

THE GULL

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GOLDEN GATE BIRD ALLIANCE // VOL. 108 NO. 1 WINTER 2024



HISMET WAREP HORSETKA: FIGHTING FOR THE FUTURE OF TESLA PARK

BY RYAN NAKANO

Soaring above blue oak and gray pines, a pair of Golden Eagles returns home. A California ground squirrel scurries across open grassland. Tule elk munch on annual and perennial grasses. A red-legged frog keeps to the shade along Corral Hollow Creek. Among and between these spaces are indigenous burial sites, bedrock mortars, and notches carved in stone to track the number of days girls spent in the wilderness learning from the women of their village during coming-of-age ceremonies.

CONTINUED on page 3

Golden Eagle.
Rick Lewis





Townsend's Warbler.

Bob Gunderson

ON THE “BIRD ALLIANCE” AND BIRD NAMES

BY GLENN PHILLIPS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Last spring, our membership voted resoundingly to change our name. As a result, thousands of members and supporters participated in choosing our new name, which was unanimously approved at the August Annual Meeting. Golden Gate Bird Alliance was the third National Audubon-affiliated organization to choose a new name, and the first to adopt “Bird Alliance”. Since then, many other organizations have joined the process. Most recently, Mt. Diablo became the second Bay Area chapter to adopt the Bird Alliance name. Elsewhere,

Madison Audubon is now the Badgerland Bird Alliance and Chicago, Detroit, and Tacoma, Washington (Tahoma) have also adopted Bird Alliance names. We are excited that these chapters have come to a similar conclusion, that “Alliance” is the best way to represent how we move forward together for birds.

In January, we will share recommendations for how to conduct a name change during a state-wide conference with other chapters. As the largest chapter in the state, we try to share resources to support

the state-wide network and help smaller chapters succeed. Many chapters still on the fence have indicated that the renaming issue has more to do with the amount of effort it will take to change their respective names, not necessarily whether they think it's a good idea overall.

In related news, the American Ornithological Society board voted to drop eponyms in bird common names in November 2023. Golden Gate Bird Alliance formally took a position in support of this change two years ago, and continues to support the change, which we believe will ultimately make learning bird names easier and more accessible to a growing community of bird enthusiasts.

People tend to think of species as being a thing, and forget that a species name is really a theory about the relationships between different populations of organisms. As we get more information from new techniques or better/bigger studies, we sometimes need to revise and update our theories. Bird names will be changing as a result of these new understandings for the foreseeable future, so we will have new bird names to learn regardless. The good news is, the human brain retains its ability to learn throughout life, and the best way to keep our brains flexible is to keep learning. Those of us who are not so young can be grateful for the opportunity to exercise our brains on new names for the birds we love.

As Chris Cooper, famed Central Park birder, put it: “Excitement and engagement from many more people of all backgrounds is exactly what the birds need from us if we're going to turn things around for them.”

NEWS BRIEFS

New Board Members

Three new board members have joined the Golden Gate Bird Alliance since the Fall: Mary Wand, a retired attorney and lifelong hiker/sailor, John Callaway, a University of San Francisco science professor with research expertise in wetland restoration, and Kenneth Hillan, master birder and head of therapeutics at 23andMe.

Docent Opportunities

Come visit our Golden Gate Bird Alliance docents out at Dotson Marsh on the first Sunday of each month from 1–3 pm and Lake Merritt every weekend (10 am–12 pm) through the winter season. If you want to become a docent, contact Deputy Director Whitney Grover at wgrover@goldengatebirds.org.

East Bay Conservation Committee

The East Bay Conservation Committee has returned under the leadership of Jeff Manker and Cathy Bleir after a year-long hiatus. The committee is currently working on Alameda and Contra Costa County Species of Conservation Concern Lists, as well as conservation advocacy for Point Molate and Tesla Park.

New Interns

We're excited to be working with Lizzie Hoerauf and Georgine Tan Co as board interns for the next eight months. These two UC Berkeley Haas School of Business students are partnering with us through the Center for Social Sector Leadership fellowship program Bears on Boards.

HISMET WAREP HORSETKA from page 1

Across 3,100 acres of wildland on the southeastern edge of Alameda County, everything seems to be as it should be.

This is Hismet Warep Horsetka, a largely undeveloped parcel of land between Livermore and Tracy just off Tesla Road.

“We believe Tesla Park to be in balance right now, and the Friends of Tesla Park group wanted a name that would reflect that,” Katherine Perez, President of the Nontonne Cultural Preservation, said. “In consultation with other tribal members we decided on Hismet Warep Horsetka, meaning ‘Sacred Earth in Harmony’ in the Chochenyo language of the Ohlone people.”

With very few places like this left, Perez and others including Golden Gate Bird Alliance are advocating for the site to be classified as a State Reserve and renamed Hismet Warep Horsetka in order to maintain and honor the harmony that currently exists in the park.

Adjacent to the site sits Carnegie SVRA, a 1,575-acre off-highway vehicle park. The park is marked by vehicular paths, leaving the otherwise rolling golden hills saturated in dark sloping lines of recreation.

“I’ve been to Carnegie, and I saw the scars of mankind. I saw how certain kinds of recreation can destroy the land,” Northern Valley Yokut and Ohlone Tribal leader Katherine Perez said. “There are still burial sites there.”

In 2021, lawmakers passed SB 155 which saved Hismet Warep Horsetka from becoming a part of Carnegie SVRA after a 20-year-long battle by the Friends of Tesla Park coalition to protect the land from off-road vehicles.

Now the same coalition is working to make sure that the park’s natural environment and cultural indigenous resources continue to be protected as California State Parks begins the process of determining the site’s future under the Alameda-Tesla Plan project.

Currently in the first phase of the project, California State Parks is working to “evaluate natural, cultural, recreational, and interpretive opportunities for the land.” This evaluation is critical in determining the most appropriate classification and name for the park.

The site is currently eligible for the follow-



Mitchell Ravine in Tesla Park.

Friends of Tesla Park

“In consultation with other tribal members we decided on Hismet Warep Horsetka, meaning ‘Sacred Earth in Harmony’ in the Chochenyo language of the Ohlone people.”

ing classifications: State Recreation Area, State Park, State Reserve, and State Historical Unit. The kind of classification that the site receives will determine the type and intensity of activities allowed in the park.

Under a State Reserve classification, the area will be managed to first and foremost “preserve native ecological associations, unique biotic characteristics, and cultural resources” while allowing for relatively low intensity trail systems, interpretive activities and recreation.

According to Perez, this is the designation the Northern Yokut and Ohlone tribes would like to see for the park.

The park itself is home to seven sensitive vegetation communities, at least 35 rare plant species, and over 50 special status wildlife species. Among these wildlife species is the Golden Eagle.

Protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, and locally under California Department of Fish and Wildlife regulations, the Golden Eagle is just one part of the park’s ecosystem and a major priority for Golden Gate Bird Alliance in determining

the future use of the land.

According to USGS Wildlife biologist Patrick Kolar, there are four Golden Eagle pairs whose territories overlap the park, covering almost the entire site. Out of these four, one nests within the park while the other three nest 1/4 to 1/3 mile outside the park boundary.

With wide open grasslands and dispersed trees, the site is perfectly suited for Golden Eagles to hunt ground squirrels and nest safely amongst the land’s rugged terrain. And this is just one of many bird species that depend on the park’s grassland habitat.

According to Perez, the local tribes are in an MOU with the California State Parks Department to ensure tribal consultation and input throughout the land management process.

“This place means a lot to us as native people. It’s a place for us to have ceremonies, pray, gather, and be ourselves without affecting the land, endangered species, plants or birds. It’s a place where we feel more connected to mother earth,” Perez said. “It has not been damaged or destroyed and we would like to keep it that way.”

BERKELEY BIRD FESTIVAL FLIES HIGH

BY RYAN NAKANO

On the clear and quiet morning of October 15, around 20 people gathered outside the southeast corner of Cesar Chavez Park in Berkeley. Waiting with their binoculars at the ready, they were all there for one thing: birds.

“When I go out by myself to look for birds, or when I’m with other people focused on looking for birds it’s the kind of experience where you don’t think of anything else,” said veteran birder Margaret Roisman.

For the rest of the day, Roisman—along with many other bird enthusiasts and bird-curious people—observed, learned about and appreciated birds during the 2023 Berkeley Bird Festival.

Returning for its third year, the Festival once again created an atmosphere of inspiration and respect for the San Francisco Bay Area’s diverse birdlife and habitat.

Less than a mile away, another birding group wrapped up their trip exploring the Berkeley Meadow trail loop.

“Today we really got to watch the birds walk around in the mudflats. It almost felt like a bird ballet,” recent bird enthusiast Nico Chen said. “Just being able to slow down and see that today was special.”

While 15 other field trips took place around the city of Berkeley, the semicircle and lawn outside the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology on the UC Berkeley campus teemed with bird-related activity.

“We just got here, but I pet Sweetie the pigeon and I think that might have been the pinnacle of my life,” UC Berkeley Gopnik Lab Manager Rose Reagan said.

Other Berkeley faculty, students and visitors to campus flocked to the tables of local science and bird conservation-based organizations including Palomacy, where Reagan almost adopted the rescued King Pigeon hen.

At the top of every hour, the Bears for Birds student birding group introduced festival attendees to the birds of the Berkeley campus



A young birder uses a field guide to ID birds at Cesar Chavez Park during the Berkeley Bird Festival. Photo by Ryan Nakano.

through their own short tours.

“I had a great time on the birding tours since I had never seen falcons on the Campanile before,” said Katie Frevert. “It was incredible to see such amazing birds on campus in Berkeley.”

In addition to nearby bird chalk art and tours of the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, the festival extended to the David Brower Center, where a man wearing a fluorescent green hummingbird costume welcomed community members.

Inside the Brower Center, families donned bird puppets on their hands, and sang along to a catchy refrain led by a Berkeley librarian. Several bird-related talks engaged the public in the Goldman Theater. Upstairs, poetry, art and music

filled the Tamalpais Room and outside, families and friends busied themselves with folding bird origami, building gourd birdhouses, and making their own bird-zines.

Over the course of the day, an estimated 1,000 people attended the festival, marking another successful year for the event.

“It’s been awesome! I’ve shared tips with other birders, got to hear great stories from an expert guide, and saw some really good birds today,” participant Erika Kent said. “This is my first year that I knew it was a thing, but I’ll definitely be back next year.”

The 2023 Berkeley Bird Festival was made possible by the financial support of the UC Berkeley Chancellor’s Community Partnership Fund and the City of Berkeley Civic Arts Commission, and by the participation of the following partners: the UC Berkeley Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, Berkeley Public Library, Bears for Birds, International Bird Rescue, Raptors Are The Solution, Palomacy, Yggdrasil Urban Wildlife Rescue, Cal Falcons, David Brower Center, Front Porch Farm, Folding for Justice, Heyday, Gather Restaurant, Berkeley Community Gardening Collaborative, and the Bay Area Queer Zine Fest.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Winter Birding Classes

This winter we’re offering six birding classes ranging from beginner to advanced. New this year is the North Bay and Skaggs Island Road Raptors class offering an in-depth look at a “wilderness-like paradise” that hosts ducks, shorebirds and uncommon, visiting non-breeding raptors. Visit goldengatebirdalliance.org/classes.

Great Backyard Bird Count

Join the annual Great Backyard Bird Count from February 16-19 to identify, count and submit bird sightings that help scientists around the world learn more about the state of bird populations. It only takes 15 minutes and the use of Merlin/eBird to participate. Last year, watchers participated from more than 200 countries.

Pt. Molate Shoreline Cleanup

Join us on Saturday, February 17, from 10 am–1 pm (low tide) for our Pt. Molate Shoreline Osprey Pre-nesting Season Cleanup. Register through our website Volunteer page at goldengatebirdalliance.org/volunteer, where you will find our Habitat Restoration link with more information and a city of Richmond waiver to sign and return.



Left: Marsh Wren at Las Gallinas. Above: One of the Las Gallinas wildlife ponds. Photos courtesy Tara McIntire.

LAS GALLINAS SANITARY DISTRICT WILDLIFE PONDS: BIRDING HOTSPOT

BY TARA MCINTIRE

LOCATION

300 Smith Ranch Road, San Rafael

One can hardly leave the parking lot without ticking off a handful of species.

Don't judge a site by its name. Poop ponds, settlement lagoons, waste-water treatment plants—call them what you want. Such seemingly undesirable locations make birders swoon! Here in the Bay Area, we are lucky to have our own waste-water paradise: Las Gallinas Sanitary District Wildlife Ponds in San Rafael.

Built in 1985, three treatment ponds provide storage for tertiary treated water before the water is released into an adjacent creek. Bordered by an expanse of Bay saltmarsh and agriculture fields, the property offers the potential for 250 bird species! It's no wonder there have been over 9,000 eBird checklists submitted (no other Bay area hot spot comes close).

The site is an easy drive from the East Bay and San Francisco. After parking in the lot or along the entry roadway shoulder, visitors will find a portable restroom, trash and recycling receptacles, and a drinking fountain.

One can hardly leave the parking lot without ticking off a handful of species (this author saw her first Harris' Sparrow without leaving the car!). The main trail system begins at the concrete bridge that spans a small creek. During the winter this creek can be covered in waterfowl, providing excellent views of such beauties as Cinnamon Teal, Green-winged Teal, and Northern Shovelers, along with a smattering of shorebirds. In spring and summer months, the bridge is home to hundreds of nesting Cliff

Swallows that fill the air like a swarm of bees.

Part of the larger Bay Trail network, the flat, wide gravel trails loop around the ponds offering approximately three miles of easy walking. A few well-located benches offer a place to rest, eat lunch, and gaze across the beautiful, birdy landscape. The ponds themselves, like the seasons, change with nearly every visit.

The multitude of ducks in winter allows for a deep study of species, especially females, juveniles, and hybrids, that can ruffle the feathers of even the most experienced birder. Spring is equally engaging with floating feathered puffballs and bold, Marsh Wrens belting out their "type-writer" songs from atop the reeds. Where the trail meets the saltmarsh, winter king tides can expose invisible species such as Sora, Virginia Rail, Ridgway's Rail and the ever-elusive Black Rail. Keep your eyes peeled too for a wide array of raptors that find the ponds, fields, and marsh to be prime hunting grounds. Always scan the powerline towers for "lumps" and be sure to look for small brown blurs that streak across the sky (Merlin!). Most of all, expect to be surprised here. You never know when you might see a Green Heron, Least Bittern, Burrowing Owl, or even a badger.

For more information and a trail map, please visit the Las Gallinas website at www.lgvsd.org/community-programs/public-access/wildlife-info.

Have a favorite birding site you'd like to share? Contact rnakano@goldengatebirds.org.



Lincoln's Sparrow.

FOR THE LOVE OF SPARROWS

ED HARPER AND ED PANDOLFINO

ZOOM

Thursday, January 18
7 p.m. Google
Community Space in SF
(188 The Embarcadero,
San Francisco) and Zoom

If you still think of sparrows as LBJs (little brown jobs); hard to identify, and generally unexciting...prepare to have your world rocked! The two Eds will take you on a journey to reveal the subtle beauty of their plumage and their songs. Along the way, you may pick up some ID tips and learn about the unparalleled variety of sparrow song composition.

Ed Harper was a long-time educator before taking up bird photography. He and his wife travel extensively, photographing the world's wildlife and scenery. Ed spends much of his time in his home state of Montana.

Ed Pandolfino's convoluted journey toward ornithology has taken him from touring Europe in a rock band, to getting a Ph.D. in Biochemistry, to becoming obsessed with all things bird. He has coauthored two bird books, published dozens of research papers, but loves nothing better than being alone at dawn recording bird song.

Zoom links and passcodes for upcoming presentations are available on our Speaker Series website at goldengatebirdalliance.org/education/speaker-series.

HOW BIRDS ARE RESPONDING TO CLIMATE CHANGE

MORGAN W. TINGLEY

HYBRID

Thursday, February 15
7 p.m. program
Zoom

While we have yet to lose a single bird species to climate change, birds and other creatures are adapting and responding in myriad ways. Across the world, species are shifting their geographic distributions, the timing of life history events, and even their body shapes and sizes. Integrating field research and citizen science, this talk demonstrates the complex ways species are responding to a changing climate.

Morgan Tingley joined the faculty at the University of California, Los Angeles in 2020, after previously serving as an Assistant Professor at the University of Connecticut and as a David H. Smith Conservation Research Fellow at Princeton University. He holds a Ph.D. in Environmental Science, Policy, and Management from the University of California, Berkeley.



Ruby-crowned Kinglet.

Rick Lewis

WHAT AN OWL KNOWS

JENNIFER ACKERMAN

ZOOM

Thursday, March 21
6 p.m. program
Zoom

Humans' fascination with owls was first documented in the cave paintings at Chauvet in southern France. With their forward gaze and quiet flight, owls are often a symbol of wisdom, knowledge, and foresight. But what does an owl really know? And what do we really know about owls? Jennifer Ackerman explores the rich biology and natural history of owls and examines remarkable new scientific discoveries about their brains and behavior.

Jennifer Ackerman has been writing about nature and science for three decades. Her latest book, *What an Owl Knows: The New Science of the World's Most Enigmatic Birds* is a *New York Times* bestseller. Her previous books include *The Genius of Birds* (2016) and *The Bird Way* (2020).



Great Horned Owlets in nest.

Jennifer Ackerman

DONATIONS

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 Bird Alliance. In this issue we recognize all those who donated through our Summer and Fall appeals and all of our major donors from the past year.

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MISSION STATEMENT

Golden Gate Bird Alliance's mission is to inspire people to protect Bay Area birds and our shared natural environment.

ABOUT GOLDEN GATE BIRD ALLIANCE

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1 Tesla Park

Golden Gate Bird Alliance advocates for Tesla Park to be classified as a reserve and renamed Hismet Warep Horsetka.

4 Berkeley Bird Festival

For the third year in a row, the annual festival invoked and inspired the joy of birds for communities here in the Bay Area.

5 Las Gallinas

This waste water treatment plant in San Rafael is a birder's paradise, with an impressive list of up to 250 bird species.

BACKYARD BIRDER



Bob Gunderson

Green-winged Teal.

GREEN-WINGED TEAL

BY BLAKE EDGAR

While not likely to turn up in your yard, the Green-winged Teal (*Anas crecca*) is particularly widespread and abundant in North America during winter. Just over a foot in length, with a wingspan under two feet, it is our most diminutive dabbling duck—and perhaps the most distinguished in appearance.

Its common name refers to the vivid green speculum, a rectangular patch on the forewing, conspicuous in males and females. Adult

males in breeding plumage display the distinctive chestnut head with a Kelly green, crescent-shaped swoosh from the eye down the back of the head; a white slash alongside the breast; and a buffy rump with a black border. Females are a more cryptic mottled brown, resembling other teals, but the speculum is a reliable field mark. Fast wing beats and fluid formations characterize their flight pattern, and they can lift off directly from the water.

Green-winged Teal overwinter across the continent from southern Canada to Mexico and the Caribbean. You might spot them in the mudflats near Golden Gate Fields or at several East Bay Regional Park District shoreline parks. They prefer freshwater ponds or lakes, shallow estuaries, and tidal marshes.

As dabbling ducks, teal procure food suspended in water while swimming or wading. Shorebirds probe down into mudflat sediment with pointed bills, while Green-winged Teal siphon food from the mud's surface in shallow water. Comb-like lamellae lining their bill's inner edge strain food from the water. One study on feeding ecology in seasonal marshes of the Central Valley found that Green-winged Teal consume mostly seeds and aquatic vegetation in the early winter months, with insect larvae and other invertebrates providing more of the diet later in the season.

Many males may court the same female with visual and vocal displays. Green-winged Teal pair up on their wintering grounds, but breeding occurs primarily in northern habitats, such as the boreal forests of Alaska and Canada. Nests are shallow depressions hidden in grass not far from a pond or other water source. Precocial ducklings develop quickly—able to swim and forage within hours of hatching—and fledge in about a month.