

THURSDAY, JUNE 11 7:00 PM

Birding the Southern Oceans and Antarctica

With Alvaro Jaramillo



Alvaro Jaramillo

Royal Penguin

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

There is no greater wilderness than the Southern Ocean! Between Antarctica and the southern points of the continents, there are islands with hundreds of thousands of penguins, millions of prions (a small seabird) and astounding numbers of fur seals, elephant seals and whales.

Alvaro will give a presentation on the amazing birds and wildlife of the Antarctic peninsula and the subantarctic islands of South Georgia, Macquarie and the Chatham Islands.

Alvaro Jaramillo, owner of international birding tour company Alvaro's Adventures, was born in Chile but began birding in Toronto, where he lived as a youth. He was trained in ecology and evolution studying the co-evolution in cowbirds. He has published several books and field guides, including the *Birds of Chile*, a major New World sparrow chapter for *Birds of the World*, and the ABA Field Guide to *Birds of California*. He organizes and leads international birding tours, as well as a full schedule of pelagic trips in central California. He now lives with his family in Picton, Ontario, Canada.

Our next Speaker Series program is on Thursday, September 10, 2026.

IN THIS ISSUE	
Conservation	1
President's Message	2
Field Trips	3
Habitat Stewardship	6
Birdlog	7



The Rail

MARIN AUDUBON SOCIETY

Acquisition of Greater Bahia Expansion Project Sites Almost Complete

As we go to press, it's just a matter of weeks before we are scheduled to close escrow on the two properties currently owned by the Leveroni family located between Rush Creek marsh and the Gnos Field Airport. Escrow is scheduled to close on June 12. We had some scary moments at the end. There is always a flurry of activity at closing of escrow, but this seemed to be more so. We had a fright over the last few weeks, concerning the adequacy of the title reports. But all has been worked out, and we



James Raines

Greater Bahia Expansion Parcel to be acquired by MAS.

are just about to complete the acquisition of the 323 acres in North Marin.

Tiscornia Marsh Update

MAS is thrilled to announce that the Environmental Protection Agency has selected the Tiscornia Marsh project for funding through its San Francisco Bay grant program. This \$5 million grant will fund most of the marsh stabilization/restoration work, which includes construction of the gravel and cobble beaches and restoration of the diked marsh by breaching and lowering the existing levees. In addition, the Ocean Protection Council has invited MAS to submit a full application in response to the previously submitted letter of interest. The Marin Community Foundation has also invited MAS to submit an application for a small grant, up to \$250,000. MAS has also submitted a letter of interest to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and is waiting to hear if it will invite us to submit a full application. Finally, MAS is working with the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority (SFBRA) to secure adequate funding to complete the raising of the levee on MAS's

property, building a new levee between the diked marsh and the soccer field, and constructing ecotone slopes.

Although we had hoped to begin construction this year, the restoration team was not able to complete the funding and permitting requirements in time to allow that to happen. However, we are in a good position to initiate the project in 2027. If neither the Black Rail nor Ridgway's Rail are detected on-site, construction could begin as early as spring 2027.

As previously reported, MAS had to revise the project design as a result of issues PG&E had raised about potential impacts to its existing infrastructure. These design changes include replacing a portion of the offshore gravel beach with a cobble berm, eliminating the beneficial reuse of dredged material, and reducing the amount of salt marsh created by the project. These changes necessitated

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
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Outreach, Media	Open
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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

Our sincere apologies to anyone who tried to attend our Speaker Series and board election on May 16 but were unable to do so. Our website went blank so there was no way for folks who tried to sign up right before the program to do so. We are advised by our webmaster that the problem was not with our website, but with our server. We're still trying to figure out how we can ensure it does not happen again, if indeed that is possible. Again, we are very sorry this happened and for any disappointment it caused to anyone.

A warm welcome to our new Board members: Sonali Shaw and Lyzy Lusterman. Sonali is a Marin native and brings 20+ years of experience in marketing and communications with leading brands and 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 of protecting birds and their habitats. Sonali will be taking over the Speaker Series programs.

Lyzy Lusterman is also a Marin native. She has a master's in business administration, a professional background in publishing, and runs an independent specialty bookstore focused on birds and birding, Buteo Books. Lyzy cares deeply about the Marin Audubon Society's mission and hopes to put her skills and experience to good use in supporting it. She joins us as Co-Treasurer.

We also welcome back familiar faces: Robert Hinz, Lowell Sykes, and Mike Anderson. Bob will continue as our Membership Chairman, Mike will serve as chair of the Finance Committee, and Lowell will be at-large in continuing his devoted work on our habitats. Thanks also to this year's Nominating Committee members: Doug Waterman (chair), Cary Sparks, and Ellena Ochoa.

CEQA UNDER ATTACK

It's not uncommon these days to hear that the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) is being maligned. There have been many attempts over the years to weaken it. CEQA has been accused of being too time consuming, too expensive, and of being used to hold up projects. The latest attempt would go even further than past attempts – it would eviscerate this critically important environmental law. It is the California Chamber of Commerce Ballot Initiative 25-0023A1 “Modifies Review for Certain Projects.”

Primarily, CEQA is a disclosure law. It ensures that the public is informed of the potential adverse impacts of a project that could adversely affect them and/or the

environment. Impacts could involve the filling in of a wetland near your house, the cutting down of ancient redwood trees, or the building of a manufacturing facility that could impair your air quality.

It's also election time in the county, state and national scene. While we can't take a position on a partisan office, we can urge everyone to vote and do so with the environment in mind. The environment isn't figuring very prominently in this year's election, especially interest in protecting habitat and wildlife.

Our spring appeal has gone out, and you have received it. All donations made in response to MAS's Spring Appeal are dedicated to funding habitat enhancement work. This year your gift will help pay for plants, the materials our volunteers need to build improved nesting boxes, and the cost of hiring contractors to help remove weeds and irrigate during the hot summer months. Please give generously to support our habitats.

Another reminder not to do major yard work until breeding season is over, which is usually August. Delay your tree trimming and removal until September to protect the birds.

In June we begin a new fiscal year. Looking back, it's been a rewarding 12 months, with the opportunity to permanently protect significant bayland acreage: field trips, the Regional Living Shoreline project, continued programs, maintaining our habitats, the Marin County Breeding Bird Atlas, and the California Breeding Bird Atlas. See Field Trips on page 3 for the MAS-sponsored California Breeding Bird Atlas field trips.

We will take a short break for the summer. The June issue of *The Rail* will be the last newsletter until September, which should be out at the end of August. We'll skip the speaker program until September. There will be fewer field trips as listed on page 3. The board will not meet in July. But our committees will continue to meet to address current issues. The fiscal year ends June 30.

CEQA ensures that the public is informed of potential impacts of a project and has ample opportunity to review projects and bring up potential aspects or conditions that should be addressed in an environmental document. This assures that the public is informed of the significance of a project in how it could affect their health and/or environmental resources. CEQA also requires that mitigation and alternatives be identified for reducing the significant impacts of a project. The Cal

environment. Impacts could involve the filling in of a wetland near your house, the cutting down of ancient redwood trees, or the building of a manufacturing facility that could impair your air quality. CEQA ensures that the public is informed of potential impacts of a project and has ample opportunity to review projects and bring up potential aspects or conditions that should be addressed in an environmental document. This assures that the public is informed of the significance of a project in how it could affect their health and/or environmental resources. CEQA also requires that mitigation and alternatives be identified for reducing the significant impacts of a project. The Cal

continued on page 6

MAS FIELD TRIPS

Open to the public

Trips with participant limits require registration on MAS website's **Field trips page**. If a trip is full, check back, even on the night before the trip, as cancellations will open new spots. If you 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.

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

Thursday, June 4, 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.

MAS HOSTS FIELD TRIPS FOR CALIFORNIA BIRD ATLAS BIG WEEKEND

California Bird Atlas Big Weekend is a four-day statewide celebration of birds and the new California Bird Atlas (CBA) – featuring dozens of field trips, and a **collective mission** to document as many species breeding in as many blocks as possible.

Field trips introduce Atlas basics in the field, with leaders showing how to contribute.

The goal is to make it easy for first-time participants to get involved and continue contributing beyond the weekend.

MAS is sponsoring the following two CBA Big Weekend field trips.

Rodeo Lagoon, Marin Headlands

Friday, June 5, 2026

7:30 AM to noon

With William Legge and David Wiechers

Registration required. Registration opens on May 26 at 8 AM on the MAS website's **Field Trips page**. Trip limit is 15.

The primary focus of this Field Trip will be seeking out and documenting breeding birds for the California Bird Atlas (CBA). Join us for a Sea Watch at 7:30 AM or arrive later at 8 AM for an expanded circuit of the lagoon to include trails that are rarely birded.

DIRECTIONS: 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. Turn left at the sign to the Marin Headland. Proceed on Bunker Road to the Rodeo Lagoon Parking Lot and meet at 7:30 by the bridge over the channel to the beach.

San Geronimo Community Center environs

Friday, June 5, 2026

9 AM to noon

Liz Lewis and Susan Kelly

Registration is required. Registration opens on May 26 at 8 AM on the Marin Audubon website's **Field Trips page**. Trip limit is 14

On this trip we will be introducing the California Bird Atlas (CBA) and the breeding codes to those who are new to the Atlas. We will hike the paths and grounds of the former golf course. All experience levels are welcome for this easy, three miles roundtrip.

DIRECTIONS: We will meet in the parking lot of the former San Geronimo Golf Club now offices of Marin County Fire at 5800 Sir Francis Drake Blvd. Look for Clubhouse Drive sign at the entrance the parking lot. There is a portable restroom in the parking lot.

FARALLON ISLANDS BOAT TRIP From Clipper Yacht Harbor, Sausalito

Saturday, September 12, 2026

8:30 AM to 4 PM

With Susan Sherman

Registration is required. Registration opens on August 12 at 8:00 AM on MAS website's **Field Trips Page**. See cost below.

Join us for a day of seabird and marine mammal watching as we head out to the Farallon Islands and offshore waters. Naturalist Susan Sherman will be our guide aboard Captain Christian's power catamaran, *Outer Limits*. When we last did this cruise sightings included **Humpback Whales, Laysan and Black-footed Albatross, Tufted Puffin, Rhinoceros and Cassin's Auklets**, shearwaters and jaegers.

We will get a close-up look at the islands and hear about their interesting natural and human history. This is a trip that both experienced and first-time birders and nature lovers enjoy.

A rain jacket and pants are recommended no matter what the weather on shore. If you get seasick easily, this is not the trip for you. We will be on the boat all day.

Although unlikely at this time of year, rescheduling might be necessary at the last minute due to sea conditions.

The trip costs \$165. A waitlist will open if the trip sells out. Add your name to the list by clicking Contact Organizer prompt. If you cancel your registration by September 5 and we can fill your spot with someone else on the waitlist, you will be reimbursed, minus a small transaction fee, unless you would like to convert your registration fee into a tax-deductible donation to MAS.

DIRECTIONS: Take Hwy 101 to the Marin City/Sausalito exit, head south on Bridgeway. Turn left at Mollie Stone's onto Harbor Dr and proceed to the parking area at the end. We will meet on the south side of the parking lot to check in before boarding. Plan to arrive by 8:30 AM for check-in and instructions.

Duxbury: A Reef at Risk

By Mary Jane Schramm



Joe Heath/GFNMMS

Sea Stars

In April the Marin Audubon Society submitted a letter to the California Fish and Game Commission to support elevating Duxbury Reef State Marine Conservation Area (SMCA) to a State Marine Reserve. This would make it a no-take zone for all fishing and collecting, while allowing other recreational and educational activities. In addition, we requested expansion north and south to the reef's full extent. At the May 6 commission meeting we presented further comments, citing existential, climate-related impacts such as the intensifying marine heat wave, and the need to reduce ecosystem stressors that lie within our power.

Duxbury Reef is one of the largest shale reefs in North America. Encompassing rocky shore, coastal waters, and sandy beach habitats, it hosts seals, seabirds, shorebirds, fish, marine invertebrates and kelp. Regulations now allow shore-based fin-fishing, which can confuse visitors who assume gathering crabs, sea stars, octopuses, sea snails, and seaweed is also allowed. This results in illegal take of marine resources, and impacts Duxbury's biodiverse ecological communities.

The Commission currently recommends against marine reserve designation, following opposition by a restaurant, business owners and the recreational fishing community. A final decision will be made later this summer. Meanwhile, the public can help by voicing their support for Duxbury Reef's redesignation and expansion at <https://fgc.ca.gov/Regulations/Submit-Comments>.

Tiscornia Marsh Update

continued from page 1

revisions to all of the permit applications. MAS has received approvals for the revised designs from the US Fish and Wildlife Service, National Marine Fisheries Service, and the Regional Water Quality Control Board, and is still waiting to hear back from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, City of San Rafael, and the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission. In addition, MAS has to execute several agreements, including two with the City, one with the SFBRA, and one with the North Bay labor unions. Before we begin construction, MAS will need to hire a contractor and find a source of sediment for the construction of the levees.

While we have completed most of the necessary pre-construction work, there are just too many loose ends to allow for construction to begin this summer. However, we are in great shape to start the project next year.

— B. Salzman and J. Raives

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.

The Disappearing Gray Whales

By Mary Jane Schramm

THE WHALES IN THE 'HOOD

The Eastern North Pacific gray whales (*Eschrichtius robustus*) are our “whales in the ‘hood,” our aquatic neighbors. The most coastal of all large whale species, they migrate near shore and are often seen from Point Reyes and other vantages as each Winter and Spring they use these waters as a marine superhighway.

These “mid-size whales” are around 45 feet long, and gray, mottled with pale blotches and crusty patches of barnacles and whale lice. They lack the characteristic dorsal fin of other whales and instead have a series of bumps along their back. Their appearance off our shores, usually in late December, is celebrated with festivals and visits to coast side locations, where whale aficionados - blubber-lovers - scan the ocean for their heart-shaped blows. They have become an institution, and somehow, a part of our lives.

MIGRATIONS

Like most large whales, our Eastern North Pacific grays divide their year into two seasons: summer-fall feeding, and winter-spring breeding. They spend summers in the icy Bering and Chukchi seas, feasting on tiny, calorie-rich, mud-dwelling, shrimp-like crustaceans. They must add inches of fatty blubber to fuel their roughly 7,000-mile southward trek in late Fall to their Mexico breeding grounds, as well as their return journey to the Arctic. Success in banking calories over the summer can mean the difference between life or death, since in their hurry to reach the breeding grounds, they abstain from feeding during their long migration. After all, the destiny of their race is to win the DNA game, to pass their genes along to new generations.

On reaching Baja's protected lagoons, groups of mating adults engage in the rites of reproduction, roiling the lower lagoon waters with vigorous courtship at times punctuated by spectacular leaps and splashdowns. Courtship successful, the males and newly pregnant females head back north to resume their crustacean feast. In the quieter upper lagoons, new mothers feed their newborn calves with 50-53% fat-rich milk to fatten them for their long and often perilous northbound journey. The calves grow fast, gaining weight and developing body condition that will enable them to keep up with mom on their inaugural journey of discovery to learn the route and the skills needed for survival. All along the West Coast, cow-calf pairs may be seen hugging the shore, sometimes stopping in sheltered coves to rest and nurse, at times concealing themselves among kelp beds to frustrate killer whales on the hunt for a meal.



Gray Whale “Spyhops”

TROUBLE IN PARADISE

This past winter and spring an ominous silence hung over the nursery area of San Ignacio Lagoon, one of Baja Mexico's three major gray whale breeding grounds. Scientists from the Mexican Gray Whale Research Project were appalled; some whales were in visibly poor condition. Also, recently the whale numbers had declined radically. Of the major breeding grounds – San Ignacio Lagoon, Magdalena Bay, and Scammon's Lagoon – the researchers close-focused on San Ignacio; what they saw was alarming: where only a decade earlier they'd recorded triple-digit numbers of cow-calf pairs, the numbers had plummeted. In 2025 and again this year, the cow-calf pair count was down to just eight. New births into a population are a prediction of a species' future existence. This situation was dire.

BACKGROUND

In the mid-19th and into the early 20th centuries, Eastern Pacific gray whales were hunted intensively for their blubber from which high-quality oil could be rendered for lighting, heating, and lubrication. But overhunting and the rise of petroleum-derived fuels rendered whaling less profitable. Still, it continued, and with new, ruthlessly efficient steam-powered vessels, the hunt intensified, bringing the whales near to extinction.

Then, in 1946, the newly formed International Whaling Commission (IWC) spearheaded a ban on commercial hunting of grays. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, with a growing public awareness of whales, the US passed the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 and the Endangered Species Act of 1973. With great foresight, the Mexican government designated the breeding lagoons as critical habitats, prohibiting hunting, industrial development, and regulating tourism. These actions led to a strong recovery for the population. By the 1990s, our gray whales had rebounded to nearly 21,000. In 1994 NOAA

removed them completely from the Endangered Species List. Unfortunately, this assessment was flawed, having failed to factor in the decline in availability of the sea floor organisms on which



©Richard Steiner

Mom Nuzzles Calf

the whales rely almost solely for sustenance.

Thus, in recent years, many gray whales who have fed poorly in the far north, have grown weak, unable to complete their migrations. Most deaths – roughly 80-90% – go undetected, while others have stranded along our shores in unprecedented numbers. The timing has accelerated, too: scientists at the Cascadia Research Collective note that gray whales are experiencing a higher level of early-season mortality than ever previously recorded. Driven by hunger, many have entered high-danger zones such as urbanized bays to seek food, where the risk of collisions with vessels is real. Sadly, as of this writing (May 2026) of the nine known whales to enter San Francisco Bay this year, nearly 20% have borne evidence of ship strike.

BOOM-AND-BUST CYCLES:

Over several decades, using sophisticated scientific methods and referencing historical documents, scientists have tracked significant fluctuations in gray whale numbers, noting a series of boom-and-bust cycles, population spikes followed by massive die-offs. These, however, occurred at very infrequent intervals. Lately, things have been different.

Just five years after de-listing, in 1999-2000, about 25% of the population died off. Malnutrition was suspected but unconfirmed in the few whales that could be examined by necropsy - animal autopsy. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) declared it an Unusual Mortality Event, or UME, that demanded prompt and effective response, freeing up funds for a scientific working group to investigate the causes of the crash. Scientists regard gray whales and other marine mammals as “Sentinel Species” that are indicators of ocean health, much like canaries in the coal mine. With a UME, resources can be secured so that scientists and resource managers can develop insights into larger environmental issues that may also have

implications for human welfare. Gradually, the whales again recovered.

Then, in 2019, after another population crash, NOAA declared a second UME, but in 2023, after only one encouraging calving season, they declared it over. Not surprisingly, the next year numbers again plummeted. In all, over half of the population is lost, a drop from 27,000 in 2016 to just 13,000 in 2025. Whale expert John Calambokidis of the Cascadia Research Collective voiced concerns that this time, they may have reached levels that threaten the very survivability of the gray whale population.

THE CULPRIT

What has caused such devastation? It is primarily disruption of the Arctic food web by human activities that create greenhouse gases. They trap heat in our atmosphere and in our oceans. Fossil fuels such as oil, coal, and natural gas for transportation, electricity, and energy, impact ecosystems all over the planet. Species unable to adapt swiftly to these impacts - in this case, grays feeding almost exclusively in one location, using one technique to secure one type of food - risk extinction, not just locally but potentially worldwide. Grays are bottom feeding specialists, but if enough can adapt to different prey, this resilience could help them survive.

A CRITICAL STEP

Reinstating gray whales as Endangered under the US Endangered Species Act would require federal agencies to ensure that any actions they authorize, fund, or carry out does not harm gray whales or their habitats, and gives increased heft to other laws that protect them. It would strengthen protections against offshore oil and gas development, shipping impacts, fisheries, and other industrial activities. But NOAA has been slow to act. Marine conservation biologist Dr. Rick Steiner of Oasis Earth/ Anchorage petitioned NOAA to reinstate them. He states, “The Eastern North Pacific gray whale population is in serious trouble ... mainly due to climate change impacts to their foraging habitat in the Arctic. Last summer, we petitioned NOAA to list the population as Endangered under the ESA, but the agency has yet to abide by its statutory timeline to issue an initial decision. It is critical for the agency to proceed immediately to list them, and to develop a robust recovery plan to give this whale population the best chance possible to survive this century’s climate crisis.”

WHAT IS THE ESA?

Adopted in 1973, the Endangered Species Act (ESA) is keystone environmental legislation that creates a framework to conserve, protect, and if possible, recover endangered and threatened species at risk of extinction. It ensures that federal and other agencies consult on proposed actions that could impact species on the Endangered Species List (ESL) and assure their continued existence, and that of their

habitats. Steps include prohibitions on killing, injuring or disturbing species, designating critical habitats, and developing a recovery plan.

ACTION!

Agencies, academics, scientists and conservation groups are working with shipping and marine transport industries to detect and monitor the whales’ presence in heavily trafficked waters such as San Francisco Bay and Puget Sound. Congressman Sam Liccardo recently introduced the Save Willy Act to establish a Whale Desk where the public and mariners can report sightings and alert vessel operators. It also directs the Coast Guard to evaluate innovative technologies for whale tracking and alerts.

The Marin Audubon Society has supported Dr. Steiner’s petition to relist the whales and has contacted congressional representatives to urge their support. Locally, the Marine Mammal Center and the California Academy of Sciences have taken the lead in engaging mariners, scientists, and resource managers through the San Francisco Harbor Safety Marine Mammal Subcommittee, training vessel operators to recognize the presence of whales and take measures to avoid them. Some collisions will be inevitable, but lowering vessel speeds can make them survivable. In the federally protected waters outside the Golden Gate, the Greater Farallones, Cordell Bank, and Monterey Bay national marine sanctuaries have worked to establish voluntary vessel slowdowns, reduce gear entanglements, and prevent disturbance by ocean recreationists.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Add your voice to support Dr. Steiner’s critical ESA petition by submitting your comments to Mr. Neil Jacobs, NOAA Administrator, 1401 Constitution Ave. N.W., Rm. 5128, Washington, DC 20230; and to Dr. Frances Gulland, Dr. Francis Gulland, Chair, U.S. Marine Mammal Commission at 4340 East-West Highway, Ste. 700, Silver Spring, MD 20814. When NOAA has made a preliminary determination, the matter will be made open for public comment on the official federal government portal, [Regulations.gov](https://www.regulations.gov).

United and determined, we can bring about changes that will protect this iconic species from decline into obscurity and possible extinction.

Habitat Stewardship

HABITAT STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

Although plant growth slows way down in the warm dry months of summer, our stewardship continues. Harding grass is the most abundant “weed,” but a few others, including fennel, mustard, bristly oxtongue, and bull thistle, will require our attention. Most annual plants have dried up, but late summer is when *Salsola* and *Dittrichia* come into view.

Our plantings from last winter will benefit from added wood chip mulch and supplemental water.

If you appreciate our birds or native plants, volunteer on a workday to give them a boost. It is also an opportunity to learn more about a native habitat of your county and be a part of improving it.

Everyone is welcome. We have the tools and gloves.

Volunteer Workdays

Triangle Marsh, East Corte Madera:

First Saturdays: June 6, July 4, August 1

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

Corte Madera Ecological Reserve:

Second Saturdays: June 13, July 11, August 8

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

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

Bahia, Novato:

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

Thank You, Stewardship Volunteers

Debbie Ablin, Annette Anzalone, Zoe Butler, Sam Cook, Isabel Dawson, Phoebe Disharoon, Ron and Belle Guelden, Bob Hinz, Martha Jarocki, James Kelly, Rowan Kelly, Rosalie Martin, Linda Nicoletto, Phoenix O'Halloran, Alison Pence, Otelia Speece, Lowell Sykes

WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS

Beverly Alexander, Jennifer Barry, Doris Blumenfeld, Bonnie T. Borenstein, Molly Brown, M. Campas, Peter Fenton, Courtney Goff, Sheila Golden, John Hart, Ann Hyland, David Janeczko, Glennis Jones, Annika Miller, Ian Mooney, Roger Perso, Edward Powell, Bryan Rulli, Linda Seabright, Erica Wehrs, Holly Welles, Chris White, Lenora Young

SUMMER MAINTENANCE BEING PLANNED

It's time we must be planning to tend to and nurture our vegetative habitats during the hot summer months. Tidal marshes take care of themselves and benefit from the twice-daily inundation by the tides.

At Bahia, we're planning irrigation of the terrestrial vegetation we planted last winter, getting rid of the invasive plants, harding grass, and radish, primarily. We're also discussing signage – new signs crafted by Olive School will be installed sometime over the summer, with the help of adult volunteers. On our Simmons property, we need to remove heavy growth of harding grass. We're still working on deciding whether or not to do more sheet mulching.

Farther south, Corte Madera plants will also be getting water, through some refurbished pipes that we installed when the marsh was restored, and some new species will be planted.

We're also planning some revegetation with native plants to plant at our property along Arroyo Corte Madera adjacent to the Redwoods in Mill Valley.

THANK YOU HIGH SCHOOL, STUDENTS

We're pleased to have had five students from Redwood High School in Larkspur volunteering at Triangle and Corte Madera sites removing fennel, bristly oxtongue, and harding grass; Branson students pulled thistle and mustard at Triangle Marsh; thistle, acacia, velt grass and fennel didn't have a chance with students from Archie Williams removing them at MAS habitat along the creek at The

Redwoods in Mill Valley. And students from San Marin and Novato High Schools have been removing Harding grass and maintaining their sheet mulch project at Bahia. Thank you.

SUMMER HAPPENINGS ...

High school interns, from the Jewish Family and Children's Services YouthFirst program, will work with Marin Audubon this summer on restoration projects in the field as well as research and special projects. The students have been engaged in environmental service and leadership at their high schools. Their work with Marin Audubon will give them more hands-on experience to help guide their interests and at the same time help us with the essential tasks that enable us to maintain healthy habitat for birds and wildlife.

VOLUNTEERS WANTED

Do you enjoy woodworking? Are you interested in helping expand nesting habitat? Consider helping with our Nest Box Program. We need a few volunteers with some experience with woodworking to help build nest boxes for blue birds and tree swallows.

Do you like to working with plants? Are you interested in helping create and maintain vegetative habitat for birds and other wildlife? We're looking for volunteers to help at several of our properties in North Marin.

For more information on these volunteer opportunities or to sign up – call 415/924-6057 or leave a message on our website.

CEQA Under Attack

continued from page 2

Chamber Initiative will change all of that. It is a developer's dream. It would limit:

- Public participation. Public comment periods are currently 20 days for negative declarations and 45 for EIRs, with the ability of lead agencies to extend deadlines for complex projects. That would change—there would be no ability to extend deadlines without a court order.
- The number of alternatives that would reduce the impacts of a project to only one selected by the developer, if the developer opts into the “preliminary scoping process.” Currently, three alternatives designed to avoid or substantially lessen a project's significant impacts are required to be assessed in an EIR.
- Environmental review to determine whether a project complies with “existing laws.” Existing laws do not capture the full extent of a project's impacts or ensure effective mitigation. Cumulative impacts would

be left unanalyzed. Some impacts, such as noise, views, and water availability, are largely or entirely unaddressed by other laws.

- And weaken standards of significance by allowing a project's significant impacts to be based solely on compliance with “existing laws.” There is no requirement in the existing laws to actually disclose any harm to the health of the environment or the public. Evaluations are locked at the time of application – there is no requirement to use current science.

The Initiative reverses CEQA's bedrock principle of affording the “fullest possible weight to protection of the environment” back to one that prioritizes developer interests.

The Cal Chamber Initiative has received sufficient votes to be put on the ballot for the November 2026 election. So, you will be hearing more from us on this matter when we return in August and give an update in the next issue of *The Rail*.

Marin Birdlog: April 2026

By Noah Arthur

April is peak spring migration in Marin, when our common warblers, flycatchers, thrushes, and vireos pass through in their highest numbers. Too early for most spring vagrant warblers, April instead produces an odd but exciting grab bag of random rarities. The first rare find of this April was a **Western X Clark's Grebe hybrid** on Rodeo Lagoon on the 1st (WL). Exceptional for this time of year were counts of **150 Elegant Terns** at Bolinas Lagoon (CH) and **197 Elegant Terns** at Rodeo Lagoon (WL) on the 2nd. Unusually large numbers of Elegants remained along the Marin coast throughout the month.

On the 3rd, **4 American Crows** were at the Fish Docks, rare on outer Pt. Reyes (JL). On the 6th a **Lawrence's Goldfinch** turned up at Indian Valley Open Space Preserve (JC), and a **Myrtle X Audubon's Warbler hybrid** was in the willows at Rodeo Lagoon (WL).

Another **Lawrence's Goldfinch** flew over Pine Mtn. Fire Rd. on the 8th, and the expected **Thick-billed Fox Sparrows** along this road were joined by a **Slate-colored Fox Sparrow** (CC), possibly a bird that wintered there undetected.

Still (fortunately) very rare in Marin, a **Barred Owl** was hunting along West Blithedale Ave. near Arroyo del Corte Madera Creek early on the 8th (SZ). Especially unusual in mid-spring, a **Palm Warbler** in full breeding plumage showed up near the Fish Docks on the 8th (LB & PJ), continuing through at least the 14th.



©Frank Lin, <https://linktree.com/franklinphotography>

Blue-winged X Cinnamon Teal hybrid

dark-morph **Swainson's Hawk** floated over Marin Headlands (CB). A female **Mountain Bluebird** was at Abbotts Lagoon on the 18th (AM).

Yet another rare hybrid turned up on the 22nd, a male **Northern Pintail X Mallard** at Valley Ford Wetlands (JB). Also on the 22nd, a **Purple Martin** flew by Drakes Corner, and a pelagic trip in Marin waters found an eye-popping **5 Cook's Petrels** and **3 Murphy's Petrels**, along with **16 Sabine's Gulls** (many observers).

A **Lawrence's Goldfinch** at Bowman Canyon on the 23rd (JC) was probably one of the ones that nested there last year. A singing **Nelson's Sparrow** at Pine Gulch on the 24th (multiple observers) was likely one of the ones that wintered there, although there had been no reports in weeks. Unusually late was a **Swamp Sparrow** on the 29th in the Tomales Bay marshes (DL). And a **Yellow-breasted Chat** was singing in the willows at Rodeo Lagoon on the 30th (WL).



Elegant Tern

Regular Daddy CC-BY-SA-3.0

Marin County Parks Considers Allowing E-Bikes

Marin County Parks has begun consideration of allowing e-bikes on Open Space District trails and/or fire roads. The first public discussion took place at a Parks Commission meeting in mid-May at which staff made a presentation focused on the status of e-bikes on adjacent public lands and a general introduction to the different kinds of e-bikes. E-bike advocates testified in support of allowing e-bikes.

Staff presented no information on the procedure they plan to follow for making the decision on allowing e-bikes and where they would be allowed, nor did they present any information on potential impacts on biological resources of allowing e-bikes on trails and fire roads. In line with our position with Marin Water, MAS will be stressing the need for adequate review of potential impacts and assuring public review through the California environmental Quality Act (CEQA) process.

THANK YOU, DONORS

Mary Abbott, Klaus Beyer, Sharon Bozic, Molly Brown, Jerry Coe, Lisa Day and Anne Pagliarulo, MaryAnne Flett, Mark Andre Hansen, Heidi Hill, Bill & Kay Jones, Paul Larkin, Joanne Lee, Susan Lindsay, Kathy Lowrey, Olga McKenna, Margaret Moster, Steve & Ruth Nas, Frank Noonan, Richard Paillon, Cindy Pritzker, Jillian Robinson, Barbara & Jay Salzman, Santa Venetia Neighborhood Assoc., Scammell Consulting, Patricia Simpson, Marie & Peter Sullivan, Margaret Wagner, Douglas Wallace

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.

OBSERVERS AND ACRONYMS: WL: William Legge, CH: C Hippenmeyer, JL: John Lace, JC: Jim Crumpler, CC: Connor Cochrane, SZ: Sam Zuckerman, LB: Lucas Brug, PJ: Patti Jewell, DS: DAVID SEXTON, NC: Natalie Clark, CD: Cedric Duhalde, JCL: Josiah Clark, PK: Parker Kaye, RC: Richard Cimino, CB: Cortney Buechert, AM: Alex Meilleur, JB: Jeff Bleam, DL: David Lumpkin



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September 12 **Boat Trip:** Farallon Islands
8:30 AM *With Susan Sherman*

Check website for updates and details



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

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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