

THE GULL

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GOLDEN GATE BIRD ALLIANCE // VOL. 109 NO. 4 FALL 2025



A BIRD SANCTUARY AND THE SANDS OF TIME

BY RYAN NAKANO

Over the past five years, sand has been gathering along Elsie Roemer Bird Sanctuary in Alameda, forming a sand bar past its protective fence. Adjacent to the sanctuary, lies 2.5 miles of man-made beach.

While we don't know how exactly the sediment dynamics work near the sanctuary, it appears to be an hourglass of sorts—sand from Crown Memorial State Beach trickles past a choke point (a concrete groin) and inches its way southeast.

CONTINUED on page 3





Chris Fox

"Bird curious" birders gather at the San Francisco Botanical Garden.

IS GOLDEN GATE BIRD ALLIANCE A BIRDING CLUB? NOT REALLY.

BY GLENN PHILLIPS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

This September, Golden Gate Bird Alliance reached a remarkable milestone: we offered 35 field trips in a single month. That's more than one opportunity every day to get outdoors, connect with others, and—most importantly—connect with birds. But while this milestone may look like the mark of a thriving birding club, GGBA is not, in fact, a birding club.

We are a conservation organization. Our mission is to protect Bay Area birds and their habitats. Part of our theory of change is simple but powerful: the more people who experience the joy of birding, the more advocates we create for the birds who need our help.

And it's working. In the last twelve months, 1,095 unique individuals have participated in our field trips. Together, they've joined us across 310 field trips—not to mention shoreline cleanups, habitat restoration days, adult classes, and other educational events. Each one of these encounters represents not just a moment of discovery, but a step toward building a stronger community of bird advocates.

Our commitment to inclusivity and accessibility continues to expand with the introduction of new initiatives. Bird Curious, launched last year, is designed for people who are brand new to birding—folks who may not own binoculars or know a

chickadee from a cormorant. The program lowers the barriers to entry, offering guided experiences where curiosity is the only prerequisite.

We also introduced Flock Together Birding Meet-ups, a series built to create community among newer birders. These gatherings emphasize camaraderie as much as identification skills, helping participants gain confidence while building friendships. By cultivating a welcoming space, we're ensuring that birding—and by extension, bird advocacy—belongs to everyone.

Our traditional field trips, led by expert volunteer guides, remain the backbone of our programs. But with new offerings like Bird Curious and Flock Together, we are deliberately broadening our reach. Each person who comes to one of our programs is a potential voice for conservation, whether they go on to write letters to policymakers, join habitat restoration projects, or simply share their enthusiasm with friends and neighbors.

Birds need all of us. In an era when habitat loss, climate change, and other pressures are reshaping the natural world, the circle of people who care enough to act must continue to grow. At GGBA, every field trip, every cleanup, and every educational program is a step toward that future.

So when someone asks if we are a birding club, the answer is clear: not really. We are something more. We are a community united by birds, working to ensure their songs continue to fill our skies for generations to come, for the betterment of the entire planet. If you've attended a field trip, but not yet participated in advocacy or restoration work, let this be your call to action!

NEWS BRIEFS

Point Molate is Officially Preserved Park Land

In late August, the East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD) officially announced its completion of the process to acquire 82 acres at Point Molate in the city of Richmond. After decades of advocating as a part of the Point Molate Alliance, GGBA is excited to see this project come to fruition.

Newest Board Member - Cathy Bleier

We are excited to welcome Cathy Bleier, GGBA's Richmond Initiative Committee Chair, to the board. Bringing a strong background in coalition building within the conservation field and decades of fighting to protect crucial habitat in California, Cathy will continue to bring her valuable insight to GGBA.

First Bird-Safe City Building in Berkeley

If you haven't visited the Willard Park Clubhouse in Berkeley yet, you should. As the first new building built with bird-safe windows in the city of Berkeley since the Bird-Safe Building Ordinance went into effect, the community center is not only environmentally responsible but a great place for families and the next generation.

BIRD SANCTUARY from page 1

In August of this year, two individuals took their electric dirtbikes onto the developing sand bar, flushing at least two Least Terns, an endangered species with a breeding colony on the northern end of the island.

The incident was reported to Golden Gate Bird Alliance's listserv, and GGBA's Friends of the Alameda Wildlife Reserve (FAWR) committee responded by reaching out to the City of Alameda's Public Works Department.

Over the past two years, there have been 29 police reports in total documenting humans as well as off-leash dogs within the restricted area.

As bird conservationists, these incidents are alarming.

The Elsie Roemer Bird Sanctuary, is after all, supposed to be just that, a sanctuary—a sacred place of refuge for wildbirds, including endangered species like the California Least Tern and Western Snowy Plover.

Along the sanctuary's perimeter a fence and signs identify the area as a bird sanctuary, reminding the public to respect the space by keeping themselves and their dogs at a safe distance.

In addition, rogue signage recently appeared along the trail running southeast of the sanctuary, stating "...Stay off this beach, don't scare the birds away or trample sensitive vegetation."

Only time will tell if these efforts keep people out of the protected area, but what of the sand itself? Does it benefit or harm habitat potential?

Here is where things get a little messy.

Back in 2013, during the first phase of the Robert W. Crown Memorial State Beach Restoration Project, the East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD) placed 82,600 cubic yards of sand along the shoreline of Alameda just west of the Elsie Roemer Bird Sanctuary, to replenish the artificial beach originally created in 1958.

In 2014, a small population of Western Snowy Plovers were observed overwintering along the restored stretch of beach just north of the sanctuary, an endangered species that had not been seen along the shoreline in decades.

Three years later, EBRPD completed



Elsie Roemer Bird Sanctuary.

Rick Lewis

Over the past two years, there have been 29 police reports in total documenting humans as well as off-leash dogs within the restricted area.

the second phase of the beach restoration project including a 100-foot extension of the pre-existing concrete groin and the replacement of non-native iceplant with Grindelia to support wetland habitat.

Over time, the separation between beach and sanctuary has blurred despite the groin.

What does this mean for the birds of Elsie Roemer? According to EBRPD Wildlife Biologist David "Doc Quack" Riensche, it depends on the species and how much the sand develops.

"On the one hand, some sand deposits and high tide berms are great because it will cushion wave energy getting right up to roosting habitat for birds, and there could be much more sand out there to support Western Snowy Plovers," David Riensche said. "On the other hand some birds will lose out on mudflat habitat."

According to Riensche, the biggest threat to birds at Elsie Roemer are the nonnative plant species that could end up taking over the sand.

Beginning in 2005, there was an effort to restore the mudflat by removing invasive Spartina. Once removed, the Invasive Spartina Project planted native Pacific cordgrass aka Spartina Foliosa which successfully established itself in 2015. Unfortunately, sand has since submerged the native cordgrass.

So what does the future look like for Elsie Roemer Bird Sanctuary?

Addressing sea level rise, with a projected 1-foot increase as soon as 2040, the City of Alameda recently proposed the "Alameda South Shore Beach Area Concept Design Project" to the California State Coastal Conservancy for Measure AA funding.

According to the project proposal, nature-based solutions such as large woody debris are planned to retain Alameda Beach. Meanwhile, the placement of cobble and gravel sill is presented as a means to stave off erosion of the pre-existing marsh habitat at the sanctuary.

These potential strategies in addition to intertidal improvements like offshore eelgrass beds at Elsie Roemer, shows the city's intent to protect both human and avian residents alike.

Importantly, the concept design project includes hydrology and geomorphology studies to help determine the current tidal action and sediment dynamics of the area.

As humans continue to enter the fenced off sanctuary, sand continues to spill over into mudflat, and as the city of Alameda prepares for impending sea level rise, Golden Gate Bird Alliance will advocate for this critical bird habitat.

THE SOVEREIGNTY IN KEEPING DARK SKIES

BY RYAN NAKANO

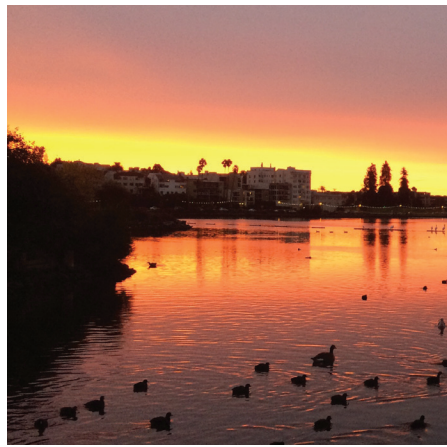
This fall migration, Golden Gate Bird Alliance launched a Lights Out for Birds campaign asking the greater Bay Area community to minimize light usage at night to prevent migratory birds from changing their traditional migratory pathways and unnecessarily meeting the threats of our dense urban environment.

As a bird conservation organization based in the urban cityscape of Berkeley, CA, the issue of artificial light at night (ALAN) and its impact on migratory birds is not new to GGBA.

In fact, in 2008, under the leadership of GGBA's former Director of Conservation Noreen Weeden, the organization ran a robust pilot program in San Francisco, encouraging lights out practices from building owners, management companies, and tenants, as well as orchestrating volunteers to monitor fatal bird collisions with buildings downtown.

It's currently estimated that over one billion birds die from building collisions every year in the United States. In addition, recent studies show a strong correlation between high levels of skyglow produced by artificial light and higher densities of birds stopping in these areas during their migratory journeys.

These two realities, compounded by additional threats birds face once in our urban environment, including predation by cats, pollution, and food scarcity, continue to be central arguments for "going lights out" at night during spring and fall migration



Lake Merritt.

Bob Toleno

periods, but they are not the only reasons.

In May 2025, a short article published by the American Astronomical Society, illuminated a less explored consequence of rising light pollution—the loss of traditional ecological knowledge and indigenous food sovereignty.

Written by Alejandra Meza, Aparna Venkatesan, and John C. Barentine, the article "Impacts of Rising Lights Pollution on Pollinators and Indigenous Food Sovereignty", cites an example of light installations along the Arizona-Mexico border potentially disrupting a migratory route used by half of all North American breeding bird species.

According to the paper, these potential disruptions to pollinator populations and migratory routes pose a threat to indigenous food sovereignty, as individual tribal communities depend on these populations and their species specific routes to be "stable

over time and long distances".

"Indigenous food sovereignty relates to the way that indigenous cultural groups choose to sustain themselves. Each community has its own version and expectations," co-author of the article Alejandra Meza shared with GGBA. "In researching for this paper we looked primarily at groups in North America and found that the cultural knowledge these groups have kept alive inherently involve practices of sustainability."

In short, these decentralized models for sustainable food production require stable environmental cycles in order to remain viable options for these communities.

"In the subtext of the paper is a focus on the word 'sovereignty'. This issue of light pollution is a microcosm of the much larger issue of colonization," co-author and former Director of International Dark Sky Association John C Barentine explained. "Many native groups are now seeing the effects of light pollution, which is not of their own making. They weren't consulted when cities and states made their policies about this and now everything from their food sovereignty, night sky quality, folklore, and oral traditions are at risk."

Concluding the article, the authors cite the recent literature regarding the negative impact of ALAN on the "library of indigenous knowledge systems" found in dark skies.

The call for going "Lights Out" is not only about conserving birds, other wildlife, and energy, its also a call to conserve traditional lifeways.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Fire Restoration and Resiliency along the Carquinez Strait

Join us and East Bay Regional Park District for our first ever fire resiliency and habitat restoration program at the Scenic Fire Site along the Carquinez Overlook Loop Trail on Friday, November 14 from 9:30-11:30am. Visit EBRPD's volunteer program page at: https://ebrpd.samaritan.com/custom/501/volunteer_home.

Christmas Bird Counts

This year you have the opportunity to help us count birds and contribute critical bird conservation data through three separate Christmas Bird Count events—Oakland on Sunday, December 14; SF on Monday, December 29; and Richmond on Saturday, January 3. Learn more by visiting our website at goldengatebirdalliance.org/cbc.

Christmas Bird Count Trainings

Interested in participating in the Christmas Bird Count for the first time? We have two non-mandatory training sessions about this annual tradition, its conservation implications, and how one exactly "counts birds". Join us in Berkeley on November 22 or SF on November 23. Learn more by visiting our website at goldengatebirdalliance.org/cbc.



India Basin Shoreline Park (Wikimedia) and Great Egret (Allen Chase).

INDIA BASIN SHORELINE PARK

BY AARON MAIZLISH

LOCATION

Hunters Point
Boulevard and
Hawes Street
San Francisco, CA
94124

This area is undergoing tremendous positive changes.

India Basin Shoreline Park is a relatively new and expanding city park on the southeast waterfront in San Francisco. This is one of my favorite spots to conduct a quick scan of shorebirds on the mudflats as I have watched this small park improve tremendously over the past decade. The new bay trails connecting India Basin and Heron's Head parks have turned this spot into the most accessible place in the city to see shorebirds up close.

Best as a 20-minute stop to check the mudflats, or as a 90-minute walk to Heron's Head and back, India Basin is only worth visiting at low or falling tide when the mudflats, visible right from the parking spots, are exposed.

For most of the year (except summer) you can observe a small selection of both resident and migrant shorebirds from the paved pathway. The flats often have a few of everything—Willetts, Whimbrels, yellowlegs, curlews, avocets, stilts, Killdeer, various plovers, as well as the smaller sandpipers. The birds shuttle back and forth between Heron's Head and India Basin, preferring the India Basin mudflats at low tide. A resident pair of Black Oystercatchers and about eight wintering Spotted

Sandpipers can be found on the rocks.

Winter brings in flocks of Least Sandpipers that usually contain a few Dunlin and Western Sandpipers. Also, look for large rafts of scoters, scaup and wigeons on the water and a large number of Short-billed (Mew) Gulls. In summer there are always a few Forster's and Caspian Terns feeding on the bay, and once or twice a year you might witness an incursion of California Least Terns—an endangered subspecies thriving at their breeding colonies across the bay in Alameda.

This area is undergoing tremendous positive changes as the City of San Francisco continues its multi-year project to expand the park in this historically underserved neighborhood. When Phase 2 of the new park opened in Summer 2024, we were immediately rewarded with a second mudflat that now fills with shorebirds at low-tide. Phase 3 of the project is even more ambitious, with planned new fishing piers and sports fields.

I worry that construction could change the hydrology of the basin and disrupt the current mudflats. But in the long-term, the extension of the park and bay trails will only lead to enhanced opportunities for wildlife viewing in this post-industrial corner of our city.

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 2024–August 2025 and all of our major donors from the past year.

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\$10,000+

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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.

CELEBRATING 2025 CONSERVATION CHAMPIONS ROBERT HALL, MARY MALEC, AND KATHY KRAMER

This year Golden Gate Bird Alliance (GGBA) gave the Elsie Roemer Conservation Award, named after the Alameda activist who fought for decades to preserve shoreline wetlands, to Robert “Bob” Hall and Mary Malec, and the Paul Covel Award to Kathy Kramer.

Robert Hall: A Steward of Native Habitat and Community Spirit

For years, Robert Hall has been a familiar presence along San Francisco’s Sunset Boulevard, tending native plants and transforming green strips into thriving wildlife corridors. Hall inspires volunteers during community workdays with hands-on lessons about the ecological importance of native flora. His leadership influenced the Middle Lake restoration in Golden Gate Park and has elevated citywide conversations about climate-resilient, bird-friendly landscapes. Through persistent advocacy he has helped forge coalitions of neighbors, conservationists, and city agencies. Partnerships with GGBA, the California Native Plant Society’s Yerba Buena Chapter, and San Francisco Recreation and Parks have amplified his grassroots efforts. As one GGBA leader observed, “Bob shows up, always. He empowers others to take on their own restoration projects.”



Mary Malec: Guardian of Peregrine Falcons

Few individuals have devoted as much time to raptor conservation as Mary Malec. For decades, she has monitored Peregrine Falcon nests across the Bay Area—tracking breeding success, rescuing chicks from hazards, and raising awareness about population threats for the Predatory Bird Research Group at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Malec’s commitment extends from bridges to bell towers, where her knowledge benefits researchers and sparks public fascination. Her steady presence turns nest sites into outdoor classrooms, where community members glimpse the resilience and fragility of wild-life. She represents the best of a largely volunteer network whose dedication has been vital to the falcon’s remarkable comeback.



Kathy Kramer: Cultivating Native Plant Awareness

Since 2005, Kathy Kramer’s Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour has encouraged thousands of Bay Area residents to replace water-thirsty lawns with habitat-rich native gardens. By opening private landscapes to the public and connecting homeowners with native plant resources, Kramer has fostered both ecological restoration and community engagement. Her work demonstrates that backyard choices can ripple outward, providing essential food and shelter for birds, pollinators, and other wildlife.



SPEAKER SERIES

Explore the secret lives of woodpeckers, from their courtship and nest selection in spring to the challenges of surviving the winter, with award-winning author and photographer Paul Bannick on Thursday, November 20 at 7pm, location TBD. Please visit us online for more Speaker Series dates and information at goldengatebirdalliance.org/education/speaker-series.

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.

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Calling all bird advocates!

The Oakland–Alameda Adaptation Committee is currently seeking input on sea level rise concepts for the Alameda Shoreline Adaptation Plan. We strongly encourage you to take their survey and advocate for more open space and habitat restoration/nature-based solutions. Visit <https://forms.oacadapt.org/> to take the survey!



BACKYARD BIRDER



Eric Schroeder

Baby Northern Mockingbird enjoying blueberries.

I KNOW WHY THE MOCKINGBIRD MOCKS

BY ERIC JAMES SCHROEDER

Regarding Northern Mockingbirds (*Mimus polyglottus*), my wife Susan and I are of differing opinions. I don't mind their incessant singing while she doesn't mind them pilfering my blueberries.

We've had mockingbirds residing year-round for a least a decade, with a pair annually in a neighboring hedge. On our street, mockingbird song begins in late February and continues into summer. While both males and females sing, males sing more and have a

larger repertoire—as many as 150 songs. Although both male and female mockingbirds sing during the day, unmatched males will sing at night, too. Thus for months the singing is constant.

By April our backyard pair has had its chicks (typically 3-5 fledglings) and is working on a second clutch. The singing resumes. Sometimes the male forgets to come up for air and sings for hours.

Birds of the World reports that some bonded pairs have as many as three broods annually; if broods overlap, the male will feed the chicks while the female incubates the new eggs in a second nest. In mid-July, I realized my bird might be working on his third nest as he carried a twig into the overhead tree. Incredible!

Males actually have two cycles of song—a spring cycle and a fall one. Thus males can sing for up to three-quarters of the year. (Probably why they wear my wife down.) But most interestingly, the males have two different seasonal repertoires that have minimal overlap. After taking off for a couple of months at the end of summer, my male mockingbird began singing again in October. (I listened for song differences, but my knowledge of mockingbird isn't extensive enough that I could detect them.) Both cycles incorporate one of the traits the birds are best known for—mimicry. If you want an example of this, just search “mockingbird” and “car alarm” or “cell phone.”

Northern Mockingbirds are omnivorous—they eat fruits, insects, earthworms, and even small lizards, with their diets split equally between prey and prey items. During breeding, however, they shift to 85% prey items. But while the adults are busy eating meat in the late spring and summer, their kids are eating my blueberries. In fact, I suspect blueberries are the main component of their diets. I wish they'd grow up and start singing.