



# THE Clapper Rail

MARIN AUDUBON SOCIETY

**SPEAKER SERIES**

*Free and Open to the public*

Richardson Bay Audubon Center  
376 Greenwood Beach Road  
Tiburon, California 94920  
Information: 415/789-0703

**THURSDAY, JANUARY 6 7:30 PM**

**A Birder's Year: Point Reyes, California and Beyond**

*With David Wimpfheimer*



Photo courtesy of David Wimpfheimer

**Marbled godwits**

Point Reyes and other regions of California contain a multitude of wonderful sites in which to enjoy birds and other wildlife. In this retrospective naturalist David Wimpfheimer will share his images of coastal, mountain, desert and other habitats that he visits in different seasons. David will provide insights into migration, breeding activity and various areas to visit to fully appreciate California's amazing biodiversity. From his more adventurous travels, he will also show us hummingbirds in Arizona, puffins in Alaska and penguins in Antarctica.

**David Wimpfheimer** is a biologist, professional naturalist and guide with a passion for birds and the natural history of California. For over twenty-five years he has taught classes and led birding excursions for Point Reyes Field Seminars, Elderhostel, Oceanic Society, California Academy of Sciences, Wild Wings and other groups in many parts of California and other regions.

Come at 7:15 PM to socialize and have refreshments before the program.

**MARK YOUR CALENDAR NOW!**

**THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 3 7:30 PM**

**Coexisting With Coyotes**

*With Camilla Fox of Project Coyote*

## Settlement of Altamont Pass Wind Turbines Lawsuit



Photo courtesy of Christopher Taylor, kiciphoto.com

**Open hills such as those near the Altamont Pass are prime breeding habitat for golden eagles. Smallwood estimated that the Altamont Pass turbines "killed on average at least 7,643 to 9,298 birds per year over the past four years including ... 55-94 golden eagles."**

**A**fter years of difficult and frustrating deliberations, parties to a suit filed in 2007 to reduce bird kills at Altamont have reached an agreement with NextEra Energy Resources that it is hoped will reduce bird kills at Altamont. Parties included five Audubon chapters (Golden Gate, Santa Clara Valley, Ohlone, Mt. Diablo and Marin), Californians for Renewable Energy (CaRE) and the State Attorney General's office. Because MAS was party to the lawsuit against wind turbine companies, we were also part of this recent settlement agreement.

The Agreement sets an expedited process for repowering (i.e., replacing old outdated turbines with more modern versions) wind turbines at Altamont. Golden Gate and Santa Clara Valley Audubon chapters took the lead in representing Audubon chapters in the negotiations. Their staffs spent countless hours in difficult negotiation meetings, which were also expensive.

The Agreement reflects the recommendation of the Alameda County Scientific Review committee that the only way to significantly reduce impacts to birds and continue energy generation at Altamont is to remove old

turbines and replace them with newer-generation models. A major part of the agreement was that NextEra committed to ceasing operation of their old turbines three years earlier than they are required to do under their current permit; this should save the lives of thousands of raptors and other birds.

MAS agreed to become a party to the suit because of our concern about the unacceptable killing of golden eagles and many other birds and bats as a result of the Altamont Pass wind turbines. The new turbines will be taller and there will be fewer of them. Currently there are more than 5,000 turbines. The number of birds killed by the Altamont Pass Wind Turbines per year over the past four years is estimated to include 1,645-1,967 raptors, including 55-94 golden eagles, 475-477

American kestrels, 253-433, red-tailed hawks, and 714-718 burrowing owls (Smallwood, 2010, Fatality Rates in the Altamont Pass Wind Turbine Resource

*continued on page 3*

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## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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

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Publicity	Martha Jarocki 461-3592
BAAC Reps	Lowell Sykes 388-2821 Barbara Salzman 924-6057

## DIRECTORS MEETINGS

Meetings open to members.

7:30 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  
Northern Calif. Bird Box: 681-7422  
(Provided by Golden Gate AS)

## 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 Clapper 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

Give a gift for wildlife! Your end-of-year donation to Marin Audubon and gift memberships for family and friends benefit our native wildlife and make the world a better place for people as well.

Our year-end appeal letter was mailed in early December and should have reached you all by now. This annual letter is our most important fundraiser and it also conveys information about what we've been doing. Your donation will be used to support our programs, maintain our properties, and fund our outreach and administration costs. Because we are an all-volunteer organization, every cent of your donation goes to support these activities. Membership dues, particularly joint memberships with National Audubon, are insufficient to support our activities and properties. We depend on your generosity to keep all of our programs going.

Another way to benefit wildlife during the holiday season is to join MAS for Work Days, planting at Bahia and Triangle Marsh. Our

work is transforming barren or weed-infested lands into native habitat for native wildlife. Check the list of currently scheduled volunteer days on page 6.

We apologize for the late arrival of the December *The Clapper Rail*. For most of us it arrived well past the Speaker Series program. The holiday season and a vacation influenced the delay. We'll do our best to make sure it doesn't happen again.

We want to hear from members who may be interested in serving on our board. If you're interested, please contact one of the nominating committee members (Phil Peterson, Martha Jarocki and Jude Stalker). Their contact information is in the column on the far left of this page.

From all of us on the Marin Audubon board, may you have a healthy and joyous New Year. We hope you're enjoying the holiday season, and that you'll take the time to enjoy our wonderful overwintering migratory birds.

## NOVEMBER 7 FIELD TRIP

# Arrowhead Marsh

By Dave Herrema

Rusty Scaup of Golden Gate Audubon ably led thirteen participants on a walk around Arrowhead Marsh, a 50-acre wetland in the Martin Luther King Jr. Regional Shoreline near the Oakland Airport. The park juts into San Leandro Bay so we encountered several distinct habitats and an impressive sixty-two species of birds, including **Burrowing Owl** just before we reached the park.

The large open bay hosted rafts of **Ruddy Duck**, with **Bufflehead**, **Surf Scoter**, **Ring-necked Duck**, a few **Greater Scaup** and a lone **Canvasback** thrown in. Five grebe species were **Pied-billed**, **Horned**, **Eared**, **Western** and **Clark's**. **Canada Geese** flew over with a **Cackling Goose** in tow. The Cackling Goose, a species now split from the Canada Goose, is slightly larger than a Mallard, and the size difference was striking.

Shorebirds were abundant, in particular **Willet**, **Marbled Godwit** and **Black-necked Stilt**. There was also a **Spotted Sandpiper**, **Greater Yellowlegs**, and a lone **Black Oystercatcher**. A freshwater pond near the bayshore yielded **Dowitchers**, **American Avocet**, both **Green-winged** and **Cinnamon Teal**, **Northern Pintail**, **Northern Shoveler**, and Mallard. We also saw a hybrid **White-crowned x Golden-crowned Sparrow**, which generated



Sora



Ring-necked ducks

considerable interest and was the "bird-of-the-day" for at least some of us.

The tide came in and the skies cleared around noon. The high tide exposed **Virginia** and **Clapper Rail** and **Sora** and we got good close looks at several. When huge numbers of shorebirds were roused from their resting areas, we looked for a Peregrine Falcon but none appeared. As the tide rose, hundreds of shorebirds, and even a few Rails, moved to the pier to wait out the high water.

## MAS FIELD TRIPS

Open to the public

Bring lunch, field guide, and binoculars. For information, weather check and accessibility: Vicky Van Meter at 415/299-2514

### LAS GALLINAS STORAGE PONDS SAN RAFAEL

January 6, 2010  
8:30 AM to 12 noon  
With Len Blumin

All are welcome to join Len Blumin on the first Thursday of each month for a walk around the Las Gallinas Storage Ponds near McInnis Park. This walk is great for all levels of birders. Winter is prime time for waterfowl and a dozen or more species can be expected. Hawks are frequent and we see the graceful Northern Harrier on virtually every trip. Over 100 bird species have been reported as likely to be seen over the course of a year.

**DIRECTIONS:** From Highway 101 North, take the Smith Ranch Road exit, go east toward the McInnis Park entrance, turn left immediately after crossing the railroad tracks and go to the end of the road to the Las Gallinas Storage Ponds parking lot. Meet the group by the bridge just past the parking lot. The walk starts at 8:30 but late arrivals should easily be able to find the group.

### GULLS OF SONOMA AND MARIN

Sunday, January 9, 2011  
Daybreak (about 6:30 AM)  
at Shollenberger Park  
or 8:30 AM at Lucchesi Park  
With Peter Colasanti

Remember Hitchcock's *The Birds*? Do you remember how scary the gulls were and did you ever get over it? Join a fellow Laraphobe for a day of immersion therapy near the scene of that cinematic crime in southern Sonoma county and Bahia in Marin. Those who dare can meet me for the exodus from Shollenberger Park at daybreak Sunday January 9, where over 2000 gulls flyover en route to their daily feast. Next we'll convene at 8:30 AM at Lucchesi Park for close views in an urban setting and then head south to Bahia in Novato to see the activity at Marin Audubon's restoration site. We'll relish the adults, study the juveniles, and mostly ignore the adolescents and hybrids. Be a "Student at Gulls" for a day. The trip will end at about 11:30 AM.

**DIRECTIONS TO SHOLLENBERGER PARK:** Take 101 North to Petaluma. Take the 116/Lakeville Hwy. East exit. Turn onto Lakeville (left, east bound), go approximately 3 long blocks from highway overpass. Turn right onto South McDowell. Turn right in 0.3 miles onto Cader Lane, which dead ends in the Shollenberger Park parking lot. Meet at the kiosks.

**DIRECTIONS TO LUCCHESI PARK:** Take 101 North, exit at E. Washington. Turn right toward east Petaluma. Take the first left onto N. McDowell Blvd. Turn right in one quarter mile on Community Center Way.



Ring-billed Gull

Photo courtesy of Len Blumin

### COSUMNES RIVER PRESERVE AND SUNSET CRANE "FLY-IN"

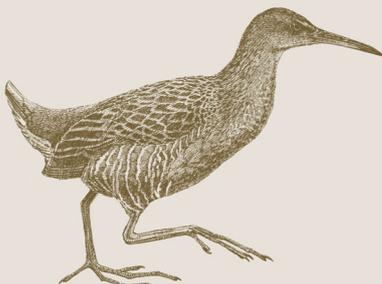
Saturday, January 22, 2010  
8:45 AM – 6:00 PM  
With Terry Colborn

The Cosumnes River Preserve, managed by The Nature Conservancy, is one of the last remnants of a once vast riparian habitat in the Sacramento Valley. Situated on the eastern edge of Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, this 1,500 acre preserve of mixed oak woodlands, grasslands and wetlands hosts an array of wintering passerines and waterfowl. The surrounding wetlands and flooded fields provide excellent refuge for many waders and Sandhill Cranes. The lush oak woodlands can often yield a number of passerines and wintering raptors. Past visits have even afforded rare views of river otters.

After a morning walk of about one flat mile, we'll eat lunch at the Visitor's Center. Afterwards we'll scope the impoundments opposite the Visitor's Center that host a significant number of waterfowl. We'll also scope out several large winter ponds checking for shorebirds, waterfowl and the resident Peregrine Falcon. We'll then head to Staten Island Rd, renowned as the winter home to thousands of Sandhill Cranes. The birds feed in the nearby rice and cornfields, and move to roost in the wetlands by late afternoon, early evening. The area often has a nice variety of ducks and shorebirds, and may hold a surprise or two. The sight and sound of hundreds of Sandhill Cranes coming into roost at sunset is a sight to behold.

**DIRECTIONS:** Meet at 8:45 am at Cosumnes River Preserve Visitor's Center parking lot. From I-80 at Fairfield/Suisun City turn onto Hwy 12 toward Rio Vista and continue to I-5 near Lodi. Go north on I-5 about 13 miles to the Twin Cities Rd exit. Travel 1 mile east, turn right (south) on Franklin Blvd and drive 1.7 miles to the Cosumnes Preserve Visitor's Center on your left. Travel time from Marin is about 2 hrs.

Bring binoculars and scope, lunch, snacks and liquids; wear comfortable footwear and dress in layers. Heavy rain cancels. For more information contact Terry at 916/705-8991, or at: [www.tlcbirding.com](http://www.tlcbirding.com) or contact Vicky Van Meter at [Vicky.vanmeter@gmail.com](mailto:Vicky.vanmeter@gmail.com) or 415/299-2514 (cell).



## Altamont Wind Turbines

continued from page 1

Areas 1998-2009). The settlement also provides for mitigation in the form of funding for a three-year monitoring program to survey bird and bat mortality, and hopefully to purchase lands for habitat.

The settlement is not perfect. At our request, some modifications were made to clarify legal restrictions. We continue to be concerned about the lack of clarity of some terms and procedures that



Photo courtesy of Richard Daneh

American kestrel

could lead to confusion and debate down the line. There are provisions to meet and confer



Photo courtesy of Len Blumin

Burrowing owl

should the bird strikes continue at unacceptable levels.

In the end those who were most involved believed this is the best agreement we could get. Most importantly, scientific experts believe repowering to be the only way to reduce bird kills, short of removing the turbines, which will not happen.

### eBIRD.ORG

Are you disappointed that you couldn't make the Southern Marin CBC the day after Christmas? Have your own mini 'makeup count.' Invite a friend. Go birding. Report your bird observations at [eBird.org](http://eBird.org)

## CONSERVATION

### DRAKES ESTERO WILDERNESS DESIGNATION

The process chosen by the National Park Service to evaluate and decide whether the parklands used by the Drakes Bay Oyster Company at Point Reyes National Seashore will become



Photo courtesy of [www.naturespisonline.com](http://www.naturespisonline.com)

#### Harbor seal

wilderness when its lease expires in 2012 or continue in operation for ten more years has begun with the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), the Federal equivalent to California's Environmental Impact Report. The EIS will address potential impacts of continuing the mariculture business. The Park Service solicited public input on issues that should be addressed in the EIS.

In our comments, Marin Audubon requested that impacts of the 50+ acre oyster-growing operation on wildlife and habitat be addressed. We requested information about impacts on: (a) shorebirds because the oyster racks and bags cover mudflat foraging habitat for shorebirds; (b) California Brant because the oyster operation is adversely impacting eelgrass foraging habitat for this declining species; (c) fish because structures extend through the water column; (d) eelgrass, a highly valuable marine plant used by many bird and fish species, because the oyster racks are in areas where eelgrass beds would grow; (e) harbor seals because boats that maintain the oyster racks pass close to harbor seal haul-out and pupping areas; and (f) tidal marsh because on-shore structures and activities related to the processing and sale of the oysters are on historic marsh and near an existing marsh.

The information and analyses in the EIS will form the basis for deciding whether or not the permit for the oyster operation is extended beyond 2012, the date established in the park-enabling legislation for the land to revert to wilderness. We estimate that preparation of the EIS will take about a year.

### MAS SUPPORTS COUNTY ORDINANCE LIMITING SINGLE-USE CARRY OUT BAGS

The MAS Board voted to endorse a county ordinance aimed at reducing the environmental impacts of plastic bags. Plastic bags are a significant source of marine debris, and are

hazardous to marine animals and birds which mistake the plastic for food, resulting in injury and death. In addition, single-use plastic bags litter the environment, block storm drains and foul beaches and other shorelines.

The ordinance requires stores to provide reusable bags to customers at no cost or, after January 1, 2013, at a reasonable cost of not less than 5 cents. Only single use carryout bags used at the point of sale are covered, not the small bags used for individual grocery items. Our message is – bring your own bags when you are shopping for groceries. A final vote to approve the ordinance is scheduled for the Board of Supervisors meeting on January 4.

### LAWSON'S LANDING HEARING POSTPONED

The California Coastal Commission's hearing on the Lawson's Landing project has been postponed from December to March, at the request of the property owners who are the applicants.

We understand that the commission staff has agreed to the wetlands delineation produced by the applicants' consultants, which would allow many more camping/trailer sites in wetlands. The current camping uses in the wetlands undoubtedly account for the destruction of wetlands vegetation. Wetland vegetation is one of the parameters (along with water and soil type) to identify wetlands.

It is important for the public to make their voices heard either by attending the hearing or writing. We will provide additional information as it becomes available in *The Clapper Rail* or on our website during the next two months to enable you to make informed comments.

The property owners have received a major grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for a program to protect the Snowy Plover by educating beach users. The property owners are also applying for a Natural Resource Conservation Service grant. Although we support their receiving public money for restoration and protection of native habitat and species, the property owners should not be allowed to continue destructive activities on other parts of the property.

### METEOROLOGICAL (MET) TOWER APPEAL BY APPLICANT GOES TO SUPERVISORS

NextEra, a multimillion dollar international wind-energy company, appealed the Marin County Planning Commission's approval of the appeal made by MAS, Marin Conservation League, Environmental Action Committee of West Marin and a number of individuals to erect a meteorological tower on each of two West Marin ranches. The NextEra appeal was heard by the supervisors on December 14.



#### 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 Presidio	2 acres

As reported in last month's *The Clapper Rail*, the planning staff had approved the meteorological towers with no environmental review. Based on our appeal, however, the commission required that an Initial Study be prepared to address impacts of the met towers.

In their appeal, NextEra claimed that the met towers would not cause significant impacts to the environment or reduce habitat for wildlife. To support their claim of no significant impact, NextEra submitted three surveys of meteorological towers in Solano County. In our view, these surveys not only failed to support NextEra's claim, but they did not provide relevant information. The location of the met towers in Solano County study, which are on flat agricultural lands, is vastly different from West Marin, where towers would be along the coast near the Estero De Americano and groves of trees.

At the Supervisor's hearing of NextEra's appeal, we were surprised by a letter of support from PRBO Conservation Science supporting the project. That letter proved to be pivotal. Several of the supervisors even said that the PRBO testimony convinced them to support the project. Among other supporting comments, PRBO expressed the view that the towers would have minimal impacts on raptors. Of course, raptors were not the only species of concern.

The environmental organizations were not opposing the met towers but, we and the other individuals, were working for an environmentally sensitive project based on a clear understanding of the constraints and potential impacts of the project as provided by CEQA. The PRBO comments were unusual as scientific organizations do not typically get involved in political matters and this is a good example of why they should not.

#### **COMMENTS NEEDED TO ENSURE REVIEW FOR BIRD COLLISIONS WITH TOWERS**

In a related matter, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has announced plans to prepare a programmatic Environmental Assessment (EA) to address the problem of bird collisions with towers. The FCC's decision comes as the result of successful litigation brought by conservation groups following years of delay by the FCC to address this problem. However, given the well-documented bird mortality, the FCC should be preparing a programmatic environmental impact statement (EIS), which is more thorough than an EA.

You can help by submitting comments urging that an EIS be prepared. Comments must be submitted on or before January 14, 2011 either electronically by accessing the

Commission's electronic comment filing system (ECFS): [www.fcc.gov/cgb/ecfs/](http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/ecfs/), through a link on the PEA website, [www.fcc.gov/pea](http://www.fcc.gov/pea), or via the Federal eRulemaking Portal: [www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov) or hard copy. Paper comments must include an original and four copies of each filing addressed to 445 12th Street SW, Washington, DC 20554.

#### **OTHER MAS ACTIONS**

*Spirit Rock Mediation Center* – We submitted comments on the Initial Study/Negative Declaration commending Spirit Rock for revising their expansion project to pull the buildings further from the creek, and we requested that additional changes be made to further protect the creek and native vegetative habitats.

*Artificial Turf* – We wrote the College of Marin Board to support restoring to tidal marsh their now-unused track field along Corte Madera Creek and objected to the use of artificial turf in case the field is retained. Reportedly Branson School is interested in leasing and modifying the field by installing synthetic turf for their use. Others want the field to remain open to use by the public.

Synthetic turf covers habitat, rendering the ground unsuitable for foraging by birds because it is covered with synthetic material. It diminishes ponding capacity because the artificial turf is designed to drain quickly. Water quality is also degraded by tiny pellets that are used to cushion the fields and by heavy metals that leach from the synthetic surface, both of which are carried by runoff into the creek.

*Removal of Refuge Designation From Mt. Tamalpais* – The California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) is considering removing the designation of Game Refuge from Mount Tamalpais and selected other refuges around the state. The DFG notice stated that these lands had been originally designated as refuges “to enhance deer populations in certain parts of California because of lack of protections afforded deer from hunters” but that this designation is no longer necessary.

MAS commented that we have no problem dropping that designation as long as the lands were managed by an entity with the legal authority to continue the hunting restriction. The maps provided, however, were too small to actually determine the boundary of the Refuge. We asked that DFG provide additional information on the ownership of lands in the Mt. Tamalpais Game Refuge so that responders can evaluate whether there would be adequate protections should Mt. Tamalpais be removed as a refuge.

#### **THANKS TO OUR STEWARDSHIP VOLUNTEERS:**

Debbie Ablin, Russ Aguilar, Christine & Lyla Albert, Ansel Burk, Craig & Kyla Burke, Shayne Decent, Sienna Decent, Jeff Johnson, Anna & Kevin Mauer, Prem McMurdo, Flinn Moore Rauck, Linda Nicoletto, Max Perrey, Jane Piel, Mary & Brendon Smith, Jude Stalker, Lowell Sykes, Christine Tran, Sarah VanDine, Dave Woody

#### **WELCOME NEW MEMBERS**

Holly Ashton, Michael Broffman, Ken Bugher, Patricia Buzzotta, Norma Churchill, Everett Clark, Mike Coleman, Glenda Corning, Ann Derrickson, Lisa Donetti, Judith Dunham, Cathy Edgett, Robert Engel, Erica Fortescue, Mary Frey, Petra Gampfer, Laurence George, Nancy Hackett, Sarah Haddon, Luanna Helfman, Susana Ives, Christa Kerl, Peter Leiter, Deborah T. Lennon, Kate Littleboy, Deborah Hollister Loft, Anne & Gerry Pelletier, Jennifer K. Riley, Joyce Roberts, Bonnie Rottier, Susan & Dale Roush, Sally Schroeder, Gary Spratt, Betty Gaye Toney, Cynthia D. Wagner, Nicole Yukawa

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

Jamie Zank, David Woody, Hilary Winslow, Martha Wickliffe, Arlin Weinberger, Joan Vaughan, Linda Trocki, Max Jr. & Phyllis Thelen, Stephen & Britt Thal, Phyllis M. Teplitz, Betty Stott, Stephanie Smith Stein, Susan & Robert Spofford, Joanne Sobel, David Sexton, Sue Severin, Stuart & Carol Schneider, Stewart Rowe, Nicholas Roth, Mary & Max Rodel, Russell Ridge, Walter & Joan Rentsch, Alison Quoyeser, Shirley Pullan, Jeanne Price, Susan Pearson, Deborah & Michael Patrick, Barbara Munden, Muller Family Foundation, William & Laura Moseley, Sally L. Milligan, Barbara Meschi, Rohana McLaughlin, Marilyn McGovern, Dr. James McCurdy, Albert R. Lubersky Trust, Mark Lindberg, Barbara & Warren Levinson, Olivia Le Feaver, Mary Lynn Kunkel, Josephine Kreider, Frances R. Kohler, Joe & Barbara Kirkbride, John Kane, Carvel & Karen Johnson, Frederick & Patricia Holden, Tom Hendricks, Jeannette Gustafson, Ron & Belle Guelden, Jane Gorski, Lewis Fredrickson, Mark H. Forney, Barbara Ford, Fischer Family Fund, Richard Felton, Margaret Fawcett, Dr. F. Gordon & W. June Dunn, Wendy & William Dreskin, John Crawford, Frank Cox, Cahill Family Fund, Priscilla & Michael H. Bull, Neil Brandt, Mary Bost, Patricia & Leonard Blumin, James Bennett, Robert & Jessica Batha, Dr. and Mrs. Donald Barbour, Mariah Baird, Sara Arnaud, Julie Allecta

## HABITAT STEWARDSHIP



Photo courtesy of Barbara Salzman

**Conservation Corps workers planting creeping wildrye rhizomes at Bahia.**

### HABITAT STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

Volunteers and hired crews have planted the native creeping ryegrass (*Leymus triticoides*) along hundreds of yards of the peninsulas at Bahia already this season. We have more *Leymus* rhizomes and there is more area to plant so that activity will continue in January. If you know weeds, you know that they are already growing rapidly. Our effort to control them will go into high gear at both Bahia and Triangle Marsh before radishes, then thistles, then others reach the seed-producing stage.

#### **Bahia, Novato:**

Thursday, January 6

Second Saturday, January 8

Wednesday, January 12

Thursday, January 20

Wednesday, January 26

We will meet at 10 AM at the end of Topaz Drive near Bolero Court and the tennis courts.

#### **Triangle Marsh, Corte Madera:**

First Saturday, January 1

Ask before coming on this date.

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

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

#### **BAHIA**

Thanks to funding from our EPA/San Francisco Estuary Partnership 2100 grant, we were able to contract with the North Bay Conservation Corps for a ten-person crew plus a supervisor to plant rhizomes at Bahia. This impressive crew worked for three days and planted ten buckets of rhizomes completing planting on the east and west peninsulas as well as removing highly invasive plants.

The North Bay Conservation Corps (NBCC) programs offer youth employment opportunities to develop skills and tools to succeed in the work-world, as well as get an education. Participants in the program range in

age from 18 through 28, devote one day a week to academic instruction and work for four. We are pleased to be a part of the NBCC program.

#### **SIMMONS SLOUGH WETLANDS AT OLIVE AND ATHERTON AVENUES**

Upon completion of the earthmoving at this 19-acre site, Marin Audubon's board conducted a workday to complement the plants that have begun to grow as a result of hydroseeding. Nine board members planted creeping wildrye rhizomes (as at Bahia) coyote bush, and other native plants. The Open Space District is beginning the necessary procedures to transfer the property to the county. We expect the transfer to take place in early 2011.

## Protection of Eelgrass in Drake's Estero

By Rick Johnson

Next in our series on impacts of mariculture in Drakes Estero, we will consider a native seagrass called eelgrass, *Zostera marina*, a flowering plant adapted to grow in saltwater. Even pollination occurs under water.

Carroll et al. (2008) reviewed its ecological importance: "Seagrass is often a foundation species in estuarine systems offering a variety of ecosystem services which can strongly influence the structure, stability, and function of regions with dense meadows (Hemminga & Duarte 2000). Some of these ecosystem services include the stabilization and oxygenation of the sediments through their root and rhizome complexes (Hemminga & Duarte 2000), reduction of water flow as their blades act to dampen water movement (Newell & Koch 2004), structural complexity which serves as a nursery ground for many marine species (Heck & Wetstone 1977), a settlement site for juvenile bivalves (Bologna & Heck 2000), and the contribution of detrital matter to estuarine food webs." Brant depend on eelgrass

as their main source of food in the winter and on migration. "Eelgrass beds provide habitat for juvenile fish including Pacific salmonids, lingcod, and rockfish, and invertebrate species such as Dungeness crab." (Ramey, 2008)

Mariculture operations in Drake's Estero cause direct loss and damage to eelgrass beds. No eelgrass can grow under oyster racks due to shading and disturbance. Oyster boat propellers cut swaths along their routes through the Estero. Some shellfish bags are inadvertently dropped or lost in currents, and these bags preempt eelgrass space. (Dixon, 2007) Eelgrass beds are further at risk in the Estero due to mariculture's role in the propagation of a non-native invasive tunicate, which will be described more fully next month. (If you can't wait, e-search *Didemnum vexillum*)

In commenting on the scope for the Drakes Estero EIS, MAS asked NPS to assess whether removal of mariculture from Drakes Estero in 2012 will reduce damage and risk to eelgrass.



Photo courtesy of [www.naturepiconline.com](http://www.naturepiconline.com)

**Black brant goose**

# MARIN BIRDLOG – NOVEMBER 2010

By Rich Stallcup

A pelagic trip to Cordell Bank in spirited weather 11/7 produced what we have learned to expect as normal for the season. The whole “show” was spectacular with Humpbacks everywhere – some breaching emphatically very near our boat. The more demure Blue Whales blew and rolled on and on, some beneath rainbows.

Birds were: 16 Black-footed Albatross, 70 Pink-footed, 4 Flesh-footed, 8 Buller’s, 35 Sooty and 18 Short-tailed Shearwaters, 380 Northern Fulmar, 160 Red and 2 Red-necked Phalaropes, 8 Pomarine and 1 Parasitic Jaegers, 5 Black-legged Kittiwake, 10 gull species, 50 Cassin’s and 90 Rhinoceros Auklets, 3 Tufted Puffin, 4 Marbled and 4 Ancient Murrelets.

**Eurasian Wigeons** were sparsely scattered about as usual. Five “pure” birds and two hybrids at the Giacomini wetlands 11/5 (JE) was a positive sign for this recently rehydrated pasture.

Always scarce nowadays in Marin, a female **Redhead** with **Ring-necked Ducks** at Five Brooks Pond 11/11 (NB,RS) was a treat. Only 30 years ago up to 200 **Redheads** would be present annually off Hamlet on the south side of the Walker Creek Delta on Tomales Bay.

The first **Goldeneyes** were a bit late 11/13 at Bahia, Novato. There were two adult male **Barrow’s**, followed 11/15 by several **Common** (RS). The water impoundments accessible from the end of Bolero Drive, Bahia host up to 500 goldeneye mid-winter and after admiring the few Barrow’s present it is a good challenge to seek a Barrow’s x Common hybrid.

The **Pacific Golden Plovers** found during a “Beachwatch” survey on Drake’s Beach 11/19 (KC) caused a thrill for those birders present. Formerly, when farming was still in practice on the O.P., small flocks of this species would often winter there moving from field to plowed field.

A juvenile **Bald Eagle** soaring with **Turkey Vultures** and two adult **Golden Eagles** over Olompali State Park 11/17 (PRBO BS) swirled long enough for excellent views. One of at least two adult **Bald Eagles** that have wintered along the south end of Tomales Bay for the past three years was watched chasing a **Red-throated Loon**, but the chasee escaped by plunge-diving into the water from an altitude of about 20 feet (RS)!

One lost **Sandhill Crane** seen by GGRO volunteers 11/29 (*fide* EB) caused only about the twelfth Marin record. Most have been flybys (or heard only in the fog) but one bird stayed an entire winter on the former Giacomini pasture.

November fourth was an excellent day for admiring **Ferruginous Hawks** near the Abbott’s Lagoon trailhead 11/4 (RS,m.ob) where at least eight were present including two astoundingly beautiful dark-morph individuals in the spectacle.

A **White-winged Dove**, very rare but of annual occurrence here in the fall (Why do some fly north at this time of year?) was at a feeder in Muir Beach 11/6 (JW) for a brief refueling.

Except for the last **Violet-green Swallows** still twinkling south in early November, most individuals of the other locally nesting species are long-gone so a **Rough-winged Swallow** (Northern if you must) 11/14 at Rodeo Lagoon (WL) was late or confused.

**Hermit Warblers** winter here in small numbers (maybe one for 40 Townsend’s Warblers) so one at Five Brooks 11/11 was nice but not unexpected (NB).

A late vagrant hatch-year male **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** was at the Drake’s Beach Monument 11/6 (RL).

**Swamp Sparrows** are rare but annually present here each winter in their preferred damp, grassy habitats with cover-veg nearby. One was at the Las Gallinas water treatment facility 11/3 (PBRO BS) and three were detected by voice 11/5 (RS) during a field survey at Inverness Park. Their call note is very much like the call note of Black Phoebe but with a more attenuated passerine inflection.

Christmas counts (CBCs) always turn-up some goodies but some of you know all about that by now. The Point Reyes Peninsula CBC was 12/18 and Marin County Southern will be 12/26. For ten years in the 70s and 80s many of us also participated on another CBC in (mostly) Marin. Its name was Arroyo Cheap Thrills and it is about time to promote that count back to active duty!

Merry Christmas Counts and Happy New Year Lists...

Photo courtesy of Richard Pavek



**Black-footed albatross**

## Junior Bird Watchers

By Wendy Dreskin

Junior Bird Watchers is an in-school program designed to teach elementary school children to identify birds in their neighborhoods. The program was developed by National Audubon Society (NAS). When NAS discontinued the program, Marin Audubon assumed sponsorship and Wendy Dreskin continues as the instructor, conducting the program in classrooms at several elementary schools. If you would like more information, please visit “Junior Birdwatchers” under the “Birds” tab on our website at [marinaudubon.org](http://marinaudubon.org), or contact Wendy Dreskin at 415/457-3949.



**Trevor Leopold**, a 4th grader at Bacich, celebrated being able to recognize 50 birds in the field with a “Happy Bird Day” cake. His 50th bird, an American kestrel, was spotted at the Las Gallinas

ponds when it obligingly perched on a utility pole where it could easily be scoped. Later Trevor identified a female Northern harrier, starting him on his way towards his next Bird Day celebration.



**Pierre Beaurang** and **Callaway Allen**, two second graders from Bacich, have done something no second grader has ever done in the 7-year history of the Junior Bird Watcher program – they have reached 6th grade level, learning 70 birds! Pierre says, “The coolest thing I did at school this year was becoming a Junior Bird Watcher in “Nature Detectives.” His mom Nina adds, “He has been constantly sharing what he has learned, whether it be looking out the window at the backyard birds or ... while on family hikes.”

Observers Lishka Arata, Bob Battagin, Eddie Brantley, Mark Butler, Heather Cameron, Kate Carolan, Jules Evens, Deborah Fitzpatrick, Golden Gate Raptor Observatory, Keith Hansen, Rick Le Bader, William Legge, Deborah Maier, many observers, Native Birds Group, Outer Point Reyes, PRBO Conservation Science Bird School, Mary Anne Rotella, Rich Stallcup, Jim White, Kerry Wilcox.



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- February 3 **Speaker Series**  
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Note: Lecture is now on  
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- February 11-13 **15th Annual Northern  
San Francisco Bay Flyway  
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The success of Marin Audubon Society's (MAS) work depends greatly on its chapter 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 Clapper Rail*, which you will receive as a MAS member. 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 as well.

If you are not already a chapter 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 [marinaudubon.org](http://marinaudubon.org).

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A National Audubon Society Membership is a joint membership with National and the chapter. With this joint membership, you will 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: Marin Audubon Society, P.O. Box 599, Mill Valley, CA 94942.

For NAS membership renewals, send your check directly to NAS.

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