

# THE GULL

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GOLDEN GATE AUDUBON SOCIETY // VOL. 107 NO. 1 WINTER 2023



## HOW FEATHERED HATS LAUNCHED A MOVEMENT

BY WHITNEY GROVER

**I**t sometimes feels as though threats to birds are becoming bigger, steeper, and more difficult to combat. When looking forward is overwhelming and when the path is unclear, sometimes it's helpful to look back. Similarly, as we contemplate what we should be, perhaps the best place to start is how we came to be. As it happens, the origin story of the Audubon Society has it all: heroic figures to inspire, conservation success to ground and gratify, and enormous gaudy hats.

CONTINUED on page 3

Great Egret.  
Rick Lewis







Kids and adults make bird chalk art at the Berkeley Bird Festival.

Elizabeth Winstead

## INCREASING OUR REACH

BY GLENN PHILLIPS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

It seems like every holiday season we try and find time to slow down and remind ourselves of the things most important to us: family, friends, and community. During this time we also tend to take the opportunity to find ways to give back, showing our love and appreciation not only to those who are already close to us, but to our neighbors and those we have yet to meet. While many of us do this as individuals, I am proud of our team at Golden Gate Audubon for adopting a similar spirit of giving and gratitude, exemplified best in our most recent outreach programs.

During our 2nd Annual Berkeley Bird Festival last October, we were able to offer the greater Berkeley community a free

one-day event to honor and celebrate our local feathered residents as well as visiting migrant birds. Throughout the day, we interacted with individuals, students and families, many of whom were new to the organization and new to birding/bird conservation. These same community members participated in birding field trips, sat in on lectures and performances and spent time with us decorating the UC campus with bird chalk art all day long.

Shortly after the conclusion of the festival, our Birding For Everyone Scholarship officially launched, providing up to 10 awardees with a free annual membership and a year's worth of adult education classes. The scholarship program is a part

of this organization's initiative to diversify our community and create more equitable opportunities for Black, Indigenous and People of Color, LGBTQIA+ individuals and people with financial needs to engage in birding and conservation. Our first award-ees have been chosen and are on their way to registering for our winter slate of classes, and we could not be more excited for them and the future of this program.

Last but not least, our wonderful Docents are returning to one of Oakland's greatest gifts, Lake Merritt. Since mid-November, our dedicated volunteers have been out at Lake Merritt every weekend engaging and educating passersby about the Lake's history as North America's first wildlife refuge. Looking toward the future, we have plans to expand our docent program into other natural areas around the Bay, highlighting the social, cultural and ecological histories of these places many of us enjoy on a daily basis.

As we enter into a new year, I find myself excited by all of the possibilities for making new and meaningful connections with others, not only to advance our mission of protecting birds and local habitat, but also to foster and nurture our relationships with each other. Seeing the success of the festival, the outpour of interest in the Birding For Everyone scholarship and our plans to expand the docent program, I feel proud of the work we have done in the past year to grow our community. But more than anything, I feel grateful to all of those who have supported us in these endeavors. Here's to another year of showing up and giving back.

### NEWS BRIEFS

#### Birding For Everyone Scholarship Program

We have officially launched our Birding for Everyone Scholarship offering 10 selected applicants an annual membership and a year's worth of adult education classes for free. This program is part of an initiative to diversify and provide greater access to our birding community.

#### Winter Classes

Hone your birding skills! From beginner classes to in-depth courses on Diving Birds, Sparrows in Winter, and Avian Anatomy, our lineup of winter Adult Ed classes has something for everyone. GGAS members get a discount. For a list of classes and registration links, see [goldengateaudubon.org/classes](http://goldengateaudubon.org/classes).

#### Rotary Nature Center

On December 10, the Rotary Nature Center at Oakland's Lake Merritt re-opened after a long hiatus. As part of its reopening, Golden Gate Audubon was invited to help educate visitors about the lake's rich biodiversity and partner with the nature center in stewarding local bird habitat.

#### Docents are Back!

Golden Gate Audubon is bringing back its docent program at Lake Merritt on the weekends and we're hoping to expand to other locations soon. If you're interested in becoming a docent, please reach out to Whitney Grover at [wgrover@goldengateaudubon.org](mailto:wgrover@goldengateaudubon.org) for information on the program.

SOCIETY from page 1

The first time the words *Audubon* and *Society* were paired was in 1886, when George Bird Grinnell, conservationist and writer, founded the society for the protection of birds. For a timeline review, this was 35 years after the death of John James Audubon. Grinnell's goal was to build an association that would advocate for birds and educate the public about threats to them. Although they had a relatively large number of initial members, this first Audubon Society died out two years later. Still, Grinnell spoke out about the agricultural industry's impact on insectivores and the cruelty and devastation of the millinery industry.

*Millinery* is a fancy term for hat making, and back in the late 19th century, hats were *fancy*.<sup>\*</sup> It was all the rage to adorn women's hats with feathers and even full taxidermied animals. No species was safe, but egrets were targeted in particular because of their beautiful feathers and the ease of catching them, especially in breeding season when they were all the more beautiful and roosting together in large numbers. Not only was the take of adult birds devastating to their populations, but their chicks would perish as a secondary result. London and New York were hat-making hubs, but hunters sourced birds from all over Europe and the East Coast of the United States, down to Florida.

It's hard to imagine so many crazy-looking hats out in the world, but due to the large size of the industry, inexpensive materials, and the coinciding boom of women's fashion magazines, the hats were affordable and desirable to middle and upper class women alike. Think Lululemon pants, but covered in bird parts.

Not all women bought into the craze, however. One Boston socialite, Harriet Hemenway, learned about the dark side of the hat making industry and knew she had to stop it. She enlisted her cousin Minna Hall, and in 1896 the two began to spread the word about the industry's devastating impact on birds. Inspired by and echoing the voices of other women naturalist writers at the time, Hemenway and Hall used their social clout to organize boycotts and recruit members to the newly formed Massachusetts Audubon Society. The Society



Feathered hats were fashionable but deadly to birds. Photos courtesy Jason Howe, photo of his great-grandmother Etta Nathan in 1910 (left), and National Audubon Society (right).

***It was all the rage to adorn women's hats with feathers and even full taxidermied animals. No species was safe, but egrets were targeted in particular because of their beautiful feathers and the ease of catching them.***

eventually moved its attention to legislating protection and in 1897 a law was passed in the Massachusetts legislature, outlawing the trade in feathers of wild birds.

The popularity of the Society and its message grew, and by October of 1897 there were 111 local chapters in the state of Massachusetts. Notably, 105 of those chapters were led by women. Their advocacy continued into the 20th century, eventually culminating in the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918.

Hemenway and Hall used their resources and privilege to make people care. There was a first Audubon Society initiated and run by one person, and it failed. The second iteration was a grassroots campaign of people connecting their social circles

and spreading awareness on issues close to home, and it succeeded, becoming one of the most powerful bird conservation organizations in the world.

Meanwhile, across the continent, the Audubon Association of the Pacific formed in Berkeley in 1917 and launched *The Gull* newsletter that you're reading. For decades the organization, unaffiliated with the Audubon network at the time, worked on bird conservation issues around the Bay Area and beyond. In 1948 the Audubon Association of the Pacific joined the National Audubon Society, and a year later changed its name to Golden Gate Audubon Society.

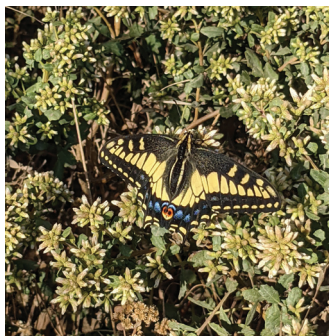
<sup>\*</sup>Mason, K. S. "Out of Fashion: Harriet Hemenway and the Audubon Society, 1896–1905." *Historian*, vol. 65, no. 1, Fall 2002, pp. 1–14.



# BIRDFIFY YOUR YARD IN 2023

BY ILANA DEBARE

**T**he rain and damp soil make winter and early spring the best time for planting. Enliven your yard with native Bay Area plants that will provide nourishment and shelter for birds and butterflies! Golden Gate Audubon's Plants for Birds initiative—a joint effort with local chapters of the California Native Plant Society—highlights several native species and works to make them available at local nurseries each year. Here are the plants of the year for winter 2022-23. All require relatively little water once established.



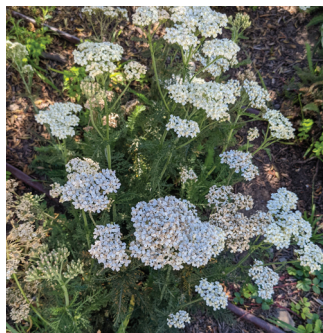
## Coyote Bush (*Baccharis pilularis*)

You've seen this evergreen shrub all over our hillsides. In the fall, male and female plants sport different-colored flowers—faintly yellow for male, white with fluff for female. It attracts many birds including finches, orioles, titmice, chickadees, sparrows, woodpeckers, thrashers and mockingbirds. It grows large—from 1.5 to 10 feet tall, and up to 12 feet wide—but you can prune it. The low-growing version makes an excellent groundcover.



## Hollyleaf Cherry (*Prunus ilicifolia*)

An even larger evergreen tree, Hollyleaf Cherry grows as tall as 30 to 49 feet and makes a nice ornamental hedge. Its leaves are dark green and spiny like holly. Birds such as robins, thrushes, Cedar Waxwings and Black-headed Grosbeaks love its red fruit. As many as 140 California Lepidoptera butterfly species are known to host on this plant! It's useful for bank stabilization and is deer resistant.



## Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*)

This is a pleasant-smelling herb that flowers in the spring and summer and works well as a ground cover or in large containers. It attracts butterflies, other insects, and birds including hummingbirds, finches, sparrows, and California and Spotted Towhees.

It grows one to three feet tall and 0.5 to 1.5 feet wide. For optimal growth, divide the plant annually.



## Coyote Mint (*Monardella villosa*)

Also called Coyote Mountain Balm, this is a compact, fragrant plant that produces white, pink, or purple flowers in the summer. The leaves can be used for tea, and were used by native people for medicinal purposes. It attracts butterflies if grown in the sun, as

well as birds such as orioles, vireos, wood warblers, hummingbirds, and waxwings. It grows up to two feet tall and three feet wide.

Learn more about these four species and their growing requirements at [goldengateaudubon.org/native-plants](http://goldengateaudubon.org/native-plants). Previously highlighted native species include Toyon, Bush Lupine, California Fuchsia, Coast Buckwheat, California Coffeeberry, Coast Red-flowering Currant, California Honeysuckle, and Beach Strawberry.

Golden Gate Audubon's Conservation Committees have contacted local nurseries about stocking these plants. In San Francisco, find them at the Bay Natives, Cole Hardware, Mission Blue, and Sutro Stewards nurseries. In the East Bay, find them at East Bay Wilds, Oaktown Nursery, Native Here Nursery, and Watershed Nursery.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Birdathon 2023

This year's Birdathon runs from mid-March through early May. Experience unique birding trips and behind-the-scenes tours to places like the Sutter Buttes, Devil's Slide, and the Marine Mammal Center, while supporting Golden Gate Audubon's education and conservation work. Check our web site in mid-February for details.

### Birdathon Auction Prizes Needed

We're seeking fun experience-oriented prizes for our Birdathon online auction in May. Can you offer time at a vacation home, a private lesson in a skill like surfing, digiscoping, or botanical drawing, or other nature-related experiences? Please contact Sharol Nelson-Embry at [snelsonembry@goldengateaudubon.org](mailto:snelsonembry@goldengateaudubon.org) if you can help.

### Bird Rescue in New Delhi

All That Breathes, an award-winning documentary about two brothers rescuing kites injured by air pollution in New Delhi, will be featured at the 2023 Mostly British Film Festival. GGAS is co-sponsoring it at the Vogue Theatre in San Francisco from February 9-16. See [mostlybritish.org](http://mostlybritish.org) for details.



# BUILDING IN SAFETY FOR BIRDS

BY GLENN PHILLIPS

**P**robably most of us have experienced the sickening thump of a bird flying into a window. Every second of every day, nearly 3,800 birds die colliding with windows in the United States. The problem is simple; birds don't see glass. When a bird flies into a window, often at speeds greater than 20 mph, it is almost always fatal.

In 2011, Golden Gate Audubon successfully advocated for the first municipal ordinance establishing standards for bird-safe buildings in San Francisco. Shortly after, similar measures were established for Oakland, Richmond, Alameda, and Emeryville. These early ordinances have been critical for creating markets for bird-safe materials and have reduced the risks of collisions from projects that would otherwise cause the most damage. But these existing ordinances are not enough.

Nearly half of all collisions happen on single-family residences. While the risk is greatest at buildings facing parks and open spaces, any building, anywhere, presents a risk. Luckily, there are many proven solutions. Glass with patterns visible to birds or exterior screens and grilles can effectively eliminate collisions.

When a group of conservationists approached the City of Berkeley's Environmental and Climate Commission in 2018, the commission quickly endorsed the proposal for a bird-safe building ordinance, and in 2019, the City Council passed a resolution calling on the Planning department to develop an ordinance for approval. Unfortunately, it took until the end of 2022 to fully develop the ordinance, which is slated for City Council approval in February 2023.

The good news is that during that time, new ordinances passed in Cupertino, New York City, and Mountain View have set a higher standard for bird-safe buildings. If Berkeley's ordinance is approved as currently written, it will be the most protective bird-safe building ordinance in the country. The new ordinance will require all buildings to meet bird-safe standards for the



Architect's rendering of 747 Bancroft Way and its bird-safe glass. Courtesy SteelWave LLC and SOM.

first hundred feet of their facades. All new construction and all retrofits of existing buildings will be required to comply, with a phase-in period for smaller residential projects without extensive glass.

None of this would have happened without the sustained effort and attention of an amazing group of Golden Gate Audubon volunteers. Erin Diehm, Kelly Hammargren, Noreen Weeden, and Chris Tarr tuned in to planning committee and design review committee meetings. Without their support, the ordinance would probably still be sitting on the shelf. Even before the new ordinance is formally adopted, a new build-

ing at 747 Bancroft Way in Berkeley is set to feature bird safe glass on all sides, proving a true testament to their tenacity.

"Just this morning I saw several species of birds in the birdbath, Hermit Thrush, Robin, White-crowned Sparrows, and it warms the heart to know our city is taking steps to protect these beautiful creatures," Erin Diehm said.

Thank you to GGAS and our City Staff and Commissions for developing this important legislation. Berkeley prides itself on being an environmental leader, and the adoption of robust regulations will continue this legacy.





Common yarrow, a California native plant.

Mirek256/Wikimedia

## NATURE'S BEST HOPE

DOUG TALLAMY

ZOOM

Wednesday, January 11  
7 p.m. program  
Zoom

Recent headlines about global insect declines and three billion fewer birds in North America are a bleak reality check about how ineffective our current landscape designs have been at sustaining the plants and animals that sustain us. We are honored to have Doug Tallamy speak on how to create landscapes that enhance local ecosystems rather than degrade them by removing invasive plants and adding native plant communities that sustain food webs, sequester carbon, maintain diverse native bee communities, and manage our watersheds.

Doug Tallamy is the T. A. Baker Professor of Agriculture in the Department of Entomology and Wildlife Ecology at the University of Delaware, where he has conducted research and taught insect-related courses for over 40 years. His main research goal is to better understand the many ways insects interact with plants and how such interactions determine the diversity of animal communities. In 2021 he co-founded Homegrown National Park with Michelle Alfandari.

**Zoom links and passcodes for upcoming presentations** are available on our Speaker Series website at [goldengateaudubon.org/education/speaker-series](https://goldengateaudubon.org/education/speaker-series).

**January and February talks were made possible by the following partners and local Audubon Chapters:** Ohlone Audubon, Marin Audubon, San Joaquin Audubon and Sequoia Audubon.

## A WORLD ON THE WING

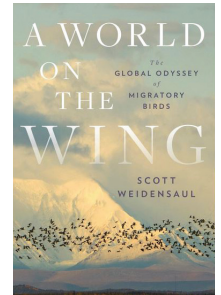
SCOTT WEIDENSAUL

HYBRID

Thursday, February 16  
6 p.m. program  
Zoom

Scientists continue to make astounding discoveries about the navigational and physiological feats that enable migratory birds to cross immense oceans or fly above the highest mountains, go weeks without sleep or remain in unbroken flight for months at a stretch. Scott Weidensaul, author of *A World on the Wing*, published in 2021, takes us around the globe to learn how people are fighting to understand and save the world's great bird migrations.

Scott Weidensaul is a co-director of Project OwlNet, a collaborative effort among over 100 banding and research stations across North America studying owl migration. Weidensaul also co-founded Project SNOWstorm, which uses cutting-edge tracking technology to study Snowy Owls, and is a founder of the Critical Connections project, which is tracking the migration of birds that breed on National Park lands in Alaska.



## BIRDING WHILE DISABLED

BONNIE LEWKOWICZ,  
JUDITH SMITH, AND TIFFANY  
TAYLOR

ZOOM

Thursday, March 16  
7 p.m. program  
Zoom

Bonnie Lewkowicz and Judith Smith will share their experiences as wheelchair-using birders and will be joined by Tiffany Taylor, a birder who is blind. Hear what they need from the birding community and birding locations for them to feel welcome, included, and able to access birding locations and activities.

Bonnie Lewkowicz (she/her) has been able to combine her love of the outdoors with her work, where for more than 35 years she has been educating about and advocating for greater access to outdoor recreation for people with disabilities.

Judith Smith (she/her) is an environmentalist, avid hiker, birder and advocate for accessibility in the outdoors. Judith received her CA Naturalist Certification at Sonoma Ecology Center in 2021.

Tiffany Taylor (she/her) is a blind birder who loves hearing the songs of the birds she encounters on her travels around the country by RV and sailboat.



Lake Merritt Bird stroll.

Judith Smith



# Thank you for being a part of our donor and member community.

We are deeply appreciative of every individual, business and organization that supports Golden Gate Audubon. In this issue we recognize our new members from December 2021 - November 2022 and all of our major donors from the past year.

## Major Donors

### \$10,000 and above

Carol Baird and Alan Harper, National Audubon Society, National Fish & Wildlife Foundation, Karen Rosenbaum and Ben McClinton, Eric Schroeder and Susan Palo, University of California, Berkeley Chancellor's Community Partnership Fund, University of California, San Francisco

### \$5,000 to \$9,999

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Please know that we work hard to ensure the accuracy of this list. If your name has been omitted or misspelled, let us know at 510.843.2222.

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### MISSION STATEMENT

Golden Gate Audubon Society engages people to experience the wonder of birds and to translate that wonder into actions which protect native bird populations and their habitats.

### ABOUT GOLDEN GATE AUDUBON SOCIETY

The Golden Gate Audubon Society was founded January 25, 1917.

*The Gull* is published four times per year. Special third-class postage paid in Oakland, CA. Send address changes to the office promptly. The post office does not forward *The Gull*.

### Golden Gate Audubon Society

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[www.goldengateaudubon.org](http://www.goldengateaudubon.org)

 The Gull is printed with soy-based inks on chlorine-free paper, 30% postconsumer waste content.

## 2 Increasing Our Reach

GGAS launches some exciting new initiatives to expand the birding and bird conservation community.

## 4 Plants for Birds—2023

Recommendations for bird-friendly native plants you can add to your yard this winter and spring.

## 5 Bird-Safe Berkeley

With sustained input from Audubon volunteers, Berkeley prepares an ambitious ordinance to prevent window collisions.

## BACKYARD BIRDER



Rick Lewis

Black Phoebe.

## THE BLACK PHOEBE: URBAN COMPANION

BY GAIL KURTZ

I recently had the pleasure of watching a Black Phoebe move into my backyard, roosting on a hook under our eave and sallying from a string of patio lights to catch bugs. While thrilling for me, its residence in my yard is not surprising. These birds are highly adaptable to human environments as long as water is nearby. Typically living along streams, lakes, and the ocean's edge, Black Phoebes are also found in urban locations like golf courses, cemeteries, and parks.

A member of the tyrant flycatcher family, the Black Phoebe has a sooty black head and body, white belly, and slight peak at its crown. Its legs and thin, pointed bill are also black. Males and females look alike, and their frequent “tsip” calls and pumping tails easily identify them. Their tail pumping behavior had long been a mystery, but in 2011 a California scientist discovered that playing Cooper’s Hawk calls tripled the number of tail pumps, which apparently signal to predators that the bird is ready for flight and, therefore, not suitable prey.

The Black Phoebe’s range traverses western Oregon and California, several Southwestern states, Central America, and South America as far as Bolivia and Northern Argentina. Primarily non-migratory, some birds move south or to higher elevations to breed. Their numbers have increased steadily since 1966 to a current global breeding population of five million, giving them a Continental Concern Score of “Low Concern.” Human development has not seemed to negatively impact these birds, as construction near water offers nest sites in places like eaves, bridges, and culverts.

Black Phoebes eat insects, primarily catching them in mid-air, and occasional small fish that are fed to young. Pairs are monogamous through the mating season. Males court females with fanned tails, fluttering wings, and acrobatic flight displays. They even give females tours of potential nest sites, hovering before each one for several seconds. The female makes the final selection and builds a nest out of mud and dry vegetation.

If you’d like to lure a Black Phoebe to your yard, install a water feature or plant a garden that produces plenty of insects. One day you might discover this elegant bird roosting under your eave!