

THE GULL

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GOLDEN GATE BIRD ALLIANCE // VOL. 108 NO. 4 FALL 2024



PARTNERSHIP IN THE EAST BAY'S PARKS

BY BLAKE EDGAR

In November 1934, in the midst of the Great Depression, voters in seven East Bay cities approved a ballot measure promising jobs through the creation of several ridgeline parks. With land in the Oakland and Berkeley hills luring real estate developers and no agency preserving the watershed, park advocates made the unprecedented proposal for a new government agency to achieve their goal.

CONTINUED on page 3



Glenn Phillips

Middle Lake Restoration Project.

REFLECTING ON RESTORATION

BY GLENN PHILLIPS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

On a beautiful, foggy morning in July, a dozen representatives from San Francisco environmental groups gathered in Golden Gate Park with SF Recreation and Parks Commissioner Phil Ginsburg and his key natural resources staff. This meeting, the first since the COVID-19 pandemic began, provided an opportunity for environmentalists to share their concerns and celebrate recent successes with the Parks Department. Among the successes was the significant increase in native plant stock grown in the

department's nursery, rising from less than 10% in 2020 to over 40% in 2024.

The highlight of the meeting was a tour of the newly opened Middle Lake Rehabilitation Project. Located at the center of the Chain of Lakes area on the west side of Golden Gate Park, Middle Lake was originally dug out of the sand dunes in 1898. Over time, it steadily declined, and by the late 1980s, it had become little more than a damp meadow, overrun with invasive species.

The rehabilitation project, which began in 2018, involved a complete rebuilding of the lake. The work included; adding a shallow shelf around the lake's perimeter to create potential habitat for threatened California Red-legged frogs, removing invasive species (including a significant number of eucalyptus trees), and planting over 100,000 native plants. Unlike previous restoration efforts in Golden Gate Park, this project's construction contract includes long-term maintenance to ensure the newly planted native species fully establish themselves.

As Commissioner Ginsburg rightfully pointed out "Middle Lake is an extremely important habitat for a variety of birds, including ducks, cormorants, geese, red-tailed and red-shouldered hawks, and great blue herons...". We couldn't agree more.

With almost 80 bird species observed at Middle Lake in the past month, and from GGBA's own ongoing habitat restoration efforts at nearby North Lake, we know just how critical these projects are to ensure the future of birds in the Bay Area.

Thanks to strong allies like Commissioner Ginsburg, Bay Area environmentalists and advocates, and the funding support of Park Bonds, the General Fund, and the Open Space Fund, we can continue to provide good wildlife habitat and accessible green spaces.

If you'd like to explore this corner of Golden Gate Park, you can join the Golden Gate Bird Alliance for a field trip to Middle Lake through our new bird curious trips, or participate in a habitat restoration project at nearby North Lake.

NEWS BRIEFS

Point Molate

In July, the City of Richmond, Guidiville Rancheria of California (Pomo), and East Bay Regional Parks District agreed to turn the 80-acre Point Molate tract on the Point San Pablo Peninsula into a regional park. Thank you to everyone who helped push for this outcome!

New Private Birding Tours

If you've ever wanted your own personal birding guide in the Bay Area, now you can hire one through our new Private Birding Tours program. Whether it's a solo trip for yourself or you have a group of friends, we have options for all your birding needs.

Elected Board Members

At our Annual Members Meeting in August, our members officially voted in John Callaway, Susan MacWhorter, Kenneth Hillan, Laurie Sample, and Mary Wand to serve on the Golden Gate Bird Alliance Board of Directors. All but one are serving their first term with GGBA.

Volunteer Appreciation Picnic

On Sunday, October 6 from 10am-1pm we'll be celebrating the incredible work of all our volunteers with guided birding and lunch on us at Wildcat Canyon (Elderberry picnic Area). If you're a volunteer with GGBA visit the volunteer page of our website to register.

PARTNERSHIP from page 1

After California Governor James Rolph signed the nation's first law to establish a regional park district in August 1933, 14,000 Bay Area residents signed petitions to place a park measure on the ballot the following year. The measure passed with 71% in favor of establishing the new district. Two years later, the first three East Bay Regional parks were established: Upper Wildcat Canyon (later named Tilden), Lake Temescal, and Round Top (now Sibley Volcanic Regional Preserve).

Celebrating its 90th anniversary this year, the East Bay Regional Park District now comprises nearly 127,000 acres in Alameda and Contra Costa counties and 73 individual parks—making it the nation's largest regional park system.

Imagine life here without Briones, Coyote Hills, Sunol, and Reinhardt Redwood. Many East Bay Regional Parks are fixtures of Golden Gate Bird Alliance's classes and field trips. Some have been sites of conservation victories, and two (Arrowhead Marsh and Meeker Slough) still benefit from our habitat restoration program. For decades, the Alliance has been an avid partner—and occasional provoker—to the Park District's ambitions to acquire land.

In 2017 during the opening reception of GGBA's centennial exhibition, the Park District's General Manager at the time, Robert Doyle, said, "I don't know of any other partner (GGBA) that has done more to get kids to the shoreline, to learn about birds and the plants you restored to nourish the birds."

The 55 miles of shoreline managed by the Park District do indeed provide rich habitat for birds and have been particularly prominent locations for GGBA action.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Regional Shoreline, Oakland

Decades of advocacy to protect tidal marsh in San Leandro Bay culminated in 1971, when GGBA secured Arrowhead Marsh as a refuge for the endangered Ridgway's Rail. Four years later, the Port of Oakland transferred Arrowhead and surrounding marshland to the Park District. In 1986, GGBA and others sued the Port to stop the filling of adjacent wetlands—leading to the



Maureen Lahiff giving a bird talk to group in front of Arrowhead Marsh.

Janet Carpinelli

The East Bay Regional Park District now comprises nearly 127,000 acres in Alameda and Contra Costa counties and 73 individual parks—making it the nation's largest regional park system.

restoration of 73 acres now known as the New Marsh.

Each month, GGBA volunteers plant native vegetation, remove weeds, and clear trash at Arrowhead Marsh. In 1999, what began as the Martin Luther King, Jr. Wetlands Project evolved into GGBA's award-winning Eco-Education Program with Title I Bay Area schools.

Robert W. Crown Memorial State Beach, Alameda

Low tide at Elsie Roemer Bird Sanctuary draws a diverse, abundant array of shorebirds to the exposed mudflat at this six-acre marsh. In 1979, the Park District dedicated the marsh to Elsie Roemer, the environmentalist who battled against wetland development in Alameda and Arrowhead Marsh and documented Alameda's nesting colony of California Least Terns. GGBA's annual conservation award also bears Roemer's name.

West of the sanctuary on Crown Beach, GGBA members have monitored another endangered species, Snowy Plover. In 2013,

GGBA persuaded the Park District to install signs alerting beachgoers to the plovers' seasonal presence in order to reduce disturbance of their roost.

Point Pinole Regional Shoreline, Richmond

The Giant Powder Company, the first American company licensed to make dynamite, occupied Point Pinole from 1892-1960. After Bethlehem Steel aborted a plan to build a manufacturing plant there, GGBA contributed \$100,000 in 1973 to help the Park District purchase Point Pinole, which harbors rarely seen Black Rails.

At the southern end of Point Pinole, the Dotson Family Marsh honors the legacy of environmentalist Whitney Dotson, who served on the boards of both the Park District and GGBA, and whose father spearheaded the first of several fights to save the site from development. Acquired for the regional shoreline in 2011 and then restored, the 100-acre marsh once hosted GGBA's winter docent program, engaging the local community in bayside birding.

LET'S BOND OVER BIRDS: A LOOK AT PROP 4

BY RYAN NAKANO

On the eastern end of Alameda, past a maze of vacant military housing units, a tiny off-white puff of feathers peeks from below a sleek Nike swoosh-of-a-bird. Beside the new family sits a beautiful speckled shell.

Every year, the newest members of the Least Tern Colony nesting in Alameda Point, emerge onto the sands of an old airfield and into the world. Each new chick sparks hope in the hearts of those who have advocated on the endangered bird's behalf.

But the world is changing, the planet is warming, and rising tides threaten nesting sites around the Bay.

According to National Audubon's Survival By Degrees climate tool, an increase of 1.5 degrees celsius could cause the Least Tern population to lose at least half its local habitat in the Bay, that is, unless something is done.

In early July, the California legislature approved a \$10 billion Climate Bond, which will show up on November ballots as "Prop 4", the Parks, Environment, Energy, and Water Bond Measure.

For this \$10 billion to become a reality, Prop 4 must be approved by a simple majority (51%) of California voters. Once approved, the state will issue this general obligation bond to fund climate resiliency projects.

This historic bond measure represents an investment for people, birds, other wildlife and the land itself.

The bond earmarks \$1.2 billion towards increasing coastal resiliency and protecting coastal lands from sea level rise, \$85 million of which is specifically reserved for habitat restoration and conservation projects in the San Francisco Bay Area.

According to the State Coastal Conservancy, Pier 94, Heron's Head Park, Pt. Isabel, and De-Pave Park are all habitat sites in the SF Bay Area in need of significant funding.

De-Pave Park sits adjacent to where the Least Tern colony currently nests on the grounds of the former Naval Air Station in Alameda. Upon its completion, the park will create new habitat for these birds and increase their chances of surviving in the Bay.

If Prop 4 passes in November, projects like De-Pave park will



Rick Lewis

Learn Tern.

have a higher likelihood of coming to fruition.

Of course, these kinds of projects are not only beneficial to birds and other wildlife, but they actively support human resilience to climate change, with 40% of bond funds reserved for climate-vulnerable and disadvantaged communities.

The proposition comes at a critical time. Back in early May, Governor Gavin Newsom announced \$9 billion in cuts to climate-related programs, \$400 million of which was slated for the State Coastal Conservancy, a key funding partner for Golden Gate Bird Alliance.

For the Bay Area and the rest of California, Prop 4 is an egg, a beautiful speckled shell holding our home and the future in its protective care. Learn how you can help make Prop 4 a reality at yesonprop4ca.com.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Birding For Everyone Fellowship

If you're a birder living in the Bay Area and you identify as a member of an under-represented community, consider applying for the Birding for Everyone Fellowship by Friday, October 18. This program provides free access to our classes, a GGBA membership, and the support of a 10-person cohort.

Save the Dates - Christmas Bird Count

Every year, Golden Gate Bird Alliance proudly hosts three opportunities for you to contribute to one of the nation's longest running citizen science projects, The Christmas Bird Count. Come out with us in Oakland December 15, Richmond December 29, and San Francisco December 27 to count birds!

Lights Out for Fall Migration

From now until November 13, during Fall bird migration, we invite you to turn off your lights from 11pm to 6am at home and at your workplace to keep birds safe at night. Follow us on social media for more tips on what you can do to go #LightsOut for birds.



From left: Ruby-crowned Kinglet courtesy Melani King; Booker T. Anderson Jr. Park courtesy Richmond Initiative Committee.

BOOKER T. ANDERSON JR. PARK: BAY AREA HOTSPOT

BY DEREK HEINS

LOCATION

Carlson Blvd,
Richmond, CA
94804

Local birders are especially drawn to this park because of the potential to spot a rarity during fall migration

A short distance from the heavily birded shorelines nearby, Booker T. Anderson Jr. Park's 22 acres in the City of Richmond has become a gem for local birders. The park was named in honor of the reverend of Easter Hill United Methodist Church, a leader of the civil rights movement who hosted Martin Luther King Jr. at his home on the corner of Bay view and South 55th Street.

Baxter Creek, flowing from its source in the Berkeley Hills, bisects the park and is the key to making this park a draw for birds. If you're flying out of Oakland International Airport, look down and you'll see this island of green against an otherwise urban landscape. A short walk from the parking lot you'll find a bridge crossing the creek. You can bird the creek from either side, with the best area typically on the southside, near the baseball field. Look for Lesser and American Goldfinches, Cedar Waxwings, Downy Woodpeckers, Orange-crowned Warblers, American Robins, Black Phoebe, Chestnut-backed Chickadees, Oak Titmice and California Towhees. The transformation of this stretch of Baxter Creek to enhance its habitat created quite a controversial situation early this century, including what became known as the "Chainsaw Massacre".

Local birders are especially drawn to this park

because of the potential to spot a rarity during fall migration. On a magical day in October 2022, the first Baltimore Oriole seen in the East Bay since 1954 was spotted in the park. Later that day a Great-crested Flycatcher was spotted, the first ever recorded in the East Bay. Those two stole the show from a Rose-breasted Grosbeak that had been hanging around for almost a month, often visiting the Chinese Pistache tree in the parking lot. Other rarities seen in recent years include Chestnut-sided Warbler, Blackpoll Warbler and American Redstart. More likely to be seen during fall migration are Western Tanagers, Yellow Warblers, Warbling Vireos, and an occasional Willow Flycatcher.

For those who avoid regional parks with challenging terrain and rocky paths, this park offers a paved path that parallels Baxter Creek and then circles the east side of the park. Say hi to some of the local residents who make this loop their daily routine and keep your eyes out for Bay Area resident species and vagrants alike.

GGBA's Richmond Initiative Committee kicked off its efforts in 2021 by creating the Richmond Christmas Bird Count. The committee has identified Booker T. Anderson Jr. Park as an ideal location for outreach and has sponsored events there to share our love of birding.

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

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 our new members from September 2023–August 2024 and all of our major donors from the past year.

Major Donors

\$10,000+

Jennifer Braun & Raymond J. Ryan; The Estate of Susan Diridoni & Satoru Fujii; Randall & Katherine Erickson; Kenneth Hillan & Duncan Robertson; The Estate of Meri Jaye

\$5,000-\$9,999

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Remember the Birds

Including Golden Gate Bird Alliance in your estate plan is a generous way to ensure that the Bay Area remains a haven for the birds you love.

A bequest can be expressed in a will as simply as, "I bequeath [a sum of money, a percentage of my estate, or an IRA, life insurance policy or investment/bank account] to Golden Gate Bird Alliance, 2150 Allston Way, Suite 210, Berkeley, CA 94704."

Consult with your attorney to discuss your particular situation. Learn more on our website at goldengatebirdalliance.org/plannedgiving.

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.

LEAVE A LEGACY FOR BIRDS

When Scrub Jays are made aware of future food scarcity, they will plan ahead, storing excess food in locations with limited resources. When ravens are given a choice between an immediate food reward or a tool to unlock a much larger reward in the future, they tend to delay gratification, and in this way, also plan ahead.

Outside the corvid family, birds “plan” for the future by selecting ideal breeding territories with potential nest sites, reliable food sources and protection against predators. This of course, not only benefits the birds presently planning, but also their offspring.

These impressive feats are an incredible reminder of how we care for the things we value, and how, in the process of planning, we make decisions based on what we feel will make the most positive and lasting impact.

For each one of us, identifying what we value, how we live our values, and what kind of legacy we will leave behind to safeguard and immortalize both is critical.

If you’ve made it this far, chances are, you value birds and their future in the Bay Area and beyond.

Whether you’re a self-identified birder, fellow conservationist, nature lover, or simply enjoy seeing and hearing birds in your own neighborhood, you care enough to remain curious.

Which brings us back to those Scrub Jays and Corvids.

What would it look like to plan, not only for your future, but the legacy you’ll leave behind to ensure theirs?

This is Planned Giving.

Like the Scrub Jay and the Raven, you get



Scrub Jay.

Rick Lewis

to decide when, where, and how to use your resources in order to make the biggest future impact possible.

Many people who share our unwavering commitment to wildlife protection have named Golden Gate Bird Alliance as a beneficiary when planning their estate.

Over the past 90 years, legacy gifts have helped us protect the endangered California Least Tern at the Alameda Wildlife Refuge, save Golden Eagles and other raptors at the Altamont Pass Wind Resource Area, and engage in habitat restoration projects such as Martin Luther King, Jr. Shoreline Park in Oakland where hundreds of children learn about their local watershed each year in our youth education program.

If you’d like to talk with our staff about planned giving options, please contact GGBA Executive Director Glenn Phillips at 510.221.4102 or email gphillips@goldengatebirds.org. We welcome your support of our work to secure a legacy of conservation for Bay Area birds and wildlife.

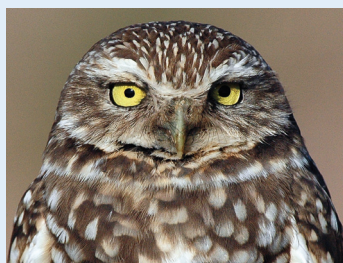
Learn more at goldengatebirdalliance.org/plannedgiving.

SPEAKER SERIES

Due to last-minute cancellations and schedule changes, our Fall 2024 Speaker Series speaker list was not finalized as of press time. Please save the dates, and visit us online for updates at goldengatebirdalliance.org/education/speaker-series.

Thursday, October 17th 7-9pm

Thursday, November 21st 7-9pm



Noreen Weeden

MASTHEAD

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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

The Golden Gate Bird Alliance 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 Bird Alliance

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This issue of *The Gull* was published October 2024.

www.goldengatebirdalliance.org

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

Get Out the Vote for Birds!

As the November elections approach, we urge you to make your voice heard by voting. This year Proposition 4, the Climate Bond, is on the ballot, as well as the East Bay Regional Park District elections. We encourage you to research the candidates' positions on environmental issues and vote for those who align with your values.

BACKYARD BIRDER



Tara McIntire

Fox Sparrow.

FOX SPARROW

BY ERIC SCHROEDER

I remember the first time I saw a Fox Sparrow: a chocolate brown bird hopping and scratching vigorously in leaf litter under redwoods in San Francisco. “Gee,” I thought. “That sure is behaving like a Hermit Thrush.” But the color and pattern weren’t quite right, and the bird was too small. “Sort of like a Song Sparrow,” I mused, but that wasn’t right either. Sensing my confusion, a birder behind me whispered “Fox Sparrow,” a new bird for me, and now a local favorite.

The Fox Sparrow is one of the most variable species in North America, with 18 subspecies divided into four distinct groups based

on appearance: Red, Slate-colored, Large-billed, and Sooty. The most common variety in the Bay Area is the Sooty Fox Sparrow, distinguished by its dark brown (sooty!) plumage and relatively short tail. The easiest way to identify them is by their behavior—that hopping and scratching in the leaf litter under mature trees. Birds of the World describes this foraging technique as a “double scratch,” meaning that both feet move synchronously like a mechanical wind-up bird.

Just as there’s considerable variation in appearance, there are differences in migratory patterns, even within a group. Some subspecies of Sooty Fox Sparrows are altitudinal migrants, meaning they travel relatively short distances from coastal areas to higher elevations in the Sierra, while others undertake one of the longest known journeys over water by a land bird, from Southern California to the Aleutians.

Our local Sooty Fox Sparrows spend the winter here and leave each spring to breed along the coast of southern Alaska. We also get a few of the large-billed subspecies breeding here. (If you see one of these, you’ll know it. Not only is it longer-tailed and reddish in color, but its scientific name, *megarhyncha*, means “big nose,” an apt description.)

Climate change may reduce the winter range for Fox Sparrows in the southeastern United States and in California’s Central Valley, but the Bay Area and Northern California Coast would still remain habitable for them. According to National Audubon, however, the picture is grim during summer months—a three-degree temperature rise would eliminate 72 percent of their current breeding grounds, meaning fewer Fox Sparrows with their distinctive “happy feet.”