

Elephant Seals at Point Reyes:
45 Years and Still Growing Strong

By Sarah Allen



Elephant Seals at Point Reyes

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

Elephant seals were hunted to extinction at Point Reyes over 150 years ago, but in 1980, the colony recolonized the Point and gradually spread throughout the peninsula. Younger colonies may exhibit novel behaviors such as male altruism and adaptations to changes in climate. Marine protected areas, such as national seashores and marine sanctuaries, are critical to the recovery and persistence of species and ecosystems.

Sarah Allen grew up in Marin County where she learned and has a passion for conservation. Sarah received her M.S. and Ph.D. studying marine birds and mammals from U.C. Berkeley and retired after 26 years as an employee of the National Park Service (NPS), 15 years of which were at Point Reyes National Seashore and then as Science Program Lead for the Pacific Region. She has authored and co-authored publications, including the U.C. Press, *Marine Mammals of the Pacific Coast: Baja, California, Oregon, Washington, British Columbia*.

Dragonflies

By Kathy Biggs and Sandra Van Orb

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The Rail

MARIN AUDUBON SOCIETY

State of the Birds Report

The status of bird species that depend on the San Francisco Estuary is evaluated in the State of the Birds Report, recently released by Point Blue Conservation Science and the San Francisco Bay Joint Venture. The report evaluates the status of indicator species (an organism whose status reflects the health of its ecosystem) according to estuary habitat types they require to survive: tidal marsh, subtidal, tidal flats (mud flats), sub- and nontidal wetlands and waters.

Tidal Marsh—Population Generally Increasing

Tidal marsh-dependent species are increasing overall, suggesting that the tidal marsh restorations and stewardship are working to effectively support a diverse assemblage of bird species. The population trend for three evaluated species is increasing:

- California Black Rail exhibited the greatest increase with a statistically significant growth rate of 2.9% per year, but only in the Central and North Bay. South Bay and Delta subregions were removed from the analysis because too few birds were detected to estimate reliable long-term trends.
- Song Sparrow abundance is stable with a small 1.9% annual increase over ten years—not a statistically significant trend over the long term.
- Common Yellowthroat abundance has increased over the long term while showing large year-to-year fluctuations.

- Ridgway's Rail (RR), a federally endangered species, is the exception to the increasing trend. RR abundance declined across all subregions during the seven-year period from 2018 to 2024. Its population remains critically low and is decreasing. Bay-wide there was an average annual decrease of 9.3%. The results for 2022-2024 suggest That the declining trend may be levelling off. RR has increased in some tidal restoration sites, indicating that continued restoration of tidal marsh is one of the best strategies for increasing the population of this species.

Tidal Flats—Species Generally Declining

Shorebird numbers in San Francisco Bay have been declining since 2006, reflecting similar declines in nearby habitats such as Bolinas Lagoon and Tomales Bay, as well as across the Pacific Flyway.

North Bay shorebirds overall declined by 26, to 68%; Central Bay (where there is the least amount of tidal flat) shorebirds declined by 41, to 87%; and South Bay shorebirds declined by 42, to 67.

- Large shorebirds (Willet, Marbled Godwit, and American Avocet) have decreased in all bay regions, but the decline in the North Bay may be leveling off.
- Medium-sized shorebirds (Long- and Short-billed Dowitcher, Black-bellied Plover) showed the steepest decline of the three

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Greater Bahia Expansion Acquisition Update

Our work toward acquiring the Leveroni properties continues. This month our attorneys forwarded to the title company a list of matters we want addressed, including conditions that need to be deleted from the title report because they do not apply to the properties for various reasons. We're planning for a Phase 1 hazardous materials

inspection to be performed as part of our due diligence. We've also heard from the Coastal Conservancy which is in support of the acquisition and that they want some additional information.

You may contribute to the acquisition either through Marin Baylands Advocates (see their website) or Marin Audubon Society.

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

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

It is the end of an era. As of their December field trip, Jim White and Bob Battigan will be retiring as leaders of our Birding in Marin monthly field trips. Their popular trips have been the foundation of our field trip program, sometimes the only ones, such as during COVID. Through the years, many of our members have enjoyed and learned from their knowledge of birds and the natural world. They will be missed. We are grateful for their leadership and wish them the best in their retirement.

King tides are coming up December 4–5 and January 2–3. These times of extreme high tides, when most and sometimes all of the marsh plants are covered by tidal waters, are dangerous for marsh birds. These are times when Ridgway's Rails (RR) and Salt Marsh Harvest Mice are most at risk from raptor predators hunting over the marshes. The RR must find hiding places under vegetation on the shoreline. King tides are also a time when people should be aware and cautious that they are not increasing the risk to wildlife by getting too close, forcing them out into the open and drawing attention to predators. Recently, I watched a kayaker in Corte Madera, intent on taking photos, completely oblivious to his impact on the birds he was trying to photograph.

King tides are fascinating—they completely change the marsh landscape. Do get out and see how they transform marshes to what appears to be open water. But please remember not to put birds and mice at risk. Keep your kayaks out of tidal marshes and stay away from shoreline vegetation that protects the wildlife that may be hiding in it. View from the shoreline, well away from vegetated habitat areas.

It is an exciting time for MAS. We have lots going on—property purchases, new programs and grants, additional field trips, conservation threats to address, and more. If you like what we do, like working with figures, and are interested in being a part of our activities, do consider joining our financial team. See the notice on this page and contact Mike Anderson at 415/990-9784 for more information.

You should soon be receiving MAS's winter appeal letter (our spring appeal is dedicated to our properties). All donations to the appeal at this time of year are committed to keeping our organization operating and to maintaining and expanding our programs. We greatly appreciate your support.

Christmas Bird Counts will be here in no time. The Southern Marin Count, which Marin Audubon organizes, is always on the Saturday between Christmas and New Year's. (See box on this page and contact Alison Pence at

415/254-4551 for more information and to sign up.) For information about the Cheep Thrills and Pt. Reyes Counts see the November *Rail*.

For many years now we've had more than 40 bird houses on our Simmons Slough property, originally installed by Lowell Sykes. Every year after nesting season they need to be cleaned out to prepare for the coming year's broods. It's a big job. A special thank you to Jeffrey Long and Alison Pence, who did the cleaning this year. We will need volunteer help next year. Please let us know if you are interested by calling Alison Pence 415/254-4551.

Do get out and enjoy the overwintering waterfowl, shorebirds, and water birds. They have all returned by now, and you will be rewarded by the delight of seeing their diversity and the challenge in identifying them.

Hats off to Lucas Corneliussen for the bird sighting and identification of the century—the Waved Albatross off the coast. See page 7 for more information about this amazing discovery.

Have a happy holiday! See you next year.

Help Needed with Treasurer Tasks

MAS is looking for a Board member to assist with treasury tasks including transactions and interacting with Bookkeeper and membership to support our programs. Accounting experience or familiarity with Excel would be useful, but not necessary, for this volunteer position. To find out more, call Mike Anderson at 415/990-9784.

Volunteer for the Southern Marin Christmas Bird Count

Volunteers are needed on Saturday, December 27, in the Southern Marin area. Some birding experience is preferred. Volunteers will be assigned to a count area team. If you are an experienced birder, we need leaders in three count areas; Phoenix Lake, Alpine Lake and Terra Linda. If you're interested in participating, contact Alison Pence at smcbc.audubon@gmail.com or fill out **this form** online marinaudubon.org/birds/christmas-bird-count.

Note to readers of the hard copy issue of *The Rail*: The links for Southern Marin CBC registration forms can be found on the Home page of MAS's website. Under the "Birds" heading click Christmas Bird Count on the drop down menu.

MAS FIELD TRIPS

Open to the public

MAS is providing a full schedule of free field trips for the 2025–2026 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.** If you see a trip you want is filled, check back later, spots open up as we get cancellations, as late as the evening before the trip.

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 4, 2025

Thursday, January 1, 2026

8:30 AM to noon

With Mark Clark

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 and raptors. 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.

BAHIA, HORSESHOE POND AND RUSH CREEK

Birding in Marin, Season 10 – Trip 12

Saturday, December 6, 2025

8:30 AM to mid afternoon

With Jim White and Bob Battagin

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

MAS acquired and restored to tidal action the diked bay lands 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.

Corte Madera Marsh Ecological Reserve

Sunday, December 7, 2025

8:30 AM to noon

With Lisa Hug

Registration is required. Registration opens November 26 on MAS website's Field Trips page.

This field trip is an eBird workshop for those participating in the Christmas Bird Count in Southern Marin County. We will walk the Corte Madera Marsh Ecological Reserve starting at the Marin Audubon Society site Lookout. The walk is level and easy. We will be making observations using eBird. We will see waterfowl and shorebirds in the estuary as well as upland suburban residents. Experienced birders and Christmas Bird Count Leaders as well as eBird newbies can enjoy counting and compiling together in an informal and fun setting.

DIRECTIONS: From 101 North, take Lucky Drive Exit to Wornum, turn left on Tamal Vista Blvd and left on Madera

Bldv. Go under freeway and take a left on Redwood Highway and turn right into the Trader Joe's /World Market mall. Stay to the right and park behind World Market.

From 101 South take the Corte Madera exit left over the freeway on Tamalpais Dr. Take a left on Redwood Blvd and right into the World Market Mall, staying right and parking behind. Meet in the parking lot.

SKAGG'S ISLAND ROAD

Friday, January 16, 2026

10 AM to 2 PM

With Daniel Edelstein

Registration required. Registration opens on January 6 at 8 AM 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/3YYUJeg>.

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



Conservation

Marin Audubon Conservation Committee reviews critical issues related to wildlife habitats and comments to cities, agencies, and other jurisdictions. To attend, phone Barbara Salzman at 415/924-6057.

SAN RAFAEL SEA-LEVEL RISE ADAPTATION PLANNING PROJECT

The San Rafael Sea-Level Rise Community-Informed Technical Feasibility Study, which has been significantly revised from the earlier version, has been finalized. The Study reports that the alternatives are designed to protect people, existing habitat, structures, and property values; all include opportunities to expand habitat and integrate nature-based adaptation, but all contain trade-offs and are expensive. None are easy to achieve. Nature-based features (such as oyster reefs, living seawalls, and coarse beaches) are recognized as important not only for flood protection and environmental benefits but also for an alternative to be evaluated as the least environmentally damaging. The Tiscornia Marsh project is recognized and supported; however, this support is contradicted by the design of Alternative 2 below, the gate-across-the-canal alternative.

The Study presents one No-Action Alternative and three Adaptation Alternatives. The No-Action Alternative (current conditions) is presented as an analytical tool to evaluate the level of tidal protection and other potential impacts of each of the adaptation alternatives. Every alternative requires additional phased adaptations over time to maintain flood-risk reduction levels with sea-level rise and subsidence.

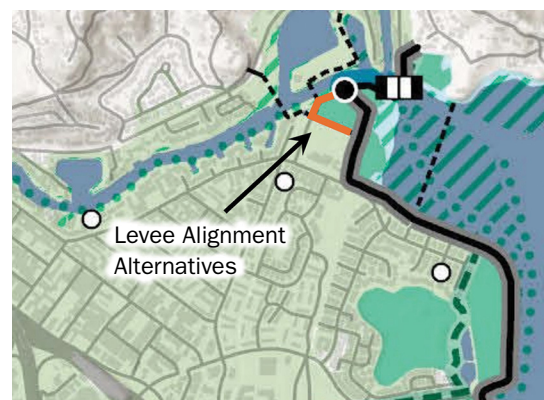
ADAPTATION ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1 (Alt. 1) Raise Canal Edges

This alternative raises the Canal edge to +12 feet, primarily through vertical living seawalls on land and in the Canal, and raises the crest of the bayfront levee to 14 feet. It consists of three types of structures, in order of priority

1. Where space exists on land, planted berms or riprap combined with a short stem wall at or above Mean Higher High Water (MHHW)
2. Where space is limited on land, a vertical bulkhead with a living seawall at or above MHHW
3. Where structures are at or overhang the shoreline, or where space otherwise does not permit, a vertical sheet pile wall with living seawall panels and a concrete cap built in the water

This alternative has the smallest physical footprint but presents significant trade-offs to visual character and future adaptation potential.



Tiscornia Designs for Alt. 2, the Gate Alternative: Black line represents levee proposed by San Rafael. Red line supports and follows Tiscornia alignment.

Alternative 2 (Alt. 2) Canal Gate

Creates a navigable flood control gate at elevation +16 feet (BFE +3 feet SLR) with large forward pumps, approximately 3,000 cfs, near the mouth of the San Rafael Canal. Like with Alt. 1, bayfront levees would initially be constructed to +14 feet, while the gate structure itself would be higher.

Alt. 2 consists of:

1. A tide control structure (gate) near the mouth of San Rafael Creek with a tie-in to the bayfront levee at the south end and natural high ground at the north
2. Pumps to convey water out of the Creek when the gate is closed
3. Elevation of the Canal edge to a minimum of +8 feet, coupled with an adaptation strategy to progressively raise the edge to limit the number of closure events to what would be feasible from a hydraulic, environmental permitting and operations perspective (estimated at 5 to 10 events per year)

The gate would remain open for almost all tidal conditions, except extreme high tides (today's seasonal king tides and higher), to maintain flows, allow navigation access, and avoid adverse environmental effects stemming from impacts to fish passage and water quality. The gate would have to be closed more and more as sea level rises.

The shorelines upstream from the gate would need to be elevated to keep pace with sea-level rise and subsidence and provide environmental benefits that would permit the alternative to be identified as the least environmentally damaging option, a requirement of agency regulations. If the Canal edge is not progressively raised, regulatory

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

agencies would require mitigation for the creek area that would be covered by water with the gate closures (84 acres).

The report states that in the proposed location the gate would preserve navigational access to the Canal and states, incorrectly, that the Tiscornia Marsh project would be preserved. The alternative has the tie-in levee between Tiscornia Marsh and the city's diked marsh, which would prevent our project of opening the diked marsh to tidal marsh.

Alternative 3 (Alt. 3) Incremental Elevation

Land elevation and building reconstruction along the first block of the south and portions of the north shoreline of the San Rafael Canal. This alternative includes acquisition, demolition, fill, and redevelopment, where possible, of all contiguous waterfront parcels to make space for a levee, new public easement and trail, and vegetated shoreline beginning at or landward of the current Canal shoreline. Alt. 3 provides the greatest margin of safety and most potential co-benefits but has the highest

first cost and takes the longest to implement.

Anticipated construction activities:

1. Acquire and demolish all structures and utilities within the footprint of the proposed work
2. Ground improvements to stabilize the proposed fill for liquefaction, mitigate settlement, and increase shear strength;
3. Elevate, lay back the Canal edge, and vegetate the slope. This could include planted riprap or ecotone slopes where space permits
4. Construct a public promenade connected to the Bay Trail
5. Redevelop open space, housing, and/or new uses

In conclusion, the Study does not recommend an alternative. Although many problems were recognized with Alt. 2, the report seems to convey a preference for it. The consultants apparently did not know our project had been revised and the configuration they chose for Alt. 2 impedes MAS restoring

the diked marsh to tidal marsh. There is an option for the location of the tie-in levee for the gate alternative that is compatible with the Tiscornia project. In this option, the tie-in levee is located along the new ecotone levee as shown in the figure on page 4, instead of between the diked and tidal marshes. The city and their consultants have agreed to include it in the Feasibility Study, as requested by MAS. This does not change MAS's opposition to the gate alternative's many environmental impacts.

We ask why not go with Alt. 1? The Study indicates that if Alt. 2 is chosen, the features of Alt. 1 would still have to be constructed. In addition, Alt. 1 would be easier to fund because it could be constructed in phases, and it could be started now to address areas and structures that are already flooding.

State of the Birds

continued from page 1

groups, with the largest drop occurring in the Central Bay, and slight increases in recent years in the North and South Bay.

- Small shorebirds (Least and Western Sandpiper, Dunlin) are all declining, especially in the Central Bay, where there are limited tidal flats. There have been slight increases in the North and South Bay in recent years.

According to the report: "Since shorebirds migrate, the population declines might be due to broader issues outside the bay. However, because different shorebird groups in the bay (with varied breeding grounds and migration paths) are all declining, it suggests that changes to their stopping points during migration or their wintering grounds—such as habitat loss or more predators—could be responsible."

There is hope in that the declines appear to be stabilizing or even slightly increasing for some shorebird groups in some subregions in recent years (large and medium shorebirds in the North Bay; small and medium shorebirds in the South Bay), perhaps indicating that habitat management is working.

Subtidal—Population Trend Mixed

Diving ducks are the most abundant waterfowl in San Francisco Bay. Diving duck trends are relatively stable overall. Diving ducks that forage in subtidal waters are declining in the North and Central Bay and are relatively stable in the South Bay.

Some species (Lesser and Greater Scaup, for example) have declined significantly across the Bay over the last 30 years. This has important implications because nearly half of the Lesser and Greater Scaup and Surf Scoters in the lower Pacific have overwintered in SF Bay. Ruddy Duck numbers have risen over the last decade. Other species like Canvasback, Bufflehead, and Goldeneye have had some fluctuation but are overall stable across the Bay.

The reasons for the declines are unclear but may be related to changes in both breeding and wintering grounds. Improving food availability and resting habitat and creating undisturbed resting areas in the Bay's open-water and pond habitats could improve conditions for these species and increase their numbers.

Non-tidal Wetlands and Waters—Population Trend Mixed

The non-tidal wetlands and waters habitat indicators are mixed, with managed ponds providing good habitat for some wintering dabbling ducks but not for others, including breeding waterbirds in the South Bay. Generally, population trends are stable in the North Bay and increasing in the South Bay. Overall, dabbling ducks are increasing. Nesting waterbird trends are mixed.

The total number of wintering dabbling ducks across the entire Bay has increased over the past 30 years, especially in the Central and North Bay, indicating that non-tidal wetlands are providing quality habitat. This trend is primarily due to significant rises in the

populations of Northern Shoveler and American Wigeon. American Green-winged Teal and Gadwall also saw notable increases, though they are still among the least common dabbling ducks in San Francisco Bay.

The mallard breeding population has been in a consistent decline in Suisun and the rest of the Bay, with the largest decline in the last 20 years. Forster's Tern nesting fluctuated over that time period, but there was no clear long-term trend. American Avocet and Black-necked Stilt populations are declining, probably due to the loss of their preferred island nesting habitat within managed wetlands.

Regional data shows increases in dabbling ducks in the former salt ponds of the North and South Bay, as well as in the North Bay's subtidal habitats. Long-term increases in some dabbling duck species might reflect their response to early tidal restoration efforts and the careful management of the remaining former salt ponds in both the North Bay and South Bay.

A website devoted to the state of the Bay's birds, sfbaystateofthebirds.org, provides more extensive information about bay habitats, success stories, actions you can take, and interesting information about the birds themselves.

HABITAT STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

IT'S PLANTING TIME! There will be planting at both Triangle Marsh and the Corte Madera Marsh properties. The rains of the first part of the rainy season, especially with the mid-November storms, have been sufficient to give new plants a longer opportunity to establish themselves this winter. Rain could postpone the planting days to later dates in December.

See the accompanying article for more details about planting at MAS's Corte Madera Marsh Ecological Reserve expansion site

If you appreciate our birds or native plants, volunteer on a workday to give them a boost. The native plants are so much better for the insects that are food for the birds. Birds are declining in number and so are insects. It is also an opportunity to learn more about a native habitat of your county and be a part of improving it.

Volunteer Workdays

Triangle Marsh, East Corte Madera:
First Saturdays: December 6,
January 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: December 13–
14, January 10

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

Bob Hinz, Martha Jarocki, Willem, Hans and Maggie MacMinn, Ellena Ochoa, Alison Pence, Lowell Sykes, Archie Williams High School (Brooke Frescos, Simon Kolek, Jaden Selvig)

REPORT BARRED OWL SIGHTINGS

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

Habitat Stewardship

ANNUAL BOARD FIELD TRIP

In November, the MAS board conducted its annual field trip to habitats MAS owns. We now own 41 bayland, tidal marsh, seasonal wetland and adjacent upland parcels, some of which are adjacent to each other and form one property. We visited our north Marin properties: the Petaluma Marsh Expansion project, Bahia and Simmons properties, and parcels at Black Point in unincorporated Novato.

Our Petaluma Marsh Expansion site, which was purchased from Waste Management, Inc., in 2003, is located north of the landfill. The restored 100-acre tidal marsh looks wonderful. We were impressed with the maturing marsh and the significant expansion of the native creeping wild rye (*Elymus triticoides*) along the ecotone levee. We tried for years to get the Elymus to grow at the base of the levee, with minimal success. Just shows that nature does the job best—it just needs time.

At our Bahia property, which consists of 60 acres of upland/seasonal wetland around the Homeowners' Association pond at the end of Topaz, the levee plants were doing well, as were the species we planted in the seasonal wetlands. We viewed the fence that we had erected to

limit walkers, in accordance with the permits and agreements, so the levee could be protected as habitat. We discussed signage to better ensure the protection of habitat and wildlife. An oak tree that had apparently been attacked by insects needs to be examined.

At the 145-acre Simmons seasonal wetlands, we checked the sheet-mulching we had installed over the last two years that is successfully retarding the growth of Harding grass. We are planning to install more sheet-mulching and start planting Elymus in it this winter. Also of interest on this property were the patches of native blackberry and milkweed we had planted over the last three or four years. All are doing well.

Our last stop was Black Point, where we viewed the two-acre seasonal wetland, other smaller parcels, and Norton Pond and adjacent parcels, most of which MAS owns. Norton Pond looks good, and tidal waters are flowing freely through the culvert under the road. On nearby parcels, we examined the garden and storage shack on our property and will be taking further action to have them removed.

In conclusion, all of our northern properties are doing well. We will visit our Southern Marin properties in the new year.

Happenings at the CMMERE Site

Six years after the soil was excavated to an elevation needed for the marsh to restore and connect to the larger surrounding historic marsh, the salt marsh at the Marin Audubon Corte Madera Marsh Ecological Reserve Expansion (CMMERE) site becomes richer every year. The initial colonizing plants—Pickleweed and Cordgrass—are slowly being joined by others, and a natural mosaic has begun to emerge. Viewed from the top of the large upland mound, the marsh is tinged with hues of rust, purple, grey and green. When the tide is low, shorebirds and ducks move through the meandering channels.

The upland transition zone, however, remains a work in progress. We don't have a lot of historic upland along the bay's edge to use for reference for our work to enhance habitat. Most of the shoreline has been built on or otherwise transformed. China Camp is the closest example of an intact transition zone—the critical habitat to which wildlife, and particularly Ridgway's rails retreat during high tides.

The MAS CMMERE site is already of value to rails. We have heard them as we work on the site. Killdeer, Red-winged Blackbirds, Tree Swallows, and Mallards have also nested on the site. In the spring, insects cloud the air over the upland mound, feeding a variety of birds and in fall, sparrows and warblers shop for seeds.

Recently we've received valuable assistance from the work of student volunteers. Three

Archie Williams High School students have committed to volunteering for our monthly workdays (first Saturdays at Triangle Marsh and second Saturdays at CMMERE) and are designing research projects to benefit both sites. Another student, Eiden Metcalfe at Marin County Day School, has just completed a project to identify plant health for both native and invasive plants on the site. This detailed information on plant survival and density will help inform our location choices for the 300 new plants we are installing in December, with your help!

Most of the plant species we are adding in December are the same as species planted six years ago. However, we are adding two new species important for pollinators, California Aster and Narrow Leaf Milkweed. In future years we hope to continue to expand the plant pallet.

This planting push, and the watering that will be required during the dry seasons, is largely funded by a very generous bequest from the estate of Joan Vaughan. Joan was a founder of the Corte Madera Beautification Committee, responsible for providing bird boxes, benches, and the "signature" hanging baskets around town. She loved birds and always had her binoculars and bird book handy. We chose to devote her funds to the city and the birds that Joan loved.

Hope to see you at the site on December 13 or 14. Join us! (See box on page 7 for more information about the work day.)

Marin Birdlog: October 2025

By Noah Arthur

October begins in peak vagrant season and typically produces a decent grab bag of warblers and sparrows, but this time, all that was overshadowed by one mega-rare seabird found near the end of the first week.

The first push of rarities this month occurred on the 4th, with a **Sage Thrasher** and late **Grasshopper Sparrow** at Abbotts Lagoon (SJ, AH, & TF), a **Prairie Warbler** at the Fish Docks (SA & KS), and an early **Snow Goose** at Pt. Reyes Nunes Ranch on the 4th (CS) which continued through most of the month.

On the 5th came a bird that may well be the rarest find in Marin birding history. On a pelagic trip launched from Bodega Bay but within Marin waters, an adult **Waved Albatross** was discovered (LC), a new species not only for California but also for the North American continent. This huge albatross breeds in the Galapagos and is considered critically endangered, with the previous northernmost records being off Costa Rica. This trip also turned up good numbers of **Black** and **Ashy Storm-petrels**.

On the 6th, a **Lawrence's Goldfinch** flew over Hawk Hill (HT), and another **Grasshopper Sparrow** turned up at Spaletta Plateau on the Outer Point, along with a **Magnolia Warbler** at the Lighthouse (DM). Very rare on the Outer Point, a **Band-tailed Pigeon** was perched on a tower at the Lighthouse on the 7th (DW).



Baltimore Oriole

Tony Castro, CC BY-SA 4.0

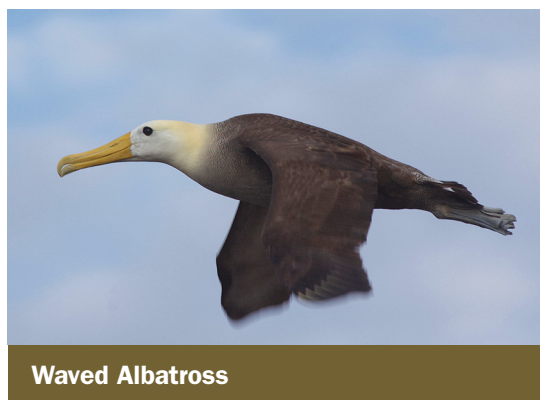
On the 13th, a **Myrtle X Audubon's Warbler** hybrid was with other Yellow-rumps at Abbotts Lagoon (DM).

The 16th produced a fluorescent **Yellow-green Vireo** at the Lighthouse (MB), and on the 17th a juvenile **Black-legged Kittiwake** flew by Abbotts Lagoon (TF). On the 18th, a **Song Sparrow (rufina Group)** was found in Volunteer Canyon (EM).

Things began to quiet down considerably after the 20th, as expected. A **Lewis's Woodpecker** flew over Hawk Hill on the 23rd (HT). Very rare coastally in California, a **Mountain Plover** showed up at Abbotts Lagoon on the 25th (IP). On the 28th, Abbotts Lagoon yielded up a **Red-throated Pipit** (CC). And finally, on the 31st, an appropriately Halloween-themed **American Crow** (rare for the Outer Point) was with ravens at Spaletta Plateau (BB).

Regular vagrants this month included **American Redstarts** at Muir Beach on the 2nd (LC) and Fish Docks on the 18th (CN), **Rose-breasted Grosbeaks** at RCA on the 4th (MH) and Rodeo Lagoon on the 8th (WL), **Blackpoll Warbler** at Muir Beach on the 2nd (LC), **Chestnut-sided Warbler** at Morse Gulch along Bolinas Lagoon on the 5th (MH), **Tennessee Warbler** at Stinson Beach on the 18th (EM), **Tropical Kingbird** at RCA on the 15th (BB).

OBSERVERS AND ACRONYMS: SJ: Sharon Jue, AH: Alex Henry, TF: Teale Fristoe, SA: Stuart Angerer, KS: Kenneth Sobon, CS: Colin Sumrall, LC: Lucas Corneliusen, HT: Holly Thomas, DM: Dominik Mosur, MF: Marty Freeland, MH: Marcel Holyoak, DW: Dan Williams, AM: Andrew Melnick, WL: William Legge, MK: Mark Kudrav, CD: Cedric Duhalde, MD: Matthew Dodder, RC: Richard Cimino, BB: Bob Battagin, MB: Mark Butler, CN: Christian Naventi, IT: Isabella Plummer, CC: Caitlin Chock



Waved Albatross

By Gregory "Greg" Smith, CC BY-SA 2.0

Planting event at CMMERE

Please join us for two days of planting at our Corte Madera Marsh Ecological Reserve Expansion (CMMERE) site on Saturday and Sunday, December 13–14 from 10 am until noon.

Everyone is welcome to these family-friendly planting day events! We will install 300 native plants at this ecological reserve that is rarely open to the public. This is a chance to get a close up look at our work, and contribute to the future viability of the habitat here.

We will plant and mulch tender new plants in pre-dug holes. The plantings will be located in the marsh upland — with beautiful marsh views. We'll do some birding, too.

We'll supply tools, gloves and instructions. Please wear sturdy shoes, long pants, dress in layers, and bring reusable water bottles. Rain will cancel.

Meet us at the end of Industrial Way near Cost Plus Plaza in Greenbrae.

Email ellenao@gmail.com to let us know if you will attend.

THANK YOU, DONORS

Carol Abdelfattah, Rosalinda Astari, Bob Battagin, Carl Blom, Burk Braun and Leslie Stewart, John Cambridge, Gayanne Enquist, Louis & Tamara Fehrenbacher, Kathleen Foster, Lizabeth Gluck, Elizabeth Graham, Hallie Inglehart, Victoria Jackson, Christina Jaqua, Michelle Kitlas, Kacey Koeberer, Mary Kyle, Elizabeth Lewis, Katherine Look, Denise Loomis, Anne Maczulak, Rebecca Matsubara, Vivan Mazur, Sharon McCloskey, Tina Mills, Michelle Muir, Ruth Nash, Debra Newman, Ron and Betsy Niewiadrowski, Jack & Judy Obedzinski, Earle Owen, Phillip Peterson, Amy Rodney, William Schmitt for Amy Faulkner, Alan & Ellyn Seelenfreund, Judd Simmons, Stolyavitch Fund CS, Muriel & Jacques Ullman

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January 8
7 PM **Speaker Series:** Dragonflies
With Kathy Biggs and
Sandra Van Orb

January 16
10 AM **Field Trip:** Skaggs Island Road
With Daniel Edelstein

February 5
8:30 AM **Field Trip:** The Ponds at
Las Gallinas
With Mark Clark

Check website for updates and details

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SUPPORT MARIN AUDUBON SOCIETY — BECOME A CHAPTER-SUPPORTING MEMBER

We invite you to become a Chapter-Supporting member of Marin Audubon Society (MAS) to support our important habitat protection and restoration work, conservation advocacy, our full calendar of birding field trips and speakers and our newsletter, *The Rail*. Marin Audubon is a chapter of National Audubon (NAS). However, becoming a **Chapter-Supporting Member** of MAS is separate and distinct from a membership in NAS. While MAS works with NAS on issues of mutual concern, we are a separate non-profit Section 501(c)(3) all-volunteer organization. Marin-based NAS members do receive this MAS newsletter, *The Rail*, however we encourage all NAS members to also become Chapter-Supporting members of MAS to support our local work. Very little of our funding comes from NAS, and we rely on our MAS Chapter-Supporting members and donors to help us fund our land acquisitions, restorations, habitat protection, conservation advocacy, this newsletter and our local programs.

If you're not already a Chapter-Supporting member, we urge you to join MAS and urge your friends, neighbors and relatives to join us, too.

You can join MAS or make a donation on our website using your credit card or PayPal by going to www.marinaudubon.org. Alternatively, you can join by filling out this form and sending us your payment by mail.

ALTERNATIVELY, IF YOU ARE LOOKING TO JOIN NATIONAL AUDUBON FOR THE FIRST TIME.

MAS will receive 100% of your initial membership if you enter **MAS's chapter code C04** on your application. To join, go to www.audubon.org/join.

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

Join or Donate to the Marin Audubon Society

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

- ☐ Enroll me as a Chapter-Supporting Member
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