



*Kim Steinhardt*

**Sea Otters**

The relationship between sea otters and humans has been strained nearly to the breaking point for almost three hundred years. Marine wildlife photographer, writer, and former administrative law judge Kim Steinhardt will share insights and images of the fascinating daily lives of sea otters, review the status of recent lawsuits over the expansion of their range, and look at some of the extraordinary adaptations these creatures have undergone in evolving from land to sea. Kim's keen observations and vibrant photographs have been recognized by National Geographic in an upcoming book of his sea otter images and coastal storytelling. He is also a co-author of the soon-to-be-released *The Edge: Tales from the Shoreline of the People's Coast*, a book that includes Kim's recollections as a child seeing the Lyford House moved across the bay from Strawberry Point to Tiburon, and the creation of the Marin Audubon Society.



# The Rail

**MARIN AUDUBON SOCIETY**

## Three Marin Christmas Bird Counts: Three Different Stories



*Len Blumin*

**Black Oystercatchers were seen in eight of the 22 sections of the Southern Marin Christmas Bird Count this year.**

### SOUTHERN MARIN

The 2016 South Marin Christmas Bird Count was held on Saturday, December 31. The count day was dry and mostly in the 40s with light northerly winds. There were approximately 100 volunteer counters and leaders to cover 22 diverse count areas ranging from the bay to the top of Mount Tamalpais including urban areas. Baykeepers was kind enough to provide a boat for Peter Colasanti to count the birds on the bay from San Rafael to Sausalito. We were not able to secure a boat for the ocean count area, which is outside the Golden Gate.

The provisional tally has 177 species and about 52,000 individual birds. The number of species is a bit below the circle average of 182, but the number of birds is far below the all-time average of about 92,000 and even far below the average of about 78,000 for the last ten years. Only in 2002 on a rainy day were fewer birds recorded, and last year the number of birds was 92,000. Go figure!

A few rarities were spotted including **Nashville, Tennessee** and **Palm Warblers** and two unidentified **Empidonax** flycatchers.

“Empids” of any kind were reported only three times in previous years.

No **Green Herons** and no eagles were spotted but the numbers of **Sora** (10) and **Osprey** (17) were relatively high. The total of **Western** and **Clark's Grebes** (669) was an all-time low, but it was probably hurt by the lack of an offshore boat. **American Kestrels** (32), **Varied Thrushes** (49) and **Red-breasted Nuthatches** (2) were relatively few, but **Blue-gray Gnatcatchers** (14) hit an all-time high. Obviously, many species, even **Wild Turkeys**, were below average with few above their averages.

Christmas bird counts are sponsored by the National Audubon Society and are the longest-running Citizen Science surveys in the world and provide valuable information on bird populations and trends. This count has been conducted since 1975 and is one of three local counts sponsored by the Marin Audubon Society.

### CHEEP THRILLS

*By David Sexton, co-compiler*

Centered in northern Marin, the 2016 Cheep Thrills Count on December 15 put the rain

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## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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

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## DIRECTORS MEETINGS

Meetings open to members. If you wish to attend please call 924-6057.

6:30 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  
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Members can receive *The Rail* electronically instead of a hard copy by emailing membershipsecretary@marinaudubon.org

## 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 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

We had three successful Christmas Bird Counts in December and we trust you will enjoy the articles about them. Thank you to Susan Kelly who almost single-handedly restarted the Cheep Thrills Count four years ago. This count was on a day of torrential rain. Many volunteers got soaked. My team of Dan Singer, Lisa Hug and Lowell Sykes fared better than many because most of our count area, at Redwood Landfill and our Petaluma property, is done from the car. The landfill staff drove us around because they feared we would slide off of the levees. For the Southern Marin Count compilers Ed Nute and Bob Hinz had trouble getting volunteers because the count day fell on New Year's Eve. The Pt. Reyes Count had its usual high count numbers. Compilers John Longstreth and Tom Gaman are retiring and we welcome the new compilers and planners: Todd Plummer, George Kurtz, Robin Blaney and Susan Ives.

Among the benefits of Christmas Counts is that they get volunteers out observing habitats. In my area, for example, at the Corte Madera Inn we found 35 Black-crowned Night-Herons roosting in even more trees than last year. Corte Madera Creek again had few birds, the likely result of increased boating. Every time a kayak or crew boat comes along, the birds have to move. This is not conducive to resting and putting on weight, which migratory birds must do to reach their northern breeding grounds in spring and to breed successfully. Also, this year the team doing Tiburon was shocked at the denuded state of the pond. When Tiburon manages the cattails, they remove all of them leaving no habitat. Our Conservation Committee will be looking into that.

We are very grateful for the strong support we have received this year from donors to our winter appeal. These donations all go to

maintaining and expanding our programs and to funding our operational needs, such as getting adequate insurance and paying our taxes. Donations enable us to seek legal action to protect Northern Spotted Owl, to update and expand our programs such as providing more field trips, and to update our county bird list. We also appreciate receiving our first car donation. Our thanks to the anonymous donor.

We are beginning the year with a brand new grant. We are thrilled to have been awarded \$195,000 to study solutions to problems that are anticipated from sea level rise at Tiscornia Marsh, our property on the San Rafael shoreline. The Marin Community Foundation recognized the importance of nature-based solutions to problems of sea level rise and provided \$750,000 to the Coastal Conservancy to operate this grant program. Our grant will study actions to address the inadequate levee adjacent to Tiscornia Marsh and the major erosion of the marsh that has been taking place over decades. We hope our grant will be an important step in beginning to protect the marsh from further habitat loss and the community from flooding. Ours was the only grant awarded to a non-government-related entity. We expect to benefit the local human and wildlife communities and also contribute to the fund of knowledge about adaptations to address sea level rise. See page 4 for additional information.

As always, on behalf of the MAS Board, we invite and welcome you to attend our field trips, monthly speakers, Conservation Committee meetings and Saturday workdays. These programs are all made possible by your donations to MAS. We receive only a fixed amount annually from NAS and this is insufficient to support any of our programs.

## Christmas Bird Counts

*continued from page 1*

back into the CBC adage "Rain or Shine." On a day that saw frequent flash flood warnings, 60 volunteers counted all the birds they could find through the downpours.

Considering the weather, the count dinner total of 133 species was impressive, not that far from the average of about 160 species. The biggest surprise was some of the common species that totally avoided detection. There were no sightings of Band-tailed Pigeons, Downy Woodpeckers, Brown Creepers, and Wrentits.

The best group total was Jim White's Rush Creek area with 75 species. Other notable

sightings were Bob Atwood's **Bald Eagle** at Stafford Lake, David Herlocker's count of 4 **Lark Sparrows** hiding under a log on Mt. Burdell, and Ed Nute's **Blue-winged Teal** at Soulajule Reservoir. Mary Anne Flett's group at Sonoma Baylands provided 6 **Black Rails** for the count, and Heather Cameron's Bahia group added **Barrow's Goldeneye**, **Red-breasted Merganser**, and a **Greater White-fronted Goose**.

The count dinner, organized by compiler Susan Kelly, was lightly attended by around 40 participants, since many chose to go home and dry off. But the pizzas were great and enthusiasm was high after a day that was described by Dave

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## MAS FIELD TRIPS

Open to the public

No need to sign up for one-day trips, just join us. Bring lunch, snacks, water, field guide, and binoculars. For information, accessibility and weather check: Jane Medley, 559/760-1551, janermedley@gmail.com.

CHECK OUR WEBSITE FOR THE MOST RECENT UPDATES.

### THE PONDS AT THE LAS GALLINAS VALLEY SANITARY DISTRICT (LGVSD) San Rafael

Thursday, February 2, 2017  
9 AM to Noon

With Rich Cimino & Janet Bodle

Beginning birders are especially welcome on the first Thursday of each month for a leisurely walk around the Las Gallinas ponds. The area includes two treated wastewater storage ponds, a freshwater pond with islands for nesting habitat, and several miles of flat levee trails. It attracts thousands of birds, including waterfowl such as ducks and geese; waders such as herons and egrets; songbirds; and varied raptors. Our January field trip at this location tallied 76 species including the resident, but not always seen American Bittern. Each month seems to yield an interesting, and often unexpected, species, so come assist us in our search.

We welcome bird enthusiasts of all levels. We all help each other to find and identify the birds, and there are usually several experienced birders to assist. You don't even have to arrive on time because we spend the first 30-60 minutes studying the birds around the first pond and the group is easy to find. Heavy rain cancels.

**DIRECTIONS:** From Hwy 101, exit at Smith Ranch Rd. Drive east on Smith Ranch Rd. toward McInnis Park. Turn left immediately after crossing the railroad tracks and drive about .5 mile through the LGVSD gates and into the parking lot at the end of the road. Meet the group by the bridge just past the parking lot. There is an outhouse in the parking area for public use or you can use the bathrooms at nearby McInnis Park.

### WORLD WETLANDS DAY AT BAHIA A Special Collaborative Field Trip by Marin Audubon and Marin County Parks Novato

Saturday, February 4, 2017  
10 AM to 2 PM

With Jude Stalker and Shannon Burke

Come celebrate World Wetlands Day at Bahia! This 200-acre parcel, now part of the Rush Creek Preserve, was acquired through a major fundraising effort conducted by Marin Audubon Society and then was donated to Marin County Parks. Our day will start with a walk through the oak-studded upland habitat where we'll discuss this unique forest and why its preservation was so fortunate. Then we'll take a tour of the adjoining Marin Audubon wetland restoration site with Wetland Ecologist Jude Stalker from Marin Audubon, who will explain how the restoration efforts here have been improving the marsh and vital habitat for the plants and animals that depend on it. Heavy rain cancels.

**DIRECTIONS:** From Hwy 101 in northern Novato, take the Atherton Ave. exit east about 0.9 miles, then turn left onto Bugeia Ln., which becomes Bahia Dr. Follow it to the end where there is street parking. No restrooms available here.

### SACRAMENTO DELTA BOAT TRIP

► Trip Full – Wait List Only  
Departure/return at Antioch Marina  
Sunday, February 5, 2017

(Super Bowl Sunday)

8:15 AM to 4:30 PM

With David Wimpfheimer

All available spaces on this boat trip were filled by mid-afternoon on the first day of registration! Those confirmed on the trip will receive directions to the Antioch Marina and other instructions the week before the trip. If you wish to be included on the wait list for this outing, contact Jane Medley at janermedley@gmail.com. Be sure to include the name, email address, and phone number for each possible passenger.

### STAFFORD LAKE PARK

Novato

Saturday, February 11, 2017

9:00 AM to Noon

With Bob Atwood

Located west of Novato, Stafford Lake is a beautiful but less birded area that is productive for waterfowl and raptors. Last year a male Tufted Duck was on the lake. On the most recent Christmas Bird Count our group saw Bald Eagle and Peregrine Falcon. Approximately 172 species of birds have been spotted through the years at Stafford Lake. The county park has facilities and plenty of parking. The mostly level terrain and water views make for pleasant birding as we walk around a portion of the lake and the surrounding area. Heavy rain cancels.

**DIRECTIONS:** From Hwy 101 in Novato, take the exit for San Marin Dr. and go west 2.9 miles. Turn right onto Novato Blvd. and follow it for 2.6 miles. The park is on the left. Turn left after the gatehouse and travel to the parking lot. There is a five dollar entrance fee per vehicle.

### NICASIO RESERVOIR

No. 2, Birding in Marin Series

Saturday, February 18, 2017

8:30 AM to mid-afternoon

With Jim White and Bob Battagin

We will meet at the backstop to the baseball field in Nicasio. The riparian, open field, and wooded habitats there are good for a nice variety of sparrows, gleaners, and woodpeckers. Next we'll head over to nearby Nicasio Reservoir and make several stops along the shoreline. Many water bird species hang out there while raptors grace the sky, and who knows what will be flitting around in the willows and shrubs that line the shore? In the afternoon we are likely to explore along the northern shoreline of Tomales Bay. Heavy rain cancels.

**DIRECTIONS:** From Hwy 101 take the Lucas Valley Rd. exit. Turn left on Lucas Valley Rd. and continue approximately 10.3 miles. Keep right on Nicasio Valley Rd. for 0.5 mile to the town of Nicasio. The baseball field is in the center of town. For GPS, use 1 Old Rancheria Rd., Nicasio, the address for the Rancho Nicasio Restaurant.

### HERON'S HEAD PARK

Thursday, February 23, 2017

9:30 AM to 12:30 PM

With Karen Vandergrift

One of only a few wetlands on the city of San Francisco's shoreline, Heron's Head Park is a hidden gem: a 22-acre open space and thriving wildlife habitat that attracts more than 150 bird species every year. Born in the 1970s when the Port of SF began filling this location to construct what was to be the Pier 98 shipping terminal, the marsh resulted after the project was never realized. Over years of settlement and exposure to the tides, a salt marsh emerged, attracting shorebirds, waterfowl and aquatic wildlife to this unique location.

This will be an interpretive walk on flat ground about the wildlife and ecology of San Francisco Bay. We expect a large variety of waterfowl, shorebirds, and maybe a rarity or two. Beginning birders are welcome! Bring binoculars, sunscreen, a hat and water . . . and a spotting scope if you have one. Heavy rain cancels.

**DIRECTIONS:** Meet at the parking lot on the corner of Jennings St. and Cargo Way, just across the street from Bay Natives Nursery. For GPS, use 10 Cargo Way, San Francisco, CA 94124, the address for Bay Natives Nursery.

### SKAGGS ISLAND & HUDEMAN SLOUGH Sonoma County

Saturday, February 25, 2017

8:45 AM to mid-afternoon

With Murray Berner

Murray Berner has been leading trips for Napa-Solano Audubon for many years and authored the Solano County Breeding Bird Atlas. Murray knows the marshes well and has access to Skaggs Island, closed to the general public. The island, a former naval facility, is now part of San Pablo Bay National Wildlife Refuge, an addition of more than 3000 acres. February is peak season for raptors, including Golden Eagle, Rough-legged Hawk, Prairie Falcon and Burrowing Owl, plus dozens of kites and harriers. Black Rail is resident and at times vocal. Songbirds flock in the former residential area, harassed by Merlin and Accipiters. Allen's Hummingbird will be displaying among the eucalyptus.

The group will continue on to Hudeman's Slough where we will bird on foot. We will meet at the south entrance to Skaggs Island off of Hwy 37 and travel by car across the island, stopping to bird along the way. Some birders may wish to leave when we reach the island's north gate. Dress in layers and sturdy shoes and bring lunch and water. Heavy rain cancels.

**DIRECTIONS:** Take Hwy 101 north to Hwy 37E. From the intersection with SR 121 (Sonoma Raceway), continue straight on Hwy 37 for 3.8 miles to Skaggs Island Rd. and turn left. No restrooms available.

## CONSERVATION

### MAS AWARDED GRANT TO ADDRESS SEA LEVEL RISE

We are thrilled to have been awarded a grant of \$195,000 to study nature-based adaptations for sea level rise at our Tiscornia Marsh at the mouth of the San Rafael Canal. This grant program was made possible by an award of \$750,000 from the Buck Family Fund at the Marin Community Foundation to the State Coastal Conservancy to manage the grant program. The purpose of the grant program is to address the impacts of climate change, specifically sea level rise, and particularly on underserved communities in Marin County.

We thought our Tiscornia Marsh property was an excellent candidate for this grant. Its levee is low, unimproved and poor as refugia habitat. Overtopping the levee as sea level rises would impact the adjacent communities including the Canal's underserved population. Also, the marsh, which has provided habitat for the endangered Ridgway's Rail in past years, is disappearing. Aerial photos show that about a third of the marsh has been lost to erosion over the last 30 years.

Our proposal includes studying and recommending ways to improve the flood control and habitat functions of the levee and to restore tidal marsh. We want the marsh restored so that it can continue to provide habitat for the endangered and other species as well as serve the critical shoreline protection function for the human community. Marshes are the first line of defense in protecting shorelines against the impacts of sea level rise, such as flooding.

Our project team consists of hydrologists from ESA, an environmental scientist from Siegel Environmental, Inc., and Shore Up Marin, a community-based organization that will be getting the public involved. Other recipients of grant awards are the Romberg Center, County of Marin/San Francisco Estuary Institute/Point Blue and the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center.

The grants are scheduled for approval by the Coastal Conservancy Board in February and we are planning to begin work in June.

### SUPPORT NEEDED FOR GGNRA DOG MANAGEMENT PLAN

Unfortunately, Congressman Huffman has departed from his usually sound environmental approach and joined with Congresswomen Nancy Pelosi and Jackie Speier in asking the National Park Service (NPS) to delay implementing the Golden

Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA) Dog Management Plan (Plan). This approach is clearly in response to demands of dog walkers and owners who want more access. The only possible reason for delay is to allow time to weaken the proposed Plan. This approach is not in the interest of protecting GGNRA's endangered wildlife, plants and native plant resources. On January 9, GGNRA announced that it is putting on hold the adoption of the Final Rule for Dog Management at GGNRA.

GGNRA reports that the decision is in response to requests from members of Congress to extend the waiting period in order to conduct a review of certain records being released to a Freedom of Information Act request related to the Dog Management Plan. Use of a personal email by a former employee was cited as needing independent review to determine whether the personal email was used in a manner that is not consistent with applicable laws and policies and whether this affected the planning and rule-making process.

The proposed Rule was published December 9 for a final 30-day review period. The record of decision was scheduled to be published in the Federal Register in January 2017, with publication of the Final Rule, which would specify an effective date, to follow. To reach this point, an Environmental Impact Statement and the Management Plan have been subject to public review, with hearings taking place over four years if not longer. The process provided ample opportunity for public comment. More public input is not the issue. The issue is that certain dog owners and dog walkers just don't like the recommendation and want access to more areas, including places with sensitive habitat.

The Plan has been thoroughly reviewed and the recommendations reflect the NPS's primary responsibility – protection of natural resources, particularly those that are endangered or threatened, including Northern Spotted Owl, Snowy Plover and Mission Blue Butterfly. Explanations of the environmental resources along each of the affected trails, those from which dog use has been either removed or changed to on-leash use, were provided in the Environmental Impact Statement and were also discussed at public hearings. GGNRA is home to more endangered and threatened species than Yosemite, Yellowstone, and Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Parks combined.

The Plan provides for places to walk dogs

on- and off-leash – just not on as many GGNRA trails as the dog-owners/walkers want. In Marin, off-leash dogs would still be allowed at Rodeo Beach, and an on-leash segment, the Kaashi Loop Trail, has been added at Muir Beach. Other additions: new voice and sight control areas and dog-free areas at Crissy Field, realigned and expanded on-leash area at Baker Beach, an additional on- and off-leash trail at Fort Funston, and other expanded dog areas further south. Twenty-two locations in GGNRA are open for dog walking, six allow dogs under voice and sight control (off-leash). In total, 14 miles of on-leash dog walking would be allowed on GGNRA trails in Marin.

Dog-free areas are also identified, so there would be more areas where people who are afraid of dogs or simply don't want to be around dogs will be able to enjoy nature. Problems with dogs were the number one complaint of users noted during the Marin County Open Space District's user survey.

According to the Marin Independent Journal, Congresswoman Speier cited the fact that GGNRA has included dog walking for much of the last 40 years. That may be, but it was without authorization from Washington. Unleashed dogs were allowed on the recommendation of the then GGNRA Advisory Committee, reportedly because one of the Commissioners wanted to walk his dog off-leash. GGNRA staff closed their eyes to the negative impacts of unleashed dogs for many years. Just because GGNRA staff did not do its governing job adequately in the past, should not be reason to allow this activity to continue. Reining in this unauthorized use is long overdue and necessary to protect special status species that depend on GGNRA habitats. GGNRA would be the ONLY Park in the National Park System where dogs are allowed to go unleashed.

Dogs are wonderful companions and benefit people in many ways, but they simply do not need to be running loose wherever their owners or walkers want them to. The desires of this or any other special interest group, be it dog walkers, cyclists, or birders, should not take precedence over protecting natural resources that are in the interest of the general public. In addition to the GGNRA areas and all Marin County Open Space District Fire Roads, where dogs can be off-leash and under voice control, there are 10 dog parks in this county where dogs can run loose. The natural habitat areas are the only places wildlife have to live and

certain native plants can grow.

We do not condone illegal activity, but even if the personal email were used in a manner inconsistent with laws and policies, that does not take away from the fact that dogs in natural resource habitats can disturb wildlife and damage habitats. We commend GGNRA staff for coming up with a Management Plan that will be more protective of wildlife than currently existing practices, yet one that, we think, provides more than generous access for dogs both on- and off-leash. We recommend that the Plan be adopted now.

#### **WHAT YOU CAN DO:**

Speak out for safeguarding GGNRA habitats for wildlife and/or to safeguard your ability to enjoy nature without dogs. Tell Congressman Huffman and GGNRA that you support GGNRA and their efforts to protect wildlife and wildlife habitat through the Dog Management Plan.

Email Congressman Huffman at <http://huffman.house.gov/contact> and GGNRA Superintendent, GGNRA, Building 201, Fort Mason, San Francisco, CA 94123.

#### **CORTE MADERA INN**

MAS commented on the Corte Madera Inn Draft Recirculated Environmental Impact Report. We addressed the document's inadequacies: 1) incomplete assessment of the importance of the Black-crowned Night-Heron roost. The DREIR said the birds could just go somewhere else; 2) deficient evaluation of the importance and value of the wetland plant, widgeon grass, present in the pond; and 3) insufficient information to support its claim that the proposed mitigation at the Burdell Mitigation Bank would adequately mitigate for the impacts of the project.

#### **Update on Pond Life**

The Black-crowned Night-Heron roosting colony is growing and expanding to trees adjacent to the trees used in previous years. On this year's Southern Marin Christmas Count, 35 Black-crowned Night-Herons were observed on the roost trees. In addition, four Hooded Mergansers and two Mallards were observed in the pond. The water level was high so no mudflat habitat was available for shorebirds along the edge of the pond.

#### **Corte Madera Inn Alternatives Analysis**

The Regional Water Quality Control Board accepted comments on the Alternatives Analyses submitted by the applicant. Three

analyses were submitted: one attempting to demonstrate that there is no other location in the vicinity where the project could be built, and two others that attempted to demonstrate that no other alternative could be built on the site. Federal 404 Guidelines provide that wetlands cannot be filled if there is practicable alternative that would have less environmental impact on the aquatic ecosystem.

MAS commented on the numerous errors and inadequate analysis in the On-site Alternative. Locations and factual information about various sites were incorrect or insufficient to demonstrate that a site was not available. The on-site analyses focused on maximizing profit for the owner. Profit for the developer, however, is not a factor that can be considered in the 404 analysis. Also, a 187-unit hotel was recommended by the consultant to be the only feasible alternative, however, the current proposal is for only 174 rooms. We asked: If the project could be reduced by 13 rooms why couldn't a few more rooms be removed to protect the pond?

#### **MMWD BEGINS EIR FOR BIODIVERSITY, FIRE AND FUELS INTEGRATED PLAN – COMMENTS NEEDED**

We are in a 30-day public scoping period for the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) that Marin Municipal Water District (MMWD) will be preparing on the Draft BIODIVERSITY, FIRE AND FUELS INTEGRATED PLAN (Plan) – quite a mouthful. This is the public's opportunity to submit questions/issues/concerns that you want addressed in the EIR. Information and analyses presented in EIRs can lead directly to changes in the project, which in this case is the Plan.

MMWD owns and manages 22,000 acres of publicly accessible wildlands from which water is supplied to approximately 190,000 people in Central and Southern Marin. The lands are divided into three administrative units: Mt. Tamalpais watershed, Soulagule Reservoir and Nicasio Reservoir. MMWD defines its mission as to "manage natural resources in a sustainable manner and to provide our customers with reliable, high quality water at a reasonable price."

The stated purpose, goals and need for the Plan are: 1) to define and guide the methods used to minimize the risk of wildfires, 2) to preserve and enhance existing significant natural resources, and 3) to provide an adaptive framework for the periodic review of the Plan in response to changing

conditions and improved knowledge. The Plan defines the challenges it must address: fire hazard and suppression, expansion of invasive plants particularly broom, spread of forest diseases, and climate change. The best defense against climate change is a healthy ecosystem.

The Plan reports that MMWD uses a variety of approaches to achieve the stated goals: constructing new fuel breaks and maintaining existing ones, removing and thinning trees, reducing accumulated fuel loads in habitats and treating new invasions of non-native species. Fuel breaks would be treated every four to five years. The toolbox for cyclical maintenance includes prescribed burning, cutting, girdling, solarization, animal grazing and mulching. Limited herbicide use through an Integrated Pest Management Program (IPM) to control and eliminate invasive weeds was in the toolbox until 2005, when the MMWD Board suspended its use in response to pressure from anti-herbicide groups. Now MMWD may be losing the battle against weeds, particularly broom. It does not appear they have the resources to control or remove the invasives manually.

How successful MMWD has been, or anticipates it will be, in controlling invasives is not addressed. Because the current and proposed future methods are the same, they can be expected to produce similar results. While no one wants herbicides used improperly, MMWD simply does not seem to have the resources to control broom and other invasives using only manual and mechanical means. Constructing fuel breaks means more broom invasions and more broom to control. Clearing for fuel breaks leaves bare ground and ideal growing conditions for broom. This then exacerbates the problem.

In addition, "biodiversity" in the Plan appears to mean only biodiversity of plant life. While the Plan lists special status plant and wildlife species, there is no discussion of the importance of maintaining wildlife species as part of maintaining the ecosystem or biodiversity.

We have not completed our review, but a few of the aspects we will certainly be asking to be included the EIR are:

- A discussion of the anticipated success of the current approach of using no herbicides to control invasive plants, particularly broom. It is our understanding that MMWD is losing the battle and

*continued on page 7*

## HABITAT STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

Planting will probably be finished although with continued wet weather even late plantings this year might be OK. Thistles and radishes might be large enough to start pulling them. Instead of removing non-native plants wherever we find them, the most useful work might be removing those that are crowding native plants, even native plants that are a year or more old.

Do you know anyone who needs to earn community service hours? Our restoration projects would fit the bill. Act locally and join us on a workday. You would make a difference.

We have the tools, gloves and snacks. We generally work until about 1 PM, but even an hour is valuable help. Everyone is welcome.

### VOLUNTEER WORK DAYS

#### Triangle Marsh, Corte Madera:

First Saturday: February 4, March 4  
Meet at 10 AM on Paradise Drive directly across from the main Ring Mountain trailhead.

#### Bahia, Novato:

February 11, March 11

Meet at 10 AM at the end of Topaz Drive near Bolero Court and the tennis courts.

If you would like to help, contact Jude Stalker at 415/680-6291 or [volunteercordinator@marinaudubon.org](mailto:volunteercordinator@marinaudubon.org) for more information and to be sure you can be informed about possible changes.

### THANK YOU TO OUR STEWARDSHIP VOLUNTEERS

Marin Country Day School fourth graders and teachers, Debbie Ablin, Bob Bundy, Dave Chenoweth, Bob Hinz, William and Charles Legge, Sharon McCloskey, Flinn Rauck, Jude Stalker, Lowell Sykes, Tom Ullmer

### WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

David Albert, Jola Anderson, Annelies Atchley, Susan Barbour, Cindee Beechwood, Deborah Bertola, Christine Bikle, Lucinda Brisbane, Andrew Brouwer, Angela Casey, Daniel Curran, Penelope F Davey, Audrey S De Martini, Kay Dirks, Jonathan Erb, Martin Jaylian Fawzy, Deirdre Fennessy, James Forsell, Susan Garnett, Sharon Grabovac, Stephanie Granneman, Jommer Gryler, Thomas Heinz, Ruth Heller, Jane C Hills, C Holden, Corrie Johnson, Daniel Kalb, Renee Kirby, Roger Kolodny, Sara Kurkov, Frank Lahorgue, Dave A Leech, Linda Librize, S Lieberman, Dean Lomax, Sharon Lovejoy, Melissa Lyckberg, Joseph Marrino, Dan Martin, Genevieve Mc Claskey, Marie McDermott, Steve Medvic, Amanda Meecham, Suzanne Mellor, Michael Muschell, Jim Nash, Matthew Oldenburg, William Osterhaus, Odelli Ozer, Laura Peshek, Alice Remer, John Robbins, Michael Schoenfeld, Ricardo Segura, Marlo Seligman, Deb Sheppard, Brenda Smith, Shirley A Soldavini, Charles Stanberry, Rachel Sullivan, Patrick Thompson, Margaret Wagner, Carly Waldeck, Marion R Weber, Tracy White, Kelly Wright, Ann Yavorsky

## HABITAT STEWARDSHIP

**BAHIA** Last month, we were pleased to welcome students from Mark Day School who spent three hours pulling a large patch of the invasive non-native ice plant at Bahia on a school community service day. The students followed up with thank you letters to Lowell Sykes, their teacher for the day, expressing their appreciation. The letters conveyed impressive insights and grasp of the significance of their work biologically and to them personally.

Some wrote of what they learned: “why invasive plants are bad for other plants and animals,” “the disturbance invasive plants create,” “if you try really hard you can help impact the environment,” “you can fix problems with a simple act,” “how big an impact invasive plants had on the environment.” Others expressed appreciation to Lowell for being an “amazing guide” and for “giving me and my classmates an experience that will make a difference for

plants and animals.”

Others shared their personal feelings: “satisfying to see progress,” “how good it feels to make a difference,” enjoyed “bonding with classmates,” “cooperation and teamwork,” and many said they “had fun.” It was certainly a good day for native wildlife to have all of that ice plant removed, and we are glad it was a good day for the students as well. Thank you, Mark Day School.

**TRIANGLE MARSH** We were also pleased to welcome about sixty students from our neighbor at Triangle Marsh, the Marin Country Day School, to help us get rid of the invasive, non-native Harding grass. The students laid out cardboard and covered it with woodchips to put Harding grass in the dark where it cannot grow and will not survive. Next year the area should be ready for planting native plants. Thank you, Marin Country Day School.

## Christmas Bird Counts

*continued from page 2*

Shuford as “pleasantly miserable.”

### POINT REYES

The 47th annual Point Reyes Christmas Bird Count, sponsored by Point Blue and Marin Audubon, was held on 17 December, a sparkling early winter day, followed by the annual Compilation Dinner at the Dance Palace. Owlers started as early as 4 a.m. and were rewarded by slightly above average owl numbers. By later morning 197 birders, organized into 29 groups, were in the field. One hundred ninety-seven species (unofficial count at this date) were seen in the count circle during that day.

The total (again unofficial) number of individual birds seen in 2016 was 111,188, up 32% from 83,590 in 2015 and 85741 in 2014. The last time this many birds were seen on the Point Reyes Count was 2011 when 122,207 birds were observed, so the 2016 numbers reversed a 5-year decline.

The most common bird in the count area this year is the **Common Murre** (14,058 reported, up from 4,855 in 2015) on the ocean, which accounts for much of the total bird population increase. This is good news because ocean food stocks have been dwindling in recent years, but are seemingly abundant this year. **Bufflehead** were up (7,741 in 2016 vs. 6,394 seen in 2015) and **Surf Scoter** were just below normal (4,729 seen vs. 5,166 6-year average seen). **American Wigeon** populations were down to 2,682 from 4,232 in 2015.

Many species are at less than 25% of their

6-year average: **Hooded Merganser, Tricolored Blackbird, Short-billed Dowitcher, White-winged Scoter, Thayer's Gull, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Horned Lark, Tree Swallow, Varied Thrush, Lark Sparrow, Killdeer, Band-tailed Pigeon, Ancient Murrelet, Ring-necked Duck, and Hermit Warbler.**

However, on the bright side, there is quite a list of birds that more than doubled their running 6-year averages. These are: **Northern Mockingbird, Mew Gull, Marbled Murrelet, Semipalmated Plover, Bald Eagle, Red-winged Blackbird, Northern Fulmar, Western Gull, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Wilson's Warbler, Long-tailed Duck, Spotted Owl, Swamp Sparrow, Sanderling, California Gull, White-throated Sparrow, Burrowing Owl, Common Murre, Blue-winged Teal and Cackling Goose.**

Notably 138 **Snowy Plovers** (average 90) and 13 **Marbled Murrelets** (average 5) were seen. Altogether the groups saw 76 **Northern Fulmars.**

Rarities included **Mountain Bluebird, Black-vented Shearwater, Short-tailed Shearwater, Long-eared Owl** and **American Avocet.** Of course it was a great day, the reunion of many happy birders, and we saw 197+ species in all.

The data for all 2016 count areas are presently being compiled and will be available by early February. For prior count totals by area, maps, and count details please visit [tgaman.wixsite.com/prcbc](http://tgaman.wixsite.com/prcbc) and click on the data links where the historic bird data, compiled 1970-2015, are available for download.

# MARIN BIRDLOG: NOVEMBER – DECEMBER 2016

By Noah Arthur



Omar Ramolfson

## White-winged Scoter

the Outer Point (DS) were present at least until 12/17. Another continuing bird from November was the **Sandhill Crane** at Laguna Lake on Chileno Valley Road found on 11/25 (MD). Two wintering **Palm Warblers** were present throughout the month at Las Gallinas. Three individuals were reported on 11/27 (JM), but no more than two at a time were seen in December.

Northeast winds blew in the Valley geese with a flock of more than 30 **Snow/Ross's-type geese** flying over the Marin headlands 12/2 (WL).

A **White-winged Scoter** on Abbotts Lagoon 12/4 was a nice find (EC). It was relocated 12/11 accompanied by a **Long-tailed Duck** (MP, DK).

A remnant of fall showed itself in a **Nashville Warbler** and a **Hermit Warbler** at Stinson Gulch in Bolinas on 12/5 (PP), associating with **Townsend's** and **Yellow-rumped Warblers** in flowering eucalyptus—very often the “go-to” habitat for wintering warm season warblers in the Bay Area. Sparrow numbers were reported to be noticeably low in Bolinas (PP).

Along Highway 1 just north of Point Reyes Station another lingering fall warbler, a **Palm Warbler** having braved the month's first light rain event that occurred on the 7th was found 12/9 (DW, ME).

One of the best birds of the month was a male **Common (Eurasian) Teal** at Las Gallinas 12/11, associating with **American Green-winged Teal** in flooded weedy fields along the entrance road (DE).

Rare passerines on the Point Reyes CBC 12/17 were few and far between but included a **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** near Muddy Hollow and a **Wilson's Warbler** in Inverness. Three **Caspian Terns** over Tomales Bay were a new species for the count, and fit into this winter's unusual pattern of wintering Caspians throughout the Bay Area.

Weather remained fair and mild to chilly for the rest of December, and as the month neared its end one more nice rarity was found, a **Harris's Sparrow** spotted at Las Gallinas on Christmas Eve (SK).

Observers and Acronyms **DE**: Daniel Edelstein, **DK**: Durrell Kapan, **DS**: Dan Singer, **DW**: David Wimpfheimer, **EC**: Everett Clark, **JM**: Joseph Morlan, **MD**: Mark Dettling, **ME**: ME: Magnus Eriksson, **MP**: Michael Park, **PP**: Peter Pyle, **SK**: Susan Kelly, **WL**: William Legge

## Conservation

*continued from page 5*

native habitats are being lost to broom at an alarming rate.

- An alternative that includes use of herbicides as part of the IPM program. Discuss how and whether even minimal use of herbicides could save habitats from the spread of invasives and enable the restoration of currently invaded areas to native habitats.
- A chapter addressing wildlife and their importance to the ecosystem. While birds, mammals and other wildlife are essential components of natural ecosystems performing such functions as controlling vegetation by eating plants, aerating soil, fertilizing plants

and pollinating plants, their part in maintaining a healthy ecosystem is virtually ignored.

December kicked off with mild conditions for the first week. A pair of **Mountain**

**Bluebirds** found 11/30 at Drakes Corner on

the Outer Point (DS) were present at least until 12/17. Another continuing bird from November was the **Sandhill Crane** at Laguna Lake on Chileno Valley Road found on 11/25 (MD). Two wintering **Palm Warblers** were present throughout the month at Las Gallinas. Three individuals were reported on 11/27 (JM), but no more than two at a time were seen in December.

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### WHAT YOU CAN DO:

View the Plan on the MMWD website ([www.marinwater.org/455/Biodiversity-Fire-and-Fuels-Integrated-P](http://www.marinwater.org/455/Biodiversity-Fire-and-Fuels-Integrated-P)) and submit scoping comments to Dain Anderson, Environmental Coordinator, 220 Nellen Ave., Corte Madera, CA 94925 by the deadline of February 3, 2017. Attend the scoping meeting scheduled for January 25 at 7 PM at the Ross Art and Garden Center, 30 Sir Francis Drake Blvd, Ross, CA. Feel free to use our thoughts above in your comment letter.

### THANK YOU FOR YOUR DONATIONS

Deborah S. Ablin, Luriko Ajari, Diane Aldrich, Julie Allecta, Elizabeth P. Anderson, Michael D. Anderson, Anonymous, Annette Anzalone, Joanne M. Arauzo, Sara Arnaud, Janet Arrigotti, Robert Atwood, Mariah Baird, Katharine Ballinger MD, Janice Bass, Bob Battagin, Jane Bell, Benevity Community Impact Fund, Mark Bennett, David L. Berry, Scott C. Blakey, LaVonne Blasche, Kimberly Blue, Patricia and Leonard Blumin, Andrew Bollen, Janet Braff, Burkhard Braun, Marion Brennan, Janet S. Brown, Mary Lou Brown, Stephen & Faith Brown, Robert & Linda Bundy, Lois Cannady, Terry Cantrell, Robert D. Casey, Mario & Juanita Castellon, Rich Cimino, James Cleaves, Collin & Jill Cochrane, Dayton Coles, Michael Concannon, A. Crawford Cooley, Carol Moeller Costa, Mary Anne Cowperthwaite, Jean Z. Dakota, Ken & Ann Davis, Paula Dawson, H.A. De Groot, Rudolph De May, Nona Dennis, Lisa Dini, William Donahoe & Kristin Klein, Lillian B. Dreyer, Bryan Eckert, Leslie Ellison, The Endurance Fund, Karen Evans, Edwin & Carol Ewry, Richard Felton, Fischer Family Fund, Mark H. Forney, Dianne Fruin, Richard Gale, Thomas Gaman, Roberta & Robert Geering, Raymond & Margot Gergus, Judith Godino, Elizabeth & Jon Goerke, Golden Gate Nat'l Parks Conservancy, James & Paula Gorder, Elizabeth & John Graham, L. Martin Griffin Jr., Jeanne & Ed Griffiths, Maureen Groper, Stephen Grossberg, Ruth Gundelfinger, Joan Halverson, Douglas Hanford, Dianne M. Hansen, John Harrington & Ida Baugh, Erika W. Harris, Roger Harris, Totton & Joanne Heffelfinger, Tom Hendricks, Robert Hinz, Vivian Holley & Bryan Baker, Molly Hynes, Susana Ives, Joan & Eugene Jacks, Vernon Jacobs, Duane Johnson, Kathleen & James Kaneko, John Kay, Anne Keeney Kelley, Mary J. Kelley, Catherine Kennedy MD, Robert Kennis, Candace Key, Josephine Kreider, Jan Lee, Hilda J. Leefeldt, Phillip Legge, Linda Levey & Mary Hanley, Judith & Harold Lichterman, Jackie Littee, David & Carolyn Long, Carolyn & John Longstreth, Charles Louderback, John & Nancy MacPherson, Ron & Amanda Mallory, Helene B. Marsh, Jeffery Martin, Dean & Julia Mayberry, Vivian Mazur, John McCabe, Sharon McCloskey, Michael McCrea & Elizabeth Chew, Morton McMichael, Prem & John McMurdo, Doyleen McMurtry, Jane Medley, Barbara & Gerald Meral, Kathleen Merrifield, Alexander Merritt, Barbara Meschi, Bernard Meyers, Teresa Miller, Ken Minkoff, Lois & Bruce Moody, Robert Morton, Margaret Moster, Nancy Moyle, Larry Mulryan, Eileen Murray, Patrick Murray, Marianne Nannestad, Steve & Ruth Nash, Rayner Needleman, Russell Nelson, David J. Neuman, Debra Newman, Lisa & Colin Nicholls, Linda Nicoletto, Larry & Maxine Nilsen, Philip Nonneman, Frank & Lois Noonan, Warren & Marcia Nute, Lucienne O'Keefe, Helena & Danny O'Shea, Open Space Sausalito, Phil Peterson, PG&E Corporation Foundation, Nancy Philie, Joy Phoenix, Catherine Plevin, Stacey Pogorzelski, Erica Posner, Christine & Paul Prusiner, Flinn & John Rauck, Donald & Hope Rehlaender, Phil & Katherine Reilly, Maude Revenko, Juanita Reynolds, Paula M. Riley, Jordan Rinker, Marianna Riser, Susan & John Ristow, Lawrence Robbins, Richard K. Robbins, Billie J. Robertson, Meg Rosegay, Georg Roth, Anne Roughton, Stewart Rowe, Richard & Anne Ruben, Carla Ruff, Barbara & Jay Salzman, King R. Sams, Sanguinetti Family Trust, Santa Venetia Neighborhood Assn., Carol Savio, Sonja D. Schmid, David & Julie Schnapf, Stuart & Carol Schneider, Allan Schreiber, Elizabeth & Eldon Schriock, Virginia & William Schultz, Linda Scott, Linda Scott & Patricia Stein, Richard W. Scott, David & Nadine Sexton, Suzanne Shelhart, Emily E. Shibata, Jean Shiffrin, Stuart Siegel, Dianne Sierra & Chris Pattillo, Madeleine and Donald Simborg, Inez Skog, Doris Solberg, Donna & Hal Solin, Sharon M. Solomon, Linda Spence & Anthony Vecino, Ellen Stein, Helen L. Stoddard, Michael Stone, Dwight & Elaine Straub, David & Mary Sullivan, Mark & Mari Summary, Linda Alden Swanson, Suzanne Thornley, Jody Timms, Evelyn Topper, Anthony & Claudia Trevor, Muriel & Jacques Ullman, Charles M. Vadalabene, Constance Vandament, Robert Edmund Weckel, Arlin Weinberger, Oliver Weir & Elizabeth Bennett, Jim White, Michael & Barbara Whitt, Nancy Willet, Kathryn Wilson, Dave Wimpfheimer, Susan Winston, Christine Wood, Emese Wood, Diane Wrona, Thomas Yarish & Laure Campbell, Catherine & John Yee, Maureen Young & Tim Shore, Eric Yunker, Carolyn Zwicker



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  - February 25 **California Duck Days, Davis**  
<http://yolobasin.org/california-duck-days>
  - February 23–26 **San Diego Bird Festival**  
[www.sandiegoaudubon.org](http://www.sandiegoaudubon.org)
  - March 2 **Field Trip:** Stafford Lake  
*With Bob Atwood*
  - March 4 **Field Trip:** Tomales Trail  
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  - March 18 **Field Trip:** Mount Tam  
*With Jim White & Bob Battagin*
- Check website for updates and details

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The success of Marin Audubon Society's (MAS) work depends greatly on its chapter-supporting members. We work collaboratively with the National Audubon Society (NAS) on issues of mutual concern, but very little of our funding comes from NAS. We receive a fixed amount based on our 2001 membership. MAS relies on local support for our habitat protection efforts, conservation advocacy, birding field trips, educational speakers series, and publication of *The Rail*. 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 because all of your chapter-supporting dues stay with MAS.

If you're not already a chapter-supporting 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 [www.marinaudubon.org](http://www.marinaudubon.org).

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A National Audubon Society Membership is a joint membership with National and chapters. With this joint membership, you receive our newsletter and other chapter benefits. However, MAS receives no portion of your National Audubon Membership dues.

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