



Established 1949

SAN MATEO COUNTY BIRD ALLIANCE

*Volume 76, No. 1
January - March 2025*

75th Anniversary Celebration

On October 6th, our Audubon Chapter celebrated its 75th Anniversary with a picnic and presentations at Twin Pines Park in Belmont. Although the weather was unusually warm, the shaded venue allowed us to celebrate 75 years of birding, education, conservation, and all the outstanding members who made it all possible. There was a presentation from Peter Cowan, POST Director of Conservation Science, about the importance of local organizations like Sequoia Audubon Society and our role in the Bair Island restoration project. We also had the privilege of a presentation by Joshua Asel, a renowned wildlife photographer whose primary interest is in the California Condor, who showed his documentary film, Wingspan, about Condors in Pinnacles National Park.

The Chapter also received multiple awards and recognition from local government officials. These included a commendation from Congressperson Kevin Mullin, a Certificate of Special Congressional Recognition from Congressperson Anna Eshoo, a Resolution from the San Mateo County Supervisors presented by Supervisor Ray Mueller at the picnic, a Resolution from California Legislators, as well as recognition from Josh Becker (California 13th District), Marc Berman (23rd District), and Diane Papan (21st District). These accolades are a testament to the Chapter's significant contributions to the community and the environment.

The organizing committee (Davena Gentry and Barbara Dye) did a fabulous job, including a silent auction and book sale. Thanks to the volunteers who helped make the day a success. And to Pro Bono Photography for documenting the event. You can see pictures on the website. Beyond the presentations and the commendations, it was wonderful to see so many members in person and remind ourselves of the important work the Chapter has accomplished and will continue to do in the future!

- John Epperson, President

Meeting Programs

2nd Thursdays at 7:00 pm

January 9 - Zoom

The Secret Perfume of Birds

Danielle J. Whittaker, PhD

February 13 - Zoom

Bay Area Wildlife

Jeff Miller

March 13 - Zoom

Owlet Night Jars & Hoatzins

Robert Siegel, M.D., PhD

Chapter Name Change

After careful deliberation, the Board of Directors voted in 2024 to change the name of our chapter to the San Mateo County Bird Alliance. It was not an easy decision; strong feelings for and against a name change existed. Some members said they would quit the chapter if the name were changed; others said they would do so if it weren't. The change included a reference to our chapter's location, as many potential members were confused about the reference to "Sequoia." It also removes the reference to Audubon, as information regarding John Audubon's life, including racist views and slave ownership, has come to light over the past few years.

Separating the person from the legacy is difficult. There is a reason why the founders of the Audubon Society selected his name for the organization; his paintings of birds and written works brought an appreciation for birds and nature to the public at a time when that was sorely lacking. Anyone who has had the good fortune of reviewing his work "The Birds of America" comes away impressed with both the artist and the attention to ornithological detail. Our website has a "name change" section with links to various articles on the topic and the arguments pro and con, including a thoughtful statement from the National Audubon Society on why it was keeping its current name.

As the Board and the Name Change Review Committee deliberated, including outreach to members, the trend nationwide was chapters renaming themselves with their location and 'Bird Alliance' as the new standard. The Board voted this year to do the same, while reaffirming our commitment to the mission and activities of our chapter. We will remain as the local chapter of the National Audubon Society, and this transition will take time. We will be making changes to our logo, website, merchandise, business records, etc., over the coming weeks and months. However, we are excited about the future and look forward to another 75 years of education, conservation, field trips, and supporting birders. *- John Epperson, President*

MEETING PROGRAMS

January 9 – Zoom

The Secret Perfume of Birds *Danielle J. Whittaker, PhD*

Smell has been called the most ancient sense, and songbirds are no exception in their use of it. Most birds' primary source of odors is preen oil, secreted by the uropygial gland and used by birds in grooming and maintaining their feathers. By smelling odors from this oil, birds can recognize and assess potential mates and rivals. Dr Whittaker will discuss the fascinating discoveries that it is microbes that produce the odors, and birds' social behavior affects the composition of these microbial communities, so that birds from the same group have a similar odor. Dr. Whittaker will discuss studies that have contributed to debunking the long-standing myth that birds have no sense of smell and will describe the many ways that scent enhances avian life.

The author of *The Secret Perfume of Birds: Uncovering the Science of Avian Scent*, a book described as “part science, part intellectual history, and part memoir”, Whittaker is an evolutionary biologist who has studied chemical communication in songbirds for over a decade. She completed her Ph.D. in Physical Anthropology at the City University of New York and a postdoc in Biology at Indiana University. She served as the Managing Director of the BEACON Center for the Study of Evolution in Action at Michigan State University and is now the Managing Director of the COLDEX Center for Oldest Ice Exploration at Oregon State University, where she is learning about Antarctic ice cores and the study of paleoclimate.



February 13 – Zoom

Bay Area Wildlife *Jeff Miller*

Bay Area Wildlife: An Irreverent Guide This quirky and entertaining wildlife guide to the greater San Francisco Bay Area invites readers to connect with and conserve local species. Featuring over 100 native creatures, from mammals to invertebrates, this informative primer is a treasure map for regional wildlife. Learn about the Bay Area's furred, feathered, and fork-tongued neighbors—from “screaming death parrots”(aka Peregrine falcons) to “bad-ass Looney Tunes velociraptors” (roadrunners). The book's colorful descriptions cover each species' natural history and fun facts, tips on when and where to find watchable wildlife, and notes on each animal's conservation status.

Jeff Miller has dedicated several decades to championing the protection of endangered species and native wildlife habitats in the Bay Area. He's the founder of the nonprofit Alameda Creek Alliance and has served as its executive director since 1997. He's a senior conservation advocate with the Center for Biological Diversity, spearheading biodiversity protection campaigns throughout the Bay Area and California, preparing endangered species listing petitions, writing press releases, and organizing around wildlife protection issues. Over the last quarter century, he has been involved in conservation efforts for dozens of the most iconic imperiled wildlife species in the Bay Area, from tule elk to steelhead trout to burrowing owls.



March 13 – Zoom

Owlet Nightjars and Hoatzins - a taxonomical endgame *Robert Siegel, M.D., PhD*

This talk will focus on two fairly obscure but fascinating orders of birds: the Aegotheliformes and the Opisthocomiformes. After recent journeys to Northern Australia and the Ecuadorian rainforest, Dr. Siegel completed (the first draft of) his project to photograph every order of birds. Once again, this effort required fortuitous encounters with remarkable individuals and a whole lot of luck. I will also discuss the first iteration of my undergraduate class, *46 Orders of Birds*. Key themes of the course include discussions of why and how we classify, taxonomic and nomenclatural challenges of bird classification, and how these themes can be generalized in myriad ways.



Robert Siegel, MD PhD, is a professor at Stanford University in the Department of Microbiology and Immunology with joint appointments in the Woods Institute for the Environment, the Center for African Studies, the Master of Liberal Arts Program, and the Program in Human Biology. He teaches courses on human viral infections, nature photography, and biogeography and has led field seminars worldwide. He has received multiple teaching awards, had much photography published, and his photo essays have appeared in Punch magazine.

SAS Conservation Update

As the county and cities start to get real about Sea Level Rise – it now has its own acronym, SLR – your conservation committee is being increasingly asked to comment on or support various topics and concerns. We are few and can't do all this alone! **If any topic is of interest to you and you'd like to help, please contact your Conservation Committee at conservation@sequoia-audubon.org.**

1. The Bay Conservation & Development Commission (BCDC) came out with its Regional Shoreline Adaptation Plan. SAS and other environmental orgs are urging BCDC that consideration of nature-based solutions is a “must,” not a “should.” This includes things like sloped/horizontal shorelines rather than a seawall. The final Plan will be issued in early December 2024.
2. **Redwood City** held a Study Session on SLR on Monday, Nov 4. They had a community webinar/discussion about this in late October. They are also considering digital billboards along Hwy. 101 (San Carlos has one and is adding more). Our comments pointing out effects on wildlife at night were noticed and commented on by council.
3. **One Shoreline** proposal for Millbrae-Burlingame shoreline was revised significantly, thanks to input from SAS and other orgs. Current proposals range from no offshore tidal barrier to one that's 200 feet offshore. However, there are now concerns about onshore effects, especially on **Millbrae**. We will continue to urge all parties to coordinate this.
4. **East Palo Alto:** The revised EIR for the Ravenswood Business District was accepted by the Planning commission without many of the changes requested by environmental groups. The city council plans to approve the Specific Plan with the maximum buildout option on Dec. 3.

Other issues we are involved with are:

5. **Unincorporated Coastside communities** propose a Dark Sky ordinance. SAS sent a letter to Supervisors in support of the Midcoast Community Council's proposal.
6. **Brisbane** plans to build a warehouse in a quarry on the flanks of San Bruno Mountain. San Bruno Mountain has unique plants and butterflies, which activists have worked for decades to record and protect. There are significant questions about the effects – lighting, noise, traffic – on the area of such an operation. The Mountain Butterfly Collective, supporting San Bruno Mountain, asked us to support them and others in opposing a change to San Bruno Mountain's Habitat Conservation Plan
7. **SAS' Outreach Team** tabled at the opening of the new Flyway Trail at the SF Bay Refuge/Bedwell Bayfront Park, as well as at the Coastside Land Trust's Wavecrest Raptor Walk. This is a great way to let people know about us and what we do.

Sequoia Audubon Society Youth Scholarships

SAS offered two scholarships for students to attend the Central Valley Birding Symposium in Stockton, November 21-24.

The Scholarship Committee selected Max Hollenback and Ava Normant to attend the Symposium. Scholarships covered registration and accommodations for each student and a parent guest to attend with each of them. Ava and Max are both busy high school students with lots of school work and college applications in progress, but both were eager to attend the symposium activities which included birding field trips and presentations. This year's symposium had a session with UC Davis students presenting results of their research projects on birds and a session with staff and students of UC Davis Museum of Wildlife and Fish Biology who brought many specimens for up close viewing. The symposium gave Max and Ava opportunities to meet some of these students.

Ava and Max were both able to meet several of our chapter members who were also attending the symposium. It was nice getting to know these two hard working students. I was pleased to hear one of Max's sightings on a symposium field trip was a rare roseate spoonbill and one of Ava's sightings was a burrowing owl. I look forward to birding with Max and Ava in the future.

Thank you to our local members and donors whose support provides the funds for our chapter activities including our youth scholarships. - **Nelle Lyons**



Burrowing Owl, Flood Rd, San Joaquin Co, CVBS Field Trip Photo: Ava Normant



Sequoia Field Trips



Please note that rain or Air Quality Index over 150 cancels unless otherwise stated. Bring binoculars, water, snacks, sunscreen, and dress in layers as the weather can change. The Great Backyard Bird Count is February 14 – 17: join us for a “Tri-County” opportunity to expand your horizons and sightings!

Friday, January 3, Pillar Point Harbor, Half Moon Bay (8:00 - 11:00) Pillar Point is a hot spot for birding, with a variety of resident and wintering birds. Walking will be on a mostly level dirt trail and some sand. Scopes will be helpful here. Directions: From CA 1, turn west at the stoplight at Capistrano Rd and continue along the harbor's north side to Prospect Way. Turn left onto Prospect, then a brief jog right on Broadway, to an immediate left on Harvard Ave. Proceed through the boat yards to the end of Harvard Ave, then turn right onto West Point Ave, which curves around the marsh and heads uphill. Meet at the “West Shoreline Access,” popularly known as the parking lot to Mavericks, just below the radar station “golf ball”. **Leader:** Donna Pomeroy **Register:** <https://bit.ly/3VxECoB>

Sunday, January 12, Woodside Horse Park, Woodside (10:00 - 11:00) Join us for our first outing at the Woodside Horse Park. An equestrian facility whose mission includes education and land stewardship is allowing us access for guided public bird walks. A rare opportunity to experience sweeping views of the Santa Cruz mountains, the grassy hills adjacent to Jasper Ridge, and views of the bay. Home to raptors year round, the park has several habitats including oak woodland, water features attracting migratory waterfowl, and open fields. This is a one hour walk on mostly flat terrain. Waterproof hiking boots recommended, for grip and any mud we may encounter. **Leader:** Christin New **Register:** <https://bit.ly/3ZvEKpv>

Friday, January 17, Filoli: Spring Creek Trail, Woodside (9:30 - 12:00) Join us for a 3 mile hike including the newly opened Spring Creek Trail through the Redwoods. This trail gains 100 foot elevation in ¼ mile on a dirt path- not recommended if you have mobility issues. We will spend most of the morning on the California Trail in the Oak and Madrone forest and the Spring Creek Trail through the Redwoods. The California Trail is over dirt paths with a slight incline and is one mile long. The Spring Creek Trail is ½ mile on a narrow dirt track with a 100 foot elevation gain. There is a possibility of seeing up to 45 bird species, 33 of which are year-round residents. **Leader:** Kimberlie Moutoux **Register:** <https://bit.ly/4iwNDIq>

Saturday, January 25, Nob Hill Pond, Redwood Shores (10:00 - 12:00) A beginner and family-friendly bird walk in an excellent area to view a variety of ducks and waterbirds. Time permitting, we may check some other birding sites nearby. Restrooms are available in the nearby shopping center. Directions: From US 101, take the Redwood Shores Parkway exit east. Turn right at the second traffic signal on Twin Dolphin Dr. Follow the road to parking at 1050 Twin Dolphin Dr. **Leader:** JR Blair **Register:** <https://bit.ly/3VyErJo>

Saturday, January 25, Palo Alto Baylands for Beginners/Families, Palo Alto (10:00 - 12:00) Meet in the parking lot for the Lucy Evans Baylands Nature Interpretive Center, 2775 Embarcadero Rd. for a leisurely walk on level gravel trails where we will explore this San Francisco Bay treasure. We should see a variety of shorebirds, waterbirds, and spring migrants. Loaner binoculars available. **Leader:** Emily Kim **Register:** <https://bit.ly/4gvfx5J>

Friday, January 31, Filoli: Estate Trail, Woodside (9:30 - 12:00) This is a 2–2.5 mile moderate walk on the Filoli Gardens and Estate trail. Habitats include mixed oak, redwood, madrone woodlands, riparian corridor, and historic horse pastures. Directions: from Hwy 280, exit at Edgewood Rd and head west. At the T intersection, turn right onto Canada Rd. In ½ mile, turn left into the property. Park under the oaks on the left side of the lot and look for the leader there. **Leader:** Kimberlie Moutoux **Register:** <https://bit.ly/4gLBuO7>

Saturday, February 1, Raptors of San Benito County, Tres Pinos, (8:30 - 3:00) Let's explore the backroads of San Benito County in search of Golden Eagles, Ferruginous Hawks, and Prairie Falcons. San Benito County is an excellent area for wintering raptors. Bring lunch, liquids, and a scope if you have one. Since parking is limited, participants on this trip must be willing to carpool with other participants from Tres Pinos (we are limited to 4 cars on the trip route). All participants must have the most current COVID-19 booster vaccination. Directions: Meet at Catholic Church (7290 Airline Highway (SR 25c) coordinates 36.787133, -121.316453) in the small town of Tres Pinos, San Benito County, south of Hollister. From San Mateo, allow about 2 hours driving time, taking Hwy 101 south to Hwy 25; follow Hwy 25 through Hollister to Tres Pinos. The large Catholic church is on the right. Park in the lot farthest from the church. Take advantage of bathroom facilities in Hollister before you drive to Tres Pinos. **Leader:** Leslie Flint. **Register:** email lflint@earthlink.net

Thursday, February 6, Pillar Pt. Bluff County Park, Moss Beach (9:00 - 12:00) This small County Park has sweeping views of both the agricultural land and the ocean, with an uncrowded trail system. There is a nice mix of birds here including breeding California Thrashers. The trail is moderately easy with a short, but steep, descent at the end of the loop. Directions: Meet at the Pillar Point Bluff parking lot on Airport St, across from the Half Moon Bay airport on the west side. Heavy rain cancels. **Leader:** Donna Pomeroy **Register:** <https://bit.ly/3ZMOvBl>



Saturday, February 8, Coyote Point Recreational Area, San Mateo (8:00 - 11:00) Meet us for a leisurely stroll around Coyote Point. With the variety of habitats at Coyote Point, we should see a number of species. With luck we may see the resident Harlequin Duck. Restrooms available. Directions: Exit Peninsula Ave. from US 101 and follow the signs 1701 Coyote Point Drive. Meet near the yacht club. \$6 admission charge. **Leader:** Doug Brown **Register:** <https://bit.ly/4fbqOad>

Monday, February 10, Filoli, Spring Creek Trail, Woodside (9:30 - 12:00) See January 17 field trip. **Register:** <https://bit.ly/3BmoeAe>

Saturday, February 15, Natural Bridges State Park, Santa Cruz (8:30-12:00) This 2-3 mile level trail includes a rocky beach with tidepools, open ocean, and shoreline cliffs great for viewing shorebirds, loons, grebes, and alcids. There's also freshwater wetlands, coastal scrub, and eucalyptus groves to search. Restrooms available but not at the meeting location. Directions: From State Route 1 southbound entering Santa Cruz turn right on Western Ave, right on University Business Park, and left on Natural Bridges Dr and proceed to Delaware Ave. Approx. address 2340 Delaware Ave. **Leader:** Nelle Lyons **Register:** <https://bit.ly/3ZvpusR>

Sunday, February 16, Pescadero State Nature Preserve, Pescadero (8:30 - 12:30) We'll travel along dirt trails with some sand. Pescadero State Nature Preserve is an important wintering ground and breeding area for a diversity of birds. We expect to see a variety of birds and hope to see, or at least hear, the elusive Virginia Rail and/or Sora. Restrooms are available in the parking lot. Directions: Take SR 1 south from Half Moon Bay. Cross the Pescadero Creek Bridge and turn into the first parking lot just south of the bridge (also known as the Cabrillo Highway South Parking). If you get to Pescadero Rd, you've gone too far south. **Leader:** Nelle Lyons **Register:** <https://bit.ly/4fan9tk>

Monday, February 17, Jetty Road, Moss Landing and environs (8:30 - 3:00) Meet at Jetty Rd parking lot of Moss Landing State Beach off Hwy 1 (approximately 1 mile north of the Power Plant smokestacks) We will meet between the entrance gate and the first restroom. **Leader:** Nelle Lyons **Register:** <https://bit.ly/3OOjM0f>

Saturday, February 22, Bair Island, Redwood City (10:00 - 12:00) Level dirt trails make this an easy outing for beginners. We should see a variety of ducks, shorebirds, and smaller songbirds. Directions: From US 101 exit Whipple Ave. Heading east, it winds for 0.5 mile becoming E. Bayshore Rd, then Bair Island Rd. Meet at the Don Edwards National Wildlife Refuge Bair Island Trail parking lot. **Leader:** JR Blair **Register:** <https://bit.ly/3D3awCM>

Monday, February 24, Filoli: Estate Trail, Woodside (9:30 - 12:00) See Jan. 3 **Register:** <https://bit.ly/3Zts8PU>

Wednesday, February 26, Mori Point, Pacifica (9:00 - 11:00) Beginner and family-friendly bird walk on accessible level trails through coastal scrub, lagoon, salt marsh, beach, and ocean rocks. We will look for sparrows, finches, gulls, wading birds, seabirds, and more! Most of the walking is flat, with a slight incline toward the beach. However, the optional walk up to the elevated bluff is short but moderately steep and less accessible. Restroom and port-a-potty at the trailhead. Directions: From SR 1 south of Sharp Park Rd, turn right on Mori Point Rd and follow it west to the parking area (798 Bradford Way) in Pacifica. **Leader:** Emily Kim **Register:** <https://bit.ly/41qPDeS>

Saturday, March 1, Filoli, Spring Creek Trail, Woodside (9:30 - 12:00) See February 10. **Register:** <https://bit.ly/49ub7cS>

Friday, March 7, Lower Windy Hill, Portola Valley (8:00 - 11:30) This is a moderately strenuous, approx. 2-mile walk on dirt trails through a diverse range of habitats, which hosts oak specialties like White-breasted Nuthatch, Oak Titmouse, and Nuttall's Woodpecker, and a small pond that hosts Wood Ducks. Directions: Windy Hill Open Space Preserve lower parking lot, 555 Portola Valley Rd. **Leader:** Donna Pomeroy **Register:** <https://bit.ly/4g3L52A>

Saturday, March 15, San Bruno Mountain, Brisbane (8:30 - 11:30) San Bruno Mountain Park is a landmark of local and regional significance, standing as a unique open-space island in the midst of the peninsula's urbanization on the border of San Mateo and San Francisco Counties. It is home to a wealth of wildlife, hidden pockets of woodland and sheltered canyons. We'll walk about 1 mile on most flat dirt and asphalt trails. \$6.00 Vehicle entry fee. Meet in the parking lot, 555 Guadalupe Canyon Parkway. **Leader:** Doug Brown **Register:** <https://bit.ly/4ivwRcr>

Saturday, March 15, Filoli: Estate Trail, Woodside (9:30 - 12:00) See February 24 info. **Register:** <https://bit.ly/4grI10a>

Saturday, March 22 Palo Alto Baylands, Palo Alto (10:00 - 12:00) See January 25 info. **Leader:** JR Blair
Register: <https://bit.ly/3Dcm0UQ>

OFFICERS

Acting President: John Epperson
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Secretary: Melissa Hero
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At Large: Doug Brown, Joyce Courtney, Beverly Cronin, Marshall Dinowitz, Nelle Lyons, Chris MacIntosh

Consulting Biologist

Alvaro Jaramillo

COMMITTEES

Cavity Nesters Recovery Program

Ronnie Eaton and Christin New

cnrp@sequoia-audubon.org

Christmas Bird Count (CBC)

Al Demartini al_demar@yahoo.com

Chris MacIntosh cbc@sequoia-audubon.org

Curt Bianchi curt@curtbianchi.com

Speakers Programs

OPEN programs@sequoia-audubon.org

Conservation

Chris MacIntosh conservation@sequoia-audubon.com

Education

Nelle Lyons education@sequoia-audubon.org

Field Trips

OPEN fieldtrips@sequoia-audubon.org

Hospitality

OPEN hospitality@sequoia-audubon.org

Membership Database

OPEN needles@sequoia-audubon.org

Newsletter Editor

Davena Gentry office@sequoia-audubon.org

Outreach

Doug Brown outreach@sequoia-audubon.org

Administrative Assistant

Davena Gentry davena@sequoia-audubon.org

MISSION STATEMENT

San Mateo County Bird Alliance 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
dba San Mateo County Bird Alliance
P.O. Box 620292
Woodside, CA
94062-0292

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Bald Eagle, Jasper Ridge Biological Preserve, 11/20/24, Photo: Sonny Mencher

San Mateo County Bird Alliance Membership

Senior or Student membership	\$20.00
Individual membership	\$25.00
Family membership	\$35.00
Supporter	\$100.00
Donation to SMCBA	\$_____
	Total \$_____

Yes, I am interested in volunteering _____

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P.O. Box 620292, Woodside, CA 94062-0292

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