

THE GULL

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GOLDEN GATE AUDUBON SOCIETY // VOL. 99 NO. 1 WINTER 2014



SPEAK UP FOR WILDLIFE IN THE GGNRA

BY ILANA DEBARE

For too many years, the Golden Gate National Recreation Area has been going to the dogs. Now there's an opportunity to take some of it back—to provide for safe use of this stunning natural spot by wildlife and by nature lovers, in addition to dogs and their owners.

The National Park Service is currently undertaking a long-overdue revision of GGNRA dog management policies. Golden Gate Audubon and



CONTINUED on page 5

Off-leash dog at the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.
Allen Hirsch/allenh.zenfolio.com



Burrowing Owl.

2013—A LEANER BUT EFFECTIVE GOLDEN GATE AUDUBON

BY MIKE LYNES, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Despite a reduced staff in 2013, Golden Gate Audubon maintained its 96-year-long tradition of strong advocacy for birds and community building among Bay Area birders.

Anthony DiCicco, our education director, highlights our Eco-Education program on page 4. Anthony was recently named Environmental Educator of the Year by the California Institute for Biodiversity—another example of the effectiveness of our youth education program under Anthony's leadership, with assistance from Marissa Ortega-Welch and our many Eco-Ed volunteers.

Our volunteer field trip leaders led more

than 100 free bird walks throughout the Bay Area in 2013. We hosted 11 expert naturalists in our Speaker Series. Our docents spread out along the Bay Trail, at Lake Merritt, and at Cesar Chavez Park to introduce thousands of Bay Area residents to the wonder of birds viewed up close through scopes. Creating these kinds of connections is a fundamental part of Golden Gate Audubon and is key to succeeding in our conservation goals.

My new responsibilities as executive director meant I had less time for conservation advocacy, but our conservation committees filled the gap. For instance, Friends of the Alameda Wildlife Reserve

reviewed hundreds of pages of planning documents on projects that will affect the endangered California Least Terns. The San Francisco Conservation Committee provided feedback on the new dog management plans for the Golden Gate National Recreation Area and on proposed redevelopment at Crissy Field, home to an important wetland and wintering Snowy Plovers.

Meanwhile, the East Bay Conservation Committee spoke out to protect the East Bay shoreline, including commenting on the Lawrence Berkeley Nuclear Laboratory development site in Richmond. And our Burrowing Owl docent program expanded beyond Berkeley to partner with other groups promoting Burrowing Owl conservation throughout the East Bay.

We also continued our hard work in the Altamont Pass area. We defeated an effort by a wind turbine company to roll back protections for Golden Eagles and other birds. And we worked with Alameda County and other wind companies to proceed with removing the most dangerous turbines in the pass.

Golden Gate Audubon accomplished all of these things despite a significant reduction in staff, a move to a smaller office, and other cost-cutting measures. For the first time in years, we operated with a balanced budget and have begun rebuilding our financial reserves.

None of this would have been possible without generous help from you, our members and supporters. The board of directors and staff deeply appreciate the trust you have invested in us. We look forward to even more successes in 2014.

NEWS BRIEFS

North American Owls Class

Registration opens on January 7 for this popular class taught by Dave Quady, author of the owls section of *National Geographic's Complete Birds of North America*. Four weeknight classes and three weekend field trips, starting February 11. Details and online registration: goldengateaudubon.org/classes.

Travel with GGAS in 2014

There are still some spaces in our incredible birding travel program in 2014, including expertly guided trips to Colombia, Brazil, Alaska, Texas, Oregon, New Mexico, and Wisconsin. Sign up now and make this a year to remember. Details: goldengateaudubon.org/field-trips/travel-with-golden-gate-audubon.

Recently on Our Blog

If you haven't been reading our blog, you've missed articles such as "Great Bird Books for Kids," "Protecting the Farallon Islands Ecosystem," and "11 Rules for the 20-something Birdwatcher." Go to goldengateaudubon.org/blog. Click on the "follow" box to receive future posts by email.

Help Restore Bird Habitat

Meet other nature lovers and make a difference for birds! Volunteer at our Saturday work days at Pier 94 in San Francisco (January 4, February 1, and March 1) or at MLK Jr. Regional Shoreline in Oakland (January 18, February 15, and March 15). Directions and info: goldengateaudubon.org/volunteer.



Jerry Ting/flickr.com/photos/jerryting

CLAREMONT CANYON

BY ERICA RUTHERFORD

Explore one of the largest undeveloped canyons in the western East Bay.

It started as an exercise routine. In the spring of 2009, my partner, John Colbert, and I began a daily brisk climb up Claremont Canyon trail starting at Stonewall Road in Berkeley and ending at Panoramic Way, a 750-foot elevation gain in roughly three-quarters of a mile. One day on reaching the ridge, John excitedly pointed out a singing California Thrasher atop a pine tree not 15 feet away. Although I'd never seen or heard of this bird, its warbled song would over time become a familiar accompaniment on our hikes.

Situated behind the Claremont Hotel, Claremont Canyon Regional Preserve is part of a larger 500-acre watershed for Claremont Creek. Its 208 acres span both sides of Claremont Avenue, with Panoramic Ridge rising to the north and Gwin Canyon extending south. The diverse habitat of coastal scrub, oak/bay woodland, eucalyptus plantations, and coniferous forest attracts an assortment of wildlife. But the daily goings-on of the resident birds and the thrill of spotting migrants are what capture our attention and bring us back each day. Our list now exceeds 85 species across the seasons.

I delight each spring to hear the first juvenile Dark-eyed Juncos buzzing in the dry grasses foretelling that soon the fields and foot paths will be littered with young and busy parents alike. We spy Pygmy Nuthatches and Chestnut-backed Chickadees as they investigate cavities for nest sites, and watch in silent awe as an Orange-crowned Warbler disappears into a grassy ground nest to feed its young.

Fall and winter bring the sad-sounding song of the Golden-crowned Sparrow, the almost impossibly high-pitched sound of Cedar Waxwings and Golden-crowned Kinglets, and the muffled tapping of the Red-breasted Sapsucker. The jittery Morse-code chatter of the newly arrived Ruby-crowned Kinglet transforms into an ebullient song just before it departs for points north to breed.

Close observation brings rewards. This past summer, for example, we discovered an adult and pair of juvenile Chipping Sparrows. In May, John recorded a Yellow-breasted Chat chattering but hidden in the brush.

Claremont Canyon is something of an undiscovered birding spot. If you're looking for a different birding location, or perhaps a combination hiking/birding experience with unparalleled views, consider making your way to Claremont Canyon. And be sure to say "hi" to us. We're the couple with binoculars.

For more information, including a map, go to ebparks.org/parks/claremont_canyon. A longer, more detailed version of this article is at goldengateaudubon.org/blog.



Jerry Ting/flickr.com/photos/jerryting; Ken Cheetham/bapd.org/hamilton-gulch-long-sequence.html



Clockwise from top left: View of the canyon from Panoramic Ridge; Dark-eyed Junco; Red-breasted Sapsucker.

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

ECO-ED TURNS SCHOOLYARDS INTO HABITAT

BY ANTHONY DECICCO

Is your schoolyard a good hummingbird habitat?" This is the very first research question asked of Golden Gate Audubon's 750 Eco-Education Program students as they team up with a checklist, pencil, and clipboard to survey their schoolyard for items needed by hummingbirds: bushes, trees, flowers, insects, spiders, nesting material, and a water source. (Drinking fountains don't count!) They are also asked to scan their schoolyard for limiting factors such as predators—American Crow, Common Raven, cats, and fox squirrels—and the garbage that can increase populations of such predators.

At the conclusion of this highly popular activity, Eco-Ed students typically determine that their schoolyard lacks hummingbird-attracting flora, protective foliage, and a significant water source. Garbage, however, is almost always present. (During the 2012 Coastal Clean-up at Rheem Creek behind Bayview Elementary in San Pablo, students found approximately a thousand pieces of plastic wrappers from school lunches!)

With our encouragement, the students are empowered to believe that "Kids CAN help the environment!" and to express their concerns to their principal. Over the years, some classes see the habitat enhancements they have requested, but most are confronted by the typical budgetary and bureaucratic obstacles.

This year is different. For the first time, in addition to the native planting they do on their wetland field trip, Eco-Education kids will work with Golden Gate Audubon's education staff to plant hummingbird-friendly flora in their schoolyard. Some classes have already determined the perfect locations for bird baths and recycling bins.

These new initiatives were inspired by Golden Gate Audubon's aim of creating "North America's most bird-friendly region" as well as National Audubon's "10 Ways to Make a Difference for Migrating Birds." Next on the list of possible Eco-Education action items: implementing methods to reduce window strikes at schools, negotiating "lights out" during afterhours, and prohibiting chemical



Anthony DeCicco

Fourth graders planting hummingbird-attracting flora in their schoolyard at Montalvin Manor Elementary in Richmond.

pesticide use on school grounds. It's unlikely that principals will allow large brush piles lying about, but who could deny children the excitement of distributing nesting materials such as feathers, yarn, and hairballs around their own schoolyard!

As Golden Gate Audubon's Eco-Education Program has become well established within 12 local schools, collaborating administrators increasingly see the impact that wildlife discovery and environmental stewardship can have on students' academic experience. Their support is crucial for the continued refinement of our award-winning program. A number of principals have given their consent for erecting nest boxes on the school grounds. In the near future, we hope to see students working together to determine the ideal box for the ideal location at their school—and then teaming up to build and install boxes.

The possibilities are endless for our little "friends of the Pacific Flyway" and the future of Golden Gate Audubon's Eco-Education Program.

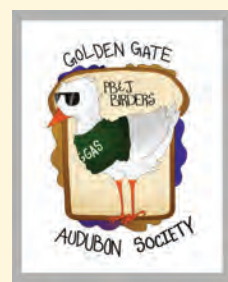
UPCOMING EVENTS

Birdathon 2014 Is Coming

Springtime is closer than you think...along with Birdathon 2014, throughout April. This will be our biggest and best Birdathon ever! Stay tuned for news about fun trips, competitions, and prizes. Want to help out on our Birdathon Steering Committee? Email Ilana at idebare@goldengateaudubon.org. Keep an eye out for our Birdathon 2014 T-shirts, featuring a new Burrowing Owl logo!

PB&J Birders—Family Bird Events

Have some outdoor fun with the young birders in your life! Our PB&J Birders program features a family bird walk at Heron's Head Park in San Francisco on January 12 from 10 a.m. until noon. Meet at 10 a.m. at the Heron's Head Park parking lot at Jennings Street and Cargo Way. Bring snacks, water, warm clothing, and binoculars if you have them. (We can provide binoculars if you need them.) Then join us for a Great Backyard Family Bird Count, from 9:30 until 11:30 a.m. on February 15 at Lake Merritt in Oakland and on February 16 at the San Francisco Botanical Garden. Look for additional details on our website.



CONTINUED from page 1

its San Francisco Conservation Committee have been speaking up for wildlife throughout this process.

But there's still a short opportunity—and a need—for individual GGAS members to make their voices heard.

Why should you comment? What's at stake?

Comprising some 80,000 acres of wild coastline within our urban Bay Area, the GGNRA has seen political battles over dog management since its creation in 1972. The GGNRA was formed from a variety of public and private lands, all of which had different policies about dogs. As a result, it became the only national park in the country to allow unleashed dogs.

As the Bay Area's population grew, the number of visitors—both with and without dogs—skyrocketed.

Some parts of the GGNRA became so thick with dogs that they are now essentially giant dog runs. Off-leash dogs menace the colonies of threatened Snowy Plovers at Ocean Beach and Crissy Field. Park staff spend large chunks of time managing conflicts between dogs and people, dogs and wildlife, and among dogs themselves.

In 2008, the National Park Service filed almost 900 pages of Criminal Incident Records related to dogs in the GGNRA, many of which involved dogs chasing and harassing wildlife.

These problems continue. Just this fall, GGAS board member David Anderson watched an off-leash dog kill a gull at Sutro Baths. The dog owner responded, "I let my dog train with them for hunting. It helps when I go duck hunting."

This problem has several roots. There are not enough dog-free trails in the San Francisco section of the GGNRA. Off-leash areas are not set off clearly enough from other parts of the park. The number of commercial dog walkers with multiple dogs continues to grow. Enforcement has been lax.

The proposed rules improve the status quo in several important ways. They prohibit dogs from some key areas such as the Crissy Field Wildlife Protection Area. They also require dogs to be leashed in some



David Asmann/flickr.com/photos/davidasf

Snowy Plover.

Off-leash dogs menace the colonies of threatened Snowy Plovers at Ocean Beach and Crissy Field.

areas where they are currently allowed off leash, such as the Ocean Beach Snowy Plover area.

There are still ways in which the new rules fall short: They don't require fencing or natural barriers around off-leash areas. They allow commercial dog walking with permits for up to six dogs.

Yet, overall, the new rules will be a big step forward. They provide more opportunities for people to picnic, hike, or view wildlife without dogs running around. They help make park accessible to a wide variety of visitors—families with young kids, seniors, joggers, and (yes) birders.

San Francisco dog activists are mounting a loud, emotional campaign against the new

policies, which they call a "plan to get rid of people with dogs."

We disagree. Many GGAS members are also dog owners and understand the importance of respecting wildlife while enjoying the outdoors with our dogs. We don't see this as an issue of dogs versus birds—we see it as an issue of balancing park uses.

Please join us in speaking up for a balance of uses in the GGNRA, along with a strong enforcement policy that will make the park safe and enjoyable for everyone.

The National Park Service is accepting comments on its proposed dog management policies until **January 11, 2014**. You can comment online at parkplanning.nps.gov/commentForm.cfm?documentID=55416.



David Asmann/flickr.com/photos/davidasf

Crissy Lagoon at the GGNRA, which provides year-round habitat for birds.

BIRDS OF THE SIERRA NEVADA

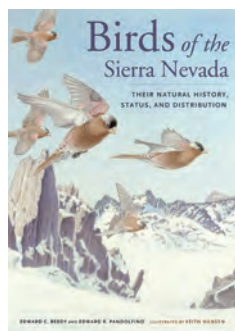
ED PANDOLFINO AND
KEITH HANSEN

Ed Pandolfino and Keith Hansen take you on a virtual transect of the range from the oak savanna in the west, through serene conifer forests of the west side, up into the majestic alpine regions, and down the steep eastern escarpment to the pinyon/juniper woodlands and open steppes of the Great Basin. Along the way, you see and hear the stunning diversity of birds that make the Sierra their home. Ed and Keith talk about which birds are in decline and which are expanding and increasing. They also address some mysteries surrounding some of those species and discuss how birders can help to solve them.

Ed Pandolfino, president of Western Field Ornithologists, is co-author with Ted Beedy of *Birds of the Sierra Nevada*, illustrated by Keith Hansen and published by UC Press. Keith Hansen is a professional bird artist who has illustrated many books, including *Discovering Sierra Birds*, *California Wild Lands*, and *The Natural History of the Point Reyes Peninsula*.

LOCATION / DATE

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



Male Yellow Warbler by Keith Hansen.

BECOME A MASTER BIRDER

Golden Gate Audubon Society and California Academy of Sciences are sponsoring the second year-long Master Birder class, following the successful launch of the program in 2013. This advanced class, starting February 5, includes 11 classes and 11 field trips throughout 2014. Instructors are Jack Dumbacher, Eddie Bartley, and Bob Lewis. Most classes are held at the Academy of Sciences to take advantage of the academy's collections and facilities. For details, see goldengateaudubon.org/classes.

THE SPINE OF THE CONTINENT

MARY ELLEN HANNIBAL

Mary Ellen Hannibal shares her latest work, *The Spine of the Continent*, described by Thomas Lovejoy as “the biography of a big conservation idea.” The book chronicles the development of the science that tells us what can be done to heal the wounds in our life-support system—nature. She relates many tales of heroic people, from a hairdresser who relocates beaver, to a waitress-turned-whistleblower who was unjustly prosecuted regarding the death of a rare jaguar, to the scientists who are racing to apply their knowledge.

Mary Ellen Hannibal is the recipient of Stanford’s Knight-Risser Prize for Western Environmental Journalism and the National Association of Science Writer’s Science and Society Award.

LOCATION / DATE

Berkeley
Thursday, February 20
7 p.m. refreshments
7:30 p.m. program



AVIAN MALARIA IN A CHANGING WORLD

RAVINDER N.M. SEHGAL

LOCATION / DATE

San Francisco
Thursday, March 20
7 p.m. refreshments
7:30 p.m. program

The effects of deforestation and climate change on health are diverse and becoming increasingly apparent. Ravinder Sehgal presents research on the impact of human-induced change on the prevalence and diversity of avian malaria in birds from the tropics to the Arctic. His research shows that habitat degradation leads to altered patterns of malaria prevalence and disruptions in parasite diversity. Models have been developed to help predict how deforestation and climate change will impact the spread of avian diseases.

Ravinder Sehgal is an associate professor in the department of biology at San Francisco State University. His research focuses on the ecology of diseases in birds. Since an early age, he has been fascinated and saddened by the extinction of species. Through research and teaching, he strives to make an impact in conservation biology.



Olive Sunbird and some of its malaria parasites.

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.uusf.org/visitors_faq.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.

DONATIONS

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

Donations from September 1, 2013, through November 30, 2013

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Lee Rudin – in honor of Dave Quady

IN-KIND GIFTS

Alliance for Community Trees
Eddie Bartley & Noreen Weeden
Jacqueline Craig
Phil Price & Juliet Lamont

EMPLOYER MATCHING GIFTS

Chevron Humankind (Bernard Braakman, Bob Lewis, Dave Quady)
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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*.

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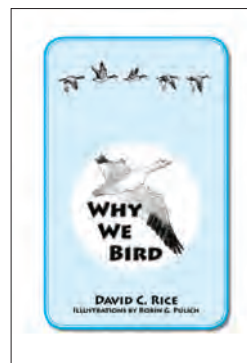
CONTEMPLATING WHY WE BIRD

What makes birders wake up at dawn to tromp through wet fields? Why do we drive a hundred miles to catch a glimpse of a rare species? Why do we keep the feeder full?

There are as many reasons to bird as there are bird lovers. Golden Gate Audubon is delighted to publish *Why We Bird*, a collection of insightful short essays on the allure and attraction of birding.

Why We Bird author David Rice is a longtime GGAS member and field trip leader, and a co-author of *The Alameda County Breeding Bird Atlas*. David's personal stories and observations, accompanied by GGAS member Robin Pulich's illustrations, will spark your own thoughts about why you bird—or why you might want to start birding.

Read a sample of *Why We Bird* at whywebird.com. You can purchase the book on that site, at the GGAS office or Speaker Series evenings, or at goldengateaudubon.org/store. \$12 paperback or \$4.99 e-book.



www.goldengateaudubon.org

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

3 Bay Area Hotspot: Claremont Canyon

Explore birdlife in one of the undeveloped canyons in the western East Bay.

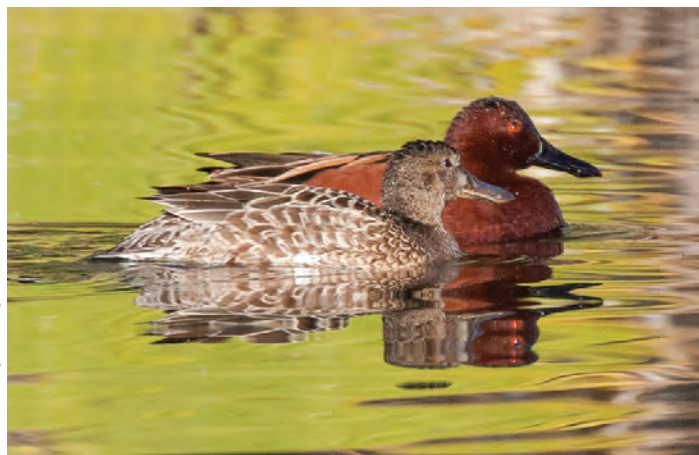
4 Schoolyards for Hummingbirds

Elementary students in GGAS's Eco-Education Program enhance the habitat for hummingbirds.

11 Why Do You Bird?

GGAS member David Rice answers this question in his new, elegantly written book, praised by the late Rich Stallcup.

BACKYARD BIRDER



Bob Lewis/wingbeats.org

Male and female Cinnamon Teal.

FEMALE DUCK IDENTIFICATION— THE DABLERS

BY LINDA CARLONI

Winter ducks have returned, and it's time to enjoy the male ducks' fancy dress (aka alternate plumage). Whereas males' bright colors and bold patterns distinguish each species, dabbling females remain, well, brown and mottled. This disguises them from predators while nesting, but definitely presents ID challenges to the novice birder!

But it is possible, and fun, for beginners to ID female dabblers, at least much of the time. Here are some tips.

Start with the easy ones. While color and pattern are different, in

some species both genders share important distinguishing characteristics. The female Northern Pintail, like her mate, has a graceful neck longer than that of most ducks and long central tail feathers that form a point, making her pointy at both ends when flying. The female Northern Shoveler shares that big spatulate bill with her more brightly colored mate.

Look for pairs. If you see an identifiable male duck paddling along with a mottled brown duck, the drab one is likely the female of same species. Confirm your ID in your field guide, and then look at the female closely for size and shape clues so you're ready the next time you see her unpaired. For example, both Green-Winged Teal sexes are smaller than other dabblers, and that size helps pick her out of a crowd of female dabblers. Bill size can help too: Green-Winged Teal has a tiny bill; Gadwall, medium; and Mallard, larger.

Look for the speculum. This patch of wing feathers is on the posterior inward part of the wing. For some of dabblers, speculum colors are bright, and they differ between species. So if you can see the speculum, it's a good field mark. Mallard has an iridescent purple-blue with white edges; Gadwall, bright white; American Wigeon, black; and Green-Winged Teal, a beautiful bright green.

Some ducks are just hard. Even *Birds of North America* admits that female Blue-Winged Teal and Cinnamon Teal are "virtually indistinguishable." Close in size and shape, both have a blue wing patch. But if the light is good and the ducks are close, you can see subtle differences. The Cinnamon has a more shovelerlike bill and an overall warmer brown tone.

Want to learn more? Take a class! Check them out at goldengateaudubon.org.

Linda Carloni lives in Alameda and is in the Golden Gate Audubon Master Birder program.