Field Trip Report  
December 11, 2013  
Cypress Grove and Tom’s Point  
Trip Leader: John Kelly

Our group met John on a sunny but cold morning at the beautiful Cypress Grove Research Center of Audubon Canyon Ranch on Tomales Bay just north of Marshall. The property includes shoreline, wetlands, grasslands, forest, and a cluster of lovely Victorian cabins surrounded by tall Monterey cypress hedges. The 150 acre preserve is closed to the public so it was a treat to tour this special area.

California and Western Gulls, Surf Scoter, Buffleheads, Red-breasted Mergansers, three species of Grebe and many others were active on the Bay. The gull activity in the deeper areas indicated that the herring had begun moving into the bay, attracting the birds. We then moved on to the protected courtyard where we watch a **Peregrine Falcon** perched in a tall cypress. John gave a fascinating talk on Peregrine hunting strategies. He has noticed Peregrines following his boat low overhead and nabbing ducks flushed by the boat. Years ago the common name for the Peregrine was Duck Hawk. Back along the bay the winter resident **Double-crested Cormorants** were plentiful.

After a stroll along the shore and across the boardwalks in the marsh, we headed over to Tom’s Point – another Audubon Canyon property. The area is part of the fault-generated Millerton Formation, bordered by an extensive, likely Pleistocene, dune-scrub landscape with a complex geological and human history. Miwok lived in the area and traded with schooners that would come up into Walker Creek.
We drove through ranchlands that had been cleared of native vegetation to graze sheep so the contrast with the protected Tom’s Point land was notable. We had lunch looking over beautiful Tomales Bay and learned about the history and ecology of the area. John explained that the lupine may or may not be native north of San Francisco but since it fixes nitrogen, non native plants have been able to move in. Out at the point we observed abundant waterbirds and watched a raccoon digging for crabs in the eel grass beds exposed by the low tide. Thank you to John for a great day.

By Vicky Van Meter
Photos by Matt Perry