

THE GULL

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GOLDEN GATE AUDUBON SOCIETY // VOL. 101 NO. 3 SUMMER 2017



OSPREY NEST CAM CREATES BIRD CELEBRITIES—AND FANS

BY ILANA DEBARE

When Golden Gate Audubon Society launched the Bay Area's first live-streaming Osprey nest cam this spring, our video feeds opened an intimate window into the life of one Osprey family.

They also turned tens of thousands of people into avid new bird watchers—creating a broader-than-ever constituency to help us protect Bay Area birds and their habitat.

CONTINUED on page 5



Osprey pair on the Whirley Crane in 2015.
Lee Aurich



One of Oakland's new library card designs.

HURRAY FOR HERONS, AND THE BIRD LOVE THEY INSPIRE

BY CINDY MARGULIS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dozens of precious young herons and egrets were saved this season, thanks to terrific teamwork by Golden Gate Audubon Society volunteers and our conservation allies: Oakland Zoo and International Bird Rescue.

In February, I trained twelve volunteer monitors to collect data on the heron and egret rookery and to keep a lookout daily for any injured or stranded young herons in the “concrete jungle” beneath the non-native trees in the downtown corridor and Chinatown areas of Oakland. This intensely urban location is less than optimal for the

Bay Area’s largest breeding concentration of these birds to raise their young. Nonetheless, more than 130 pairs of Black-Crowned Night Herons, plus about twenty pairs of Snowy Egrets, nest there.

When a GGAS monitor sees an injured heron or a pre-fledgling stranded on the pavement, they notify the Oakland Zoo, which sends an on-call trained animal handler to rescue the bird and transfer it to International Bird Rescue for longer term rehabilitative care. With our allies, we’ve already released several of the rehabbed birds into a wetland at Martin Luther King

Jr. Regional Shoreline—property that our GGAS advocacy had saved twenty years ago.

Meanwhile, GGAS has been working with the City of Oakland, developers, and biological consultants on a comprehensive plan to optimize sites at Lake Merritt so that these remarkable birds will have safer places than downtown streets to raise their young in future seasons.

Our several years of heron outreach have inspired love for #OaklandHerons in myriad delightful forms. Third graders at Park Day School launched an online petition to declare Black-crowned Night-Herons the official bird of Oakland. These youngsters even made two brief films as public service announcements! Plus, local artist Lea Zalinskis, daughter of a GGAS volunteer, won the Oakland Public Library Card Design contest with her charming Black-Crowned Night-Heron hand-cut paper creation.

Our vibrant heron chalk-art “flash mobs” in 2015 and 2016 inspired Presidio Trust to partner with Golden Gate Audubon for a sidewalk chalk art event celebrating birdlife of the Presidio this summer! The Presidio has planned a series of public walks to discover diverse birds and habitats and to tour the sidewalk chalk bird art. Artists’ sidewalk chalk bird renderings will still be visible when we open our expanded Centennial Exhibit at the Tides Thoreau Center in the Presidio, running July 12 – September 29.

Come view the exhibit, admire the chalk art, and rejoice that birds are such a gorgeous way to bring people together in our communities.

NEWS BRIEFS

Pier 94 BioBlitz finds 168 species

Pier 94, the former dump site we’re restoring as wetlands, held its first BioBlitz in May. We found 168 species of flora and fauna, including 40 bird species. Hats off to our volunteers who are turning this Port of San Francisco site into flourishing habitat.

Five years of Snowy Plover habitat help

2017 marks five years of our monthly beach clean-ups at Crissy Field in San Francisco. GGAS volunteers have put in 700 hours and removed over 250 buckets of trash, making the beach safer for threatened Snowy Plovers and other shorebirds. Join us! See goldengateaudubon.org/volunteer.

Bring 100 for 100

Celebrate GGAS’s Centennial by helping us grow! The first 100 current members who recruit a friend to join GGAS will receive enamel pins with our Centennial logo – one for you and one for your friend. Great way to share your love of birding. See goldengateaudubon.org/bring100-info.

Are you getting our emails?

If you’re not receiving our monthly Field Trip and e-Gull email newsletters, you’re missing out on lots of great birding events. Send your name and email to ggas@goldengateaudubon.org to ensure you get advance notice of upcoming classes, bird walks, birding tours, and other events.



Jack Ryder



Ilana DeBare

Left: Jack Dumbacher shows Birdathon participants the bird skin collection at California Academy of Sciences. Above: GGAS members on a South Bay Birdathon trip to Calero County Park.

BIRDATHON 2017: FROM THE PINNACLES TO PIXAR

BY ILANA DEBARE

About 250 Birdathon participants raised over \$61,000 despite a challenging fundraising year.

Birdathon 2017, Golden Gate Audubon Society's biggest fundraiser of the year, boasted our most diverse array of field trips ever.

Throughout April, over 250 Birdathon participants visited classic birding destinations such as Pinnacles National Park (*condors!*), the Presidio, and Point Reyes. They also visited more unusual sites—such as Livermore Valley for a day that combined birding with wine tasting, and Pixar, for a private screening with the director of *Piper*, the Oscar-winning short animation about a young sandpiper.

We even sponsored our first *Birds and Chocolate* trip, which combined viewing shorebirds in breeding plumage along the Alameda shoreline with a blind tasting of gourmet chocolates!

Despite a challenging fundraising year with many competing demands on people's charitable giving, Birdathon participants raised or donated over \$61,000, exceeding our goal of \$60,000.

The top individual fundraiser for the the third year in a row was Dan Harris, who raised \$2,795 from 50 donors! The second place fundraising award went to Bruce Mast, while third place went to Eric Schroeder.

The top first-time Birdathon fundraiser was Marjorie Powell, who had never raised money before but brought in a whopping \$550! Marj emailed her friends about our Oakland heron rescue program. Then she went on the *Behind the Scenes at International Bird Rescue* Birdathon trip, where she got to see some of the rescued herons as they recovered in IBR's good care. Afterwards, she sent a follow-up letter to her donors with photos from the IBR trip.

Not only did she raise money...she raised awareness about the plight of Oakland herons and about our great rescue partnership with IBR and Oakland Zoo.

Both the fundraising and birding winners were honored on May 13 at a delightful Birdathon Awards Celebration at the home of board member Carol Baird and Alan Harper.

The Best Bird award went to Dan and Joan Murphy's team for a rare Eurasian Green-winged Teal on the Peninsula. The prize for most birds in six hours went to Bob Power and his Alameda County team (116 species), while most birds in 24 hours went to Dave Riensche and his East Bay Parks team (168 species).

We also announced the winners of our prestigious 2017 Elsie Roemer Conservation Award and Paul Covell Education Award. The Roemer award went to Tony Brake for his work documenting the spread of nesting Ospreys along the Bay shoreline.

The Covell award went to Eddie Bartley, Jack Dumbacher and Bob Lewis—founders and instructors of the Master Birding class that GGAS co-sponsors with California Academy of Sciences. Over the past four years, about 80 birders deepened their ornithological knowledge through the intense year-long class. Thanks to the class's community service requirement, they also formed a new generation of leaders for GGAS and other local conservation groups.

Help us organize Birdathon 2018! Email Ilana at idebare@goldengateaudubon.org.

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



Hooded Mountain-Tanager in Peru.

PERUVIAN PEREGRINATIONS

BOB LEWIS

LOCATION / DATE

Berkeley
 Thursday, July 20
 6 p.m. Annual Meeting
 and refreshments
 7 p.m. program

Peru is a land of many habitats, from the dry Tumbas in the north-west and the high Andes mountains running down the center of the country, to the Amazonian forests and rivers in the east. During two trips, we had a chance to examine the avian inhabitants of each of these regions. We'll discuss evolution, speciation, and the impact of geological upheavals while focusing on hummingbirds, and then look at some other exotic bird families, from Tanagers and Oven-birds to Hoatzins. Finally we'll finish with a brief look at amazing Machu Picchu.

Bob trained as a chemist and worked for Chevron for 33 years. He's taught birding classes for over 25 years, and is past chair of Golden Gate Audubon's Adult Education Committee. His life list is over 4,700, and he loves to travel. Bob was honored with American Birding Association's Chandler Robbins Award for Education and Conservation in 2016 and GGAS's Paul Covel Award for Education in 2017.

2017 ANNUAL MEETING

You are invited!

Golden Gate Audubon Society will hold our annual membership meeting on Thursday, July 20 at 6 p.m. immediately before the Speaker Series in Berkeley. Hear the latest on our conservation activities, Centennial year celebrations, and upcoming plans. Share your ideas. Enjoy some snacks. Then stay for Bob Lewis's talk.

SONGS OF CITY SPARROWS

JENNY PHILLIPS

LOCATION / DATE

San Francisco
 Thursday, August 17
 6:30 p.m. refreshments
 7 p.m. program

Scientists have found that many birds alter the pitch or duration of their songs in areas with a lot of urban noise. But how and why do their songs change? Wildlife biologist Jenny Phillips will address the vocalizations of urban White-crowned Sparrows, and whether ambient noise affects how sparrows respond to each others' songs.

Jenny Phillips, a wildlife biologist with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation in Fresno, received her PhD from Tulane University. As part of her dissertation, she compared songs of male White-crowned Sparrows in urban, noisy San Francisco and rural, quieter Point Reyes National Seashore.



Jenny Phillips

UNLIKELY URBAN ENVIRONMENTS

ANN RILEY

LOCATION / DATE

Berkeley
 Thursday, September 21
 6:30 p.m. refreshments
 7 p.m. program

Over the past 30 years, the East Bay has pioneered a growing movement to restore very degraded riparian corridors, including digging up streams buried underground in culverts. These neighborhood-scale projects have produced unlikely wild areas with remarkable bird and wildlife use in the midst of densely populated cities.

Dr. Ann Riley is the author of Restoring Neighborhood Streams and was recently featured in the PBS show Urban Nature. She has worked as a river scientist for state agencies for over 25 years and was a cofounder of the Urban Creeks Council and California Urban Streams Partnership.



Ann Riley

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: uusf.org/contact.

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



From left: Rosie and Richmond on April 10 with their three eggs, two of which subsequently hatched. Rosie with a chick at sunset on May 27.

OSPREY NEST CAM CONTINUED from page 1

“Everyone can relate to a family—the dorky dad with a strange collecting impulse, the rambunctious youngsters who test limits and get too close to the edge,” said GGAS Executive Director Cindy Margulis. “The amount of affection for these birds is heart-warming...and *relevant*. When you love something, you’re motivated to take care of it. We’re aiming to channel the public’s newfound passion for wild Ospreys into tangible stewardship that will help all our Bay birds to thrive alongside us.”

The nest cam and outreach effort was sparked by the surprising phenomenon of Ospreys starting to nest along the Bay’s edge. Although Ospreys breed along freshwater lakes in Northern California, the species had never been documented nesting on San Francisco Bay until the 1990s.

Decimated by DDT in the 1960s, Osprey populations across North America began to rebound after the pesticide was banned in 1972. Vital wetland restoration and cleaner water have likely facilitated Osprey breeding success on the Bay.

By 2016, there were at least 42 nesting pairs and 51 fledglings along the Bay, according to ongoing citizen-science monitoring led by GGAS member Tony Brake.

Margulis saw the potential to inspire stewardship and education by connecting people with these charismatic raptors. Situating a webcam at the historic Whirley Crane, a decommissioned World War II-era

The nest cam and outreach effort was sparked by the surprising phenomenon of Ospreys starting to nest along the Bay’s edge.

maritime crane used by nesting Ospreys in recent years, would show both natural and human use of the landscape.

With cooperation from the Port and City of Richmond, the National Park Service, the adjacent SS Red Oak Victory, and a “big lift” from a telescoping PG&E bucket truck, two video cameras were positioned high on the Whirley Crane at opposite angles.

Our webcam set-up is innovative. We deploy two high-definition streaming video cameras that provide close-up and wide-angle views. GGAS controls each cam remotely with pan, tilt, and zoom functionality. Infrared illumination allows nighttime observation without disturbing the birds. Meanwhile, audio allows people to hear the voices of the Ospreys as well as the ambient soundscape.

The nest cam team—Margulis, Brake, *pro bono* project manager John Ehrenfeld, and wildlife camera expert Joe Pifer—rejoiced when an Osprey pair bonded before the cameras early in March.

The resident male Osprey was named Richmond for the city, and the migrating female dubbed Rosie in honor of the brave women who worked in the shipyards during WWII.

We debuted the SFBayOspreys.org live stream and website with a press conference on March 29. Richmond Mayor Tom Butt spoke, joined by numerous project allies, including two original “Rosie the Riveters” from the National Park Service.

Within weeks, 33,000 people were watching the live stream. Viewership surged further when the chicks hatched on May 12 and 14. (Mother’s Day!)

Our public naming contest produced evocative names for the nestlings: Whirley, for the Whirley crane, and Rivet, for Rosie’s littler one...and for how so many people are *riveted* by the nest cam.

As the chicks grew, so did their fan base. Secondary school teachers downloaded our STEM science lesson plans to engage 6-12th grade students.

“This signature project of our GGAS Centenary year exemplifies our perennial mission: connect people to local birdlife and translate their wonder into stewardship actions that protect local bird populations and habitat,” Margulis said. “We’re leveraging leading-edge technology as a ‘force multiplier’ to drive local bird conservation.”

You can watch the live nest cam at <http://sfbayospreys.org>. Or view highlights on Facebook at [facebook.com/bayospreys](https://www.facebook.com/bayospreys).

DONATIONS

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

Donations from March 1, 2017 through May 31, 2017

GOLDEN EAGLE (\$1000 and above)

Agerter Judd Fund, Chris & Gary Bard, Eddie Bartley, March Conservation Fund, Martin Bern, Mary Betlach, Jane Freeman, Patricia Greene, Cameron Phleger

PEREGRINE FALCON (\$500 to \$999)

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Sharon Beals

Learning to spot local birds in our Eco-Education program.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Centennial Exhibit at The Presidio

Tides Thoreau Ctr, The Presidio, San Francisco
July 12 – September 29

View gorgeous photos of Bay Area birds and learn about GGAS's inspiring 100-year history as our free traveling Centennial exhibit comes to the Presidio. Open during weekday business hours at 1012 Torney Street. Then join us for a members-only reception on Thursday, July 13! For details, email ggas@goldengateaudubon.org.

BioBlitz at Heron's Head Park

San Francisco
Monday, July 24

A BioBlitz is like a citizen-science scavenger hunt! Take photos and notes of all species of plants and animals you find in this park along the city's southeastern waterfront, then share your findings. All ages welcome, no experience necessary. Contact nweeden@goldengateaudubon.org for more information.

Burrowing Owl Docent Training

Berkeley
Saturday, September 23

Help introduce the public to the adorable Burrowing Owls that winter along the East Bay shoreline. Our once-a-year volunteer docent training will tell you everything you need to know to become a docent during the winter 2017-18 season. Email nweeden@goldengateaudubon.org for sign-up or info.

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Volunteers restore shoreline habitat at Pier 94 in San Francisco.

Noreen Weeden

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Anne Bergman, in honor of Pat Greene
Barry Epstein, in honor of Ilana DeBare
Pauline Grant, in honor of Eddie Bartley, Jack Dumbacher and Bob Lewis
Hilma and Mark Jones, in honor of Jackson, Hudson and Ellie
Maureen Lahiff, in honor of Dave Quady and the Greater Sage Grouse
Chris Muir, in honor of Gracie
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GIFTS IN MEMORY OF

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Elaine Geffen, in memory of Thomas Schmitz, MD
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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 ggas@goldengateaudubon.org to receive our monthly e-newsletters with upcoming events and other news.

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www.goldengateaudubon.org

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

2 Oakland Herons Inspire Bird Love

Our partnership to rescue young herons in downtown Oakland helped inspire a heron library card and a third-grade petition drive.

3 Birdathon 2017

Over 200 participants raised \$61,000 on unique trips including one that combined shorebird viewing with gourmet chocolate tasting.

4 Speaker Series

Peruvian peregrinations with Bob Lewis in July, songs of city sparrows in August, and unlikely urban environments in September.

BACKYARD BIRDER



Miya Lucas

California Thrasher.

CALIFORNIA THRASHER

BY MIYA LUCAS

In the spring and summer, the song of the California Thrasher always puts a smile on my face. The rapid throbbing beat within a continuous melody reminds me of a rhythmic rap song. Often lasting three to five minutes, it's one of the more varied and complex bird songs. One study found 2,807 phrases in a single Cal Thrasher song! Some phrases are repeated like the chorus in your favorite pop song, while others are used only once.

The Cal Thrasher belongs to the *Mimidae* songbird family. “Mimid” means mimic in Latin, and other *Mimidae* include our familiar Northern Mockingbird and the Gray Catbird of the East Coast. It's the largest of the eight thrasher species found in North America, 10 percent heavier than a robin and twice the weight of a mockingbird.

The Cal Thrasher's most distinctive visual feature is its long, decurved bill, which it uses to mow through grass or leaves like a farmer wielding a scythe. This foraging behavior may be the source of its name—thrashing through leaves and mulch to find insects, spiders, berries, and seeds.

Cal Thrashers spend most of their life on the ground. They have strong, long legs for running in and out of bushes. When threatened, the Cal Thrasher is more apt to run than fly from danger.

I particularly like the innovative way that the Cal Thrasher grooms itself. While other birds bathe in water or dust, Cal Thrashers take a different approach—what I call their personal ant spa treatment. They find a carpenter ant hill, stand on top, and allow the ants to crawl all over them, with formic acid secreted by the ants possibly killing the thrasher's mites and lice.

The Cal Thrasher also preens itself in a distinctive and systematic manner. While most birds use the sides of their jaw and bill for preening, the Thrasher uses only the tip. It starts with its breast feathers, goes on to its back and wing coverts, and finally uses its toenails to preen its head and face.

Some good places to hear California Thrashers in the Bay Area are San Leandro Reservoir's Valle Vista entry, Sibley Volcanic Regional Preserve, and Tilden Regional Park.