

THURSDAY, APRIL 9 7:00 PM

Adelie Penguins: Their Past, Present and Future in a Changing Antarctica

By Grant Ballard



The Rail

MARIN AUDUBON SOCIETY



Annie Schmidt

Leaping Adelie Penguins

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

Point Blue Conservation Science has monitored the Adelie penguins of Antarctica for decades, witnessing firsthand the profound effects of climate change, including the recent, rapid decline in Ross Sea ice that is now threatening their survival. Grant will share recent research made possible by their advanced technology and extensive, multi-decade datasets, including new findings into the evolutionary past of penguins, and will show how comparing their ancient history with their current condition and challenges can teach us about the unique and globally important Southern Ocean ecosystem.

Grant Ballard joined Point Blue as a volunteer in 1991 and is currently Chief Science Officer, responsible for overall leadership and coordination of Point Blue's scientific activities. He has a PhD in Biological Sciences from the University of Auckland and a BA in English from Cornell University and has expertise in evaluating climate change impacts on wildlife and human population..

THURSDAY, MAY 14 7:00 PM

The Aquatic World of Penguins

By David Ainley

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MAS Board Elections Coming Up

Anual Elections for MAS Board Members are coming up at our Annual Meeting in May, at our Speaker Series meeting. We're pleased to announce a slate of four nominees for positions on the MAS Board. Once elected, their three-year terms will begin in June.

Because MAS is a membership organization, our members have a right to vote annually for Board members. This year we have a special local bird expert, David Ainley Ph.D., presenting a program on penguins. We hope you will join us to hear David and vote on our slate of Board member nominees. We are pleased to announce this year's candidates:

Sonali Shah Sonali brings 25 years of experience in communications, as well as work with numerous nonprofits. A wildlife enthusiast, she is also an artist whose work celebrates our natural world. Sonali is excited about the opportunity to support Marin Audubon's mission to protect birds and their habitats.

And returning Board members:

Mike Anderson This will be Mike's second term. He is in charge of our Speaker Series Programs and is the chair of our Finance Committee. Mike is a CPA, and MAS has benefitted from his expertise in many ways. He manages our audit activities and tax preparations.

Robert Hinz He is a long-time Board member, our Membership Chair, and also the compiler for the Southern Marin Christmas Bird Count. Bob is also active in stewardship activities, especially on our Corte Madera properties, and manages activities on Triangle Marsh.

Lowell Sykes Another long-time Board member, Lowell has a special interest in habitat stewardship. He is active with just about all of our properties, removing invasive broom, mowing invasive grasses, and weed-whacking. We can always count on him to contribute.

Conservation

MMWD MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE: EBIKES ON TRAILS

The Marin Municipal Water District (now called "Marin Water") has embarked on a process to update its 2005 Road and Trails Management Plan (RTMP). According to the District's website, the update will build on past planning efforts to guide how Marin Water manages, maintains, and restores watershed roads and trails in the future. Marin Water has committed to doing environmental review, but what kind of environmental document they will produce is unclear. The District appears to be determined to allow e-bikes on its lands; currently, e-bike riding there is illegal. Updating the RTMP, including environmental review of changes in use, such as allowing e-bikes, is essential.

According to Marin Water, the RTMP

update will integrate findings from the Watershed Recreation Management Plan (WRMP) Feasibility Study, conducted several years ago, and the 2019 Biodiversity, Fire and Fuels Integrated Plan. It will:

- Reevaluate trail classifications and standards;
- Update social trail management criteria (social trails are those that have been created not by Marin Water but by private individuals);
- Identify bike access routes and restoration priorities;
- Refine visitor management and outreach strategies; and
- Complete a comprehensive environmental analysis (this is the most critical component).

Marin Water has been conducting field trips to the selected trails. These field trips are

continued on page 4

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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

President	Barbara Salzman 924-6057
Vice President	Doug Waterman dglswtrmn@gmail.com
Secretary	Lelia Lanctot 924-6138
Treasurer	Martha Jarocki 461-3592
Conservation	Barbara Salzman 924-6057 MJ Schramm maryjane.Schramm@gmail.com
Field Trips	Doug Waterman dglswtrmn@gmail.com Alison Pence 254-4551
Membership Chair	Bob Hinz 383-8688 Contact Bob for membership problems or questions.
Outreach, Media	Open
Outreach, Website	Cary Sparks cary@holotropic.com
Speaker Series	Mike Anderson 990-9784
Project Management	Jude Stalker 680-6291
Nominating	Doug Waterman dglswtrmn@gmail.com Ellena Ochoa volunteercoordinator@marinaudubon.org Cary Sparks cary@holotropic.com
Newsletter Editors, <i>The Rail</i>	Doug Waterman newsletter@marinaudubon.org
Property Real Estate	James Raives 497-4492
Volunteer Coordinator	Ellena Ochoa volunteercoordinator@marinaudubon.org
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

Many of you may have seen the sad account in the San Francisco Chronicle of mountain lions in Southern California. Their habitat has been diminished by development, segmented by freeways, and they're being hit by cars because they don't have enough room to roam. Such tragedy. I hope some of MAS's properties can help the mountain lions here. We're trying to do our part to protect bay ecosystems by acquiring and restoring habitats, and we're thrilled to have received the \$2 million grant from the Coastal Conservancy.

It's the beginning of nesting for Northern Spotted Owls and other species, and we're beginning our Northern Spotted Owl Protection Program, again under the expert guidance of Elyse Omernick. See her article on page 5. Elyse is gearing up to send letters with information about NSO to residents within a quarter mile of a nest. The program also includes a docent program that is described in the attached write-up. If you're interested in learning more, contact Elyse. There's an article about Point Blue Conservation Science's report on their surveys of the Marin County Open Space District and Marin Water lands.

We're in the process of applying for multiple grants to complete the Tiscornia Tidal Marsh and Sea-Level Rise Adaptation Project. We have the funding to improve the existing levee and construct and vegetate the ecotone levee.

We've had another dumping on our Triangle Marsh property. Thank you to the Town of Corte Madera Public Works for alerting us that someone dumped an old mattress on our property, picking it up and disposing of it. This is not the first time people have dumped refuse at Triangle Marsh and Simmons. Both properties are on well-traveled roads with easy access for people not wanting to pay to take their junk to a designated facility. The dumping reflects an incredible lack of responsibility and concern about the impact of their actions on others. Without staff, it is difficult for us to deal with debris that's been dumped on our properties.

Another reminder not to do your major tree and shrub removal or major trimming now. It is nesting season, and you will risk destroying an active nest. Bird nests are usually constructed with care to avoid being seen by predators. That means they will be difficult for you to see, too. So, don't risk it—delay your major tree and brush work until autumn.

Don't miss the species that move through on their migratory routes north to nest. Join one of our field trips. We have two field trips to Rodeo Lagoon to allow for more people to join us to enjoy birds at this special space.

Southern Marin Christmas Bird Count, Final Results

For the 49th Christmas Bird Count in Southern Marin, 134 volunteers reported 84,911 individuals among 172 bird species. The most unusual species was **Nelson's Sparrow** (3) in Bolinas. The other notable species was the count week observation of the **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron** that has wintered in Sausalito for seven years.

There were unusually large numbers of some species led by a phenomenal **28,000 Common Murres** streaming by Bolinas. That was a big boost to the otherwise unremarkable number of individuals in the circle. **Vaux's Swifts** (320), **Bald Eagles** (10) and **Brown Pelicans** (2999) were three other species with high counts.

Are You a Chapter-supporting Member?

If you are a National Audubon Society (NAS) member, you are, thereby, also a member of the Marin Audubon Society (MAS), the local chapter of NAS and you might expect that your membership dues for NAS are shared with our chapter. Although chapters do receive a base amount from NAS, it is based on the membership dues collected by each chapter more than 20 years ago. It has no relationship with current dues paid or collected.

MAS depends heavily on Chapter-supporting Memberships and donations to fund our local activities, *The Rail*, habitat improvement on our properties, monthly speakers, legal expenses and more.

So, we encourage NAS members to join MAS, also, as a Chapter-supporting member. Please support what MAS does right here in Marin.

MAS FIELD TRIPS

Open to the public

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

Trips with participant limits require registration on MAS website's Field trips page. If you want to cancel a trip you registered for, contact newsletter@marinaudubon.org. If a trip is full, check back, even on the night before the trip, as cancellations will open new spots.

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, April 2, 2026

Thursday, May 7, 2026

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, raptors and swallows. 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.

DOMINICAN UNIVERSITY

San Rafael

Wednesday April 15, 2026

8:30 to 11:30 AM

With Rich Cimino and Janet Bodle

Registration is required. Registration opens on April 5 at 8 AM on MAS website's Field Trips page. Trip limit is 12.

Spring migration birding on the Dominican University grounds will take us to riparian, sycamore and oak habitat.

Species we hope to see are **Western Tanager, Black-headed Grosbeak, Cassin's Vireo** as well resident birds.

DIRECTIONS: Address for Dominican University is 50 Acacia Ave in San Rafael – meet at the free visitors parking lot at the intersection of Grand and Acacia avenues (the Conlan Center lot).

RODEO LAGOON

Marin Headlands

Wednesday, April 22, 2026

7:30 AM to noon

With William Legge & David Wiechers

Registration required. Registration opens on April 12 at 8 AM on the MAS website's Field Trips page. Limit of 15 participants for this trip.

With early spring migration underway, we'll be looking out for migrant wildfowl, shorebirds, 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 passerine migrants. Join us for a Sea Watch at 7:30 AM or arrive later at 8:15 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.

BIRDS, PLANTS AND WILDFLOWERS OF MOUNT BURDELL

8:30 AM to 1:30 PM

Thursday May 12, 2026

With David Edelson and Michelle Muir

Registration is required. Registration opens May 2 at 8 AM on MAS website's Field Trips page. Trip limit is 15.

On this moderate 4-mile hike, we will look and listen for birds, and also stop to appreciate native plants and habitat, particularly wildflowers which should be in

abundant bloom.

Mount Burdell, a Marin County Open Space Preserve located just west of Novato, is a hotspot of plant and avian diversity, with oak woodlands, grasslands, serpentine outcrops and a vernal pool (Hidden Lake). Some of the birds we'll hope to see include spring migrants like orange-crowned warblers, house wrens, lark sparrows, and Bullock's orioles, as well as year-round residents like oak titmice, Bewick's wrens, western bluebirds, and multiple species of woodpeckers. This trip is suitable for all levels of birders and plant enthusiasts.

We are planning a 4-mile hike which includes some uphill and/or rocky sections where hiking poles might be useful. We recommend hiking shoes or trail shoes with good traction. Please bring lunch/snacks, ample water, sunscreen, a hat, and, of course, binoculars.

DIRECTIONS: We'll meet at the San Andreas trailhead. To get there, exit Hwy 101 at San Marin Dr, go west approximately 2.5 miles, turn right (north) on San Andreas Dr and go roughly .6 mile to the trailhead. There is parking along the road but no bathrooms or water.

RODEO LAGOON

Marin Headlands

Wednesday, May 13, 2026

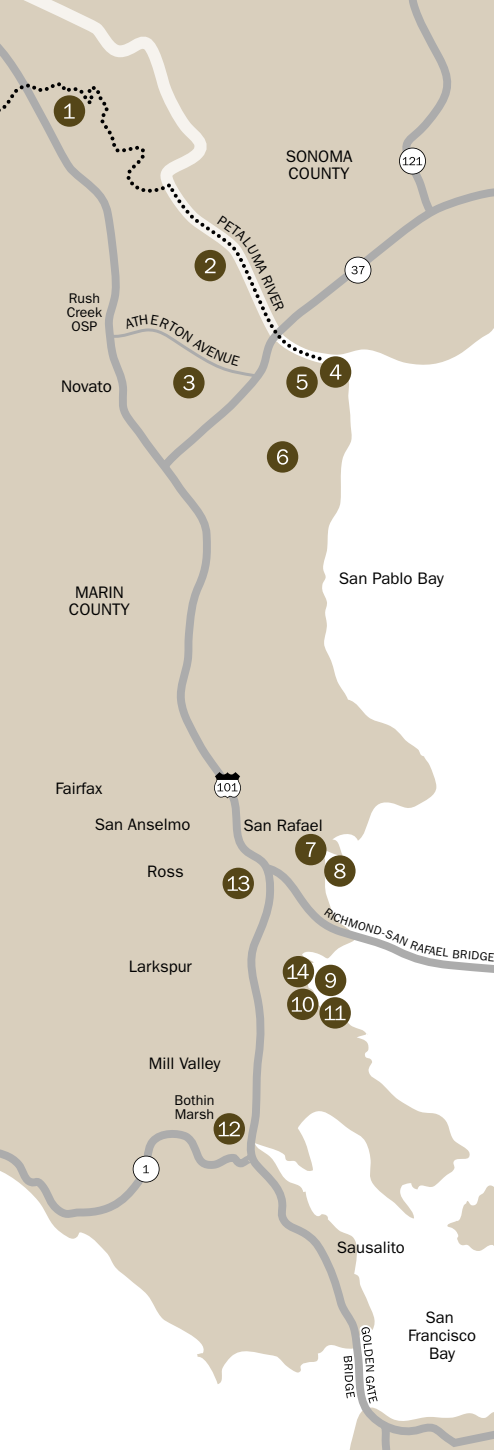
7:30 AM to noon

With William Legge & David Wiechers

Registration required. Registration opens on May 3 at 8 AM on the MAS website's Field Trips page. Limit of 15 participants for this trip.

Please see the second column for the description and directions for this trip.





Conservation

continued from page 1

opportunities for the public to see the trails Marin Water is considering to open for e-bike use. There have been two site visits so far, Mountain Top, Arturo, Pumpkin Ridge and Madrone trails.

The last discussion of the planning was at the Watershed Committee’s mid-March meeting, before publication of this issue of the newsletter. But don’t worry if you couldn’t attend that meeting. There will be many more opportunities to learn about and comment on Marin Water’s plans.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Visit the trails on your own, especially if you haven’t been able to attend the site visits. Pay attention to the adjacent habitats and evaluate whether you think additional bike or e-bike use could impact the habitats or wildlife using them.
- Attend site visits and assess the potential impacts of expanded bike use on the habitats near the trails. There will be another site visit on April 11.
- Learn about the scenarios Marin Water is considering and provide input by attending workshops and meetings. Another workshop will be held in May, and input from this one will be presented at the June Watershed Committee meeting.
- Visit the webpage periodically for new information on upcoming engagement opportunities, new project documents, and further news as the RTMP update progresses.
- Subscribe to <https://mailchi.mp/marinwater/watershedrecplan> to receive email notifications about this and other elements of the WRMP process. You’ll also receive Marin Water’s monthly e-news containing information about water- and money-saving customer resources, rebates, the Mt. Tam watershed and more.

2025 POINT BLUE REPORT ON NORTHERN SPOTTED OWL NESTING

Point Blue Conservation Science has been conducting annual breeding-season surveys of Northern Spotted Owl (NSO) nesting areas on Marin Municipal Water District and Marin County Open Space District lands since 1999. For this year’s report, “Point Blue Northern Spotted Owl Monitoring on Marin County Parks and Marin Water Lands 2025 Report,” four Point Blue biologists monitored 58 survey areas. Data was collected on occupancy rates, the proportion of NSO pairs that attempted nesting, the proportion of nesting attempts that were successful, and fecundity (the number of female young produced per

territorial female, calculated by dividing the total number of young that fledged by two and dividing that number by the total number of territorial paired and single females).

All of the categories studied were below the 1999–2024 study averages. The report also noted that none of the differences were statistically significant, except for one. The difference between the number of NSO that attempted nesting this year compared with the average of previous years was statistically significant. The report did not discuss possible causes for the reduced nesting attempts.

Of the 52 sites surveyed in 2025, 40 (77%) were occupied by pairs, which was below the 1999–2024 average of 90%; 13 of the 17 nests (76%) successfully produced at least one fledgling, which is slightly below the 1999–2024 study average and not statistically significant; fecundity was 0.28 in 2025, which is below the 1999–2024 study average (0.40). Of the 40 sites occupied by pairs in 2025, 17 (43%) were known to attempt nesting, which is below the 1999–2024 study average (62%), and this difference is statistically significant. The reasons for the low nesting attempts were speculated as being a suppressed response due to the presence of Barred Owls (BO) and various survey issues.

NSO populations in Marin are not impacted by logging, as they are in the rest of their range. According to the report, the likelihood of a successful nest and the number of young produced depends on a variety of factors, including predator abundance, food availability (Courtney, 2004), weather (North et al. 2000; Olson et al. 2004) or a combination of these and other factors. Franklin et al. 2021 found fecundity to be negatively impacted by the presence of barred owls. NSO in Marin have to cope with many stressors, including habitat loss due to urban development, increase in extreme temperatures and weather events due to climate change, high-severity wildfire, human disturbance, competition and displacement, noise, rodenticide, poisoning, disease, vehicle strikes, genetic isolation, and changing forest structure due to sudden oak death and dusky footed woodrat abundance (Swei 2011).

The Report highlights some of the stressors NSO face. An increase in BO population is the primary threat facing NSO. BO are more aggressive, have a wider diet, have more young, and have a higher survival rate than NSO. Studies have shown that Marin NSO behavior in the presence of BO is the same as elsewhere: NSO become quiet and disappear when BO are around. Eight BO have been collected by the Academy of Sciences and the University of Wisconsin under permits from the USFWS for scientific research. Components studied include genetics, diet, exposure to rodenticides, and NSO response

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

to BO removal. “Removal of BO from NSO territories has been successful in reversing NSO declines in previous studies and is currently the only known effective solution to address this threat.” The Report points out that the USFWS Barred Owl Management Plan could be used by private residents in Marin County who may find barred owls on their property.

Another stressor that’s mentioned is vehicle strikes. Three NSO carcasses were found along the same stretch of road in Inverness apparently hit by cars. In addition, four NSO carcasses were recovered, one on Marin County Open Space lands and three in residential neighborhoods; all were in emaciated condition.

The Report concludes with a recommendation that “Monitoring NSO during the breeding season is an essential component to evaluating their population health and ensuring the management activities to not negatively impact owls, including where management activities are slated to occur.” We agree and would like to have seen the management activities of concern identified, with a discussion of the current management activities of concern.

While the threat of catastrophic fire is noted as a stressor, the concern for MAS and other environmental organizations is a reduced woodrat population, the primary food for NSO, as a result of the removal of understory vegetation for fire suppression. Understory vegetation provides food and cover for woodrats. Also removed are sticks and other downed debris that are important to woodrat habitat as well. A discussion of potential human disturbance due to recreational activities is also warranted. Both understory clearing and diverse recreation, which could be contributing to cumulative impacts, are taking place right now in NSO habitats on both Marin Water and Marin County Open Space District lands.

The Report concludes that the known population of BO in Marin is still low compared with other parts of the NSO range and that, combined with the many protected forested areas in the region, it likely explains the relatively stable population here. This past monitoring year showed lower NSO activity across most categories. This may have been an isolated year—let’s hope it was.

The Great Blue Heron: Witness at the Water’s Edge

By Sepala Weliwitigoda

The life of the Great Blue Heron is inseparable from water. It depends on healthy wetlands—quiet shorelines, floodplains, estuaries, and shallow rivers where fish and amphibians remain abundant and waters retain ecological balance. Because of this reliance, the heron has long been regarded as an indicator of environmental health. Where herons thrive, wetlands are often functioning well. Where they disappear, the loss usually signals deeper disruption long before it becomes obvious elsewhere.

Yet the heron’s significance extends beyond biology. In Indigenous traditions across North America, herons were associated with wisdom, patience, and self-reliance; their presence often signaled abundance and the assurance of sustenance.

These traditions were not grounded in data, but in sustained observation and lived experience with the natural world. The heron’s quiet self-reliance served as an example to individuals, particularly in the production and gathering of food.

Today, science has given us extraordinary insight into how ecosystems function and why species like the Great Blue Heron depend on ecologically sound wetlands. What science



Great Blue Heron

cannot compel, however, is care. No legislation or dataset can require people to notice a bird standing at the water’s edge, or to feel responsibility for the habitat that sustains it.

Laws can protect wetlands, but their effectiveness ultimately depends on human behavior and a willingness to coexist thoughtfully with other forms of life.

Modern knowledge can explain why wetlands matter; reverence gives us reason to care. Together, they offer a framework for stewardship that serves birds, forests, waters, and people alike.

NSO Protection Program



Northern Spotted Owl

Our annual “**Northern Spotted Owl**” **Advisory letters and fact sheets** will be mailed to all Marin residents that live within a ¼ mile of a NSO activity center by the end of this month. If you received one of our letters, please open it and review the contents.

The Northern Spotted Owl is listed as ‘Threatened’ under the Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the California Endangered Species Act (CESA). Because of this, it is afforded extra protections from noise and habitat disturbances during its nesting season. Marin county houses one of the last stable populations of the Northern Spotted Owl in the world. In Marin, nesting season is typically from February 1 to July 31.

Marin Audubon Society is dedicated to protecting these owls, especially during this critical nesting time, which is why our annual advisory mailing is so important.

You can also become a **Canyon Health – Northern Spotted Owl Docent** this nesting season. Marin Audubon partners with the Marin Open Space Ranger Team to offer this program. Being a docent is a wonderful way to create community, learn around NSO habitat, and monitor active sites within Marin.

Please contact **Elyse Omernick** at conservation@marinaudubon.org if you are interested in becoming a docent this season.

Habitat Stewardship

HABITAT STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

Many weed species are completing their life work, producing seeds. We will be cutting, pulling, and mowing as many as we can. With another dry spell beginning in late February, weeding and mulching around this winter's plantings will benefit them even before the hot, dry summer.

If you appreciate our birds or native plants, volunteer on a workday to give them a boost. To grow, nearly all baby birds need insects, and as insect numbers decline, baby birds will decline. The native plants are so much better for the insects that are food for the birds. 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: April 4, May 2

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

Corte Madera Ecological Reserve:
Second Saturdays: April 11, May 9

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, Annette Anzalone, Brooke Frescos, Ron and Belle Guelden, Bob Hinz, Martha Jarocki, Simon Kolek, Ellena Ochoa, Alison Pence, Jaden Selvig, Lowell Sykes, Sienna Yang and students from Novato, San Marin and Temescal High Schools

DONATE YOUR CAR TO MAS

Looking for deductions on your taxes? You may qualify for a write-off if you donate your unwanted car, truck, motorcycle, RV, or boat.

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

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

SIMMONS SLOUGH NEST BOXES

By Alison Pence

On a sunny, hot November day, I was out at Simmons Slough with Jeff Long learning how to clean and count the nest boxes that Marin Audubon Society has on their property. The 38 boxes are arranged around a former pasture of about 10 acres now filled with cocklebur.

Cleaning a nest box involves lifting out the old nests, sometimes as many as four, stacked one on top of the other. We try to identify the species and to see if there were any unsuccessful eggs. Then the box is swept out and checked for wasps and spiders and then sprayed with alcohol. We left a handful of fresh alfalfa in the box to entice next year's birds.

While Tree Swallows use the delicately scooped breast feathers of the Gadwall, other ducks, or chickens to line their nest, Western Bluebirds will build on top of a used swallow nest using grasses. A successful nest will be filled with poop. Sometimes we found one unhatched egg left in the nest. But as we went along, we found more and more nests with baby birds in them, almost fledged.

When Jeff got home to count the results of our nestbox cleaning there were 27 unsuccessful boxes. There were 58 dead or unhatched swallows and six unhatched or dead bluebirds. Of the successful boxes four were bluebird and ten Tree Swallow. We don't know the size of those broods.

Concerned about the high incidence of nest failure, we took Jeff's data to Georgette Howington of CRPB California Bluebird Recovery Program. We learned that mortality for young birds is very high. Georgette cited many factors that affect nest success. These include smoke from wildfires and pesticide drift. One stressor that concerns everyone is "food web provisioning failure" which speaks to the larger problem of insect population collapse worldwide. Georgette concluded that high temperature was the most likely explanation.

Georgette's husband Bruce Mushrush, created a forensic analysis from Jeff's data, and weather data from last year and correlated the mortality with heat spells during May 2025. May 9 and May 30 were both heat spells and would correspond to late-nesters. Memorial Day weekend was 101 degrees! CRPB finds that box interiors reach temperatures of over 115-120 degrees when ambient temperature is 95 degrees. Adult females abandon boxes at 110 interior degrees. A ten-day-old nestling will die at sustained temperatures over 105 degrees.

Addressing temperature in the boxes is

now our priority for this spring. Georgette recommended retrofitting the nest boxes with a double roof. Installing an additional roof leaving an air gap of 1.5 inches insulates the nest box to prevent overheating. Painting the South side of boxes (any side without entry hole) white provides additional protection. They can stay up to 8 degrees cooler if painted white. Drilling angled holes in the side for more ventilation is also recommended. We have been encouraged to move the poles closer to the treeline so they are in shade.

If you would like to help retrofit the boxes, contact Alison Pence at 415/254-4551.

California Breeding Bird Atlas Report

California's first statewide Breeding Bird Atlas launched on January 1, 2026. In just over two months, participation across the state has been remarkable. As of early March, 2,568 birders have submitted 43,721 checklists to the Atlas, spanning all 58 counties and 3,954 atlas blocks across California. The use of breeding codes on eBird in January and February is up a staggering **545%** over last year. By the end of January, 61 species had accepted confirmed breeding codes. By the end of February, that number had risen to 102.

WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS

Joyce Andrews, Margaret Ariani, Emily D. Boyles, Belle L. Cole, Susan Griffin, Katharine Harer, Joe Hiney, Carol Kurland, Gary Lowell, Leslie Miekley, Hazel Miller, Linda S, Catherine Scott, Patricia Simpson MD, Michael Smith, Janny Tam, Steven Voien, Richard J. Whelan

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Marin Birdlog: February 2026

By Noah Arthur

February is an odd mix of early spring and late winter in Marin, but mostly highlighted by typical winter rarities. This season's good run of rare passerines kept going in February, starting with an unseasonable **Black-throated Grey Warbler** in a mixed warbler flock at Inverness Tennis Club on the 3rd (CC). A male **Tufted Duck** at Rush Creek (Petaluma Marsh) on the 6th (CD) was likely the same one from last winter. Rarely reported but probably often overlooked, a **Myrtle X Audubon's Warbler hybrid** showed up at Lucas Valley Open Space on the 9th (DM).

One of the rarest of the winter vagrant sparrows that occur in Marin, a **Harris's Sparrow** was found roost-calling just after sunset at Santa Venetia Marsh Preserve on the 12th (MZ & LL), continuing through the end of the month.

The duck megaflock at Rush Creek included a "**Brewer's Duck**" (**Mallard X Gadwall hybrid**) on the 14th (LC). Also on the 14th, a **Hammond's Flycatcher** was found along Earthquake Trail (LC, RB, & JB). Early **Northern Rough-winged Swallows** turned up at Las Gallinas on the 15th (LK) and Novato Sanitary District ponds on the 16th (LC). **2 Western Tanagers** were an unseasonable surprise in a Mill Valley persimmon tree on the 16th (SM).



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Harris's Sparrow

A large gathering of various birds in a field at Black Point Boat Launch on the 19th included a **White-faced Ibis** (LCW) in with many common ducks and shorebird. Resident but rarely detected, a **Northern Pygmy-owl** was tooting at Kule Loklo on the 19th (TB & RM).

Another **Myrtle X Audubon's Warbler hybrid** showed up on the 23rd at Valley Ford Wetlands (CC), followed by a backyard **Wilson's Warbler** in San Anselmo on the 24th (CC), the latter possibly a very early migrant but likely a bird that wintered somewhere in the Bay Area. Then on the 25th, a new **Black-and-white Warbler** joined the continuing banded female at Muir Beach (CC).

On the 26th, a female **Tufted Duck** showed up at Las Gallinas (JC), along with **2 Common Teals** and a **Common X Green-winged hybrid** (CC & SE), plus a **montana/merrillii Song Sparrow** (CC). An especially high count of **24 Thick-billed Fox Sparrows** was counted at Pine Mountain Fire Rd on the 27th (CC & LC).

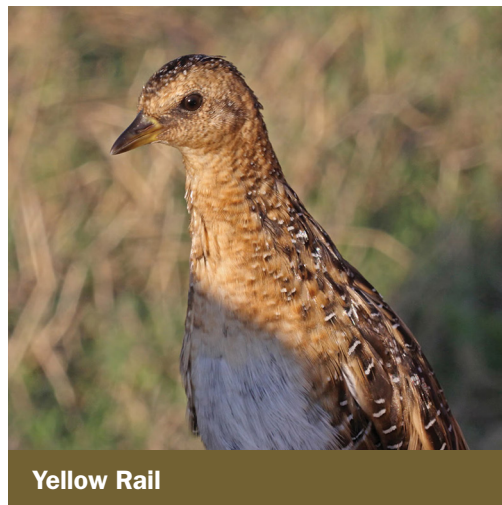


Patricia Ware

Black-throated Grey Warbler

The rarest find of the month also came on the 16th, a **Yellow Rail** seen briefly but closely at Pine Gulch in Bolinas (LK). This species is probably more regular in Marin than we know, but is ghostly secretive and very rarely seen.

A **Wilson's Warbler** at Giacomini Wetlands on the 18th (DH & WK) may have been the same one reported nearby earlier in the winter.



Dan Mooney/Flickr, CC BY-NC 2.0

Yellow Rail

OBSERVERS AND ACRONYMS: CC: Connor Cochrane, CD: Cedric Duhalde, DM: Dominik Mosur, MZ: Missy Zepeda, LL: Leonard Liu, LC: Lucas Corneliussen, RB: Raurie Bowie, JB: Jonah Benningfield, LK: Louis Kreemer, SM: Sarah Mannell, DH: Derek Heins, WK: William Kezer, LCW: Luke Colwell, TB: Tony Briggs, RM: Renee Masotti, SE: Sam Eberhard, JC: Jaime Chavez

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Sunday, May 17, 2026
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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.



The Rail

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- May 14 **Speaker Series:** The Aquatic World of Penguins
7 PM *With David Ainley*
- May 26 **Field Trip:** DeSilva Island Heron Colony
10 AM *With Ron Brown*

Check website for updates and details



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