Field Trip Report  
November 21, 2015  
Las Gallinas Wildlife Ponds and Hamilton Wetlands  
Trip Leaders: Jim White and Bob Battagin

Our group of 20 met at the Las Gallinas Wildlife Ponds this fine Saturday morning and visited the Hamilton Wetlands after lunch. Countering the usual human tendency to use the best places for homes, cities, highways, airports, shopping centers, etc., these two areas have been returned to nature and the birds certainly appreciate it. We saw 86 species (around 3000 birds) this day, and 28 were new to our year list.

We humans make a lot of water dirty, very dirty, before we flush it away. That we also clean it up with nature’s help is the function of the Las Gallinas Wildlife Ponds, designed by Ed Nute, President of Nute Engineering and one of our Marin Audubon Board members. Among the ducks that find a winter home here and can be readily studied are Canvasbacks, Bufflehead, Ruddies, Shovelers, American Wigeon, Gadwall, and Green-winged Teal. Our bright young birder, Lucas, got us all on a handsome Eurasian Wigeon, a flyover Wilson’s Snipe (another was seen later by all lurking on the shore), and a Merlin which zoomed by our picnic table. Beautiful Cinnamon Teal, Gadwall, and a single female Ring-necked Duck were with the numerous Mallards. Two Cackling Geese were seen with the many Canada Geese.

Black-crowned Night Herons roost on the islands of Pond #1 while Great and Snowy Egrets forage around the edges. Bitterns remained undetected, but some sharp eyes saw Soras and Virginia Rails. Ridgway’s Rails occasionally grunt from the surrounding salt marsh, and Common Gallinules have become common here. Great-tailed Grackles and Eurasian Collared Doves have also taken up residence, and Mew Gulls have arrived for the winter. Two delicate Bonaparte’s Gulls foraged from the air, and a Herring Gull rested on the floating pipe. Harriers, Kites, Redtails, Kestrels, and Red-shouldered Hawks are more numerous in the winter. Sparrows, finches, mockingbirds, blackbirds, and California Quail were joined by Say’s Phoebe, Yellow-rumped Warblers, and an American Pipit on this fall day at Las Gallinas.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has done a terrific job restoring the Hamilton Air Force Base Airfield back into a tidal wetland bordered by the Bay Trail. In its second year since importing approximately 8 million cubic yards of bay dredge spoils carefully contoured to accept high tides and rising sea level, the area is hosting a few thousand shorebirds and ducks. We saw stilts, Avocets, Greater Yellowlegs, Log-billed Curlews, Dunlin, Dowitchers, Semipalmated (that means that they have partially webbed toes) Plovers, and Black-bellied Plovers. With the receding tide pretty far out, a scope was necessary to see the two female Common Goldeneyes. Fortunately our December trip to Bahia will provide us with fine views of both Barrow’s and Common Goldeneyes.

By Jim White