

**THURSDAY, JUNE 13**

**7:00 PM**

**Marin's Declining Shorebirds**

By Nils Warnock



BOEM

**Marin Shorebirds**

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

Nils Warnock will talk about the status and trends of our North America shorebirds, particularly those that occur in Marin County. He will talk about the results of a winter shorebird monitoring program that Audubon Canyon Ranch has been conducting at Tomales Bay since 1989. Overall, numbers of wintering shorebirds on Tomales Bay have declined by over 65% over the past decades with Dunlin and Western Sandpipers among the biggest losers. Of the 14 taxa that ACR analyzed, 3 increased over the past 30 years, 1 stayed stable, and 11 species declined. Nils will discuss potential reasons why our shorebird populations have declined and what we might do about it.

Nils has been the Director of Conservation Science for Audubon Canyon Ranch since 2018. He has a PhD in Ecology from UC Davis and San Diego State University. Nils started his ornithological career in West Marin at the Point Reyes Bird Observatory (now Point Blue), where he was the co-director of the Wetlands Division. From 2010-2018, Nils served as the executive director of Audubon Alaska and as a vice president of the National Audubon Society. Nils is a Fellow of the American Ornithological Society and has 40 years of experience working with Pacific Flyway birds, especially shorebirds.

**THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 12**

**7:00 PM**

**Vagrancy in Birds**

By Daniel Edelstein

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# The Rail

MARIN AUDUBON SOCIETY

## Tomales Point Environmental Assessment Out for Public Comment

The National Park Service (NPS) is developing a Tomales Point Area Plan (TPAP) and has released an Environmental Assessment to update management guidance for Tomales Point resources. Specifically, the purpose of the plan is to establish management direction for preserving natural resources, wilderness character, and visitor use and experience within the 2,900-acre planning area. The primary planning issue is the removal of the fence that has been confining the Tule elk (*Cervus Canadensis nannodes*); the planning area includes the elk fence and all lands to the north. Historic droughts, changing use conditions and visitor experience, and partnership with the local tribes are cited as reasons for preparing the TPAP.

In 2020, the NPS issued the General Management Plan Amendment and Final Environmental Impact Statement for the 28,000 acres of the Seashore and Golden Gate National Recreation Area, which identified a management approach for Tule elk and allowed for continued 20-year leases for ranching. In 2022, several environmental organizations filed a lawsuit, and that suit is currently in mediation. This EA is likely part of the settlement of that suit. On May 22, the NPS held a public information meeting on Zoom during which they answered clarifying questions about the project.

The TPAP discusses three alternative conditions:

**ALTERNATIVE A**

**Continue Current Management** (No action)

The following components of Alternative A are also part of the other two alternatives: continued elk herd monitoring and disease surveillance, discontinued watering and mineral resources for the elk, management of invasive plants, use of



NPS, Tim Bernot

**Tule Elk at Point Reyes National Seashore**

prescribed fire, repair of the McClures Beach and Tomales Bay trails, development of a new Tomales Bay overlook on the eastern end of the Pierce Ranch complex, and preservation of the historic Pierce Ranch. The lands would be divided into zones: 1) The Wilderness Zone would remain essentially free from modern manipulation, 2) Development Zone would be the Pierce Ranch area and the non-wilderness area between them, 3) Scenic-Landscape Zone, including the elk fence and wilderness boundary areas, which would be managed to maintain a natural appearance but with visitor amenities and trails enhancement, and 4) Visitor facilities would be improved by better-organized parking, better restrooms, and a new location-based permit system for beach camping.

**ALTERNATIVE B**

**Unconfine Elk Herd, Remove Elk Fence, Improve Visitor Amenities and Explore Adaptive Use of Pierce Point Ranch**

(Preferred alternative)

The elk fence would be removed, and a new wildlife-friendly fence would be constructed to prevent cattle from entering the area; the free-ranging herd would be managed as the

*continued on page 4*

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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. 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](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

This is our last newsletter until September. Most of our activities will continue over the summer: Conservation and Property Management. We've planned a few more field trips over the summer than usual, thanks to the work of our new Board Member Alison Pence and our volunteer work days will continue. Speaker Series will take two months off and resume in September.

A warm welcome to Alison Pence to our Board. Alison will be working with Doug Waterman as co-chair of field trips. She is already doing a great job finding new field trip leaders so we can bring you more field trips. And welcome back to our returning Board Members, Roger Harris, Lelia Lancot, Martha Jarocki and me. And thank you again to this year's Nominating committee Ellena Ochoa, Mike Anderson and Doug Waterman.

The news from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service about their funding deficits that will mean a delay of the non-native house mouse eradication work on the Farallon Islands is disheartening (see below for more information). The presence of the introduced mice causes a tragic chain of destruction when winter comes and the mice run out of food, the mice and owls end up and preying on sea bird eggs and young. We'll be discussing next steps we can take to help resume planning for removing the mice.

Huge thanks to all who have donated in response to our Spring appeal letter. This appeal is critical to maintaining and enhancing our habitats for wildlife. It's not too late – please

send a generous donation.

We're hoping to announce in our next newsletter some exciting news about new acquisitions. It's been quite a while since we've acquired a new property. We've worked on a few prospects, but so far none have worked out. This time it seems pretty certain we'll be successful. We're keeping our fingers crossed. Let you know in our next newsletter.

A reminder to save your tree and major brush trimming to Fall. Nesting extends through August. Nests can be incredibly difficult to find and may be missed with inexperienced eyes. For any essential tree work, a professional should be hired to survey vegetation for nests. Removing active nests with eggs or young is contrary to state and federal regulations.

I hope everyone is enjoying landbird babies in your neighborhoods and on trails traveled. It's a slow time for waterbirds but a few can still be found around our wetlands, streams and other water habitats. Shorebirds begin to return early, beginning in July. So keep watchful and join one of our field trips.

Happy summer!

## MARTY GRIFFIN, 1920–2024

We are saddened by the loss of Dr. Martin "Marty" Griffin who died on May 22, 2024. We will have a tribute to Marty in the next issue of *The Rail*.

# Farallon Islands Mice

by Mary Jane Schramm

For many years the MAS has supported a US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) plan to eradicate a plague of invasive house mice that have overrun the Farallon Islands National Wildlife Refuge and caused the decline of rare native species. We have supported the plan through public outreach (<https://bit.ly/3V4xzDW>), in testimony during the California Coastal Commission's 2021 Coastal Act Consistency hearing, and in regular subsequent appearances at their monthly meetings.

Recently the FWS Regional office became aware that significant agency budget cuts have triggered a fiscal shortfall for the Farallon Islands field station. This will impact Pt. Blue Conservation Science's presence in the refuge, which supports the largest breeding seabird colony in the contiguous United States. For over 50 years



Ashy Storm Petrel

Point Blue Conservation Science has carried out on-island research, monitoring, and restoration projects year-round to restore the refuge's native species and ecosystem.

With reduced fiscal resources, the Service is working with Point Blue to write a de-escalated  
*continued on page 7*

## MAS FIELD TRIPS

Open to the public

MAS is providing a full schedule of free field trips for the 2024 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. If a trip is closed when you try to register, use the "contact organizer" and request to be put on the waiting list. **If you are unable to attend a trip you signed up for, use "Contact Organizer" to cancel so that someone on the waiting list will have an opportunity to attend.**

**In some instances, trip signups aren't available precisely at 8 AM but it doesn't mean the trip is full. Please try to register again 2 or 3 minutes later.**

### OUTER POINT REYES

Wednesday, June 12, 2024

8:30 AM to 2 PM

With Liz Lewis and Susan Kelly

Registration required. Registration opens Sunday, June 2 at 8 AM on the MAS website's Field Trips page.

Would you like to contribute to the second Marin County Breeding Bird Atlas? Join MCBBA2's Liz Lewis and Susan Kelly for a morning of blockbusting birding in Outer Point Reyes including the cypress tree tunnel to the historic RCA radio station. Time permitting, we will explore the abandoned ranch as well. Block 3-4 is a high priority block with minimal data collected to date. Species we might see or hear include: **Allen's Hummingbird, Swainson's Thrush, Northern Harrier, and Western Meadowlark.**

The Atlas II is a four-year project that builds on the first Atlas begun in the 1970s which culminated with the publication of Bob Shuford's landmark Marin County Breeding Bird Atlas. Now four decades later, 70 volunteers are in their fourth year of collecting data and the Atlas II data is viewable through the MCBBA2 Data Explorer.

**DIRECTIONS:** From the Bear Valley Visitor Center, head north 0.2 miles (0.3 km) to Bear Valley Rd. Turn left and follow Bear Valley Rd 1.75 miles (2.8 km) northwest to Sir Francis Drake Blvd. Turn left and follow Sir Francis Drake Blvd 9.5 miles (15.2 km) north and west. Follow road signs for "Lighthouse" until you see a sign for "North District Operation Center." Parallel park on the shoulder along Sir Francis Drake Blvd near the entrance to the cypress tunnel. Parking is limited so carpooling is encouraged. Restrooms are available at the Visitor's center and at the North Beach parking lot.

### BEAR VALLEY AND FIVE BROOKS

Birding in Marin, Season 9 – Trip 7

Saturday, July 6, 2024

8:30 AM to mid afternoon

With Jim White and Bob Battagin

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

Join Jim and Bob on this trip as part of their yearly series of Marin walks. We will start our day at Bear Valley in search of nesting birds. Next, we'll travel to Olema Marsh and Whitehouse Pool for a look at some different habitats. Our final stop of the day will be Five Brooks where we have a chance of finding Wood Duck at the retired logging pond. We will also look for birds in the Douglas Fir forest.

**DIRECTIONS:** From Hwy 101 take Sir Francis Drake Blvd toward Point Reyes for

about 20 miles. At Olema turn right onto Hwy 1. In 600 feet, turn left onto Bear Valley Rd. In approximately 0.5 mile, turn left at the entrance to Point Reyes National Seashore Headquarters at Bear Valley. We will meet at the picnic tables near the parking lot.

### SKY TRAIL AND LIMANTOUR BEACH

Birding in Marin, Season 9 – Trip 8

Saturday, August 3, 2024

8:30 AM to mid afternoon

With Jim White and Bob Battagin

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

The Sky Trail, called "the misty spine of Bear Valley," takes us through a maturing Douglas Fir/Bishop Pine forest. Forest birds are more active early so we would like to look and listen on our walk through this habitat. We may see or hear a **Pileated Woodpecker, Band Tailed Pigeons, Stellar's Jays, Swainson's Thrush, Osprey, nuthatches** and surely **Acorn Woodpeckers** and **Chestnut-backed Chickadees.**

After we leave, we drive down to the great beach of Limantour with its miles of sand, its tidal estuary the open expanse of Drakes Bay and the Pacific Ocean beyond. We will gather at 9:30 in the ample parking lot with restrooms nearby. We'll pack our lunches, shoulder our scopes and head out and up the beach. We can hike far enough to find **Snowy Plovers** to get our exercise and to cross over to the estuary side for our walk back. Gulls, terns, cormorants, loons, grebes, pelicans, murres, and guillemots will garner our attention. Shorebirds too, some already back from their breeding excursion to the Arctic, may decorate the shore or be gathering along the estuary shores and shallows.

**DIRECTIONS:** To Sky Trail – from CA 1 South, right (left from CA 1 North) onto Sir Francis Drake Blvd for 0.7 miles, left onto Bear Valley Road for 0.5, then right onto Limantour Road for 3.4 miles to the Sky Trailhead. Meet at Sky Trailhead, near the crest of Limantour Rd. Roadside parking is available near the trailhead.

From Sky Trailhead, the drive to the Limantour beach parking lot is 4.3 miles.

### THE PONDS AT THE LAS GALLINAS

VALLEY SANITARY DISTRICT (LGVSD)

San Rafael

Thursday, September 5, 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 as we resume our regularly scheduled walks on the first Thursday of the month at Las Gallinas. We especially welcome

beginning birders on this leisurely walk around the ponds. Among other birds, we will see various species of rails, swallows and teals. 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.

### PT REYES LIGHTHOUSE TO DRAKES BEACH

Birding in Marin, Season 9 – Trip 9

Saturday, September 7, 2024

8:30 AM to mid afternoon

With Jim White and Bob Battagin

Registration required. Registration opens Wednesday, August 28 at 8 AM on the MAS website's Field Trips page.

This is the place to be for fall birding. Many migrants like hawks, jaegers, shorebirds and loons follow the coast south. Millions of recently fledged birds undertake a journey of 2-4,000 miles without a Google assistant and many without parental guidance. Many songbirds seem to have a compass bearing in mind. Some get lost.

Imagine that you are a dyslexic Connecticut Warbler hatched in early June in the boreal forest of north central Canada. It is your second night flight, you are flying west instead of east or south, morning is approaching so you descend through the clouds and there is nothing but water. You reverse directions, trying to avoid the gulls and jaegers pursuing you, when you see trees miles away on a point sticking above the fog. Relief, a place to land, to rest, and to find something to eat. These vagrant warblers and other eastern songbirds are the reasons that the tree islands of the Point Reyes peninsula are so popular with birders.

We intend to visit the nearby Fish Docks after The Light house then work our way back to Drake's Beach for lunch and much more birding.

**DIRECTIONS:** Meet at the Lighthouse parking area at the west end of Sir Francis Drake Blvd. Going north through Inverness follow Drake to the Lighthouse. Allow 30 minutes from Inverness or 1.5 hour from San Rafael.

## **Tomales Point Management Plan**

*continued from page 1*

Limantour herd (i.e., cull if problems arise); stock ponds would be modified if determined to be a threat; efforts would be made to remove invasive plants; and the 12 fenced elk enclosures that were part of the elk-vegetation research would be removed. A trailhead would be relocated, and certain trails would be slightly rerouted to address erosion and sedimentation. A new spur trail in the vicinity of Pierce Ranch would be established to provide alternative public access to known vistas.

### **ALTERNATIVE C**

#### **Retain the Elk Fence and Continue Confining and Managing the Elk Herd**

(Includes many of the same features as Alternate B)

A population threshold would be established for the elk, and lethal population control would be used to maintain that population level. In addition, as many as eight natural seeps and springs would be enhanced. The elk enclosures would remain and invasive species would be prioritized for removal.

### **ANALYSIS OF POTENTIALLY SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS**

#### **Vegetation**

There are two predominant vegetation types at Tomales Point, shrub and grassland/herbaceous cover, both of which are preferred by Tule elk. Native and non-native annual species increased in abundance and biomass in areas of elk grazing. Annual species may benefit from trampling and reduced thatch. Elk grazing has reduced perennials and some non-native species.

While elk reaction to removal of the fence is unknown, it is expected that they will expand their range, thus reducing the potential for overgrazing during drought. Invasive vegetation removal would be done, using manual labor, herbicides, and prescribed fire to maintain natural plant communities. Mechanical treatment to maintain defensible space would continue. Formalizing parking in established areas would reduce instances of visitors parking on shoulders, thus benefitting the species growing along roads.

#### **Elk and Other Wildlife**

Alternative B would have many beneficial impacts due to removal of the fence. The herd would have access to additional habitat, which would allow for mixing of the herds, increasing genetic variability, and would promote natural population cycles. Healthier herds would be expected due to

additional habitats and increased forage. Impacts of droughts on the herd would be expected to lessen due to increased forage and reduced population die-offs. Removal of the fence is also not expected to increase the spread of Johne's disease, either with elk, black-tailed deer, or cattle. The Seashore's staff would continue to monitor for Johne's disease.

Mammals at the Seashore are not expected to be impacted by actions under any alternative. No species except deer occur in the project area in significant numbers. The alternatives would not negatively affect avian species that depend on the Seashore which supports the greatest diversity of avian species of any national park unit in the United States, with records of approximately 490 species belonging to nearly 60 distinct families (NPS 2018a).

Competition with cattle is not expected to limit elk survival or productivity because grazing resources are not currently a limiting factor for Limantour or Drakes Bay herds. Given the absence of predators, it is anticipated that the free-ranging elk would eventually expand to 2,800 animals and population control will be needed to keep the elk within the boundaries of the Seashore at some point beyond 20 years.

While it is not known precisely how or when the presence of elk could impact the adjacent ranches, observation of the two free-ranging elk herds show that female groups tend to maintain limited ranges from their core area. The NPS anticipates that under Alternative B, many subgroups from the Tomales Point herd would remain at Tomales Point after removal of the fence, and that few, if any, nearby ranches would be impacted, unless more intensive changes to existing forage or water sources occurred. Elk that leave the planning area and cause problems would be managed in a way similar to the Limantour herd which includes a mix of hazing, monitoring, and other methods including lethal removal. The EA reports that neither the Limantour nor the Drakes Beach herds have been found to significantly impact historic ranching operations.

#### **Wetlands and Water Resources**

Water resources are limited on Tomales Point. The project area contains 130-acres of wetlands and a series of seeps and springs in the project area. Elk have trampled the creeks, especially in drought years. Removal of the fence would reduce grazing pressure and trampling, especially at naturally occurring water sources, as other water sources would be more available to the elk.

Removal of supplementary water tanks and mineral licks are not expected to have adverse impacts on the elk or deer populations.

#### **Wilderness Experience (Philip Burton Wilderness Area)**

Qualities listed as contributing to wilderness experience: "untrammelled, undeveloped opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined recreation experience, and other features of value" are evaluated as either improving or being slightly degraded. The EA does not expect that any of the improvements (parking lot, trailhead, spur trail, and restrooms) would impact visitor opportunities for wilderness experiences.

#### **Visitor Experience**

While there may be increased contact between visitors and elk, the public is not expected to have significant effects on the elk. Frequent interaction between visitors and elk at Limantour and Drakes have not led to any observable adverse effects on either Tule elk or Black-tailed deer. The EA considers that all improvements would enhance visitor experience. Erosion and sedimentation would be addressed on the .4 mile McClure's trail. The paved parking would be improved to delineate parking spaces. Twenty camping permits would be issued, which would require people to camp in specified spaces. The new spur trail would be located in the non-wilderness area. Visitation levels are not expected to increase significantly under Alternative B.

#### **MAS Recommendation**

MAS finds that the impacts of removing the fence that has been confining the elk will have only positive results for the wildlife of the Seashore, and, therefore, MAS strongly supports Alternative B. In addition to the benefits discussed in the EA, removing the fence would restore connectivity between Tomales Point habitats which will allow mammals now confined to move freely to interact with others of its species and find new sources of food and water.

An aspect of concern is the construction of a new trail. The EA does not describe the proposed trail nor is there an explanation of why it is needed or what its impacts on habitat and wildlife would be. At the May 22 hearing, however, it was explained that only the elk fence has been analyzed. All other components of the Plan have been developed at the program level only, and that project design, location, and impact analysis for all other components will take place later. It was explained that the purpose of the trail is intended to provide inclusive

access and it is not intended to be a major project. So, for the trail and other components of Alternative B (e.g. parking lot and trail improvements) there should be opportunities to comment in the future when those features are specifically planned.

Also, of concern is the allowance for lethal removal. Removal of the elk fence could affect the ranchers on NPS land as the elk could go onto grazing land or leave the seashore boundaries. Not noted in the EA, in the past some lessee and commenters have complained about elk damaging fences and eating forage intended for cows. The Record of Decision for the General Management Plan for Point Reyes Seashore provides for various methods to control elk, and those include monitoring behavior, hazing to make the animals move away, enhancing habitat, and the potential for lethal removal of individual animals. At the May 22 meeting, when asked what the NPS would do to if the elk leave the Seashore boundaries at some time in the future, the response was that they would be returned to the Park.

#### WHAT YOU CAN DO:

The 30-day public review and comment period will end on Wednesday, June 5, 2024, at 10:59 PM. Pacific Daylight Time (PDT).

The preferred method for commenting is online through the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment website: [bit.ly/3QRBi5a](https://bit.ly/3QRBi5a). Comments may also be mailed or hand-delivered to: Tomales Point Area Plan, c/o Superintendent, Point Reyes National Seashore, 1 Bear Valley Road, Point Reyes Station, CA 94956.

Comments will not be accepted by fax, email, USB drive, or any other way than those specified above. Bulk comments submitted on behalf of others in any form also will not be accepted.

## COUNTY MOVES TO WEAKEN BAYLANDS PROTECTIONS

The Community Development Agency and Planning Commission made a recommendation (with two commissioners dissenting) to the Board of Supervisors last month to change the Marin County Development Code to allow maximum density, height, and floor-area ratios, not only for housing but also for commercial properties in the Baylands Corridor and insensitive habitats. Due to the overwhelming public opposition (700 pages of comments were received), the Supervisors put off making a decision. The issue is expected to come back to the Supervisors soon.

The Baylands Corridor was adopted,

after lengthy evaluation and public review, as the fourth corridor (the other three being City-Centered, Coastal Recreation, and Inland Rural) in the 2007 Countywide Plan (CWP). The Corridor approach defines allowable development types for each land area. As the CWP states, “The Baylands Corridor was established to protect important baylands...” The CWP defines baylands as “the ecosystem consisting of the baylands themselves, together with a buffer on the remaining undeveloped uplands, and the open waters of the deep bay and channels.” “Baylands are areas between historic high- and low-tide elevations, forming a complex ecosystem of aquatic and upland habitats.” Compliance with State directives to provide more housing is no reason to reduce protections for vital bayland resources.

The Baylands Corridor was adopted because of the ecological importance of the baylands. The Baylands Corridor provides essential protection for diked historic baylands, lands that were diked off from the bay more than a century ago but still provide valuable ecological services. Additional benefits Baylands provide include flood protection; buffering adjacent uplands from high tides and erosion; valuable habitat for migratory waterfowl and shorebirds during the winter rainy season, when waterbirds are overwintering in the Bay Area; and opportunities to restore tidal marsh. Increasing development in baylands is contrary to the commitment of the people of Marin to protect and restore the ecosystem of the Bay.

It is particularly disappointing that, according to the April 16, 2024 staff report, the County has already changed CWP policies to eliminate important protections for the Baylands Corridor as a “means of enabling future housing development and complying with State housing laws.” This change allows development at the “highest applicable densities in either the general plan or zoning. Reducing the already meagre protections for the baylands ecosystem conflicts with the intent of the Countywide Plan. In our opinion, there should be no development allowed in baylands.

Further, baylands are probably the worst place to develop housing, particularly low-cost housing. As former tidal marsh, the baylands’ soil is bay mud (clay), which is inherently unstable and leaves any development vulnerable to ongoing differential settlement and subsidence. One needs only to look at developments on bay mud (Santa Venetia, Corte Madera, and

San Rafael) that are continuing to subside and are vulnerable to flooding. Subsidence continues for many years, although at a reduced rate. Building houses on baylands increases the risks for residents during floods and earthquakes. Impacts, will only increase over the long term as sea level continues to rise. .

While construction standards have improved to better withstand unstable soils, history demonstrates that baylands are still an inappropriate location for housing. Ensuring structural stability and resident safety when building on unstable soil is expensive and likely to generate only expensive housing. Also, the long-term stability of housing built on bay mud, even with modern building methods, is unknown, particularly with sea-level rise.

Allowing increased densities on “sensitive habitats” is further alarming. Marin supports rare habitats, the loss of which would have countywide and statewide significance. The proposed approach would lead to the direct loss of habitat for both state- and federally listed endangered and threatened species, and would eventually result in a decrease in sensitive species populations. Increasing densities on sensitive habitats also conflicts with state and federal endangered species laws.

As we stated in our comment letter to the Supervisors, the environmental community fought hard to protect the baylands and adopt the Baylands Corridor. The need for and importance of the Baylands Corridor designation does not change because there is a need for housing and the state has revised housing laws. We urged that the county reaffirm support for the protection of baylands and the San Francisco and San Pablo Bay ecosystems by:

- Rejecting the proposal to amend the development code to allow the highest-density development on baylands and sensitive habitats; and
- Reinstating Countywide Plan policies that protect the Baylands Corridor and sensitive habitats.

#### WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Send a message to your supervisor urging him/her to not allow our valuable bay resources to be destroyed. We all benefit from healthy ecosystems.

Find your Supervisor’s name and email address on the county’s website, if you don’t already know it. Supervisor email addresses are listed by the first initial of the person’s first name, followed by their last name, then @marincounty.org.

## Habitat Stewardship

### CORTE MADERA (AT THE ECOLOGICAL RESERVE) AND TRIANGLE MARSH



Bob Hinz

**Marin Country Day School Students pulling radish at Triangle Marsh**

We're lucky to have had help at Triangle Marsh and at Corte Madera this past month when a large group of sixth graders from Marin County Day School came to help with the habitat enhancement. The students worked at both sites removing Harding grass and digging and cutting other non-native plants, such as bristly oxtongue and fennel. It was such a large group (60 students) that they could not all be accommodated at one site. They switched sites so all had a chance to work at both. At Corte Madera some dug while others placed cardboard and a mulch of wood chips to prevent regrowth.

At Corte Madera, as students cut weeds with our volunteer Alison Pence, they came close to several Red-winged Blackbird nests and were introduced to a respectful encounter with wildlife – or, “Get Out Now.” Our thanks to Marin Country Day School sixth graders for helping with enhancement of the habitat at Triangle and Corte Madera marshes.

In addition, we hired the Conservation Corps North Bay to also help us control Harding grass at Corte Madera, a few weeks after the students helped with the Harding grass. (There is so much Harding grass, it's still not all treated) The Corps also dug out some plants and placed cardboard and mulch to cover the Harding grass.

We also had the Conservation Corps work at our property between The Redwoods

Retirement Community and Arroyo Corte Madera in Mill Valley. There the Corps' crew cut down invasive acacia trees and took them off to the transfer/composting center in San Rafael. Conservation Corps offer opportunities and experience with job training and learning skills to prepare young people for the job world.

### EARTH DAY CLEAN-UP A BIG SUCCESS

About 20 volunteers, mostly from the San Rafael Rotary Club, plus a Boy Scout Troop showed up to help clean up the San Rafael Shoreline on the city's Earth Day Shoreline Clean-up Day on April 20. Attention focused on the edges of Tiscornia marsh. The volunteers, including the Scout Troop, spread out along the shoreline and picked up trash. There was a small crew of three who went into the marsh led by Liz Ryan, a biological monitor from ESA we hired to make sure no trash pick-up took place in areas where there were rails. That crew worked impressively for two hours getting every sort of debris from plastic bags to couch cushions and lawn chairs. The amount of trash removed was impressive. At the same time we installed the “don't feed the wildlife” signs out in three languages to



Liz Ryan

**This trash was only part of what was collected.**

deter feeding of rats along the shoreline.

Our thanks to all of the volunteers, Marin Country Day students and the Rotary Club of San Rafael and to the City of San Rafael's Sustainability Coordinator, Cory Bytoff, who organized the Earth Day event.

### HABITAT STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

Harding grass will be blooming so we will cut it very short to retard and reduce seed production. Italian thistles are still blooming and now have seeds, but cutting them will keep the seeds from blowing in the wind and will give rodents the chance to eat the seeds. We will continue to mulch.

Be aware of birds and be careful not to disturb their nests wherever you are working. It is a great time to be outdoors and helping. Bring a friend!

Workdays continue through the summer. Join us. Earn community service hours. Help our native plants reclaim their home. It's an opportunity to learn more about a native habitat of your county and be a part of making it better. Make a difference.

#### Volunteer Workdays

**Triangle Marsh, East Corte Madera:**  
First Saturdays: June 1, July 6, August 3

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

**Corte Madera Ecological Reserve:**  
Second Saturdays: June 8, July 13, August 10

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

For up-to-date information, contact Martha Jarocki, [marthajarocki@gmail.com](mailto:marthajarocki@gmail.com) or phone 415/461-3592.

#### Bahia, Novato:

If you'd like to help, please contact Jude at [judestalker@gmail.com](mailto:judestalker@gmail.com).

### THANK YOU, DONORS

Lynne Apostle, Mariah Baird, Anne Baxter, Barbara Bensen & Robert Hinz, Klaus Beyer, Mark Birnbaum, Leslie Brown, Carol Budzinski, Linda & Mark Buetzow, Heather Cameron, Wayne & Gerri Cooper, Michael Day, Mike de La Cruz, Bonnie DeClark, Nusi Dekker, Andrea English, Robert & Michelle Friend, Abe Froman, Sarah Griffith, William Jones, Paul Larkin, Daphne Markham, Linda Miller, Larry Nilsen, Peggy Ostercamp, J Morrow Otis, Melville Owen, J Michael Phelps, Bill Remick, Jillian Robinson, Jane Singer, Deborah Sorondo, Barry Spitz, Peter & Marie Sullivan, Boren Swisher, Cynthia Theobald, Valorie Van Dahl, Vicky Van Meter, Douglas Wallace, Jim White, Donna Williams, Karen Young

### WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS

Robert Dimond, Harry Fussganger, Emma Jannes, Karen Kissler, Peggy Ostercamp, Kerrie Reilly, Kathleen Sanders-Curtis, Suzanne Steele

# Marin Birdlog: April 2024

By Noah Arthur



Rhododendrites, CC BY-SA 4.0 DEED

Palm Warbler

April is generally a low point of the year for vagrant occurrence in Marin, mostly highlighted by the welcome return of familiar faces as our common migrants pile into the region. A random grab bag of rarities still does always show up, starting this time with a **Snowy Egret** on the Fish Docks, rare for the Outer Point, on the 1st (BY). A singing **Nashville Warbler** was at Walker Creek Ranch on the 5th (MP), one of our rarer expected spring migrants in Marin. On the 7th, a **Swainson's Hawk** flew by in Bel Marin Keys (LC).

A **Ring-necked Pheasant** in Novato on the 9th (KW) is a head-scratcher of an occurrence, like many Marin records of this presumably naturalized but scarce exotic. Las Gallinas on the 8th produced a late **Swamp Sparrow** and an especially high count of **900 Cackling Geese** (DA).

Presumably the same, though long-absent, **Tropical Kingbird** that wintered at Bel Marin Keys Blvd. reappeared there on the 10th (JW), continuing at least to the 29th (LC). Also in Bel Marin Keys, a new male **Common Teal** showed up at Marsh Drive on the 12th (WL), probably a migrant rather than a local wintering bird.

One of the rarest finds of the month came on the 12th at Spaletta Ranch on the Outer Point, where **2 Palm Warblers** were a very unexpected surprise for April in Marin (DL). This species is extremely rare as a spring vagrant, and April 12th is early for spring vagrant warblers anyway, so these two Palms likely wintered undetected on the Point somewhere and had recently shaken loose from their winter territory when they were found. At least one of them continued at least until the 21st (OB). Interrupting the Palm Warbler viewing on the 12th was a fly-by **American Crow**, rare for the Outer Point (DL).

On the 15th a **Ruddy Turnstone** was on Pt. Reyes North Beach on the 15th (ML), **4 Varied Thrushes** were at the Fish Docks (SJ), and still very rare in Marin though perhaps not for long, **2 Scaly-breasted Munias** were in tules at McInnis Park (TM). On the 18th, two **American Crows** were at Drakes Beach (DS).



Ruddy Turnstone

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An unexpected first record for the Outer Point came on the 19th in the form of a **Wild Turkey** at the Lighthouse, providing rare photo opportunities as it flew over the water (DS).

Possibly settling in to breed in the area, a **Red-breasted Sapsucker** was drumming (not drilling) on a telephone pole just north of Bolinas on the 20th (CH). On the 21st a **Yellow-headed Blackbird** showed up at Marin French Cheese out west of Novato (ES), and a **Belted Kingfisher** was at the Fish Docks (JR). A classic April rarity in coastal California, a **Solitary Sandpiper** appeared at the end of Chileno Valley Rd. on the 22nd (CC). Also on the 22nd and possibly the latest ever in Marin, a **Swamp Sparrow** was still at Giacomini Wetlands (JE).

On the 25th, a **Sage Thrasher** turned up at Commonweal along the coast north of Bolinas (LB). Another very nice rarity came on the 27th, a **Brown Booby** plunging with a gull flock off Chimney Rock (MS & LS). Yet another Outer Point **American Crow** also showed up on the 27th at Lupine Gulch, along with a **Lark Sparrow**, also rare on the Point (MS & LS).

An exceptional count of **6 Ruddy Turnstones** was alongshore north of Abbotts Lagoon on the 29th (ML), plus an additional individual at the lagoon (CC). And another **Ruddy Turnstone** was at the estero mouth near Drakes Beach on the 30th (SE).

**OBSERVERS AND ACRONYMS:** BY: Bill Yeates, MP: Mataan Peter, LC: Lucas Corneliussen, OB: Owen Bowie, RB: Raurie Bowie, KW: Kristine Wiskes, DA: David Assmann, JW: Jim White, WL: William Legge, DL: Derek Lecy, ML: Matt Lau, TM: Tara McIntire, SJ: Suzanne Johannet, DS: Dan Singer, CH: Chris Henry, ES: Elliott Steinfelds, JR: Jane Rudebusch, OB: Owen Bowie, CC: Connor Cochrane, JE: Jules Evens, LB: Larissa Babicz, MS: Mark Stephenson, LS: Lucas Stephenson, SE: Sam Eberhard

## Farallon Islands Mice

*continued from page 2*

plan for island operations. Meeting priority safety and research needs will require costly infrastructure repairs and improvements, e.g., to the islands' freshwater supply and sanitation systems, the 1870s-era housing, and other elements.

The shortfall has also de-prioritized special projects such as the mouse eradication plan which would end their direct and indirect impacts on endemic species' survival and help restore the island's ecosystem balance. Of special concern is the recent sharp decline of the IUCN-Endangered Ashy Storm-Petrel. Although the plan will use rodenticides to permanently eradicate the mice, rendering it highly controversial, we agree with its scientific soundness and necessity.

Once the basic fiscal issues are resolved, which may require at least one or two years, and conditional on securing additional special project funding for the mouse plan, further action can proceed. In the meantime, while remaining fully supportive but pending fulfillment of these terms, the FWS regional office has delayed signing its Record of Decision (ROD). Though deferred, it remains a viable plan, and the Marin Audubon Society will continue to support this critical conservation work to restore the Farallon Islands ecosystem, with its rare and unique species, to full health and resilience.

## DONATE YOUR CAR TO MAS

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.

It's easy, just contact CARS. They will pick up your car, sell it, and after paying their costs, give the rest to Marin Audubon Society.

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



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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](http://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](http://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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