

THE GULL

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GOLDEN GATE AUDUBON SOCIETY // VOL. 100 NO. 4 FALL 2015



CREATING FUTURE CONSERVATIONISTS

BY ILANA DEBARE

Yes!" Anthony DeCicco shouted in the middle of a North Richmond schoolyard last spring. DeCicco, Golden Gate Audubon Society's Youth Education Director, was overcome with excitement: He'd just discovered real, live nestlings in the bluebird box he'd helped the school's third-graders build and install.

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Eco-Education field trip to Point Pinole in Richmond.
Eva Guralnick



Rick Lewis

Western Snowy Plovers in Alameda, now protected thanks to GGAS members.

THE MEANING OF THE GOLDEN GATE AUDUBON BRAND

BY CINDY MARGULIS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Since becoming Executive Director over a year ago, I've had the opportunity to meet with myriad government officials, land managers, port authorities and developers. It's been fascinating to discover what Golden Gate Audubon Society means to people outside our organization—and to see how effective we can be when engaging with them.

Here's one example. In late 2013, a group of smart, impassioned volunteers discovered roosting Snowy Plovers facing constant disturbance on an Alameda beach. They raised the issue at the next board meeting of the

land management agency. After listening carefully, one board director asked, "Well, what does Golden Gate Audubon think should be done?"

The volunteers had been speaking as citizens, though all were Audubon members. GGAS responded with recommendations which the agency adopted. Now those threatened Snowy Plovers are well protected, roosting in safety throughout winter.

For 98 years, GGAS has persisted in an important mission: engaging people to experience the wonder of birds, and translating that wonder into action.

But I've learned that it's not only what we stand for but how we act on our mission that best explains GGAS's longevity, efficacy, and relevance.

We may not win on every issue, and some losses are heartbreaking and infuriating. But we remain resilient. We don't burn relationships or slam doors. GGAS undertakes advocacy in ways that inspire people to cooperate. We consider the perspectives of government agencies, land managers, developers, and the public when formulating recommendations. They in turn appreciate our professionalism and admire the way we strive for win-win results.

GGAS leads habitat restorations at eight different sites administered by five different land management entities. We prove that we're a worthy partner by investing our time, energy, and resources improving their properties for native wildlife.

In a metropolis of 8.5 million people, blocking all development is neither feasible or necessary. GGAS collaborates to ensure that projects accommodate local wildlife and the public good. The federal codification of a permanent Alameda Wildlife Reserve last November is a prime example.

Veterans Affairs will build at the former Alameda Naval Air Station site, but their facilities will be required by law to sustain the breeding colony of endangered Least Terns there. There will also be a Bay Trail segment and a nature center at the site.

This marvelous outcome is a tribute to decades of GGAS work...characterized by a long-term commitment to constructive, collegial dialogue. That is the true hallmark of the GGAS brand of conservation.

NEWS BRIEFS

Travel with GGAS

Encounter amazing new birds and places in 2016 on one of our expertly guided birding tours. Destinations include Costa Rica, Ecuador's Amazon rain forest, South Africa, Oaxaca, South Texas, and Southern Oregon. Add to your life list while making new friends! Details at goldengateaudubon.org/travel.

Pocket Guide to Birds of Golden Gate Park

New! Our laminated, folding pocket guide to *Birds of Golden Gate Park* is handy when you don't want to lug a full field guide. It's also a great, inexpensive holiday gift for novice birders or friends you'd like to introduce to birding. Order online at goldengateaudubon.org/store.

Donate Your Car

Donate your old car to Golden Gate Audubon—whether it's running or not! You'll get a tax break, and we'll get funds for bird conservation and education. The donation agency will even pick it up from your house. For more information or to donate your car today visit goldengateaudubon.org/donate-car.

Bird-Friendly Coffee Club

Help sustain bird habitat in Central America and elsewhere by buying organic, shade-grown coffee certified as bird-friendly by the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center. Order once a month and pick up your coffee at the GGAS office or speaker series. For details, see goldengateaudubon.org/coffeeclub.



(Left) Coyote Hills in springtime; (above) a pair of juvenile Tree Swallows at Coyote Hills.

Pamela Llewellyn

Jerry Ting/East Bay Regional Park District

COYOTE HILLS: BIRDING HOTSPOT

BY PAMELA LLEWELLYN

LOCATION

8000 Patterson
Ranch Road,
Fremont

Habitats include brackish wetlands, salt marshes, and woodlands.

Coyote Hills Regional Park in Fremont is one of my all-time favorite East Bay birding locations, due to the variety of habitats supporting diverse groups of both flora and fauna. Important bird habitats include brackish wetlands, salt marshes, willow woodland, and oak woodland. There is not a dull time of year to bird at Coyote Hills: Each season offers a unique glimpse into the life of birds.

Spring in Coyote Hills is a very busy time of year. Upon entering the park, the road passes through grasslands and marsh where Northern Harriers soar over the reeds in search of food, or do roller-coaster loops in mid-air to impress a potential mate.

Marsh Wrens chatter their staccato song out in the marshes, while Bewick's Wrens sing melodiously from branches up on the hillside. The park has installed between 20 and 30 nest boxes that each spring are fully occupied by easily viewable Tree Swallows. Meanwhile, in one of the channels in the marsh, Pied-billed Grebes,

American Coots and Common Gallinules are all busy building nests, incubating eggs, and feeding young.

As summer ends, the ponds fill up with an entirely new set of feathers. Sandpipers and other shorebirds start to arrive from their northern breeding grounds as early as June, with many of them still wearing their colorful breeding plumage.

Fall brings ducks: Canvasbacks, Greater and Lesser Scaups, Northern Pintails, Buffleheads, and Common Mergansers all fly in to join their resident cousins the Cinnamon Teal and Mallard, and the marshes are once again transformed. Trudging through the cold wet weather of winter to count duck species is an entirely different experience than standing in the bright spring sunlight, watching ethereal Tree Swallows fluttering down out of the sky to feed their young.

Raptorphiles can get their fill with up to 23 different species recorded here. White-tailed Kite, Northern Harrier, Red-shouldered Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, and Great Horned Owl are a few of the more common sightings.

Beyond the abundant wildlife, Coyote Hills also offers a window into the East Bay's cultural history. The park is home to 2,000-year-old Tuibun Ohlone Indian shellmound sites, and its Visitor Center offers interpretive displays of both wildlife and the Ohlone way of life.

For anyone with even a mild interest in the natural world, Coyote Hills does not disappoint.

For more about Coyote Hills Regional Park and other Bay Area birding hotspots, including directions, see our blog at goldengateaudubon.org/categories/hotspots.

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

PERSEVERANCE PROTECTS OUR BIRDS

BY ILANA DEBARE

People often expect conservation victories to happen quickly and dramatically, like a U.S. president protecting thousands of acres of wild lands with a stroke of the pen. But in reality, most victories take years and happen in small steps.

One issue that Golden Gate Audubon has pursued for years is preventing deadly bird-building collisions. In 2009, we launched our Lights Out for Birds program, educating people to dim their office and home lights at night to prevent drawing migrating birds off course. In 2011 and 2013, we worked with the planning departments of San Francisco and Oakland to enact Standards for Bird-Safe Buildings in those cities.

Our latest step is educating architects about bird-safe building design considerations. In partnership with American Bird Conservancy, we're offering free professional information seminars that explain hazards like glass walls, and highlight alternatives that are both safe and attractive. Attendees can receive continuing education credit; our first class will be a lunchtime session for architects from Gensler. *Do you know a local architectural firm that could host a class? Let us know at nweedn@goldengateaudubon.org.*

Another issue we've pursued over time is sensible dog management in Bay Area parks and natural areas. Off-leash dogs are a menace to birds—including threatened species such as Snowy Plovers—at San Francisco's Ocean Beach and Crissy Field's beach. GGAS volunteers like Dan Murphy and Matt Zlatunich have closely monitored bird populations there for years and documented disturbances of protected species by dogs.

This fall, the Dog Management Final Rule for the Golden Gate National Recreation Area will be published. For years, GGAS has weighed in with detailed testimony and recommendations. We're hopeful the Final Rule will ensure that sensitive habitat areas are free of domestic dogs. At the same time, we recognize that select trails can accommodate leashed dogs, and that certain very well-delimited areas can handle off-leash dogs as long as those dogs don't harm wildlife or degrade the experience of other park visitors.



Bob Lewis

Long-billed Curlew with a clam. Curlews are among the many shorebirds that face harassment by off-leash dogs in the GGNRA.

If the final National Park Service policy includes meaningful measures to protect wildlife, it's likely to be attacked by a vocal minority of dog owners objecting to any restrictions on where their dogs can run. And that's where you—as a lover of birds and wildlife—can help. Stay tuned: We may call on our members to write another round of letters to officials and news media about the crucial importance of protecting wildlife in the GGNRA.

If we don't have your email address, let us know at idebare@goldengateaudubon.org so you'll receive our calls to action. Your involvement can transform long-term advocacy into wins for wildlife!

For background on dog management in the GGNRA, see our blog at <http://bit.ly/1LkCm5H>. Learn about our work on bird-safe buildings at goldengateaudubon.org/bird-safe-buildings.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Christmas Bird Count

Oakland and San Francisco

Sunday, December 20 and Tuesday, December 29

Join tens of thousands of birders across North America in Audubon's 116th annual Christmas Bird Count. Both beginning and experienced birders are warmly welcome. Sign up for the Oakland-area count on Sunday, December 20, the San Francisco count on Tuesday, December 29, or do both! Can't spend the day? We also need volunteers for the festive dinner after each count. Online registration opens in mid-October at goldengateaudubon.org/cbc. The Oakland count is looking for more feeder watchers this year. If you have friends with feeders in Oakland, Berkeley, Alameda, etc., please have them contact Bob Lewis at RLewis0727@aol.com.

GGAS Holiday Open House

Berkeley

Friday, December 11

Share seasonal cheer (and birding stories) at the annual holiday open house at our Berkeley office. Refreshments, door prizes, shop for birding gifts, plus meet the photographers who contributed to our beautiful 2016 Birds of the San Francisco Bay Area calendar. Details to come in our monthly e-newsletter.

CONSERVATIONISTS CONTINUED from page 1

The Western Bluebird nestlings grew and fledged. Kids and teachers at Lake Elementary watched, marveled, and kept nature journals.

The nest box success story was one of the highlights of the 2014-15 school year for Eco-Education, Golden Gate Audubon's award-winning nature education program.

Since its start in Oakland in 1999, Eco-Ed has expanded to 10 elementary schools and over 650 students in Oakland, San Francisco and North Richmond. Some things remain constant: The program serves low-income, Title 1 schools whose students typically don't have much access to outdoor nature experiences. It provides a series of dynamic field trips to nearby creeks, wetlands, and ocean shoreline that include both hands-on exploration and habitat restoration. And it invites parents as well as students on the year-end, culminating ocean trip—a way to extend the conservation ethos to entire families.

"Thank you Mr. Anthony, for taking us to Point Pinole and Alvarado Park," one fourth grader wrote last year. "You taught us many things like birding, planting, digging, hiking, observing, building nest boxes and how birds fly. You showed us many things like binoculars, beaks, tadpoles, snakes, lizards, trails and habitats."

While building on that strong base, Eco-Ed also continually innovates and evolves.

Last year, GGAS pioneered its "Creating



Students restore habitat with native plants during an Eco-Ed field trip.

Anthony DeCicco



Eco-Education students build a nest box for their Richmond schoolyard.

Eco-Ed integrates scientific observation with verbal skills through activities like nature journaling.

Bird-Friendly Schools" curriculum, including those bluebird nest boxes. Students conducted a baseline survey of their schoolyard to rank how welcoming it was to birds, and then undertook improvements like planting native fuchsias to attract hummingbirds or installing solar-powered birdbaths.

Another new module reinforced Eco-Ed's alignment with Next-Generation Science Standards by integrating scientific observation with verbal skills. In a pilot session, GGAS volunteers Brenda and Michael Helm—who are part of John Muir Laws's Nature Journaling Club—helped students observe, sketch, write notes, and pose questions about wetland birds at Point Pinole just like adult field naturalists.

"The program gives us many opportunities to write about what we are learning," one elementary school teacher reported. "We described the steps of how to plant a native plant. We also wrote about the different ways to become a bird-friendly school. [Students]...are excited to share their experiences and what they have learned on the field trip."

Reaching out to older public school youth, GGAS launched a new partnership with the environmental science program

at Oakland High School. GGAS staffer Marissa Ortega-Welch led 70 tenth-graders on a series of four bird walks at Lake Merritt, during which they learned about local species, migration, the importance of Lake Merritt as winter waterfowl habitat, and also did nature journaling with the Helms. The year culminated with a final bird walk—in which Ortega-Welch was led by the teens, who shared their new enthusiasm for the lake's vitality.

Now, as the 2015-16 school year gets underway, we're looking forward to another year of Eco-Ed learning and fun. Much of the program's success rests with its volunteers—more than two dozen GGAS members who accompany those field trips.

What's in the works? Making the Bird-Friendly Schools curriculum available to non-Title 1 schools. Refining that curriculum, with possible innovations like a nest camera streaming live video into classrooms. And yes, more nest boxes installed at school sites and in area public parklands. More songbird fledglings!

"Western Bluebirds are a magnificent bird," DeCicco said. "Their numbers are in decline and they need our help. That's a great motivator for the children."



Supposed Red-backed X Red-tailed Shrike hybrid, by Joe Morlan.

Joe Morlan

A CENTURY OF FIELD IDENTIFICATION

JOE MORLAN

LOCATION / DATE

San Francisco
Thursday, October 15
7:00 p.m. refreshments
7:30 p.m. program

Our ability to identify birds by sight has grown dramatically since the early 20th century. Meanwhile, technical advances in optics and photography continue to change the way we see birds. Joe Morlan will present a history of bird identification, starting with early pioneers like Ludlow Griscom and continuing with a personal look at how birding and bird identification have changed over the decades. What will future generations think of our own conventional wisdom about bird identification and distribution? Join us for this entertaining and thought-provoking presentation.

Joe Morlan teaches ornithology at City College of San Francisco. He has been a member of the California Bird Records Committee of Western Field Ornithologists since 1981 and currently serves as committee chair. He received the American Birding Association's prestigious Ludlow Griscom Award for outstanding contributions in regional ornithology in 2010 and is the coauthor of two books on birds in Northern California.

EARLY BIRD RENEWAL

Renew your Golden Gate Audubon membership now for 2016! If you renew now, we won't need to mail you a year-end renewal letter—saving postage, time, and trees. If you're a member of National Audubon who has not yet joined Golden Gate Audubon, please do! Benefits include this quarterly *Gull* newsletter, free admission to our monthly Speaker Series, and discounts on local birding classes and pelagic trips. And of course...being part of a community that loves and works to protect Bay Area birds.

Renew or join online at goldengateaudubon.org/join. If you join now, your membership will cover the rest of 2015 and all of 2016.

WOODPECKERS OF NORTH AMERICA

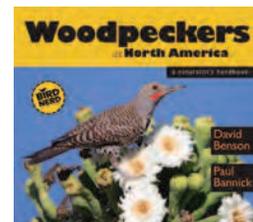
PAUL BANNICK

LOCATION / DATE

Berkeley
Thursday, November 19
7:00 p.m. refreshments
7:30 p.m. program

Learn about North American woodpecker species through award-winning images, intimate sounds, and stories and observations from the field. Paul Bannick, co-author and photographer of the new book *Woodpeckers of North America: A Naturalist's Guide*, will help you distinguish between species by behavior, habitat, and field markings. He will also discuss races of woodpeckers, adaptations to specific habitats, morphology, and cultural ties.

Paul Bannick is an international award-winning photographer, specializing in birds and their habitat. His work has been published by *National Geographic*, *The Smithsonian*, *The New York Times* and *Audubon* magazine. He will have several of his books available for sale/signing.



2016 BIRDS OF THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA PHOTO CALENDAR

Bring amazing hawks, mergansers, warblers, and other Bay Area birds into your home or office each month with our beautiful 2016 wall calendar! It features work by the Bay Area's most talented bird photographers, including Ken Shaw, whose Red-masked Parakeets are on the front cover. The calendar makes a great holiday gift. Supply is limited so order now. Available at the GGAS office or speaker series, or order securely online at goldengateaudubon.org/store.



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_fa.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!

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(To \$99)

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Lee Kerney

GGAS volunteers restore habitat at Pier 94.

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STAFF

Executive Director

Cindy Margulis, 510.843.9912
cmargulis@goldengateaudubon.org

Education Director

Anthony DeCicco, 510.843.2222
adecicco@goldengateaudubon.org

Volunteer Coordinator

Noreen Weeden, 510.301.0570
nweeden@goldengateaudubon.org

Communications Director

Ilana DeBare, 510.301.5573
idebare@goldengateaudubon.org

Eco-Education Program Coordinator

Marissa Ortega-Welch, 510.843.2222
mortegawelch@goldengateaudubon.org

Office Manager

Monica Moore, 510.843.2222
mmoore@goldengateaudubon.org

THE GULL AND WEBSITE

Gull and Web Editor

Ilana DeBare, idebare@goldengateaudubon.org

Observations

Bruce Mast, observe@goldengateaudubon.org

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA BIRD BOX

Report your unusual bird sightings: 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
www.goldengateaudubon.org
ggas@goldengateaudubon.org

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**3 Bay Area Hotspot:
Coyote Hills**

There's great birding during every season in the marshes and hills of this Fremont park.

4 Perseverance Protects Our Birds

Protecting birds from threats like building collisions or off-leash dogs can take years. But you can help.

6 Speaker Series

Joe Morlan speaks in October on the history of field ID, plus all about woodpeckers in November.

BACKYARD BIRDER



Michael Helm

Vaux's Swifts arrive at the McNear Brickyard chimney.

**VAUX'S SWIFTS AT
MCNEAR BRICKYARD**

BY MICHAEL HELM

Every fall, flocks of Vaux's Swifts from the Pacific Northwest migrate south along the California coast to Central America. They make a rare terrestrial appearance at mass roosting sites along their migration route, including McNear Brickyard in San Rafael, which was discovered about five years ago by Golden Gate Audubon birding instructor Rusty Scalf.

The brickyard has several century-old kilns (architectural wonders themselves) with enormous chimneys. In September, flocks of

thousands of swifts converge on the chimneys at sunset. Curiously, their chittering and calling can often be heard well before they are seen; their large numbers seem to make up for the distance and the softness of their calls. They can suddenly appear out of nowhere, whirl around in murmuration-like formations, and then descend into the chimneys like a reverse flow of smoke. Around sunrise, the birds boil out of the same chimneys like foam out of a beer glass. The swifts have been using this site for a long time, perhaps ever since the old kilns were decommissioned.

Vaux's Swifts are small, with a plain grey underbody and a brown gray top. They forage on "aerial plankton" such as high-flying insects and ballooning spiders, hundreds of feet up: These birds are seldom visible from ground level. We likely have a small resident population in the Bay Area, and they are known to breed in Sonoma and Santa Cruz Counties (probably in very small numbers). They more commonly breed in old-growth forests in the Pacific Northwest, and are thought to be at great risk due to habitat loss, but they are very poorly understood.

The swifts are not easy to find in either their breeding or wintering habitat, so fall migration is one of the best times to see them. The industrial chimneys they have adopted are another endangered feature of the landscape. And what about spring migration? Numbers are much smaller on the coast in springtime; it's thought that the returning birds take a different route traveling north. Rusty saw them in large numbers in Palm Springs on a recent GGAS spring field trip, so perhaps another discovery awaits.

Michael Helm helps count the McNear swifts for Larry Schwitters' Vaux's Swift study. For updates on the 2015 season, follow our blog at goldengateaudubon.org/blog.