



Golden Gate Bird Alliance
East Bay Conservation Committee

Alameda County Bird Species of Conservation Concern



June 2026

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Alameda County is a hotspot for avian biodiversity. Over 400 bird species have been observed in the county across a wide range of habitats, from the bay edge to interior oak woodlands and grasslands. Beyond numbers, birds serve as a valuable indicator of overall ecosystem health. They are exciting and fun to observe and a great way to connect people with the natural world.

Unfortunately, many bird species in Alameda County and the broader Bay Area are threatened or in decline, underscoring the need for improved conservation efforts. Species that use grassland habitats, as well as those using aquatic and wetland habitats, are of particular concern in the county, reflecting historic impacts to these important habitats. Major threats to bird species within the county are habitat loss and degradation, including loss of native plants and impacts of invasive species; disturbances and other direct impacts to bird populations, including impacts from cats and dogs; exposure to contaminants; and climate change.

This document, prepared by Golden Gate Bird Alliance (GGBA), identifies and prioritizes bird species of conservation concern for Alameda County based on population trends, habitat impacts, and other threats to local bird species. The purpose of the document is to provide conservation guidance for GGBA, as well land managers, government agencies, conservation groups, and others interested in bird conservation in the county.

This document serves as a companion to the previous evaluation of bird species of concern for the city and county of San Francisco by GGBA. Following the approach of that effort, notable species of conservation concern were identified from an initial pool of state and federal listed species, as well as National Audubon Society priority species that occur in the county. Additional unlisted species that are of local conservation concern within the county were also included as notable species. Out of the over 400 species that have been observed in the county, 46 notable species of conservation concern were identified for Alameda County.

For each species of concern, we provide a short summary identifying preferred habitats for the species, as well as available information on regional population trends, current threats to the species, and management approaches that could improve their conservation status. We categorized the 46 notable species as High Priority (9 species), Priority (15 species) or Watch (21 species) within the county. In addition to the species summaries, we also provide overviews of habitat types and common threats within the county.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that there are many opportunities to restore and improve local habitats and improve conditions for Alameda County bird species. With coordinated action, we can address and reverse the threats facing our birds and add to the long and growing list of success stories involving bird conservation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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The approach of the document was patterned on the San Francisco Conservation Committee's previous work for San Francisco County; many thanks to Matt Zlatunich for guiding the initial development of the document and for providing advice on the organization and process for identifying notable species, as well as additional input on the document.

The document was developed in coordination with the Ohlone Audubon Society Chapter. We thank Carin High and Bill Hoppes for coordination and providing input from a number of Ohlone Chapter members on the document, including: Phil

and Pat Gordon, David Riensch, Bob Toleno, and others.

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Photographs for the document were provided by: Eildert Beeftink (California Quail, Common Yellowthroat, Black Oystercatcher); David Edelson (redwood forest); Jeff Manker (Burrowing Owl, California Thrasher, Western Meadowlark, salt marsh, oak woodland and grassland); Peter Meyer (Least Tern, Ridgeway's Rail, White-tailed Kite); and Jerry Ting (Grasshopper Sparrow).



California Thrasher



White-tailed Kite

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Bird Species of Conservation Concern of Alameda County. While over 400 bird species have been recorded in Alameda County, many species in the county are declining and face on-going threats, including direct impacts to their populations, habitat loss and degradation, contaminants, and climate change. In order for Golden Gate Bird Alliance (GGBA) to be effective with our conservation work, we need to prioritize efforts towards species that are of greatest concern. This document identifies bird species of conservation concern for Alameda County and highlights conservation needs and threats across species and habitats. The document will be used to prioritize conservation efforts for GGBA within Alameda County, but also will be valuable for other conservation groups and natural resource agencies in the county.

We patterned the development of this document directly on the approach used by GGBA's San Francisco Conservation Committee's document: City and County of San Francisco Bird Species of Conservation Concern (Golden Gate Audubon, 2023). We also relied on information from the Alameda County Breeding Bird Atlas that was developed by GGBA and Ohlone Audubon in 2011 (Richmond et al., 2011).

Using the approach from the SF Conservation Committee, species were identified as "notable" species of conservation concern in two ways: First, species that occur in Alameda County and

are on a Federal, California (State), or National Audubon Society (NAS) list qualified as notable species of concern based on the following criteria:

- any species included on Federal, State or NAS lists that are residents or summer residents (i.e., breeding) in the county (including Federal or State species of concern), or
- Federal or State Threatened or Endangered species that are winter residents, or post breeding residents in the county.

All of the listed species that occur in Alameda and that were considered in our review are included in Section 1, with notable species in bold in that section.

Second, additional species that are not Federal, State, or NAS listed species were identified as notable species based on existing conservation concerns of GGBA, input from a wide range of reviewers (see below), and the East Bay Conservation Committee. These additional non-listed species are included in Section 2. Many additional non-listed species were carefully considered for Section 2 (e.g., Wood Duck, Greater Roadrunner, Prairie Falcon, Bell's Vireo, American Dipper, Bell's Sparrow, and Blue Grosbeak), including species where Alameda County may be on the border of their overall distribution. Although these species are not included as notable species, they warrant on-going monitoring and evaluation, along with many other species in the county. Overall, we found that many species, including notable species, are in

need of additional monitoring, highlighting the role that all of us can play in furthering data collection and local species conservation.

Summary information for every notable species from Sections 1 and 2 is provided in Section 3, including information on habitat use, threats, and conservation needs. In addition to their overall status as a species of conservation concern in Alameda, all notable species were assigned a rating to indicate the degree of local conservation concern as follows:

Alameda High Priority: Highest concern for immediate conservation actions based on population declines, impacts to habitat, and/or other threats in the county.

Alameda Priority: Significant concern for priority conservation actions based on population declines, impacts to habitat, and/or other threats in the county.

Alameda Watch: Moderate concern for conservation actions on based on population declines, impacts to habitat, and/or other threats.

Some species may qualify as notable species according to the rubric above for listed species; however, critical conservation issues for a particular species may be elsewhere, and their population currently may be doing reasonably well in Alameda. These species are still included as notable species and are likely identified as “watch species” within the county. Conversely, some species may be doing reasonably well on a larger scale, but they have local management and conservation issues and are included because of this local concern. In sum, the document and the county rating

status identifies current priorities for conservation needs in Alameda County.

We felt that it would be useful to include additional information in the species summaries related to the habitats that species use across the county, as well as the common threats that affect these species. Sections 4 and 5 provide this additional information on habitat types and threats to the species, respectively.

Developing this document for the county of Alameda has been challenging, given the large area of the county and the wide range of ecosystems. The County of Alameda covers 821 square miles, of which 739 square miles is land and 82 square miles (10%) is water. The county is bordered by San Francisco County and San Francisco Bay to the west, Contra Costa County to the north and east, Santa Clara County to the south and San Joaquin County to the east. The crest of the Berkeley and Oakland Hills forms part of the northeastern boundary and reaches into the center of the county. A coastal plain several miles wide lines the bay and is the county’s most populous region. Livermore Valley lies in the eastern part of the county. Amador Valley abuts the western edge of Livermore Valley and continues west to the Pleasanton Ridge. The ridges and valleys of the Diablo Range, containing the county’s highest peaks, cover the very sparsely populated southeast portion of the county. This range of areas provide a wide mix of habitats that support the diversity of bird species in the county.

SECTION 1. Listed Species

As of August 2025, 412 bird species have been recorded in Alameda County (This does not include exotic escapees or hybrids). Of these 412 species, all taxa of conservation concern that are listed by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), or the National Audubon Society (NAS) have been compiled and are included into Table 1. While many of these species are rarities in our county, conservation-listed species that have a significant presence in the county warrant appropriate conservation attention and are identified in bold below. Details on the process for identifying these notable species are provided in the Introduction.

Occurrence in the table below is described as resident (birds that regularly reside year-round, or over-summer, or over-winter), migrant (birds that regularly occur in transit between their summer and winter ranges), visitor (birds that are within their normal range but do not have a regular local presence), or vagrant (birds far outside of their normal range). Resident (i.e., year-round) and Summer resident species are breeding and nesting in the county; winter residents, migrants, visitors, and vagrants occur in the county, but not typically as nesting species. The term over-summer refers to the time frame within which migratory species’ arrive, nest, fledge and depart. Locally, the timeframe for this annual event is from mid-January to mid-September.

Table 1. Bird species or subspecies that have been observed and documented within Alameda County and are listed by the US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) or the National Audubon Society (NAS). USFWS listing categories are: Endangered (E), Threatened (T), or Birds of Conservation Concern (CC); CDFW: Endangered (E), Threatened (T), or a Species of Special Concern (SC); NAS: Species of Conservation priority (P). Notable species are highlighted in BOLD and are discussed in further detail in Section 3. See the Introduction and Section 3 for more information on the GGBA Priority within the County, as well as information on the identification of notable species. Species here and in all other tables are listed in taxonomic order following the Official California Checklist of the California Bird Records Committee (Western Field Ornithologists).

<u>Taxon</u>	<u>GGBA Priority</u>	<u>Federal Status</u>	<u>State Status</u>	<u>Audubon Status</u>	<u>Occurrence in Alameda</u>
Fulvous Whistling Duck			SC		vagrant
Brant			SC		winter resident
Ruddy Duck	Watch	CC		P	rare resident
Eared Grebe	Watch			P	resident
Western Grebe	Watch	CC			resident
Clark's Grebe	Watch	CC			resident
Black Swift		CC			rare migrant

<u>Taxon</u>	<u>GGBA Priority</u>	<u>Federal Status</u>	<u>State Status</u>	<u>Audubon Status</u>	<u>Occurrence in Alameda</u>
Vaux's Swift		CC	SC		migrant
Calliope Hummingbird		CC			migrant
Rufous Hummingbird		CC			migrant
Allen's Hummingbird	Priority	CC			summer resident
Ridgway's Rail	High Priority	E	E	P	resident
Yellow Rail		CC	SC		vagrant
Black Rail (California)	High Priority	E	T		rare resident
Sandhill Crane (Greater)		CC	T	P	vagrant
American Avocet	Priority	CC		P	resident
Black Oystercatcher	Priority	CC		P	resident
American Golden Plover		CC			vagrant
Mountain Plover		CC	SC		vagrant
Snowy Plover (Western)	High Priority	T		P	resident
Long-billed Curlew		CC		P	winter resident
Bar-tailed Godwit		CC			vagrant
Marbled Godwit		CC		P	winter resident
Black Turnstone		CC			winter resident
Red Knot (Pacific)		CC		P	winter resident
Buff-breasted Sandpiper		CC			vagrant
Pectoral Sandpiper		CC			rare migrant
Western Sandpiper				P	winter resident
Short-billed Dowitcher		CC			winter resident
Wandering Tattler		CC			rare migrant
Lesser Yellowlegs		CC			migrant; rare winter resident
Willet		CC			winter resident
Wilson's Phalarope				P	migrant
Marbled Murrelet		T	E		vagrant
Ancient Murrelet		CC			vagrant
Tufted Puffin		CC	SC		vagrant
Ross's Gull		CC			vagrant
Franklin's Gull		CC			vagrant
Heermann's Gull		CC			rare post breeding resident
Western Gull	Watch	CC			resident
California Gull	Watch	CC			resident
Least Tern (California)	High Priority	E	E	P	summer resident
Black Tern		CC			rare migrant

<u>Taxon</u>	<u>GGBA Priority</u>	<u>Federal Status</u>	<u>State Status</u>	<u>Audubon Status</u>	<u>Occurrence in Alameda</u>
Elegant Tern	High Priority	CC			summer resident
Black Skimmer	Watch	CC	SC	P	summer resident
Yellow-billed Loon		CC			vagrant
Laysan Albatross		CC			vagrant
Ashy Storm-Petrel		CC	SC		vagrant
Brandt's Cormorant	Watch	CC			resident
American White Pelican	Watch	CC	SC		resident
Least Bittern			SC		vagrant; potential breeder
White-faced Ibis				P	rare visitor
Northern Harrier	Priority	CC	SC		resident
Bald Eagle	Watch		E		resident
Swainson's Hawk	Watch		T	P	migrant; rare summer resident
Flammulated Owl		CC			vagrant
Western Screech-Owl (N. Pacific)	Watch	CC			resident
Snowy Owl		CC			vagrant
Burrowing Owl (Western)	High Priority	CC	C		rare resident; potential breeder
Long-Eared Owl		CC	SC		rare winter resident; potential breeder
Short-Eared Owl		CC	SC		rare winter resident; potential breeder
Lewis's Woodpecker		CC			rare winter resident; potential breeder
Nuttall's Woodpecker	Watch	CC			resident
Olive-sided Flycatcher	Priority	CC	SC		summer resident
Willow Flycatcher		CC	E		migrant
Loggerhead Shrike	Priority	CC	SC		resident
Yellow-billed Magpie	Priority	CC			resident
Oak Titmouse	Watch	CC			resident
Bank Swallow			T		rare migrant
Purple Martin			SC		rare migrant
Wrentit	Watch	CC			resident
California Thrasher	Priority	CC			resident
Evening Grosbeak		CC			vagrant
Cassin's Finch		CC			vagrant
Lawrence's Goldfinch	Watch	CC			resident
Chestnut-collared Longspur		CC			rare migrant
Grasshopper Sparrow	High Priority	CC	SC		summer resident

<u>Taxon</u>	<u>GGBA Priority</u>	<u>Federal Status</u>	<u>State Status</u>	<u>Audubon Status</u>	<u>Occurrence in Alameda</u>
Black-chinned Sparrow		CC			rare visitor; potential breeder
Savannah Sparrow (Bryant's)	Watch		SC		resident
Song Sparrow (Alameda)	Watch	CC	SC		resident
Yellow-breasted Chat		CC	SC	P	migrant
Yellow-headed Blackbird		CC	SC		rare visitor
Bobolink		CC		P	vagrant
Western Meadowlark	Priority			P	resident
Bullock's Oriole	Watch	CC			summer resident
Tricolored Blackbird	High Priority	CC	T	P	winter resident; potential breeder
Virginia's Warbler		CC			vagrant
Common Yellowthroat	Priority	CC	SC		resident
Hooded Warbler				P	vagrant
Yellow Warbler	High Priority		SC	P	migrant; rare summer resident
Black-throated Blue Warbler				P	vagrant
Prairie Warbler		CC		P	vagrant
Canada Warbler		CC		P	vagrant
Red-faced Warbler		CC			vagrant
Summer Tanager				P	vagrant
Rose-breasted Grosbeak		CC		P	vagrant



SECTION 2. Non-listed Species

There are additional species which are not found on any of the considered lists yet they have been - and continue to be of local conservation concern. These are species that have a special presence particular to Alameda County and have been deemed worthy of conservation attention as notable species. Future adjustments to this list are at the discretion of the conservation committee.

Table 2. Additional species of local conservation concern within Alameda County. All of these notable species are discussed in further detail in Section 3. See the introduction and Section 3 for more information on the GGBA Priority within the County.

TAXON	GGBA Priority
California Quail	Priority
Virginia Rail	Watch
Sora	Watch
Sanderling	Watch
Spotted Sandpiper	Watch
Pelagic Cormorant	Watch
American Bittern	Priority
White-tailed Kite	Priority
Golden Eagle	Priority
American Kestrel	Priority



Western Meadowlark

SECTION 3. Notable Species Summaries

Drawing from Sections 1 and 2, the following table gives a brief account for each species that is a notable conservation concern within Alameda County. Each summary aims to describe the species relative presence, particular conservation issues (see Section 5 for common threats), and the potential need for management action. In addition to the summary, common and scientific names are provided, along with: Federal, State, and National Audubon Society status (if applicable) and common habitats used (see Section 4 for habitat descriptions).

Each species also has been assigned a rating to indicate the degree of local conservation concern within Alameda County as follows:

Alameda High Priority: Actively advocate to improve/increase habitat and reduce harmful impacts.

Alameda Priority: Generally advocate to maintain habitat and reduce harmful impacts.

Alameda Watch: Monitor population and habitat conditions. Be prepared to elevate status if necessary.

Species are listed in taxonomic order.

Table 3. Summaries for all notable species of conservation concern in Alameda County.

<p>Ruddy Duck <i>Oxyura jamaicensis</i> Alameda Watch Freshwater and brackish marsh, salt pond, open bay, freshwater lake</p>	<p>Federal Species of Concern Audubon Priority Bird</p>
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The Ruddy Duck is the sole species of the *Oxyura* genus, commonly known as “stiff-tailed ducks,” that regularly inhabits much of Canada and the United States. It is most abundant in western North America, with approximately 85% of the population breeding in the prairie pothole region. Breeding typically occurs in freshwater marshes, ponds, and lakes, while wintering habitats expand to include brackish marshes and coastal waters. The total breeding population, estimated at around 1.3 million birds, has remained stable since at least the mid-1960s. In Alameda County, the Ruddy Duck is a common migrant and winter visitor and has been confirmed as a breeding species in freshwater marshes, including at Coyote Hills Regional Park, Hayward Marsh, and the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge. Notably, at Hayward Marsh, the planting and natural spread of tule have significantly boosted the local breeding population. The Ruddy Duck population in Alameda County stands to benefit from ongoing efforts to protect and restore freshwater wetlands, as well as from measures aimed at preventing pollution and the spread of invasive species.

California Quail

Callipepla californica

Alameda Priority

Oak woodland, chaparral, coastal scrub

California Quail, the state bird of California, is a common year-round resident of Alameda County. It is a habitat generalist found primarily in chaparral, sagebrush scrub, and oak grassland where it feeds and nests on the ground. The California Quail has declined significantly west of the East Bay Hills due to habitat loss and fragmentation from urbanization and related issues, including predation by cats. The species has been virtually extirpated from the Alameda County shoreline and much of the surrounding lowlands. While the California Quail remains a confirmed breeder in other parts of the county, continued urbanization and habitat conversion are likely to pose ongoing threats to its local survival.

Eared Grebe

Audubon Priority Bird

Podiceps nigricollis

Alameda Watch

Freshwater marsh, salt pond, open bay, freshwater lake

Eared Grebes are gregarious and colonial in all seasons. In Alameda County, Eared Grebes are common winter residents, primarily in salt water habitats. The species has also bred in large numbers at Hayward Marsh and occasionally elsewhere. According to the National Audubon Society, Eared Grebe populations are stable but considered vulnerable because large numbers depend on just a few large inland lakes, including Mono Lake, for breeding and staging.

Western Grebe

Federal Species of Concern

Aechmophorus occidentalis

Audubon “Climate Endangered”

Alameda Watch

Salt pond, open bay, freshwater lake

The Western Grebe is a common winter resident in the San Francisco Bay and in adjacent coastal waters. In California, it breeds primarily in large inland lakes in the Great Basin. In Alameda County breeding has been confirmed at Lake Chabot, Del Valle Reservoir, and San Antonio Reservoir. In addition to the small number of year-round residents in the county, numbers increase dramatically in the non-breeding season, especially along the Bay shoreline. Western Grebes are of federal concern due to threats to their breeding habitat, including from boating, fishing, and water drawdowns for power generation. Audubon California has designated the species as “climate endangered” due to projections of

significant climate-change-induced declines in inland lake breeding habitat, although under the same projections, the bird's winter range is projected to increase.

Clark's Grebe

Aechmophorus clarkii

Alameda Watch

Salt pond, open bay, freshwater lake

Federal and State Species of Concern

Audubon "Climate Endangered"

Clark's Grebe is a close relative of the Western Grebe. The two species have similar habitat requirements, are often found together, and were considered to be conspecific until 1985. The Clark's Grebe is a common winter resident of San Francisco Bay and adjacent coastal waters. Like the Western Grebe, its principal breeding habitat is inland lakes, but it has been recorded as breeding in Alameda County, including at San Antonio Reservoir. In addition to the small number of year-round residents in the county, numbers increase dramatically in the non-breeding season, especially along the Bay shoreline. Global populations have declined by approximately 8% between 1970 and 2017. As with the Western Grebe, Clark's Grebe breeding habitat in California is threatened due to human interactions such as boating, fishing, and water drawdowns for power generation, as well as climate change, but the species' wintering habitat is currently not threatened.

Allen's Hummingbird

Selasphorus sasin

Alameda Priority

Oak woodland, conifer forest, Eucalyptus forest, riparian areas, chaparral, coastal scrub, urban and suburban areas

Federal Species of Concern

A neotropical migrant overwintering in central Mexico, Allen's Hummingbird is found in Alameda County between early February and late July. Within the county, it is largely restricted to the fog belt, breeding from the flatlands near the bay up the western slopes of the Berkeley and Oakland hills and down the I-680 corridor. Allen's Hummingbird has adapted well to local suburbanization and remains fairly common in Alameda County. Due to the species' overall small population size and limited range it is thought to be susceptible to climate change-induced increases in fire, drought, and heat, as well as to diseases, dense urbanization, and land use change.

Ridgway's Rail*Rallus obsoletus***Alameda High Priority**

Salt marsh

Federal and State Endangered

Audubon Priority Bird

Ridgway's Rails require dense cover for nesting and foraging and taller vegetation for high-tide refuge from predators. In Alameda County they are residents of tidal marshes dominated by cordgrass, pickleweed, and saltgrass. The breeding season usually extends from March to July-August. Some populations in the San Francisco Bay Area continue to decline. Current threats are habitat loss and degradation due to urban development, pollution, invasive exotic vegetation, including hybrid *Spartina*, predation from native and non-native species, and sea-level rise. Conservation efforts that would benefit the species include marsh restoration with monitoring and adaptive management, reduction or mitigation of local development, feral cat control, addressing other predation impacts, reducing mercury exposure, and habitat enhancements to mitigate impacts of sea-level rise or predation.

Virginia Rail*Rallus limicola***Alameda Watch**

Freshwater and brackish marsh

Virginia Rail is a secretive freshwater marsh bird that breeds predominantly in freshwater wetlands and occasionally in salt marshes. It prefers shallow water with some extent of emergent vegetation that is not overly dense. Breeding has been confirmed at Coyote Hills and Hayward Marsh. The species was more common historically, when wetlands were more abundant, but it may be more common than currently reported due to its secretive nature. It is considered by IUCN to be of least concern globally. Along with other marsh residents, its habitat is particularly sensitive to rising sea levels. Efforts to protect and restore fresh and brackish marshes would benefit the species in Alameda County.

Sora*Porzana carolina***Alameda Watch**

Salt marsh, freshwater and brackish marsh

Sora occurs in marshes dominated by emergent vegetation, breeding in freshwater habitat and wintering in both freshwater and saline marshes. It is considered to be the most abundant and widespread rail in North America,

though it is more often heard than seen due to its secretive nature. Breeding has been confirmed at Coyote Hills and Hayward Marsh. The Bay Area is one of only two regions in North America where Sora lives year-round. It is considered to have been more common in the past, when wetlands were more abundant, though it may be underreported due to the difficulty of observing the species. It is generally considered to be of low conservation concern in North America and is legally hunted in many states. Along with other marsh residents, its habitat is particularly sensitive to rising sea levels. Efforts to protect and restore wetlands with emergent vegetation would benefit the species in Alameda County.

Black Rail

Laterallus jamaicensis

Alameda High Priority

Salt marsh, freshwater and brackish marsh

Federal Endangered

State Threatened

The Black Rail is sparsely distributed throughout North America and is a rare resident in Alameda County. Black Rails are more abundant in the San Pablo Bay and Suisun Bay than they are in the central Bay; however, Black Rail numbers are low throughout the San Francisco Bay Area. The historic breeding range in coastal California extended south to northern Baja; at present, the Black Rail likely no longer breeds in southern California. Loss of tidal wetlands and adjacent upland habitat for refuge have impacted the species throughout the coastal parts of its range. Black Rails rarely venture into the open and as a rule only betray their presence through vocalizations. Ongoing surveys are needed to identify potential nesting populations and ensure protection within Alameda County.

American Avocet

Recurvirostra americana

Alameda Priority

Salt marsh, freshwater and brackish marsh, tidal mudflat, salt pond

Federal Species of Concern

Audubon Priority Bird

An inhabitant of both freshwater and saline aquatic environments, the American Avocet ranges throughout much of coastal and interior North America. The Bay Area is home to year-round populations that have expanded over the last hundred years. American Avocets are regular breeders along much of the Alameda coastline. Successful nesting has also been recorded in Livermore-Amador Valley and in the Altamont Hills where both freshwater and alkaline habitats were reportedly used. Threats to the species include wetland loss and degradation, and pollution, including methyl mercury. Active monitoring and advocacy could further benefit this species.

Black Oystercatcher*Haematopus bachmani***Alameda Priority**

Rocky shoreline

Federal Species of Concern

Audubon Priority Bird

The Black Oystercatcher can be found year-round in small numbers in the San Francisco Bay Area, with several confirmed breeding sites in Alameda County in recent years. Occurring from Alaska to Baja, the species global population is estimated to number 10-12,000 individuals, with a total California population of approximately 5-6,000. Black Oystercatchers forage exclusively on intertidal invertebrates, primarily in rocky intertidal areas, and thus are potential indicators of the overall health of this ecosystem. The species is considered vulnerable to decline due to small population size, low reproductive rate, and close association with rocky intertidal shorelines that are impacted by human use, pollution, and rising sea levels. In addition, they are sensitive to disturbances and are easily flushed. In California as elsewhere, intertidal foraging habitat is highly vulnerable to projected sea-level rise. Further threats include changes to prey populations due to sea surface warming and pollution and disturbance from coastal development and urbanization. Conservation efforts have so far included state-wide population monitoring, including San Francisco Bay, and the publication in 2010 of the *Black Oystercatcher Conservation Action Plan*.

Snowy Plover (Western)*Charadrius nivosus***Alameda High Priority**

Barren areas, beach, salt pond

Federal Threatened

Audubon Priority Bird

Western Snowy Plovers are residents of open, flat coastal areas with sparse vegetation from Washington to Baja. The Snowy Plover has increased its presence in Alameda County, and nesting birds are now found at multiple locations. Potential threats include sea-level rise, habitat degradation, human recreational activities, and nest predation and disturbance by crows, gulls, foxes, feral cats, dogs, and other species. The subspecies is subject to ongoing monitoring and management efforts throughout the Bay Area, including camouflaging of nests with oyster shells to mitigate the impact of nest predation.

Sanderling*Calidris alba***Alameda Watch**

Rocky shoreline, beach, tidal mudflat

The Sanderling is a long-distance migrant with a circumpolar breeding range, wintering as far south as South America, southern Europe, Africa, and Australia. In North America, the Sanderling breeds in arctic Canada and occurs as a passage migrant and non-breeding resident along the Atlantic, Pacific, and Gulf coastlines. The Sanderling's preferred staging and wintering habitat is sandy beaches, but the species can also be encountered on tidal mudflats and along rocky coastlines. Globally the Sanderling is listed by IUCN as a species of least concern despite an estimated 80% population decline in North America since the 1970s. Likely causes of the decline are the negative effects of climate change on the Sanderling's arctic breeding habitat and anthropogenic disturbances to its staging and wintering habitats. In Alameda County, the Sanderling could profit from the preservation of coastal shorebird habitat and from the minimization of human activity in these sensitive areas.

Spotted Sandpiper*Actitis macularius***Alameda Watch**

Riparian areas, rocky shoreline, beach, tidal mudflat, freshwater lake

Unlike most sandpipers, the Spotted Sandpiper is not limited to breeding in Alaska and northern Canada; instead, it breeds commonly across much of North America. The Spotted Sandpiper typically breeds near freshwater habitat, including lakes, ponds, rivers, and streams. The species overwinters from the southern and Pacific United States south to Patagonia, where it also can be found on rocky shorelines, mudflats and sandy beaches. Although listed by the IUCN as a species of least concern globally, the Spotted Sandpiper has shown signs of population decline across North America in recent decades. In Alameda County, this species is present throughout much of the year, being rarest in the month of June and most common from August to March. Breeding has been confirmed in the county near Alameda Creek and near Del Valle Regional Park. In Alameda County as elsewhere, the Spotted Sandpiper is vulnerable to habitat loss and stands to profit from the protection of riparian and shoreline areas and the creation of shorebird preserves.

Western Gull

Federal Species of Concern

*Larus occidentalis***Alameda Watch**

Rocky shoreline, beach, tidal mudflat, open bay

The Western Gull is found along coastlines and in saltwater bays from southern British Columbia to the tip of Baja. This gull uses freshwater habitats for bathing and resting but is rarely encountered more than a few miles from the coast. Although the Western Gull remains the Bay Area's most common coastal gull, its global population of approximately 50,000 nesting pairs is in decline. The breeding colony on the Farallon Islands is the largest of approximately 200 known colonies for the species and has suffered total reproductive failure multiple times over the past two decades. In Alameda County, the species nests primarily on and around the former Alameda Naval Air station on runways, piers and breakwaters. Like those of many other San Francisco Bay marine birds, the Western Gull's food resources are vulnerable to oil spills and to potential consequences of climate change, including spring heat waves and abnormally heavy rainfall during the breeding season. Western Gull colonies have in the past also proven to be vulnerable to the effects of pesticides in the food chain.

California Gull

Federal Species of Concern

*Larus californicus***Alameda Watch**

Barren areas, beach, tidal mudflat, salt pond, open bay, freshwater lake

Although declines have been noted in some portions of their range, California Gulls are common and widespread, breeding along inland lakes and rivers throughout much of western North America and wintering along the Pacific coast from Washington to central Mexico. Breeding colonies have been increasing in salt ponds throughout the Bay Area. Though still predominantly a post-breeding resident in Alameda County, California Gulls have in recent decades nested in increasing numbers on the runways at the former Alameda Naval Air Station and along salt ponds in the south of the county. Protection from terrestrial predators, primarily feral cats and off-leash dogs, would help preserve these expanding colonies.

Least Tern (California)*Sterna antillarum browni***Alameda High Priority**

Barren areas, beach, salt pond, open bay

Federal and State Endangered

Audubon Priority Bird

The California Least Tern was federally listed in 1969 following several decades of significant population decline. California Least Terns overwinter in South America and breed on the Pacific coasts of California and Baja where they nest on beaches and on open, sparsely vegetated ground adjacent to bays and estuaries. In Alameda County, Golden Gate Bird Alliance has participated in monitoring and stewarding a nesting colony at Alameda Point. Local populations have increased somewhat but remain vulnerable to nest predation, environmental contamination, and climate change.

Elegant Tern*Thalasseus elegans***Alameda High Priority**

Beach, tidal mudflat, open bay

Federal Species of Concern

Outside of the breeding season, Elegant Terns range widely along the Pacific coasts of North and South America. However, the species' highly limited breeding distribution (two islands in the Sea of Cortez and some scattered sites in California) renders it vulnerable to population decline. In Alameda County, the Elegant Tern can be found in large numbers during the post-breeding season, loafing and roosting at beaches and on mudflats. Nesting has been documented in recent years at Alameda Point on the former Alameda Naval Air Station. The Elegant Tern's terrestrial nesting habits makes it prone to disturbance by humans and natural and introduced predators. Climate-change-induced alterations to prey distribution are an additional potential concern for the future.

Black Skimmer*Rynchops niger***Alameda Watch**

Beach, tidal mudflat, open bay

Federal and State Species of Concern

Audubon Priority Bird

Black Skimmers are colonial, ground-nesting waterbirds that require expanses of bare ground isolated from disturbance for roosting and nesting. Winter roosts include urban beaches (often associated with estuaries), protected harbors, and the mouths of river or drainage channels. First recorded in southern California in 1962, the Black Skimmer has continued to expand its range, establishing the first recorded nest in Alameda County in 1994 at Hayward Regional Shoreline. Most

county sightings have occurred at Hayward Regional Shoreline, Elsie Roemer, Oakland Middle Harbor and Emeryville. Human disturbance and development, nest predation by mammals and gulls, and storms and flooding may cause nest failures. Conservation of isolated islands and maintenance of sand substrates could protect nesting sites, and additional monitoring would be helpful to identify ongoing changes in abundance and distribution of this species.

Brandt's Cormorant

Federal Species of Concern

Urile penicillatus

Alameda Watch

Rocky shoreline, open bay

Brandt's Cormorant is a marine cormorant species that occurs along ocean shorelines and on open sea up to 10 miles from the coast. Brandt's Cormorants occupy a large nesting colony at the Farallon Islands and use areas of the San Francisco Bay close to the Golden Gate, nesting at Alcatraz Island. Within Alameda County, Brandt's Cormorants are found in low numbers throughout the year, primarily along the Bay Bridge, on Alameda Island, and to a lesser extent off the Berkeley and Emeryville shorelines. As their diet consists primarily of fish and squid, their breeding success is variable and principally affected by fish population dynamics associated with El Niño and other climatic drivers. Further threats to this species include environmental pollution, disturbance, and predation.

Pelagic Cormorant

Urile pelagicus

Alameda Watch

Open Bay

Pelagic Cormorants are primarily found in nearshore areas. They are less social than other cormorants and tend to feed individually, eating small fish and some crustaceans. Pelagic Cormorants are also less studied than other cormorants. They nest on Alcatraz Island in cavities or narrow ledges on island cliffs. Within Alameda County, they are primarily observed in the central bay, with most observations from Albany to Alameda. Oil spills and gill net entanglement are potential impacts to their population, as well as nest predation by gulls and crows.

American White Pelican

Federal and State Species of Concern

*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos***Alameda Watch**

Salt pond, freshwater lake

American White Pelicans breed in two metapopulations: one to the west of the Rockies and one to the east. Western birds move down the Pacific coast, occurring in the San Francisco Bay Area as migrants and as wintering birds. Within California, breeding occurs in the northeastern corner of the state, followed by dispersal to the south and west towards coastal bays, estuaries, and sloughs. The salt ponds in the South Bay are valuable habitat, providing shallow water for feeding. Coyote Hills and Don Edwards NWR host large numbers, along with other areas with shallow open water (Lake Merritt, Lake Temescal, etc.). Although the range-wide population of the American White Pelican is now stable, impacts of human disturbance and habitat degradation remain causes for concern. Habitat preservation and restoration, including the protection of nesting areas outside the region, are the primary actions needed to protect this species.

American Bittern*Botaurus lentiginosus***Alameda Priority**

Freshwater marsh

American Bittern is a solitary, secretive heron that breeds from the central United States to northern Canada. Confirmed breeding in Alameda County has been infrequent, though there have been numerous spring and summer sightings at Coyote Hills in recent years; the species is relatively more abundant as a winter resident. Wetland loss and degradation have contributed to population decline in many areas. Due to the species' overall large range and population size (especially in the northern United States and Canada), it is considered by IUCN to be of least concern globally; however, due to its secretive nature, there remain significant questions about its biology and status within the region. Preservation and restoration of freshwater wetland habitats would presumably benefit the species.

White-tailed Kite

State Fully Protected

*Elanus leucurus***Alameda Priority**

Coast live oak woodland, riparian areas, grassland, pasture, cropland, freshwater and brackish marsh

The White-tailed Kite is a non-migratory raptor that forages by “kiting” and preying on small mammals, especially voles, and occasionally reptiles, insects, and small birds. It nests and roosts in oak woodlands and riparian areas, and roosts communally in non-breeding season, commonly with 10-50 birds or more. California has the largest population of White-tailed Kites in North America, and within Alameda County, they are most commonly seen at Coyote Hills, Hayward Regional Shoreline and McLaughlin Eastshore State Park. White-tailed Kites were threatened with extinction in the early 20th century. Their populations have recovered since then, although numbers across the country declined in the 1980s and 90s. Conservation of prey habitat and protection of appropriate nesting and roosting trees, including in riparian areas, are among the conservation efforts most likely to benefit this species.

Golden Eagle

State Fully Protected

*Aquila chrysaetos***Alameda Priority**

Oak woodland, grassland, pasture

One of the world’s largest predatory birds, the Golden Eagle is widespread across most of the northern hemisphere. They are resident year-round in the western USA and much of California.

In Alameda County they are breeders in the south-eastern part of the county, east of the Oakland Hills. Alameda County may have one of the highest breeding densities of Golden Eagles in the world. Golden Eagles prefer open topography that provides updrafts for soaring. Suburban sprawl, overgrazing of grasslands, and climate-change-induced increases in fire risk threaten this species’ habitat. Golden Eagles are regularly killed by wind turbines, collisions with cars, and electrocution.

Northern Harrier

Federal and State Species of Concern

Circus hudsonius

Alameda Priority

Grassland, pasture, cropland, salt marsh, freshwater and brackish marsh

Found throughout much of California in grasslands, weedy agricultural fields, and in both freshwater and saline marshes. In Alameda County, Northern Harriers are confirmed breeders in the marshes and grasslands bordering the San Francisco Bay and in the Altamont Hills. Nesting success is declining across the county, largely due to the impacts of urban and agricultural expansion on wetlands and undisturbed grasslands. As ground nesters, Northern Harriers are particularly vulnerable to introduced predators like foxes, unleashed dogs, and feral cats. This species would likely benefit from limiting human activity within its breeding habitat, especially in areas heavily impacted by agriculture. Cattle ranching, in particular, poses a significant threat to Northern Harriers by altering the plant composition and structure of breeding sites. These changes can disrupt prey communities and reduce the availability of suitable shelter and nesting areas.

Bald Eagle

State Endangered

Haliaeetus leucocephalus

Alameda Watch

Open bay, freshwater lake

A very large bird of prey, the Bald Eagle is found near freshwater and saline bodies of water where fish are abundant. The species is widespread across the USA from Alaska to Florida. Single birds, and occasionally pairs, are observed with increasing frequency at Alameda County's lakes, reservoirs, and along the coast. Though a year-round resident, the Bald Eagle has had relatively few confirmed successful breeding attempts in Alameda County, including at Lake Chabot and Del Valle Reservoir, and in 2025 in Oakland. Despite being hailed as a national symbol for over 250 years, DDT poisoning and culling pushed the species close to extinction, and in the 1970s it was placed on the Endangered Species list. Following several decades of population recovery, the Bald Eagle was removed from the list in 2007. At present, the species is still considered Endangered by the State of California. The Bald Eagle was officially declared the National Bird on December 24th, 2024.

Swainson's Hawk*Buteo swainsoni*

Alameda Watch

Oak woodland, grassland, cropland, barren areas

State Threatened
Audubon Priority Bird

Swainson's Hawk breeds across most of the western inland United States and in southern Canada and northern Mexico, utilizing open grassland, sparse shrubland and open woodland. After breeding and prior to migration to South America, Swainson's Hawks utilize croplands for foraging, especially during harvest, tilling, and burning. No breeding pairs were found in the county during the production of the Alameda County Breeding Bird Atlas, although nests were found in nearby Contra Costa County. As there are Alameda County spring sightings, it is suspected that Swainson's Hawks may be nesting locally. In both their breeding habitats and along their migratory routes, these hawks are threatened by habitat loss and by human attempts to control invertebrate populations. Like the Northern Harrier, Swainson's Hawks are threatened by the impacts of cattle ranching, which include changes to prey species composition and the loss of suitable shelter and nesting habitat.

Western Screech-Owl*Megascops kennicottii*

Alameda Watch

Oak woodland, montane hardwood forest, riparian areas

Federal Species of Concern

Found from coastal Alaska to coastal and central Mexico, the Western Screech-Owl is one of the most common owls of low-elevation woodlands and deserts. This species is found in a wide variety of wooded habitats. In Alameda County, it is most abundant in the blue oak/gray pine woodlands of the southern and eastern parts of the county. Within urban areas, Western Screech Owls usually occupy stands of oak trees or riparian corridors. Current threats to this species include habitat loss due to housing development and predation pressure from expanding Barred Owl populations. Recommended conservation actions include the preservation of dead and dying trees as potential nesting locations; this will require additional engagement with fire hazard reduction planning.

Burrowing Owl (Western)*Athene cunicularia hypugaea***Alameda High Priority**

Grassland, pasture, barren areas

Federal Species of Concern

State Candidate

Found in open, treeless areas of western North America, primarily south of the Canadian border. Burrowing Owls generally inhabit gently sloping areas with short, sparse vegetation and high densities of burrowing mammals. Such areas can include natural grasslands, golf courses, cemeteries, fairgrounds, vacant urban lots, road margins, and airports. Burrowing Owl populations have declined substantially over the last 50 years throughout the county. While they were relatively easy to find as breeding birds ~10 years ago, it is uncertain if they are currently breeding in the county. During the winter months, Burrowing Owls are found in both the eastern and western portions of the county, with some birds using rip-rap for burrows. Although habitat loss is their primary vulnerability, Burrowing Owls' reliance on mammal burrows for nesting and roosting sites also renders them vulnerable to the use of pesticides and other methods of rodent population control. Other threats include ground predators, including unleashed dogs, feral cats and others. A coordinated monitoring effort is recommended. Inconspicuous, safe artificial burrows have been proposed and used by some local agencies.

Nuttall's Woodpecker*Dryobates nuttallii***Alameda Watch**

Oak woodland, riparian areas

Federal Species of Concern

A species strongly associated with oak woodlands, Nuttall's Woodpecker is a near-endemic to California, ranging throughout the Coast Ranges and Central Valley and extending into northern Baja. Nuttall's Woodpecker is a common resident throughout most of Alameda County. It commonly nests in riparian corridors with willows, cottonwoods, and sycamores, and forages in nearby oak woodland. Although the current population is thought to be stable and healthy, the species is potentially vulnerable to threats to its habitat, including Sudden Oak Death and other diseases, and climate change.

American Kestrel*Falco sparverius***Alameda Priority**

Grassland, pasture, cropland, barren areas

A widespread inhabitant across the US and throughout California, American Kestrel are found year-round in Alameda County. They live in open areas with short ground vegetation where they hunt from a perch or while hovering, mostly for arthropods, other invertebrates and small vertebrates on the ground. The Kestrel is a secondary cavity nester, using old woodpecker holes, natural cavities in large trees or rocks and nooks in buildings and other manmade structures. The Alameda County Breeding Bird Atlas mentions that Mexican Fan Palm skirts have been used as nesting sites in urban areas. Christmas Bird Count data show a gradual but steady decline over the last several decades. Average count numbers are half what they were in 1990. The reason is unclear; however, it could be increased competition from other cavity nesters (especially aggressive European Starlings) or the loss of Mexican Fan Palm skirts being trimmed regularly for fire hazard concerns or esthetic reasons.

Olive-sided Flycatcher

Federal and State Species of Concern

*Contopus cooperi***Alameda Priority**

Conifer forest

A bird of boreal and montane coniferous forest edges, this member of the peewee genus is found in Alameda County from April until August. The Olive-sided Flycatcher nests in the coniferous forests of the Berkeley and Oakland Hills where it can be seen flycatching from the tops of tall trees. This species has suffered population declines in recent decades, possibly due to habitat loss in its Central and South American wintering grounds. Olive-sided Flycatcher conservation efforts should include the preservation of open, mature woodland as breeding habitat, the preservation of healthy aerial invertebrate populations, and the stimulation of sustainable agricultural activities in the species' southern wintering habitats, including coffee cultivation shaded by native tree species.

Loggerhead Shrike

Federal and State Species of Concern

*Lanius ludovicianus***Alameda Priority**

Grassland, pasture, cropland

Formerly described as an 'abundant' resident of the San Francisco Bay region, the species has undergone a continuous decline since the late 1960s. Within Alameda County, the Loggerhead Shrike most commonly occurs in open grassland, farmland, and rolling hills of the eastern part of the county as well as in the foothills of the Livermore-Amador Valley and the Hayward-Fremont Hills. In winter, the species can also be found along the county's shoreline from Alameda Point south to Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge. Presumably, local population declines are primarily due to habitat loss. The Loggerhead Shrike's nesting and foraging habitat is especially at risk due to the rapid replacement of native vegetation with non-native species on cattle ranches, which is often accompanied by a decline in the diversity of prey species. Population monitoring, as well as the creation of suitable open, grassland habitat, could help the species recover.

Yellow-billed Magpie

Federal Species of Concern

*Pica nuttalli***Alameda Priority**

Blue oak woodland

A true California endemic that inhabits the open oak woodlands of the central valley, the southern coastal ranges and the foothills of the Sierra Nevada. In Alameda County, Yellow-billed Magpies are found in suitable habitat throughout much of the southeastern part of the county. Protecting and managing Alameda County's open oak woodlands is essential for supporting local magpie populations and for addressing agricultural conversion and intensification in the eastern part of the County. In addition to habitat loss and degradation, pesticides and other contaminants, especially rodenticides and predator control chemicals, pose significant threats to Yellow-billed Magpies. These birds are also still subject to shooting and trapping in some rural parts of California. The species' sedentary nature and vulnerability to diseases, including West Nile Virus, may limit its capacity to recolonize areas from which it has been extirpated.

Oak Titmouse

Federal Species of Concern

*Baeolophus inornatus***Alameda Watch**

Oak woodland

Oak Titmice are common, year-round residents of warm, dry oak and oak-pine woodlands ranging from southern Oregon to Baja. They are found in low to mid-elevation habitats in the coast ranges, Sierra foothills and surrounding the central valley. In Alameda County this species prefers the drier, eastern part of the county, but it is also found in urban neighborhoods dominated by mature oaks. Oak Titmice depend on older trees that have natural and woodpecker-created cavities for nesting. The removal of such nesting trees from the landscape could cause population declines. Sudden Oak Death (SOD), which is killing oaks throughout the county, also could impact nest cavity opportunities, and continued SOD monitoring, including by volunteers, is needed.

Wrentit

Federal Species of Concern

*Chamaea fasciata***Alameda Watch**

Chaparral, coastal scrub

A year-round resident in dense coastal scrub, chaparral, and shrubland habitats of far western North America from Oregon to Baja, the Wrentit is known to be a very sedentary species occupying intact native plant communities. Despite recent local population declines, the species is still common in the Berkeley-Oakland and Hayward-Fremont hills. The Wrentit's low dispersal ability makes it vulnerable to habitat loss, habitat fragmentation, and impacts of ground predators. Like elsewhere in California, the Wrentit's chaparral habitat faces threats from urban and suburban expansion, with a statewide conversion rate second only to that of grasslands.

California Thrasher

Federal Species of Concern

*Toxostoma redivivum***Alameda Priority**

Chaparral, coastal scrub

California Thrashers are permanent residents and endemics of coastal and foothill areas of California and northern Baja. They are found in chaparral on rocky, well-drained, south- or east-facing hillsides. In Alameda County, most birds are found east of the Berkeley and Oakland Hills in the southeast part of the county. Because the young leave the nest as ground runners, many juveniles on

suburbia's fringes are taken by cats and other ground predators. Predation, which also affects adults who feed mostly on the ground, along with suburban development are the greatest threats to this species in Alameda County.

Lawrence's Goldfinch

Federal Species of Concern

Spinus lawrencei

Alameda Watch

Blue oak woodland

Lawrence's Goldfinch is endemic to arid foothill woodlands in the extreme southwestern United States and northern Baja. It appears to prefer the seeds of specific native plants, especially fiddlenecks (*Amsinckia* spp.) during the breeding season. Lawrence's Goldfinch is an uncommon breeder in Alameda County, primarily in open blue oak and gray pine woodland in the southeastern part of the county, migrating south during the non-breeding season. This species may benefit from non-intensive habitat disturbance, such as grazing or agriculture, but destruction of oak woodland could have a negative effect. The Lawrence's Goldfinch's foraging habitat may also be threatened by the spread of non-native grasses, particularly on cattle ranches where native species are being displaced. Data from eBird for the SF Bay Area show a significant negative trend from 2007-2024.

Grasshopper Sparrow

Federal and State Species of Concern

Ammodramus savannarum

Alameda High Priority

Grassland

Primarily a summer resident in California, this semi-colonial ground-nesting species breeds in most coastal counties and in much of the Sacramento Valley from mid-March to August. It prefers moderately open, short to mid-height grasslands with scattered shrubs, though it may use taller and more diverse grasslands than Savannah Sparrows. The species may be more numerous in the Berkeley and Oakland Hills than in drier Diablo Range grasslands. Numbers and nest sites can vary from year to year. Grasshopper Sparrow populations are declining across the species' continent-wide range due to the loss and fragmentation of native and non-native grasslands to agricultural and urban development. In Alameda County, it is primarily urban development that poses a threat, as well as trail building and off-trail use. Conservation strategies should include the protection of grassland habitats, and minimization of disturbances that promote weed encroachment and impact native grasslands. Suitable or known nesting sites should be adequately protected from disturbance during

breeding season. More monitoring of local populations is needed, as well as research into the effects of fire and appropriate (potentially beneficial) grazing intensities on Grasshopper Sparrow habitat.

Savannah Sparrow (Bryant's)

State Species of Concern

*Passerculus sandwichensis alaudinus***Alameda Watch**

Grassland, salt marsh

A non-migratory subspecies, the Bryant's Savannah Sparrow resides in tidal marshes and grasslands of the coastal California fog belt from Humboldt County to Point Conception. Habitat degradation and loss throughout their range has led to population decline and local extirpations. In Alameda County, habitat restoration along the southern waterfront may benefit this subspecies. More widespread and accurate knowledge of the subspecies' field marks (back is a "... dark brown with olive cast and heavy black streaks; ventral streaks blackish, heavy" *Birds of the World*) could benefit from monitoring efforts and improve understanding of the subspecies' local presence and habitat preferences.

Song Sparrow (Alameda subspecies)

Federal and State Species of Concern

*Melospiza melodia pusillula***Alameda Watch**

Salt marsh

Endemic to the south arm of San Francisco Bay, this non-migratory subspecies of the Song Sparrow is restricted to tidal salt marsh habitats of suitable quality. Within its territory, this subspecies requires some upper marsh vegetation for nesting, so that nests remain dry during all but the very highest tides. Since the 19th century, tidal marsh habitat in the San Francisco Bay Region has been significantly reduced by diking and filling for salt evaporation ponds and urban development, which has led to local extirpation and an overall population decline for the Alameda Song Sparrow. In 2000, the population was estimated to be approximately 13,400-20,000. A potential threat to the species is invasive, non-native cordgrass (hybrid *Spartina*). Supporting efforts to eradicate hybrid *Spartina*, as well as wetland restoration of salt ponds, could benefit the species. Sea-level rise from climate change also threatens the Alameda Song Sparrow.

Western Meadowlark

Audubon Priority Bird

*Sturnella neglecta***Alameda Priority**

Grassland, pasture

The Western Meadowlark is a common year-round resident of Alameda County. It is generally found in grasslands, fields and pastures, and open areas, particularly in the eastern portion of the county. Although the species is still locally widespread and common, surveys indicate population declines in recent decades. Multiple studies have shown that grassland birds face steep declines across North America. Agricultural conversion and intensification in the east county are a concern for this species.

Bullock's Oriole

Federal Species of Concern

*Icterus bullockii***Alameda Watch**

Eucalyptus forest, riparian areas

A widespread summer resident and migrant throughout much of the western United States, Bullock's Oriole winters primarily in Mexico and, in smaller numbers, in coastal southern California. In Alameda County, this species occurs in open woodlands, generally in areas where large trees are widely spaced or occur in isolated clumps. Typical breeding habitats include riparian woodlands with cottonwoods, sycamores, and willows, and deciduous oaks. The species' propensity for eucalyptus nectar and pollen has allowed it to expand its historical range into areas where eucalyptus trees were introduced. California populations appear to be declining by an average of 1.4 percent annually. Among the likely causes for this decline are the use of pesticides and habitat destruction. In addition, Bullock's Oriole is possibly negatively affected by larger-scale shifts in rainfall patterns due to climate change in the southwestern United States and adjacent regions of Mexico, where the species undergoes a molt stopover during fall migration. Efforts to protect and enhance the habitat where they occur within the county could help this species.

Tricolored Blackbird*Agelaius tricolor***Alameda High Priority**

Pasture, cropland, freshwater marsh

Federal Species of Concern

State Threatened

Audubon Priority Bird

This species' global population is almost entirely confined to the state of California, with more than 75% of birds living in the Central Valley. Tricolored Blackbirds, or trikes, are year-round residents of Alameda County and are most abundant in the eastern portion of the county, particularly near Patterson Pass. Tricolored Blackbirds nest in eastern county freshwater wetlands with cattail and tule and, less commonly, in agricultural areas; however, they also have nested in wetland areas closer to the Bay, such as in Sunol Valley. The species forages extensively on agricultural lands, where it primarily preys on insects. Trikes are found in mega-colonies that require extensive foraging areas to support large numbers of nesting pairs. In winter, trikes can be found in large mixed flocks with other blackbirds. Populations have declined ~90% since the 1930s due to loss of freshwater wetlands and agriculture impacts. Efforts to protect and enhance the limited habitat of this type within the county could help this species.

Common Yellowthroat (San Francisco subspecies)*Geothlypis trichas sinuosa***Alameda Priority**

Riparian areas, freshwater marsh

Federal Species of Concern

State Species of Concern

One of North America's most widespread warblers, the Common Yellowthroat generally inhabits thick, tangled vegetation, particularly in wet areas. In contrast to the other migratory subspecies of the Common Yellowthroat, the non-migratory San Francisco Yellowthroat is a species of conservation concern. This endemic to the San Francisco Bay Area has seen its population decline by over 80% in the last century due to significant habitat loss and degradation. Within Alameda County, the San Francisco Yellowthroat breeds in marshy areas near the shoreline. Efforts to protect and enhance these habitats could help this unique subspecies.

Yellow Warbler*Setophaga petechia***Alameda High Priority**

Riparian areas

State Species of Concern

Audubon Priority Bird

The Yellow Warbler is found across North America in wet, deciduous thickets, particularly those containing riparian willows (*Salix* spp.). Once considered a common summer resident in Alameda County, the Yellow Warbler is now close to extirpation as a local breeding species. Population declines throughout much of California have been attributed to loss of riparian willow habitat (clearing and replacement by non-native grasses and other plants) and to nest parasitism by Brown-headed Cowbirds. Restoration of willow habitat of sufficient quality may avail future repopulation, as well as overall support of stream and watershed restoration. Any detection of this species in June should be carefully investigated.



SECTION 4. Habitat Types

Protection of habitat is critical to maintaining bird populations within the county and elsewhere. Many notable species use multiple habitat types within the county. The descriptions of habitat types have been adopted from Alameda County Breeding Bird Atlas (Richmond et al., 2011), and the San Francisco Bird Species of Conservation Concern (GGA, 2023), with much of the text below coming directly from the summary of habitat types in the Breeding Bird Atlas.

Table 4. Habitat Types for Alameda County Bird Species of Conservation Concern. Notable species that commonly use these habitats in Alameda County are indicated in italics, and the habitat types are also referred to in the species summaries in Section 3.

Tree dominated

Coast Live Oak Woodland: Consists primarily of coast live oak, along with bay laurel, madrone, and buckeye. Includes similar habitats dominated by canyon live oak. Coast live oak is more common on the western side of the county; in the east coast live oak woodland merges into blue oak woodland. Includes grassland understory in drier areas, and blackberry, toyon, hazelnut and other species in wetter areas. This habitat type also includes the Montane Hardwood Forest classifications from the ACBBA.

California Quail (Montane Hardwood Forest), Allen's Hummingbird, White-tailed Kite, Western Screech-Owl, Nuttall's Woodpecker, Oak Titmouse

Blue Oak Woodland: Dominated by blue oak, but also including gray pine, typically with a grassland understory. Occurs in drier areas of the southeastern hills of the county. Wetter areas may include valley oaks.

Golden Eagle (Valley Oak Woodland), Western Screech-Owl, Nuttall's Woodpecker, Yellow-billed Magpie, Oak Titmouse, Lawrence's Goldfinch

Conifer Forest: Includes a mix of conifer-dominated forests, including Monterey Pine (non-native in the County but introduced in East Bay hills) and Redwood, as well as mixed forests of conifers and hardwoods. Mostly occurs in the Berkeley-Oakland hills.

Allen's Hummingbird (Redwood), Olive-sided Flycatcher (Monterey Pine)

Eucalyptus Forest: Eucalyptus are non-native and were planted throughout the county for timber windbreaks - primarily blue gum, although other eucalyptus species are also found. Understory can include live oak, bay, poison oak, toyon, blackberry and non-native grasses.

Allen's Hummingbird, Bullock's Oriole

Riparian Areas: Consists of a broad mix of tree species, shrub dominated habitats, and unvegetated areas adjacent to streams throughout the county. Typical trees include valley oak,

Fremont cottonwood, western sycamore, California black walnut, white alder, big leaf maple, California buckeye, and box elder, with willows most common riparian scrub areas. Understory can include elderberry, blackberry and more.

Allen's Hummingbird, Spotted Sandpiper (unvegetated areas), White-tailed Kite, Western Screech-Owl, Nuttall's Woodpecker, Oak Titmouse, Bullock's Oriole, Common Yellowthroat, Yellow Warbler

Shrub dominated

Chaparral: Contains a mix of shrubs, including scrub oak, chaparral oak, ceanothus, toyon, and manzanita, as well as chamise, California sage, and black sage in drier and hotter areas.

Found in southeastern hills and in Berkeley-Oakland and Hayward-Fremont hills. Typically chaparral is found in drier areas than coastal scrub.

California Quail, Allen's Hummingbird, Wrentit, California Thrasher

Coastal Scrub: Dominated by coyote bush and including blackberry, coffeeberry, poison oak, ceanothus, buckwheat, California sage, and monkey flower. Taller than most chaparral habitats and in wetter areas. Found on south-facing slopes in the Berkeley-Oakland and Hayward-Fremont hills as well as in isolated locations closer to the Bay.

California Quail, Allen's Hummingbird, Wrentit, California Thrasher (in areas with dense canopy)

Alkali Scrub: Consists of alkali grassland and iodine bush scrub. Occurs in limited areas in the northeastern portion of the county.

American Avocet, Burrowing Owl, Loggerhead Shrike

Herbaceous dominated

Grassland: Includes the predominant annual non-native grasslands found throughout the county, as well as areas of perennial native grasslands. Annual non-native species include wild oats, *Bromus* spp. and others. Native perennial species include needlegrass, fescue, blue wild rye, California oat grass, meadow barley, and *Melica* spp.). Native grasslands are only found in small remnants, while annual grasslands occur throughout the ridges and hillslopes of the southern portion of the county.

White-tailed Kite, Golden Eagle, Northern Harrier, Swainson's Hawk, Burrowing Owl, Loggerhead Shrike, Grasshopper Sparrow, Western Meadowlark

Pasture: Grassland areas used for grazing, hay, and unirrigated grain production. Occurs in the northeastern part of the county.

White-tailed Kite, Golden Eagle, Northern Harrier, Burrowing Owl, Loggerhead Shrike, Western Meadowlark

Cropland: Includes areas actively used for crops as well as vineyards. Occurs primarily in the gently rolling hills of the Livermore-Amador Valley.

White-tailed Kite, Northern Harrier, Swainson's Hawk, Loggerhead Shrike, Western Meadowlark, Tricolored Blackbird

Other terrestrial habitats

Barren Areas: Areas lacking vegetation, including saline and disturbed areas adjacent to the shoreline and salt ponds, as well as other urban areas, such as airport runways, freeway overpasses, and breakwaters.

California Gull, Least Tern, Snowy Plover, Swainson's Hawk, Burrowing Owl

Urban and Suburban Habitats: Includes planted tree groves, shade trees, street strips, lawns and shrub cover in urban and suburban areas. This is found throughout the county, and especially from the east bay hills to the Bay shoreline.

Allen's Hummingbird, Nuttall's Woodpecker, Oak Titmouse

Wetland and aquatic habitats

Salt Marsh: Tidal and non-tidal wetland areas dominated by California cordgrass, perennial pickleweed, salt grass and other species. Found along the Bay shoreline, although substantially reduced in area due to shoreline development, including salt ponds.

Ridgway's Rail, Sora, Black Rail, American Avocet, Northern Harrier, Alameda Song Sparrow, Bryant's Savannah Sparrow

Freshwater and Brackish Marsh: Includes tidal and non-tidal wetlands dominated by herbaceous emergent vegetation, including cattails, as well as tule, bulrush, and many other plant species. Found along tidal creeks with low salinity, as well as along lakes, reservoirs, ponds, and sewage treatment facilities. Vegetation in freshwater and brackish marshes is typically taller and denser than in salt marsh areas.

Ruddy Duck, Eared Grebe, Virginia Rail, Sora, Black Rail, American Avocet, American Bittern, White-tailed Kite, Northern Harrier, Tricolored Blackbird, Common Yellowthroat

Rocky Shoreline: Unvegetated and rocky dominated areas of the Bay shoreline; primarily areas created with riprap or fill, with very limited natural rocky shoreline in the county.

Black Oystercatcher, Spotted Sandpiper, Western Gull, Brandt's Cormorant

Beach: Sandy and unvegetated shorelines, with large areas along the western side of Alameda Island, as well as some areas in McLaughlin Eastshore State Park and the Hayward shoreline.

Snowy Plover, Sanderling, Western Gull, California Gull, Least Tern, Elegant Tern, Black Skimmer

Tidal Mudflat: Unvegetated intertidal areas that are typically between salt marshes or beaches and the open bay. Primarily muddy areas (fine clay sediment), but also includes sandy tidal flats in some locations along the bay. These are very important foraging areas for shorebirds.

American Avocet, Western Gull, California Gull, Elegant Tern, Black Skimmer

Salt Pond: Areas currently used for salt production from Coyote Hills to the southern county border, as well as ponds previously used for salt production that are now being managed as open water ponds in the Eden Landing area. Shallow areas are used by shorebirds and waders, while deeper areas are used by ducks and other waterbirds.

Ruddy Duck, Eared Grebe, Western Grebe, Clark's Grebe, American Avocet, Snowy Plover, California Gull, Least Tern, American White Pelican

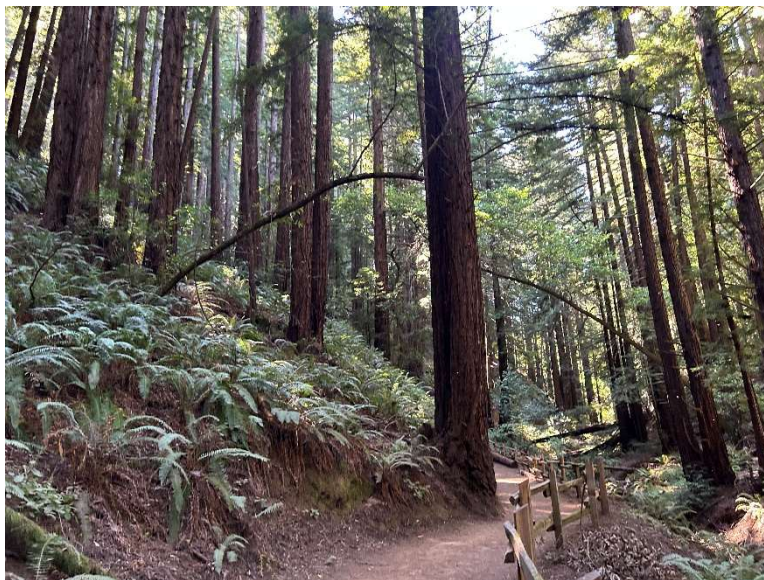
Open Bay: Shallow subtidal waters adjacent to the Bay shoreline. Important foraging areas for ducks and other waterbirds.

Ruddy Duck, Eared Grebe, Western Grebe, Clark's Grebe, Western Gull, California Gull, Least Tern, Elegant Tern, Black Skimmer, Brandt's Cormorant, Pelagic Cormorant, Bald Eagle

Freshwater Lake: Open water areas, including ponds, lakes, reservoirs and treatment ponds. Most freshwater open water areas in the county are man-made but still provide important habitat and foraging areas for waterbirds, including the freshwater wetlands that border their shorelines.

Ruddy Duck, Eared Grebe, Western Grebe, Clark's Grebe, California Gull, American White Pelican, Bald Eagle

Birds in the county and elsewhere are impacted by a range of human activities, and the relative importance of a particular threat varies by species. Most species are impacted by multiple threats, and some threats include impacts across the four major categories below (e.g., direct impacts of contaminants can also affect habitat degradation, habitat fragmentation can lead to increased predation, etc.). Below we have attempted to categorize the major threats to bird species within the county.



SECTION 5. Common Threats

Bird species in the county face many threats, through impacts to their habitat, as well as direct threats to individuals and local populations, such as disturbances and increased predation. Below, we have summarized common threats to species of concern within the county. It is important to note that most species face multiple threats across a range of these issues.

Table 5. Common threats to Alameda County Bird Species of Conservation Concern.

Habitat loss and degradation

Habitat conversion for urban and suburban development: Increased development leads to the permanent loss of habitat as natural areas are converted to urban or suburban uses. This includes a wide range of development: from housing and shopping centers to business parks, industrial areas, and energy development (solar, wind), as well as additional infrastructure, e.g., roads, water impoundment, power lines, bike paths, etc. These impacts are of most concern on the border of existing habitats, where development can fragment and expand into areas that provide valuable existing habitat for birds and other wildlife. This also can include the conversion of agricultural lands to urban or suburban uses.

Agricultural expansion: Expansion of agricultural activities through the conversion of existing habitat to agriculture also results in the loss and fragmentation of habitat. In addition, agricultural intensification, i.e., pasture or grazing areas being converted to row crops including viticulture, as well as overgrazing, leads to reduction in habitat quality and impacts many bird species that use low-intensity agricultural areas.

Non-native and invasive species: Non-native species have been introduced to the region intentionally or unintentionally, with exponential growth in trade and travel. Many non-natives do not persist, but those that do, can cause substantial impacts to local bird populations by impacting the food web, spreading disease, and increasing predation and competition. Local species have adapted and co-evolved over millions of years, and increasing non-native populations of plants and other animals leads to consequential declines in local bird populations.

Promoting native plants helps local birds, and this is true both in natural areas, as well as in urban and suburban areas. Planting native plants in home gardens, schools, and throughout our cities is a critical way to improve conditions for Alameda county birds and other wildlife.

Invasive species are highly problematic non-native organisms that reproduce widely and once established, readily spread without human intervention. Invasive plants can modify habitat structure and quality and shift the food availability (e.g., English ivy, eucalyptus, thistle,

mediterranean annual grasses). Invasive animals can cause increased predation (e.g., red foxes, rats) or outcompete native bird populations (e.g., European Starlings and House Sparrows). Some bird native species, such as crows and some gulls, have increased in urban and degraded environments, and they can have impacts similar to non-native species through increased predation and disturbances.

Disturbances and direct impacts to populations

Human disturbances: Human activities, including hikers, bikers, equestrians, birders, off-roading, dumping, and drones, directly impact birds by flushing them from their nesting or foraging activities, which reduces energy for reproduction and increases chances for predation. Beyond immediate disturbances, these activities can also impact bird species by degrading habitat quality. Of particular concern are off-trail use and impacts, and the creation of unpermitted trails in parks and other natural areas. Off-trail impacts are much more likely to affect nesting, foraging, and roosting activities. Humans also impact birds by feeding them or feeding other wildlife (directly, as well as indirectly through poorly secured trash or pet food), which may increase bird predation.

Cats: Cats, whether they are outdoor pets, feral, or have been trapped, neutered and released, can cause substantial predation on local bird populations. They especially impact ground-nesting and ground-feeding birds. A number of species in this report are the victims of the expanding cat population across the country. Cat feces also carry *Toxoplasma gondii*, a parasite that can be passed to other animals, especially where cats congregate at feeding stations.

Dogs: Some dogs have been bred to chase other animals, and birds are no exception. Dogs, especially when off-leash, can disturb or even kill ground-nesting and ground-feeding birds, as well as flocks of shorebirds, waterfowl, and gulls that are resting in open areas or beaches.

Disease: Many diseases directly affect local bird populations, including avian flu, West Nile Virus, and salmonella. In addition, plant pathogens such as Sudden Oak Death, have impacted bird habitat in the county. Disease-related impacts are expected to increase with greater globalization, travel, and climate change.

Building and infrastructure impacts: Buildings and other human structures can impact bird populations through window strikes and other collisions. In addition, night lighting impacts bird migration and also increases the likelihood of building collisions. Wind turbines impact a wide range of bird species from song birds to raptors, while power line collisions appear to have a greater impact on larger bird species.

Contaminants

Contaminants are of most concern when they accumulate up the food web, although they can impact bird species at many different trophic levels. In addition, many contaminants are transported by water and impact aquatic habitats more intensively, although air contamination and direct application of pesticides and other chemicals on the land are still of major concern. Oil spills and other aquatic contaminants are of particular concern for water birds. Pesticides

have historically impacted many bird populations, and their impacts continue to be of concern, both from ongoing applications, as well as from food-web exposure to historic accumulations in soils and sediments. Secondary poisoning from rodenticides and other pesticides is also a problem in multiple habitats. Rat poison kills many owls and birds of prey when they feed on the rodents who have ingested these chemicals.

The Bay region has high accumulations of mercury and selenium, from watershed sources and historic management and mining activities. In particular, methyl mercury is an ongoing concern throughout the Bay. Similarly, inputs of lead to the environment have declined, but elevated levels remain in some soils and sediments. More recent sources of contamination include PFAS, microplastics, pharmaceuticals, and many other chemicals. Much more information is needed on potential impacts of these contaminants of emerging concern.

In addition, human castoffs, whether trash dumped at the side of a road, chemicals, lubricants or paint poured down a storm drain or stashed in the woods, can have a poisonous effect on birds. If it is in the gutter or on the street it will likely go down a storm drain. Storm drains lead directly to bodies of water and only a small amount of oil/gasoline/coolant can contaminate hundreds of gallons of water in our bays, lakes, reservoirs and creeks affecting the birds living, feeding and nesting at those places.

Climate Change Impacts

Sea-level rise: Sea-level rise, driven by climate warming, is already occurring and is predicted to accelerate substantially in the coming decades. It will impact all habitats adjacent to the Bay, and the birds that use these habitats, with increased flooding and erosion of nesting, foraging and roosting areas. Transitional uplands habitats between tidal areas and developed lands also will shrink (often referred to as “coastal squeeze”). Saltwater intrusion associated with sea-level rise will impact shoreline and adjacent habitats with increased salinity leading to shifts in local plant communities.

Additional climate change impacts: In terrestrial habitats, climate change will impact habitat distributions and bird species directly by increasing temperature, as well as causing regional shifts in precipitation patterns. These changes will lead to gradual shifts in plant distributions, as well as increased stress for birds and other animals. In addition, with warmer temperatures and increased droughts, fire severity is likely to increase and could lead to rapid shifts in plant and animal distributions. Compounding this, vegetation management to reduce fire risks, also can impact bird species, especially if not done in an appropriate way (e.g., tree removal during nesting season).

In aquatic and shoreline habitats, increases in water temperature and changes in water salinity will affect the aquatic food web and shift the aquatic prey base that is critical for Bay waterbirds and shorebirds.

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- BirdLife International Data Zone. <https://datazone.birdlife.org/>
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Black Oystercatcher