

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 12 7:00 PM

Phalaropes in the Big City: Can Human Habitats Help Save the Birds of Americas' Saline Lakes?

By Nathan Van Schmidt



Don Dvorak

Red-necked Phalarope

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

Wilson's Phalaropes and Red-necked Phalaropes are exceptionally unique shorebirds that specialize in hypersaline habitats. Nathan will discuss the challenges facing phalaropes within the San Francisco Bay and across their intercontinental migration. He will discuss monitoring data within the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project, how saline lakes like California's Mono Lake have declined under the pressure of unsustainable water withdrawal and climate change and key research questions and next steps that the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory (SFBBO) plans to address these conservation science needs.

Nathan Van Schmidt is the Director of Regional Strategies at SFBBO. He obtained his B.S. from University of Wisconsin, Madison and his Ph.D. at U.C. Berkeley. He currently leads monitoring and research on non-breeding waterbird guilds, colonial waterbird breeding activity, waterbird disease and abatement research, and is the Lead Author of the Central Coast Regional Report for California's Fifth Climate Change Assessment.

THURSDAY, MARCH 12 7:00 PM

Bluebird Recovery Program and Nest Boxes

By Georgette Howington

IN THIS ISSUE	
President's Message	2
Field Trips	3
Conservation	4
Habitat Stewardship	6
Birdlog	7



The Rail

MARIN AUDUBON SOCIETY

2025 Christmas Bird Counts

SOUTHERN MARIN CBC

Summary by SMCBC Coordinator Alison Pence

Birders in Southern Marin were delighted to enjoy a sunny Saturday for this year's Christmas Bird Count. In contrast, the past few years have been rainy and cold, conditions that made birds less active and birders far less comfortable.

At Phoenix Lake, **American Robins** and **Cedar Waxwings** flocked to Toyon berries, while **Orange-crowned Warblers** and **Varied Thrush** were easier to spot in the bright understory. The improved weather made photographs better, too.

This year marked the 47th year Marin County has reported its findings to National Audubon. Southern Marin includes 24 regions of one count circle, 15 miles in diameter, stretching from the Headlands to Terra Linda. A total of 88 volunteers and 25 leaders covered



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Golden Eagle

these areas. While some volunteers monitored bird feeders at home, others ventured out—including a team surveying by boat on the Bay.

The count numbers are not complete at the time we go to press. One or two area leaders *continued on page 5*

CHEEP THRILLS CBC

Summary by Compilers David Sexton and Susan Kelly

Take a combination of good weather and excellent birders, send them out into the wetlands, Novato, and surrounding areas and what do you get? A Cheep Thrills CBC count that had the most birds we have ever observed in the fifteen years of this count. The 78 volunteers spread out in the 15 mile circle surrounding Mt. Burdell on December 18 and tallied 163 species with 82,511 total birds.

There were some truly amazing counts of many of the duck and shorebird species as compared to previous years. The **Dunlin** (8,295), **Western Sandpiper** (7,652), and **Least Sandpiper** (2,400) accounted for over 22% of all the birds seen and were more than twice the long-term average of 8,770. The volunteers that covered Black Point had an amazing 30,148 total birds in their area. The **American Avocets** (4,183), **American Wigeons** (4,028), **Common Goldeneyes** (2,261), and **Green-winged Teals** *continued on page 5*

POINT REYES CBC

Summary by Compiler David Wimpfheimer

On December 20, 160 eager participants helped to make the Point Reyes Christmas Bird Count (CBC) a successful event. First conducted in 1970, counters experienced overcast, somewhat misty and foggy conditions. While not ideal, the weather was certainly better than the hurricane like winds, downed trees and flooded roads that impacted the 2024 CBC.

It's important to look at our numbers as a

snapshot of a fifty-five year effort to collect numbers of resident birds and those wintering in the area. It's difficult to look at our numbers for one day and document long term changes although they seem to indicate declines.

In general, many species detected were at lower than average totals. Although real declines in these species is quite possible, the lower count can also be attributed to conditions that were not ideal for censusing birds.

continued on page 6

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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

President	Barbara Salzman 924-6057
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BAAC Reps	Barbara Salzman 924-6057 Doug Waterman newsletter@marinaudubon.org
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

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

We've just been through the highest king tides in decades, and we can expect more of the same. On Saturday, June, tidal waters overtopped the levee in Corte Madera in several places. My husband and I were trapped on the north end of the levee, near the Ecological Reserve, until the water receded. The levee was flooded in several spots at the north end, near MAS property. Industrial Way was flooded, as were the dirt trails leading to the levee trail from the Cost Plus parking lot. Streets and buildings in the Canal Area of San Rafael suffered ongoing flooding in a number of low-lying areas. Streets and buildings along the banks of San Rafael Creek flooded. On Friday tidal waters came within one foot of the top of the levee at Tiscornia Marsh. All the marsh plants were completely covered, but there was no flooding at MAS property. As reported in the Marin Independent Journal, at 8.7 feet the tides were more than a foot higher than the predicted 7.2-foot tide. All of the places that flooded are former tidal marsh. As tides get higher, how will we cope? Can everyone be kept free of the tides and their inconvenient impacts? We can expect higher tides with increasing frequency. Can we afford to remake all of the infrastructure to keep communities free of the flooding? We'll need to build higher tide walls, bigger pumps, and raise the streets. Maybe we'll just have to live with some flooding.

Our Board has approved a donation of \$25,000 to Point Blue Conservation Science, as we did last year, for the specific purpose of keeping staff on the Farallons during non-nesting season. One of the benefits of staff personnel being on-site for a full year was that they observed the presence of both sick and dead gulls, which gave them an early warning of avian influenza.

Thank you to all donors to our End-of-Year appeal. This winter appeal is our largest, and it is important to our work throughout the year. Again, we're sorry for any disruption related to the zip code mistake. Most of the letters seemed to have been delivered to the correct addresses, as far as we can tell. Some were returned to our P.O. box, and Martha Jarocki readdressed and reposted them. If you haven't donated yet, you can send a check to P.O. Box 599, or donate through PayPal. Thank you all again!

An extra task we're working on now is the preparation of an audit of our finances. We are required to have an audit for 2025 because the large grants we received have increased our annual revenue to the point where an audit is

required. The audit's been completed, and it's clean. Special thanks to Mike Anderson and Martha Jarocki for gathering all of the needed financial material. In addition, it's also National Audubon Annual Report time, a requirement to retain our standing as a chapter of the National Audubon Society and to receive basic funding from it. It's a long form with lots of questions for us to answer about our activities during the year.

Big thanks to our Southern Marin Christmas Count Coordinator Alison Pence who put the teams and the dinner together, and Bob Hinz, who is compiling the data. Thanks also to David Wimpfheimer, compiler of the Point Reyes count and the compilers of the Cheep Thrills count, David Sexton and Susan Kelly. As you can see from the reports, the counts were successful and fun, although the numbers were generally down.

And it's time for our Nominating Committee to begin its work. The members of our 2026 Committee are Doug Waterman (Chair), Cary Sparks, and Jude Stalker (see contact information in column on far left). We'll need to fill several seats on our Board this year. If you support our mission and would like to get more involved with our activities and decisions, contact one of the Committee members to find out more about the Board, — how we work, and what we need.

Like What MAS Does? Consider Joining the MAS Board

NOW is your chance to find out how you can help continue our activities or start new ones, use your skills, or learn new skills, to further enjoyment of birds and support enhancing habitats.

We have several openings but if you have some accounting experience or just like working with numbers we need you.

Contact our Nominating Committee: Mike Anderson at mdander65@gmail.com or Alison Pence at alipence9@gmail.com to learn about MAS's needs and opportunities for you with MAS.

MAS FIELD TRIPS

Open to the public

MAS is providing a full schedule of free field trips for the 2026 season.

Trips with participant limits require registration on MAS website's Field trips page. If you wish to be added to a waitlist or want to cancel a trip you registered for, contact newsletter@marinaudubon.org.

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.

JEAN AND JOHN STARKWEATHER SHORELINE PARK, San Rafael

Sunday, February 1, 2026

12 to 2 PM

With Rich Cimino and Janet Bodle

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

Jean and John Starkweather Shoreline Park is a narrow strip of parkland in east San Rafael that stretches for 2 miles along the Bayshore and freshwater ponds. The marshes adjacent to the Community Center are the locations where MAS has been planning a marsh restoration Sea Level Rise Adaptation project for some years now. We will walk a section of the Bay Trail that travels the edge of the park, including two ponds, and will be provided with plentiful birdwatching of wintering diving ducks, dabbling ducks, wetland waders, peeps, shorebirds and possible rail.

Bring your scope. Rain cancels.

DIRECTIONS: Meet in the Target parking lot, 125 Shoreline Parkway, at the southeast corner close to the pond vista point.

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

Thursday, February 5, 2026

Thursday, March 5, 2006

8:30 AM to noon

With Mark Clark

No registration required. 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 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: From Hwy 101, exit at Smith Ranch Rd. Drive east on Smith Ranch Rd toward McInnis Park. Turn left 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.

WINTER BIRDS OF THE DELTA Boat Trip

Sunday, February 8, 2026

8:40 AM to 4 PM

With David Wimpfheimer

This popular cruise is a winter highlight for birders and provides a specialized look at the richness and history of the California Delta. A full trip description and ticket information can be found on the MAS website under Field Trips.

This trip is full, but the waitlist is still open.
Contact newsletter@marinaudubon.org.

HAMILTON WETLANDS, Novato

Friday, February 20, 2026

8:30 AM to noon

With David Sexton and Matt Keller

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

Birders of all experience levels are welcome to join us for an exciting morning at Hamilton Wetlands with Point Blue Conservation Science! Spotting scopes and binoculars will be available. We recommend bringing your own pair of binoculars, water, sun protection, layers of clothing, and comfortable walking shoes. We will be on a wide, flat compacted dirt/gravel levee. A fully accessible bathroom will be available at the start and end of the event.

DIRECTIONS: Meet at Point Blue's Novato Baylands native plant nursery at 737 Aberdeen Road, Novato. From Hwy 101, take exit 458 to merge onto Nave Dr toward Hamilton Field. Turn right onto Hamilton Pkwy. Turn left through an open gate onto Aberdeen Rd, then keep to the right at the fork to proceed to the nursery.

RODEO LAGOON, Marin Headlands

Wednesday, February 25, 2026,

7:30 AM to noon

With William Legge & David Wiechers

Registration required. Registration opens on February 15 at 8 AM on the MAS website's Field Trips page. Limit of 15 participants for this trip.

With early spring migration underway will be looking out for migrant wildfowl, grebes, loons, gulls, and passerines. As usual, the weather will dictate our focus with onshore northwest winds ideal for spring sea watches, while offshore easterly winds promise a good selection of late winter and early summer passerine migrants. Join us for a Sea Watch at 7:30 AM or arrive later at 8 AM for a circuit of the lagoon. A brief mid-morning 'coffee-stop' is planned at Headlands Center for the Arts and it would be appreciated if participants come willing to contribute via the onsite 'tip-jar' as a thank you to the Headlands Center for the Arts for accommodating our group. This field trip is less suitable for beginners.

DIRECTIONS: Head south on Hwy 101 and take the last Sausalito exit just before the Golden Gate Bridge. At the exit stop sign, turn right and go under the freeway, then follow the road down to the left. Within 300 feet turn left at the sign to the Marin Headlands; this is the only available left turn before you begin the descent into Sausalito. You should see the tunnel with the five-minute signal light. Proceed through the tunnel on Bunker Road to the Rodeo Lagoon Parking Lot at the end and meet by the bridge over the channel to the beach.

Golden Gate Bird Alliance Classes Offered to MAS at a 20% Discount

EXPLORING BREEDING BIRD BEHAVIORS

Instructors: Liz Lewis (elewis227@gmail.com) and, with Dom Mosur on field trips
Through a combination of classes and hands-on field trips, you'll deepen your understanding of breeding bird behaviors. This class is tailored for intermediate birders.

Four Thursday evening lectures (Zoom)

April 2, 9, 30, and May 7, 2026

6:30 to 8:30 PM

Zoom link provided when you register.

Two Field trips

El Polin Springs and Inspiration Point

San Francisco

Saturday, April 4, 2026

9 AM to noon

Mount Burdell Preserve, San Andreas Trailhead

Marin County

Sunday, May 17, 2026

9 AM to noon

Price is \$260 (\$208 for GGBA and MAS members). MAS members should contact newsletter@marinaudubon.org to obtain a discount code to register at the GGBA website. Registration opens February 4. Limit of 20 participants for this class.

BAY AREA BIRD VOCALIZATIONS

Instructor: Lynn Perry (lperry@perryip.com)

Whether you are a beginner or intermediate, this class will power up your skills to identify the birds you are likely to encounter in the field.

Two Tuesday evening classes (Zoom)

May 7 and 12, 2026

7 to 9 PM

Zoom link provided when you register.

Two Field trips

Tennessee Valley Trail, Mill Valley

Sunday, May 10, 2026

8:30 to 11:30 AM

Escalon Trailhead, Camino Alto Open Space Preserve

Sunday, May 17, 2026

8:30 to 11:30 AM

Price is \$130 (\$104 for GGBA and MAS members). MAS members should contact newsletter@marinaudubon.org to obtain a discount code to register at the GGBA website. Registration opens February 4. Limit of 16 participants for this class.



Conservation

GREATER BAHIA ACQUISITION PROGRESS

We're on track to purchasing the two 323.28-acre parcels just north of the Rush Creek Preserve in unincorporated Novato. The last two contingencies in our Purchase Agreement are on track to be satisfied in the next several months. The hazardous materials Phase 1 investigation has been completed, and it reports no evidence of any hazardous materials. MAS's purchase of the two parcels is scheduled to be on the agenda for the State Coastal Conservancy Board's next meeting on February 19. The parcels will be purchased from the Leveroni family.

REGIONALLY ADVANCING LIVING SHORELINES (RALS) PROJECT

We're well on our way to starting work on this project. Proposals from consultants for the 12 sites (three in Marin) have been received and vetted. We're pleased to announce that the consultant team chosen for Marin consists of Environmental Science Associates (ESA) as the lead the firm we are also working with on Tiscornia; H.T. Harvey & Associates; Peter Baye, Ph.D.; and Mark Cederborg, Inc.

The purpose of the project is to advance coordinated programmatic design planning for living shorelines at three sites in Marin County ("the Project") and develop plans that would broaden the use of living shoreline measures to improve the bay environment. The full project includes three sites in San Francisco, owned by the Port of San Francisco and managed by Golden Gate Bird Alliance, and four sites in the East Bay, managed by Ducks Unlimited. The Marin sites are the San Rafael bayfront, the Corte Madera bayfront, and a portion of San Francisco State University's Estuary.

CATTAIL REMOVAL UPDATE

Las Gallinas Sanitary District is finishing up their cattail removal and may be finished by the time this *Rail* is published. So far the actual removal has changed significantly from the original plan. And even the effort to make up for the loss, has gone awry. Cattails in the northwest and southeast corners have been extensively removed and areas where sora and Virginia Rails have been observed foraging have been removed. The wide dense areas of cattails were supposed to have remained or been broken up with channels. Instead wide swaths appear to have been removed. The work is in process as we go to print. Decisions are being made based largely on input from the Marin/Sonoma Mosquito & Vector Control District, to ensure they'll have access to treat the pond for mosquitoes after finding some carrying the West Nile Virus.

NEXT STEP IN AIR TOUR UPDATE

Instead of producing an environmental assessment addressing potential impacts of small planes and/or helicopters carrying tourists over the Golden Gate Recreation Area, Point Reyes National Seashore, Muir Woods National Monument, and the Maritime Museum, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the National Park Service (NPS) have proposed that voluntary agreements (VAs) be signed with each of the air tour companies operating the flights.

These agreements are proposed to comply with the federal court order in the case brought by our legal counsel, Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) on behalf of MAS) the Marin Watershed Alliance, and an individual. The order gave the FAA and NPS one year to "restart" the currently inadequate National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis. PEER submitted comments on our behalf and Marin Audubon Society submitted additional comments in opposition to the use of the VAs. Our input is generally presented below. If the FAA/NPS proposal prevails, it would circumvent the court's decision, continue the status quo, and leave wildlife populations at risk of significant, long-term damage.

The VAs would do nothing at all to ensure the protection of critically important bird and other wildlife species that depend on habitats in these federal parks. There has been no analysis of the disturbance impacts under current conditions. The proposed VAs would allow the airplane and/or helicopter tourist flights to continue at the same level (altitude and number) as they are now. The VAs would keep the diverse wildlife populations that depend on the San Francisco Bay Area's world-renowned national parks at great risk.

The Point Reyes National Seashore alone provides essential habitat for 490 species of birds, 17 of which are endangered. Many are at risk because they nest in locations where they are vulnerable to overflight disturbance, and because these sites are the very same scenic coastal cliffs and beaches that air tours seek out for their customers. Federally protected marine mammals, such as harbor seals, Steller sea lions, elephant seals, and California sea lions, are also threatened by overflights. Coastal beaches are their pupping grounds, where aerial disturbance can cause frightened, helpless pups to be separated from their mothers. Also, adults require undisturbed rest after foraging dives.

Data available to the public (e.g., the NPS Datastore – Pinniped Monitoring for the NPS Inventory and Monitoring San Francisco Bay

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

Area Network: 1983-2025 – Data Package at <https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore/Reference/Profile/2315921>) reveal instances of marine mammals flushing into the water as a result of disturbance by aircraft along the Point Reyes Seashore and GGNRA coasts during surveys in recent years. At the very least, the significance of such data must be analyzed in an environmental document.

According to studies conducted by the US Fish & Wildlife Service and others, “Civilian small aircraft, including fixed-wing and helicopters, are a major source of disturbance to seabird colonies at Devil’s Slide Rock and the Pt. Reyes Headlands. Professionally trained seabird monitors record between 50 to 100 separate disturbances per year at these colonies. Scores of disturbances are also documented by Alcatraz Island biologists as well as at the Farallon Islands.* Commercially operated air tours have been reported causing disturbances at these areas.” (See sources noted below).

Terrestrial species, such as the federally threatened Northern Spotted Owl, are also at risk. Marin County is the last stronghold for these threatened species. Northern Spotted Owls are known to nest at Muir Woods National Monument and other federal parks in Marin.

The FAA and NPS have failed to justify or even explain their proposal to use VAs, which are wholly inadequate to comply with the mandate from the court to conduct environmental review of the tour flights. The FAA and NPS fail to provide any evidence whatsoever in support of their assumption that the current conditions are benign. The proposal ignores evidence that impacts are occurring.

At the very least, the significance of the existing data must be discussed and analyzed in an environmental document. All survey data of wildlife that could be affected in the four

parks should be compiled and analyzed for potential impact, instead of simply assuming that the current situation is benign. Our search was not exhaustive.

That a federal agency charged with protecting the nation’s natural resources would propose using VAs, which would provide a framework for the potential demise of those resources, is most troubling. There needs to be an analysis of how the FAA and NPS are complying with the laws and policies that direct their responsibilities, including the Endangered Species Act, Marine Mammal Protection Act, and Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Instead, these VAs would provide a framework for continued threats to protected species.

Ideally, the most protective approach would be to disallow overflights for recreational viewing. Recognizing, however, that some overflights will likely be permitted, enforcement must also be addressed. The environmental document must define penalties for violators, with increasing severity for repeat offenders. Violations that put our native wildlife at risk cannot continue without consequences, as is the case now.

An environmental assessment document must be prepared to comply with the court’s directive. The current proposal is not in the public interest and must be rejected. In addition, the public has a right to comment on the environmental analyses of natural resources that it owns, so any such document must be released for public review.

Additional Sources: Restoration and Monitoring of Common Murre Colonies in Central California: Annual Report 2023, 2022, 2021, 2019 – Seabird Protection Network (SPN)

Aircraft Disturbance to Common Murres (*Uria aalge*) at a Breeding Colony in Central California, USA. Allison R. Fuller, Gerard

J. McChesney et al. Waterbirds, 41(3):257-267. <http://www.bioone.org/doi/full/10.1675/063.041.0305>

FEDERAL ACTIVITIES

Last month the federal government was focused on destroying the Endangered Species Act. This month they’re moving on to destroy the California Coast and all other coasts (see below). Their next attack, we hear, will be on the National Environmental Policy Act (the federal equivalent of CEQA).

CALIFORNIA COAST MAY BE LOST TO OFFSHORE OIL DRILLING

The Department of the Interior is proposing a Five-Year Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Oil and Gas Leasing Program that proposes to offer for lease to the oil and gas industry the entire California Coast in a series of six separate federal offshore drilling lease sales: three redundant OCS sales in Southern California, two in Central California (including Monterey, Santa Cruz, San Mateo, Marin, and Sonoma Counties, as well as the City and County of San Francisco), plus an additional first-ever OCS lease sale located off of Mendocino, Humboldt, and Del Norte Counties. Particularly outrageous is the inclusion of the area of the continental shelf where the deep drop-off generates rich upwellings that support diverse populations of fish, birds, and marine mammals. We’ve signed on to a group letter and we’ll be writing our own letter as well. More to come next month.

Southern Marin CBC

continued from page 1

have not submitted their numbers. Preliminarily, the Southern Marin CBC has tallied 35,194 birds and 165 species, compared to a historical average in the 170-180 range. Seven Bald Eagles have already been reported; in the first 32 years of this count only three were observed. Two teams observed Peregrine Falcons. Except for a ‘count week’ Yellow-crowned Night-Heron no rare birds have been reported so far.

Some experienced birders noted lower numbers of shorebirds this year, reflecting a perceived decline that aligns with data presented by researchers. For more information, see this video (<http://bit.ly/3NGgXBd>) or visit <https://sfbaystateofthebirds.org/>. Thanks to everyone who helped make this year’s count a success.

Cheep Thrills CBC

continued from page 1

(2,223) were as much as four times the average of previous counts.

The Rush Creek count area had the most species with 121 and the Bahia area had 113. Their sparrow count included **1 Grasshopper, 38 White-crowned, 15 Golden-crowned, 192 Savannah, 95 Song, and 21 Lincoln**. The Mt. Burdell count area had the highest count of any area that did not have a wetland. They had 62 species and 2,081 birds, including the only **Golden Eagle** that was observed.

The team of Lowell Sykes and Lisa Hug have taken on the toughest assignment of counting all of the gulls at the Redwood Landfill. For most of us it is Oh No, Not Gulls but Lisa is one of the best at separating all

those gulls, right down to the hybrids and all the age variations.

There were 21 species that were only seen in a single count area. A **Long-tailed Duck** and a **White-winged Scoter** were spotted for the Black Point area and a **Short-eared Owl** was added to the Rush Creek count. The only one **Wood Duck** seen in the Nicasio area. A **Swamp Sparrow** was added to the Stafford Lake count area. The Bahia group added the **Red-naped Sapsucker, Red-breasted Mergansers**, and more from the Bahia count area.

It was a great count with a lot of great volunteers, continuing for the fifteenth year and is annually dedicated to the memory of Rich Stallcup.

HABITAT STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

Mulching is at the top of our to-do list now that the new plants are in the ground. Thick mulch will control some of the weeds near the needlegrass, gumplant, etc., that we planted during December and January. Moisture retention is an issue even now in winter when a carpet of weeds, not heat, takes a surprising amount of moisture out of the soil. We will remove some larger weeds before mulching.

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.

Rain cancels our workdays. We have the tools and gloves.

Volunteer Workdays

Triangle Marsh, East Corte Madera:

First Saturdays: February 7, March 7

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 14, March 14

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

Sero Dee, Carmen Clementine Deitmer, Katrina Hanley, Bob Hinz, Martha Jarocki, Alison Pence, Lowell Sykes

WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS

Cindy Biehler, Teresa Bright, Maggie Brind'Amour, Ann Carroll, Meghan Dunn, Christine Egan, Ronya Ehrlich, Penny Friday, Nancy R Hudson, Sam Jones, Lily King, Katherine C. Kline, Catherine Lindelli, Sheryl M Longman, Suzanne Mollenkopf, Ronald C Nerviani, Kristina Stone, Leigh Threlkel, Carolyn Truelove

Habitat Stewardship

MUCH APPRECIATION FOR THE NOVATO HIGH SCHOOLS

By Jude Stalker

MAS is so grateful to have volunteers from Novato and San Marin High Schools helping with our native habitat stewardship work at Bahia for the past several months. They have already accomplished a lot!

Last year, I was contacted by David Glasgow, a School to Career Liaison for the Marin County Office of Education. In this position, he connects students to internships and other work-based learning opportunities. He asked me if some of the high school students in Novato could volunteer their time to help at Bahia.

Of course, I was thrilled by the prospect of having the extra help and agreed!

Since then, one of the students, Rubi Tavares, has stepped up to recruit students and to help coordinate and facilitate the workdays as part of her internship.

Rubi is going even further now by reaching out to the local middle schools to get even more students involved. She has been a tremendous help and is learning much about coordinating this type of program and about the various tasks that we are working on at Bahia.

We start the day with an introduction to who we are and what we do at MAS. We explain the importance of wetland habitats and describe the history of how Bahia came very close to being developed into a larger community rather than restored into the beautiful place that it is now. The students are enthusiastic and at the end of the day feel proud that they have been able to help the environment.

In the five workdays that we have held, the students have participated in removing invasive plants such as harding grass (*Phalaris aquatica*)

Point Reyes CBC

continued from page 1

Tomales Bay, Drakes Estero and Abbotts Lagoon are very productive estuaries that have been protected from negative impacts.

However, waterfowl, shorebirds and other species are declining in their breeding ranges due to large scale changes in food availability and habitat changes. Those impacts will be reflected in our count no matter how well protected and productive our habitats are. Non migratory species such as quail, woodpeckers and some song birds have not shown the same declines as migratory birds.

Some of the birds that were recorded in below average totals follow below with their totals and their average totals of the last 25



David Glasgow (left) and students collecting wood chips for sheet mulching

and stinkwort (*Dittrichia graveolens*), sheet mulching (placing cardboard and mulch) over larger patches of invasive harding grass and will be planting native grasses into the sheet-mulched areas in late January.

Working with them has been a pleasure, and we look forward to more stewardship workdays together.

PLANTING TIME

January is planting time, and as we go to press, the Hanford ARC crew has just completed the planting of 1,000 creeping wild rye (*Elymus triticoides*) and 500 sedge (*Carex praegracilis*) in the seasonal wetland on the Central Peninsula, and 250 coyote bush (*Baccharis pilularis*) and 250 California sage (*Artemisia californica*) in the open areas along the levees at Bahia.

The Hanford crew has also planted 500 beardless wild rye (*Leymus triticoides*) in the areas that were sheet-mulched to stop the growth of harding grass at Simmons several years ago.

A volunteer crew of six planted 45 gumplants (*Grindelia stricta*) plants along the shoreline at our Corte Madera property.

years in parenthesis. **Killdeer 81** (278), **Common Loon 77** (238) **Tri-colored Blackbird 3** (193), **Band-tailed Pigeon 51** (395), **Canvasback 8**, much below the species average. **Cinnamon Teal** was missed for the first time on the count.

Many raptor species were recorded in low totals, possibly the result of the foggy, wet conditions. Only three **Ferruginous Hawks** were seen. Seven **Bald Eagles** were seen and only one **Golden Eagle**. In recent years there have been eight to ten of the latter. Most glaring was the small number of **Peregrine Falcon**, 3, the lowest total since the early 1970s Their average of the previous 25 years was 22. We first observed low totals two years ago as did many other CBCs in the state. Avian flu was the main

continued on page 7

Marin Birdlog: November 2025

By Noah Arthur

December is deep winter in Marin, when chilly temperatures tend to push wintering rarities into towns and parks, just in time to be found on Christmas Bird Counts. The first new rare finds this December were **2 Tundra Swans** at Santa Venetia Marsh on the 3rd (BK). On the 5th, a presumably returning **montana/merrilli Song Sparrow** (northern Great Basin subspecies) turned up at Rodeo Lagoon at the same place where at least one of these has wintered the past two years (WL).

A likely-returning male **Wilson's Warbler** showed back up at its known location in Muir Beach on the 7th (JP) to join the banded **Black-and-white** that has also wintered there for at least two seasons. A **Lewis's Woodpecker** was at Pantoll on Mt. Tam on the 11th (N). **2 Grasshopper Sparrows** were seen together in a closed area of Bel Marin Keys on the 15th (MK), roving around with a mobile Savannah flock.

Duck flocks at Rush Creek included two rarities on the 16th, a male **Common Teal** and a male **Mallard X Gadwall hybrid** (BB).

Winter rarity occurrence kicked into higher after mid-month as CBCs started up. The 18th produced a **Red-naped Sapsucker** at Slade Park (CP & HC) – a classic CBC rarity in Marin – plus a **Grasshopper Sparrow** at Simmons Slough (JC), and a **Cassin's Vireo** and **montana/merrilli Song Sparrow** at Olema Campground (BB). On the 19th, CBCers in the mostly private Hicks Valley counted exceptional numbers of small geese: **30 Snows**, **4 Ross's**, and **151 Greater**

White-fronts, but oddly on **1 Cackling** (DM and others).

As usual, the Pt. Reyes CBC on the 20th turned up a plethora of rarities. A wintering **Western Flycatcher** was found in Pt. Reyes Station (EH & JB), a **Loggerhead Shrike** at Drakes Head (WM, AJ), a noisy **Winter Wren** near Tomales Beach, **2 rufina-group Song Sparrows** (Pacific Northwest subspecies) at McClure Dairy (group checklist), and **2 Barn Swallows** at Limantour (unsure who found them). Rare warblers were concentrated around Olema Marsh and included a **Black-throated Gray** (unsure who found it), a **Black-and-white** (EM & LC), and **2 Wilson's** (EM & LC). **Swamp Sparrows** were exceptionally numerous

in the Tomales Bay marshes, with over 50 counted.

Things were less eventful until the 27th, when **2 Nelson's Sparrows** were found in the marshes at Pine Gulch in Bolinas (CD & JCh). On the 30th a **Ruddy Turnstone** turned up in rarely-birded Dillon Beach (KE). And also on the 30th, birders seeking the Sausalito **Yellow-crowned Night-heron** came across a male **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** in nearby willows (AG).

OBSERVERS AND ACRONYMS: BK: "Brother Kevin" (eBird name), WL: William Legge, JP: John Paul, N: "Null" (eBird name), MK: Matt Keller, BB: Brian Browne, CP: Carl Parkinson, HC: Heather Cameron, JC: Josiah Clark, DM: Dominik Mosur, EH: Eric Heisey, JB: Jonah Benningfield, WM: Whitney Mortimer, AJ: "Amy and James" (eBird name), EM: Eddie Monson, LC: Lucas Corneliussen, CD: Cedric Duhalde, JCh: Jaime Chavez, KE: Karen Evans, AG: Alex Gotz

Point Reyes CBC

continued from page 6

cause for the decline of this species.

Only **224 Brant** were observed. In previous years over a thousand were tallied, but observations from many sites indicate that the species now winters further north. **117 Mourning Doves** were seen, compared to **139 Eurasian Collared Doves**. It is not clear if the increase in Eurasian Collared Doves has negative impacts on our native species, but it will be informative to document the numbers of these species in the future.

Long-billed Curlew 147 (38) and **Swamp Sparrow 58** (11) were found in above average numbers.

Uncommon species that were found included **Elegant Tern** (2), **Barn Swallow** (2), **Cassin's Vireo**, **Western Flycatcher**, **Black-throated Gray**, **Black and White** and **Nashville Warblers**.

186 species were seen on the count. This would be a very impressive total for most of the CBCs in North America, but it is a relatively low total for the Point Reyes CBC. In the last 25 years the total has been below 190 only three times, usually as a result of adverse weather.



Nelson's Sparrow

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Black-throated Gray Warbler

Patricia Ware

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March 5 **Field Trip:** Las Gallinas Ponds
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March 25 **Field Trip:** Rodeo Lagoon
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March 12 **Speaker Series:** Bluebird Recovery
7 PM *Program and Nest Boxes
With Georgette Howington*

Check website for updates and details



SCAN QR CODE on left with your phone camera to connect to MAS's website.

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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.

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