let's make Italian thistle the next annual weed to be eliminated from Triangle Marsh and the Ecological Reserve expansion site. Thistle will be large enough to find but will still be easy to pull or cut off before it blooms. Mustard is another weed whose removal now will pay off next year.

Earn community service hours. Help our native plants reclaim their home. Doing the work with other folks makes the time go quickly and provides an opportunity to learn more about a native habitat of your county. Make a difference. Rain cancels our workdays.

Volunteer Workdays

Triangle Marsh, East Corte Madera:

First Saturdays: February 3, March 2

Meet at 10 AM on Paradise Drive between the Ring Mountain Phyllis Ellman trailhead and the Montessori School.

Corte Madera Ecological Reserve:

Second Saturdays: February 10, March 9

Meet at the end of Industrial Way near Trader Joe's in Greenbrae.

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.

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 marinaudubon.org/2020/09/01/alert-report-barred-owl-spottings.

DONATE YOUR CAR TO MARIN AUDUBON SOCIETY

Looking for deductions on your 2023 taxes? You may qualify for a write-off if you donate your unwanted car, truck, motorcycle, RV, or boat.

Contact CARS and they will pick up your car, sell it, and after paying their costs, give the rest to MAS.

If you would like to donate your car, follow this MAS link careasy.org/nonprofit/Marin-Audubon-Society to the CARS website where you can start the vehicle donation process or call 855/500-7433.

BAHIA

As we go to press, crews from Habitat Potential are finishing up planting 4,800 plants on the Bahia levees around seasonal wetland areas and in the seasonal wetland area of the central peninsula. The crews vary from five to seven, all energetic workers. Species planted include California sage (*Artemisia californica*), coyote bush (*Baccharis pilularis*), creeping wild rye (*Leymus triticoides*), clustered field sedge (*Carex praegracilis*), and western goldenrod (*Euthamia occidentalis*). MAS property includes three peninsulas, that were originally constructed as building pads for houses, a permanent tidal pond, several seasonal ponds, and uplands around the Homeowners' muted-tidal lagoon.

CORTE MADERA MARSH MAKES GOOD PROGRESS

Environmental Science Associates (ESA), in partnership with The Watershed Nursery (TWN), has completed the five-year monitoring of the Corte Madera Ecological Reserve Marsh Expansion Project, and the results of this final year of monitoring are presented in the recently released Monitoring Report ("Report"). We're pleased that the overall finding that the "project site exceeds most expectations based on the performance criteria and is expected to evolve into a fully mature tidal marsh over time."

Between 1945 and 1984, the site at the end of Industrial Way was a dumping ground for construction debris. This was prior to the Clean Water Act. MAS was finally able to purchase the site in 2015. The restoration project was completed in 2018, culminating more than thirty years of MAS effort to purchase, protect and restore the 5.2-acre property from a developer. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife owns one acre of filled land that was also part of the 6.2-acre project site. The marsh restoration involved excavating and moving fill from roughly one half of the site to lower it to elevations that would allow tidal marsh to restore naturally, placing and grading the fill, and excavating two main channels in the lowered area to connect to the Flood Control Channel to the south and a small tidal channel to the north.

Two previous monitorings have taken place: one year after construction and three years after construction. Post-construction monitoring has been performed in accordance with the project's Monitoring Plan, which was developed in 2017 and was required by regulatory agencies as a condition of issuing permits. This Year 5 monitoring included topographic

survey transects, inundation surveys, erosion monitoring, aerial photographs, vegetation monitoring (ground transects and aerial mapping with ground truthing), and photo monitoring. ESA performed surveys, vegetation mapping, and photo monitoring; ground-based vegetation monitoring was done by TWN.

The Report describes the project as having progressed well over the last five years and as being in a healthy state. Tidal channels have naturally resized since Year 1. The channels are now conveying tidal waters into the site's interior and no longer limiting them. No erosion of fill areas or the toe of the uplands zone within the tidal restoration footprint is occurring.

Physical process monitoring included topographic survey transects, inundation (water level) measurements, and erosion monitoring. Four transects were studied to evaluate marsh plain accretion and tidal channel development.



Corte Madera Ecological Reserve Marsh

Surveys were completed at low tide. Water-depth observations, measuring water surface elevations in the western channel and within the Flood Control Channel, were performed simultaneously. Vegetation monitoring methods included aerial photography and remotely sensed mapping of marsh vegetation to identify percent cover and native vs. non-native vegetation. Three locations were used to ground-truth the vegetation.

The marsh plain has continued to raise and make possible the establishment of tidal marsh vegetation, including native pickleweed (*Salicornia pacifica*), Pacific cordgrass (*Spartina foliosa*), and gumplant (*Grindelia stricta*). Native tidal marsh vegetation now covers almost 100 percent of the restored tidal marsh and transition/upland zone. The tidal marsh did not experience as much sedimentation as anticipated; however, elevations within the

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Marin Birdlog: December 2023

By Noah Arthur



Nelson's Sparrow

Jeremy Nadel, creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0

the 14th (BB, NC, & AL).

The rarest bird of the month visited a Sausalito hillside backyard on the 14th, a female-type **Yellow-throated Warbler** that briefly stopped in at a birdbath with **Golden-crowned Sparrows** and was never seen again (AT).

A yard in San Rafael produced another **White-winged Dove** on the 16th (MS), and a **Winter Wren** was calling along the Sky Trail near Pt. Reyes (LN). Also, on the 16th a **Glaucous Gull** was at Kehoe Beach (JL), a **Glaucous-winged X Glaucous hybrid** at McClures Beach (PP). And a **Black-and-white Warbler** and **Red-naped X Red-breasted Sapsucker** were along Bear Valley Road, plus a **Wilson's Warbler** in Pt. Reyes Station (LS, MSt, & EM). Possibly the rarest bird on this red-letter day was a **Nelson's Sparrow** at Giacomini Wetlands (JC & JCh).

A **Black-throated Grey Warbler** turned up at Cypress Grove on the 17th (NW). Last season's **Sandhill Crane** was back at Laguna Lake by the 19th (MSt & LS), and probably the same **Eastern Phoebe** from last winter was back at Rodeo Lagoon on the 21st, plus a new **Green-tailed Towhee** (WL). Another wintering **Wilson's Warbler** was near Bolinas on the 20th (MSt & LS). Rare in the winter especially in multiples, 2 **Chipping Sparrows** were at McInnis Park on the 23rd (CC). Yet another **Wilson's Warbler** joined the rarity party at Rodeo Lagoon on the 26th (CC).

An off-season **Western Flycatcher** was caught and banded at Muddy Hollow on the 28th. A classic December rarity, a female **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** showed up at Santa Margarita Island near Las Gallinas on the 30th (VV & KA). Also on the 30th, a female **Black-and-white Warbler** joined the flock with the continuing male at Muir Beach (JP & JW), and another **Black-and-white Warbler** was found at Earthquake Trail (SR). Expected at Pine Maintain Fire Road were 3 **Thick-billed Fox Sparrows** on the 30th (EC).

OBSERVERS AND ACRONYMS: KR: Kent Russell, LS: Lucas Stephenson, DM: Dominik Mosur, LK: Logan Kahle, AT: Anita Toney, DS: David Sexton, CC: Connor Cochrane, BB: Bob Battagin, NC: Natalie Clark, AL: Ann Linder, AT: Amy Tan, MS: Mario Santi, JL: Jason Liu, MSt: Mark Stephenson, EM: Eddie Monson, LN: Larry Nigro, JC: Josiah Clark, JCh: Jamie Chavez, PP: Peter Pyle, NW: Nils Warnock, WL: William Legge, VV: VICENS VILA, KA: Kaden Agha, JP: John Paul, JW: Jim White, SR: Siobhan Ruck, EC: Everett Clark

With wintering rarities settling in and increased coverage due to CBCs, December is often one of the annual high points of rare bird occurrence in Marin. Rare in the winter, a **Parasitic Jaeger** was seen from a boat off Bolinas on the 3rd (KR). Also, very rare after October was an **American Redstart** at Fort Baker on the 3rd (LS). The Outer Point was productive on the 4th, with a **White-winged Dove** at Nunes Ranch, a **Clay-colored Sparrow** and **Blue-winged Teal** at the Drakes Beach pond, and a **Snowy Egret** (very rare on the Point) at the Mendoza Ranch pond (DM & LK).

A regular seasonal rarity in December, a **Western Tanager** was in a Fairfax yard on the 3rd (AT). Fort Baker produced another nice warbler on the 7th, a **Tennessee Warbler** (CC), far and away rarer this late than it is in the fall. Another or the same Outer Point **Snowy Egret** turned up at Drakes on the 8th (DS). A male **Yellow-headed Blackbird** was at Lafranchi Ranch in Nicasio on



Yellow-throated Warbler

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Corte Madera Marsh

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marsh are continuing to increase and have reached anticipated marsh plain levels, except in a few unvegetated areas. The Report suggests that the ponded areas within the tidal restoration footprint that remain unvegetated may develop into tidal pannes. Tidal pannes, a special feature in tidal marshes, pond water at high tides and provide foraging and resting habitat for shorebirds and other species.

Performance criteria assessment shows that

- With an average intertidal marsh elevation of 5.15 ft. NAVD 88, the intertidal marsh elevation criterion continues to be met.
- Performance criterion for tidal marsh sedimentation is partially met. Average marsh plain sedimentation levels reached 0.15 ft. in Year 5, with some areas having up to 0.5 ft. of sedimentation.
- Criterion for tidal water levels has been met, with water surface elevation measurements indicating that tidal conveyance is not limited during ebb or flood tides.
- Native tidal marsh vegetation has established 80 percent cover in the restored tidal marsh, meeting the native tidal marsh vegetation criterion.
- Performance criterion for native transition/upland vegetation has been met with nearly 100 percent cover in the transition/upland areas.

The Report encourages MAS to maintain its current weed-removal schedule. The Report further recommends monitoring for non-native species growing nearby with a “high” invasive ranking, such as perennial pepperweed, French broom, and yellow star-thistle. According to the Report, “The project has exceeded most expectations based on the performance criteria and is expected to evolve into a fully mature tidal marsh over time.”



The Rail

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March 14 **Speaker Series:** Avian Diversity
7 PM *With Jordan Boersma*

March 20 **Field Trip:** Rodeo Lagoon
7:30 AM *With William Legge and David Wiechers*

March 21 **Field Trip:** Introduction to
10 AM *Birding at Loch Lomond Marina
With Roger Harris*

Check website for updates and details

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SUPPORT MARIN AUDUBON SOCIETY — BECOME A CHAPTER-SUPPORTING MEMBER

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.

ALTERNATIVELY, 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.

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

Join or Donate to the Marin Audubon Society

Please fill in this form and mail to the address below. If you are paying by check, please make it payable to **Marin Audubon Society**.

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