

**THURSDAY, DECEMBER 12 7:00 PM**

**Colombia: South America's Birding Mecca**

By Benny Jacobs-Schwartz



# The Rail

MARIN AUDUBON SOCIETY



Benny Jacobs-Schwartz

**Andean Cock-of-the-rock**

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

Get ready for a dive into South America's birdiest country! Together we'll explore Colombia's unique ecology, breathtaking scenery, and unparalleled avian diversity! Colombia holds the record with nearly 2,000 bird species and an impressive 80 endemics!

We'll discuss what has given rise to such incredible diversity. Topics include the country's five regions, how the Andes Mountain Range formed into three distinct cordilleras, the importance of the mighty Rio Magdalena, and national conservation successes. From sloth-eating Harpy Eagles to shy antpittas, and menageries of colorful tanagers and hummingbirds, Colombia's astonishing diversity will leave you wanting more!

Benny Isaac Jacobs-Schwartz owns and operates a bird-guiding business and lifestyle brand called BIRDS by BIJS (pronounced Bee-jus). With a background in biology, ecology, and outdoor education, Benny has worked for over 13 years as a naturalist guide, expedition trip leader, and international bird guide.

**THURSDAY, JANUARY 9, 2025 7:00 PM**

**Migratory Shorebirds**

Matt Reiter (Point Blue)

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## Air Tour Plan Lawsuit – We Won on the Merits

In response to our lawsuit, brought by the Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER), the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit rejected the environmental analysis of the Air Tour Plan over four San Francisco Bay Area national parks. The Plan had been adopted last year by the National Park Service (NPS) and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). The action was the result of a suit brought last year by PEER, representing the Marin Audubon Society, the Watershed Alliance, and a private individual. Marin Audubon's motivation is to protect the rich and diverse wildlife and natural resources of the four national parks: Point Reyes National Seashore, Golden Gate National Recreation Area, Muir Woods National Monument and San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park.

The court determined that the baseline used by the agencies was improper, arbitrary and capricious, because the agencies used the existing level of flights allowed under an interim operating authority as the baseline for assessing the environmental effects of the Plan. Identifying the environmental baseline is critical. In the court's opinion, "When conducting an environmental analysis of a proposed action under NEPA [National Environmental Policy Act], an agency should compare the action's projected environmental effects to the existing condition of the environment. Through this comparison an agency can determine the magnitude of the proposed action's environmental impacts." By treating the interim operating authority (the current condition) as the baseline, the agencies have weighted the scales in a way that obscures the true environmental effects of a plan. The agencies claim that "the impacts associated with the existing condition," along with the



Patrick Coxe, www.patrickcoxe.com

**This tour helicopter is the type of aircraft that, along with small planes, is currently permitted to fly over Bay Area National Parks.**

"mitigation measures" in the Plan, would "not result in significant adverse impacts," only because they were compared to the existing condition itself.

The other claims of our suit were not considered by the court. The opinion explained that because the agencies measured environmental impacts against an improper baseline, it needed not to consider the petitioners' argument that the agencies erred by excluding 2015–2016 flight data from that baseline. Nor did it need to address their contention that the interim operating authority did not qualify as an "approved action" for purposes of the approved-action categorical exclusion."

The court went beyond the relief sought in our suit. Observing that both parties' arguments centered on whether the agencies complied with regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality, an entity within the Executive Office of the President, "The Court's 2-1 conservative majority used the case as a vehicle to repudiate the validity of the Council on Environmental Quality regulation. CEQA regulations have been used for five decades to implement federal environmental review processes." Changing the regulatory authority

*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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At-large Director	Lowell Sykes 388-2821

## 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

I write with a heavy heart, thinking of what's ahead. We've faced challenging times before, but this time it's different. The potential impacts are broader, more pervasive, more global. Many aspects of our lives will be affected: environment, climate change, sea level rise, world relationships, health, and more. We can expect rollbacks, or attempted rollbacks, of protective laws and regulations covering many facets of our environment, such as clean air, water quality, endangered species, wetlands and other habitats.

As the National Audubon Society has committed to doing, we at Marin Audubon will strengthen our dedication to protect birds and the natural habitats they depend on, and the environmental laws that protect them and all of us. Locally we can make a difference by being involved. It's more important than ever that we stay connected with friends, family, community, nature, and folks with whom we share interests and goals. Our field trips are a wonderful way to connect with nature, with birds, and with other people who share similar pursuits. Getting out into nature can calm our anxieties and raise our spirits.

Working together can help achieve common goals and help us feel better at the same time. We'll continue to offer ways you can join MAS to take action supporting birds, wildlife, and their habitats. Joining our Conservation Committee to protect Marin's wildlife and their habitats and participating in our habitat work days are two of the ways you can have a direct beneficial impact on habitats, through hands-on activities.

One bright spot in the election was the passage of Proposition 4. With its win, at least we can count on state funding for restoration projects. Thank you to everyone who voted for the measure and to the coalition of environmental groups who worked for its passage. This positive news is particularly welcome at this troublesome time, when federal funding for habitat restoration projects will undoubtedly be greatly diminished or probably eliminated. Now, the real work will be to translate the bond funds into results on the ground—to show that the funds that will go to the Coastal Conservancy and Wildlife Conservation Board are a good investment. The wetlands that will be restored will reduce vulnerability to flooding while providing habitat for endangered resident and migratory species.

Christmas Bird Count planning has begun. Alison Pence has returned to head up the Southern Marin Count and coordinators for the other two counts are also returning. Consider participating in one or more of the

three Christmas Counts in Marin. For dates, how to sign up, and other information see the write up below.

You'll be receiving our winter appeal letter soon. The letter highlights our accomplishments and activities that we want to continue and expand. We depend on your generosity to keep our basic programs going. Your memberships are important but not enough. As you know, all of your contributions go to support our activities and programs. We hope you'll give generously.

As this newsletter will likely arrive after Thanksgiving, we hope you had a happy one. And have a happy December holiday and New Year! Get out and enjoy nature and the birds.

## 2024 Christmas Bird Counts

Three Christmas Bird Counts will be held in Marin this December. Dinner plans after the SMCBC will be announced soon!

Note to readers of the hard copy issue of *The Rail*: The links below for South Marin and Point Reyes CBC registration forms can be found on the Home page of Marin Audubon's website.

### Saturday December 14 – Point Reyes

Covering west Marin, including Tomales Bay and Point Reyes National Seashore. Register at [www.pointreyescbc.com](http://www.pointreyescbc.com) to get more information on the count and dinner.

### Thursday, December 19 – Cheep Thrills

Covering north Marin and extending into southern Sonoma County. Contact Susan Kelly at [cheepthrills@icloud.com](mailto:cheepthrills@icloud.com).

### Saturday, December 28 – Southern Marin

Covering much of east Marin and extending west as far as Bolinas and Stinson Beach. Contact Alison Pence, [smcbc.marinaudubon@gmail.com](mailto:smcbc.marinaudubon@gmail.com).

Please fill out the form here: <https://bit.ly/3OkfrSa> to volunteer for the Southern Marin Bird Count. Please email Alison Pence if you are willing to carpool.

## GIVE A GIFT OF AN MAS HAT

Our hats feature MAS's Ridgway's Rail logo embroidered on the front. The logo was designed by local artist Keith Hansen. The hats are constructed of high quality materials and made in the US.

Hats will be available to purchase in person on most field trips or by arrangement. The cost is \$30 per hat, payable by cash or check. To receive a hat by mail, please add \$8 for postage. To order, please contact Jude Stalker at [judestalker@gmail.com](mailto:judestalker@gmail.com).

## MAS FIELD TRIPS

Open to the public

MAS is providing a full schedule of free field trips for the 2024–2025 season.

**Registration is required for our trips** with size limits, which are used 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 A FEW MINUTES LATER.**

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

#### San Rafael

Thursday, December 5, 2024

Thursday, January 2, 2025

8:30 AM to noon

With Mark Clark

No registration or participant limit for this trip.

We welcome bird enthusiasts of all levels, especially beginning birders, to join leader Mark Clark on our monthly walk around the ponds at Las Gallinas. On our search we'll be looking for waterfowl, waders, songbirds, raptors and rails. Ducks have arrived, we are seeing teals, pintails, and shovelers. We are likely to spot some interesting species, so come assist in our search.

The packed dirt paths around the ponds are wide, flat and easy to navigate. Heavy rain cancels.

**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 a portable restroom in the parking area for public use.

### BAHIA, HORSESHOE POND & RUSH CREEK Birding in Marin, Season 9 – Trip 12

Saturday, December 7, 2024

8:30 AM to mid afternoon

With Jim White and Bob Battagin

Registration required. Registration opens November 27 at 8 AM on the MAS website's Field Trips page.

MAS acquired and restored to tidal action the diked baylands around the residential Bahia neighborhood. As the ebbing tide exposes the mudflats thousands of shorebirds now descend to feed while on the flood tide hundreds of ducks and some gulls float, forage and loaf about. The oak-wooded ridge stretching from Hwy 101 to Bahia, also saved from development by MAS, holds **Oak Titmice, White-breasted Nuthatch, Hutton's Vireo**, at least four woodpecker species and many sparrows in the winter.

Horseshoe Pond (Homeowners Lagoon) at the southeast end of Topaz is a great place to look for wintering ducks.

**Goldeneyes, Scaup, Canvasbacks, Buffleheads, and Mergansers** seem to like it and it has been Marin's best place for **Barrow's Goldeneyes** the last few years.

After lunch we plan to look at the nearby Rush Creek area from the Airport Rd which parallels Hwy 101 north of Atherton.

**DIRECTIONS:** From Hwy 101 in north

Novato take Atherton Ave east, take the Y left onto Bugeia which becomes Bahia Dr, near the end at the bottom of the hill take a right onto Topaz, follow Topaz to its end and park.

### STAFFORD LAKE

#### Novato

Saturday, December 7, 2024

9 AM to 1 PM

With Bob Atwood

No registration or participant limit for this trip.

Located west of Novato, Stafford Lake is a beautiful but less-birded area that is productive for waterfowl and raptors. Stafford Lake has had approximately 172 species of birds spotted at it through the years. The county park has facilities and plenty of parking. The mostly level terrain and water views make for pleasant birding as we walk around a portion of the lake and the surrounding area. Rain cancels.

**DIRECTIONS:** From Hwy 101 in Novato, take the exit for San Marin Dr west 2.9 miles. Turn right onto Novato Blvd and follow for 2.6 miles. The park is on the left. Turn left after the gatehouse and travel to the parking lot.

### OLIMPALI STATE HISTORIC PARK

Sunday, December 15, 2024

9 AM to 12:30 PM

With Rich Cimino (Yellowbilled Tours) and Evan Weissman (Olympali State Historic Park)

No registration or participant limit for this trip.

Join us to admire the winter birds of Olympali State Historic Park in Novato. We'll explore grassland, savannah, and riparian habitats, as well as the remnants of the 150-year-old Victorian garden. Expect to see and hear overwintering birds such as kinglets, warblers, sparrows, and maybe a **Red-breasted Sapsucker** or **Say's Phoebe**, as well as year-round residents including six woodpecker species, raptors, and quail.

We'll walk at a fairly slow pace, about 1.5 miles roundtrip, on wide gravel and dirt trails, with moderate slope in portions. Bring binoculars if you have them; we'll also have a few to loan. Rain cancels.

**DIRECTIONS:** Meet at 9 AM in the Olympali State Historic Park parking lot. There is no charge for the trip, but parking is \$8, payable by cash, check, or via smartphone with QR code at the parking lot. No fee is charged if you borrow a free State Park pass from your local public library.

### LAS GALLINAS VALLEY SANITARY DISTRICT AND HAMILTON WETLANDS Birding in Marin, Season 10 – Trip 1

Saturday, January 4, 2025

8:30 AM to mid afternoon

With Jim White and Bob Battagin

Registration required. Registration opens at 8 AM on December 26 on the MAS website's Field Trips page.

Bob and I are leading our Birding in Marin monthly first Saturday field trips for the tenth season sponsored by the MAS. Please join us as we go birding with a goal of finding and sharing 100 species at two of our prime wintering habitats for ducks, shorebirds, raptors and sparrows.

Las Gallinas is a great example of generating wildlife habitat with ample human access. This will be a 2 mile walk over a wide, flat packed dirt walkway with plenty of scope views to share closeups.

The Hamilton wetlands have been restored with intelligence, sensitivity, and precision. The birds and wildlife have appreciated this and come back in numbers that we expect to share. The walk is flat over a wide, mostly paved walkway, accessible via a ramp.

**DIRECTIONS:** From Hwy 101 in northern San Rafael take Smith Ranch Road east about a mile, just crossing the tracks turn left and park in 1/2 mile near the east end. Meet at Las Gallinas VSD parking lot.

### SKAGGS ISLAND ROAD

Wednesday, January 10, 2025

10 AM to 1:30 PM

With Daniel Edelstein

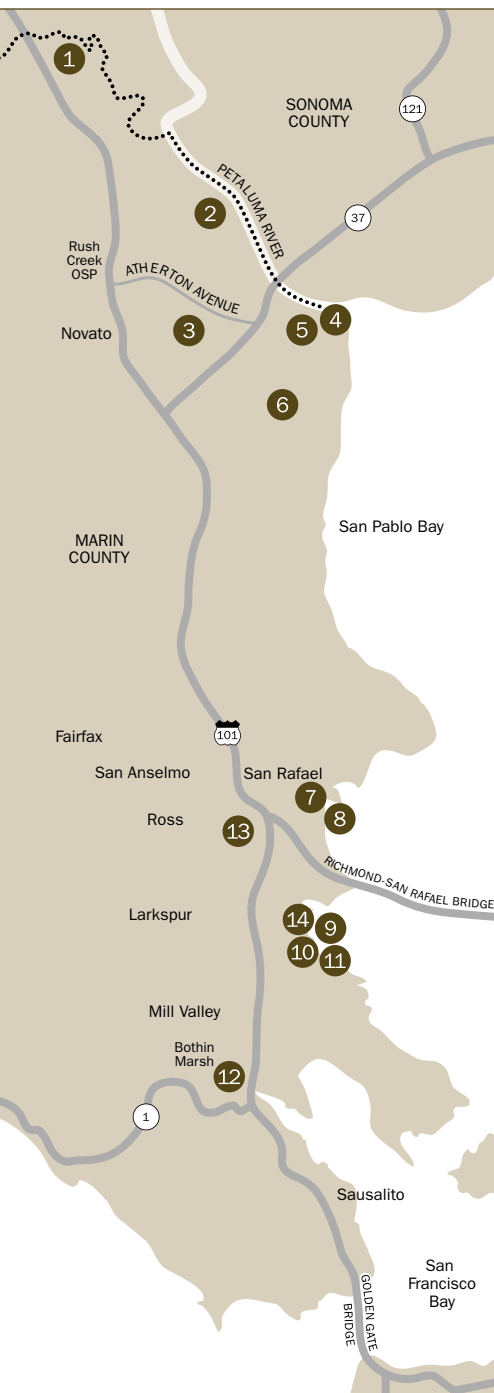
Registration required. Registration opens at 8 AM on December 31, 2024 on the MAS website's Field Trips page.

Daniel invites you to discover the joy of a wilderness-like paradise — Skaggs Island Road — that often attracts dozens of shorebird and duck family members, in addition to uncommon, visiting non-breeding raptors such as **Rough-legged Hawk, Ferruginous Hawk, and Merlin** (along with sightings of **White-tailed Kite** and other raptor species).

Skaggs Island Road has flat, level hiking for no more than 1.5 miles; bring your lunch, we'll eat at the bridge approximately 0.6 mile from the parking area at Hwy 37.

**DIRECTIONS:** Closed to the public, Skaggs Island Road is accessed by meeting our group in the parking area adjacent to Hwy 37 (approximately 3 miles east of Reclamation Rd and 2 miles east of the Hwy 121/Sears Point Raceway intersection (at the stoplight). We'll meet on the north side of Hwy 37 where it intersects with Skaggs Island Road. Here's a map link that shows where we'll meet: <https://bit.ly/3YYIJeg>.

Please be careful turning into this road when coming from Marin County. Oncoming traffic is often heavy.



## Air Plan Lawsuit

*continued from page 1*

to advisory authority would likely have significant effects on environmental review. That is a separate question in which PEER anticipates defending those regulations if necessary. PEER supports the strong dissenting opinion of Chief Judge Sri Srinivasan on that question.

The next steps are somewhat unclear, as the Court vacated the current plan, but the Court's majority invited the agencies and PEER to seek a stay. PEER recommends that the FAA and the NPS begin environmental review immediately.

## ANOTHER BLACK POINT PROPERTY ACQUIRED

It's been a while since we acquired a new property. We broke that pattern on November 5, when we closed escrow on a tax default property we had been working on for many months. The property is a small upland parcel adjacent to seasonal wetland and other adjacent upland parcels we own in this section of Black Point. This brings the number of parcels we own at Black Point to 20. Black Point consists of several coves (similar to Bahia, between Novato Creek and the Petaluma River, when peninsulas of oak wooded hills that, before being diked off, extended into the Petaluma River). Now the wetlands are seasonal. What a familiar story. Our hope is to gather enough small parcels to enable or promote restoration of tidal marsh, or at minimum, protect maximum habitat.

The process for nonprofits (schools, churches, environmental organizations, and others) to purchase properties is called Chapter 8. To be eligible for this program, through Marin County but overseen by the state, the properties must be maintained in uses that are in the public interest, in our case open space.

## MMWD LAWSUIT UPDATE

The preliminary ruling from Judge Andrew Sweet on our lawsuit against MMWD ("District") was favorable. The ruling, released just before the November 1 hearing, clarified that the court considered the objections of the District exclusively for the purpose of determining the extent of any harm the petitioners will face absent a preliminary injunction.

Judge Sweet reviewed the objections presented by the District:

The District objected to the testimony of David Long, of the California Native Plant Society (CNPS), where he quoted and paraphrased botanist Andrea Williams, saying that he was neither an expert in trail design

nor a botanist. This objection was partially overruled by the Judge. The aspects of Mr. Long's testimony about trails the District objected to were the poor and dangerous conditions, the damage to plants from people having to step off the trails to avoid obstructions, and the danger of fast-moving bikes and motorized bikes. These objections were dismissed by the Judge.

Judge Sweet also overruled District objections to Barbara Salzman's testimony, finding that Ms. Salzman's long years of experience qualified her as an expert, and to Robert Eichstadt, preparer of the overlay maps showing northern spotted owl critical habitat and activities centers in relation to trails. The District objected to Mr. Eichstadt on the basis that he was not an expert. The judge dismissed this objection because Eichstadt was simply providing a factual account, based on his professional knowledge, of how he creates certain documents; he was not offering an opinion as an expert witness.

The amicus brief filed on behalf of E-Bike Access was rejected because there was no request for permission to file it, as is required by the Court.

The draft ruling rejected all claims for "exemptions." Below are the exemptions MMWD claimed for the Trail Sharing Pilot Program and a summary of Judge Sweet's analysis:

- "Exemption" for "no expansion of use": The District claimed that the Trail Sharing program does not involve any expansion of use, or if it does, it is negligible. The judge responded that the District did not provide the required substantial evidence that visitors are already using conventional bicycles on the nine trails at issue, or that they are doing so at a rate similar to that which is anticipated to be generated by the pilot program. In fact, the District provided no evidence at all.
- The ruling on the "exemption" for "no expansion of use" stated that the District provided no evidence that would allow comparison of the rates of illegal e-bike use before the pilot program with anticipated use afterward.
- Regarding the "necessary maintenance and repairs" exemption, the District focused on the pilot program taking place within the footprint of the existing trails without increasing capacity. The judge found that this was not relevant to the intent of this exemption.
- For the "minor alterations" exemption, the District never identified what the alterations are. And finally, the "data collection" exemption requires that the data collection

## MARIN AUDUBON PROPERTIES

1. Petaluma Marsh Expansion Site	180 acres
2. Bahia	60 acres
3. Simmons Slough	144 acres
4. Norton Avenue Pond	4 parcels
5. Black Point Parcels	many parcels
6. Arroyo San Jose	2 parcels
7. Tiscornia Marsh	20 acres
8. Tidelands and Murphy's Rock	34 acres
9. San Clemente Creek Tidelands	4.34 acres
10. End of Channel Drive	1 acre
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

be the purpose of the project, which it is not.

The court concluded that we (California Native Plant Society, MAS and the Marin Conservation League) “made a very modest showing of interim harm in the absence of a preliminary injunction” and that “the District made no showing of interim harm.” The court’s preliminary conclusion was to grant a preliminary injunction.

The hearing on the temporary injunction took place before Judge Sweet in Marin Superior Court on November 1 in person and via zoom. At the hearing, the attorney for MMWD testified that the E-bike Class 1 Trail and Trail Sharing Pilot Programs were really two separate projects, with independent utility; therefore, the impacts for each would be minimal and the projects should go forward with no CEQA review.

As we go to press, we still haven’t received a final ruling from Judge Sweet, but we’re expecting one soon.

## WHAT’S HAPPENING AT DRAKE’S ESTERO?

Many will remember the bitter fight in 2014 over the 2,500-acre Drake’s Estero. The operator of the aquaculture facility, Kevin Lunny, pressured the National Park Service to remain in business even though the lease termination date had been agreed upon years before. The dispute pitted some environmentalists against others who felt oyster farms were environmentally benign, or even beneficial. What a difference a few years makes.

A recent article, “Biologists Restored an Estuary to Revive Eelgrass. Then an Otter Swam 118 miles to Reach it” by Avani Skye Fachon, gives a window to the transformation that has taken place in the Estero’s habitat since termination of the aquaculture operation.

In 1916-17, after the oyster lease was terminated, the estuary underwent a cleanup, a removal of 95 wooden racks that were embedded at the bottom, along with millions of non-native Pacific oysters. Many racks were made of pressure-treated wood, which means they were treated with toxic preservative chemicals. An additional 2.8 million pounds of aquaculture debris, oyster shells, metal racks, plastic rope, and cement, that had been accumulating for over 50 years, were also removed.

With the debris removed, underwater and aerial photos showed an amazing 11.376 square feet of new eelgrass had sprouted on the estuary’s floor just three years after the cleanup. “There was so much new eelgrass that the plots were almost unrecognizable,” chief researcher Sara Codde reported. Eelgrass is growing over



**A small sample of the aquaculture debris removed from the bottom of Drake’s Estero.**

the scars and channels left by the vessels that managed the oyster racks, and they are getting harder to find.

Then, as an added surprise, in 2021 an 18-month-old southern sea otter, which had been released by the Monterey Bay Aquarium, swam 118 miles from Monterey Bay, through shark-infested waters, to reach Drake’s Estero. She set a record for the most miles traveled the first two weeks after her release. She had been at the aquarium since she was three weeks old.

Eelgrass and sea otters have co-evolved for 700,000 years. Eelgrass creates an ecosystem that provides a nursery for many species of fish and invertebrates, including Pacific herring, crabs, sea hares and slugs. Flocks of migratory birds rely on eelgrass beds and on the many species of fish and invertebrates they harbor. In addition, eelgrass effectively sequesters carbon – two to four times more than terrestrial forests.

As Fachon wrote: “Estuaries like this one are thought to be among the most productive and diverse ecosystems in the world, serving as a wildlife refuge, corridor, nursery, and feeding ground for innumerable marine and terrestrial animals. The Estero is one of only two marine wilderness areas in the U.S. and is home to creatures as diverse as the elusive leopard shark, the tiny comma shrimp, and the shy harbor seal.”

### WHAT YOU CAN DO TO PROTECT THE ESTERO:

- **Obey the rules.** Drake’s Estero is closed to canoeing and kayaking from March 1 through June 30 to protect pupping harbor seals.
- **Pick up a reusable bag** from one of the National Park Service’s beach cleanup stations to help collect and remove remaining debris.
- **Read Avani Fachon’s full article** on the NPS website. It first appeared in the Summer 2024 edition of the NPS’s Park Science magazine.

## RICHARDSON BAY EELGRASS

Let’s hope the Richardson Bay eelgrass beds follow the same pattern as at Drake’s Estero. On October 30, the Richardson Bay Regional Agency (RBRA) celebrated the dedication of the “no-anchor” zone on Richardson Bay and the beginning of the Richardson Bay eelgrass restoration funded by a major grant from the EPA. Establishment of the no-anchor zone was part of the resolution of the anchor-out problems on Richardson Bay. There are still 10 boats anchored in the zone, but the RBRA is planning a more active effort to remove those boats, either by relocating them to on-land housing or other means.

The event was upbeat with lots of supporters from elected officials, agency representatives, funders, and other supporters in attendance. The RBRA has come a long way in the last few years in restoring the bay and removing the anchor-outs from it, an action that was required 30 years ago in the Richardson Bay Special Area Plan.

### JOIN OUR TEAM – MAS SEEKS OUTREACH CHAIR

Our Board is searching for a new Outreach Chair whose primary responsibilities are.

- Maintain and update our website
- Send monthly event announcements to list
- Manage ticketbud listings for field trips
- Post special events on website

Contact Nominating Committee for information: Mike Anderson, [mdander65@gmail.com](mailto:mdander65@gmail.com); Alison Pence, [alipence9@gmail.com](mailto:alipence9@gmail.com); or Lelia Lanctot, 924-6138.

## HABITAT STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

We have had some rain and we have a few plants to put in the ground but it is not a big planting year at either Triangle or CMMERE.

Many annuals have sprouted after the rain but they are too small to be on our to-do list. We will continue to make progress in removing some invasive perennials from locations close to native species.

Students can 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: December 7, January 4

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

#### Corte Madera Ecological Reserve:

Second Saturdays: December 14, January 11

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, Stewardship Volunteers

Annette Anzalone, Bob Hinz, Susan Meffert and Eiden Metcalfe, Linda Nicoletto, Alison Pence, Martha Jarocki, Chloe Roos, Lowell Sykes

## WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS

Richard Abruzzo, Laura Adler, Johanna Boero, Jim Brovelli, Phillip Collins, Johathan Frieman, Natalie Gill, Fanny Glasser, Robert Hostetter, William Hutchinson, Marilyn Kausch, Matthew Lingner, Lyzy Lusterman, Morgan Manning, George Martinez, Laurence Minikes, Cecil Nielsen, Kathryn Norris, Barbara Ruffino, Doug Scott, Bruce Scott, Tyson Smith, Tamara Sweger, Ari Taylor, Cooper Weingart

## THANK YOU, DONORS

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## Habitat Stewardship



Jude Stalker

**Members of the Board of Directors on annual field trip to MAS properties.**

### BOARD FIELD TRIP

On November 3rd, members of the MAS board visited half of our properties, those in southern Marin, on our Annual Property Tour. Most of the properties are looking good, but some issues were present on a few. There was

new fill in the wetlands at our CalPark site that will have to be reported to regulatory agencies. At Tiscornia, tower construction has progressed, and the new tower is partially constructed. Its base is considerably larger than the current tower. At our Redwoods Creekside property, along Arroyo Corte Madera, the invasive fennel is a concern, but our three Corte Madera properties all look good.

### BAHIA AND NEARBY

This past month we hired the Conservation Corps North Bay to remove the highly invasive *Dittrichia* from our neighbor's, the Novato Sanitary District, property adjacent to our Bahia property. We hired them to remove the *Dittrichia* to avoid its seeds blowing over onto our property. The crew was also able to remove some plants that were on our property on the other side of the fence.

## Breeding Bird Atlas Completes Year Four

By Liz Lewis

We are excited to share with you the release of our 2024 Marin County Breeding Bird Atlas Annual Report, available on our website at: <https://bit.ly/3AHXIXn>. This project replicates a landmark effort completed forty years ago by Dave Shuford and Point Blue Conservation Science (then Point Reyes Bird Observatory) under the sponsorship of MAS. While the second Atlas also incorporates an online Data Explorer mapping tool curated by GIS Analyst William Wiskes, the foundation of both efforts is a cadre of dedicated and skilled volunteers documenting breeding bird behaviors across Marin. The report chronicles what everyone's efforts are producing, what we are learning, and our plans for 2025, and beyond.

A goal of this Atlas (or any Atlas) is to compare the number of species exhibiting possible, probable, and confirmed breeding behaviors in a defined area or block. The Data Explorer tool allows one to view the distribution and breeding status of species documented in Marin for both the first Atlas and the ongoing second Atlas. A block is deemed "complete" when we've documented as many species with confirmed or probable breeding codes as during the first Atlas. In 2024, we used several new strategies to increase block completion including "block busting" and targeted passive surveys for **Great Horned Owls, Barn Owls, Western Screech Owls, and Common Poorwills**. This process was bolstered by the data we brought in from partner agencies and institutions. The 2024 report documents how we used these strategies



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### Rock Wren

to preliminarily complete 148 blocks out of 221 (or 67%) with another 51 blocks over 60% complete. This data will be used to direct where mop-up surveys are needed in 2025.

We added eight more confirmed breeding species in 2024 including **Sharp-shinned Hawk, Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Rock Wren, Black-crowned Night Heron, Barred Owl, Western Tanager and MacGillivray's Warbler**, bringing the total number of confirmed breeding species to 144! The report details all the species with documented evidence of breeding and you can search the Atlas website via our online Data Explorer, to search for species of interest to you.

As we prepare for the 5th and final year of Atlas surveys in 2025, we are eager to fill in the remaining data gaps. You can begin as early as December to contribute data to the Atlas by submitting breeding behavior observations for early breeders such as **Great Horned Owls** and

*continued on page 7*

# Marin Birdlog: October 2024

By Noah Arthur



John Leffmann/Wikipedia, CC BY 4.0

White Wagtail

October of 2024 will be remembered as one of the least-productive “peak” fall months in Marin birding history. Northwest winds and clear skies kept most vagrants away, but a few mega-rarities added excitement to a month mostly lacking the expected Eastern warblers. A **White Wagtail** was found at Rodeo Lagoon on Sept. 29th (DC), and October kicked off with a **Tropical Kingbird** (DA) and **Prairie Warbler** (??) found at Rodeo Lagoon on the 1st by successful wagtail chasers. The wagtail was later identified as the ‘Black-backed’ subspecies, based on its entirely white wing-covert panel.

On the 4th, a **Mountain Plover** turned up at Abbotts Lagoon (JC). A very rare warbler at a very

random location, a **Cape May Warbler** stopped in at the Shorebird Marsh overlook on the 4th (RH). Early, and rare from shore at any season, a juvenile **Black-legged Kittiwake** flew by Rodeo Lagoon on the 6th (WL). Also on the 6th and rare for the Outer Point, a **Hooded Merganser** was on the Mendoza Ranch pond (NW).

A steady trickle of **Black Swifts** and **Broad-winged Hawks** passed over Hawk Hill early in the month, as usual, joined on the 5th by two flyover **Lawrence’s Goldfinches** (SR).

Rare nearshore and exceedingly rare onshore, a juvenile **Long-tailed Jaeger** was sitting on Abbotts Lagoon on the 7th (MD). Another Rodeo Lagoon **Tropical Kingbird** occurred on the 9th (JA). Getting rarer by the year, a **Loggerhead Shrike** was along the trail to Abbotts on the 12th (SS).

A pelagic boat moved through Marin waters on the 13th, scoring another **Long-tailed Jaeger**. The **Yellow-crowned Night-heron** returned for its fifth(?) winter in Sausalito on the 18th (SSi).

The second **White Wagtail** of the month, this one with separate white wing-bars, appeared at Abbotts Lagoon on the 18th (PK) hanging with some pipits on the lagoon shore.

Probably underreported in California, an **Eastern Orange-crowned Warbler** (subspecies celata) was in Stinson Beach on the 19th (NA). Also on the 19th, a **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** was at Lupine Gulch on the Outer Point (MS), along with a (rare for the Outer Point) **Spotted Towhee** (EM). Another subtle warbler, a **Myrtle X Audubon’s Warbler hybrid** was at Abbotts on the 21st (DM).

Rare on the Outer Point, a **Hairy Woodpecker** turned up at Fish Docks on the 22nd (RT).

Another big-ticket eastern rarity in a random location was a **Great Crested Flycatcher** at Pacheco Creek Trail on the 22nd (BM).

The rarest vagrant of the month, an immature **Mississippi Kite** that initially caused some understandable ID confusion, passed Hawk Hill on the 23rd (finder?).

A pelagic trip picked up **Long-tailed Jaeger** and **Flesh-footed Shearwater** in Marin waters on the 24th, along with a very unexpected passenger in the form of a **Grasshopper Sparrow** resting on the boat.

A small late push of vagrants occurred on the Outer Point on the 25th, including **American Redstarts** at Lighthouse and New Willows (EM), **Lawrence’s Goldfinch** at the Lighthouse (EM), and **American Crows** at Lighthouse (EM), and New Willows (AZ), the latter possibly the same bird.

Another Outer Point **Broad-winged Hawk** flew over at the Fish Docks on the 26th (AL), and a honking **Snow Goose** flew by the road to Fish Docks on the 31st (JW).



Hairy Woodpecker

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**OBSERVERS AND ACRONYMS:** DA: David Assmann, JC: Jim Chiropolos, RH: Roger Harshaw, JG: Jared Geiser, WL: William Legge, NW: Nils Warnock, SR: Sonja Raub, MD: Mark Dettling, JA: Jan Ambrosini, SS: Susanna Singer, SSI: Sylvie Silverstein, PK: Parker Kaye, NA: Noah Arthur, MS: Mark Stephenson, EM: Eddie Monson, DM: Dominik Mosur, RT: Robert Thoren, BM: Brandon Madsen, AZ: Andrew Zylka, AL: Andrew Lee, JW: Jim White

## FIELD TRIP REPORT

### Gray Lodge Wildlife Area

By Alison Pence

We had six people come North for the mid-week trip to Gray Lodge on October 29. The group had a variety of birding skill levels but everyone had a good time. One of our participants used eBird to count and make lists that could be shared with everyone. The sheer number and variety of species was thrilling to see.

Gray Lodge is at the top of Sutter Buttes and is known for its winter migratory waterfowl. We saw sandhill cranes, snow geese, white-fronted geese and all manner of ducks. Historically, the birds would fly out to the flooded rice fields to feed in the morning but since the use of drip irrigation, they fly in and out all day. If you have never seen (or heard) a sky full of birds, you will be astonished by this display.

At Parking lot 14, we walked the Nature Trail (1.5 miles) a wooded levee with views of the marsh. Then continued from there in our cars to the Auto Loop.

It is very comfortable to bird by car. Regardless of temperature or bugs, you can see quite a lot and stop and start at your own pace. My favorite moment was seeing a dozen sand hill cranes approach, fly over, and land right in front of us!

**IF YOU GO:** You can take Interstate 5 all the way to Williams, but I recommend taking Highway 99 to see the country. Use your maps in satellite mode to get a view of the giant, now dormant, Sutter Buttes volcano. Geologists think it may be part of the Shasta and Lassen formation. Make sure you have plenty of gas, use your headlights, and watch for trucks on these roads.

### Breeding Bird Atlas

*continued from page 6*

**Anna’s Hummingbirds.** Breeding behaviors to look for are described on the **Atlas Incidental Data Entry Portal** which can be found on the right side of the Atlas page.

Thanks to MAS and our individual donors’ support, our Year Four report is a testament to everyone who has contributed to and supported the Atlas since its inception, and we are grateful to the many who made the Atlas effort possible this year and continue to contribute to its success.



# The Rail

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January 4 **Field Trip:** Las Gallinas Valley  
8:30 AM Sanitary District and Hamilton  
Wetlands  
With Jim White and Bob Battagin

January 9 **Speaker Series:** Migratory  
7 PM Shorebirds  
With Matt Reiter (Point Blue)

January 10 **Field Trip:** Skaggs Island Road  
10 AM With Daniel Edelstein

February 1 **Field Trip:** Sausalito/Strawberry  
8:30 AM With Jim White and Bob Battagin

Check website for updates and details

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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.

## 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.

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