Observations
by Steve Glover

Nov. Speaker Is World Expert on Penguins

“...The Foraging Behavior of Penguins...” with particular emphasis on the Rockhopper Penguin, will be the topic of Yann Tremblay, our speaker at the November 6 general meeting. Tremblay currently works and teaches at the Long Marine Laboratory, University of California, Santa Cruz.

A native of France, Tremblay attended the University of Tours and University Paris 13. He has taught at the Universities of Angers, Lyon, La Rochelle, and Tours in the field of eco-ethology, the study of adaptations to diving in air-breathing vertebrates.

His research has taken him to the Crozet and Kerguelen Archipelagos and Amsterdam Island in the Southern Ocean, where he began his study of the Rockhopper Penguin. On Hornoya Island in northern Norway, he focused on the ecology at sea of the Common Guillemot. He has studied the Laysan and Black-footed Albatross on Tern Island, Hawaii, and dabling ducks and brent geese in the coastal marshes of western France.

Tremblay recently returned from studying the foraging ecology and habitat use of the Australian sea lion at Kangaroo Island, Australia, and is currently directing a field test of CT tags on the Northern Elephant Seals in Monterey Bay.

Tremblay is an expert in biotelemetry, the use of miniaturized electronic devices to gather data on animal movements, diving depth, temperature changes, heart rate, and weight. He has created artificial nests for automatic weighing of Yellow-nosed Albatross and Rockhopper Penguins. He has published numerous articles on diving and foraging behavior of far seals and penguins.

This presentation by one of the world’s experts in adaptive behaviors of mammals promises to be informative and entertaining.

Birding Information

Birding Information will have information on a fantastic place for winter birding—Heather Farm Lake.

Brian Murphy will show slides of the trail around the lake, and then slides of the numerous bird species that live and visit there. Brian claims that a four-heron migration is almost commonplace at Heather Farm lake.

He will also discuss the habitat improvements that the Walnut Creek Open Space Foundation has planned at and around the lake. The Foundation needs volunteers to help with planting and other activities.

Meeting Schedule

The next MDAS general meeting will be Thursday, November 6, in the Camellia Room of The Gardens at Heather Farm, 1540 Marchbanks Dr., Walnut Creek (see map on p. 8). 6:30 p.m.—Doors open 7 p.m.—Birding Information 7:25 p.m.—Business meeting 7:40 p.m.—Social time, refreshments and door prize drawing 8:05 p.m.—Program

Remember your cup!
Connections
Hurrrah for East Bay Regional Park District!
The East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD) has again proven its dedication to education, conservation, and the residents of the East Bay by making a commitment to build and operate the Delta Science Center. Thanks to EBRPD’s stepping forward to operate the Center, the project can now qualify for state bond money. Located in the Big Break area near Oakley in East County, the shoreline property will open for public use in 2005.

Construction of the first phase of the Delta Science Center itself can also begin with an opening date set for 2006. The first phase will provide a viewing pier extending over the water, outdoor displays, and a parking lot to be followed by a classroom and display structure.

The purpose of the Delta Science Center is to educate the public about the waterways, islands, and marshes making up the unique estuarine area of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.
The Delta Science Center was a favorite project of MDAS’s Al McNabney, who served on its board for many years. MDAS continues to support the development of the Delta Science Center by contributing to the funding for observation facilities, and Joel Summerhill, MDAS board member, serves on the Board of Directors of the Delta Science Center.

What’s Happening with Los Vaqueros?
The General Manager, Walter Bishop, of the Contra Costa Water District has been pushing hard to get Contra Costa voters to support expansion of the Los Vaqueros Reservoir. However, given the state’s fiscal crisis and the fact that federal tax dollars are in short supply, finding the money to build a larger dam in East County and flood more open space may have hit snag.

A further setback may have come from the California Department of Water Resources’ new water plan. The plan gives priority to a multimillion-dollar investment in water conservation and recycling—not dam construction. Although the plan includes investigation of water storage projects, like Los Vaqueros, it states that California can easily gain 5 million acre-feet of recycling, replenishing aquifers, and conservation. Five million acre-feet of water would supply the needs of 10 million households. The plan also does not endorse pulling more water out of the Delta and sending it to southern California.

Los Vaqueros was built by the Contra Costa Water District using bond money approved by the district’s customers. To win support for the project, CCWD promised to preserve 20,000 acres of open space, much of which will be flooded if the reservoir is expanded.

The Quail is published 10 times a year by the Mt Diablo Audubon Society, a nonprofit organization dedicated to habitat conservation and environmental education.

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drawing courtesy of Carol Lutz

Veracruz Birding—the Hawk Migration & More
by Martha H. Breth
If you get the chance to see the “River of Raptors” Hawk Migration in Veracruz, Mexico, you will be amazed and thrilled by it.

I spent ten days, September 22-October 2, on a trip led by David McCauley. He met us at the airport and took care of our meals, lodging, and travels in Mexico.

This trip was more than just the Hawk Migration: we stayed in Tlacotalpan, located 55 miles south of Veracruz, and McCauley’s homebase, and bused by canoe in the Alvarado Wetlands, which were featured in the August 2003 Birding magazine. Among the birds we saw by canoe were Laughing Falcon, Roadside Hawk, Grey-Necked Wood-Rail, numerous Northern Jacanas, Black, Turkey, and Lesser Yellow-Headed Vultures, various herons and egrets, Ringed Kingfisher, Green-Breasted Mango, and various flycatchers.

On the second day in Tlacotalpan, we spent in the wet Savanna, which we traversed in rubber knee boots. There we saw the magnificent Fork-Tailed Flycatcher, many Vermilion Flycatchers, Least Grebe, Anhinga, White Ibis, Roseate Spoonbill, Common Tody-Flycatcher, Limpkin, and Rufous-Breasted Spinetail.

Later, birding in drier countryside, we saw a pair of Aplomado Falcons in aerial displays, Snail Kite perched eating a snail, and Common and Great Black-hawks.

Leaving Tlacotalpan, we traveled to Montejo and the coastal rainforest of the Tuxtlas Mountains where we saw Masked Tituya, Black-Crowned Tityra, Band-Backed Wren, Bat Falcon, Groove Billed Ani, Common Pauraque, Violet Sabrewing, Amazon Kingfisher, Viscouscuckoo and Stately-Tailed Trogon, Golden-Olive Woodpecker, Streak-Headed Woodcreeper, Great Boat-Billed and Social Flycatchers, Crimson-Collared, Yellow-Winged and Blue-Gray Tanagers, and Red-Lored Parrot. There were many Ruddy Ground-Doves, Inca Doves, Rock Pigeons, Red-Billed Pigeons everywhere.

American Redstart and Yellow Warbler were just two of many warbler species we saw. Ahaiana and Baltimore Orioles were frequently sighted. While we stood under a tree in the forest, a White Hawk perched overhead. Awesome!

Our time in Paso de Ovejas and nearby Cardel gave us spectacular, breath-taking views of thousands of Broad-Winged Hawks circling in kettle overhead, a vortex lifting into the thermal until breaking out and streaming forward: the River of Raptors in the sky! We were also lucky to be there when thousands of Wood Storks flew in formation overhead as they migrated.

David McCauley led our group to some great birding sites. He was attentive to our comfort and saw to it that we had plenty of bottled water at all times—it was very hot and humid; we were drenched in sweat before noon. It was worth it! His trips are geared to small groups and the budget-minded birder. He can be reached at birdingveracruz@hotmail.com or http://birdingveracruz.20m.com or http://geocities.com/birdingveracruz

Bush Derails Wilderness, Opens Land to Development
Since the passage of the Wilderness Act of 1964, 106 million acres have been given the formal wilderness designation, with more than half of that total in Alaska.

The Bush Administration recently declared that it would end reviews of western public lands for new wilderness protection. As long as the lands had been under consideration for the American wilderness system, they had temporary protection from development.

With a single order, the Bush administration removed more than 200 million acres from further wilderness study, including caribou stamping ground in Alaska, the red rock canyons and mesas of southern Utah, Case Mountain with its sequoia forests in California, and a wall of rainbow-colored rock known as Vermilion Basin in Colorado.

By declaring an end to wild land surveys, the administration ruled out protection of these areas as formal wilderness—which, by law, are supposed to be places people can visit but not stay. Now, these areas managed by the Bureau of Land Management can be opened to mining, drilling, logging, or road-building.

The move follows a consistent pattern in the president’s environmental policy: to change the way the land is managed, without changing the law.

Whether the issue is allowing snowmobiles in Yellowstone National Park or logging in the Pacific Northwest, the course has been to settle lawsuits by opponents of wild land protection, opening up the areas to wide use, without going to Congress to rewrite the rules.

November Field Trips

Elizabeth Dickey, Field Trip Chair

Field trips are open to MDAS members and nonmembers alike. You do not have to be a birding expert, only one who enjoys nature. Bring binoculars, field guides, and lunch. We have a limited number of loaner binoculars available by calling the trip leader at least 7 days in advance. Whether or not the availability of leaders may require changes. Trips go in light rain or drizzle. If in doubt, call leader up to 1/2 hour before departure. Carpool time is the departure time. Carpool expense: 20 cents per mile shared among drivers and riders; tolls and entry fees are shared equally by driver and riders.

Wednesday, November 5, San Francisco Bay Wildlife Refuge. Carpool leaves at 8 a.m. from LaGronda Way in Danville. From I-680 southbound, exit on El Pondito, turn right and right again onto LaGronda. From I-680 northbound, exit at El Cerrito Blvd., Danville, turn left, turn right on LaGronda, and drive about 1/4 mile north to El Pondito. Meet at 9 a.m. at parking lot at refuge entrance. Take I-680 to I-580 west, south to I-880, to Thornton Ave. exit. Go right on Thornton and turn left at refuge entrance. We will bird the marshes east of I-880 for shorebirds first. Mostly levee walking. Bring lunch. Leader: Elizabeth Dickey, 254-0486

Category 1

Saturday, November 8, Limantour. Carpool leaves at 7:30 a.m. from Acalanes Ave., off Pleasant Hill Rd. just north of SR 24. or meet at 8:45 a.m. at the Bear Valley Visitor’s Center, Pt. Reyes National Park. Take Camino Pablo to El Sobrante, go 1 1/2 miles east on I-80 to Richmond Parkway exit; turn left and go straight through stoplight. Cross the San Rafael Bridge. From I-101 north, take Central San Rafael exit. Go two blocks, turn left on 3rd St. and continue west to Sir Francis Drake Blvd. Turn right on Sir Francis Drake. At SR 1 in Oelma, turn right 0.25 miles, then left on Bear Valley Rd. Turn left into Visitor’s Center off Bear Valley. We expect shorebirds, waterfowl, and land birds on the ridge. Trails may be muddy. Leader: Maury Stern, 284-5980

Category 2: Easy, little or no walking, smooth paths

Category 2: Moderate, 1 mile or more, possibly rough terrain

Difficulty of field trip: Category 1: Easy, little or no walking, smooth paths Category 2: Moderate, 1 mile or more, possibly rough terrain

November 2003

Entertainment Books On Sale!

2004 Entertainment Books are bigger than ever and still only $30!

Save 50% on restaurants, travel, entertainment and much more at the same time supporting your chapter. NEW! Christmas edition comes out the expanded home, garden & auto section offering great discounts.

Pick up your great savings book at Wild Birds Unlimited, 692 Contra Costa Blvd., Pleasant Hill. or at MDAS monthly meetings. Shop on the web at entertainment.com for additional savings and an easy way to order out-of-town editions—a marvelous Christmas gift.

Be sure to include the MDAS code of 175587 when ordering.

MDAS Christmas Bird Count Dates

Mark your calendars now for the two MDAS Christmas Bird Counts. The Bird Count for Central County will be Saturday, December 14. The East County Count will be held Saturday, December 20. Sign-up forms and more information will be in the next issue of the Quail.

Observations

Dawn 11th Annual Christmas Bird Count — We have a limited number of loaner binoculars available by calling the trip leader.

Pablo to El Sobrante, go 1 1/2 miles east on I-80 to Richmond Parkway exit; turn left and go straight through stoplight. Cross the San Rafael Bridge. From I-101 north, take Central San Rafael exit. Go two blocks, turn left on 3rd St. and continue west to Sir Francis Drake Blvd. Turn right on Sir Francis Drake. At SR 1 in Oelma, turn right 0.25 miles, then left on Bear Valley Rd. Turn left into Visitor’s Center off Bear Valley. We expect shorebirds, waterfowl, and land birds on the ridge. Trails may be muddy. Leader: Maury Stern, 284-5980

Category 2

Thursday, November 13, Corte Madera Marsh—New Trip! We will carpool at 8 a.m. from Acalanes Ave., off Pleasant Hill Rd. just north of SR 24. There is no meeting place in Marin. Leader: Elizabeth Dickey, 254-0486

Category 1

Wednesday, November 19, Mountain View Sanitary Plant/Mc Nabney Marsh. Meet at 9 a.m. at the plant’s parking lot. Take Pacheco Blvd. exit from I-680, turn right onto Arthur Rd., and go under the freeway. Arthur Rd. turns left, then right; at the second turn, turn sharp left onto a non-county-maintained road. Follow the road into the sanitary plant. Trails may be muddy. Close-up looks at dabbling ducks; possibly bitterns and heron. If you wish, bring a lunch and explore Martinez shoreline in the afternoon.

Leader: Elizabeth Dickey, 254-0486

Category 1

Saturday, November 22, Palo Alto Baylands. Carpool leaves at 7:30 a.m. from LaGronda Way in Danville. From I-680 southbound, exit on El Pondito, turn right, and right again onto LaGronda. From I-680 northbound, exit at El Cerrito Blvd., Danville, turn left, then right on LaGronda, and drive about 1/4 mile north to El Pondito. Meet at 9:00 a.m. in parking lot by marsh at Baylands. Take Dumbarton Bridge and drive south on US 101 to Embarcadero exit. Go east. Continue towards the Yacht Harbor and park in lot near the Environmental Center. With a high tide, we hope for Clapper Rails, possibly Black Rails. Trails may be muddy. Bring lunch. Leader: Elizabeth Dickey, 254-0486.

Category 1

November 2003
MDAS CAPS ARE ON SALE NOW!

Our new Chapter caps were snapped up at the September General Meeting. MDAS members loved these handsome khaki caps with our distinctive Quail logo emblazoned on them. It was fun to see so many members sporting these caps at the meeting, and they will add a unifying note to our field trips. We still have a supply, so get your MDAS cap while they are still available. Only $15 at the General Meetings or on our website with S&H fee added.

Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival, January 16-19, 2004

The 8th Annual Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival will be held January 16-19, 2004. Morro Bay, an important stop on the Pacific Flyway, is recognized world-wide for its diversity of both resident and wintering birds with over 200 species identified during past festivals.

The Festival also offers small-group field trips and workshops aimed at sharpening your birding skills as well as evening programs with outstanding speakers.

For more information about the Festival, check out www.morro-bay.net/birds. Registration deadline is December 31, 2003, and early signups are encouraged as the most popular events fill up quickly.

Anna’s Hummingbird  

(Calypte anna)

Truly one of the marvels of our local birds, Anna’s Hummingbirds are models of toughness and resourcefulness. At only 4 inches in length, Anna’s are only 1 inch larger than Allen’s and Black-chinned Hummingbirds, our two smallest breeding birds. Observers can only be astonished the first time they see a territorial male Anna’s zip up into the sky to harass passing Red-tailed Hawks and Golden Eagles.

Anna’s Hummingbirds are common and widespread nesters in Contra Costa County although, like many species, they are rare or absent in East County. The Atlas project, unfortunately, did little to illuminate the status of Anna’s in East County, and, as of 2002, all we can state with certainty is that they are uncommon and usually found around introduced stands of eucalyptus. Black-chinned Hummingbirds are also usually found in riparian situations. In fact, most of East County seems to be unoccupied by any types of hummingbird.

However, Anna’s were confirmed in 60 blocks—nearly every block in which they were detected. In the Richmond area, in Central County, and in the Diablo Range, they are far and away the most common hummingbird and, except in rare instances, the only species present in winter.

They are found commonly in oak and riparian woodlands, evergreen woodlands (especially around the edges), chaparral, eucalyptus groves, and, most notably, in urban and suburban settings with their attendant exotic flowering plants and hummingbird feeders. They are less common in the moister, forested areas of the Berkeley Hills where Allen’s Hummingbirds are widespread and in arid East County where Black-chinned Hummingbirds are more common.

Anna’s Hummingbirds, amusingly, can begin nesting in December, just as the rainy season begins to kick in here in the East Bay. The Atlas, however, failed to prove this for the obvious reason that no body was out counting breeding birds in December.

Anna’s Hummingbirds have undoubtedly become more common in the last century. The primary reasons for this increase are the presence of exotic urban plants and the increasing fragmentation of woodland. Non-native (“exotic”) plants, unlike our native species, may bloom throughout the winter months, allowing large numbers of hummingbirds to subsist through winters in areas where hummingbirds would find little food.

Profile of a Hummingbird

by Steve Glover

MDAS has just completed five years of observations in the initial phase of the Contra Costa Breeding Bird Atlas. Steve is now writing the profiles of the breeding species observed in Contra Costa. This is the first in a series of sample profiles that will ultimately appear in the Atlas. Steve welcomes your comments at <SGlover@aol.com>.

September 10, Jewel Lake—On this pleasant day with early fog clearing about 9 a.m., only the leader showed up. This was a Wren-day—three pairs were seen and several others heard. Most interesting was a big muskrat eating willow twigs in Jewel Lake. Eighteen species were seen.—Elizabeth Dickey

September 15, Point Pinole—A rather hot day with no wind. Six birders walked out to the fishing pier and took the wrong way back. We saw Black Oystercatchers in the algae along the shore again this year and 10–12 Elegant Terns were on the old pilings at the pier. A total of 33 species were seen.—Elizabeth Dickey

September 24, Hayward Regional Shoreline—Four birders braved traffic for a sunny morning of birding. There were good views of the usual shorebirds and a number of duck species which were mostly in eclipse plumage. The highlight was a flight of more than 15 White Pelicans. We saw 35 species.—Elizabeth Dickey

September 27, Outer Point Reyes—Four MDAS members joined the crowd of birders at Nunez Ranch and the Fish Docks. This was one of the hot days at the Point. Some or all of our group saw Yellow Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Yellow-rumps, Townsend’s Warbler, Blackpoll Warbler, and American Redstart—all at all three of the other goodies. We enjoyed an adult Great Horned Owl and a full-sized young bird still with us for the very fluffy plumage sitting in the Fish Docks cypress. We also saw early Hermit Thrush, Fox Sparrow, and White-crowned Sparrow. We saw a total of 49 species.—Elizabeth Dickey

A general comment from Elizabeth Dickey: “We saw very few raptors and sea birds during the month. There were only Redtails at Jewel Lake and Point Reyes, and a Red-shouldered Hawk at Jewel Lake and Pinole. one Harrier at Pinole—and that was it. There was one Loon, one scrubby Surf Scoter, a small flock of Western Grebes and some Cormorants at Point Reyes, and on the Bay—nothing. Is this the general experience?”

October 11, Rodeo Lagoon/Hawk Mountain—Five birders enjoyed perfect weather and saw 40 species. The hawk flight included many acipers, but no unusual species, so the bird of the trip was definitely the brilliant fall-full- plumage Chestnut-sided Warbler that posed for us for several minutes at the Lagoon.—Fred Safier