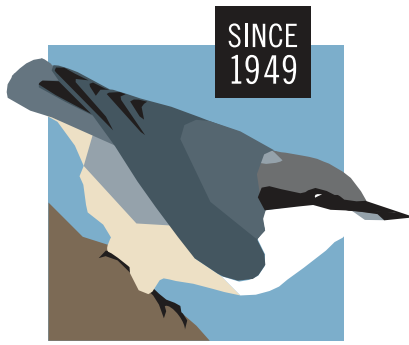




SEQUOIA AUDUBON SOCIETY

Bulletin of the Sequoia Audubon Society, San Mateo County

*Volume 72, No. 1
January - March 2021*

2020 - Sequoia Rises to the Challenges

No recap of this year can begin without acknowledging what a tragic and chaotic time it has been, for San Mateo, for California, for the U.S. and for the world. The COVID-19 virus has claimed 1.5 million lives worldwide, with over 300,000 of those in the U.S. The economy, schools, transportation, and all of our everyday activities have been disrupted, if not upended. Sequoia responded to the crises with clarity when we cancelled our March general meeting just as the first wave of COVID cases started to grow in the Bay Area. By April, thanks to our intrepid and resourceful Davena Gentry, we were able to hold our general meetings live on ZOOM. The first one, with Damon Tighe of the California Center for Natural History, set the precedent for these being joyous community gatherings, filled with knowledge, smiles, laughter, and camaraderie. For our September meeting with Sequoia member (and consulting biologist) Alvaro Jaramillo, we attracted over 150 participants from across the nation.

Meanwhile, all field trips had to be cancelled, but Donna Pomeroy came to the rescue with a series of ten weekly “distributed Big Days” in which Sequoia members were encouraged to go within walking distance of their homes and search for birds to see how many we could collectively uncover. This project helped get many birders through the difficult initial months of shelter-in-place.

In late May word started to trickle through the birding community about a racist incident in New York’s Central Park, where a local Audubon board member, Christian Cooper, was verbally insulted by a white woman who threatened to call the police on him for “birding while Black.” Led by BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) groups, conservation organizations moved quickly in solidarity with Christian Cooper, and established a Black Birders Week in early June. But the same day as the incident involving Christian Cooper, the horrific murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis galvanized the entire nation to a racial reckoning. Sequoia Audubon will be focusing on how to engage issues of concern to BIPOC communities in our county, and nationally. One small step will happen at our February 2021 general meeting, when County Parks ranger, Katharine Wright will speak with us about one of the local African-American heroes of conservation, Sam McDonald (1884-1957).

The parkland that he donated to the county - now Sam McDonald County Park - fell under a cloud of smoke and ash when August brought us the most significant wildfires the county has seen in over a century. The CZU Complex fires ravaged the southwestern sections of Pescadero Creek County Park, much of Butano State Park, and areas west of SR1 in Año Nuevo State Park (as well as causing significant damage to the redwood forest and historic structures at Big Basin State Park in neighboring Santa Cruz County). While the damage to San Mateo county parks is still being assessed, our chapter’s commitment to community-science (a.k.a. citizen-science) came into immediate focus, with an iNaturalist project to document recovery from the fire. The project also contains baseline data collected before the fires, which demonstrates the importance of documenting whatever we

Monthly Meetings

2nd Thursdays

7:00 pm

Currently online: check website

January 14

13 Ways of Looking at a Blackbird
Mary Ellen Hannibal

February 11

The Remarkable Story of
Sam McDonald
Katherine Wright

March 11

Avian Wonders of Morocco
John Sterling

No Field Trips Scheduled

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(continued from page 1)

can, whenever we can. The project can be accessed at “CZU Lightning Complex Fire Perimeter” [<https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/czu-lightning-complex-fire-perimeter>] on iNaturalist - thanks to Donna Pomeroy and our allies at the California Academy of Sciences for launching this important repository.

The fall migration was one of the most memorable for rarities in recent county history. Thanks to the diligent San Mateo County Year List maintained by local eBird reviewer Malia DeFelice, the impact is charted month-by-month on the Sequoia Audubon website. Here are some of the highlights, excerpted from her report: “in October 2020 we had.....drum roll.....a whopping SEVEN 6’S!” [note - “6” is the highest county rarity code!] “This beat the previous 6’s high count of THREE set in October 2009.” The honor roll of seven included Broad-billed Hummingbird, Streaked Shearwater, LeConte’s Sparrow, Worm-eating Warbler, Yellow-Green Vireo, Rusty Blackbird, and Vermilion Flycatcher. Three more level-six birds were added in November: Dusky-capped Flycatcher, White Wagtail, and Cassin’s Finch. Lessons and admonitions to take from this include birding close to home in the fall is a winning proposition, and if we have good sleuthing in December this could be the second-best year since we started these monthly reports in 2009! Since Sequoia Audubon and our long-serving CBC team of Leslie Flint, Al DeMartini, and Gary Deghi are forging ahead with our two CBCs for this year - Crystal Springs and Año Nuevo (following all National Audubon COVID guidelines) we have a good chance at making it!

We may be a small Audubon, but thanks to you, our members, we are succeeding in making 2020 a memorable year for birds and birding. It will be a difficult few months ahead, with COVID-19 still spreading, but hope is in the offing with vaccines being shipped out even as I write. It is as good a time as any to pique the interest of your children, your grandparents, your neighbors, your friends far and wide, in the wide world of nature and our special avian friends. Look to the Skies and the Birds for a Happy New Year in 2021!

Dusky-capped Flycatcher, *photo by Donna Pomeroy*



Important legal victory regarding the Cargill Redwood City Salt Ponds

On October 5, 2020, US District Court Judge William Alsup issued an important decision in a lawsuit involving the Redwood City salt ponds owned by Cargill Inc. There are competing visions for future use of these salt ponds, re-development for housing and/or commercial purposes versus restoration as San Francisco Bay tidelands. In March 2019, EPA issued its final determination that the salt ponds are not “Waters of the United States” because they are no longer connected to the bay waters due to the series of dikes and levees constructed prior to the passage of the Clean Water Act. This is important because if the salt ponds are waters of the US, a Clean Water Act Section 404 permit issued by the Corps of Engineers will be required to fill the ponds, which is necessary to allow future development. No Section 404 Permit (and Corps of Engineers review) would be required under EPA’s final determination.

The determination was immediately challenged in a lawsuit by San Francisco Baykeeper and several other local environmental organizations, joined by the State of California. Judge Alsup’s decision noted that a 1978 decision by the Ninth Circuit regarding these very same salt ponds held that they were subject to Clean Water Act jurisdiction as waters of the US. Furthermore, the draft determination by EPA’s Region 9 concluded that the salt ponds were waters of the US but that was subsequently reversed at EPA’s headquarters when the final determination was issued. Judge Alsup found no basis for reversing the Ninth Circuit precedent and vacated the jurisdictional determination, remanding it back to the EPA for further consideration.

Fall Migration – Donna Pomeroy

For many birders, including myself, fall migration is the most exciting season of the birding year. Fall migration begins early, as shorebirds who had failed nesting attempts in the Arctic begin to appear in late June and July. They are soon joined by those adult shorebirds who nested successfully, and next, their offspring in their bright new plumage. As we welcome back these earliest of migrants, we begin to anticipate the excitement of fall migration. Fall migration in San Mateo County does not coincide directly with autumn on the calendar. Rather, fall migration begins in early summer and lasts until late fall and even into early winter. The general rule of thumb is birds that have the longest migration leave earliest, since they have the longest journey. Those with shorter distances to travel can leave later in the season. The months with the hottest action are September and October, when we see the majority of the activity among passerines, raptors, and waterfowl.

September and October are the months when we see the greatest variety of vagrants. It's a time filled with potential, whether you are birding your local patch or one of our many migrant traps. The more you get out, the greater are the chances you will find something unusual, but you will definitely notice the presence of some species that you rarely see the rest of the year. It might be a Yellow Warbler in a fennel patch or a mega-rarity such as the Worm-eating Warbler found recently by Alvaro Jaramillo and seen by many grateful birders. Some migrants follow the coastline in fall, for example the Yellow Warbler, which we rarely see during spring migration. Other migrants are just plain lost, perhaps blown off course by an early season storm, but most of our Eastern United States vagrants that appear in fall are young birds on their first migration. Many of these vagrants are mis-wired to migrate the wrong direction and end up on a route that is the mirror image of the rest of their population. Some vagrants come from even further away, crossing the North Pacific from Eastern Asia, bringing extreme excitement to birders in the area.

Normally when we think of fall migration, we think of the flocks of birds coming from the colder climates of the north, seeking the warmer climates to spend the winter. Food resources become scarce in winter in the north and may be covered with a layer of snow. It takes more calories for a bird to stay warm in winter, so the availability of food is essential to their survival. Changing daylight amounts or changing food resources create the impetus for birds to move on. Food resources also trigger a phenomenon known as "reverse migration". Several species of birds which breed in Baja California make a northward migration at the conclusion of the breeding season to take advantage of the abundance of small fish in our cooler waters. Elegant Terns and Brown Pelicans, along with their kleptoparasite-companion Heermann's Gulls are another component of fall migration. These species arrive here in mid-summer and head back south to warmer waters in late fall. Fall migration may even bring some southern species north, such as Tropical Kingbird, which regularly shows up in early fall.

Migration occurs in spring as well, so why is fall migration much more exciting? Spring migration happens over a short window. Birds are driven by high hormones to get to their breeding grounds as quickly as possible. In contrast, fall migration happens over a much longer window. Birds are not as driven to get to their wintering grounds in a hurry. They can take their time, stopping to rest and refuel as necessary. The main difference, however, is that fall migration includes the young of the year. Large numbers of juvenile birds are on their first journey south. These juvenile plumages can offer interesting identification challenges to birders with some species or in the case of shorebirds, brighter, fresh colors. Many passerines have a different plumage in fall, molting to their "winter" or "basic" plumage before they migrate. These fall birds can pose some difficult identification challenges to birders. For many of us, solving these identification puzzles are some of the highlights of fall birding. Many fall warblers show only a glimmer of their colorful breeding plumage pictured so prominently in the field guides. Even our resident juvenile birds offer a fun identification challenge during the summer months. Sometimes it is not until you see them being fed by the parents that you recognize what they are.

The lure of the unexpected draws birders out in droves during the fall and, of course, the more birders out there, the greater the number of exciting finds there will be. Some birders pay close attention to weather reports, noting a higher number of migrants dropping in to rest and refuel after certain weather events. Each day can be vastly different from the previous day. The thrills are out there, whether it is a first of season sighting of a Hermit Thrush, a wayward flock of Cackling Geese overhead, or the next great find. So grab your binoculars, your camera, your spotting scope, and your enthusiasm and get out there and bird!

What Are Your Birding Goals 2021? - *Malia DeFelice*

Happy New Year! I hope the New Year brings renewed energy and inspiration to everyone. What will your birding focus be in 2021? The clock struck midnight on December 31 and the final 2020 bird tallies slate was wiped clean and set back to zero. Traditionally birders head outside bright and early every January 1, and start counting each bird species for the New Year! In addition to counting birds, birders also make New Year's resolutions regarding how their birding year will proceed. What will your resolutions and birding goals for the 2021 year be?

For me, with every new birding year, I like to enhance my understanding of the birds, their abundance, seasonality, distribution and their habitats. I enjoy birding new places in the county and plan to do more of that in 2021. I'm always working on figuring out something about birds that I have found puzzling, frustrating or mystifying. I know I am not alone. As an eBird reviewer, I get asked many questions throughout the year about ID tips and where and when to find certain species. So, regarding learning new things, what do you wish to know about birds that you do not know at present? And how will you go about it?

Will you be working on learning or refining visual or audio ID skills? Are you inspired to capture your observations with photography, audio recording or to become more proficient with translating what you are seeing into skillfully composed written words? If you have ever considered how drawing or painting birds could be both a learning experience as well as a fulfilling artistic expression, will this be the year?

Is there a bird family that you have vowed to become more confident with? Are you considering gulls, sparrows, waterfowl, shorebirds, hummingbirds or raptors, to name a few? Are there similar species ID dilemmas that you've always wanted to conquer? Such as Greater vs. Lesser Yellowlegs, Lesser vs. Greater Scaup, House vs. Purple Finch, Short-billed vs. Long-billed Dowitcher, Sharp-shinned vs. Cooper's Hawk, Western Wood-Pewee vs. Olive-sided Flycatcher, Ross's vs. Snow Goose, female teals, female mergansers, winter loons, cormorants, fall warblers?

Balancing time spent observing in the field with at-home study, referencing your favorite field guides, can produce results and be rewarding. Bird-group specific books such as "Gulls Simplified: A Comparative Approach to Identification" by Dunne and Karlson, "The Warbler Guide" by Stephenson and Whittle, "Sparrows of the United States and Canada" by Beadle and Rising, "North American Raptors" by Wheeler and Clark, "Hawks from Every Angle" by Liguori and "Hummingbirds of North America" by Howell are good additions to any library. eBird can be an excellent place to look at photos, hear audio and study distribution and seasonality. Our San Mateo County eBird reviewer team works very hard to maintain a high standard of data quality so that it is a reliable source for those who wish to learn from it. You can create an account at www.ebird.org. Downloadable smart device apps such as "Sibley Birds" and "iBird PRO" can be referenced while in the field. "Merlin" is an Artificial Intelligence (AI) app that can analyze photos and, if used properly, it can help with bird ID.

One day we'll get back to field trips, but in the meantime there are some excellent online webinars and classes being offered in the New Year. Check out <https://www.alvarosadventures.com/events> for classes with Alvaro Jaramillo. Also explore <http://www.coastsidelandtrust.org/> for a variety of webinars. If you are a Facebook user, FB has many bird-specific groups that you can join and engage with other birders in discussions about bird ID. There are gull, flycatcher, woodpecker, etc. groups. Search key words to find them.

Are you intrigued by birding areas in the county that have been under-birded? Do you enjoy contributing to community/citizen science projects such as eBird and iNaturalist, by recording bird observations in areas with few or no observations?

Is introducing folks to birding, especially young people and connecting them to the outdoors something that you have been involved in and hope to continue 2021? Or will you sign up to volunteer for a conservation project that will help the birds?

Do you have listing goals? Are you planning a big year and have you been planning your strategy for the New Year? Increasing skills and gaining knowledge of seasonality, distribution and species frequency can support successful listing endeavors. Will you be looking to increase your life, ABA, state, county, 5-mile radius or yard list totals? Is chasing rarities a priority? Are you focusing on nemesis birds that have eluded you forever? Pen-birds is a place to stay informed of the latest bird news. You can join here: <https://groups.io/g/peninsula-birding>.

Gaining new knowledge can be fun, but can also be daunting. An important thing to consider is to keep it fun and not become too overwhelmed. And if in 2021, you want to get outside, enjoy seeing the birds, and take in the sublime beauty of their surroundings, simply for the pleasure of it all, that can be a good focus too.

As we move into 2021 it looks like we may still have COVID-19 restrictions to contend with including travel bans. So what about YARD BIRDING? Chris and I found birding in our own backyard far more enjoyable and less stressful than visiting our local forever-crowded beaches, so we started spending much more time in the yard. After finding a Yellow-breasted Chat and a Broad-billed Hummingbird in the yard, we are now full believers in the magic of yard birding. If you have a yard, consider spending more time there. Something about seeing the same species over and over again in your yard will help you pick out the rarer one when it drops in. Remember, your yard need not be special, but you do need a birder in it to see the birds!

MEETING PROGRAMS

January 14

Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird with Mary Ellen Hannibal

“Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird” is one of Wallace Stevens’ most beloved poems, taught in many an English class, and accessible even to those who don’t love poetry. Given the seasonality of the poem, it is likely Stevens was writing about a Rusty Blackbird, evidently so common as to be taken for granted as part of the scenery. The bird is not given a name, a history, or its own reality outside the mind of the poet.

In this slide presentation, noted Bay Area author Mary Ellen Hannibal (*Citizen Scientist, The Spine of the Continent*) will take a look at Stevens’ poem alongside the natural history and current situation of the Rusty Blackbird. Questioning whether Stevens was really looking at a blackbird and not just thinking about one, she will highlight how citizen science helps reveal the deepest truths about the world. She’ll discuss how the group mind of citizen science, which aggregates millions of individual observations into discernable patterns, has an emerging poetry all its own. And the blackbird has a starring role.

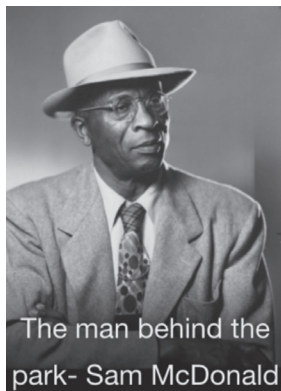


Mary Ellen Hannibal, author of *Citizen-Science* and *The Spine of the Continent*

February 11

The Remarkable Story of Sam McDonald – Katherine Wright, San Mateo County Park Ranger

In honor of Black History Month, Ranger Katherine Wright of San Mateo County Parks will share the story of Sam McDonald, the child of parents freed from enslavement, who rose to prominence at Stanford, then left his large estate for the betterment of San Mateo county youth. Don’t miss this exciting opportunity to combine human history and natural history.



The man behind the park- Sam McDonald

Katherine Wright is a San Mateo County Park Ranger who works on interpretive programming. She has been the County Parks’ coordinator for the joint Bio-Blitz project with Sequoia Audubon, California Academy of Sciences, and other organizations since its inception in 2014.

She grew up in San Mateo; her family camped at Memorial Park every summer! She went to UC Davis and studied Wildlife, Fish, and Conservation Biology where she learned even more about the natural world and the amazing science behind the beauty. While a student, she worked as a Park Aide at Memorial Park, and after graduating from Davis, transitioned to a Park Ranger position with county-wide purview for the entire county. A strong member and ally to Sequoia, we are delighted to have her speak.

Sam McDonald (1884-1957)

March 11

Avian Wonders of Morocco – John Sterling

John Sterling will share highlights from his tours’ adventures in Morocco. With its high mountains, high desert, low Sahara desert, agricultural plains, coastal lagoons, cork oak woodland, and coniferous forest, Morocco has much to offer to birds and birders. Home to several endemic bird species as well as North Africa species not readily seen elsewhere, it is also along the major migratory pathway for European migrants including shorebirds, raptors, songbirds and others. Join us for this virtual tour of the country’s birds, landscapes and culture.



Levaillant’s Woodpecker, *photo by John Sterling*

John Sterling has been a very active birder since 1971 and a professional wildlife biologist since 1981. He has traveled extensively throughout California learning about local bird distribution. He’s also traveled internationally as a guide and ornithologist for many institutions to 30 countries including projects as a Smithsonian ornithologist to Mexico, Ecuador, Peru, Sumatra, the Philippines, Canada and Russia. John currently has his own company specializing in tours, birding classes, research and environmental consulting.



Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, *photo by John Sterling*

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MISSION STATEMENT

Sequoia Audubon Society protects native birds and other wildlife and their ecosystems in San Mateo County by engaging people of all ages in conservation, education, advocacy and enjoyment.

Sequoia Audubon Society

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Seeking Newsletter Contributions – Articles and Photography!

Do you enjoy reading articles by “just regular birders”? How about writing a short article for this newsletter? Sequoia’s newsletter is *for* you, so why not *by* you? You don’t have to be an expert birder. If you can write about how you got into birding/ what enthalls you about it/ a good day out/rarities conservation, and other areas of interest, please email Davena at office@sequoia-audubon.org. High quality resolution photos, from San Mateo County, are especially appreciated.

Support our Chapter’s Work – Donate

Please consider a donation during our 2020 Annual Appeal in support of the work we do providing monthly programs, conservation, education and nest box monitoring programs. Thank you!

Shopping online more? Support SAS through Amazon Smile!

A percentage of your purchase is donated to SAS whenever you shop on Amazon using their Amazon Smile site. You get the same products, prices, and service while at the same time supporting our work! Sign up here: <http://smile-amazon.com>.



We’re looking for volunteers – Get Involved

Want to have fun while making a difference? We’re looking for help with publicity, website and video support. Have other skills that you’d like to offer, contact us at office@sequoia-audubon.org.

Sequoia Audubon Society Membership Form

Senior or Student membership	\$15.00
Individual membership	\$20.00
Family membership	\$25.00
Supporter	\$100.00
Donation to SAS	\$_____
	Total \$_____

Yes, I am interested in volunteering _____

Newsletter Preference:

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