

THE GULL

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GOLDEN GATE AUDUBON SOCIETY // VOL. 103 NO. 4 FALL 2019



ENTERING NEW WATERS AT PIER 94

LESLIE WEIR

More than a million individual shorebirds rely on the San Francisco Bay for at least some portion of their annual lifecycle. The Bay Area is classified as a site of hemispheric significance for migratory shorebirds by the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network, and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands has designated San Francisco Bay as a site of international significance for migratory waterfowl. More than 1,000 species of birds, mammals, and fish rely on the San Francisco Bay Estuary—the centerpiece of our region.

CONTINUED on page 5

American Avocet at Pier 94.
Bob Gunderson





Male Blackpoll Warbler.

OUR TIME OF TRANSITION

BY PAM YOUNG, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Fall is a time when we birders scan the skies for visiting migrants as they wing their way to their wintering grounds. For many species of birds, it is a time of transition from the energetic demands of breeding and molting to feeding ravenously and experiencing a restless urge to leap skyward. Migrating birds have an unrelenting craving to navigate to a very specific location—a drive that has been carved into their ancient wisdom over millions of years.

Many Septembers ago, while aboard a ship that was plowing through the Atlantic

Ocean toward New York, I discovered a frantic Blackpoll Warbler, *Setophaga striata*, exhausted but valiantly struggling to penetrate a raging 30-knot wind. I reached out and gently cupped the bird in my hands. He immediately quieted, and I transferred him to a small box—his own personal berth. This moment reminded me of an account I had read about migrant passerines “boarding” ships that apparently suit them just fine as temporary transports to their landward destinations. After offering the bird a little water, I left him to rest, hopefully

long enough to be restored for his astonishing journey. Ornithologists discovered that Blackpoll Warblers have the longest migratory route of any New World warbler. Every fall, these tiny 12-gram birds make a nonstop transatlantic flight from upper Canada to South America. Then, the following spring, they reverse migrate to their breeding grounds.

A few hours later, I checked on this exquisite feathered jewel. He was no longer quiet. I could hear him bouncing against the box top in a frenzied urge to leap up and fly south. I let him go and off he went—toward the Statue of Liberty, a fitting testament to his fortitude. I hoped that I had helped him a little.

Like this Blackpoll Warbler’s drive to migrate during the fall season, this is our time of transition at GGAS. As we gather ourselves to move through this fall season, I am humbled by the achievements of our great leaders, volunteers, members, supporters, and friends who steered GGAS through 102 years of extraordinary service for our Bay Area. I look forward to serving in the grand tradition that is this great institution’s venerable heritage.

As our mission statement attests, we “engage people to experience the wonder of birds, and translate that wonder into actions.” Where habitats or wildlife are besieged by a range of assaults, we will engage our community to translate the wonder of birds into action so that all living beings that form our web of life will thrive. Together, we will continue the enduring legacy of GGAS.

UPCOMING EVENTS

2019 Christmas Bird Counts

Oakland and San Francisco
December 15 and 27
Mark your calendars now for our Oakland CBC on December 15 and San Francisco CBC on December 27. Both counts will be followed by a traditional festive count dinner. All skill levels welcome. Feeder Watchers are invited to take part in the Oakland count. Registration opens late October.

Fall Birding Classes

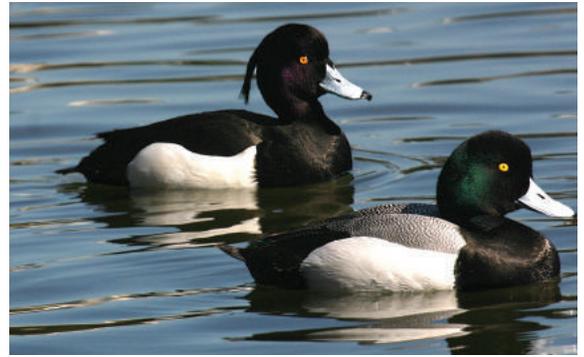
Improve your birding skills—or get started in birdwatching with some friendly, expert help! Fall classes available for all levels of birding experience—from beginning to advanced. For classes at the Marin Headlands or Ed Roberts Campus go to goldengateaudubon.org/education/classes. For classes at the Rotary Nature Center, go to goldengateaudubon.org/classes-rnc.

Eco-Sail on the Bay

October 26, 8:00–11:30 a.m.
Sausalito Yacht Harbor
This trip to benefit GGAS takes you under the Golden Gate Bridge and out to Point Bonita Lighthouse with frequent bird and wildlife sightings. Ticket price includes coffee and a mimosa! Register at goldengateaudubon.org/upcoming-field-trips and scroll down to Fee-based Trips.

Lake Merritt Docent Training

Tuesday October 22, 7 p.m.
GGAS Office, Berkeley
Help GGAS introduce Oakland’s residents and visitors to Lake Merritt’s wintering birds! We will be serving on Saturday mornings from 10 a.m. until noon. Available docent shifts will run from November through February. For more information, please contact Maureen Lahiff at MLahiff@aol.com.



(From left) Scenes from Lake Merritt: Lake Chalet, Tufted Duck and Greater Scaup, and birders. Photos courtesy of Rick Lewis.

LAKE MERRITT: BIRDING HOTSPOT

BY HILARY POWERS

LOCATION

Rotary Nature
Center
600 Bellevue Ave.
Oakland

*There's
never a
truly bad
day to be
at Lake
Merritt*

Lake Merritt is Club Bird—a winter destination for almost a dozen kinds of ducks and grebes, plus assorted warblers and sparrows. On the fourth Wednesday walk, a GGAS feature since 2005, the December and January species count usually hits the mid- to high 40s, sometimes reaching the mid-50s. But high summer isn't empty; with a species count nearer 30 there's still plenty to see—and easier to keep track of if you're new to birding. So come on down to the lake! There's never a truly bad day to be there; even if it's raining sideways you'll find something worth watching, and most days rank among the best anywhere. Join us at 9:30 at the dome cage for our monthly excursion, or come when you can.

And GGAS has more to offer at the lake. Since the Rotary Nature Center reopened, we've been offering classes there—check them out at goldengateaudubon.org/classes-rnc. Upcoming: “Wintering Birds of Lake Merritt,” a classroom session on November 9 followed by a guided walk on November 16, designed for new birders. Then in February, we will offer “Bird as Icon: Black-crowned Night-Heron”; keep an eye on the web-

site for registration info. If you don't have access to a computer, phone our office at (510) 843-2222 and we'll return your call as soon as possible.

How did the lake get to be the sanctuary we know today? I think of it as a “people refuge.” Originally a tidal slough, it was dammed in 1869 to create a 155-acre pool that proved irresistibly attractive to passing birds... and would-be bird hunters (both in far greater numbers than Oakland sees today). The noise of gunfire and the danger of scattered shot proved so unpleasant around the new lake that within a year Dr. Samuel Merritt, the man who had donated the land for the project, arranged with the state of California to have it declared a “wildlife refuge”—the first in the US. Hunting was forbidden and fishing limited to hook and line, primarily to protect humans from a nuisance rather than non-humans from mortal peril. At the time, even birders used shotguns rather than optics. After all, wild lives had few defenders—but the ploy set up a treasure for our time, where people who do value the lives of wild creatures can join them in the refuge and find refreshment and restoration.

Read more about this and other birding hotspots at goldengateaudubon.org/hotspots.

DUBS SLAM DUNK BIRD-FRIENDLY AT CHASE ARENA

BY NOREEN WEEDEN

The Warriors achieved gold—LEED gold, that is—on their new stadium.

Golden Gate Audubon learned about the proposed new stadium along the San Francisco waterfront, an area of San Francisco not required to adhere to the Bird-Safe Building ordinance, in 2012. Since 2007, GGAS members, San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory, and Bay Keeper had collaborated to monitor and document bird species along the waterfront including the Agua Vista, Pier 60, and Pier 64 sites opposite the proposed stadium. Based on these surveys, GGAS identified potentially impacted species, including shorebirds, terns, gulls, grebes, cormorants, hawks, and passerines.

GGAS San Francisco Conservation Committee members attended community meetings, read proposed plans, and worked with staff on comments for the project. Early in the design process, GGAS encouraged everyone involved in the planning and design of the waterfront arena to ensure that environmental impacts, especially impacts to birds, would be considered. The Warriors built relationships with the surrounding neighborhood and sought to have a stadium that reflected the beauty, ingenuity, and innovation of the Bay Area.

One of the selected architect firms, Gensler, had taken the American Bird Conservancy bird-safe building design CEU course taught by GGAS. “The Northeast corner was of particular concern for bird safety given its close proximity to the new waterfront park and the San Francisco Bay,” said Barry Bourbon, Principal at Gensler. “The goal was to design a seamless architectural solution for bird safety considerations. A series of frit patterns of differing densities—based on the different flight path elevation data—were integrated into the façade glazing. This creates an added play of light, shadow, and texture on the façades, providing not only a layered design aesthetic but also a practical and safe solution for bird safety.”

The result is an 18,000-seat arena and event space that has a US Green Building Council Leadership in Energy and Environmental



Photo courtesy of Warriors Chase Stadium.

Design (LEED) Gold certification. The bird-safe building design LEED features include UV-treated glazing, fritted glass (with thermal regulating properties), and down lighting. The Warriors Chase Stadium is part of the Green Sports Alliance, which promotes healthy, sustainable communities.

Yoyo Chan, Vice President Government and Public Affairs for the Golden State Warriors, said, “Designing with birds in mind was a very important aspect for us in building Chase Center. This effort is part of our organization’s broader commitment to sustainability and being environmentally friendly. We are very proud to be one of the few bird-friendly arenas in the NBA.”

On September 6, 2019, the Chase Center Warriors Stadium opened to the public for the first time. We are thrilled that they considered people, birds, our environment, and the input of GGAS at this new venue.

NEWS BRIEFS

Early Bird Renewal

Renew your Golden Gate Audubon Society membership for 2020. Renew or join online at goldengateaudubon.org/join. If you join now, your membership will cover the rest of 2019 and all of 2020. If you're a member of National Audubon who has not yet joined GGAS, please do!

GGAS 2020 Photo Calendar

The 2020 Birds of the Bay Area calendar is now on sale. Don't miss this chance to enjoy the stunning photos by some of the Bay Area's best photographers. Perfect for your home or office wall; also great as a holiday, birthday, or host thank-you gift. Order online at goldengateaudubon.org/calendar.

Birds and Beans

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. It's easy. Order once a month and pick up your coffee at the GGAS office. For details, go to goldengateaudubon/coffeeclub.

2019 Summer Gull Correction

In our Summer 2019 article titled “Birdathon 2019: Expanding Our Reach,” we mistakenly reported that our top individual fundraiser, Dan Harris, had raised \$4201. Our apologies to Dan for understating his grand total. Dan Harris raised a monumental \$4376 during Birdathon 2019!

PIER 94 CONTINUED from page 1

Despite the Bay Area's importance for species survival, San Francisco has lost over 90% of its wetlands. The southeastern waterfront of the San Francisco Bay has been devastated by decades of industrial pollution, landfill, and habitat loss. Our birds and other wildlife are struggling to adapt to multiple threats under pressure from increasing urbanization and projected impacts of climate change.

Since 2002, GGAS has supported the Port of San Francisco in restoring Pier 94 along San Francisco's southeastern shore. Through the stewardship of Golden Gate Audubon, the site has evolved from a neglected landfill to a thriving 7-acre wetland, transition zone, and upland ecosystem. The project benefits a wide range of migratory and resident birds, including species listed as "of special concern" by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. The Pier 94 project site is ideally located to provide habitat refuge—a refuge that will become increasingly important under California's changing climate.

Golden Gate Audubon staff member Noreen Weeden has been responsible for implementing the Pier 94 wetland restoration since 2006. The restoration has ensured survival for the native plants, birds, and other wildlife beginning to establish at Pier 94. Noreen recruits volunteers and schedules work days at the restoration site. Volunteer events engage community and corporate groups in outdoor learning. GGAS's staff provide a brief history of the site, explanation of the work intended, and why it is important. Volunteer groups participate to learn more about the urban environment. Salesforce brings groups of volunteers from all over the world, and GGAS's Eco-Education program is engaging students from federally assisted (Title I) schools, their teachers, and their families in science and conservation.

This fall, Golden Gate Audubon embarked on an exciting expansion into the subtidal zone of Pier 94. GGAS is conducting a research pilot guided by the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center to determine the sustainability of native oysters at the pier. Historically, oysters lived in the San Francisco Bay and are an impor-



Noreen Weeden

Checking the Pier 94 shoreline to collect baseline data on native oysters, drill, and seaweed.

Through the stewardship of Golden Gate Audubon, the site has evolved from a neglected landfill to a thriving, 7-acre wetland, transition zone, and upland ecosystem.

tant foundational species for its wildlife. The reintroduction of native oysters to Pier 94 will result in a better understanding of how the oysters can improve shoreline biodiversity. Through this new phase at Pier 94, we will learn more about San Francisco Bay shoreline species. This project offers volunteers the opportunity to participate in meaningful research on our west coast native oysters. This valuable, local community science will provide data about oysters and birds, like Black Oystercatchers and Surf Scoters, that rely on them.

Pier 94's biodiversity has already increased for birds and butterflies, indicating improved shoreline habitat as a result of GGAS's restoration efforts. In 2018, there were 146 species of birds recorded at the site, a 14% increase over the previous year. Avian species that nest on-site include Canada Goose, Mallard, Killdeer,

American Avocet, White-crowned Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, Anna's Hummingbird, House Finch, Bryant's Savannah Sparrow, and Northern Mockingbird. Additional likely breeders at this site include Lesser Goldfinch, Barn Swallow, and Black Phoebe. Data collected suggests that both the variety of species and the number of birds, insects, plants, and wildlife will continue to increase as the habitat improves.

Through the protection of this coastal habitat and through the enhancement of the ecosystem with the addition of the native oysters, GGAS will create an integrated and inviting living shoreline in the southeastern industrialized and urban area of San Francisco. The results of this project will feed into the San Francisco Bay Subtidal Habitat Goals Project and a long-term vision for restoration of multiple, larger San Francisco Bay sites.

DONATIONS

Thank you for joining our donor community.

Donations from June 1, 2019 through August 31, 2019

With gratitude to every individual, business, and organization who made a recent donation. Large or small, the gifts you send support our conservation, education, and member programs and benefit the birds you love.

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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.

STATUS AND CONSERVATION OF WATERBIRDS OF THE NORTH BAY

NILS WARNOCK

Learn about the work at Audubon Canyon Ranch (ACR) by their scientists, colleagues, students and volunteers who study the local status and ecology of wintering and migrant shorebirds and waterbirds in the Bay Area. Nils will present results of 30 years of waterbird monitoring by ACR in Tomales Bay and discuss results of ACR's 50 years of work on herons and egrets throughout the Bay Area. This will include presenting data on movements of the first ever satellite telemetry-tracked Great Egrets on the West Coast of North America.

Nils Warnock is Director of Conservation Science at ACR. He is an elected Fellow of the American Ornithological Society with 35 years' experience on ecology and conservation of Pacific Flyway birds, especially shorebirds. Nils has a PhD in Ecology. Previously he worked as Co-Director of the Wetlands Division of Pt. Reyes Bird Observatory (now Pt. Blue, 1998–2008), and then as the Executive Director of Audubon Alaska and a Vice President of the National Audubon Society (2010–2018).

LOCATION / DATE

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



Nils Warnock

GOLDEN EAGLES IN A CHANGING WORLD

BEN DUDEK

Golden Eagles are a well-studied, widely distributed raptor species. Long-term monitoring of Golden Eagle populations have revealed several current and emerging threats, including landscape-mediated diet shifts that may increase the potential for disease infection, and warming temperatures that may increase the distribution and abundance of eagle ectoparasites. Management to mitigate these threats requires first identifying and understanding factors that influence individual susceptibility within populations. Given the projections of current climate trends and the increasing human ecological footprint, monitoring threats to raptor populations and the ability of birds to respond to these threats is important in a changing world.

Ben Dudek is a wildlife biologist in the San Francisco Bay Area with a M.S. in Raptor Biology. Ben has worked with birds for organizations across the western United States, including the Institute for Bird Populations, Hawkwatch International, and Yosemite National Park. He is a volunteer at Golden Gate Raptor Observatory.

LOCATION / DATE

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



Ben Dudek

San Francisco: New venue! Sports Basement, 1590 Bryant Street, San Francisco.

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

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MISSION STATEMENT

Golden Gate Audubon 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

The Golden Gate Audubon Society was founded January 25, 1917. Golden Gate Audubon Supporting Membership is \$35 per year. You can join or renew on the website or through our Berkeley 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*.

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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3 Bay Area Hotspot: Lake Merritt

Fall migration is a great time to see waterfowl at Lake Merritt, the first designated wildlife refuge in the US.

4 Slam Dunk at Bird-Friendly Chase Arena

The Golden State Warriors Stadium bird-safe building design includes UV-treated glazing, fritted glass, and down lighting.

7 Speaker Series

This fall learn about research projects at Audubon Canyon Ranch in October and threats to Golden Eagles in a changing world.

BACKYARD BIRDER



Lee Friedman

Brown Creeper.

BROWN CREEPER

BY MADELINE BRANE

The Brown Creeper is a small songbird (4.6"–5.3" long). They prefer living in mixed woodlands near riparian corridors. These areas provide the key elements needed for survival: food, shelter, nesting habitat, and water. They are frequently seen in the SF Bay Area alongside birds including Oak Titmice, nuthatches, and Bewick's Wrens.

Brown Creepers are camouflaged by their streaked brown feathers, making it easy for them to blend into tree bark. When walking

in mixed woodlands past conifers and oak trees, you may see a slight movement on a tree trunk. This could be the Brown Creeper searching for food, spiraling upward on the tree trunk, then flying to the base of a nearby tree to start the spiraling process over again. They move upward around the trunk, as opposed to nuthatches, who climb up, down, and around tree trunks.

The Brown Creeper is often heard before being seen. It has a high song that sounds like it is saying "tree, beautiful tree." The song is a high frequency (3750Hz–8000Hz). People (normal range 1000Hz–8000Hz) who are losing some of their hearing may find that this is one of the first birds they no longer hear. The Brown Creeper's high-pitched song may remind you of another bird with a high frequency song, the Cedar Waxwing (6000Hz–8000Hz).

Brown Creepers are common across the US, although their numbers are declining due to deforestation, especially the removal of dead and dying trees used for nesting. The loss of California riparian habitat is also a danger to these birds.

Locally, Brown Creepers are seen throughout the year at mixed woodland areas, such as Lafayette Community Park and Valle Vista. We recently observed parents and young hopping up oak trees looking for insects. One parent landed behind a juvenile and handed off some food to the younger bird. Then they both continued climbing around the tree trunk. We were entranced by this family interaction!

I encourage you to listen ("tree, beautiful tree") and look for the Brown Creeper the next time you are in their habitat. Come on our monthly hikes at either Lafayette Community Center or Valle Vista, and you just might see this bird creeping up a tree.