



Len Blumin

**Canvasback**

Len Blumin will discuss the waterfowl family, *Anatidae*, with a focus on species of ducks, geese and swans seen in California. As we explore the family tree we'll learn about the various branches and tribes that comprise this diverse and very visible group, and how they sorted into subfamilies and tribes, such as the dabbling ducks, diving ducks and sea ducks.

The duck family emerged early in the evolution of birds, and their order, *Anseriformes*, has been moved closer to the front of newer guidebooks. Emphasis in the presentation will be on features needed for field identification, to serve as a review for upcoming Christmas Birds Counts. Len will mention his favorite spots to find each of the local species, as well as some distant sites for species not seen here.

Len is a retired physician. He and his wife Patti have been active volunteers at Audubon Canyon Ranch for three decades. They enjoy bird outings and when possible Len photographs the birds they see, using a camera mounted on his spotting scope, which allows the birds to be closely observed without disturbing them. Many of his photos are from San Rafael's Las Gallinas Water Treatment ponds, where Len and others have been leading the Marin Audubon Society's regular "First Thursday" bird walks for a number of years. His book, "Len's Lens, Vol. 1: The Duck Family" is available for viewing on a computer or a portable device.



# The Rail

MARIN AUDUBON SOCIETY

## Christmas Bird Count Season is Near



Photo courtesy of ©Jacelyn Knight Photojocelynknights.com

**The 2014 San Rafael CBC team counting birds from the Jean and John Starkweather Shoreline Park**

**T**his year between December 14 and January 5 will be the 116th season of the National Audubon Society's Christmas Bird Counts. It is the longest-running citizen science program in the world. Its long history and wide scope (there are now over 2,300 individual count circles) provide invaluable information about the long-term status of bird populations across North America. The Marin Audubon Society sponsors three counts in Marin County with hundreds of participants. Each covers a 15-mile diameter circle in which teams of volunteers, from novice to expert, count every bird they encounter during the entire day. For more information about Christmas Bird Counts go to [www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count](http://www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count).

Everyone is encouraged to participate in one or more of Marin's Christmas Bird Counts. The following is basic information about our three local counts.

**CHEEP THRILLS, NORTH MARIN/SOUTH PETALUMA, DECEMBER 17**

Join us for Cheep Thrills, the north Marin/south Petaluma Christmas Bird Count that was started in 1978, stopped after ten years, and revived five years ago by Marin Audubon and Rich Stallcup.

You'll have great fun getting out at first light to count birds until your eyes are blurry ... and even more fun at the compilation dinner, joining your friends and hearing everyone's results. At \$10 per person for pizza and salad, it's a real deal.

Last year we counted 61,000 individual

birds and came up with an impressive number of species: 159. You might find something unusual like a Lewis' Woodpecker (there were 13 last year) or a Long-tailed Duck (found in Bel Marin Keys) or a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (found in Nicasio square). Or you might end up counting almost 8,000 American Robins in an hour's time, as one participant did last year. And in case you're wondering how that's done, join us for a practice session at Las Gallinas on November 29th from 9 am to noon (details in the field trip section of this newsletter).

For more information and to sign up with the compiler, Susan Kelly, visit the Cheep Thrills website at <http://cheepthrillscbc.blogspot.com>.

Cheep Thrills is dedicated to the memory of our great friend and teacher, Rich Stallcup, who generously shared his astounding knowledge of birds, dragonflies, and all natural creatures and who also taught us the importance of striving to be what he called "good humans."

**POINT REYES, DECEMBER 19**

The 2015 Point Reyes Peninsula Christmas Bird Count, sponsored by Marin Audubon and Point Blue, will be held on Saturday, December 19th, rain or shine. The count welcomes participants of all ages and skill levels. The 27 count areas are centered about Tomales Bay stretching from Drakes Bay to the Chileno Valley. Bird counters are also invited to enjoy the Compilation Dinner beginning at 5 pm at the Dance Palace. For complete information and to register go to [www.forestdata.com/cbc](http://www.forestdata.com/cbc). *continued on page 2*

**IN THIS ISSUE**

President's Message	<b>2</b>
Field Trips	<b>3</b>
Conservation Report	<b>6</b>
Birdlog	<b>7</b>

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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

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## DIRECTORS MEETINGS

Meetings open to members. If you wish to attend please call 924-6057.

6:30 PM, First Tuesday of the month  
Richardson Bay Audubon Center  
376 Greenwood Beach Road  
Tiburon, California 94920

**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](http://www.marinaudubon.org)  
Northern Calif. Bird Box: 681-7422  
(Provided by Golden Gate AS)

Members can receive *The Rail* electronically instead of a hard copy by emailing [joandbijou@sbcglobal.net](mailto:joandbijou@sbcglobal.net)

## 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 \$100 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 MESSAGE

By Barbara Salzman

There have been several sobering and sad messages in recent weeks. On October 4, the Chronicle reported on the tragic toll the warmer waters of the Pacific are taking on our pelagic birds. On a recent trip researchers from the National Marine Sanctuary, Cordell Bank National Marine Sanctuary and Point Blue continued their observations of significant declines in pelagic species. Gray Whale, California Sea Lion, Guadalupe Fur Seal, Brandt's Cormorant and Common Murre are starving due to lack of their usual forage fish that are no longer present in the warmer waters. Instead the scientists found 20 new species of zooplankton, including krill, marine worms and snails, to which they attribute the presence of Blue and Humpback Whales. The declining numbers in species that are usually seen off our coast were also reflected on our recent pelagic trip. The El Niño that will bring us the anxiously-awaited rains to nourish our plants, replenish our streams and ponds, and freshen our bay waters, is causing such devastation in our other ecosystem—the Pacific Ocean.

Then came *The Messenger*, the moving film that presented in striking cinema many of the dangers facing songbirds during migration. Among the many obstacles were night-lighting that attracts and disorients birds; glass windows particularly on large skyscrapers that birds fly into not recognizing it as a solid surface which usually kills them instantly; free-roaming cats; farming practices; and French farmers who trap Ortolan Buntings which they consider a delicacy. They even missed a few we struggle with here—solar systems and wind turbines, invasive

species, home windows, off-leash dogs and mountain bikes. The film emphasized that even though some of the few dangers may seem minor or local, when considered together with all of the other dangers, each is indeed significant.

The film reported on a Canadian organization called FLAP (Fatal Light Awareness Program; [www.flap.org/residential\\_new.php](http://www.flap.org/residential_new.php)) through which volunteers monitor for and collect birds that have collided with windows. In Toronto alone 3,400 birds were collected in 2005 of which 2100 were dead. We'll write more on birds and window collisions next month.

The film asks: What would the world be like without birds? Perhaps we should learn from China. When China killed off Tree Sparrows because they were eating crops, the resulting infestations of insects contributed to a famine that caused the deaths of millions of people. If we don't work to save their habitats, make their migratory routes safe and their habitats function to support them, we may not have our songbirds for much longer.

Considering all of the dangers facing birds in our modern society, I often wonder how we have as many birds as we do, although surveys show that many species are declining. Through banding, individual birds have been found to have made the many thousand mile journeys from South America, through all of the dangers, to breeding locations in the US. We need to and can ensure that many more birds can make those arduous journeys successfully by working together to ensure safe and viable habitats in our open space lands and in our own yards.

## Christmas Bird Count Season

*continued from page 1*

### SOUTHERN MARIN, DECEMBER 26

This count covers areas extending from Bolinas Lagoon and Tennessee Valley to Tiburon and San Rafael including Mt. Tam and areas of the Bay and the ocean. Sign up online by December 21 by completing the registration form at [www.marinaudubon.org/cbc\\_form.php](http://www.marinaudubon.org/cbc_form.php) or contact compilers Ed Nute and Bob Hinz at [smcbc.marinaudubon@gmail.com](mailto:smcbc.marinaudubon@gmail.com).

If you'd like to contribute to the Christmas Bird Count, but will not be participating in the actual count, please consider volunteering for the Christmas Bird Count Compilation Dinner on Saturday, December 26 immediately following the count. We need several volunteers afternoon (4:30 pm) through the evening to help organize, oversee, set up, check people in, and clean up.

### BUY A DUCK STAMP TO SUPPORT MIGRATORY BIRDS

The 2016 Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation stamp debuted this summer. It features a Ruddy Duck, a handsome winter resident of San Francisco Bay. The artist, Jennifer Miller, is only the third woman to have her art work grace the stamp since the contest was established in the 1930s. Monies raised through the sales protect wetland and grassland habitats in the federal refuge system. Purchasing a duck stamp is one of the few ways a non-hunter can support bird protection nationally. Almost every penny goes to the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund. You can buy a duck stamp for \$25 at your local post office.



## MAS FIELD TRIPS

Open to the public

No need to sign up for one day trips, just join us. Bring lunch, field guide, and binoculars. For information, accessibility and weather check: Vicky Van Meter, 415/299-2514, vicky.vanmeter@gmail.com or co-host, Jane Medley, 559/760-1551, janermedley@gmail.com.

CHECK OUR WEBSITE FOR THE MOST RECENT UPDATES.

### LEFT OF THE FAULT: POINT REYES BIG DAY BLAST

#### Point Reyes Station

Tuesday, November 3, 2015

7:30 AM to 4 or 5 PM

With Keith Hansen

This trip may be full but for availability check with Rich Cimino at yellowbilledtours@gmail.com, or call him at 925/353 0266.

### LAS GALLINAS STORAGE PONDS

#### San Rafael

Thursday, November 5, 2015

9 AM to Noon

With Susan Kelly, Len Blumin and friends

Birders of all levels are welcome on this first Thursday walk. Each month the avian cast of characters will change, and we'll try to keep track of newly arriving species. This is a great way to start learning the raptors, waterfowl, and other bird families, as well as to get tips on optics, birding books and birding etiquette. Try to bring a pair of binoculars, as well as some water. We'll be walking about two miles on the levees that surround the ponds.

**DIRECTIONS:** From Hwy. 101 take the Smith Ranch Rd. exit, and go east on Smith Ranch Rd. toward McInnis Park. Turn left immediately after crossing the railroad tracks, staying on Smith Ranch Rd. Go about 0.5 mi to the parking lot at the end of the road. Meet the group by the bridge just past the parking lot. The walk starts at 9 AM but late arrivals should easily be able to find the group. There are rest room facilities only at the parking area.

### ABBOTTS LAGOON

#### Point Reyes National Seashore

Sunday, November 15, 2015

9:30 AM to 2 PM

With With Carolyn and John Longstreth

Abbotts Lagoon is well-known as a birding hotspot due to the variety of habitats, including coastal scrub, freshwater ponds and wetlands, brackish lagoon, dunes, sandy shoreline and open ocean. We can expect to see waterfowl, herons, raptors, wintering shorebirds, loons, grebes and possibly a few late migrating landbirds. With luck, we might find Virginia Rail, Sora or American Bittern on the upper pond, river otters on the lower lagoon or alcids beyond the surf. If the adjacent farm-field is freshly plowed, there could be some interesting species there as well. We'll walk the 1.5 easy miles to the lower lagoon and another 0.3 mile to the ocean beach.

John and Carolyn have been birding for over 30 years. John, who ran an Audubon Center in Connecticut, is the co-compiler of

the Point Reyes Christmas Bird Count and a skilled nature photographer. Carolyn helped organize the Point Reyes Birding & Nature Festival and created two CDs on local birdsong. Carolyn will tell us also about the plants of the area.

Dress in layers; bring hat, sunscreen, lunch and water. Bathrooms are available at the Abbotts Lagoon parking lot.

**DIRECTIONS:** *Allowing about an hour and a half travel time from San Rafael, follow Sir Francis Drake Blvd (SFDB) to Olema. From Stinson Beach, go north on Hwy 1 to Olema. From Olema continue north on Hwy 1 (SFDB), then take the second left turn (SFDB west). Drive through Inverness, turn right (north) onto Pierce Point Road and keep driving until you come to the Abbotts Lagoon parking lot on the left (west) where our group will gather.*

### LAS GALLINAS STORAGE PONDS AND HAMILTON WETLANDS

#### NO. 7, BIRDING IN MARIN SERIES

Saturday, November 21, 2015

8:30 to mid-afternoon

With Jim White and Bob Battagin

The Las Gallinas ponds are a great place for good views of many kinds of ducks and raptors. This is an easy 1.5 mile walk where many other species may be seen, including Ridgeway's Rails and Soras. After a lunch break we will go to the Hamilton Wetlands in Novato. This square mile wetland was reconnected with the Bay two years ago after two decades of planning and work. The wetlands were diked off at the turn of the 19th century, cutting off an important area for thousands of migrating waterfowl along the Pacific Flyway. The birds are returning. We will see the waterfowl, shorebirds, raptors and other species that are now making these new wetlands their home.

**DIRECTIONS:** *We will meet at Las Gallinas. From Hwy 101 in north San Rafael take the Smith Ranch Rd exit east about 1/2 mile. Turn left after crossing the RR tracks to park at the Las Gallinas Ponds parking lot.*

### CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT PRACTICE

#### Las Gallinas Storage Ponds

Sunday, November 29, 2015

9 AM to Noon

With Susan Kelly

If you are participating in a Christmas Bird Count, thinking about participating, or just wondering what this is all about, join Susan Kelly for a hands-on training session. Susan is the organizer and compiler of the Cheep Thrills Bird Count in northern Marin. We will meet at Las Gallinas at the picnic tables

by pond 1. We'll spend about 30 minutes talking about the process. The talk will cover 1) how we divide the count circle into areas and cover each area with a team of 2 to 12, each with an experienced leader; 2) how we record all birds seen and/or heard on the field form (one person in each group is responsible for this and also must keep track of time spent birding while walking, driving around, riding a bike, or any other method they use); and 3) how to estimate large flocks such as robins, blackbirds, crows, geese, and ducks. We will then walk around the pond and count the birds, recording them on the Cheep Thrills field form (each person will receive a copy). If we have time, we may go up into the trees and try counting the small birds. Please bring binoculars, water, snacks, and a pen or pencil to record the birds you count.

**DIRECTIONS:** *From Highway 101 take the Smith Ranch Road exit, then go east on Smith Ranch Rd toward the McInnis Park entrance. Turn left immediately after crossing the railroad tracks, staying on Smith Ranch Rd and go about 0.5 mi to the end of the road at the Las Gallinas Ponds parking lot.*

### BAHIA, RUSH CREEK AND ROWLAND AVE. WETLANDS, NOVATO

#### NO. 8, BIRDING IN MARIN SERIES

Saturday, December 5, 2015

(Note: This is the 1st Saturday in December because of Christmas Bird Counts)

8:30 to mid-afternoon

With Jim White and Bob Battagin

Please meet at the foot (east end) of Bahia Drive in Novato where Marin Audubon is continuing a large marsh restoration project. Shorebirds, ducks, herons, swallows and rails will be reaping the benefits here for years to come. After viewing the birds and the restoration area we intend to walk the trail along the edge of the mixed oak woodland. Next we plan to drive around to the end of Topaz Street to view the Horseshoe Pond where some diving ducks, including a few Barrow's Goldeneyes, like to winter. During the day we will practice some bird counting to help prepare for the upcoming Christmas Bird Count season. After lunch we will take a look at two nearby areas—Rush Creek and the Rowland Ave wetlands.

**DIRECTIONS:** *From Hwy 101 in north Novato take the Atherton Avenue exit east about 2 miles. Then turn left onto Bugeia Lane, which becomes Bahia Drive, and follow it to the end where there is some street parking. No restrooms available here.*

## HERBICIDE WORKSHOP

The Marin Board of Supervisors October 6 workshop lasted four hours and began with presentations by the Open Space District (OSD) staff Chris Chamberlain and Mischon Martin explaining the problem and current herbicide uses, and then presenting their proposal for limited future uses, i.e., that herbicides would only be used on traffic medians for the safety of crews, on fuel breaks, and to protect critical habitats as part of a larger robust program to maintain biodiversity on OSD lands. The ultimate goal would be to eliminate the use of herbicides.

Dr. Susan Kegley, an expert on herbicides and their toxicity, reviewed studies most of which indicate that risk to humans is dependent on exposure and most apparent with occupational exposure. The risk is from direct exposure to high doses over a long period of time (one year). For most people the largest component of their exposure is dietary exposure from eating food from crops sprayed with glyphosate. She reported that glyphosate is in the same cancer-causing category with sunlamps, hairdresser products, and Tylenol. Then, Marin County Fire Chief Jason Weber spoke to fire dangers of non-native plants (broom) and about restricting use of herbicides and noticing of treated areas.

The public comments went on for almost three hours with about 50 speakers testifying for the allowed two minutes each. Approximately 40% of the speakers supported limited use of herbicides as part of an Integrated Pest Management Program (IPM) and these were an impressive lot. IPM supporters included college professors and other educators, experienced land and habitat managers, biologists and other scientists, and environmental advocates with extensive experience, some speaking as individuals and others representing environmental organizations interested in protecting natural systems. All spoke to the critical need for limited use of herbicides to protect native vegetative habitats.

Speakers wanting no use of herbicides based their demands primarily on human health and appeared based on emotion. There were anecdotal reports of health problems with speculation on the causation between the illnesses and application of glyphosate. Studies were mentioned but their scientific validity could not be

determined. Not all studies are conducted according to accepted scientific standards. One speaker openly threatened the supervisors that his followers would work to defeat their election.

In addition, the Supervisors received about 150 emails. As reported by Board President Rice, they generally reflected the testimony presented at the workshop. So we know many of you must have submitted comments and we thank you.

The analysis of studies by MAS board member and biochemist, Bob Hinz, conforms to those of Dr. Kegley; risk is related to exposure. “There can be no risk to humans if there is no exposure. The treated OSD plants are neither food nor forage. Because glyphosate binds very tightly to plant material and to soil, there will be no exposure to glyphosate if people stay out of freshly treated areas.” Glyphosate, the main chemical being considered here, is not carried by air or water to nearby areas by the spot-application method used by the OSD, and it breaks down relatively quickly. We emphasize that there is no risk to humans if public obeys signs and directions to stay away from treated areas. Note: We recommend that the OSD do more than put up signs and website notifications. They should install barriers (e.g., tape or temporary fencing) to be very clear which areas to avoid.

Human health should be considered when using any chemicals—whether the chemicals are in soaps, aspirin, hair and other personal care products, and even water. To separate human health from environmental health reveals a profound lack of understanding of our natural environment and our place in it. People as well as wildlife depend on natural habitats with native plants and wildlife functioning together to give us clean water and air that supports all life – yes, even people. These systems will be destroyed if invasive plants are allowed to take over.

The Supervisors made no decision, but they did express their views. Supervisor Damon Connolly of San Rafael, emphasized looking for newer products, educating the public about the dangers of herbicides, and using other solutions such as increasing the number of volunteers. The other Supervisors did support the OSD recommended approach. Supervisor Arnold emphasized the importance of the county being as stewards of the land. Supervisor Rice supported limited use of herbicides as a tool in the

IPM toolbox and working toward eventually eliminating herbicide use. Supervisor Sears spoke to the importance of maintaining the habitats for Pacific Flyway species and recommended that the county partner with retailers to remove products from sale for private use. Supervisor Kinsey was not present but sent his views in a letter supporting limited use as part of an IPM program and public education.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO:

There is no information yet on when the Supervisors will vote on the OSD recommended approach. In the meantime we recommend not using or purchasing herbicides for home use, and avoiding wheat, soy and corn on which pesticides may have been sprayed. These are the two likely sources of human concern.

## MOSQUITO AND VECTOR CONTROL DISTRICT'S EIR

MAS submitted comments on the Marin/Sonoma Mosquito and Vector Control District's Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (DPEIR) for its Integrated Vector Management Program which covers 2,300 square miles in the two counties. The District describes its program as an integrated systems approach using a suite of tools that include public education, surveillance to determine the presence of mosquitoes, source reduction (e.g., physical control, vegetation management and water management) and biological and chemical controls.

The DPEIR states: “Program implementation is weighted heavily towards source reduction and biological control, in part to reduce the need for chemicals.” Treatment can be physical management, such as removing vegetation, or removing standing water, to using biological controls or chemicals which are applied by hand, sometimes using equipment including all-terrain-vehicles or aerial spraying for areas that are too large or otherwise impossible to cover by on-the-ground means.

Mosquitoes breed in shallow standing water so the District does a lot of work in seasonal wetlands and drainage ditches. There are even salt marsh mosquitoes that live in our tidal marshes. There are about 28 species of mosquitoes that breed in the two counties. Mosquitoes not only bother people by biting them (only females bite)

but they can also carry diseases including encephalitis, malaria, dog heartworm and West Nile Virus. The District also treats other vectors of disease, including ticks and rodents, and yellow jacket wasps.

Our DEIR comments focused on clarifying possible impacts of the program, particularly physical treatment and aerial spraying, timing and the extent of treatment areas on wetland habitat resources and wetland dependent wildlife, including migratory birds and resident raptors. We are concerned about direct impacts of applying chemicals to kill mosquitoes as well as the loss of beneficial insects that not only eat mosquitoes but that are a food source for birds. We asked for explanations of some vague terms used such as that pesticides are “generally” used at levels below the effects threshold and to define “small” when concluding that areas of seasonal wetlands treated are small. We also expressed concern, as we have in the past, about depressions left in soft mud of wetlands by ATV’s used in wetlands, because they destroy vegetation and can be breeding grounds for mosquitoes if water gathers in them.

We have some experience with the District because they treat our north county properties. The District coordinates with us when they treat some of our properties in the North Marin. We are not certain that we are notified for treatment on our other properties, and we asked for a policy to ensure private owners are consulted.

The comment period has ended and there is no further opportunity for public comment until the Final is released. We were not able to review the document to get the information to you in a timely way.

## **RESIDENTIAL PROJECT PROPOSES MASSIVE REMOVAL OF NATIVE TREES**

A plan for a huge single family house and associated buildings was heard by the Marin County Planning Commission on appeal after it was denied by planning staff because of numerous inconsistencies with policies of the Marin Countywide Plan, the Black Point Community Plan, County Development Code and Residential Design Guidelines. A single residential project that would cause such massive environmental destruction as this one is rarely seen these days.

The property is on Atherton Avenue near Olive in unincorporated Novato. The project would remove 102 trees classified as heritage or protected including Coast Live Oak and Blue Oak, as well as native grasses and many

other smaller trees. Although there are other places on the property to locate a house, the applicant chose the top of the hill, undoubtedly for the view. This location requires a long access road and the proposed road snakes through the dense oak woodland. The house would be 5,418 square feet with a total building area of 6,208 square feet that includes a pool, cabana, spa, patio and large parking area/turnaround for fire trucks in addition to the house.

Inconsistencies with county planning ordinances and policies are related to the extensive environmental impacts from the significant loss of native trees as well as extensive grading and violation of policies for ridgeline and view protection. The house would be located on the most visible portion of the property and grading and vegetation removal are not minimized.

The Community Development Agency denied the application and the applicants, Gary and Maria Niebuhr, chose to appeal rather than revise the plan. The Planning Commissioners voted unanimously to uphold the staff recommendation and deny the appeal. The applicants can appeal that decision to the Board of Supervisors.

## **CORTE MADERA INN EXPANSION UPDATE**

Apparently the meeting on the Corte Madera Inn Expansion Project that was reported in the October 1 Independent Journal was a private one held by the applicant. It is no wonder that there were no objections to the project—dissenters do not appear to have been invited. Marin Audubon Society was not invited. The Town was not even invited. The applicant appears to have only invited supporters.

Concerning the applicant being “willing” to mitigate for filling the pond. This sounds like a generous offer but the reality is that, if they get away with filling the pond, they most certainly will be REQUIRED by regulatory agencies and the Town to mitigate for filling the pond. It is not a matter of choice for them.

## **PROTECT THE BAY ECOSYSTEM AND PEOPLE**

Nearly 4 million tiny pieces of plastic, called “microplastic” flow into San Francisco Bay every day from eight major sewage treatment plants, scientists from the San Francisco Estuary Institute study recently revealed. The quantity would be much higher if all 42 plants had been measured. They also absorb and concentrate

water-borne pollutants. Microplastics are swallowed by fish that can’t separate them from plankton, are consumed by birds and other marine species and possibly eaten by humans as well.

Microbeads, one component of microplastics, are used by manufacturers of cosmetics, toothpaste, and other personal care products to provide a smooth texture for their customers.

Eight hundred thousand microplastic particles of 5 mm or smaller per square mile were found in water samples from the Central Bay. Samples from the South Bay were much higher, 2.6 million particles per square mile. Numbers from other major US water bodies, the Great Lakes and Chesapeake Bay were all significantly lower. Filter systems of home laundering appliances and sewage treatment plants are not designed to remove these pollutants and so allow them to pass into our estuary waters. Estimates are that it would take many millions of dollars to retrofit the treatment plants to be able to remove them, so best to implement source reduction.

In another alarming UC Davis study, scientists found a significant number of fibers from synthetic clothing inside fish caught off the Northern California Coast and landing on dinner plates. The study found that “Plastic clothing fibers were found in the guts of about one-fourth of the smelt, anchovy, rockfish, bass, salmon, sanddab, cod and oysters.”

Fortunately Governor Brown signed AB 888 (Bloom) into law on October 8 requiring that manufacturers remove microbeads from their products by 2020. It should be sooner. Procter and Gamble plans to remove microbeads from Crest toothpaste by 2016 and Johnson and Johnson from all of their products by 2017.

We are not aware of any pending legislation to address the problem of synthetic fibers.

### **WHAT YOU CAN DO:**

Do not purchase or use products with microbeads. Buy products with natural alternatives, apricot shells and cocoa beans. Do not dispose of products with microbeads in your toilet or down the drain if possible. To limit the discharge of synthetic fibers, researcher Chelsea Rochman of UC Davis suggests putting a filter on the back of your washing machine and cleaning it and your dryer every time you do a wash. And be careful what you eat.



## HABITAT STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

We will be making a final effort to remove invasive nonnative plants before planting some new natives next month. It's pretty much the same list of undesirables to remove: cocklebur at Bahia, Harding grass, *Dittrichia*, fennel, mustard, etc. Even if there is no rain before our November workdays, plants do not have the same need for water during these cooler days with fewer hours of sunshine.

Act locally and join us on a workday. You would make a difference.

We have the tools, gloves and snacks. We generally work until about 1 PM, but even an hour is valuable help. Everyone is welcome.

### VOLUNTEER WORK DAYS

#### Triangle Marsh, Corte Madera:

First Saturdays: November 7, December 5

Meet at 10 AM on Paradise Drive directly across from the main Ring Mountain trailhead.

#### Bahia, Novato:

Second Saturdays: November 14, December 12

Meet at 10 AM at the end of Topaz Dr. near Bolero Ct. and the tennis courts.

If you would like to help, please contact Bob Hinz at [rbthnz@comcast.net](mailto:rbthnz@comcast.net) or 415/383-8688 for more information.

### THANK YOU TO OUR STEWARDSHIP VOLUNTEERS

Linda Nicoletto, Bob Hinz, Jason Hubbs, Marin Country Day School, Sharon McCloskey, Chris Peters, Flinn Rauck, Jude Stalker, Lowell Sykes, Madeleine Turskey, Katy Zaremba

## SWIFTACULAR

The southbound migration of Vaux's swifts this year was the most spectacular in the short history of monitoring the tall unused chimneys at McNear Brick and Block on North San Pedro Road. Attendees at Marin Audubon's field trip to the chimneys saw a wonderful show by about 11,000 swifts, but that number ranked only about tenth this season. On four evenings there were about 20,000 swifts and on two incredible occasions there were almost 30,000. Most of these birds roost in just one of the chimneys. On the biggest nights a few enter one or the other of the chimneys and some fly away to sites unknown.

Large numbers of migrating Vaux's swifts are known to roost in a few chimneys in Washington, Oregon and California during September and October. Where else they might roost is unknown. Breeding sites are mostly in the forests of the Pacific Northwest and British Columbia but are as far east as the Rockies of Montana and as far north as Juneau, Alaska. They winter from Mexico to northern South America and return to the Northwest in April, but northbound birds do not crowd into the chimneys in the same way.

## HABITAT STEWARDSHIP

### BAHIA (Novato)

Seven volunteers removed cocklebur from the pond at the Central Peninsula on the regular second Saturday Volunteer Stewardship Workday. We are expecting several large school groups to volunteer during the next month and we hope they will remove all or most of the ice-plant that is along the edges of the peninsula.

A crew of six MAS Board members removed two truckloads of trash and debris from Bahia and took them to the dump. The junk was assembled in two oak groves that were obviously used for gatherings probably of neighborhood teenagers. There was an old couch, chairs, broken-down tables and swings, all likely-unwanted stuff brought from neighboring residences, along with emptied bottles, cans and cigarette butts. The possibility of fire is a concern. Special thanks to Phil Peterson and Ed Nute for taking the debris to the dumps.

### TRIANGLE MARSH (East Corte Madera)

On our regular first Saturday stewardship

day we were joined by volunteers from the Marin Country Day School. After we once again watered last winter's plantings, we pulled *Salsola soda* (Russian thistle) which is taking hold in many locations around the Bay. We also continued to remove Harding grass and pulled a very small patch of *Dittrichia graveolens* (stinkwort).

### THE REDWOODS

We still haven't managed to remove all of the acacia resprouting at the Redwoods. We've had to take care of other needs, such as removing the debris at Bahia. We simply don't have enough volunteers to accomplish all we need to get done. We hope to get the acacia removed in the next few months. There are other problems besides the invasive acacia at The Redwoods: vegetation has been removed from our property by maintenance crews, and construction workers have encroached onto our property in working on The Redwood's expansion project. We are trying to work out these issues.

### SEPTEMBER 19 FIELD TRIP

## Drakes Beach and the Fish Docks With Jim White and Bob Battagin

By Jim White



**Broad-winged Hawk**

visited Drakes Beach, the Fish Docks, and the Point Reyes Lighthouse. Five **Barn Owls** decorated the sky as we watched from the Drakes Beach parking lot. Close by, **Yellow Warblers** bounced in and out of the willows as two **Great Horned Owls** watched and hooted. This was just the beginning of what was to become a twelve-raptor day for our group.

**Red-necked Grebes**, a **Ruddy Duck**, loons, cormorants, **Common Murres**, and many foraging **Elegant Terns** were observed on calm Drakes Bay. One of seven **Parasitic Jaegers** seen flew nearly over our heads causing serious concern with the Elegant Terns. Bob Battagin

A wonderful variety of birds, a beautiful day along the coast, and a fun and knowledgeable group combined to create a particularly enjoyable day for the more than twenty-five Birding in Marin participants that

directed us all to three **Common Terns** on the beach amongst the settled flock of **Elegant Terns**, **Heermann's Gulls**, **California Gulls**, **Western Gulls**, **Marbled Godwits** and **Whimbrels**.

A lone **Bonaparte's Gull** was sighted on a rock near the elephant seals as we watched three more **Parasitic Jaegers** chasing 100+ **Elegant Terns**. As we headed toward the Fish Docks, we encountered our first raptor identification dilemma perched in one of the cypress trees. After much discussion it was determined to be a juvenile **Broad-winged Hawk**. This was later confirmed by examining photos taken by Matt Perry and Len Blumin. This unusual raptor sighting was followed by the appearance of a **Swainson's Hawk** which circled the area providing excellent views for the entire group. In the vicinity of the ranger residence, many of us saw our first-of-fall **Golden-crowned Sparrow**, **Fox Sparrow**, and **Townsend's Warbler**. In the distance at the Fish Docks, a single **Wandering Tattler** was spotted.

At the Point Reyes Lighthouse, we got some great views of a **Peregrine Falcon** and a **Sharp-shinned Hawk**. Our popular, young birding companion, Lucas Corneliusen, spotted a **Rock Wren** on the cliffs below our lunch spot and ended up seeing a total of five life birds during the

# MARIN BIRDLOG: SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER 2015

By Josiah Clark

With days getting shorter the pace of the migration intensifies. Peak migration for Yellow Warbler and other insectivores has passed but sparrows, thrushes and waterfowl continue to move down from the north and mountains in force.

Late September typically brings some of the rarest birds of the year and this year was no exception when one of Marin's very few records of **Cassin's Sparrow** turned up during a shorebird census on the difficult to reach hinterland of Kent Island in Bolinas Lagoon on 9/19 (PP). Nearby Point Blue



Caren Tepke, gtepk@pbsac.com

**Prothonotary Warbler**

banders captured a **Yellow-green Vireo** at Pine Gulch Creek on 9/31, and while most chasers failed to find it they did discover a **Blue-headed Vireo** (MD) the next day as a very reasonable consolation reward.

The Outer Point sees more birding effort during this period than any other. Dozens of eastern vagrant warblers showed up over the month, with most being "expected" but the following are a few more notable records: 9/21 **Prothonotary Warbler** (HC), 9/26 **Cape May Warbler** (CC), **White-winged Dove**, **Ovenbird** 10/6, 10/10 **Black-throated Blue Warbler** (JK).

The **Northern Gannet** made another visit to the feeding frenzies and productive waters of Drake's Bay on 9/27 (EC) with unseasonal numbers of humpbacks and much of the commercial salmon fleet finishing their season just offshore. By the 5th of October, unprecedented numbers of **Black-vented Shearwaters** moving near shore up the coast were also being seen by bird-a-thonners at nearby Arch Rock (JW, JC, RF).

And while West Marin sees the most action during fall, what would the September of 2015 have been without the rapidly shrinking Nicasio Reservoir? This under-loved birding location rewarded birders from far and near with views of **Red-throated Pipit** (BB) starting on 9/22. On 9/25 the ever more exposed muddy shoreline a juvenile **Ruff** was reported as "skittish" and quickly moved on.

A **Brewer's Sparrow** at Las Gallinas on October 5th was likely of the second wave of the species coming from the more northerly 'Timberline' race. A **Broad-winged Hawk** there that day was one of hundreds that passed over the county during this period (JW, JC, RF).

Observers and Acronyms **BB:** Bob Battagin, **CC:** Chris Conrad, **DS:** Dan Singer, **EC:** Everett Clark, **HC:** Hannah Conley, **JC:** Josiah Clark, **JK:** Jeff Kimura, **JW:** Jim White, **PP:** Peter Pyle, **RF:** Rob Furrow

day. While gathered for lunch a large group of people sang "Happy Birthday" to Barbara Rozen who chose to spend her birthday out birding. On the way back we paused at the Mendoza Pond where an **Eared Grebe**, **Tricolored Blackbirds**, and **Say's Phoebe** were seen.

Out on the Spaletta Plateau, a **Ferruginous Hawk** filled our bins and scopes momentarily, and four **Pacific Golden-Plovers** were located. A dowitcher lurked about with 40 **Black-bellied Plovers** and ten **Killdeer**. We made a last stop to check the Spaletta slop pond for a hoped for Pectoral Sandpiper (not found) but did discover a **Wilson's Snipe**.

Throughout the day we noted 76 species (26 new to our cumulative year list) and had a rather wonderful time. Thanks to the many trip participants (too many to list) who helped spot and identify birds, shared their spotting scopes and knowledge, and contributed immensely to a fun and interesting day for all.

## CLIMATE CHANGE PROGRAM

You are invited to attend TIME TO LEAD ON CLIMATE – CA:US:UN, a program intended to fire up the state, national and global leadership to solve climate change.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 7 TO 9 PM  
ANGELICO HALL, DOMINICAN UNIVERSITY  
SAN RAFAEL

Dominican University President Mary Marcy will moderate. Speakers include Congressman Jared Huffman, UN Climate Delegate Ken Alex with the Office of Governor Jerry Brown; Bill McKibben, founder of 350.org, via video and others.

Program sponsors are Organizing for Action, Sustainable San Rafael, and a dozen other environmental and social action groups, including Marin Audubon Society. Tickets are \$10 advance (best seating), \$15 at door, \$5 students. For tickets and information visit [www.leadonclimate.org](http://www.leadonclimate.org)

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You'll be seeing the following list regularly during the coming months because we promised to recognize donors of more than \$1,000 to our Corte Madera acquisition in our newsletter and on the property for a year. The list below is corrected from last month and includes donors to both Marin Audubon and Marin Baylands Advocates. Our thanks to everyone who contributed to make this purchase possible.

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- November 14 **Stewardship Day,** Bahia
- November 19-22 **Central Valley Birding Symposium**  
[www.cvbsreg.org](http://www.cvbsreg.org)
- December 3 **Field Trip:** Las Gallinas  
*With Susan Kelly*
- December 13 **Field Trip:** Piper Park  
*With Rich Cimino*

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The success of Marin Audubon Society's (MAS) work depends greatly on its chapter-supporting members. We work collaboratively with the National Audubon Society (NAS) on issues of mutual concern, but very little of our funding comes from NAS. MAS relies on local support for our habitat protection efforts, conservation advocacy, birding field trips, educational speakers series, and publication of *The Rail*. To better ensure we can continue our programs on the local level, MAS offers a separate chapter membership. Your membership in MAS will help us protect local habitats, resident and migratory birds and provide you with educational and enjoyable programs because all of your chapter-supporting dues stay with MAS.

If you are not already a chapter-supporting member, we urge you to join MAS and urge your friends, neighbors, relatives to join us, too.

You can also join or make a donation on our website using your credit card or PayPal. Please go to [www.marinaudubon.org](http://www.marinaudubon.org).

### JOINT NAS-MAS MEMBERSHIP

A National Audubon Society Membership is a joint membership with National and chapters. With this joint membership, you receive our newsletter and other chapter benefits. However, MAS receives no portion of your National Audubon Membership dues. We receive a fixed amount based on our 2001 membership. We will receive, however, a portion of any new memberships that are generated by MAS, the local chapter. **So we request that you send all checks for new National memberships to: MAS, P.O. Box 599, Mill Valley, CA 94942.**

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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**.

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