

THE GULL

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GOLDEN GATE AUDUBON SOCIETY // VOL. 106 NO. 4 FALL 2022



THE ETHICS OF INTERVENTION: A BIRD'S EYE VIEW

BY RYAN NAKANO

In July, the SF Bay Osprey Cam captured Osprey chick Molate struggling to breathe atop the WWII era “Whirley Crane” in Richmond, CA. Viewers immediately grew concerned. Some took a break from watching, others stayed and watched life happen, and then there were those who called for human intervention.

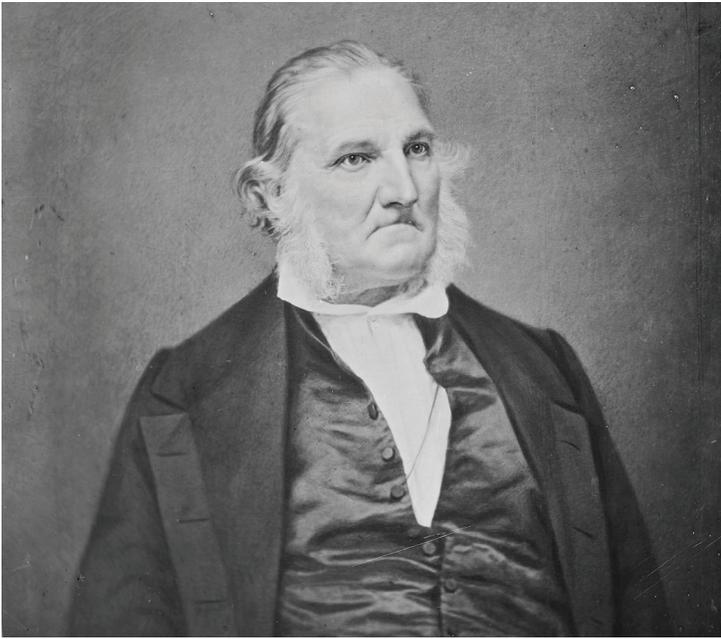
Zooming out from the Osprey nest, we are left with a question of ethics.

When do we have a responsibility to intervene in the lives of individual wild birds when they appear to be suffering or in poor health, if at all?

CONTINUED on page 3

Osprey nest building.
by Lee Aurich





John James Audubon, National Archives and Records Administration image; Robin by John James Audubon, from 1851 or earlier.

BY ANY OTHER NAME

BY GLENN PHILLIPS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In 1917, a group of birdwatchers inspired by a nature study class at UC Berkeley banded together to form the Audubon Society of the Pacific. Nearly 40 years before the Civil Rights Movement and 50 years before the American Indian Movement, nobody questioned whether John James Audubon's behavior, beyond his work as an artist, merited such an honor.

Today, we acknowledge that John James Audubon was a slave owner, a racist and lacked scientific integrity by inventing birds he claimed to discover, falsifying scientific data, and failing to acknowledge contributors to his work.

With an expanding climate and biodiversity crisis threatening the existence of many bird species, it is critical that all people feel welcome and included in conservation work.

With the recent news that our sister chapter in Seattle dropped "Audubon" from its name, Golden Gate Audubon is beginning its own assessment process.

The National Audubon Society has been conducting research to better understand John James Audubon in a historical context and to collect feedback from stakeholders across the Audubon network. National Audubon expects to complete its

investigation by the end of 2022 and make a decision in February 2023.

We plan on reviewing National Audubon's research and getting feedback from Bay Area stakeholders, including members and supporters like you, during January and February 2023.

With this information, we will present a recommendation to the board of directors in March. Golden Gate Audubon will make its decision independently from National Audubon but regardless of what decision each organization makes, it is our intention to remain an affiliated chapter.

NEWS BRIEFS

New Golden Gate Audubon Committees

Looking for more ways to get involved? We now have a Richmond Committee and Climate Committee actively looking for members to support these specific initiatives. For more information on the Richmond Committee email richmondcommitteall@goldengateaudubon.org, or for Climate Committee contact climatecommitteall@goldengateaudubon.org.

Angie Geiger SF Conservation Committee

We are excited to announce Board Member Angie Geiger as the new Chair of the San Francisco Conservation Committee. Having led field trips and participated in the first Master Birder Program cohort, Angie has years of experience and knowledge with the organization and its programs.

Elsie Roemer and Paul Covel Awards

We are honored to announce our annual conservation award winners. The winner of the Elsie Roemer Award is Susan Mullaney, the lead volunteer at Bison Paddock for the past 10 years. This year's Paul Covel Award recipient is Mark Rauzon, the author of over 20 children's science books and designer of the cormorant platforms on the new Bay Bridge.

INTERVENTION from page 1

Josh Milburn, a Lecturer in Political Philosophy at Loughborough University, thinks and writes a lot about how animals fit into our systems of ethics, law and politics. “I personally don’t believe we should always help individual wild animals when they’re suffering because the logical endpoint for this argument is the reordering of nature entirely,” Milburn explained. “But I do think we should help individual animals if we have the right kind of relationship with them.

Returning to the nest, what kind of relationship exists between viewers and the Ospreys?

According to Milburn, since the birds are wild (autonomous), not captive-reared, and haven’t been intentionally welcomed into our human environment, the only relationship that seems to exist is a kind of one-sided affection, meaning viewers like the birds.

Charles Eldermire, the Cornell Lab Bird Cams Project Leader, knows this relationship well.

“One of the challenges with running a nest cam is that the connection of individual birds to people that are watching is way tighter,” Eldermire said. “It’s almost more akin to having a pet in a way, rather than wildlife.”

In addition to the connection the nest cam provides, Golden Gate Audubon offers viewers the opportunity to name the Osprey chicks each year and purchase annual Osprey t-shirts.

But according to Kathie Jenni, a professor of philosophy and Director of Human-Animal studies at the University of Redlands, these practices do not make them pets nor any less wild.

“The birds are not conscious of you naming them or even watching them via a nest cam,” she said. “These birds are clearly living wild lives and naming them just reinforces that each one is an individual being.”

Still, this close relationship can sometimes be a double-edged sword, according to Eldermire.

“Being close to a wild animal makes it seem less wild to us and in some ways the more we understand that we aren’t so different from these animals, that’s a really good thing,” Eldermire said. “But we can’t lose



Osprey at Whirley Crane nest in Richmond, CA.

“My view is, we don’t always have to intervene, but if we can in a way that is respectful, we should,” Milburn said.

sight of the fact that they are fundamentally not what we are.”

Eldermire explained that as a science institution, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology places an importance on the natural history of bird species and educating people about their unique lives, including their struggle and suffering.

“With Barn Owls, they’ll often have more eggs hatch than they can feed and sometimes they [chicks] starve or are fed to each other,” Edlermire explained. “But that’s simply part of their natural history well before the modern era of global warming and climate change.”

According to Josh Milburn, if a bird is suffering or in poor health due to natural causes and the relationship we have with the wild bird is solely one of affection, the argument toward any kind of obligation or responsibility to intervene is weak.

Of course, Milburn acknowledged that just because one might not be obliged to intervene doesn’t mean it’s not the right thing to do.

“My view is, we don’t always have to intervene, but if we can in a way that is respectful, we should,” Milburn said.

Here the word “respectful” becomes

important. In the case of the Osprey family in Richmond, attempting to intervene and check on Molate’s health would’ve been dangerous for Molate’s sibling, Brooks.

Even if intervention was requested, Wildcare, a local wildlife rescue service, would’ve been unable to intervene given the risk to Brooks’ well-being.

At the same time, Ospreys are known to be a high stress species with needs that prove difficult to recreate in captivity, leaving little room for survival and plenty of room for stress and trauma.

On July 16, Molate fell from his nest and died. While the cause of Molate’s death remains unknown, the grief from viewers was and continues to be evident.

As a conservation organization, it is often easier and more important to think about our responsibility to entire populations of species from an ecological perspective. And yet, we recognize the individual lives of birds through programs like the nest cam.

While each decision surrounding intervention should be made on a case by case basis, we must ask ourselves; What relationship do we truly have with these individual birds? And what does respect look like with respect to their livelihood?

FIELD MARKS FOR IDENTIFYING YOUR MEMBERSHIP

BY ILANA DEBARE

So you can tell a White-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*) from a Golden-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia atricapilla*). But, can you tell a Golden Gate Audubon member from a National Audubon member?

That's a dilemma that's plagued Golden Gate Audubon Society (GGAS) and other chapters for years.

Maybe you wrote a membership check to National Audubon and then received a "your membership has lapsed!" letter from GGAS. Or maybe you renewed your GGAS membership and are perplexed by why you're no longer getting that beautiful *Audubon* magazine. It's genuinely confusing.

Let's untangle the mess.

While Golden Gate Audubon is a chapter of National, we are a separate 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Each chapter needs to raise funds to support its operations, and each has its own membership list.

While joining National Audubon gives you a complimentary membership in your local chapter, this complimentary membership to Golden Gate Audubon does not include field trip or class discounts.

Your National Audubon membership supports advocacy for birds and habitat on a national level. It also gives you a subscription to *Audubon* magazine.

Your Golden Gate Audubon membership supports advocacy for birds in the Bay Area. It helps pay for conservation and education programs such as our habitat restoration work and our Eco-Education program for Title I



Golden-crowned Sparrow and White-crowned Sparrow.

Gail West

elementary schools. It helps cover office rent, liability insurance for our 150+ free field trips, and the occasional lawsuit filed on behalf of threatened birds and habitat.

A Golden Gate Audubon membership gives you a discount on GGAS birding classes and special field trips like birding-by-boat excursions. It also includes a subscription to *The Gull* (which you're reading right now).

Membership in GGAS also makes you part of a community of people who care about birds, wildlife, and each other. And it gives extra credibility to our advocacy, so we can approach a legislator and say, "We're speaking for xxx thousand of your constituents."

Since the arrival of Executive Director Glenn Phillips last year, we've been working

to modernize our membership process. We weren't always good at reminding people to renew, so a lot of folks unknowingly let their memberships lapse.

If you're unsure whether your GGAS membership is current, call our office at (510) 843-2222 or email us at membership@goldengateaudubon.org

Your memberships in both National Audubon and Golden Gate Audubon are important! Please renew today at goldengateaudubon.org if yours has lapsed. And while you're at it, become a monthly donor, with an automatic recurring contribution of \$10 to \$50. Bay Area birds like those *Zonotrichia* sparrows need our help year-round, and monthly contributions are a great way to provide that.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Christmas Bird Counts 2022

Leading into the holiday season, make sure to mark your calendar to participate in one or more of the following Golden Gate Audubon sponsored Christmas Bird Counts (CBC): Oakland CBC Sunday, December 18, San Francisco CBC Tuesday, December 27, Richmond CBC January 1, 2023.

2nd Annual Berkeley Bird Festival

Golden Gate Audubon will co-sponsor the second annual Berkeley Bird Festival on Sunday, October 16, a free all-day community event filled with birding field trips, arts and crafts, film, talks and storytelling. For more information on the festival and for event registration visit berkeleybirdfestival.org.

Rotary Nature Center Grand Reopening

The Rotary Nature Center will celebrate its grand reopening on Wednesday, November 2. Golden Gate Audubon will be showcasing an exhibit at the center to honor Lake Merritt as the oldest designated wildlife refuge in North America and reflect our work to conserve local wildlife.



MEEKER SLOUGH: BIRDING HOTSPOT

BY GAIL KURTZ

LOCATION

Meeker Slough,
Regatta Blvd,
Richmond, CA

Meeker Slough may be little, but it plays a big role in supporting a variety of birds.

A small mudflat channel on Richmond's southern shoreline, Meeker Slough is easy to miss. It cuts a narrow track between UC Berkeley's Richmond Field Station and the Marina Bay residential community before draining into a tidal marsh nestled against the bay.

Meeker Slough may be little, but because the Bay Area has lost 90 percent of its wetlands since 1850, it plays a big role in supporting a variety of birds. With over 200 species spotted here, this hotspot also offers crucial habitat and breeding ground for the endangered Ridgway's Rail.

Two points of entry to the slough, both on its northeastern flank, connect storm water runoff from the city of Richmond to a brief stretch of Meeker Creek before entering the tidal marsh. Here one finds a quiet scene where natural and human landscapes converge. Egrets perch on old sections of fence lying catawampus on the shore, Black Phoebes swoop from metal posts to catch bugs, and several "Duck Crossing" signs pay homage to the rafts of Mallards nearby.

Continue south along the channel, you'll come to a bridge that crosses the slough, where Ridgway's Rails pick their way along the banks. By the late 1990s, after a century of industrial contamination, there was no rail activity in this area. But in 1999, UC Berkeley began remediation

and restoration efforts in nearby Western Stege Marsh, helping these birds rebound.

Moving southwest of the bridge, the trail hugs the slough as it winds into the tidal marsh. Here benches offer expansive views of the bay and San Francisco skyline. You can observe squadrons of White and Brown Pelicans as they glide overhead and Long-billed Curlews with Semipalmated Plovers sifting through the mud.

Head a few yards west to a sliver of beach for views of overwintering grebes, Red-breasted Mergansers during migration season, or Caspian Terns on their summer visits. From here you can follow the trail west along the shoreline to Shimada Friendship Park, another good birding spot.

While garbage can be an issue at Meeker Slough, especially after winter storms, community groups are contributing solutions. The City of Richmond installed trash interceptors at the western terminus and The Watershed Project, a local advocacy group, hosts cleanup days. On most days you'll find these wetlands clean and beautiful.

Meeker Slough is a little gem. This section of the Richmond shoreline demonstrates that habitat restoration and conservation can yield beautiful results for birds and humans alike.

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

DONATIONS



Mixed shorebirds. Photo by Verne Nelson.

Thank you for being a part of our donor and member community.

We are deeply appreciative of every individual, business, and organization that supports Golden Gate Audubon. In this issue, we recognize all of those who donated through our summer appeal and all of our major donors from the past year.

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Golden Gate Audubon acknowledges donors who contributed during our 2022 Summer Appeal (through September 21). Thanks to your generosity, we exceeded our target match, leveraging an additional \$25,000 from 13 board members.

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Please know that we work hard to ensure the accuracy of this list. If your name has been omitted or misspelled, let us know at 510.843.2222.

IN SEARCH OF MEADOWLARKS

JOHN MARZLUFF

One of humanity’s grand challenges is to conserve nature while providing for a growing and increasing affluent population. The lessons learned from agrarians and the scientific literature suggests strategies that we can each employ to help meet this challenge. As John Marzluff searched for meadowlarks and other open country birds among farms and ranches, he learned how these species flee the plow and how many farmers adjust their actions to lessen this exodus. He birded and talked with farmers on their lands from Nebraska to California to Costa Rica, focusing on the actions of many farmers that coexist with nature because “it is the right thing to do.”

John Marzluff is James W. Ridgeway Professor of Wildlife Science at the University of Washington. He has been working with corvids since graduate school, where he focused on the social behavior and ecology of crows, ravens, and jays, and now studies the interactions of ravens and wolves in Yellowstone. He has written six books, including *Welcome to Subirdia* (2014), in which he demonstrates how moderately settled lands can host a splendid array of biological diversity, and *In Search of Meadowlarks* (2020), which connects our agriculture and diets to the conservation of birds and other wildlife.

LOCATION / DATE

Thursday, October 20
7 p.m. program
Zoom



Western Meadowlark.

Susan Cook

WHY BIRDS FLOCK

JESSICA GRIFFITHS

You may have heard the old saying “birds of a feather flock together”. But have you ever stopped to wonder why? Join Jessica Griffiths for a fascinating look at bird flocks and flocking behavior. Why do some species of birds form flocks while others do not? Why do geese and ducks fly in a “V” formation? How do birds flying in large flocks synchronize their movements? Learn the answers to these questions and more in this presentation, which touches on bird biology and behavior, and highlights some remarkable scientific discoveries.

Jessica Griffiths has worked as a wildlife biologist in California for 20 years, focusing on songbirds and monarch butterflies. She loves birding, and enjoys sharing her passion for birds and conservation via bird walks and public talks.

LOCATION / DATE

Thursday, November 17
7 p.m. program
Zoom



Shorebird flock at sunset.

Rick Lewis

MASTHEAD

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MISSION STATEMENT

Golden Gate Audubon Society engages people to experience the wonder of birds and to translate that wonder into actions which protect native bird populations and their habitats.

ABOUT GOLDEN GATE AUDUBON SOCIETY

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Zoom links and passcodes for upcoming presentations are available on our **Speaker Series website** at goldengateaudubon.org/education/speaker-series.

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www.goldengateaudubon.org

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1 The Ethics of Intervention

When should we intervene in an individual wild bird's life if it's been injured or is suffering?

2 By Any Other Name

Golden Gate Audubon announces its process for keeping or dropping the "Audubon" name given John James Audubon's character.

5 Meeker Slough

This small mudflat channel on Richmond's shoreline is home to the Ridgway's Rail and a testament to good habitat restoration.

BACKYARD BIRDER



Bob Lewis

Cooper's Hawk at left, Sharp-shinned Hawk at right.

COOPER'S HAWK AND SHARP-SHINNED HAWK

BY BLAKE EDGAR

Roaming the Oakland Zoo during last year's Christmas Bird Count, a team of birders flushed a hawk causing it to perch ahead of us on a branch. Its body size and banded tail indicated one of our two Accipiter species, but which one?

It's not straightforward to distinguish Cooper's Hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*) from Sharp-shinned Hawk (*A. striatus*). My San Francisco Master Birding instructors presented them as the most difficult local raptors to tell apart, especially when the choice is between a male "Coop" or a female "Sharpie."

These are the two most commonly banded raptors at Marin County's Hawk Hill, where sightings peak between mid-September and early November. Data from the Golden Gate Raptor Observatory indicate that Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks are, respectively, the third and fourth most frequently spotted species during the annual Hawkwatch. While we're in the midst of raptor migration season, let's consider this common but confounding pair.

Imagine being atop Hawk Hill with each of these hawks soaring above. Look for a sharper, straight edge to the Sharp-shinned's tail and a head aligned with the leading edge of its forward-bent wings. The head of a Cooper's in flight extends in front of the wings, and its more curved tail has a white band at the tip. Its long tail makes a Coop look longer, while the more compact Sharpie has proportionally longer wings. The Cooper's Hawk also has slower wingbeats compared with its smaller counterpart.

When you spot an Accipiter closer to earth, observe the head. On the rounded head of a Sharp-shinned, each eye appears relatively large and centrally positioned, lending the bird a "crazed" gaze. The smaller eye of a Cooper's is further forward on a boxier head—topped with a dark crown and pale nape in adult birds. If you get a glimpse of the legs, those on a Sharp-shinned (as the name suggests) look skinny.

Try not to rely on any single characteristic, and don't hasten your identification. Keep looking. Even though *Identify Yourself: The 50 Most Common Birding Identification Challenges* describes these two hawks as being "depressingly similar," the authors offer some wise advice: "Use every encounter as a learning experience." As for that hawk spotted at the Oakland Zoo, we went with Sharp-shinned.