Southern Marin Christmas Bird Count — December 26, 2009

The Christmas Bird Count for Southern Marin County will be held on Saturday, December 26, rain or shine! If you haven’t yet signed up, there is still time. Just go to MarinAudubon.org and click on the “Southern Marin Christmas Bird Count” link for more information and a signup form. For additional info call Dominik Mosur at 415/786 2768. Last year 113 people took part in the Dec. 27, 2008 Christmas Bird Count. They spent a total of 300 hours, braved a low temperature of 33°F and a high of 45°F to report 174 species. The Compilation Dinner will follow (see page 7). We hope to see you there!

MAS Prepares to Acquire Lands Along the Petaluma River

Marin Audubon is thrilled to announce that we have just signed an agreement to purchase a stunning 60-acre property in unincorporated Novato, on the Marin-Sonoma border.

Located at the confluence of San Antonio Creek with the Petaluma River, the property straddles San Antonio Creek and supports a spectacular array of habitats. These habitats include tidal marsh fringes along the banks and at the mouth of the creek, plus 25 acres of historic tidal marsh that is part of the Petaluma Marsh. At approximately 2,000 acres, the Petaluma Marsh is the largest salt marsh in the state that has never been diked. In addition, there are seasonal wetlands and a small oak-studded hill that was once an island in the bay before dikes were placed around tidal marshes to create agricultural lands.

The location of the property, between two major areas of publicly-owned (California Department of Fish & Game) lands, increases its value for wildlife. This purchase will create a continuous corridor connecting the Petaluma Marsh with other Fish & Game-owned lands to the north and south. The varied habitats support upland species as well as herons, egrets, endangered California Clapper Rail, other special status species, and native fish including steelhead.

The property also presents opportunities for restoration of both seasonal and tidal wetlands. Remnants of development on the property could be removed to enhance the habitat value.

Marin Audubon and Marin Baylands Advocates, our partner in bayland acquisitions, are planning a major effort to raise the funds to acquire and restore this property. If you would like to be a part of this important acquisition, send your contribution to the Marin Baylands Fund at the Marin Community Foundation. Thank you.

Habitat Stewardship Program

We are getting our properties ready for the upcoming rains and need to remove invasive non-native plants such as ice plant, Dittrichia, and stinkwort, and radish. If you are interested in these work days, or would like to be notified if additional dates are chosen later, please contact Bob Hinz at 415/383-8688.

Triangle Marsh: Sat, January 2
Bahia: Sat, January 9, Sun, January 17, & Sat, February 13
**President’s Message**  
*By Barbara Salzman*

We apologize for failing to include the phone contact information for signing up for the Christmas Bird Count in the December Clapper Rail. We are hopeful this issue will be delivered prior to the count day on December 26, and if you want to join a team, please call Dominik Mosur at 415/786 2768 or go to our web site marinaudubon.org AND click on CBC. Also call Mary Anne Cowperthwaite if you wish to join us for the dinner at 415/453-2216.

I made a major omission in the list of people to thank for their work on the Christmas Bird Count. Harrison Karr is a long time Marin Audubon member and former board member. Harrison stepped up several years ago to guide us when we needed a volunteer to chair for this important event. This year he has continued to play a leadership role by helping our new chairperson, Dominik Mosur, learn the ropes. Thank you, thank you Harrison. And thank you again, Dominik Mosur, Roger Harris, Meryl Sundove, Dianne Sierra, Mary Anne Cowperthwaite, and Jo Kreider. Nancy Okada has decided to resign from her board position as Publicity chair. During her time on the board, Nancy took on many challenging tasks, including chairing the Mother’s Day Barbecue for the past two years. Her energy and willingness to help will be missed. We are pleased she will continue as editor of the Clapper Rail. Thank you Nancy.

**Conservation**  
*By Barbara Salzman*

Marin Audubon Conservation Committee reviews critical environmental issues related to wildlife habitats and comments to cities, agencies, and other jurisdictions. To attend, call Barbara Salzman at 415/924-6057.

**WIND POWER – MORE STUDY NEED ON LOCAL BIRD AND WILDLIFE IMPACTS**

The Marin County Planning Commission is revising the county’s development code to expand standards regarding development and operation of Wind Energy Conversion Systems (WECS). Intended to implement Countywide Plan policies which strongly endorse alternative energy sources to reduce consumption of utility-supplied electricity, the new ordinance would apply to all county areas, except floating homes. The new ordinance would require that all projects go before the Marin County Planning Commission for environmental review.

The commission’s draft recommendations include: summary of policies, criteria for environmental review, and proponent review criteria for projects on public property.

The commission held its first workshop in late November, with the next scheduled for January 11. Omissions, discrepancies and other problems identified at November’s workshop by both commissioners and audience members, will result in changes in the next draft.

Three categories of WECS are described in the draft code: small WECS (of up to a height of 200 feet or 10 feet above roofline for rooftop mounted wind turbines), large WECS on larger lots only in agricultural zoning, and community-based WECS (a category to be used by non-profits and governments).

The county intends to encourage community-based WECS by proposing less restrictive requirements.

The draft code’s specific requirements (turbine color and distances from property lines, ridge tops, and structures) are designed to protect people from noise and visual impacts. The environmental concerns, expressed by MAS and other conservation organizations at the meeting, are about potential impacts to wildlife — particularly birds and bats.

Three specific aspects need to be addressed:

- Absence of information about existing conditions (including wildlife use and habitats), failure to adequately identify potential impacts, and lack of
On a cold, wind-whipped day, a stalwart group of birders followed leader Bruce Deuel around Gray Lodge on Saturday, December 5 — his On a cold, wind-whipped day, a stalwart group of birders followed leader Bruce Deuel around Gray Lodge on Saturday, December 5 — his On a cold, wind-whipped day, a stalwart group of birders followed leader Bruce Deuel around Gray Lodge on Saturday, December 5 — his

By Sande Chilvers

Gray Lodge, Feather River and the Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge

By Sande Chilvers

an Osprey over the river. On the river, Common Mergansers, Common Goldeneyes and Buffleheads shared space while a Belted Kingfisher worked the banks. At the Thermalito Afterbay we saw Common Loons, Canvasbacks, Redheads and all five kinds of grebes for these parts. We saw Wilson’s Snipes and American Pipets in a field on our way to the Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge, and an adult Bald Eagle flew overhead.

The Arctic wind continued at the refuge and kept the birds away from the viewing platform, but we did see two male Ring-necked Pheasants and, surprisingly, a Yellow-billed Magpie. On the auto tour at the refuge notable birds were Lesser Scap, a Cackling Goose, another Golden Eagle, more Common Moorhens, a Ring-necked Duck and Tundra Swans.

In all, 113 species were spotted by our group. Bruce’s Trip #34 for MAS was another successful event, and he made it look easy.
**Property Stewardship**

**BIRD USE AT BAHIA**

The first of the avian surveys required by regulatory agencies took place November 17. Volunteer observers Jules Evens, Jim White, Mary Anne Flett, Len Blumin and Don Rienberg tallied 2,795 birds.

The highest number of species counted included: White Pelican (13), Double-crested Cormorant (70), Gadwall (34), Mallard (100), Northern Shoveler (789), Northern Pintail (68), Canvasback (48), Greater Scaup (568), Semi-palmated Sandpiper (107), Western Sandpiper (456), Least Sandpiper (468), Dunlin (509), Peep sp. (130), and Snowy Egret (14).

Thank you Mary Anne, Jules, Jim, Len, and Don.

While birds are clearly enjoying the habitat we have restored, some human users seem bent on destroying it. A sign that we installed — explaining the lands are being protected as habitat and asking people to stay out — was recently shot full of bullet holes (see photo below).

As we wait for the rain to come so we can begin revegetation, we have spent workdays removing iceplant and other invasives.

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**JUNIOR BIRD WATCHERS CORNER**

**By Wendy Dreskin**

Two second graders at Bacich Elementary School became Junior Bird Watchers this month.

**Parker Leopold** now has 23 birds on his life list. His favorites so far were the male Northern Shoveler and the male Green-winged Teal. His wish is to see his first Osprey!

**Pierre Beaureang** was excited to see a perched Red-tailed Hawk at his school the day he became a Junior Bird Watcher. Maybe it came by to wish him luck with his test!

If you know an individual child or a teacher who would like to participate, please have them go to www.marinaudubon.org and click on Junior Bird Watcher. Questions? Call Wendy at 415/457-3949.

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**MARIN AUDUBON THANKS THE FOLLOWING FOR THEIR GENEROUS DONATIONS:**


**THANKS TO OUR VOLUNTEERS:**


**WELCOME NEW MEMBERS:**


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**A Special Thanks**

A big thank you to Goodman Building Supply in Mill Valley for donating an assortment of gardening gloves for our volunteers to use in restoration efforts. The gloves will come in very “handy”.

Thank you to Casey Falvey at the Center for Volunteer & Non Profit Leadership for including the habitat restoration at Bahia as one of their ‘FLEX program’ projects. Casey is very supportive and is doing great work in recruiting volunteers to help us out at Bahia. We are grateful for this ongoing partnership.

— Jude Stalker

**PHOTOS: WENDY DRESKIN**

**Marin Audubon sign damaged**

— Jude Stalker

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**MARIN AUDUBON PROPERTIES**

1. Petaluma Marsh 180 acres
2. Bahia 60 acres
3. Simmons Slough 162 acres
4. Norton Avenue Pond 2 parcels
5. Black Point Parcels 2 parcels
6. Arroyo San Jose 2 parcels
7. Tidelands at Murphy’s Rock 34 acres
8. Corte Madera Marsh 1.8 acres
9. Triangle Marsh 31 acres
10. San Clemente Creek 4.34 acres
11. Tiscornia Marsh 20 acres
12. Arroyo Corte Madera del Presedio 2 acres

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**MARIN AUDUBON THANKS THE FOLLOWING FOR THEIR GENEROUS DONATIONS:**


**THANKS TO OUR VOLUNTEERS:**


**WELCOME NEW MEMBERS:**

Bird of the Month

By Meryl Sundove and Roger D. Harris

The LBJ (little brown job) that is this month’s bird is arguably among the most ubiquitous bird species in the world, found throughout temperate regions globally, especially places that have been subjected to British colonialism.

Our bird has a simple – some would say monotonous – song, repeated with no particular rhythm, beginning, or end. It chatters all day long and year-round. Its song resembles the stereotypical “cheep” of bird vocalizations used in cartoons.

Our bird is not a native American species but originates from Eurasia and North Africa. Initially a hundred birds of our species were purchased for $200 from England and released in Brooklyn, New York, in 1851. Aided by additional introductions, a remarkable adaptability to co-exist with humans, and a high reproductive potential, the species rapidly spread throughout the US, north to British Columbia, and south to Central America, expanding from the small founding population to an estimated continental population of 150,000,000 by 1943.

As a close commensal with humans, our bird was able to fill a niche that no native species occupied. Our birds thrive in human modified environments like farms with cereal cultivation and/or livestock as well as urban gardens where there is safety, places to nest, and plenty of food. Indeed, out bird is virtually never found far from human habitations.

In the horse and buggy era, the original hope was that our bird would help control flies attracted to horse droppings in the cities. But our bird feeds mostly on grains and weed seeds, although they require an abundance of insects to feed their nestlings during the breeding season. Apparently a big black bib is a signal of fitness to prospective mates. The bigger the bib, the greater is the success of the individual male in attracting females. Initially the male acquires fresh feathers in the fall with its pre basic molt. The mottled tones of gray and tan has fooled many a new birder as she lacks much of a defining pattern and is truly a LBJ. When first introduced to North America it was called the English Sparrow.

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Signature Gathering Begins For


The California Parks Foundation has filed a proposed statewide ballot to create a stable funding source (the California State Parks Trust Fund) to protect state parks and wildlife from budget-cut funding reductions. Marin Audubon has signed on as an endorser.

The measure would establish an $18 surcharge on vehicle license fees. The money would be put in a Wildlife Conservation Trust Fund where it could be spent only on state parks, urban river parkways, wildlife, natural lands and ocean conservation programs. Vehicles would receive free, year-round admission to all state parks.

The petition drive will begin in early January and continue through mid-March. For more information and/or if you are interested in volunteering to collect signatures to qualify this measure for the ballot, please contact North Bay Coordinator, Ann Thomas 415/924-9559.

California parks support extensive wildlife habitat. Currently thousands of acres are closed and risk wildlife and habitat destruction, crime, vandalism and the additional concern of parklands being sold.
Volunteer Needed

The Marin Audubon Society is seeking a volunteer to do the clerical tasks related to membership matters. Familiarity with Microsoft Excel is necessary. The job entails keeping the membership list current, and mailing out renewal notices and other membership-related correspondence. If you are interested in helping us this way, please call Bob Chilvers at 415/444-0875.

Other Conservation Actions Taken This Month:

LOCAL COASTAL PLAN
The Marin County Planning Commission’s workshops on the Local Coastal Plan (LCP) continue. This month MAS testified before the Commission asking no additional trails be constructed in West Marin. Trails adversely impact wildlife because the required removal of vegetation destroys habitat. Trails guide people into remote wildlife areas — bringing noise, odors, and litter. People straying off trails and/or letting dogs run off-leash present additional threats to these already strained habitats. Owners of agricultural lands also objected to increased trail construction because of management problems they present.

Marin County Open Space District has more than 150 miles of trails, not including those on lands owned by the state and federal governments, water districts and other public agencies.

DUBAI STAR OIL SPILL
MAS submitted comments urging increased compliance and enforcement of existing state law. California regulations (14 Cal. Code Regs. 844.3) require, during fuel transfers, that captains either pre-boom the vessel or have booms on hand to respond to a potential spill within 30 minutes.

Neither was in place when, during a fuel transfer on October 30, the Dubai Star spilled 400 to 800 gallons of oil into San Francisco Bay. It took six hours before a boom was placed to contain the spill. This was in direct violation of state law.

We urged the enforcement of existing regulations and that immediate action be taken to ensure vessels transferring fuels in the San Francisco Estuary comply with the law. Heavy fines should be levied for violations.

If you would like to comment, send to:
Steve Edinger, Administrator
California Department of Fish & Game
Office of Spill Prevention and Response
1700 K Street, Suite 250
Sacramento, CA 95814

“STATE OF THE STATE’S WETLANDS” REPORT
This report, produced by California’s Natural Resources Agency, summarizes the importance of wetlands, what we know about them, and progress made by many state agencies, public and private partnerships to protect and restore wetlands. According to the report, California has made substantial progress over the last ten years in identifying, acquiring, restoring and enhancing wetlands. The state currently has approximately 2.9 million acres of wetland — roughly one-tenth of the wetland areas of two centuries ago. Significant stressors, such as urban and agricultural development, continue to affect California’s wetlands.

To continue these gains, the report recommends: coordinating wetland programs and standardizing wetland monitoring and assessment procedures; adopting a common approach for wetland identification and classification; improving management and monitoring; sharing data with the public; supporting the use of standardized assessment with a wetland defnition inclusive of all wetland types (particularly those the Army Corps of Engineers no longer claims jurisdiction over); use of standardized assessment with a revision of CEQA to ensure that assessments (that a wetland is of “low” quality) not be used to justify filling wetlands; assurance that all wetlands lost to development are adequately mitigated; and increased enforcement to ensure that existing wetlands are not destroyed or degraded.

We expect the report to be revised to address public comments. The month-long comment period ended October 30, 2009.

Conservation

Continued from page 2

We expect the report to be revised to post-construction requirements regarding monitoring and removal of WECS that are causing problems.

The ordinance recognizes WECS impact on birds and bats by restricting building near streams and wetlands, but focuses on nesting and roosting areas and on endangered species. No information about migration corridors through the county and where bird strikes are likely to occur is provided. Marin is a major movement corridor for raptors and, as we have learned from Altamont and other East Bay locations, the potential for raptor losses is great. The staff report actually minimizes the significance of potential impacts by stating more birds are killed either by cats or by flying into buildings. MAS pointed out that this use of statistics does not negate the impacts of WECS. In fact, WECS impacts would add to the cumulative impact humans have on wildlife.

MAS recommended the county develop a map identifying where raptors are likely to occur. Existing maps show high wind areas, but lack background data describing where raptors travel, soar or hunt.

Potential impacts to raptors and other species need to be identified and standards developed to evaluate the significance of these impacts. Instead, WECS applicants hire consultants to identify natural resources, impacts and evaluate their significance. MAS knows, from long experience, that consultants can be found to advocate almost any position. The county should have objective information regarding permit approval and/or hire consultants directly (with the applicant paying, of course) to evaluate the impact potential.

Finally, specific recommendations are needed for monitoring wind turbines after they are installed, as well as procedures for taking problem turbines out of service. There should be a required shut-down of turbines shown to cause significant loss of birds.

Bird and bat collisions can be expected from individual WECS and the potential for bird impacts increases as the number of WECS increases. We have learned at Altamont (MAS is one of several Audubon chapters involved in the lawsuit over bird kills at that site) that without a provision for removing high-impact turbines, there is no effective way to control or stop their use. Further, because the county is proposing to approve this code change with a Negative Declaration, there will be no analysis of potential cumulative impacts.
Christmas Bird Count Compilation Dinner Saturday, December 26, 2009

Join us at our COMPIlATION DINNER following the Christmas Bird Count (see page 1). Whether you reserve a dinner or bring your own, everyone on the count is encouraged to come.

The dinner will be held after the count from 5:30 - 8:30 PM (doors open at 5 PM) at the Tamalpais Valley Community Center, Mill Valley. Reservations required for the catered dinner (pasta, green salad, garlic bread, coffee or tea). Cost: $12. Please pay at the door.

To keep with our dessert potluck tradition, we encourage everyone to bring something sweet to share.

BE “GREEN”: In order to minimize waste, please bring your own plate, cup, cutlery and napkin. Thank you!

DIRECTIONS:
From Hwy 101 take Stinson Beach exit, which turns into Shoreline. Follow around the bend to Tennessee Valley Rd (at the fruit stand) and turn left. Go 1/4 mile to Marin Ave and turn right, then make an immediate left into the Center parking lot.

TO RESERVE A DINNER:
Email jcowper993@aol.com or mail your NAME(s), EMAIL and MAILING ADDRESS and PHONE NUMBER to Mary Anne Cowperthwaite, 141 Oak Avenue, San Anselmo, CA 94960. Questions? Call Mary Anne at 415/453-2216.

A Thank You Note From the Editor:
I’d like to take this opportunity to say “Thank you!” to my hardworking team members who help me get out each Clapper Rail — and have for the past three years!

The biggest “thank you” goes to Sue Morrison, our always cheerful, hardworking and most important graphics gal who helps me put the newsletter together each month. I really couldn’t do it without her! Thanks Sue!

Thanks also to my “proofing team” of Mary Anne Cowperthwaite and Nancy Bohnet, who catch phrases that don’t make sense and double-check spelling and punctuation before each issue prints. Thanks also to Mary Anne for coordinating and proofing the Birdlog! And a “thank you” to Susan Ives for editing Barbara Salzman’s texts.

Dear Readers: It’s fun to put together The Clapper Rail! If you are interested in helping or joining our newsletter team, please contact me at nxokada@yahoo.com or 415/987-8800! Happy Holidays!

Nancy Okada
The Clapper Rail editor
The success of Marin Audubon Society’s work depends greatly on its Chapter members. We work collaboratively with the National Audubon Society on issues of mutual concern, but very little of our funding comes from the NAS. The Marin Audubon Society relies on local support for our habitat protection efforts, conservancy advocacy, birding field trips, educational Speakers’ Series, and publication of The Clapper Rail. Chapter members also have the opportunity to support and participate in the acquisition, restoration and enhancement of open space in and around Marin County, which will remain undeveloped habitat and open space in perpetuity. Our members’ ideas, values and resources help us shape our agenda and carry out our goals and mission. We are confident you will find that being a Marin Audubon Society Chapter Member is worthwhile.

If you are not already a Chapter member, please consider joining the Marin Audubon Society, and urge your friends, neighbors and relatives to join us too.

Join Marin Audubon Society
Use this form to join or renew your membership in Marin Audubon Society.

☐ $1,000 Benefactor ☐ $100 Sustaining ☐ $25 Basic
☐ $50 Patron ☐ $50 Sponsor Amount Enclosed $ __________

Name ________________________________

Address ________________________________

City __________________ State _______ Zip ___________

Email ________________________________

Telephone _____________________________

Your membership will provide significant support to our conservation, education, and acquisition programs and include a subscription to The Clapper Rail. Your payment will be tax deductible. Make sure you know when your membership expires! It’s the date located to the upper right of your address.

Please make check payable to Marin Audubon Society and mail with this coupon to:

Membership Secretary
Marin Audubon Society
P.O. Box 599, Mill Valley, CA 94942-0599

Now Use Your Credit Card To Join Or Donate To Marin Audubon Society

To use “JustGive”, a convenient secure, online donation program, go to MAS’s web site www.marinaudubon.org, click on “donate now” and follow the easy instructions. Or if you prefer, send this form to: Marin Audubon Society, Box 599, Mill Valley, CA 94942-0599. Just fill in the information below and mail to us.

Payment Amount $ ____________
Credit Card Information ☐ Master Card ☐ Visa

Name ________________________________

Credit Card Number ____________ Expiration Date ____________

Signature ________________________________

NOTE: We do not give your name to other organizations.

Membership in Marin Audubon does not include membership in National Audubon. Do not send a National Audubon renewal to Marin Audubon. New National Audubon memberships may be sent to MAS, but renewals should be made by mailing check to:

National Audubon Society
700 Broadway
New York, NY 10003

= SAVE THE DATE =
Feb 5-7 The Flyway Festival (Vallejo)
For information: www.sfbayflywayfestival.com. FREE

April 23-25 Point Reyes Birding Festival
More information at http://www.eacmarin.org

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