

Field Trip Report: Marta's Marsh

October 15, 2011

Leaders: Meryl Sundove and Roger Harris

Good weather, cooperative birds, and about 35 enthusiastic participants, some newish to birding, made this a fun event. Walking the peripheral levee at Marta's Marsh is particularly good for viewing a variety of shorebirds and ducks, most of which have recently returned from their northern breeding grounds. This trip was timed on a rising tide, which pushes birds off the Bay and onto the exposed mud flats in the marsh.

When we first arrived the mudflats were exposed and many birds were resting. As the tide progressed and the channels filled with water from the Bay, birds began to display their feeding strategies.

Dowitchers began their sewing machine style up and down motion driving their long beaks in and out of the mud to nab invertebrates. In contrast, nearly a 100 **Black-bellied Plovers** picked morsels off the still exposed portions of the mudflat. **Green-winged Teals** were shoveling wet mud with their beaks straining out food particles. **Western** and **Least Sandpipers** were probing the exposed wet mud along with a few **Dunlins**. The bigger **Long-billed Curlew** and **Marbled Godwits** mostly loafed.



Green-winged Teal

As the tide filled up the nearby San Clemente Creek, a **Clapper Rail** called and **Marsh Wrens** scolded from the cordgrass stands. **Willetts** began moving into Marta's Marsh giving their loud alarm calls and showing their flashy black and white wing pattern in flight. A flock of about seven **Blue-winged Teals** displayed the powder blue patches on their wings as they took off when a **Northern Harrier** flew in too close for comfort.

With the rising tide, water eventually covered the mud. First the shorter legged sandpipers, the "peeps," flew away in flocks. Then other larger birds left as well, hastened by a coursing **Merlin**. Meanwhile a pair of **White-tailed Kites** foraged over the vegetated marsh for mice forced into the open by the rising tide.

By Meryl Sundove

Photo by Bob Chilvers