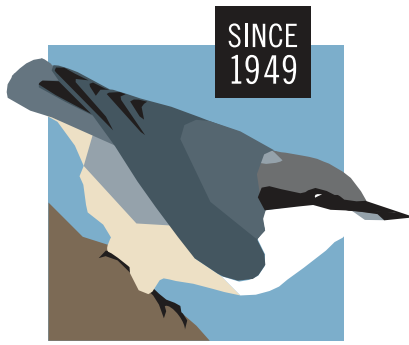




SEQUOIA AUDUBON SOCIETY

Bulletin of the Sequoia Audubon Society, San Mateo County

*Volume 71, No. 4
October - December 2020*

Partnership with Crystal Springs Golf Course – Jennifer Rycenga

Over this COVIDian summer, Sequoia received a request for an informal birding visit/survey from the manager of the Crystal Springs Golf Course. In early August, eight intrepid Sequoia members were given individual golf carts. In the fine tradition of slapstick comedy, we launched into a wild combination of birding, dodge ball, and bumper cars through the 18-hole course.

Sandwiched between Crystal Springs Reservoir and I-280 in Burlingame, the course has many old trees, a pond, vantage points to the reservoir, chaparral, and even small patches of serpentine grassland off its southern edge. Wild Turkeys and Mule Deer were conspicuous, while Black Phoebes appreciated the many perches created by the accouterments of golfing. The Bald Eagles known to live in the deeper recesses of the reservoir were represented by a fly-over first-year bird.

Most interesting and most edifying to watch, though, were the abundant Western Bluebirds. Our Cavity Nesting Program coordinator, Beverly Cronin, and Davena Gentry, have arranged for future visits to install new Bluebird boxes and have them regularly monitored. Additionally, we hope to supplement these with Barn Owl boxes. Barn Owls are a boon to birders and to golfers: only rodents will complain!

Partnerships formed between Sequoia Audubon and such parks and recreation facilities are invaluable win/



win situations, protecting habitat, nurturing pro-environmental policies, and enticing more people to stop and appreciate birds. If you wish to assist with the Cavity Nesters Program, please contact Beverly at beverly.cronin@gmail.com. If you are a birder interested in participating in a survey at the Crystal Springs Golf Course, please email office@sequoia-audubon.org. If you are a birder who likes to play golf, do so at this course – and keep an eBird list while you play!

Peggy Macres & Jennifer Rycenga
Golf Cart Birding at Crystal Springs Golf Course

Monthly Meetings

2nd Thursdays

7:00 pm

Currently online: check website

October 8

Cape to Cape Birding Adventure
Joe Morlan

November 12

**Curiosity & Connection Through
A Decade of Birding**
Ioana Seratin

December 10

**The Sweet Smell of Ecological Balance:
Skunks and their Roles in
California Habitats**
Jen Hunter

No Field Trips Scheduled

Major Legal Victory in Defense of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act - John Epperson, Board Member

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) is one of the oldest environmental laws on the books, dating back 100 years. It prohibits taking migratory birds, implementing the Migratory Bird Treaty entered into among the United States, Canada, and Mexico. In 2017, the Trump administration significantly restricted the MBTA when the Department of the Interior issued an opinion interpreting the MBTA to apply only to activities that intentionally kill birds. "Incidental take," meaning activities that are not intended to kill birds but result in their deaths, would no longer be considered a violation of the MBTA. This meant that the vast majority of migratory bird deaths previously prohibited would no longer be a violation of the MBTA, since very few activities, other than hunting, are intended to kill birds. For example, under the MBTA, companies had to take measures to cover oil waste pits associated with extraction activities to ensure that waterfowl do not land in them. Under the new guidance, that would no longer be necessary because the purpose of the pit was not to kill birds, even if it is well-known that failure to cover them will result in needless deaths of birds coated with oil. Even the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico would not have violated the MBTA under the revised guidance, as it was not intended to kill birds, although an estimated 1 million birds died as a result.

The National Audubon Society filed suit in 2018 challenging this new guidance, along with a coalition of national environmental groups. A separate coalition of states, including California, filed a lawsuit that was consolidated with the Audubon case. On August 11, 2020, U.S. District Court Judge Valerie Caproni rejected the Trump Administration guidance as not consistent with the plain language of the MBTA itself and a major departure from long-standing interpretation of more than 50 years. Judge Caproni ruled that the new guidance was contrary to law and granted the plaintiffs' motion to vacate the new guidance.

This ruling will likely be appealed by the Trump administration, but it is a thoughtful and well-supported decision after extensive briefing by many parties and should stand up well to review by a higher court. It is a tremendous victory for birds and bird-watchers, as the MBTA has long been one of the most-successful protections for migratory birds we have and this new guidance would have effectively eliminated its force. Maintaining it in full force is critical at a time when birds are under increasing threat from loss of habitat and climate change.



Tundra Swans at Cosumnes Preserve, photo by Donna Pomeroy

Conservation through Federal Duck Stamps

Buying Federal Duck Stamps is among the simplest ways that anyone can participate in wildlife and habitat conservation. Duck Stamps are a required annual purchase for waterfowl hunters 16 and older, and a current Duck Stamp grants the bearer free entrance to any national wildlife refuge that charges an entry fee. But whether you are a hunter, birder or other outdoors enthusiast or you simply want to help preserve our natural resources for future generations to enjoy, you can contribute to conservation by buying Duck Stamps.

Since we're not able to meet monthly and sell the annual Federal Duck Stamp, this year we're encouraging our members to purchase the stamp through the American Birding Association. Wonder why the ABA is selling the Federal Duck Stamp? The ABA continues to support the mission and conservation successes of the Federal Duck Stamp Program. By purchasing your Duck Stamp(s) through the ABA, you will be showing your support of bird conservation in our National Wildlife

Refuge System and your voice as a birder will be heard! Remember, 98 cents of every duck stamp dollar goes directly to the purchase and conservation of vital bird habitat! Tell your friends. Think of all the habitat we can protect for birds using this program! Birders are the best conservationists! <https://www.aba.org/store/2020-2021-duck-stamp>



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

2020-2021 Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp

Promote Habitat Conservation

Funds generated by the purchase of this stamp are used to conserve wetland habitat in the National Wildlife Refuge System. Over 560 National Wildlife Refuges are found across the United States - most within driving distance from your home. Spend the day connecting with the outdoors on your public lands.



If applicable, sign your stamp.

Artist: Eddie LeRoy, Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks ©

Purple Martins of San Mateo County - Mike Azevedo, Purple Martin Project Manager SAS

Transplanted people from the East Coast are likely very familiar with a bird called the Purple Martin. It may come as some surprise that here on the west coast, we also have a purple Martin but things are a little different than they are on the east coast. For starters, our Purple Martin, *Progne subis arboricola*, is a different subspecies than the eastern *Progne subis subis*. The eastern Purple Martin has a storied history of human involvement. Native Americans would put up gourds near their dwellings and the Purple Martins would move in and provide insect control for the village. The practice of providing nesting opportunities for Purple Martins was taken over by settlers and the gregarious nature of the birds led to larger condo-style nesting structures and large colony-sized gourd racks. Purple Martin flocks grow so large that, even today, flights of migrating purple martins actually show up on weather radar as rings as the birds fly in all directions.



On the west coast, our subspecies is a bit more subdued. Never known for massive gatherings as in the east, the western Purple Martin still has a gregarious nature and likes to live in groups. Historical references show the western Purple Martin as a nester in woodpecker cavities in riparian, oak woodlands and conifer forests. Until recently, the western Purple Martin hadn't been nesting in manmade nest boxes.

Progne subis arboricola is no longer unable to accept human help. Over the last 50 years, populations in the Pacific Northwest have adopted nest boxes and increased dramatically.

Yet, in this nation's most populous state, the Purple Martin remains aloof for the most part, not using or being provided man-made nest boxes. One criticism regarding human intervention for the eastern populations of this species has been that Purple Martins have become completely dependent upon humans for nesting sites. Ironically, we can destroy habitat for a bird and then complain when efforts are made to replace them as causing human dependence.

Unfortunately, in California, we do know what the historic nesting locations have been, but in discussing them, we need to bring up another problem. The European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) was introduced to the United States, along with the House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) around 1900. Both birds have become a tremendous nuisance to native birds. After their arrival in California as a breeding species, their hypercompetitive nature has led to decline in the populations of native birds. Though both European Starlings and House Sparrows are willing to break eggs and kill both young and adult native birds, most cavity nesting birds such as the Western Bluebird, Tree Swallow, Ash throated Flycatcher, to name a few, can easily fit into a nest box with a smaller entrance hole like the House Sparrow. European Starling on the other hand, now one of our most common birds in the United States, is unable to enter such a small hole. This is good news for the majority of native cavity nesting birds which are either safe because the starling is stuck outside or because they are robust enough to fight off any threat from the starling.

The Purple Martin is unique in that it must face the European Starling head-on, and its numbers reflect that. The Purple Martin has been attempting a comeback in California. They have done so by nesting in locations where Starlings are rare and have an agility advantage for example in bridge structures that occur along Coast Highway 1 and in Sacramento. Good nest sites are those that combine proper entrance and dimensions, good hunting for a food source, and either no starlings or a careful design that allows martins to enter, but excludes the slightly larger starlings.



In both Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties, the Purple Martin takes advantage of forested and shrubland habitats far from urban/suburban and agricultural lands where there are few Starlings. In Sacramento, Big Sur and certain other locations, the bird uses an advantageous design of some bridges. Many underpasses have abundant holes that rise into a chamber that the birds can use for nesting. Starlings have a hard time entering and, due to a lack of food in the surrounding lands, their numbers are small. That allows the Purple Martin to nest in relative peace. Without those bridge chambers, California Purple Martins have primarily nested in woodpecker holes in either snags or power poles. PG&E is under tremendous pressure to replace deteriorating power poles. Audubon volunteers are aware of several power poles in San Mateo County that formerly held Purple Martin nests that have been now been replaced and are no longer available.

Sadly, housing is not the only problem California Purple Martins have faced. The Sacramento Purple Martins are declining despite an abundance of nesting chambers available to them. It is believed that neonicotinoid pesticide use in the Central Valley is responsible for the Sacramento population declines. Sequoia Audubon Society and others are actively working to find a solution that will help the Purple Martins of San Mateo County. A multi-pronged approach will be needed around the state to stabilize the insect populations and to find a replacement for power poles as a nest site. - photos by Donna Pomeroy.

Megafires in California are Shattering Records!

Smoky days are degrading our air quality and the respiratory health of millions of people. Our hearts go out to those who have been displaced, lost a home, or loved one.

Many of you have asked how this impacts birds. Wildfires are posing a new stressor to birds who are already threatened by habitat loss, climate change, and pollution.

Various species are on the move to escape the flames and migrate. However, many wild food sources and rest areas are scorched, leaving birds highly vulnerable.

What can we do to help birds?

During this crisis, we recommend taking two simple steps to help local and migrating birds stay clean and nourished: providing water and food.

By providing extra care during this crisis, you can help birds stay resilient. Your popular watering hole and eatery may give you a glimpse of birds that you've never seen before!

Tips for Bird Baths and Feeders

WATER: Provide water in a bird bath or shallow tray (2 inches) for drinking and bathing. Add a few rocks for easy perching! With a lot of bird traffic to your bath during fires, it's important to change out the water daily to prevent the spread of disease and to flush out any ash that has collected.

FOOD: Keep your bird feeders or trays stocked with bird seed. A variety of seeds will attract the greatest variety of birds. Black-oil sunflower seed appeals to the greatest number of birds. When using blends, choose mixtures containing sunflower seeds, millet, and cracked corn—the three most popular types of birdseed. Mixtures of peanuts, nuts, and dried fruit are attractive to woodpeckers, nuthatches, and titmice.

To avoid crowding and to attract the greatest variety of species, you can also provide table-like feeders for ground-feeding birds, tube feeders for shrub and treetop feeders, and suet feeders well off the ground for woodpeckers, nuthatches, and chickadees. Locating feeders where there is ample cover will also make it easy for birds to safely access the food.

How will the fires impact birds?

Research shows that bird lungs may be more susceptible to respiratory distress from smoke. They are generally less active during smoke events. We do not know how smoke impacts birds' ability to migrate or hunt. There could be long-term implications for some bird populations.

Of course, most birds are highly mobile. Even as birds fly out of forests, shrublands, and grasslands that are aflame, that movement is a stressor as they must then compete with resident birds for limited food and water in new habitat areas. With fires burning through millions of acres, habitat refuges may also be limited.

How will the fires impact migration?

Right now, we are in songbird migration season. Millions of birds are coming south through California along the Pacific Flyway, looking for their usual resting spots, particularly along river corridors. When they find these areas burned, they continue on their way in search of reliable habitat, or they fly further south without an important stop to rest and refuel.

Bird migration is a series of stops, each of which are vital to a bird's survival. If we remove these links in the chain, birds will have difficulty completing their journeys. In New Mexico, biologists are witnessing record numbers of dead migratory songbirds and have speculated that the cause may be related to fires in the West, leaving birds in a weakened condition for migration.

How will the fires impact bird habitat?

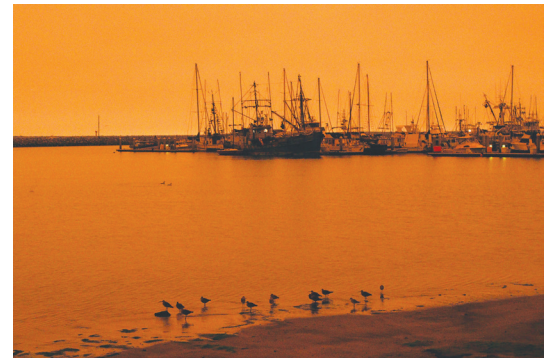
Fire is a natural part of almost every California ecosystem and is important to its health. But the intense, frequent fires that California has seen in recent years are not normal, and sometimes not healthy for habitat.

Nesting habitat will be at a premium in the parts of the state that have burned in recent years and this could impact an entire generation of birds in some areas if they are unable to find suitable habitat.

What else can we do to help birds?

As we begin to approach the rainy season, it's a good time to plan for planting plants in backyards and gardens that are native to California, as these are better adapted to drought and fire. [Audubon's Plants for Birds database](#) can help you find out what plants are appropriate for your area. Thank you for everything you do to protect birds and our communities from wildfire.

Andrea Jones, Director of Bird Conservation at Audubon California, and Joanna Wu, Avian Ecologist at National Audubon Society



Noon at Pillar Point Harbor



Wildfire and Wild life

MEETING PROGRAMS

October 8, 7 pm

Cape to Cape Birding Adventure *with Joe Morlan*

Joe will describe the birds and wildlife encountered while on a three week cruise from Chile to South Africa in March 2018. Joe's adventures on the ship "Silver Cloud" took him to some of the remotest islands on Earth including the Falklands, South Georgia and Tristan de Cunha. These outposts host numerous penguins, petrels and albatrosses including at least one mysterious species that has not yet been described. Among the island endemics, we will be treated to the endangered Striated Caracara, South Georgia Pipit, and the little known Moseley's Rockhopper Penguin. Join us for what promises to be an entertaining and informative presentation.

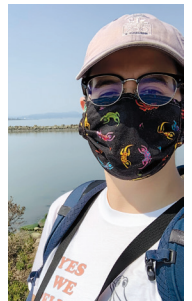
Joe Morlan has taught field ornithology at City College of San Francisco since 1978. He is the coauthor of "Birds of San Francisco and the Bay Area" and "Birds of Northern California." He has served as Chair of the California Bird Records Committee and was the recipient of the 2010 ABA Ludlow Griscom Award for contributions to regional ornithology.



November 12, 7 pm

Curiosity & Connection Through a Decade of Birding *with Ioana Seritan*

My relationship with birding has changed in the 10 years that I have called myself a birder. At the beginning, I went birding whenever I had a moment of free time. As I have grown, I didn't have the time, resources, or energy to bird all the time anymore. This change was a source of shame for me, as I felt that my identity as a birder was at stake. Within the past couple of years, my perspective has shifted. The amount of time I spend birding may have changed, but my curiosity and passion are still exactly the same. My life experiences as a wildlife rehabilitator, bird bander, magazine editor, environmental educator, and museum volunteer educate my birding today. When I look at a gull, I can practice aging it using my knowledge as a bird bander. When I watch a pelican fly, I can think about the anatomy underneath its feathers using my experience as a museum volunteer. When I cross paths with someone on a trail, I can talk to them about the bird that I am looking at using my skills as an educator. This renewed perspective has transformed my relationship with this hobby from shame, to excitement and joy once again. As ABA President Jeff Gordon often says, there are a million ways to bird. I believe that every birder has their own unique topics that they find the most exciting & interesting. I also believe that by sharing our own individual passions, we can understand each other better and get excited about each other's interests. As we recognize that every single person goes birding in a unique way, we will also encourage a more diverse birding community, where people of all cultures, languages, abilities, and interests feel welcome.



Ioana Seritan is an aquatic bird rehabilitator with International Bird Rescue and Associate Editor of the American Birding Association's *Birding* magazine. She graduated from UC Berkeley in 2017 with a B.S. in Environmental Sciences.

December 10, 7 pm

The Sweet Smell of Ecological Balance: Skunks and Their Roles in California Habitats *with Jen Hunter*

While skunks have an unenviable reputation in human communities, they are actually fascinating and resourceful critters (as well as being a major prey item for Great Horned Owls!). Everyone has seen (and smelled) a skunk at some point in their lives as naturalists, but our knowledge of this common mammal is shallow, due to an (entirely understandable) aversion to disturb or startle them. Come and learn from an enthusiastic teacher how to love these handsome stinkers!

Jen Hunter is the site Director for the University of California's Hastings Natural Reservation in Monterey County. A native of Seattle, she earned a Ph.D. in carnivore community ecology from UC Davis, and excels as both a research scientist and as a bio-enthusiast. She is spearheading programs to diversify the community of researchers using the UC Reserve system. Her Ph.D. research focused on how color and shape patterns affected rates of skunk predation.



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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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Support our Chapter's Work - Donate

Please consider an extra donation to your chapter in support of the work we do to provide birding trips, monthly programs, monitoring conservation concerns around the county, education and outreach. Thank you!

Give a Gift Membership or in Recognition

Has someone inspired you, or just done something kind for the world or for the birds? A donation in recognition gives toward supporting our Chapter's work.

Support SAS through Amazon Smile when you shop online

A percentage of your purchase can be donated to support the work of SAS whenever you shop on Amazon. You get the same products, prices and service and support our work to protect native birds and other wildlife and their ecosystems. The only difference is that, to support SAS through Amazon Smile, you must access the site: <http://smile.amazon.com/ch/94-60929053>.

amazonsmile

We're looking for Volunteers! Get Involved! Take Action!

You can make a difference! We're looking for a website monitor and publicity coordinator. Join our team! For more information, email: office@sequoia-audubon.org

Make Sure Your Coffee Supports Birds – Buy Bird Friendly SMBC Certified Coffee

Does your daily coffee support bird habitat or contribute to the demise of Neotropical landscapes? If it doesn't have the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center (SMBC) Bird Friendly certification seal your money does not support farming practices that support resident and migratory birds. During our monthly public meetings Sequoia proudly serves Certified Bird Friendly coffee, 100% organic and shade grown from *Birds and Beans, The Good Coffee* (<https://www.birdsandbeans.com>) and generously donated for each monthly meeting by Susan Rowinski.



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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