

# BAY BIRD REVIEW

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION ON THE SCIENCE AND CONSERVATION OF BIRDS AND THEIR HABITATS



SAN FRANCISCO BAY  
BIRD OBSERVATORY

## Director's Message

My favorite time of year is here. It's time to prepare for the upcoming field season, and SFBBO is going at it full tilt – hiring new seasonal staff and student interns, training volunteers, and in general making sure we're ready to hit the ground running when field work begins in earnest. After an eventful close to 2012, complete with departures of treasured staff and arrivals of fresh new faces, the SFBBO team is gearing up for our busiest time of year. Our science team, led by Science Programs Director Christina Donehower, has just begun our annual studies on Snowy Plovers, and will soon be in the field daily, monitoring many other bird species and their habitats across the South Bay.

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE *continued on page 2*



AMERICAN AVOCET by Emmanuel Rondeau.



CLAPPER RAIL.

PHOTO BY PATI ROUZER

## Habitats Report

# Habitats Program Prepares for Climate Change

*Led by Senior Ecologist David Thomson, SFBBO's Habitats Program is a science-based program that works to determine feasible methods to restore and manage transitional habitats between tidal marshes and adjacent uplands. The work David describes below occurred in the time since David joined SFBBO in June 2011. David hopes to contribute to our understanding of bird habitat ecology, and to guide our role in the conservation of birds that rely on these transitional habitats.*

As the largest remaining wetlands on the West Coast of North America, San Francisco Bay is considered of hemispherical importance to migratory birds on the Pacific Flyway, and was just named a Wetland of International Importance by the Ramsar Convention, an intergovernmental group committed to promoting global wetlands sustainability. A large diversity of birds passes over our region, and many stop here to overwinter or breed. It's difficult to believe our highly urbanized estuary remains so biologically important, but with the nearly complete conversion of

the vast seasonal wetlands of the Central Valley into farmland, and the almost ubiquitous disturbances to coastal habitats, the Bay has grown in importance to many species, some of whom may not have utilized it much prior to modern times.

Although the Bay has not avoided the impacts of ever-growing human populations, it was spared additional habitat conversions and has been recovering since the 1960s, due to efforts begun by three East Bay women (aka Save San Francisco Bay Foundation). Now climate change threatens to bring more than just warmer temperatures: the world's oceans are predicted to rise quickly enough to cause many scientists to question the ability of tidal marshes to keep pace. If preliminary projections of tidal marsh responses to predicted rates of sea level rise are correct, marsh plants may begin drowning by the middle of this century. This could mean loss of high marsh habitats and the critical functions they provide to

HABITATS REPORT *continued on page 2*

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE *from cover*

As in the past, nearly all of our research activities this year will benefit greatly from the contributions of SFBBO's volunteers. From volunteers who help us to collect seasonal data to those who offer their time year-round in the office or at the Coyote Creek Field Station, each contribution of time and effort expands the ability of our organization to advance the conservation of birds in the Bay Area. On behalf of the entire SFBBO staff, I'd like to say thank you to each of our volunteers for making the work we do possible. We are very much looking forward to spending the coming field season working with you on ongoing projects, and to launching several new ones. We also hope you'll join us at SFBBO's annual Volunteer Appreciation Day event on May 9th at the Rengstorff House in Mountain View! More details to follow soon.

In addition to supporting our work with volunteered time, our members also showed their strong financial support for SFBBO at the close of 2012. I am delighted to announce that SFBBO achieved its year-end fundraising goal of raising \$15,000 to support the organization's activities. This high level of support for the organization was exciting to see, and it will provide important resources for our programs this year.

Thank you for all the ways you contribute to SFBBO's success. I am looking forward to more time to get to know you in 2013, be it in the field, at an SFBBO event, or at the office. Please come say hello!

.....  
*Cat Burns, Ph.D., Executive Director*



GREAT BLUE HERON *by Scott Norton.*



*Restoration Site in Year Two (2010-2011)*



*Restoration Site in Year Three (2011-2012)*

PHOTOS BY DAVID THOMSON

HABITATS REPORT *from cover*

endangered species such as California Clapper Rails, and eventual conversion of many marshes to mudflats by the end of the century.

What can be done to help conserve the marshes? Marshes are dynamic, adaptable systems, having a range of tolerance to changes in sea level over time, but the laws of physics and the limitations imposed by their own biology set a limit to how quickly marsh plants can adapt to sea level rise. To address perceived threats there are several approaches to marsh conservation that are being discussed in groups like the State Coastal Conservancy's "Climate Change Update for the Bay Goals" (a planning document from 2000), and in U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)-led planning workshops on active management. The approaches include targeting restoration for areas projected to perform better during rapid sea level rise, enhancing marshes to improve their resiliency to predicted changes, and acquiring and preparing upland areas adjacent to the estuary for marsh migration upslope as sea levels rise.

SFBBO is involved in these efforts, and is working with scientists and land managers from throughout the estuary. One current project, funded by the USFWS Coastal Program, is our tidal marsh-upland transitional habitat project, which we are conducting with the help of SFBBO board member Brian Fulfrost. In this project we aim to describe, map, and assess marsh-upland transitional habitats throughout the estuary to help scientists and land managers understand their distribution. This would help to better conserve them, as well as assess the space avail-

able for marsh accommodation during rapid sea level rise. Other SFBBO projects are aimed at restoring transitional plant communities, which can help prepare these transition zones for colonization by marshes in the future.

SFBBO's restoration projects are also showing how important it is for marsh habitat to be able to cope with the weather variability. Although last year's drought, which severely impacted our new restoration sites, was not directly attributed to climate change, such extremes are predicted by climate change models. We had 15 acres of seed on the ground last winter that performed very poorly. As the weather becomes increasingly difficult to predict, but restoration continues, we must utilize approaches that are successful under a wide range of conditions. The methods developed by SFBBO appear able to adapt to climate variability, because recruitment this winter from sites seeded in the fall of 2011 appears promising! The photographs included in this newsletter show another aspect of this adaptability in areas that have already been restored by SFBBO at the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge's Environmental Education Center in Alviso. They show the berm alongside the access road in Year 2 (2010-11), which was a very good rainfall year, and Year 3 (2011-12) which was not. Although recruitment from seed appeared poor, the perennials that were established performed well enough to create some habitat, showing that the species diversity in our restoration methods can provide some adaptability to climate change.

.....  
*By David Thomson, MS  
SFBBO Senior Ecologist, Habitats Program*

# Volunteering...Is for the Birds!

Volunteers are a crucial part of our work. Each year you give thousands of hours of valuable time to the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory. We appreciate that when we put out the call for people to help—surveys, bird banding, data entry, habitat restoration, net repair, or office work—you respond with enthusiasm and commitment! The work of SFBBO is for the birds, but it's also for the humans who share their environment, to provide opportunities for people to be directly involved in the nature and science of the San Francisco Bay Area.



*Dave Austin, member with his wife Gail Richardson since 2004, volunteered many hours making repairs and doing much needed maintenance on the boats used for our waterbird programs.*



*Larry Yamasaki, member since 2009, volunteers with our Avian Disease Prevention Program and Colonial Waterbird Program.*



*Amy Lauterbach, member since 2003, volunteers as a bird bander at the Coyote Creek Field Station.*



*Troy Rahmig, member since 2006, volunteers as an SFBBO Board member and is currently our Board Chair and led the search for a new executive director in 2012.*

*Corina Rahmig, member since 2006, volunteers as a bird bander at the Coyote Creek Field Station.*



*Michael Kern, member since 2007, volunteered to help set up SFBBO's photo database and helped found our CFC Click-off fundraising initiative.*

## Volunteer Appreciation Party

On May 9th, we'll be hosting our Annual Volunteer Appreciation Party at the Rengstorff House in Mountain View. This is our day to honor YOU and all of your dedication and hard work. We couldn't complete all of our observing, monitoring, counting, capturing, and banding birds without our volunteers. Please come and celebrate all of our shared achievements with staff and fellow volunteers, and enjoy good food, great people, fun games, and a bird walk to visit with our local birds. Please RSVP to Kathi Kendrick at [kkendrick@sfbbo.org](mailto:kkendrick@sfbbo.org) or 408.946.6548 x10.

## How Will You Help this Year?

SFBBO is powered by the work of our wonderful volunteers! Here's how you can get involved:

**Colonial Waterbirds Program Volunteer** – Monitor local populations of herons, egrets, terns, and gulls that rely on the San Francisco Bay as breeding grounds.

**Coyote Creek Field Station Volunteer** – Collect avian information at one of the South Bay's largest remaining riparian habitats.

**Avian Disease Prevention Program Volunteer** – Monitor local sloughs and collect dead, sick, and injured birds to prevent the spread of botulism.

**Governance** – Serve on our Board, Advisory Board, or on our fundraising or other committees.

**Corporate Groups** – Help us on 1-day projects with activities like moving equipment, weeding, planting, and trail maintenance.

**Photographer** – Take photos of birds, and of people at our workshops and events, for use in our print and electronic communications.

**Outreach Volunteer** – Represent SFBBO at tables and booth events, work on our website, invite us to speak to your company or group, or cover SFBBO in your publication.

**Fundraising Volunteer** – Solicit prizes and collect donations for our California Fall Challenge, help with membership mailings, or host a fundraising party to support our work.

**Vehicle Maintenance Volunteer** – Help maintain the field trucks and boats that we use in our science programs.

For more information, visit our website or contact Outreach and Membership Coordinator Kristin Butler at 408.946.6548 or [kbutler@sfbbo.org](mailto:kbutler@sfbbo.org).

# 2012 Colonial Waterbird Monitoring Program—Year in Review

The Colonial Waterbird Program is one of SFBBO's longest-standing citizen science initiatives. Since 1982, the program has engaged over a hundred volunteers in waterbird nest-monitoring activities in the San Francisco Bay. Trained volunteers independently collect observational data on nesting colony status, timing of breeding, numbers of active nests observed, waterbird behavior, and evidence of nest predation or human disturbance at selected colonies each year. This information is shared with landowners and resource agencies and contributes to the conservation and management of these species.

In 2012, 47 volunteers (who contributed 409.25 volunteer hours) monitored 59 active waterbird nesting sites from March to August, using observational methods. They observed waterbirds nesting in a range of habitats, from salt ponds and levees to parks and residential areas, mostly in the South San Francisco

Bay, with some colonies in the Central and North Bay. In many cases SFBBO volunteers were the only "eyes-on-the-ground" watching over these birds, and they brought conservation threats, such as human disturbance, to the attention of resource managers. They also identified nesting behaviors (such as incubation, nest-building, and courtship displays) and discovered new nesting sites, including heron rookeries at Bunting Pond-Niles, Chesapeak-Saginaw in Redwood City, and Coyote Ranch Road.

The 2012 monitoring effort focused principally on colonies of Forster's Tern (*Sterna forsteri*), Caspian Tern (*Hydroprogne caspia*), California Least Tern (*S. antillarum browni*), Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*), Great Egret (*A. alba*), Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*), and Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*). Additionally, the team monitored American Avocet (*Recurvirostra americana*), Black-necked Stilt (*Himantopus mexicanus*), Black Skimmer (*Rynchops niger*), and Black-crowned Night Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) when they were seen nesting with other species of interest. The sidebar shows results for SFBBO monitoring sites in 2012.

In addition, SFBBO biologists led one walk-through survey of California Gull colonies between May 11, 2012 and May 23, 2012. Trained volunteers often accompanied SFBBO staff on these surveys. The team documented ten active California Gull colonies in the South San Francisco Bay ranging in size from 61 nests to 9,164 nests. Altogether there were an estimated 52,172 California Gulls breeding in the South Bay in 2012, a 38% increase from 2011.

Over the last 30 years, SFBBO's Colonial Waterbird Program has documented an exponential increase in the number of California Gulls nesting in the San Francisco Bay, from fewer than 20 gulls in 1980 to over 52,000 gulls in 2012. The size and location of active gull colonies have fluctuated over the study period, probably reflecting a suite of changing environmental and demographic factors, including gulls' use of landfills and other sources of anthropogenic food in the South Bay, recent gull abatement programs at several area landfills, and restoration of salt pond habitat to tidal marsh by the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project. As distributions shift and numbers grow, gulls may impact Western Snowy Plovers, Forster's Terns, and other sensitive species through predation and competition for nest sites.

With the help of our citizen scientist volunteers, SFBBO will continue to monitor gulls and the other birds in our Colonial Waterbird Monitoring study to better understand their behavior and ecology. We want to thank SFBBO's wonderful volunteers for their hard work and commitment in collecting these important data, as well as our members, who make this work possible.

For more information, please visit [www.sfbbo.org](http://www.sfbbo.org) or contact Outreach and Membership Coordinator Kristin Butler at 408.946.6548 or [kbutler@sfbbo.org](mailto:kbutler@sfbbo.org).

## SFBBO Colonial Waterbird Monitoring 2012 Season Results

Below is a summary of the data collected by participants in our Colonial Waterbird Monitoring Program in 2012.

Heron, Egret, and Cormorant: peak nests observed (all SFBBO sites combined) plus largest colony monitored by SFBBO.

- Double-crested Cormorant: 479 nests; 152 at Steinberger Slough in Belmont
- Great Blue Heron: 109 nests; 22 at Ovation Court in San Jose
- Great Egret: 100 nests; 26 at Ruus Park in Hayward
- Snowy Egret: 161 nests; 103 at Lakeshore Park in Newark
- Black-crowned Night Heron: 85 nests, 36 at Lakeshore Park in Newark

American Avocet, Black-necked Stilt, California Gull, Caspian Tern, Forster's Tern, and Black Skimmer peak nests observed (all SFBBO sites combined) plus largest colony monitored by SFBBO.

- American Avocet: 284 nests; 200 nests at Moffett in Mountain View
- Black-necked Stilt: 12 nests; 10 at New Chicago Marsh in Alviso
- California Least Tern: 0 nests
- Caspian Tern: 138 nests; 133 at Coyote Hills Regional Park in Fremont
- Forster's Tern: 605 nests; 295 nests at Hayward Shoreline
- Black Skimmer: 1 nest at Moffett Field in Mountain View

# Calendar

## BIRDING SUNOL

Tuesday, March 19, 2013

9:00 a.m.—12:00 p.m.

SITE: TRIP BEGINS AT SUNOL TRAIN STATION

Join Rich Cimino for a lovely morning of birding. We will meet in the town of Sunol, off Hwy 680 and Hwy 84 at the old train station, then walk a country road and look for Golden Eagles, song birds, and other bird species. Rich will also discuss the interesting ecological and cultural history of this once thriving agricultural area. In addition, we will take a side trip to visit the birds that live near the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission Water Temple. Please join us for this informative walk.



## SFBBO TEAM COMPETES IN SCV AUDUBON BIG SIT CHALLENGE

Sunday, April 17, 2013

SITE: TO BE ANNOUNCED

SFBBO's team, the DataSets, will again participate in Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society's Big Sit Challenge. We'll

compete against other teams to i.d. as many birds as possible from within a 17-foot diameter circle within a 4-hour period of time, and will try and break through the 60 species barrier. Stephanie Ellis will be back to lead the team! Please let us know if you'd like to participate.



## A BIRD IN THE HAND

SITE: COYOTE CREEK FIELD STATION

(MILPITAS)

Tour SFBBO's banding station and meet the Coyote Creek Field Station Manager, Josh Scullen. Learn about SFBBO's bird banding research and see several different species up close. We will tour mist nets, watch a bird banding demonstration, and explore a restored riparian habitat. Please contact us for information or to schedule a group visit and learn why bird banding is so important for protecting birds and their habitats.



WALK: Open to the public; \$10 donation requested for non-members. RSVP at outreach@sfbbo.org or 408.946.6548



ACCESSIBLE: Contact outreach@sfbbo.org or 408.946.6548.



SPECIAL EVENT



MEMBER-ONLY ACTIVITY: Active SFBBO membership required to attend event.



HOUSE WREN by Michael Mammoser.

## Workshops for the Birder and Naturalist – 2013

WITH: *Alvaro Jaramillo, SFBBO Senior Biologist*

SITE: *Sobrato Center for Nonprofits in Redwood Shores*

### SPARROWS — THE LITTLE BROWN JOBS

Tuesday, March 26 (instruction), 6:30 – 9:00 pm;

Thursday, March 28 (instruction & field trip), 6:30 – 9:00 pm;

Saturday, March 30 (field trip), TBA

Well-camouflaged and perfectly adapted to living low and near the ground, sparrows are often categorized as "little brown jobs" by birders. By concentrating on differences in shape, behavior, voice, and habitat, sparrows can be easier to identify than you think. Sparrows are also fascinating as they have afforded scientists important opportunities to learn about bird song, dialects, territoriality, and migration patterns. Come and gain an appreciation for this largely North American group of birds, their natural history, and their influence on ornithology. The field trip will require light to moderate hiking.

Birding Level: Beginner and up. \$150 fee.



### MIGRATION: WARBLERS AND OTHER MIGRANT LANDBIRDS

Tuesday, April 30 (instruction), 6:30 – 9:00 pm;

Thursday, May 2 (instruction & field trip), 6:30 – 9:00 pm;

Sunday, May 5 (field trip), TBA

Migration has captured imaginations from ancient times until now. Today we have many tools at our disposal to help us understand migration and begin to explain how these little creatures do it. This course is an introduction and summary of bird migration, and will help participants learn to identify and understand the biology of some local migratory landbirds, and will focus on warblers, vireos, tanagers, thrushes and a few others. On the field trip, which will require light hiking, we will watch visual migration on the coast and then look for migrant and resident landbirds.

Birding Level: Beginner on up. \$150 fee.



Check your membership status, RSVP, or register for a workshop, at [www.sfbbo.org](http://www.sfbbo.org), 408.946.6548, or [kkendrick@sfbbo.org](mailto:kkendrick@sfbbo.org) and we will be happy to assist you!

# Our thanks to these supporters of the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory!



*Thank you new and returning members, and generous donors. October – September 2012*

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Yvette Leung and Liwen Mah, Marshall Marlowe, S.B. Meyer, Jean Myers, David Speer and Tiffany Choy

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And thank you to the 71 people who gave up to \$40 each.

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## Thank You for Making Our Year End Appeal a Success!

Thank you for your support in 2012, and for your time, energy, and commitment to our mission to conserve birds and their habitats. Your support helped make our year of transition a great success and allows us to continue doing research and monitoring that contributes to informed land management decisions. Thank you for making a difference and for caring about SFBBO and the environment of the San Francisco Bay Area.

# There Are Many Ways to Support SFBBO's Bird Conservation Efforts

As a nonprofit organization, SFBBO depends on the generosity of our community to help us meet our mission to conserve birds and their habitats through science and outreach. This support comes in many forms.

## Membership

Members are critical to the success of our work, and annual membership dues go to support our citizen science and outreach efforts. Member benefits include our Bay Bird Review Newsletter, free bird walks, invitations to our bird workshops and special events, and member-only citizen science volunteer opportunities like our Colonial Waterbird Monitoring Program and Coyote Creek Field Station bird banding study.

## Monthly Giving

Protecting sensitive habitats requires long-term, innovative, science-based work. Effective conservation is a long-term process; and to successfully accomplish that, we rely on steady, predictable funding. Our monthly givers' program, the Stilt Society, is a way to make a monthly gift, provide reliable support, and reduce fundraising expenses by eliminating the need to send paper reminders to renew your commitment.

## Gift in Honor

A Gift in Honor is a great way to recognize a special person or family. For each \$25 Gift in Honor donation, we will promptly send a beautiful, personalized tribute card to you, or to the person or family you indicate, to notify them of your thoughtful donation.

## Workplace Giving

Making a gift through your company's workplace giving program is a great way to support our work, and participating in your company's matching gifts program increases the impact of your gift.

## Corporate Giving

Corporations and businesses can make a positive impact on their community by making a donation, sponsoring an event, or offering a grant to support SFBBO programs.

For information about how to give, please visit [www.sfbbo.org](http://www.sfbbo.org) or contact Outreach and Membership Coordinator Kristin Butler at [kbutler@sfbbo.org](mailto:kbutler@sfbbo.org) or (408) 946-6548.



SNOWY EGRET by Michael Mammoser.

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## Make an In Kind Gift to Support SFBBO and Birds!

Donating office and field equipment is another way you can support SFBBO. Some top items on our wish list include emergency roadside kits, safety vests, spotting scopes, rubber muck boots, peat moss, laptop computers, hard drives, cardboard pet carriers (cat-sized), Hydrolab MiniSonde water quality equipment, GPS units, and 4-wheel drive vehicles. For a full list, please visit our website at [www.sfbbo.org](http://www.sfbbo.org) or check out our Amazon.com Wish List.

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*The San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation dedicated to the conservation of birds and their habitats through science and outreach.*

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## Bird Banding Program Year in Review

The Coyote Creek Field Station is our year-round bird banding station located on one of the largest remaining riparian tracts in the South Bay. At SFBBO, we band birds to study the seasonal and long-term population patterns of migratory and year-round resident birds. Banding allows us to track individuals, which is important in determining survival, migratory turnover rates, and longevity. Additionally, banding birds allows us to examine how species have responded to the riparian restoration at the Coyote Creek Field Station.

The best part of CCFS is the birds! In 2012, we processed a total of 3,229 birds of 56 species at CCFS; 1,594 were newly banded, and 1,635 were recaptures. Nets were open on 143 days (39% of the year), with our volunteers donating 3,205 hours of their time. The species that we captured the most in 2012 were Song Sparrow (825), Common Yellowthroat (319), Hermit Thrush (249), Golden-crowned Sparrow (206), and Bushtit (205). Over the entire year, we caught only a single individual of the following species: Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Brown-headed Cowbird, Chipping Sparrow, Cooper's Hawk, Northern Flicker Intergrade, Marsh Wren, Nashville Warbler, Oregon Junco, Red-shafted Flicker, Varied Thrush, Violet-green Swallow, and a hybrid White-crowned x Golden-crowned Sparrow. CCFS is staffed by Josh Scullen, our Field Station Manager, and more than 25 dedicated volunteers. We appreciate all of our volunteers and their efforts last year. Thank you for helping ensure a thriving avian community around our banding station.

To become a volunteer in SFBBO's bird banding program at the Coyote Creek Field Station, please visit [www.sfbbo.org](http://www.sfbbo.org) or contact Outreach and Membership Coordinator Kristin Butler at 408.946.6548 or [kbutler@sfbbo.org](mailto:kbutler@sfbbo.org).



THIS CHIPPING SPARROW was a rare capture at our Coyote Creek Field Station in 2012.



THIS NASHVILLE WARBLER was an uncommon capture at our Coyote Creek Field Station in 2012.