

# THE GULL

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GOLDEN GATE BIRD ALLIANCE // VOL. 108 NO. 2 SPRING 2024



## BIRDING FOR EVERYONE FELLOWSHIP

BY RYAN NAKANO

Last February, GGBA members and Black birders Chelsea Connor and Julian Nesbitt organized and led “The Pursuit of Birdiness: A Black History Month Hike and Birdwalk” along the shoreline of Candlestick Point State Recreation Area in San Francisco. “We chose Hunter’s Point because it’s a predominantly Black neighborhood, it’s also near a superfund site and there’s concentrated pollution,” Chelsea Connor said. “So, on the one hand, you have this incredible natural space with amazing bird diversity, but also, the people who should be able to utilize it have other things they have to think about.”

CONTINUED on page 3

White-crowned Sparrow.  
Adan Deeb





Birders at MLK Jr. Regional Shoreline in Oakland.

Rick Lewis

## HONORING THE LEGACY OF EAST BAY REGIONAL PARK DISTRICT

BY GLENN PHILLIPS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

This fall marks the 90th anniversary of the East Bay Regional Park District. We celebrate not only its remarkable growth but also the House’s recent passage of the Migratory Birds of the Americas Conservation Enhancements Act.

Since its modest beginnings with 2,100 acres across three parks, acquired from the East Bay Municipal Utility District in 1934, the East Bay Regional Park District has expanded exponentially. Today, it oversees 124,909 acres spanning seventy-three parks, along with an extensive network of 1,330 miles of regional trails. This growth is a testament to the district’s dedication to preserving natural spaces for both wildlife and the community.

One pivotal aspect of the district’s success is its collaboration with community organizations like Golden Gate Bird Alliance, and other environmental groups. These partnerships have been instrumental in creating, expanding, and improving many parks across the district. From Point Pinole to Sibley to Martin Luther King Jr. Shoreline, the influence of these alliances can be seen in the enhancement of habitats and the promotion of wildlife conservation initiatives. In the coming years, additional acreage along the shoreline such as Point Molate and Golden Gate Fields may join the list, along with additional properties in the Diablo Range. With your help, we will continue to press the district to acquire lands critical for bird

conservation as opportunities arise.

At the same time, the recent passage of the Migratory Birds Act in the House furthers the nation’s commitment to protecting wild birds. This landmark legislation, championed by the entire Audubon network and supported by legislators on both sides of the aisle, strengthens protections for migratory birds and emphasizes the importance of preserving their habitats across the Americas.

At the heart of the Migratory Birds Act is the recognition that birds know no boundaries. Their annual journeys span continents, linking distant habitats in a delicate web of interconnectedness. By enhancing protections for these birds, we are not only safeguarding their populations but also preserving the integrity of entire ecosystems.

The East Bay Regional Park District’s commitment to habitat preservation and restoration has long been a cornerstone of its mission. Through meticulous stewardship and strategic land management, the district ensures that its parks remain havens for wildlife. Golden Gate Bird Alliance works closely with the district to ensure that management from the marshlands along the San Francisco Bay to the oak-studded hillsides of the East Bay, continues to provide essential refuge for migratory birds and countless other species.

As we reflect on the remarkable journey of the East Bay Regional Park District and celebrate the passage of the Migratory Birds Act, let us also acknowledge the invaluable contributions of community organizations and environmental groups. Together, through collaboration and dedication, we can ensure a brighter future for wildlife and preserve the beauty of our natural landscapes for generations to come.

### NEWS BRIEFS

#### New Osprey Nest Cam

Thanks to a grant from the Contra Costa County Fish and Wildlife Propagation Fund, our crane nest camera got a major upgrade just in time for resident Osprey Rosie to return and reunite with her partner Richmond. Check out the new nest cam at [sfbayospreys.org](http://sfbayospreys.org).

#### Winter Gull 2024 Correction

In the last issue of the Gull we unintentionally left out our organizing partner for the Berkeley Bird Festival, California Institute for Community, Arts, and Nature (Cal ICAN) in the “Berkeley Bird Festival Flies High” article. The festival would not be possible without their dedicated team.

#### Birdathon Awards Celebration

In honor and recognition of all of our donors, supporters and volunteers during our largest fundraiser of the year Birdathon, we’ll be holding our annual awards celebration on Sunday, May 19 (2-4:30pm) at the Shoreline Center at MLK Jr. Regional Shoreline in Oakland.

## BIRDING FELLOWSHIP from page 1

Between birding, participants learned about the negative impacts of historic redlining, failed redevelopment projects, and industrial pollution on the local community. The trip concluded with a reflection from Connor and Nesbitt. “How can we work to bridge these gaps in our own communities? How can we continue to bring in people who look like us and give them opportunities?”

From educating participants on environmental justice issues to sharing a love of nature and birds, the success of Connor and Nesbitt’s event is just the latest example of leadership coming from Golden Gate Bird Alliance’s Birding For Everyone Fellowship program.

Now in its second year, the fellowship continues to offer free membership, a year’s worth of classes, and a mentor-led cohort experience to 10 Bay Area residents from underrepresented communities. The intention behind the fellowship is to nurture diverse leadership by eliminating financial and social barriers to GGBA programs.

“The environmental movement needs to have more people from different communities of color and other minority groups be its face,” Nesbitt shared in his fellowship application. “Environmental leaders like me can bring in new perspectives and ideas to move the conversation forward.”

For Nesbitt, co-organizing the Black History Month event for GGBA was the first time he had ever led a birding trip since beginning his birding journey in 2021.

But even outside the Birding For Everyone program, Nesbitt has been moving the conversation forward through his work as an ecologist at Kleinfelder and his education-based collaborations (Wildlife Media Network and Wild Thoughts Podcast) with fellow Black birder Tykee James.

Similarly, Chelsea Connor’s passion for the natural world and environmental justice was evident long before her involvement as a BFE fellow. Connor not only co-founded Black Birders Week, she is also working on publishing a children’s book introducing kids to endemic wildlife species from her home island of Dominica.

And these are just two of the fellows from the current cohort.



Black History Month Birding Trip.

### *“How can we continue to bring in people who look like us and give them opportunities?”*

There’s also Adan Deeb, a 25-year-old Palestinian scientist who earned her Masters of Science in Biology at SFSU, writing her master’s thesis about the effect of urbanization on the beak morphology of Darwin’s finches. Deeb has already attended GGBA lectures and field trips on Diving Birds, and participated in BFE-specific birding trips.

“During the gathering of new and old (BFE) cohort members, the atmosphere and vibes were so light,” Deeb said. “It felt easy to talk to everyone and I didn’t feel like I had to put on a face or make an extra effort to fit in.”

For BFE Fellowship Mentor, Daniela Sanchez, this is the space out of which leadership grows, a space she is actively trying to curate based on her experience as a fellow from the first cohort. “I think in the cohort we found our comfort more or less. We understood we didn’t need to know everything about birding to make an impact. Skylar built a class. Others volunteered. All of these things are ramifications of that comfort,” Sanchez said.

Cohort members from the program’s first year like Julian Vigo Rivera and Jessika Reyes-Serrano, created their own community events including several birding in Spanish opportunities. Others like Skylar Wang helped develop beginning birding classes.

Doubling the number of applicants in

its second year, from 28 to 56, the Birding For Everyone Fellowship is continuing to grow and provide professional development opportunities.

Take 29-year-old Mexican-American and Native-American cohort fellow Lauren Rangel for example.

For the past couple of years Rangel has been considering a career change. Without the current means to go back to school for a degree in Wildlife Biology, Rangel saw the fellowship as an opportunity to discover the kind of work she would like to do in the future. “The two other girls I’m in classes with have backgrounds in biology and they both just completed their masters so it’s been nice to ask them how they did it,” Rangel shared. “Each person is a little world that I’ve never had a key into.”

Just two years in, the Birding For Everyone Fellowship is showing great potential thanks in large part to Bruce Mast and Amy Chong who laid the groundwork for the program, Rachel Katz who served as the first BFE mentor, current BFE mentor Daniela Sanchez, and most of all, all past and present fellows for pushing the program and organization into the future.

Learn more about the Birding For Everyone Fellowship at <https://goldengate-birdalliance.org/scholarship>.

# BIRDATHON AUCTION COMING IN MAY

BY DARYL GOLDMAN

**O**ur annual online Birdathon Adventure Auction returns on May 5 with 40 extraordinary birding experiences, family activities, bird art, and fine dining.

This year's highlights include nine "bed and bird" vacation packages—pairing accommodations with a private bird guide at birding hotspots that include Southeast Arizona, the Colorado Rockies, New York City's Central Park, Portland Oregon, Mendocino, Bodega Bay, San Francisco, and the Monterey Peninsula.

The Bodega Bay trip offers three days of fall migration birding with guide Bruce Mast, while the Rocky Mountains trip provides nine days of summertime birding (airfare and transportation included!) with Viviana Wolinsky and Steve Hunter.

We're also offering some stand-alone vacation stays without a bird guide, including a beachside condo in San Diego, Howard Creek Ranch above Mendocino, Sierra Hot Springs, and the Sky Islands of Arizona.

No winter is complete without a trip to Lodi to see thousands of wintering Sandhill Cranes. Heighten that experience with auction items including an elegant dinner for two at the Towne House restaurant in Lodi, a two-night stay in a Lodi vacation home, or a tailgate viewing party hosted by Golden Gate Bird Alliance Executive Director Glenn Phillips.

Closer to home (your own backyard!), you can win a customized landscape design by former GGBA board member Amy Chong to create a garden that welcomes birds, butterflies, and of course your human friends.

Take to the water with your binoculars for an SF Bay schooner cruise or an Elkhorn Slough safari. Hop on a private Oakland History Bicycle Tour or learn to digiscope with EBRP naturalist Anthony Fisher. Enjoy a date night with Berkeley Rep tickets and dinner at Gather. Love coffee or chocolate? We've got you covered.

We've also got two private birding lessons—a half-day with noted birder Judith Dunham and a birding-by-ear outing for beginners with the excellent Erica Rutherford and John Colbert. Got kids or grandkids? Bid on our museum package, toddler bird dress, or craft session making Fairy Doors for your garden.



Chiricahua Mountains by Daryl Goldman.

Expand your nature library with a package of eight Heyday Press books, including field atlases signed by author Obi Kaufman. Bring birds into your home with art prints by Tex Buss and Rita Sklar or a papier-mâché sculpture of your favorite bird by Nancy Overton. For an even more personalized artwork, have your name spelled out in watercolor images of birds by Jeanette Nichols!

Finally, GGBA favorites Bob Lewis and Eric Schroder return with a Portuguese dinner for eight and Bob's fantastic slides of birds of Portugal. And Out of This World Optics, our favorite place to shop for binoculars and scopes, is again donating a \$500 gift certificate so you won't miss a single bird on your far-flung birding trips or in your own backyard.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### BioBlitz at Pier 94

As part of the annual City Nature Challenge run by The Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County and California Academy of Sciences, we are hosting a Bioblitz event where participants will record all wildlife at Pier 94 on Sunday April 28 from 9:30am-12pm.

### Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour

The 20th Annual Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour and Green Home Features Showcase kicks off its in-person program on Saturday, May 4 and Sunday, May 5. This is a great opportunity to learn about the benefits of native plants. To learn more visit: [www.bringingbackthenatives.net](http://www.bringingbackthenatives.net).

### Birdathon Auction Opens

Treat yourself to birding experiences, art, and other items during our Birdathon Auction. Highlights include "bed and bird" vacation packages in hotspots such as Arizona, the Rockies, and NYC, where you can explore Central Park with a local birding guide. Visit: <https://www.32auctions.com/GGBA2024>.



Wildcat Canyon. Photos courtesy Margot Bezurczyk.

## WILDCAT CANYON REGIONAL PARK: BIRDING HOTSPOT

BY MARGOT BEZRUTCZYK

### LOCATION

5755 McBryde Ave,  
Richmond, CA

*A two-hour  
loop affords  
access to all  
the habitats.*

When I needed to find a weekly birding patch for the Golden Gate Bird Alliance Master Birder course in 2022, I wanted a place with an abundance of birds in all seasons, beautiful natural scenery, and a variety of habitats. With just weeks to decide, I scrambled to bird in as many East Bay parks as possible, and a winner emerged: Wildcat Canyon.

The park's habitat includes oak woodland, expansive grassy hills, chaparral, a rushing creek in winter, and perhaps most uniquely, an abandoned arboretum from the former Belgum Sanitarium. A two-hour loop starting at the Alvarado Staging Area affords access to all these habitats, perfect for studying Bay Area birds across the seasons. Fox Sparrows, Hermit and Varied Thrushes, Western Meadowlarks, Red-breasted Sapsuckers, White-throated Sparrows, and tremendous flocks of American Robins can be found in the woods and grasslands in winter. In spring, the oaks provide excellent habitat for migrating passerines. So abundant is the morning bird-song at the park entrance, that it's often difficult to leave the parking lot. Breeding birds in late spring and summer include some special individuals, such as Western Tana-

gers and California Thrashers. In the fall, oaks are host to migrating warblers, including a famous Canada Warbler one recent year. Year-round raptors included buteos, accipiters, and a regular American Kestrel.

Birding among the ruins of the Belgum Sanitarium may sound creepy, but the estate was actually more of a luxury getaway for the wealthy, boasting kitchen gardens and live music. Today, the garden is feral, and remaining horticultural specimens include fruit trees, date palms, and spring ephemerals from long-ago planted bulbs. The date palms provide habitat for several interesting species, including Bullock's Orioles and Barn Owls. Look for tiny skulls and owl pellets under the trees to see where the owls have been roosting.

I visited on a recent weekend and stood in awe of an oak absolutely crawling with Townsend's Warblers and Dark-eyed Juncos, noting there were not many other birders in the park on a Saturday. Whether you're looking for a patch to deeply study birds across the seasons, a hike with ridgeline views of the bay to take your non-birding friends, or a place to rack up 60 species on a spring morning, it's worth checking out.

Have a favorite birding site you'd like to share? Contact [rnakano@goldengatebirds.org](mailto:rnakano@goldengatebirds.org).

SPEAKER SERIES



Western Tanager.

Kenneth Lui

## WILD STORIES FROM THE HISTORY OF BIRD MIGRATION RESEARCH

REBECCA HEISMAN

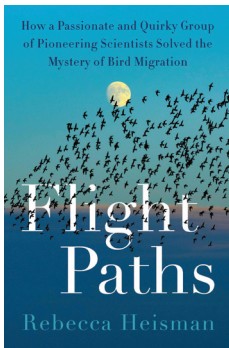
We've all heard amazing facts about bird migration—the long distances that birds travel, the ways that they navigate, etc. But did you ever wonder how we figured all of this out? While working for the American Ornithological Society, Rebecca Heisman became fascinated with the varied and creative techniques that scientists have used to study bird migration, and this eventually became the basis for her book “Flight Paths: How a Passionate and Quirky Group of Pioneering Scientists Solved the Mystery of Bird Migration”. In her talk, she'll share some surprising stories from the history of bird migration research and discuss why understanding migration is so crucial for bird conservation.

Rebecca Heisman is an award-winning science writer who lives in Walla Walla, Washington, and has worked with organizations including the Audubon Society, the American Bird Conservancy, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and the American Ornithological Society. Flight Paths is her first book.

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

ZOOM

Thursday, April 18  
7 p.m. program  
Zoom



## BERING SEA SAGA: A TALE OF TWO BIRDERS

JONAH BENNINGFIELD AND MARK RAUZON

On-island and at-sea perspectives show how changes in the Bering Sea affect its birds, from St. George's 1,000 foot tall cliffs where Red-legged Kittiwakes nest, to the new range extension, an indication of how animals are moving north into the Chukchi Sea.

Mark James Rauzon is a tenured geography professor at Laney College, Oakland. He is also a seabird biologist and is currently working on a book about the Bering Sea.

Jonah Benningfield was born and raised in San Francisco, and currently goes to community college in the city. When not in school he works as a field tech in remote places, especially throughout Alaska and on islands.

HYBRID

Thursday, May 23  
7 p.m. In-Person at the Tamalpais Room (David Brower Center) and Online via Zoom



Eiders in the Arctic.

Mark Rauzon

## SERENDIPITY AND SALT PONDS

NATHAN VAN SCHMIDT

After the Gold Rush, the San Francisco Bay lost nearly all of its tidal wetlands, many of which were converted to commercial salt production ponds. The South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project is now restoring large swaths of tidal marsh habitat, but they face a new dilemma: many bird species that once used wetlands, including the Central Valley and Sierra Nevada, have come to use the salt ponds as accidental habitat.

Dr. Van Schmidt is an ecologist and the Director of Landscape Sustainability Science for San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory. His research emphasizes understanding ecosystems and land-use as coupled systems, combining field research with simulation methodology.

ZOOM

Thursday, June 20  
7 p.m. program  
Zoom



Snowy Plover at salt pond.

Courtesy SFBBO

## 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 of those who donated through our Year End Appeal 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

The Golden Gate Bird Alliance was founded January 25, 1917.

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#### Golden Gate Bird Alliance

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goldengatebirdalliance.org

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

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#### 1 Birding For Everyone Fellowship

Golden Gate Bird Alliance program creates a space for diverse leadership to grow within the current conservation field.

#### 4 Birdathon Auction

Bid on “Bed and Bird” vacations, local date night packages, and family-friendly items to help support the protection of our local birds!

#### 5 Wildcat Canyon

Study your Bay Area birds near the former Belgum Sanitarium in Richmond, CA at this local Master Birder patch.

## BACKYARD BIRDER



Wren-tit.

## WRENTIT

BY TARA MCINTIRE

Sweet, secretive, long-tailed darlings of the scrubby chaparral, Wrentits (*Chamaea fasciata*) are found in every season throughout the Bay Area. Yes, even in your backyard! You’ll hear their distinct descending bouncing-ball song more often than catching a glimpse. Though if you are lucky, you’ll see their clear-yellow eyes peering back through the foliage. Even luckier, you may hear them give a subtle “purr” or “churr” call, another vocalization in their

limited repertoire. Unlike many songbirds (categorized as Passerines—“perching birds”), the non-migratory Wrentits vocalize and defend their territories year-round instead of just during the breeding season. Interestingly, Wrentits aren’t related to the well-known European ‘tits’ as one might assume. Instead, they represent the only member of the Parrotbill family (*Paradoxornithidae*), which are found across Asia.

A West Coast endemic, they are typically found only in a sliver of territory stretching between Southern Washington and Baja. In our region, a quick look at eBird will note their sightings correlate to larger areas of park and open space lands, especially within the urban fabric. Though still considered stable and “a species of least concern,” these birds, like many birds and other wildlife, are directly impacted by habitat loss and fragmentation.

Like some humans, Wrentits are recluses, remaining in their birthplace for the entirety of their lives, often not straying further than a quarter mile! These scrub-skulkers bounce around under the protection of dense branching, feeding on a wide range of insects as well as seeds and berries. As with many birds here in the Bay Area, Poison oak berries are an important food source for Wrentits, so don’t pass by that ‘itchy’ thicket without a good look and listen.

Though they may not be visually dazzling birds compared to some avian show-stoppers, they do possess an unassuming and subtle beauty to be appreciated in the details. From a faint light eyebrow (supercilium) to their slightly curved bill and lovely rufous cream-streaked breast, topped off by a dusky gray-brown feathered coat, it’s hard not to fall in love.

And you will.