

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 13 7:00 PM

Bay Area Wildlife Guide

Jeff Miller



Jeff Miller

Burrowing Owl

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

Jeff Miller will discuss his book "Bay Area Wildlife: An Irreverent Guide," a quirky and entertaining wildlife guide to the greater San Francisco Bay Area. Featuring over 100 native creatures, from mammals to invertebrates, this informative primer is a treasure map for regional wildlife. Learn about the Bay Area's furred, feathered, and fork-tongued neighbors – from "screaming death parrots" (aka peregrine falcons) to "bad-ass Looney Tunes velociraptors" (roadrunners). The book's colorful descriptions cover each species' natural history and fun facts, tips on when and where to find watchable wildlife, and notes on each animal's conservation status.

Jeff is the founder of the nonprofit Alameda Creek Alliance, serving as its executive director since 1997. Over the last quarter century, he has been involved in conservation efforts for dozens of the most iconic imperiled wildlife species in the Bay Area, from tule elk to steelhead trout.

THURSDAY, MARCH 13 7:00 PM

Beavers: Worth a Dam

Heidi Perryman, Worth a Dam

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The Rail

MARIN AUDUBON SOCIETY

Another Black Point Property Acquired

As mentioned in last month's *Rail*, we were scheduled to close on another Black Point acquisition at the end of December. We're pleased to report that we successfully closed escrow on the property. (One never knows with default parcels.) The current owners can pay off their taxes up to the designated closing date. This property was purchased under Chapter 8, a federal program that allows nonprofit organizations to acquire properties on which owners have failed to pay their taxes. The properties are purchased for the amount of back taxes owed, and they must be protected and maintained in a use that benefits the public. In our case, that use is open space.

This brings to 23 the number of parcels owned by Marin Audubon at Black Point. That number will change to 21 when we combine this parcel with the two adjacent parcels we acquired from a private owner last month. We have actually purchased more properties, but we combine parcels when we can, to reduce our parcel taxes. In order to be combined, parcels need to be adjacent to each other.

As noted last month, this purchase enables us to protect an expanded habitat for native wildlife that lives in the Black Point area. Our partner, Marin Baylands Advocates, covered the cost of acquiring this property as they have with other Chapter 8 purchases.

Farallon Islands Wildlife Need Your Support

Just 27 miles off the coast of San Francisco and Marin, the Farallon Islands support the largest seabird nesting colonies on the West Coast as well as marine mammals and endangered plants and invertebrates. Point Blue Conservation Science has been a presence on the islands for 60 years, conducting critical research and providing continuous protection for the seabirds and marine mammals. All that will end if funding is not found. The current threat is not the house mice, it's the potential loss of people on the island.

Last year the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) was mandated to make budget cuts across the entire agency. As a result, the USFWS will cease providing the \$250,000 annual funding for research. This funding loss will reduce vital ecological research and put the wildlife themselves at risk. It will mean the islands will be left unattended for at least several months of the year, leaving the habitats vulnerable to vandals and risking the very safety of the many marine mammals and birds that depend on the islands.

One-quarter of California's breeding seabirds, at least one of which is threatened by the non-native house mice, and five species of breeding pinnipeds depend on the islands. There is no other place as essential to our marine wildlife. Concern about the impacts of the mice is taking a back seat to the current threat.

Point Blue is not just a presence on the islands – its staff and interns conduct essential research of marine birds, including breeding success, oiled birds, and feeding flocks, as well as pinniped surveys, tagging, sightings of whales and dolphins, and surveys and banding of non-breeding birds (migrating birds that land on the island). Regular surveys of indigenous salamander, vegetation, and bats are conducted in the fall. Annual assessment of marine algae and invertebrates takes place in partnership with the Greater Farallones National Marine Sanctuary.

Adjacent waters are surveyed for sharks, particularly white shark predation. Vessels near the islands, including commercial, fishing, and sightseeing, are documented daily. Documentation and enforcement of land and marine access restrictions, including closed areas for boats, take place. Overflights and fishing violations are recorded. Many or most of these surveys would be eliminated or significantly reduced, potentially leaving major gaps in the contiguous 20-year research.

Point Blue's research has contributed to significant conservation actions such as the establishment of marine sanctuaries and marine protected areas, changes in gill net fisheries, a white shark protection bill in 1993, and new

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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

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Outreach, Media	Michele Miller lavocat14@gmail.com
Outreach, Website	Elyse Omernick outreach@marinaudubon.org
Speaker Series	Mike Anderson 990-9784
Special Projects	Jude Stalker 680-6291
Nominating	Michael Anderson mdander65@gmail.com Alison Pence alipence9@gmail.com
Newsletter Editor, <i>The Rail</i>	Doug Waterman newsletter@marinaudubon.org
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Property Real Estate	James Raives 497-4492
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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

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

The beginning of the new year has been overwhelming. So many things are happening. The horrific fires in Southern California have devastated the lives of many people, many human communities and, undoubtedly, natural communities. Although the focus of the news reports is on the loss of structures, there are natural areas within the heavily urbanized area of the fire footprint; e.g., Will Rogers State Park and Runyan Canyon. Habitat for the birds and other wildlife is destroyed as well. This catastrophic event is a reminder of our vulnerability to the forces of nature. Our fires in Marin and Northern California are also wind-driven.

As we go to press, the federal administration in Washington is changing, and we're bracing for the changes that will undoubtedly take place in environmental protections that have been so important to our habitats. Reduced federal funding for restorations and acquisitions, and diminished or eliminated regulations, are some changes we fear are coming. Others we haven't even thought of are also likely. While we're facing the next four years with trepidation, we'll take each issue as it comes and do our best to keep working to protect the ecosystems at risk.

We're finding ourselves depending increasingly on courts and legal assistance in our conservation work. This month we learned that well-meaning organizations have sued the US Fish and Wildlife Service over the loss of individual owls under the Barred Owl Management Plan, with no apparent interest in the potential loss of Northern Spotted Owls. This is similar to the non-native house mice on the Farallones, where opponents of the removal of the mice expressed no interest in the deaths of individual Storm Petrels or the impact on the Farallones' ecosystem. That people sympathize with non-native species that are impacting native wildlife and ecosystems and not with the loss of our native species consistently amazes me.

On the positive side, the MAS board has approved our accepting a grant from the state coastal conservancy to participate in the Regional Living Shoreline Project. We will be managing the planning for three projects in Marin and coordinating with two other projects in San Francisco and the East Bay. More next month on this exciting opportunity that will inform future restoration projects in the Bay.

A huge "Thank You" to all who have donated to our winter appeal. Donors have been generous, and all of the gifts will be put to constructive use to benefit our wildlife and habitats. With no staff or office, our administrative costs are minimal. For members who have not donated, it is not too late to send

a check to our PO box or donate online using a credit card or PayPal.

We have a special need for someone to take over the technical side of our outreach program. You need not be a tech expert, but it would be helpful to have some knowledge and certainly an interest in learning. The job involves sending monthly alerts for our field trips and programs, keeping our website current by adding monthly activities, and general upkeep. For more information, contact a member of our Nominating Committee (see box below).

I want to apologize if sometimes our newsletter arrives too late for you to participate in an activity or comment on an issue. When *The Rail* actually becomes available on our website, via email or USPS depends on a number of factors: writer submissions, editing and production time, how busy our printer and the post offices are, and the speed of your mail carrier. So, sometimes the publication date turns out to be later than we planned for. We try our best to get it to you in a timely manner.

Sorry no space this month for Stewardship activities.

As usual, do get out and enjoy the diversity of waterfowl and shorebirds that are overwintering with us. They'll be off to the north to breed in a few months. Don't miss out this year.

Join Our Team

MAS's Nominating committee is looking for members interested in being involved with MAS as a Board member. In particular we are searching for a new Outreach Chair whose primary responsibilities are to manage the technical side of our outreach.

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

Contact Nominating Committee for information on Board membership and the Outreach position specifically:

Mike Anderson, mdander65@gmail.com; Alison Pence, alipence9@gmail.com; or Lelia Lanctot, 924-6138.

WINGED MIGRATION EXPO

The Winged Migration Expo, with bird-focused presentations, informative tables and field trips, is set for February 1-2 on Mare Island. Admission is free.

MAS will be participating in this new event and we encourage all birders and nature lovers to visit.

For a schedule of activities, please visit wingedmigrationexpo.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, February 6, 2025

Thursday, March 6, 2025

8:30 AM to noon

With Mark Clark

All participants are welcome to join this trip.

We welcome bird enthusiasts of all levels, especially beginning birders, to join leader Mark Clark on our monthly first Thursday walk around the ponds at Las Gallinas. On our search we'll be looking for waterfowl, waders, songbirds, raptors and rails. 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.

REDWOOD-SAN ANDREAS MARSH AND PIPER PARK

San Rafael

Saturday, February 15, 2025

8:30 AM to noon

With Rich Cimino

All participants are welcome to join this trip.

This field trip is a twofer: We will bird the Redwood-San Andreas Marsh, located behind Redwood High School in Larkspur on Lucky Drive, and Piper Park pine forest and athletic field. During low tides, the marsh supports shorebirds and waders, and during high tides, it supports many duck species and waders.

After visiting the Redwood-San Andreas Marsh, we'll move on to Piper Park, which is located off Doherty Road behind the police station. Piper Park has an Oak-Pine ornamental "forest" around its picnic area, which can have **Pygmy Nuthatches**, **Pine Siskins**, three species

of woodpeckers, and **Red-breasted Sapsuckers**. The athletic field may have **Canada Geese**, **White-fronted Geese**, **Cackling Geese**, **American Pipits**, **Western Meadow Larks**, **Western Blue Birds**, and **Says Phoebe**. Piper Park has a restroom.

The field trip ends at noon. Those who want to enjoy the picnic grounds bring your lunch and drinks. Rain cancels.

DIRECTIONS: Meet at the DMV parking lot located at 75 Tamal Vista Blvd in Corte Madera. We'll take a short walk to reach the marshlands.

WINTER BIRDS OF THE DELTA BOAT TRIP

Antioch Marina

Sunday, February 16, 2025

8:40 AM to 4 PM

With David Wimpfheimer

Registration required. Registration opens at 8 AM on January 19, 2025 on the MAS website's Field Trips page.

This cruise is a winter highlight for birders and provides a specialized look at the richness and history of the California Delta. From the Antioch Marina we head east, entering sloughs and waterways that provide wildlife views you'd never get from the land. Along with the flocks of snow geese, white fronted geese and **Tundra swans**, numerous ducks, shorebirds, and raptors are usually spotted. Well known birder and naturalist David Wimpfheimer will provide commentary and Captain Ronn Patterson will add a glimpse into the history and culture of this unique region.

Coffee, tea, hot chocolate is provided, bring lunch and snacks. Light rain does not cancel the trip, but high winds/heavy rain might. If necessary, the trip will be rescheduled. After meeting at 8:40 for sign in and instructions, we'll depart from the Antioch Marina at 9 AM.

The trip costs \$130. A waitlist will open if the trip sells out. Add your name to the list by clicking Contact Organizer prompt. If you cancel your registration one week before the start of the trip and we can fill your spot with someone else on the waitlist, you will be reimbursed unless you would like to convert your registration fee into a donation to MAS

DIRECTIONS: Registered participants will receive an email with directions and information about a week before the trip.

VALLEY FORD WETLANDS AND DILLON BEACH

Birding in Marin, Season 10 – Trip 3

Saturday, March 1, 2025

9 AM to mid afternoon

With Jim White and Bob Battagin

Registration required. Registration opens at 8 AM on February 19, 2025 on the MAS website's field trips page

The Valley Ford Wetlands span the Marin/Sonoma County line less than a mile West of Highway 1 and just a few lies from the mouth of Tomales Bay and the Pacific coast at Dillon Beach. This involves for most of us a drive to the northwest corner of Marin so I'd like to recommend carpooling and delaying our meeting time to 9 AM. (Three can ride with me from Muir Beach at 8 AM).

Wading birds such as the **Pacific Golden Plover** and **White Faced Ibis** and many swallows including **Bank Swallows** have been seen there in recent years. The rolling grassland pastures southwest a few miles from the coast can harbor many raptors, mostly **Red Tails** and **Kestrels**, but **Ferruginous** even **Rough-legged Hawks** and **Eagles** may sometimes be seen.

There is a \$10 dollar parking fee to visit Dillon beach, but the views and the potential birds are good. The rocky tip of Marin, often obscured by fog, is just over a mile west, and the south edge of Bodega Bay and the mouth of Tomales Bay exchange a vast amount of water as the tide changes.

Bring lunch, dress in layers. Heavy rain cancels.

DIRECTIONS: Take Rt 1 north through Marin or the Valley Ford Rd west from Petaluma to Valley Ford then from its northwest edge take Valley Ford Estero Rd west a mile where there is ample parking on the road edge and meet on the bridge. For a shorter route from San Rafael and Novato, take Hwy 101 north to Railroad Ave, exit 479 and work your way west to Valley Ford and make a left on Valley Ford Estero Rd, approximately one mile and park on the side of the road, near the bridge.

HABITAT STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

The first weeks of January were nearly rainless, but the earlier rains have produced a lot of growth. The weeds are taking a lot of water out of the soil, so weed control and mulching will be the important for the California natives.

Mulching can be weed control; most weeds in the dark under deep mulch are not going to grow. Annual grasses are thick at Corte Madera Marsh so cutting or mowing them and covering the stubble with mulch will save water for more desirable species. Harding grass, too, will be set back if it is cut short.

Mustard and bristly oxtongue are growing rapidly but have few flowers. They can spread rapidly if they mature so let's cut them off early. Italian thistle is abundant at Triangle but still very small.

Earn community service hours or just get satisfaction from good work. Come out to see the greening of our native species. It is an opportunity to learn more about native habitat of your county and be a part of making it better.

Volunteer Workdays

Triangle Marsh, East Corte Madera:

First Saturdays: February 1, March 1
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 8, March 8

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

For up-to-date information, contact Martha Jarocki, 415/461-3592 or marthajarocki@gmail.com.

Bahia, Novato:

If you'd like to help, please contact Jude at judestalker@gmail.com.

Thank You, Stewardship Volunteers

Debbie Ablin, Belle and Ron Gueldon, Katrina Hanley, Bob Hinz, John Jackson, Alison Pence, Lowell Sykes

WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS

Robert Avrick, Steven Chapman, Jennifer Ann Copeland, Lynn Dubinsky, Denise Dugan, Karen Dunn, Scott Epstein, Jeffrey Hekemian, Kara Henderson, Norman Kolpas, Heather Newberry, Jane Steel

Farallon Islands Wildlife

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regulations since 2003, significantly reducing whale ship strikes through speed reductions. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) depends on Point Blue's data to guide the timing of the opening of crabbing season.

With the islands unmanned for even several months, there would be a gap in the long-term research. The major concern for MAS is the safety of the islands and the wildlife that depend on them. They would be wide open to vandalism. While accessing the islands is difficult, it is not impossible. More than a hundred years ago eggers managed to access the islands to gather eggs for San Francisco residents, which demonstrates the possibility. With modern equipment, access is much easier now.

The loss of biological data will impede effective management of the islands, the Gulf of the Farallones refuge, as well as impact management of NOAA's Greater Farallones and Cordell Banks National Marine Sanctuaries. Point Blue's collected data is critical for ongoing management to protect the wildlife that depends on the islands and adjacent waters.

HOW YOU CAN HELP:

You can help keep the Farallones safe and important data and research continuing by making a donation to Point Blue. To replace the federal funding loss, \$250,000 needs to be raised.

Donate by sending a check to MAS, designating that it be used for Point Blue's programs on the Farallon Islands. All of your donation money will go to Point Blue for this purpose and will be tax deductible under MAS's 501(c)(3) status.

Join the Stewards of the Farallones – a new program established for the purpose of raising significant funds to continue Point Blue's work on the Islands. The program is an opportunity to become part of a select group, providing major support by donating \$25,000 annually for three years. Special benefits of becoming a Steward include an opportunity to volunteer on a supply/delivery patrol boat that is usually closed to the public, to volunteer on a scientific marine research event, and to attend a Stewards of the Farallones dinner, at which you can engage with researchers about their work on the Islands. To find out more, contact Christine Walker, Major Gifts Officer, Point Blue Conservation Science, 707/694-9811 or cwalker@pointblue.org.

STATE ROUTE 37 UPDATE

The next phase of the State Route 37 Improvement Project is the stretch along the top of the Bay, between Sears Point Raceway and Mare Island. To address this section, Caltrans has already certified *Route 37 Sears Point to Mare Island Improvement Project (State Route 37 from State Route 121 to Mare Island; Napa, Sonoma, and Solano Counties)*.

The current environmental document released by Caltrans, the *Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Report (SEIR) to the 2023 Final Environmental Impact Report/ Environmental Assessment*, was produced for the purpose of addressing changes in the Project's design, particularly the enhancement of the degraded Strip Marsh East (SME). The SEIR describes the SME project design and assesses its potential environmental impacts.

Strip Marsh East is the narrow band of marsh (3.5 miles long and 0.57 miles wide, north to south) between SR 37 and the Bay. SME was formed between 1940 and 1980 with sediment deposited on the mudflat by waves. Over time the sediment extended into the Bay, and marsh evolved. The site was part of the salt production operation owned by Leslie Salt. Portions of the property are now owned by CDFW and USFWS and are managed by the USFWS Refuge.

Enhancement of SME will have many beneficial impacts. It will improve drainage, restore full tidal function, create new wetlands and other waters from uplands, create new emergent salt marsh habitat, and establish tidal channel and tidal flat habitat.

The improvements will have broad ecosystem benefits. Approximately 600 acres of salt marsh habitat will be enhanced, which will promote the recovery of special-status species with potential to occur in the Project area. The SEIR concludes that changes in the Project would not result in any new significant impacts.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

To review the document go to the Caltrans website at <https://dot.ca.gov/caltrans-near-me/district-4/d4-popular-links/d4-environmental-docs> and the link to the *Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Report to the 2023 Final Environmental Impact Report/ Environmental Assessment* at <https://dot.ca.gov/-/media/dot-media/district-4/documents/d4-environmental-docs/1q761-sr37-sears-point-to-mare-island/sr37-spmiip-supplementaldeir-2024-12-13r-ada-a11y.pdf>.

The deadline for comments is February 3. Send to:

Caltrans District 4
ATTN: Skylar Nguyen,
Senior Environmental Scientist
P.O. Box 23660, MS: 8B
Oakland, CA 94623-0660

Or email to: StateRoute37@dot.ca.gov (preferred method).

CORRECTION

The Drake's Estero article in the December 2024 issue of *The Rail* incorrectly reported 1916 and 1917 as the years when the cleanup of Drake's Estero occurred, after the closing of the mariculture operation. The correct years for the cleanup were 2016 and 2017.

2024 Point Reyes Christmas Bird Count

Summary by Compiler David Wimpfheimer

The 54th Point Reyes CBC was held on December 14, 2024. High winds gusting to over 70 mph and periods of heavy rain often made counting birds extremely difficult. Some counters could not even get to their assigned areas due to flooded roads and fallen trees blocking roads. Still the count went on.

125 intrepid counters braved the winds, pelting sand and rains to valiantly count whatever birds they could find. Near hurricane force winds prevented us from counting waterbirds on Tomales Bay, resulting in low or near low totals for many waterfowl. Only 120 Brant were found, the lowest total since the 1970s. This may also be a result of the species now wintering further north of Point Reyes.

Lesser Scaup, Clark's Grebe, Black and White-winged Scoter were all missed. Canvasback was missed for the second year in a row while only 24 Ruddy Ducks were found. The latter was an all-time low. This decrease in waterfowl is a continuing trend and may reflect declines throughout the continent. Cypress Grove Preserve biologists have been documenting these changes for many years.

Only one **Brown Pelican** was found which was a dramatic contrast to the previous year when almost 6,000 were observed. Other observers have remarked on low numbers of this species in our area, but whether this is a seasonal change or a result of a food shortage is not known. Additionally, only two **Pacific Loon** and one **Pelagic Cormorant** were seen, far below average totals.

Whimbrel, **Black Oystercatcher** and **Turnstone** were all missed due to an inability to survey some of their preferred habitats. Conversely, 179 **Red Phalarope** were seen. This is a species that winters in the offshore ocean habitat

and was obviously blown inland by the storm.

Only one alcid was seen, a **Common Murre**. In most years several species from this group are noted by observers along the ocean and Drakes Bay.

In recent years more **Peregrine Falcons** are found on the Point Reyes count than any other in the country. In 2023, only about ten were found, less than half of our usual total. In 2024 we only found 9. It has become accepted that the avian flu is the most likely explanation for a decrease in this species, but certainly the storm conditions were a factor as well.

No swallows were observed. In 2023 over 240 representing three species were tallied. **Loggerhead Shrike** was missed for one of the first times ever. This continues a decades long decline of this species. Only 272 **Yellow-rumped Warblers** were found, an all-time low for the species.

It was not all doom and gloom, here are some highlights. Ten **Snow Geese** were seen at Abbotts Lagoon and Creamery Bay. One **Fork-tailed** and two **Leach's Storm Petrels** were seen at Kehoe Beach, Abbotts Lagoon and other coastal sites. Each of these pelagic species had been recorded only one time previously on the count. One **Black Rail** was seen at the Giacomini wetlands.

The numbers of gulls seen over the Giacomini wetlands and the costal zones was astronomical. Over 10,000 were recorded at the restored wetlands south of Tomales Bay, while a total of over 30,000 were seen in all the aquatic habitats. Experienced observers called it a "cyclone" of gulls. Strangely, only 197 **California Gulls**, an all-time low, were counted in 2023. This year, more than 13,000 were counted.

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2024 Cheep Thrills Christmas Bird Count

Summary by Compilers David Sexton and Susan Kelly

The continuation of the National Audubon Christmas Bird Count for 125 years is an amazing statement to the dedication of 80,000 citizen scientists who venture out into the winter weather to count all the birds they can find. More than 70 volunteers participated in the 14th annual Cheep Thrills CBC on December 19, 2024 and we strongly congratulate them for their role in this endeavor.

The gray skies and cool temperatures did not impact the enthusiasm of the counters as they spread out over Novato and nearby ranches of Marin, covering everywhere from the edge of San Pablo Bay to Nicasio Reservoir. A very respectable count of 163 species and over

53,900 birds were observed.

With so many habitats explored there were very few expected species that were missed. The 37 species of the most commonly observed birds were seen in 11 or more of the 13 count areas and totaled 32% of the count. **Turkey Vulture** (500), **Red-tailed Hawk** (141), **Black Phoebe** (208), **Western Bluebird** (386), **House Finches** (1,072), **Golden-crowned** (1,404) and **White-crowned Sparrows** (2,009), as well **Yellow-rumped Warblers** (498) were reported by all groups.

From the unique habitats in the Cheep Thrills count area there were 25 species that

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2024 Southern Marin Christmas Bird Count

Summary by Compiler Robert Hinz

As of the time of writing this, 58,726 birds among 166 species have been reported for the Southern Marin Christmas Bird Count (CAMC) that was held on a dreary December 28, 2024. A significant number of areas have not yet reported so there will be additions to the bird total and perhaps to the species total. Weather was a factor in holding bird activity down with rain, fog or, at best, overcast skies all day. Visibility over the ocean from shore was limited, and we did not have boats on the bay or the ocean.

Notable sightings included 17,000 scaup and 6,000 **Ruddy Ducks**, most along the San Rafael shore. That was the most Ruddys since 1981. Also in San Rafael, 19 **Vaux's Swifts** entered the old chimneys of the McNear brickyard; they are counted during fall migration by the tens of thousands but winter south of the border.

The **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** along the riparian corridor of San Rafael Creek was another unusual species. California's northernmost **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron** returned to Sausalito for the fifth winter in the last six; summers might be spent in Sacramento County. **Brown Pelican** numbers fluctuate widely, and after 2,754 in 2023 only 22 have been recorded so far for 2024.

A **Nashville Warbler** and a **Black-and-White Warbler**, found in the Muir Beach area, are both infrequently recorded on the CAMC. Only 14 species were found in the very wet weather of the Rock Springs area, but one of them was the only **Hermit Warbler** of the day.

Total bird numbers on the CAMC have dropped dramatically from the early years. For the period 1975-2001 only two years had fewer than 80,000 birds reported, and in nine years there were over 100,000. For 2002-2024 only three years have reached 80,000; three years tallied fewer than 50,000 individuals.

Marin County Breeding Bird Atlas II – Early Birds!

Was the **Great Horned Owl** the first bird you detected for 2025? As we begin the fifth and final season of field surveys for the second Marin County Breeding Bird Atlas, we encourage you to contribute any early breeding-species detections, or observations of breeding behaviors, to the Atlas as an incidental observation. Instructions for submitting observations using our one-page form can be found on the Atlas webpage – <https://marinaudubon.org/birds/marin-county-breeding-bird-atlas/>.

Early birds to look (and listen) for include the **Great Horned Owl** and American Barn Owl. For the Atlas we will accept observations for any duetting **Great Horned Owls** (D = display), territorially calling birds (S) or any owls you may see flying or perched (but not heard) can be reported as in habitat (H). Additionally, if anyone had **Great Horned Owls** during the Christmas Bird Counts or otherwise from December, we encourage you to submit those as well.

This is also the time of year to be closely watching **Anna's Hummingbirds** (especially the female birds because they choose the nest site and subsequently build it) and **Allen's Hummingbirds**. You can submit an

incidental form for any hummingbirds you find displaying (D) or gathering material for a nest. While hiking or strolling around your neighborhood, look for any **Red-tailed Hawks** displaying (D) or gathering material for a nest. Perhaps you will be rewarded during one of your hikes with an observation of a **Golden Eagle** displaying or gathering material for a nest.

This is also the time of year that we tend to hear **Ridgway's** and **Black Rails** vocalizing from our tidal marsh wetlands and adjacent wetlands. These secretive birds are protected species surveyed by permitted biologists, not Atlas volunteers. However, we accept observations from birders who incidentally, passively, and responsibly detect them (e.g., without using any playback or mimicry, and without going off trail in pursuit of them; extra care is essential for these threatened and endangered species and their sensitive habitat). As with owls, we accept encounters of territorial-calling individuals (S) or birds in appropriate habitat (H). This spring we will also accept detections of **Virginia Rails** and Soras, once they begin nesting. Any incidental observations of **Virginia Rails** may be really

helpful 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 annual reports, and other Atlas data needs. Your donations also allow us to keep our web page and the Data Explorer current, so that you and our volunteers can track the weekly and monthly progress of the Atlas. 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'D LIKE TO DONATE

We have set up several ways for you to contribute to the Atlas:

- Via Paypal on the Atlas page
- By check made to the *Breeding Bird Atlas* and sent to:
Marin County Breeding Bird Atlas
c/o Daphne Hatch
67 Pinheiro Circle, Novato CA 94945
- 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!

2024 Cheep Thrills CBC

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were only located in a single area. The Black Point team, led by MaryAnne Flett, had a total of 123 species and 10 of them were unique to the count, including the **Black Rail**, **Virginia Rail**, **Burrowing Owl**, **Western Screech Owl**, and **Snowy Plover** (19). The Bahia team, led by Heather Cameron, with 109 species contributed 4 unique species including **Barrows Goldeneye** (14) and an **Eurasian Wigeon**. The Hicks Valley team, led by David Wimpfheimer and with huge assist from Dominik Mosur, had 104 total species including the only counts of **House Wren**, **Rock Wren**, **Horned Lark**, and **Ross's Goose**.

Some of the other unique species observed included a **Prairie Falcon** by Peter Colasanti's team, a **Pileated Woodpecker** by Jack Gedney's team on Mt Burdell, a **Wilson's Warbler** by the Waterman's in Lucas Valley and a surprising 40 **Great-tailed Grackles** at Scottsdale Pond by the Indian Valley team, led by David Sexton. Both **Golden Eagles** and **Bald Eagles** continue to have a steady presence in the count, with 3 **Golden Eagles** and 5 **Bald**

Eagles reported.

The most common small bird was **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** (413) followed by **Oak Titmouse** (352), and **Bushtit** (276). **Acorn Woodpeckers** (257), **Northern Flickers** (108) and **Downy Woodpeckers** (70) were the most common woodpecker species. The small shorebirds were led by **Dunlins** (4,302), **Western Sandpipers** (4,252), and **Least Sandpipers** (1,755). There were 99 **American Kestrels**, 61 **Say's Phoebes**, and 1,427 **Dark-eyed Juncos**. The most common duck was the **Green-winged Teal** (2,946), followed by **Mallards** (1,300) and **Bufflehead** (1,136). There were 11 **Wood Ducks** observed and 32 **Snow Geese**.

As this count is annually dedicated to the memory of Rich Stallcup it was especially nice to note that the day of the count would have been his 80th birthday. Many of those who attended the compilation dinner had decades of memories of Rich and it was a delight to hear the many stories about him that they shared with the Cheep Thrills CBC volunteers.

Next year's count will be on December 18, 2025. Put it on your calendar now so that you can be sure to enjoy the fun.

2024 Point Reyes CBC

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Most likely many of the gulls were blown ashore by the storm, but it's difficult to account for such high totals.

Jaegers have been seen over the years by our keen eyed observers from coastal vantage points. One seen on this year's count, a Pomarine, was far inland, near Inverness Park.

Despite the inclement conditions, 865 **Band-tailed Pigeons** were tallied one of the highest counts ever. A **Western Flycatcher** at Marshall Beach was a good find.

Some species including **Red-winged Blackbird**, **European Starling**, **White-crowned Sparrow**, **House Finch** and **American Crow** were at totals close to their ten year averages.

172 species were found, by far an all-time low, but the valuable data will be added to more than half a century of observations of resident and migratory birds. The overall feeling was summed up by one seasoned veteran who remarked "I think this was the most exciting Point Reyes Christmas Bird Counts I've participated in – the weather and birds responding to the weather was truly amazing."

Marin Birdlog: December 2024

By Noah Arthur



Ryan Askeren, USGS, Alaska Science Center

Yellow-billed Loon

December in Marin – especially the latter half of it – is our deep winter, a season of cold, storms, and rain that brings a host of new opportunities for the cold-hardy birder. The beginning of the month, however, can remain mild and fallish, sometimes even producing a few fall rarities like a flyover **Swainson's Hawk** at Hawk Hill this December 1st (KM). A much more wintry rarity, and one of the best birds of the month, a **Yellow-billed Loon** was on Tomales Bay near Cypress Grove on the 3rd (NW), oddly in partial breeding plumage. A pale adult Iceland-type gull that may be a **Kumlien's Gull** was at Belvedere on the 4th (WL). Increasingly rare in Marin as its population crashes, a **Loggerhead**

Shrike was at Carmody/Two Rock Road intersection in north Marin on the 3rd (SM).

An exceptional record came on the 2nd in the form of a singing **Wrentit** at the Point Reyes Lighthouse (ED & KH). Though they're a fact of life in most of Marin, **Wrentits** do not occur on the Outer Point past Drakes Beach, and being extremely sedentary, are almost unheard-of there even as vagrants. The so-called 'Snowy Owl of the Sea,' a huge frosty-white 1st cycle **Glaucous Gull** was on Drakes Beach on the 5th (DS).

On the 7th a male **Common Teal** was at Hamilton Wetlands (DE), another or the same **Glaucous Gull** was roosting on rocks by the Lighthouse (EC), and a **Lesser Yellowlegs** flew by Pine Gulch in Bolinas, accompanied by a Greater sidekick for easy comparison (EH). Probably not as much rare as underreported, an '**Alberta**' **Gull** (California Gull subspecies *albertainensis*) was at Blackies Pasture on the 12th (WL). Also on the 12th, two **Northern Rough-winged Swallows** were in a Violet-green flock at Laguna Lake (CD).

A winter storm of Biblical proportions slammed into the Marin coast on the 14th, the day of the Pt. Reyes Christmas Bird Count. This created perhaps the most unusual circumstances this count has ever faced, with much of the area closed due to unsafe road conditions. But heavy morning winds pushed thousands of gulls into Tomales Bay along with a **Parasitic Jaeger** (JL). The highlight of the count was an incursion of storm-petrels seeking refuge inshore and even on/over land. Most were **Leach's Storm-petrels**, including two actively foraging on Abbotts Lagoon (DK), and one sitting on the water at Drakes Estero by the Oyster Farm (JC). Out on the Point, a **Leach's** flew across and briefly landed in the parking lot at North Beach, and another or the same one flew across the Sir Francis Drake/North Beach Road intersection an hour later (DH & CE). A **Fork-tailed Storm-petrel** flew in off Tomales Bay and attempted to land on a road alongshore near Hearts Desire (KS). **Red Phalaropes** were also reported inshore at several locations on the count. The only rare passerine reported on the rainy, stormy Point Reyes count was a **Western Flycatcher** at Marshall Beach (TF & CT).

On the 17th, a **Common X Green-winged Teal hybrid** was at Shorebird Marsh (BB). On the North Marin CBC on the 19th, special access to the closed Redwood Landfill area yielded a **shrike sp.** that may or may not have been a Northern. The 20th produced a male **Common Teal** at the south end of Bolinas Lagoon and a male '**Cassiar**' **Junco** at Keith Hansen's gallery in Bolinas (NA). A **Myrtle X Audubon's Warbler hybrid** was in suburban Corte Madera on the 20th (VV).

A small 'echo flight' of last winter's huge irruption of northern Song Sparrows has materialized this season, including a **Montana/merrillii Song Sparrow** at Las Gallinas on the 24th (CC).

A female **Yellow-shafted Flicker** was at Abbotts Lagoon on Christmas Day (TF), and a female **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** was in a backyard near downtown in San Rafael the next day (KS & SB). On the 27th, a **Tropical Kingbird** was hawking at Las Gallinas (MY). A male **Common X Green-winged Teal** was at the south end of Bolinas Lagoon on the 28th (NA), and a pure **Common Teal** was at Rush Creek on the 29th (WL). The month closed out with an **Eastern Orange-crowned Warbler** (subspecies *celata*) in Stinson Beach on the 30th (CC).

OBSERVERS AND ACRONYMS: KM: Kimberly Montoux, NW: Nils Warnock, WL: William Legge, SM: Scott Morrical, ED: Ezekiel Dobson, KH: Kadyann Hatfield, DS: Dan Singer, DE: Daniel Edelstein, EC: Everett Clark, EH: Eric Heisey, CD: Christyne Davidian, JL: Jasen Liu, DK: Durrell Kapan, JC: Jim Chiropoulos, TF: Teale Fristoe, CT: Cameron Tescher, DH: Diana Humple, CE: Carleton Eyster, KS: Kirk Swenson, BB: Brian Browne, VV: Vicens Vila, CC: Connor Cochrane, KS: Kevin Stockman, SB: Sharon Barnett, MY: Mitchell Youngman, NA: Noah Arthur

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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.

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