

# Golden Gate Audubon Society | 2016 Annual Report



July 1, 2015 — June 30, 2016

American Avocets by  
Allen Hirsch.



Downtown Oakland has the biggest night-heron rookery in the Bay Area, with over 150 pairs of nesting Black-crowned Night-Herons and Snowy Egrets. But Oakland's young, not-quite-fledged herons face injury and death when falling from their nest trees onto the unforgiving concrete of city streets.

This challenge led to Golden Gate Audubon's most public achievement of 2015-16 – convening a **three-way partnership** with the Oakland Zoo and International Bird Rescue to rescue injured young herons and educate the public about these amazing birds nesting in the heart of a bustling city.

Our cooperative effort saved the lives of 21 young herons. We mobilized two dozen volunteer docents to monitor the heron colony, compile data on nests, interpret the birds and their behavior for neighbors, and invoke rescue for injured birds. Our Art Flash Mob convened dozens of talented nature artists to publicize the herons' presence through sidewalk chalk drawings. We led bird walks through the rookery for both adults and students from nearby schools. In the coming year, we hope to work with the City of Oakland to improve future survival odds for Oakland's iconic herons.

**But that's not all we did in 2015-16....**

Juvenile Black-crowned Night-Heron in Oakland by Nova Togatorop. >





## CONSERVATION

**Bird-safe architecture.** In partnership with American Bird Conservancy, GGAS launched trainings for Bay Area architects in how to design bird-safe buildings. Architects receive continuing-education credits and learn ways to comply with bird-safe building ordinances.

**Safer Bay Bridge.** We worked with CalTrans and Illuminate the Arts to [replace old inefficient static lighting](#) on the Bay Bridge with new LED bulbs and shades that will be less distracting and disruptive to birds and marine life. We also worked collegially with Caltrans to ensure no water birds or marine life were harmed during the implosion of old Bay Bridge pier E6.

**Wild in Alameda.** We organized a three-month-long photo exhibit on Alameda wildlife at the Alameda main library, capped by a [sold-out symposium](#) on Alameda wildlife and docent-staffed wildlife viewing stations all over the island city.

**Lead pollution in Chabot Park.** Together with concerned neighbors and other environmental groups, we urged the East Bay Regional Park District to end lead contamination in the Lake Chabot watershed by [closing the Chabot Gun Range](#), which had been using lead ammunition for over 50 years. The District agreed and the Range closed in September 2016.

**Dog management in the GGNRA.** Our members mobilized to support the common-sense Final Dog Management



**Off-leash dog flushing shorebirds in the GGNRA** by Jouko van der Kruijsen.



**GGAS is training architects to prevent bird-building collisions.**  
**American Kestrel** by Neil Berget.



**Bald Eagle at Lake Chabot**  
by Mary Malec.

Rule that will protect wildlife and better serve all park visitors in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

**Wind power and birds.** Maintaining our decades-long efforts to minimize raptor deaths at the Altamont Pass, we forced the final shutdown of the outmoded, deadly turbines of Altamont Winds Inc. Two other wind companies have been repowering more responsibly by planning properly sited, more efficient facilities. We continue pressing the county to require all wind companies to build and operate in ways that are compatible with sustaining wildlife populations.

**Funding for wetlands.** GGAS joined other Audubon chapters and Bay Area conservation groups to win passage of [Measure AA](#), a multi-county ballot measure that will raise an estimated \$500 million for wetlands restoration

over the next 20 years. This is a huge win for wildlife as well as for local communities' preparedness for climate-related sea level rise.

**Alameda seal habitat.** When an old dock used as a haul-out site by harbor seals was threatened by development, we convinced the City of Alameda to require the developer to install a [new floating haul-out](#) that will allow seals and water birds to rest safely nearby.

**Fishing line recycling.** Discarded fishing line is a deadly entanglement hazard for water birds and marine mammals. We worked with the cities of Oakland, Alameda, San Leandro, East Bay Regional Parks, and the Port of Oakland to place and maintain monofilament (fishing line) recycling containers at key fishing sites along the Bay. This more than doubled the monofilament recycling capacity in Alameda County.

## HABITAT RESTORATION

Over 2,500 volunteers put in a record-setting 3,434 hours helping us restore habitat at eight public land sites – Pier 94 (Port of San Francisco);



**Restoring habitat at Pier 94 by Lee Karney.**

North Lake and Buffalo Paddock in Golden Gate Park; Land's End and Crissy Field beach in the GGNRA; Martin Luther King Jr. Shoreline

in Oakland; Point Pinole in Richmond; and the Alameda Wildlife Reserve.

Bird counts at Pier 94 documented 136 species in the first half of 2016, a dramatic increase from the 87 found before we began restoration there over a decade ago. We were honored to continue our partnership with Salesforce, whose employees help year-round at Pier 94. For more on our habitat restoration program, see the [Fall 2016 issue of The Gull](#).

## YOUTH EDUCATION



**Eco-Ed students build a nest box by Anthony DeCicco.**

Our award-winning Eco-Education program served 537 third- and fourth-grade students and 450 of their family members in nine Title I low-income schools in Oakland, San Francisco, and

Richmond. The year-long curriculum included 46 [field trips](#) to local creek, wetland, and ocean habitats that engaged children in hands-on nature education and habitat stewardship activities.

We expanded our initiative of Bird-friendly Schools, in which students conduct wildlife surveys at their campuses and then improve those areas for wildlife by planting native gardens, [building nest boxes](#), installing solar-powered bird baths, and creating anti-collision window art. Richmond students built over 50 nest boxes,

which were installed in their schoolyards as well as at Wildcat Canyon Regional Park. We also piloted nature journaling as a curriculum component.

In addition, our Eco-Education staff led four family bird walks for the general public, serving 87 children and family members.

## ADULT EDUCATION



**Brooks Island field trip by Ilana DeBare.**

Our popular field trip program continued to grow, reaching 166 free trips led by 69 volunteer leaders. We sponsored 20 birding classes that enrolled 450 people. We also co-sponsored our fourth year-long Master Birding class with the California Academy of Sciences, fostering a cohort of knowledgeable conservation leaders. Over 60 GGAS volunteer docents helped introduce people to the birds of Lake Merritt, the Bay Trail, downtown Oakland, and the Burrowing Owls of Cesar Chavez Park. Our Travel with GGAS program took participants to six top birding destinations including South Africa, Oaxaca, and South Texas. Our monthly Speaker Series drew over 950 attendees in Berkeley and San Francisco.

## CITIZEN SCIENCE

We marked the 75th anniversary of our Oakland Christmas Bird Count in December 2015 by setting a world record of 277 field observers – more

than any other CBC – plus 37 feeder watchers.

The Oakland count documented 179 bird species and

96,287 individual birds. Meanwhile, our 33rd consecutive San Francisco count mobilized 128 volunteer observers who found 184 species and 73,095 individual birds. Both counts received extensive media coverage in the San Francisco Chronicle, San Jose Mercury News, and beyond.

In addition, GGAS members participated in the [first Pacific Coast count of Brown Pelicans](#), organized by Audubon California in spring 2016. Data collected over years by GGAS observers led to recognition of Alameda's island breakwater as a very important San Francisco Bay roosting site for these at-risk birds. We also took part in citizen science projects focused on shorebirds, Black Oystercatchers, Burrowing Owls, and Candlestick Point wildlife.

## BIRDATHON

Our sixth annual Birdathon mobilized 44 volunteer fundraisers and 198 Birdathon field trip participants who generated a total of \$63,000. At the [Birdathon Award Celebration](#), we bestowed our 2016 Elsie Roemer Conservation Award on Cornelia Foster, who created and organizes our Crissy Field beach cleanups. Our 2016 Paul Covel Education Award recognized Alan Kaplan, a retired East Bay Regional Parks naturalist who has led over 100 uniquely-themed field trips for GGAS.



**2015 Oakland CBC by Rick Lewis.**

**Many thanks to the volunteers, donors, partners, and staff who helped us achieve so much this year! We look forward to working with you to accomplish even more for Bay Area birds and wildlife in 2017, when we celebrate the Centennial of Golden Gate Audubon's founding.**



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*GGAS mourns the loss of Board member Allen Hirsch, photographer of the Avocets on the cover of this report, who passed away while participating in the 2015 Christmas Bird Count.*



**Allen's Hummingbird by Bob Gunderson.**



**Green Heron by Peter Seubert.**

## Golden Gate Audubon Society

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**Brown Pelican during the 2015 CBC by Alan Krakauer.**



**Great Blue Heron by Rick Lewis.**