



the Quail

Mount Diablo Audubon Society

P.O. Box 53, Walnut Creek, CA 94597-0053

www.diabloaudubon.com/index.php

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July–August 2009

Killing of Acorn Woodpeckers Remains an Enigma

More than eight months ago we got word that Rossmoor had been issued a permit by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to kill up to 50 Acorn Woodpeckers that were damaging buildings within Rossmoor. We quickly put together a team headed by Diana Granados to try to get the depredation permit stopped. We met with officials at Rossmoor; we brought in experts, the media was all over the issue, letters, calls, hours of time spent and so much more. This issue of the Quail will bring you up to date as to where we are. It is not over yet, even though we have had setbacks. Please read about the issue.

Here is the press release issued by Audubon California. Also, here is a response to questions we asked the Department of Agriculture, from Gail Keirn, Public Affairs Specialist for Wildlife Services. An unsolicited response was also received by Audubon California and MDAS from Ellen Paul, Executive Director of The Ornithological Council. This organization, based in Washington, DC, is associated with the American Ornithologists' Union and other groups. The purpose of her letter is to assure us that the USDA Wildlife Services "researchers are of the highest caliber, and that their ethics are beyond reproach". We do not have space here for that letter, but you may contact the Quail Editor for a copy, if you wish.

Audubon California, June 1. As a federal permit allowing homeowner groups in the Northern California community of Rossmoor to shoot Acorn Woodpeckers expired this past weekend, conservation advocates who had opposed the killing might have had cause to celebrate.

However, the expiration of the permit came just as news that a separate federal agency has trapped 20 woodpeckers from the Rossmoor area for scientific purposes.

"The killing of Acorn Woodpeckers in Rossmoor is something that should never have been approved in the first place, and this news about trapping is shocking," said Graham Chisholm, executive director of Audubon California. "Over the last several months, scientific experts have concluded that killing these birds will not achieve the intended purpose, and it is clear that the public doesn't approve of this flagrant abuse of native wildlife."

Homeowner groups in Rossmoor initially obtained the depredation permit to shoot up to 50 Acorn Woodpeckers that had been causing damage as they built their granaries in the sides of buildings. At least 22 woodpeckers had been shot by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services before representatives from Audubon California and Mt. Diablo Audubon began working with the homeowner groups to find other alternatives – and made several substantial



offers of assistance that would have avoided the need for lethal remedies.

In January, the homeowners declined the assistance and vowed to move ahead with plans to shoot birds. This prompted Audubon California to begin a broad campaign both at the legislative and administrative levels, as well as in the media. At the prompting of Audubon California, thousands of activists sent letters to the Service or signed the online petition.

This outcry led to a voluntary cessation of shooting so that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service could evaluate the situation, and on May 31 the permit quietly lapsed. However, U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services, the agency that had been charged with carrying out the original killings, received permission from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service for the live collection of 20 woodpeckers from the Rossmoor area for their research purposes. Details of the study have not been released and Audubon California was not made aware of this new twist in the issue until late last week. It is likely that once

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Meeting Schedule

There are no meetings in July or August. The next general meeting of Mount Diablo Audubon Society will be **Thursday, September 3**, in the Camellia Room of The Gardens at Heather Farm, Walnut Creek.

Acorn Woodpecker Controversy

» *Continued from Page 1*

their study is completed the captive birds will be killed.

“The handling of this issue raises substantial questions about the judgment of the public agencies involved,” said Chisholm. “We want assurance that the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service will reject any application to renew the depredation permit at Rossmoor, and that the bird conservation community will be consulted before any further actions are taken against the Acorn Woodpecker population in that area.”

Acorn Woodpeckers are a fairly common and beloved bird in California. The highly social bird is known to store food in large communal granaries drilled in oaks or other woodland trees. As housing developments, such as the ones in Rossmoor, have encroached into these woodlands, the creative birds have been known to drill their holes in buildings.

“The Acorn Woodpecker is a particularly beloved part of the California landscape,” said Chisholm. “Killing them for doing what they do would set a horrible precedent at a time when we should be finding ways to protect and support this kind of native wildlife.”

“If this situation has had any benefit,” Chisholm added, “it has been the renewed awareness and respect for California’s native wildlife, which are treasures we shouldn’t take for granted.”



U.S. Department of Agriculture, June 4.

Thank you for your inquiry to the U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services’ National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC). We are familiar with the Audubon Society’s involvement in the acorn woodpecker situation at the Rossmoor retirement community near Walnut Creek, California, and understand the Audubon Society’s concerns over the capture and fate of 20 acorn woodpeckers. We appreciate the opportunity to share with your readers our efforts to find a responsible solution to the damage problem.

The NWRC is the research arm of the USDA’s Wildlife Services (WS) program. Our mission is to apply scientific expertise to resolve human-wildlife conflicts while maintaining the quality of the environment shared with wildlife. Our scientists develop tools and techniques that are biologically

sound, environmentally safe, and socially responsible. Approximately 75 percent of NWRC’s research budget is devoted to the development of nonlethal tools and techniques, such as scare devices, repellents, wildlife contraceptives, and vaccines. Studies to develop and evaluate these tools often require the capture of wild animals.

NWRC scientists have a long history of conducting research to develop nonlethal methods to mitigate problems associated with woodpeckers and other bird species. A formal protocol for our planned acorn woodpecker study was initiated in December 2008 and finalized in January 2009. Our 2009 California Scientific Collecting Permit (issued February 11, 2009) states that “Take from populations where depredation is occurring is preferred; e.g. Walnut Creek, CA.” Based upon this preference stipulated in our collecting permit and discussions with the WS State Director in California (February 2009), the decision was made to capture birds for our study at the Rossmoor retirement community near Walnut Creek.

NWRC scientists, with the help of WS Operations field specialists, live-captured 20 acorn woodpeckers from the Rossmoor community in late May. Capture was delayed until after documented egg laying dates by acorn woodpeckers in this region. Care was also taken to not remove birds observed feeding young or sitting on eggs. The birds arrived at the NWRC in Fort Collins, Colorado, on May 27.

The birds will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of several deterrent calls for use in a nonlethal electronic deterrent device. The device is meant to prevent damage to utility poles and other structures. The birds are housed in both indoor and outdoor aviaries and are under the care of our Attending Veterinarian. Our research is conducted under strict scientific protocols and quality assurance standards. Results from this study, as well as others conducted by NWRC scientists, are published in peer-reviewed journals, usually within 1-2 years of a study’s completion.

Under provisions of our 2009 California Scientific Collecting Permit (#SCP-10561), we will euthanize the birds upon the completion of the study. Since these woodpeckers are housed in outdoor aviaries, we cannot ensure their isolation from other

President’s Corner

By Jimm Edgar

What a year it has been from so many aspects. This issue will bring you all up to date on the struggle to save the Acorn Woodpeckers at Rossmoor. That has been a huge issue this year.

What a great evening our end of the year potluck dinner was for the 80–90 people who came. The program was just perfect for the evening. Larry Arbanas who is on contract with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology to photograph birds all over the United States showed us film of beautiful birds. It was spectacular. Also at the potluck we honored a couple of folks. One was our hospitality chair, Gerry Argenal. She and her crew have done such a wonderful job again all year to provide food and goodies at every meeting. We also honored a member we are losing to Texas. Steve Glover, who has been a member for over 20 years, is moving. Steve has done so much for the chapter. He has been the Observations Editor for the Quail for 18 years, has always been a leader on the two Christmas bird counts, a field trip leader for the chapter and the author of the Breeding Bird Atlas of Contra Costa County. The Atlas is at the printer and should be available for you to purchase later this summer. The Atlas is a monumental task and documents all of the breeding birds of Contra Costa County. Hundreds and hundreds of volunteer hours over five years of observations throughout the county and then Steve’s putting all that information together and preparing it for printing. On top of all of that he almost single handedly raised the \$18,000 it will cost to print the Atlas by leading trips around the US where people paid to go with him. We are going to miss Steve in so many ways.

species or pathogens during the course of our study. Therefore, releasing the birds back into the wild is not allowed under our permit. If possible, we will use these birds in additional studies, thus alleviating capture of additional birds from the wild.

We empathize with the concerns of both the homeowners who are economically impacted by the woodpeckers and those who wish to protect the birds from harm. Our goal is to develop new methods to help resolve conflicts, such as the one in Rossmoor, and provide wildlife managers and homeowners with additional options in the future.



Any City That's Smarter Than a Beaver...

...can keep a beaver. At least that's what supporters keep telling the city of Martinez. In 2006 a pair of breeding adults took up residence in the downtown Alhambra Creek. Fearing the worsening of an already daunting flood problem, the city called for their extermination in 2007. In the face of huge public outcry, they secured permission from Fish and Game to relocate them. Residents, however, wanted the beavers to stay.

Impossible? A beaver subcommittee was formed to address challenges and solutions. Its first act was to hire Skip Lisle of Vermont, inventor of the "beaver deceiver", who installed a flow device to regulate dam height. The subcommittee issued its report to the council, and six of the seven members advocated for responsibly allowing the beavers to remain. Faced with national media, and unrelenting concerns of property owners along the creek, the council declined to vote on the matter.

That was a year ago, and during that time the city dredged much of their habitat and spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to build a sheet pile wall that passed through the beavers lodge. Beaver supporters (and many taxpayers) called the action unnecessary, but when it was done, Martinez was left with a bank of metal, a safer floodplain, and a family of healthy, slightly irritated, beavers.

Beavers are a keystone species and have a tremendous impact on the land they cultivate. Their changes to the habitat increase wildlife, improve water quality, and actually foster a greater density and variety of migratory song birds. Recently beavers have been praised as a solution to some of the damaging watershed effects of climate change. There are literally hundreds of reasons for Martinez to keep its beavers, but perhaps the most compelling is the impact this colony has had on

No Child Left Inside

By Paul Schorr

On Tuesday, May 26 and Thursday, May 28, a total of fifty-seven 5th grade students from nearby Jack London Elementary School, their teachers, Evelyn Jones and Marnie Hassig, and several parent volunteers were joined by fourteen MDAS volunteer leaders to enjoy two mornings of excellent birding at Contra Loma Regional Park in Antioch. The MDAS volunteers included President Jimm Edgar, Gloria Cannon, Joel Summerhill, Claudia Hein, Hugh Harvey, Rosita Harvey, Mike Tischler, Austin Prindle, Jenny Papka, Carolyn Lie, Leslie Jordan, Brian Murphy, Nancy Schorr and Paul Schorr.



The weather was clear, warm and breezy and the groups practically had the area to themselves. The students were divided into six groups and they rotated among six birding stations on or near Loma Island, each station being monitored by MDAS volunteer(s) with a spotting scope. Each of the students adeptly used a pair of binoculars that had been purchased by MDAS for purposes such as this and other Education Outreach programs. Following this activity the group walked from

creek awareness. With effortless and furry charm, the Martinez Beavers have become mascots for the city, the species, and the environment

Worth A Dam, associated with the non-profit Land for Urban Wildlife, is dedicated to maintaining the beavers in Alhambra Creek through responsible stewardship, creative problem-solving, community involvement and education. They will hold their second annual beaver festival downtown August 1st. The free event will offer entertainment, education, children's activities, beaver tours, and promise to be a dam good time.

For more information go to www.martinezbeavers.org

Heidi Perryman is the President and Founder of Worth A Dam and served on the beaver subcommittee. Photographer Cheryl Reynolds is Worth A Dam's Vice President of Wildlife.

the lake area to an open area with views of the oak-dotted hills, an introduction to the California savannah. From this location Brian Murphy explained the importance of the nearby California Quail habitats and the Western Bluebird nest boxes located along an adjacent fence line. Cooperative Western Bluebirds and Tree Swallows substantiated the success of this conservation project.

After lunch, as in MDAS field trips, the group tallied a total of 42 and 32 species respectively. Highlights included the following observations: Barn Owl with owlets in a nest box, roosting Barn Owl in a palm tree, Killdeer on nest of eggs, Cooper's Hawk on a nest, Cooper's Hawk catching and partially eating a Pocket Gopher, Common Yellowthroat, and families of Mallards and Canada Geese.

The volunteers all had many teachable moments and they were rewarded with the subsequent excitement and enthusiasm of the students. At the conclusion of each day's program, the book entitled *Backyard Birds of California*, was presented to every student. These books were also purchased by the Chapter. All in all, it was a very rewarding experience for everyone and lifelong memories were certainly created.

Q The male of this species scrapes a shallow depression in gravel or open ground to make a nest. Eggs are speckled and look like stones; the nest blends uncommonly well with the background.

Unscramble these letters, or turn to Page 6 to learn more.

DEEIKLLR

Come birding with us this Summer!

Saturday, July 25

San Mateo Coast

Leader: Maury Stern, 284-5980

Carpool leaves at 7:30 AM from Sycamore Valley Road Park and Ride. Meet at 9 AM at overlook at Pescadero Beach on Highway 1 across from Pescadero Road. Take Crow Canyon Road to I-580, go west to I-238, follow to I-880, then south to SR 92. Cross the San Mateo Bridge (toll) and continue to Half Moon Bay. Turn south on SR 1, go 15 miles to Pescadero Road, turn right into parking lot. Bring lunch and sunscreen—one can get badly burned on a foggy day at the seashore. Early returning shorebirds, gulls, possibly Bank Swallows. Category ① or ②, with optional Category ③ extension to Año Nuevo Beach.

① Saturday, August 15

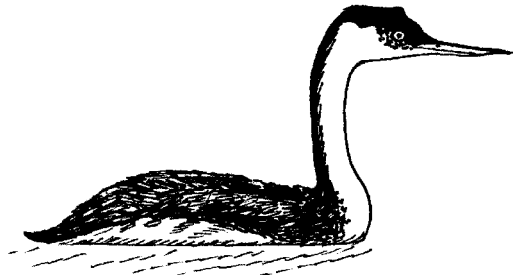
Bodega Bay

Leader: Fred Safier, 937-2906

Carpool leaves Sun Valley at 7:30 AM. Meet in parking lot of Tides Restaurant on Bay side of Highway 1 in Bodega at 9:15 AM. Take I-680 across the Benicia Bridge (toll). Go west on I-780 to I-80 towards Sacramento, exit to SR 37. Follow SR 37 to Lakeville Road, turn right. In Petaluma turn left on E Washington Street and continue on Bodega Road, Valley Ford Road and SR 1 to Bodega Bay. Possibilities at Bodega Bay include flocks of shorebirds including Black Oystercatcher, Wandering Tattler, Marbled Godwit, as well as terns, gulls, cormorants and much more. Bring lunch, liquids and sunscreen.

Summer is now here and we have two more field trips to complete our year's calendar. After 43 trips and many wonderful bird sightings, it is time to thank the 16 leaders who have taken us out into the Greater Bay Area and beyond. Thank you to all for your great efforts.

It is now time to start planning the upcoming calendar of field trips. Do you have any ideas where we might find new birds? Are we not going to your favorite birding spot? The field trips take us to many diverse areas, from the coast to the Central Valley to the Sierra Nevada. Come and join us at Jean Richmond's home in Alamo the evening of July 15. Find out what other exciting areas we can visit. We will meet at 7 PM, light refreshment will be provided. Call Jean (837-2843) or Hugh (935-2979) for further details or to leave new ideas.



Field trips are open to members and non-members, beginners and advanced birders. Weather or other contingencies may require changes. For updates, visit the MDAS website at www.diabloaudubon.com/index/php. Bring a lunch and drink and join us during our midday break.

Category ①: Easy, little or no walking, smooth paths

Category ②: Moderate, one mile or more, possibly rough terrain

Category ③: Difficult, extensive walking on rough terrain

Carpool locations: **Sycamore Valley Road Park and Ride Lot**—Just south of Danville, exit I-680 at Sycamore Valley Road to the east; the Park and Ride lot is on the left. **Sun Valley**—Southwest corner of the Sun Valley Mall parking lot at Willow Pass Road and Contra Costa Boulevard in Concord.

Trip Reports

Del Puerto Canyon, April 21. It was a hot day for a drive up Del Puerto Canyon, but 19 members made the trip, seeing great birds and flowers along the way. Altogether 60 species were seen or heard. Right off the bat the day started with a Merlin, a seemingly late-in-the-year bird. We added four wrens, including both Canyon and Rock Wrens, Cedar Waxwings, Greater Yellowlegs, Green Heron, Costa's Hummingbird, Lawrence's Goldfinch, Lewis's Woodpecker, Rufous-crowned Sparrow and three blackbird species. The ice cream and cold drinks at The Junction were a welcome treat. But the strawberry

shortcake given to us at the lunch stop at the campground just past Frank Raines Park was the best. A great thank you to the San Joaquin Stanislaus Cattlewomen's Association for that one. We were lucky the birds and strawberries made up for the oppressive heat.

Hugh B. Harvey

Mines Road, April 18. 'Twas the 18th of April in 2009, it was hotter than blazes and we went birding anyway. Despite the heat, we had 74 species while birding from Murietta's Well to Del Valle Regional Park to The Junction and San Antonio Valley Road. We started with nestling Great Horned Owls, Eurasian Collared-Doves, Yellow-billed Magpies and a Black-headed

Grosbeak. At Del Valle we had Spotted Sandpiper, Common Merganser, White-throated Swift, Belted Kingfisher and numerous swallows. Mines Road itself was fairly birdless, but we did find Lewis's Woodpeckers beyond The Junction as well as Tri-colored Blackbird. What a surprise it was when we completed our checklist and counted our total, not bad for the oppressive heat.

Hugh B. Harvey

Mitchell Canyon, April 30. Twenty-nine members and guests spent a beautiful morning at Mitchell Canyon. The weather was fair, with temperatures in the 55 to 65-degree range, puffy white clouds and gentle

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Welcome New Members

Mindy Brooks	Martinez
Michael Corwin	Menlo Park
Hannah Craddock	Diablo
Lori Fujimoto	Moraga
Vicki Lee	San Pablo
Joan Mancuso-Adair	Walnut Creek
Donna Preece	Danville
Ted Robertson	Walnut Creek
Nona and Bill Thomas	Walnut Creek
Thomas Verrill	Pittsburg

Trip Reports

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breezes. 49 species were seen or heard. Highlights were: Wild Turkey (displaying males), Golden Eagle, Prairie Falcon while still in the parking lot, Hairy Woodpecker, Olive-sided Flycatcher easily visible in telescopes, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Bushtit and nest, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, California Thrasher singing on a bush at the top of a hillside of chapparal, Yellow Warbler, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Townsend's Warbler, and Western Tanager.

Maury Stern

Mount Diablo, May 6. Ten members and guests birded Mount Diablo starting at the south gate entrance and on up to Juniper campground. The day was rather quiet as far as birds. A few of our stops produced not a single bird heard or seen. The most exciting event of the day was at Rock City. When we parked and got out of our cars we heard coyotes howling. They sounded quite close, so we walked in the direction of the sounds and sure enough a coyote walked ahead of us just 30–40 feet. One of our members took a pretty good photo of the animal with her small digital camera. In all we had 38 species. Maybe half of these were just a single bird heard or seen. Blue-gray Gnatcatchers seemed to be at every stop. As we ended our trip back at the junction for lunch a pair of Golden Eagles soared high above us engaging in mating behavior.

Jimm Edgar

East Contra Costa County, May 9. Sixteen participants enjoyed a clear and warm, yet breezy day visiting numerous

locations throughout East Contra Costa County. Stops included Marsh Creek Trail in Oakley, Jersey Island, Bethel Island and Delta Road in Knightsen. Fifty-eight species were seen or heard and noteworthy birds included: Blue Grosbeak, Black-chinned Hummingbird, Swainson's Hawk, Yellow-billed Magpie, Burrowing Owl, Great Horned Owl, Bullock's Oriole, Hooded Oriole, Western Tanager, Black-headed Grosbeak and Western Kingbird. The following birds were observed at nest sites: Great Horned Owl, House Wren, Hooded Oriole, Swainson's Hawk and Red-tailed Hawk.

Paul Schorr

West Briones, May 14. Nineteen members and guests had a pleasant morning hearing and seeing 46 species at the Bear Valley side of Briones Regional Park. Weather was fair with temperatures varying between 50 and 70. Highlights were: flyover American White Pelicans, Great Blue Herons and Mallard; Lazuli Buntings were numerous and easily seen singing near the tops of bushes and trees. A Warbling Vireo nest was found with singing Hutton's vireos nearby. From the Seaborg Trail we heard many Wilson's and Orange-crowned Warblers. Acorn Woodpeckers were in the usual trees at Homestead Valley and the cypresses there had House Wrens, Creepers and numerous Starlings. Ash-throated Flycatchers were seen and heard as well as Pacific Slope Flycatchers. Surprisingly, no Western Bluebirds were seen.

Maury Stern

Sycamore Grove, May 27. The day started warm and only became more stifling, but the eight birders were happy with what they found. Highlights along Sycamore Grove and Arroyo Del Valle in Livermore were Western Tanager, Warbling Vireo, Brown Creeper and many titmouse families. Near the dam for Del Valle Reservoir we heard a California Thrasher and saw a very nice reddish-brown California Kingsnake. We found four Barn Owls in the tank tower on a residential street before continuing to Murietta's Well for lunch. Here we added Great Horned Owls, Yellow-billed Magpie, Wild Turkey, California Quail and a very vocal American Kestrel. A final stop at milepost 6.2 on Mines Road gave us very satisfactory looks at male and female Phainopeplas. Altogether we found only 44 species on a very warm day, but many were very satisfactory.

Hugh B. Harvey

Observations

By Steve Glover

A female **Common Merganser** along San Pablo Creek near San Pablo Reservoir on 5/21 was said to be acting "anxious" and could have had a nest nearby (DV). Contra Costa County still awaits its first breeding confirmation for this species.

Fifteen **American White Pelicans** were noted circling over San Pablo Reservoir on 5/4 (JD) and three more were circling over Briones Regional Park on 6/6 (LL).

A **Green Heron** was a nice find at the lagoons in Briones Regional Park on 5/18 (S&ST).

A **Eurasian Collared-Dove** was in suburban Alamo 6/6–7 (JR). It probably won't be long until this species has colonized open areas throughout the county but there is no hurry.

A pair of nest-building **Blue-gray Gnatcatchers** was along the Laurel Canyon Road in Tilden Park on 5/10. This species was not detected as far west as Tilden during the breeding bird atlas project (DV).

Two males and a female **Phainopepla** were at Lime Ridge Open Space near Concord on 5/20 (DW).

A singing **Yellow-breasted Chat** was found along Dutch Slough, Jersey Island, on 5/27 (MP). This species has never been found at that location but it appears suitable for nesting.

Grasshopper Sparrows were all the rage this season. Up to eight were heard singing at Wildcat Canyon Regional Park on 5/10 (DV), eight more singing males were along the Old Moraga Ranch Trail near St. Mary's College on 5/31 (JH), and at least two were near the Sindicich Lagoons in Briones Regional Park on 6/6 (LL).

A male **Lawrence's Goldfinch** was found along the Oursan Trail near San Pablo Reservoir on 5/21 (JS). We were surprised to find this species so far west during the breeding bird atlas but they apparently are now regular there.

Jay Dodge, Joel Herr, Laura Look, Michael Perrone, Jean Richmond, Judi Sierra, Susan and Steve Taylor, Doug Vaughan

Submit Contra Costa County sightings to Steve Glover at countylines@sbglobal.net or (925) 997-1112.



Killdeer • *Charadrius vociferus*

a



Killdeer are famous for their protective “broken wing” display when a potential predator approaches the nest. The adult bird will fan out its tail, flap one wing, and feign a struggle away from the nest. This behavior will draw attention to itself, and when the intruder is diverted and the young are out of danger, the Killdeer will miraculously recover and scream loudly as it takes flight. If a large animal, such as a deer or cow, approaches, the ruse is not used, as the risk is that of potential trampling of the nest. The bird will then move away from the nest and make a ruckus with flapping wings to distract the animal, or it may even fly in the animal’s face in defence of its young.

As do the zebra’s stripes, the two dark black bands across the pure white breast of the Killdeer demonstrate what is called disruptive coloration; the rings tend to break up the outline of the bird, helping it to meld into the variegated background of its habitat. Two other plovers, Semipalmated and Snowy, have only one band, sufficient to serve as camouflage for these smaller birds. Fledgling Killdeer also have just one band.

Feeding mostly on insects, Killdeer are one of the most beneficial of shore birds. They will run, stop abruptly and stand, then snatch their prey from the ground, or run again and repeat.

The onomatopoeic name imitates the birds’ shrill calls; the scientific genus name derives from Latin words recognizing their loud and persistent cry.

In early May, four Killdeer chicks hatched in a gravel area at Heather Farm Park. Jim Silva discovered the nest and put out orange cones to prevent someone from driving over the invisible nest. This remarkable photo is by Brian Murphy.

Valle Vista Trails

» *Continued from Page 8*

also been seen from this location. This is the best location I know to find California Thasher, often with one singing on the hillside above the parking lot. House Wren is often found near the parking lot in winter. I showed a class a small foraging flock of eleven Spotted Towhees in mid-summer. When teaching or birding alone, I rarely travel more than a mile from the parking lot.

Mixed species of swallows line up on the wires over the horse pasture on summer evenings. There is even a report of Purple Martin from this location.

Phalaropes, Lesser and Greater Yellowlegs, and American White Pelican stop by in migration. As with many of the reservoirs tucked along the coast range, the waterfowl species are fun to view, such as Hooded Merganser, Ring-neck Duck and American Wigeon. Wood Ducks are seen most of the year. Last year a pair flew around the parking lot pines in search of a suitable nest cavity, even though there are Wood Duck boxes nearby.

The Summer Tanager found by Tim Howe last summer was a highlight to my Contra Costa Big Year and attracted many birders to the area. Red-naped Sapsucker, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and Gray Flycatcher have also been found here. This is good spot to find Willow Flycatcher, Hermit Warbler and other birds in migration.

I have seen a bobcat kitten in a tree by the bridge. Mountain Lions have been sighted too!

The history of Upper San Leandro Reservoir is of some interest. The village of Contra Costa, in Contra Costa County, grew rapidly during the Gold Rush, and in 1851, with a population of 4000, changed its name to Oakland. Two years later, the County was split to place the town in a new Alameda County. By 1870, San Leandro Reservoir was completed by An-



Rimer Creek Bridge. Photo by Denise Wight

thony Chabot to serve the water needs of the community. In 1926 a second reservoir was added upstream on San Leandro Creek, named Upper San Leandro Reservoir. The original reservoir was later renamed in honor of Chabot.

If you haven’t yet made an acquaintance with Valle Vista and King Canyon, you have a treat awaiting for you when you go.

Birds in Focus

Audubon magazine is launching the 2009 Audubon Magazine Photography Awards: Birds in Focus, created to celebrate the beauty and diversity of birdlife through the art of photography.

Audubon will be accepting submissions online until July 15 in three categories: Professional, Amateur, and Youth. Photographers are encouraged to reveal a new angle or perspective in their work. "Think creatively," advises Audubon's design director Kevin Fisher, one of the judges. "Originality and drama rank high at Audubon. Include tight shots, such as close-ups of eyes, feathers. We welcome uncommon perspectives."

The Award winners will be announced in December and will see their work showcased within the pages of both Audubon and Nature's Best Photography magazines.

An impressive array of prizes will be awarded, including top-of-the-line photo and optic equipment from award sponsor, Nikon.

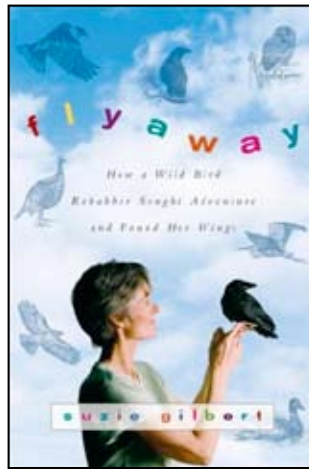
- Journey to Peru's Tambopata National Reserve.
- An ultimate birding safari to Australia's Northern Territory.
- 14-day Tropical Rivers and Rainforest cruise through South America.
- Opportunity to travel to Honduras with Audubon wildlife photographer Roy Toft as your photographer/guide.
- A Nikon D80 digital SLR camera, 18-55mm NIKKOR VR lens, and a set of Nikon EDG 8x32 binoculars.

For details, visit www.AudubonMagazinePhotoAwards.com

A Book for Birders

Suzie Gilbert lives in the Hudson Valley of New York with her family. She began volunteering at a raptor rehabilitation center in 1990 and wrote the children's book *Hawk Hill* before opening her home-based bird rehabilitation center, Flyaway, Inc. Trying to raise public awareness about the beauty and mystery of birds, highlight the dangers they face, and suggest ways to help them, she found that the best way to connect people with wild birds is to describe some of the more fascinating parts of their natural histories, then relay facets of their personalities. Most people are astonished to discover that wild birds have personalities as varied as do their friends and family.

She wrote all of this into a book *Flyaway: How A Wild Bird Rehabber Sought Adventure and Found Her Wings*, published by HarperCollins. Her goal was to show what wild birds are really like—from close, day-to-day observations that reveal both their inner and outer lives. Look for this entertaining memoir at your local book store or online at www.suziegilbert.com.



the Quail

is published 10 times a year by the

Mount Diablo Audubon Society

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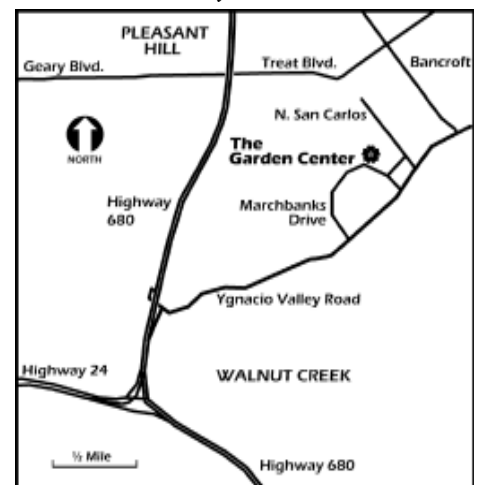
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The Garden Center

Mount Diablo Audubon Society meets on the first Thursday of each month, except July and August, in the Camellia Room of The Gardens at Heather Farms, 1540 Marchbanks Drive, Walnut Creek. Everyone is invited.



MDAS MEMBERSHIP/RENEWAL APPLICATION

Please enroll my family and me as a member of Mount Diablo Audubon Society for \$25 for one year.

I'm enclosing an additional tax-deductible donation of \$_____.

For an additional \$20 (new NAS members only), please enroll me in the National Audubon Society.

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Mount Diablo Audubon Society
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View from King Canyon Trail

Valle Vista Trails

The trails of East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD) that radiate from the Valle Vista staging area in Moraga are popular with birders. In particular, the King Canyon Trail provides many different habitats and many wonderful views, as it follows—for much of its way—the shoreline of Upper San Leandro Reservoir. The combination of planted Monterey Pines, creekside habitat, madrone/bay covered hillsides, hillside pasture and open water. Nearby redwood forest with marine influence creates a location filled with a nice variety of bird species year round.

But first, you must obtain a permit to use the trail. You can buy a permit (\$10 for a year, \$20 for two years, or \$30 for five years) at EBMUD offices such as at Lafayette Reservoir, or on line at <http://www.ebmud.com/services/recreation>. Pay by credit card; print out the permit on your computer. The permit is valid for the trails at Briones Reservoir as well.

To reach the Valle Vista trailhead, go south on Moraga Road from Lafayette, or on Moraga Way from Orinda, to Canyon Road in Moraga. Go southwest on Canyon Road for 1¼ miles to the staging area on your left. Sign in at the register and walk downhill on the Rocky Ridge Trail. After a short distance, a marker indicates that Rocky Ridge drops off to the left while Riche Trail continues straight. Riche Trail is a ¾-mile loop that circles to the right and returns you to the parking lot. Rocky Ridge goes through an old plum orchard, then a pine forest; listen for the sounds of woodpeckers and the scuffling of towhees. The trail emerges where a farm lane joins Canyon Road. Cross the bridge and bear to the right. The Rimer Creek Trail, to the left from this point, follows the creek for a short distance, then climbs to the ridge.

As you proceed along the lane, you will find many nesting boxes for Wood Ducks. It stands to reason that you should look for Wood Ducks hereabouts. Soon you come to a junction where King Canyon Trail begins and Rocky Ridge Trail branches to the left and begins its climb.

King Canyon trail continues on the dirt road past working farm buildings. Watch for American Kestrels that may be hovering over anticipated prey. Soon you come into view of the reservoir. You'll almost surely spot Canada Geese on the water, perhaps a Cinnamon Teal.

The trail continues for about three miles along the edge of the narrow lake until it rejoins Rocky Ridge Trail. From here, a short distance will take you to Rancho Laguna Park. Consider stashing a second car here for a one-way excursion.

Last year, Denise Wight did a Contra Costa County Big Year, as reported to Mount Diablo Audubon Society at the February meeting. She adds these notes concerning the Valle Vista trails:



The grassy area just south of the parking seems to create thermals for raptors to ride. In one hour period of just sitting on the hillside, I have seen Golden Eagle, Osprey, American Kestrel, Red-tailed Hawk and Common Raven use this area to gain altitude on warm thermals. Merlin, Peregrine Falcon, and Bald Eagle have

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