

THE GULL

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GOLDEN GATE AUDUBON SOCIETY // VOL. 100 NO. 2 SPRING 2015



SPEAKING OUT FOR BIRDS IN THE EAST BAY

BY ILANA DEBARE

Pam Young stood on the ridge of Albany Bulb and trained her binoculars onto the sandy beach where the bulb meets the main East Bay shoreline. Five or six dogs cavorted off-leash across the sand, in and out of the water.

“You’d see plovers on this beach if not for the dogs,” she murmured.

CONTINUED on page 5





GGAS conservation activists meet with East Bay Regional Park District rangers in Alameda.

CONSERVATION COMMITTEES: AN INVALUABLE BRAIN TRUST

BY CINDY MARGULIS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Since becoming Executive Director, I've been amazed by how profoundly our work is advanced by volunteers. Of course I deeply respect the passion and skill of our staff, but the prodigious talents, energies, and intelligence of our volunteer corps magnify our impact tremendously. Most people, aware of our 98-year track record of championing conservation in the Bay Area, imagine that GGAS has a much larger staff and budget than we actually have. In fact, the real secret to our success is that we deploy—I kid you not—approximately 300 times as many volunteers as staff.

Everything we do—from our 120+ popular field trips and award-winning Eco-Education programs for underserved kids, to our citizen science projects and successful habitat restoration efforts on both sides of San Francisco Bay—depends upon the participation of volunteers.

This issue's main story highlights how one well-led interdisciplinary team of volunteers achieves results. GGAS's three distinct conservation committees—San Francisco, East Bay, and Friends of the Alameda Wildlife Reserve—focus on different areas and address a variety of concerns.

FAWR works closely with multiple government entities and marshals volunteers to support the colony of endangered California Least Terns and other species living at Alameda Point (the former U.S. Naval Air Station site), while the San Francisco and East Bay committees keep busy on a litany of issues, including formulating draft recommendations for local governments and land managers to protect birds under threat in our burgeoning metropolis. The committees analyze issues, research best practices, and generate solutions that work well for birds *and* for people. Scientists, lawyers, educators, writers, and individuals with diverse talents come together to make Golden Gate Audubon's voice so effective. By leveraging such intellectual capacity, our recommendations are not just thorough but achievable.

Nowadays, conservation is a collaborative enterprise. Ideals and passion are not enough. We also need energy to conduct citizen science, diverse mindsets to address complex issues (and evaluate 500-page Environmental Impact Reports!), and a willingness to work together in a coordinated fashion.

Fortunately, GGAS's recommendations often do prevail—because the collective brain trust and diligence of our conservation committees makes us especially good at defining feasible win-win situations. Thank goodness!

And thank *you*...to all our conservation committee volunteers and to our donors whose generosity, during Birdathon and throughout the year, sustain the volume of our conservation work.

NEWS BRIEFS

Tree Care Brochure in Spanish

Our *Healthy Trees, Healthy Birds* brochure is now available in Spanish as well as English! Help prevent damage to nests during tree care. Share a copy with your landscaper or tree trimmer. Download it from our web site or call our office at 510.843.2222.

Save Birds from Fishing Line

Discarded plastic fishing line is a major hazard, entangling water birds and often drowning or strangling them. We're working to install fishing line recycling containers and educational signage at local fishing sites along the Bay. To get involved, email nweeden@goldengateaudubon.org

Learn about GGAS Events by Email

Are you receiving our monthly emails listing our upcoming free Field Trips and other birding events? If not, you're missing out on a lot of fun! Send your current email address to idebare@goldengateaudubon.org and we'll add you to the list.

Bay Area Rare Bird Sightings

What exciting avian visitors have we had recently? Each month Bruce Mast compiles rare or unusual Bay Area bird sightings on our website. You can find Bruce's current and past Observations columns at goldengateaudubon.org/birding-resources/observations. Call in your rare sightings at 415.681.7422.



Martin Nicolaus



Martin Nicolaus

(Left) A paved loop trail encircles the park; (above) Red-winged Blackbird at Cesar Chavez Park; (below) Burrowing Owl at Cesar Chavez Park.

CESAR CHAVEZ PARK

BY TONI MESTER

LOCATION

11 Spinnaker Way
Berkeley

Once a dump, the park today is a treasure trove for birders.

Berkeley old-timers remember when Cesar Chavez Park was a dump, the last of the active East Bay landfills. It would cost nothing to leave a truckload of trash on a smelly mound, surrounded by thousands of circling gulls. After the dump closed in 1983, the 90 acres on San Francisco Bay were capped and sealed and gradually transformed into a park with some of the most astounding views in the Bay Area.

Today the park is a treasure trove for birders, who can spot up to 150 species from low hills and grasslands bordered by the bay and a shallow tidal basin.

A paved, flat loop trail circles the edge of the park. Starting near the DoubleTree Hotel on Marina Blvd., you'll find wintering water birds such as scaups, Buffleheads, Ruddy Ducks, and grebes feeding in the tidal basin.

Further along, look for shy Burrowing Owls—a California Species of Special Concern—poking their heads out of ground squirrel burrows between November and March. They can be hard to spot, but the volunteers in Golden Gate Audubon's Burrowing Owl docent program can help you out.

Note the low concrete art installation on the north

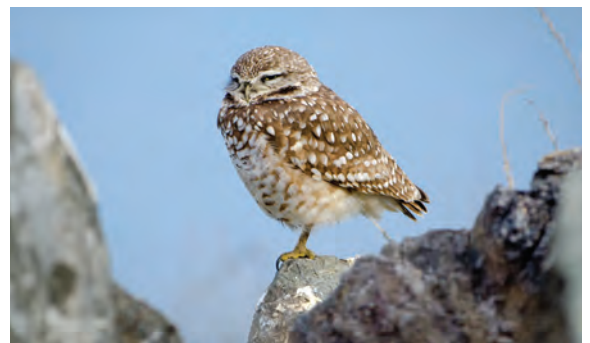
side of the path. GGAS volunteers worked with the city to ensure this sculpture—which echoes the line of the hills—doubles as a visible border to protect the owls when they're present.

Heading west, you leave behind the visible signs of civilization with just the bay and Mount Tamalpais in the distance. You could be in the Outer Hebrides. Look for the Barn Owl boxes, high on stilts. The trail is lined with sweet fennel, where you can spot Red-winged Blackbirds, sparrows, finches, and with luck, a meadowlark.

The park also has an abundance of dogs, with a 17-acre off-leash area in the center. Overgrown fox-tail grasses threaten the dogs' safety, and the City of Berkeley is considering options such as mowing, better vegetation management, or moving the dog area.

Golden Gate Audubon's East Bay Conservation Committee is an active part of the debate. We advocate moving the dog area to the southeastern corner of the park, which would not only make mowing easier but would be closer to parking and further from the Burrowing Owls and other wildlife.

Read a longer version of this article on goldengateaudubon.org/blog, where you can also find information on other local Birding Hotspots.



Doug Donaldson

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



Bryan's Shearwater

DISCOVERING AND CONSERVING BRYAN'S SHEARWATER

PETER PYLE

LOCATION / DATE

San Francisco
Thursday, April 16
7:00 p.m. refreshments
7:30 p.m. program

Bryan's Shearwater (*Puffinus bryani*) was identified for the first time in 2011 by Peter Pyle and two colleagues, based on DNA analysis of a specimen collected in 1963 on Midway Atoll. That specimen had initially been misidentified as a Little Shearwater. Peter will recount discovery of the new species, which was named after his grandfather, a long-time curator at Honolulu's Bishop Museum. He will share information on these birds, their habitat requirements, and attempts to locate them with remote audio-recording devices designed by U.C. Santa Cruz researchers. Bryan's Shearwaters appear to be extremely rare and in need of targeted conservation actions to increase their population size.

Peter Pyle is an ornithologist and marine biologist who works for the Institute for Bird Populations in Point Reyes Station. He has authored over 120 scientific papers and is well-known among bird banders for his Identification Guides summarizing molt, ageing, and sexing information for birds in the hand.

BIRDATHON AWARDS CELEBRATION

Oakland

Sunday, May 17, 3–6 p.m.

Whether or not you went on a Birdathon trip, join us for a fun afternoon celebrating the beauty of birds on Sunday, May 17! Mingle with birding friends while enjoying gourmet appetizers and premium wines from Robert Young Estate Winery and Hawkes Wines—the hosts of our Birds and Wine Birdathon trip. Visit with live raptors from Native Bird Connections, view bird prints by Berkeley artist Maggie Hurley, and try out some new binoculars from Woodland Hills Cameras & Telescopes...all at a stunning Oakland Hills home with views of Chabot Regional Park. See goldengateaudubon.org/birdathon2015-celebration for details and tickets.

THE CALIFORNIA DROUGHT AND GARDENING FOR WILDLIFE

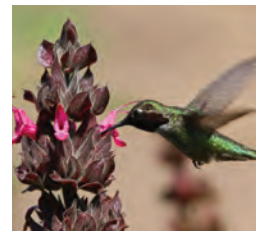
NANCY KENT

LOCATION / DATE

Berkeley
Thursday, May 21
7:00 p.m. refreshments
7:30 p.m. program

Our current drought has challenged landscape architects to find new ways to design residential landscapes. As we move away from water-intensive plants and lawns, towards designs that incorporate drought-tolerant and native species, there are new opportunities to create more sustainable landscapes with diverse habitats for birds and butterflies. Nancy Kent, a California landscape architect with a practice in Oakland, will discuss evolving garden design and garden elements that encourage diverse wildlife and plant communities.

A Parks Commissioner for Piedmont, Nancy is working with the city, EBMUD, and StopWaste.org to create a bay-friendly park from a water-intensive lawn landscape.



Nancy Kent

HIDDEN LIVES OF BIRDS: THEIR WORLD OF SOUND

GREG BUDNEY

LOCATION / DATE

San Francisco
Thursday, June 18
7:00 p.m. refreshments
7:30 p.m. program

Explore the lives of birds through a presentation of sound recordings from Cornell's Macaulay Library, the world's largest archive of bird sounds. From the stunningly beautiful to the bizarre, from drumming to mimicry, from the Nightingale to the Musician Wren...we will listen to sounds that birds use to communicate, and learn what sounds tell us about their complex lives.

Greg Budney has worked at the Macaulay Library for 34 years and is currently its Curator for Collection Development and Outreach. He created a sound recording training course that has trained about 500 scientists and volunteers for field research.



Pioneer bird song recordist Peter Paul Kellogg, 1950s.

Cornell Lab of Ornithology

San Francisco: First Unitarian Universalist Church and Center, 1187 Franklin Street (at Geary). Public transit, street parking, and parking in a lot for a fee are available. Directions: Visit www.usf.org/visitors_faqs.html, and use the Map It! link on the left.

Berkeley: Northbrae Community Church, 941 The Alameda (between Solano and Marin). Directions: www.northbrae.org/directions.html.

EAST BAY CONTINUED from page 1

Pam is a member of Golden Gate Audubon Society's East Bay Conservation Committee. One of GGAS's most active volunteer committees, the EBCC gathers data on local birds at risk, meets with government officials, and submits thoughtful, well-researched comments on development projects affecting wildlife.

Two of their current hot-button issues: Plans for the future of Albany Bulb and Beach, where Pam Young was looking for shorebirds, and protecting a Cliff Swallow colony in Orinda.

Albany Shoreline

The Albany Bulb, a former landfill jutting into the bay just north of the Golden Gate Fields race track, became part of Eastshore State Park in 2002. For years, its overgrown, rebar-studded landscape was filled with homeless encampments. But in 2013 and 2014, the City of Albany removed the homeless camps, widened trails, and eliminated shrubbery to make the bulb a safer and more attractive park destination.

City and park district officials are now holding a planning process to determine the site's future—and GGAS committee members are weighing in.

"We favor passive recreation, which includes hiking and biking and birding," said Young. "We don't think it should include things like a boat launch."

A related issue is management of Albany Beach, next to the Bulb. Current park regulations prohibit dogs on the beach, and



Pam Young looks south at Albany Beach.



John Ehrenfeld

GGAS is working to ensure Orinda swallows can nest successfully like these at Lake Berryessa.

Albany Bulb and Beach is a fragile, relatively small area that attracts a variety of uplands and shoreline birds.

require dogs to be on-leash elsewhere on the Bulb.

But—as Pam was documenting through her binoculars—dogs illegally dominate the beach. It's common to see off-leash dogs throughout the Bulb area.

So Golden Gate Audubon is pushing for stronger enforcement of existing dog rules at the Albany shoreline.

"This is a very fragile area that attracts a variety of uplands and shoreline birds," said Young, who herself is a dog owner. "It's a small area, so the impacts of off-leash dogs are relatively greater. And dog owners have access to wonderful off-leash parks nearby at Point Isabel and Cesar Chavez Park."

Wilder Swallows

Twelve miles away in Orinda, conservation committee members Erica Rutherford and John Colbert have been working to protect a colony of Cliff Swallows.

They started visiting the former Wilder Ranch—now under construction as a residential development—when they heard of a Rock Wren sighting during the 2013 Christmas Bird Count.

Last spring, they spotted nine occupied Cliff Swallow nests in the restroom eaves at a sports field there, and at least 30 nests at

the Quarry House community center. But the next week they found all the Quarry House nests removed, and remnants of broken nests on the ground at the sports field.

Swallows and their nests are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, among other regulations. It is illegal to intentionally destroy swallow nests, eggs, or young without a permit.

"At the Quarry House, surely the maintenance staff is responsible for nest removal because the eaves are too high for anyone else to reach," said Rutherford.

GGAS contacted city officials, who agreed to hang reflective strips over the restroom doors as a more humane deterrent to nest-building. GGAS also produced educational flyers about the swallows for sports field users.

Meanwhile, Rutherford and Colbert hope to extend this educational outreach to Wilder homebuyers as well. "People are presumably moving here to be close to nature," Rutherford said. "We hope they will see nesting birds as an opportunity, not a nuisance."

To get involved in the East Bay Conservation Committee, contact chair April Rose Sommer at april@sommerpublicinterestlaw.com.

DONATIONS

Thank you for your generous donations to support our many conservation, education, and member activities!

Donations from December 1, 2014 through February 28, 2015

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\$1000 or more

Carol Baxter, Estate of Hans Bruijnes, Katherine Erickson, David Haray, Harold C. Kirker, Patricia Kirkpatrick, Miles & Mel McKey, John Nelson, Karen Rosenbaum & Ben McClinton, SCS Global Services, Kuppe G. Shankar, Jon & Donna Sieker, Jacqueline Smalley, Estate of John Sudall, Sylvia L. Sykora, Marshall White

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BIRDATHON 2015: MORE TRIPS, MORE FUN

A Photo Big Day where people try to photograph 100 species of birds in 12 hours...A behind-the-scenes tour of the Oakland Zoo...Watching California Condors soar in the Ventana wilderness... A combination of Sonoma's best birding spots with private tastings at two premium wineries...

Birdathon 2015, taking place throughout the month of April, offers a wider and more exciting array of trips than ever.

And with the enthusiastic involvement of Golden Gate Audubon members, we're hoping to hit our fundraising goal of \$50,000 to help Bay Area birds!

It's not too late to get involved. Although some of the 25 Birdathon trips filled up quickly, many still have openings. See golden-gate-audubon.org/birdathon2015-trips.

All participants who raise \$100 or more will receive a free Birdathon t-shirt featuring our Long-billed Curlew logo. Top fundraisers will win prizes such as two-night stays at the Costanoa eco-lodge and Sierra Hot Springs lodge.

And fundraising isn't as hard as it might seem!

"You wonder, 'Can I really make a difference?'" said Bonnie Ng, last year's top Birdathon fundraiser.

Bonnie was a newcomer both to birding and to fundraising, but she wrote a heartfelt email to her friends about her desire to become a better birder and also to undertake a "togetherness project" with her husband.



The "Birding Boot Camp" trip was their joint project. And her outreach paid off in a whopping \$2,480 to protect Bay Area birds.

"It was truly amazing the people who responded," she said. "You just have to get over the fear of asking for money. You realize there's a greater cause that is worth stepping out for."

Even if you can't take part in a Birdathon trip, join us at the Birdathon Awards Celebration on Sunday, May 17. (See details on page 4.) Celebrate spring, birds, friendship...and raise a glass of Hawkes Wine or Robert Young Estate wine, the two Sonoma wineries that are featured in our Birds and Wine trip.

Many thanks to our terrific field trip leaders, Birdathon celebration volunteers, and members of the Birdathon 2015 Steering Committee who made it all happen: Holly Bern, Cathy Bleier, Linda Carloni, Ilana DeBare, Alan Harper, Dan Harris, Lisa Eileen Hern, Steve Lombardi, Cindy Margulis, Beth Moseley, Chris Okon, Judith Pynn, and Madelyn Stone.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Return of the Terns

Alameda

Saturday, June 20

These naturalist-led bus tours are the one day each year when you can get a close-up view of the nesting colony of endangered California Least Terns at Alameda Point. Advance sign-up required. Check with us or East Bay Regional Parks in May for details.

2015 Volunteer Appreciation Picnic

Alameda

Saturday, June 20

Celebrate our incredible volunteers at our annual picnic, this year in Alameda after the Return of the Terns event. Join us from noon until 3 p.m. at the Sand Castle Picnic Area at Crown Beach, Otis Drive and 8th Street. Carpooling recommended.

ROSTER

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NORTHERN CALIFORNIA BIRD BOX

415.681.7422

The Golden Gate Audubon Society was founded January 25, 1917, and became a chapter of National Audubon in 1948. Golden Gate Audubon Supporting Membership is \$35 per year. Renewals should be sent to the Golden Gate Audubon office. The board of directors meets six times per year (schedule can be obtained from the office).

The Gull is published four times per year. Special third-class postage paid in Oakland, CA. Send address changes to the office promptly. The post office does not forward The Gull.

Golden Gate Audubon Society

2530 San Pablo Avenue, Suite G
Berkeley, CA 94702

Office hours: Monday, Wednesday and Thursday
9 a.m. – noon, and other hours by appointment
Tel 510.843.2222

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ggas@goldengateaudubon.org

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Visit our online store at goldengateaudubon.org/store.

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

**3 Bay Area Hotspot:
Cesar Chavez Park**

There's a lot more than Burrowing Owls at this Berkeley waterfront park.

4 Speaker Series

Discovering Bryan's Shearwater, gardening for wildlife during our drought, and the hidden world of bird sounds.

7 Birdathon 2015

Our sixth annual Birdathon has more exciting trips than ever—and there's still time to sign up for one.

BACKYARD BIRDER



Allen Hirsch, allen.hirsch@zenfolio.com

Western Bluebirds on nest box at San Pablo Park, Berkeley.

BECOME A NEST BOX HOST

BY ILANA DEBARE

Spring is nesting season...and a time when many bird lovers long for a close-up view of nestlings and parents. Installing a nest box in your yard is easier than ever, thanks to some great web sites with advice on how to design, place, and monitor boxes for various species.

Point Blue Conservation Science offers tips on "Being the Best Nest Box Landlord" at pointblue.org/uploads/assets/education/songbirdboxes.pdf.

And the Cornell Lab of Ornithology offers nest box instructions

for over 50 species (not all local to the Bay Area) at nestwatch.org/learn/all-about-birdhouses.

Nest boxes are useful for cavity nesters—birds that normally nest in holes in trees. Here in the Bay Area, that includes species such as Western Bluebirds, Tree and Violet-green Swallows, Chestnut-Backed Chickadees, Bewick's and House Wrens, and in appropriate areas Ash-throated Flycatchers, American Kestrels, Barn Owls, and Western Screech Owls.

Cornell also has instructions for a nesting shelf for Barn Swallows and a nesting basket for Mourning Doves, two Bay Area species that are in decline and could use a helping hand.

The best time to install a nest box is winter, before nesting gets underway. Make sure your yard has the right habitat for the species you're targeting. If outdoor cats frequent your yard, it's not a safe place to install a box.

Many decorative "bird houses" sold in home décor stores or craft galleries are completely unfit for actual birds! The most important feature is the entry hole, which should be big enough for your target species, but not big enough to allow non-native species like European Starlings. An exterior perch is unnecessary and in fact may endanger nestlings by providing easy entry to predators. See the Cornell or Point Blue web site for more design specifications.

Once your box is installed, you can monitor it and share your data with Cornell's Nestwatch program. And each fall, once the young have fledged, clean the box using gloves, a mask, and a 10 percent solution of bleach to water.

No room in your own yard? GGAS often gets requests to provide nest boxes for schoolyards and parks. Let us know at nweeden@goldengateaudubon.org if you'd like to help fund, build, or install nest boxes in public spaces.