

THE GULL

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GOLDEN GATE AUDUBON SOCIETY // VOL. 102 NO. 2 SPRING/SUMMER 2018



CHALK IT UP FOR THE YEAR OF THE BIRD

BY BLAKE EDGAR

When major bird conservation organizations teamed with the National Geographic Society to proclaim 2018 as “The Year of the Bird,” in recognition of the 100th anniversary of the passage of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, Golden Gate Audubon eagerly joined the initiative. GGAS chose to focus on urban birdlife and the value of wild birds to city environments.

CONTINUED on page 5

Osprey
John Ehrenfeld





Snowy Egret in breeding display.

CELEBRATING HOW MUCH BIRDS ENHANCE OUR COMMUNITIES

BY CINDY MARGULIS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

This year, 2018, marks the centennial of our nation's passage of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the most important bird-protection law ever passed. To highlight the centenary of such crucial legislation, organizations, including National Geographic Society, Audubon, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Birdlife International and myriad others across our nation have teamed up to call attention to what birds mean in our lives, in our communities, and to our environment as a whole.

In this issue, you'll read about how Golden Gate Audubon is championing local birdlife and cooperating to help birds thrive in our local communities. What we've learned in a century of our work connecting people to birdlife is that, while the Migratory Bird Treaty Act saved a whole lot of species, the work is not finished but perpetual. Absolutely, we need this legislation to remain firm and strong, yet even as I write this, it's infuriating to realize that forces in the Administration and in the

US Congress are endeavoring to weaken this landmark piece of legislation or gut it, entirely.

Our antidote to those who would destroy our wildlife is not just to be vigilant and to oppose them, but to showcase the real truth: birds are sources of wonder, joy, and discovery in our local communities. They are also vital ecosystem service providers: pollinators like hummingbirds, seed dispersers like Acorn woodpeckers and Tanagers, aerators of soil such as Quail and California Towhees, natural rodent-pest controllers like owls and hawks, organic insect-pest managers like swifts and swallows, essential recyclers like condors and vultures. There's no end to what birds do for us.

Golden Gate Audubon's mission is to engage people to experience the wonder of birds and to translate that wonder into actions which protect local bird populations and their habitats. We know that great laws are important, but we must also inspire and marshal everyone to care about birds. We are most effective when we team up and learn to collaborate with all those who care about bird survival, including local municipalities.

In this issue you'll read how two local cities have each partnered with Golden Gate Audubon in novel ways to honor their birdlife. When vibrant, rapidly growing communities focus on birds, they discover a bit of the magical quality of birds. Somehow, birds summon what is best in each of us: they inspire us to learn, to create, and to flock together to solve problems that challenge us. Cities that welcome birds and support their survival become even better places for humans, too.



Laurie Wigham's flock of Brown Pelican poses in chalk.



Magellanic Penguins.

THE BIRDS AND WILDLIFE OF PATAGONIA

PATRICIA BACCHETTI

LOCATION / DATE

San Francisco
Thursday, July 19
6:30 p.m. refreshments,
7 p.m. program

From Buenos Aires to Ushuaia, Patagonia offers the opportunity to see the Southern Hemisphere's whales, sea lions, pumas, penguins, and a unique set of birds. Then, there are the glaciers and landscapes of the Southern Andes which are spectacular and easy to access. We will start the journey in the capital, Buenos Aires, and continue down through the rugged Valdez Peninsula, the glaciers of southeastern Argentina, dip into Chile's wondrous Torres del Paine National Park with its population of protected pumas, and finish at the southernmost post office in the world, Ushuaia. Darwin spent a year of his life traveling Patagonia on his way to the Galapagos Islands, its wild past contributing to the development of his theory of evolution. We'll view mammals of the land and sea, as well as most of the iconic birds of the Southern Cone, ending up in Darwin's Beagle Channel.

Pat is a native of the great Central Valley of California, though she has been a resident of Oakland for the past 40 years. She's winding down her career as a small animal veterinarian by birding and photographing as much of the world as she can—Antarctica is next!

Josh Engel, the founder of Red Hill Birding, has led birding trips on four continents and conducted research around the world. He is also an ornithologist at the Field Museum in Chicago.

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 usuf.org/contact.

Berkeley: Northbrae Community Church, 941 The Alameda (between Solano and Marin). Directions: Visit northbrae.org/contact--find-us.html.

THE AMAZING SOUNDS OF BIRDS

NATHAN PIEFLOW

LOCATION / DATE

Berkeley
Thursday, August 16
6:30 p.m. refreshments,
7 p.m. program

What bird uses its voice to echo-locate inside dark caves? Which bird sings a duet with itself? Which bird sings over a thousand different songs? In this presentation, Nathan Pieflow shares remarkable audio from over a decade of recording birds in the field. You will see the sounds as well as hear them, learn the stories of the birds that made them, and what some of those birds are actually saying.

Nathan teaches writing and rhetoric at the University of Colorado, Boulder. He is a former editor of the quarterly journal *Colorado Birds* and one of the developers of the Colorado County Birding Website and the Colorado Birding Trail. Growing up in South Dakota, Nathan got started identifying bird songs by studying the classic "Birding By Ear" field guides in the Peterson series. In 2003, facing the frustrations of studying sounds for his first trips to Mexico and Costa Rica, he became dedicated to finding new and better ways to learn, describe and catalog bird sounds.



Doug Mosher

BIRDING THE UNITED STATES BY BICYCLE: AN 18,000-MILE AMERICAN ODYSSEY

DORIAN ANDERSON

LOCATION / DATE

San Francisco
Thursday, September 20
6:30 p.m. refreshments,
7 p.m. program

On January 1st, 2014 Dorian Anderson departed a frozen Massachusetts to undertake one of the most ambitious birding projects in history: the first North American bicycle Big Year. In 365 days, he cycled 18,000 miles through 28 states, raised \$49,000 for bird conservation, and found 618 bird species.

From New England to Florida, from Texas to the Pacific Northwest, and from Colorado to California, Dorian experienced the United States in the most memorable and unique manner imaginable.

A lifelong birder, Dorian completed his B.S. in Molecular Biology at Stanford University and his Ph.D. in Developmental Genetics at NYU. An accomplished bird photographer, he works as a travel writer and bird guide while he finishes a book about his adventure.



Bill Schmoker

HELPING OAKLAND'S HERONS: AN ONGOING CHALLENGE

This spring offered new opportunities for herons and egrets to make themselves at home by Lake Merritt, providing hope for their future in the heart of Oakland.

In May of 2014, an infamous tree-trimming incident caused by the US Postal Service injured and displaced nestling and fledgling night herons. Golden Gate Audubon Society partnered with International Bird Rescue to care for the young birds and prepare them for the wild. Taking advantage of the media frenzy surrounding the release of the birds, GGAS seized a teachable moment to focus public attention on responsible tree care and debuted our Healthy Trees Healthy Birds brochure.

In 2015, a public education campaign about herons and egrets was launched at the downtown rookery. The campaign included a series of public walks, guided tours for nearby schools, prominent information posters, and an eco-art flashmob. By 2016, GGAS trained docents began monitoring the downtown heronry in street trees, especially near the US Post Office at 13th and Alice and around the corner in Oakland's Chinatown. The Oakland Zoo became a crucial ally, and their professional animal handlers and veterinary crew provided essential on-call rescue response for herons in distress. During the past two seasons, the collaboration of Golden Gate Audubon, the Oakland Zoo, and International Bird Rescue saved nearly 100 herons and egrets on downtown streets.

When GGAS learned that two planned housing developments would remove most of the heron and egret nesting trees at the downtown rookery, it became clear that a long-term strategy was needed to ensure the future of our Oakland heronry. The sites slated for development had 150 breeding pairs comprising the largest nesting concentration of Black-crowned Night-Herons in the region. Using our volunteer docents' data to demonstrate the case for attracting herons and egrets to a safer setting, GGAS asked the City of Oakland to require a comprehensive heronry relocation effort as a



Cindy Margulis

Black-crowned Night-Heron decoy.

condition of granting permits to the developers.

Both developers agreed and hired ecological consultants with expertise in herons, H.T. Harvey & Associates, to manage the relocation. The project leverages best available science and entails optimizing three sites at Lake Merritt to accommodate breeding Black-crowned Night-Herons and egrets. Their biologists placed heron decoys, sound systems broadcasting rookery breeding calls, and actual nests (collected in November 2017) to serve as attractants for the birds. H.T. Harvey & Associates continuously monitors three lakeside destinations, both developers' construction sites, and the downtown rookery.

Season one of the multi-year relocation plan isn't finished yet, however GGAS is already strategizing with all stakeholders on adaptive management measures to draw more of Oakland's herons and egrets to the Wildlife Refuge and the groves at Lakeside Park in future seasons.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Annual Membership Meeting

First Unitarian Universalist Church
1187 Franklin Street
San Francisco
July 19, 6:30–7:00 p.m.

Annual membership meeting to take place before the July 19 Speaker Series. Join us for refreshments, awards presentation, and to hear Executive Director Cindy Magulis present GGAS accomplishments, challenges and plans for the coming year.

Burrowing Owl Docent Training

Shorebird Nature Center
Berkeley
September 22, 9 a.m.–4 p.m.
The Burrowing Owl is a California species of special concern. GGAS is training docents to talk with the public and participate in documenting these over wintering owls in the San Francisco Bay Area. Offered only once annually. RSVP to nweeden@goldengateaudubon.org or call 510-301-0570.

Coastal Cleanup

MLK Jr. Shoreline Park,
Oakland & San Francisco's Pier 94
September 15, 9 a.m.–noon
Join us for California's largest volunteer day. Coastal Cleanup Day is about much more than picking up trash. It's a chance for Californians to join people around the world in expressing their respect for our oceans and waterways, and to demonstrate our desire for clean water and healthy marine life.

Travel with GGAS

Peru Birding—Amazon to Andes
from October 18-27
Oaxaca, Mexico
from December 11-21
There are still opportunities to join the final GGAS international travel trips of 2018. Each trip includes a registration fee that benefits Golden Gate Audubon's conservation and environmental education programs. Please visit goldengateaudubon.org travel for more information.

Since the East Bay city of Richmond had been a strong supporter of GGAS's SFBayOspreys.org initiative and had agreed to host our centennial exhibit, *100 Years of Protecting Bay Area Birds*, in the City Hall lobby, Richmond was the logical partner for one of GGAS's popular chalk art events. The event on April 4 highlighted the astonishing avian biodiversity of Richmond and was dubbed "Chalk it Up for Richmond's Birds in the Year of the Bird."

More than 30 local artists signed up to portray a plethora of local wild birds in sidewalk chalk on Richmond's Civic Center Plaza pavement, in front of City Hall. While this event was Golden Gate Audubon's fourth public chalk art festival, it was the first to take place in Richmond. Executive Director Cindy Margulis noted that Richmond hosts a wide variety of birdlife, well over 300 species are documented each year, plus it's a "city that totally celebrates the arts".

Recorded calls and bird songs reverberated across Civic Center Plaza while the artists created vibrant sidewalk chalk birds from Cedar Waxwings to Clark's Grebes in just a few short hours. Participating artists included professionals and amateurs, Nature Journal Club members, Urban Sketchers, and a delegation from Rich-

Recorded calls and bird songs reverberated across Civic Center Plaza while the artists created vibrant sidewalk chalk birds from Cedar Waxwings to Clark's Grebes in just a few short hours.

mond's NIAD Art Center. On the porch of City Hall, GGAS's Youth Programs Manager Clayton Anderson completed a huge rendering of local celebrity Osprey "Richmond," with outstretched wings facing all the other bird art filling the plaza's hard-scape surface.

All of Richmond's senior managers were on hand to hear the huge round of cheers and applause when Richmond Mayor Tom Butt ended the event by announcing that he was "moving forward to declare the Osprey as the official bird of the City of Richmond." Two weeks later, on April 17, the Richmond City Council agreed with the Mayor and passed a resolution designating the Osprey as the city's bird.

"We're ecstatic that the city has chosen the Osprey as its official bird," said Margulis. "In a strong community like Richmond—that's so diverse—birds are one of the ways to bring everybody together. Everybody can get excited about the beauty of birds."

Beyond appreciating avian aesthetics, the chalk art event gave attendees the

opportunity to advocate on behalf of California's birds. Volunteers collected signatures on a petition urging the U.S. Congress to maintain strong support of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act in the face of efforts by the current Administration to reinterpret the law allowing industries to evade responsibility for the prevention of bird deaths.

Pivoting from politics back to art, Margulis invited the artists to explain to the crowd why each had chosen to depict a particular bird. "I chose an Acorn Woodpecker, and I now have an appreciation of all their hard work," said Richmond artist Jessica Burbank, who depicted the bird at a well-stocked granary tree. Unable to decide on a single pose for the Brown Pelican, urban sketcher and art teacher Laurie Wigham drew a series of pelicans, each displaying different behavior. As she put it, "This bird just does so many amazing things."

Margulis added, "Surely, Richmond's example will inspire other cities to honor their own distinctive birds and celebrate local birdlife always."



From left: Susan Ford's Cedar Waxwings in chalk, Mette Seager's Steller's Jays chalk art.

DONATIONS

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

Donations from December 1, 2018 through April 30, 2018

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(\$1000 and above)

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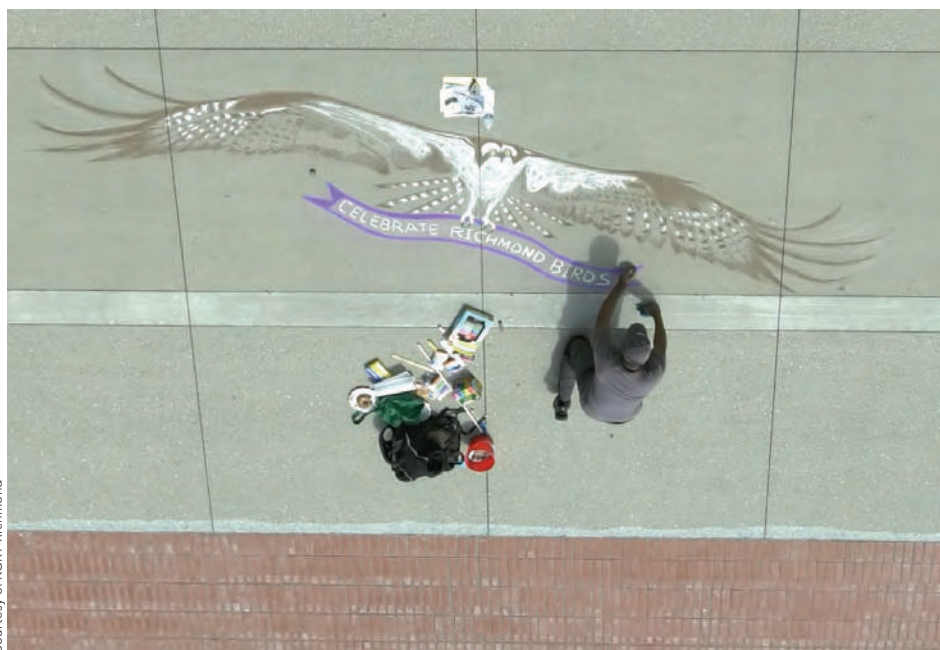
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Clayton Anderson's enormous Osprey in chalk.

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Rebeca Garcia Gonzalez's chalk Osprey and nest.

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ABOUT GOLDEN GATE AUDUBON

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).

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Learn about upcoming Golden Gate Audubon events every month! Send your name and email address to ggass@goldengateaudubon.org to receive our monthly e-newsletters with upcoming events and other news.

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2 Celebrating How Much Birds Enhance Our Communities

Executive Director Cindy Margulis' reflections on how birds unite communities.

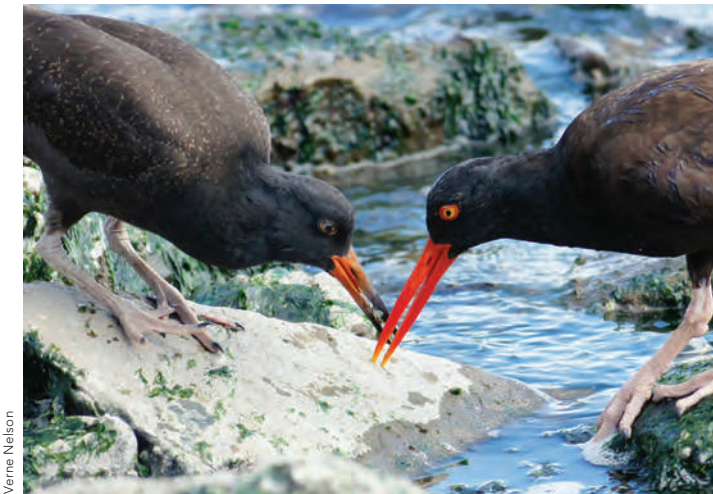
3 Speaker Series

July: The Birds and Wildlife of Patagonia.
August: The Amazing Sounds of Birds.
September: Birding the United States by Bicycle.

4 Helping Oakland's Herons

The City of Oakland and GGAS work together on efforts to relocate Oakland's downtown heron rookery to Lake Merritt.

BACKYARD BIRDER



Verne Nelson

Adult and juvenile Black Oystercatchers.

THE STANDOUT SHOREBIRD THAT'S NOT SO EASY TO OBSERVE!

BY BLAKE EDGAR

Some shorebirds can be hard to distinguish, but not this one. Bigger and darker than other shoreline birds, the Black Oystercatcher (*Haematopus bachmani*) is unique, with pale pink legs, bright yellow eyes, and carrot-colored bill. It stands out in our field guides but blends in well along wet, rocky shorelines.

Unique among wading birds, an oystercatcher uses its stout bill

to shuck mussels by prying apart the shell and severing the adductor muscle. The bill also dislodges limpets, chitons, and other intertidal invertebrates. A heavy skull, strong neck, and sturdy legs help relieve sideways stress on the bill as an oystercatcher chisels or hammers to break into mollusk shells.

The Black Oystercatcher is a Pacific coast native that ranges from the Aleutian archipelago to northern Baja California. It rarely strays inland and in the Bay Area resides year-round near its coastal or island breeding areas. Pairs form long-term, monogamous bonds, and you might hear their loud shrill calls over the sound of ocean waves.

A nest consists of a shallow bowl scraped above the high tide line, marked with small rocks or shells. Both parents incubate their eggs for nearly a month, and chicks fledge about 40 days after hatching.

Juveniles have duller plumage, a dusky bill tip, and dimmer eyes. Adults can be distinguished by the stark yellow eye and orange orbital ring, and adult females tend to have flecks near the base of the black pupil, giving it a more oval shape.

Since 2011, Audubon California has been gathering baseline data on Black Oystercatchers and estimates the statewide population at under 6,100. A team of Golden Gate Audubon's citizen science volunteers has been monitoring Black Oystercatcher breeding sites and has prepared an extensive report for public land managers on how to best protect this species. With a global population that may be as limited as 12,000, California sites are crucial for the species' survival. Recent studies underscore that Black Oystercatchers are particularly vulnerable to risks of sea-level rise and storm surges on intertidal habitat.