

# BAY BIRD REVIEW

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



SAN FRANCISCO BAY  
BIRD OBSERVATORY

## Director's Message

Winter is an exciting time for birds throughout the San Francisco Bay Estuary, and is one of the busiest times of year for those of us who study the waterbirds who use the estuary as overwintering grounds or as a migratory stopover. It's also the time of year when SFBBO's staff take the opportunity to analyze the data collected during the previous year's research, and to share this information with our members, partners, and funders to shape bird and habitat conservation around the Bay.

In this issue of the *Bay Bird Review*, we'll describe for you the highlights from several of our 2014 science and outreach programs, and we will give you a preview of the directions these programs will take in 2015. We'll also share the exciting news of several new staff transitions, so please make sure to check out pages 2 and 8 for all the news.

This time each year we also take the opportunity to highlight some of our most dedicated volunteers and thank them for the time and energy they have devoted to working with SFBBO—see page 3 for these volunteer highlights. Thanks to each of these individuals, and to all of our volunteers, for their hard work in assisting SFBBO in enhancing bird habitat and improving avian conservation around the Bay!

By Cat Burns, SFBBO Executive Director



WESTERN BURROWING OWL.

PHOTO BY SRIDATTA CHEGU

## Science Report

### SFBBO Habitats Program Launches Two New Projects!

In January 2015, SFBBO's Habitats Program received contracts totaling over \$350,000 to begin work on two exciting new projects. The first is a two-year endeavor with Ducks Unlimited to begin habitat restoration of a large tidal marsh-upland transition zone area at Bair Island (near Redwood Shores). This \$175,000 project will focus on restoring a diverse set of native plants—approximately 30 species may be used—at the Bay's margin to provide important habitat for rare species like the Ridgway's Rail and salt marsh harvest mouse, and for other species who rely on marsh-upland transitional habitat. SFBBO Senior Ecologist David Thomson and Ecologist Aidona Kakouros have recently begun work on this exciting new project, which grew from earlier pilot studies that SFBBO carried out at the site.

The second project focuses on Western Burrowing Owl habitat enhancement at Warm Springs (in the south-eastern area of San Francisco Bay), with a five-

year contract totaling \$178,000 from the Santa Clara Valley Habitat Agency. This work will be carried out in close partnership with the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge. The approaches at Warm Springs include increased monitoring efforts in the spring and summer to better document changes in the existing owl population, maintenance of short vegetation in nesting areas, habitat enhancements designed to boost prey availability for owls including construction of vegetated islands and rock piles, and predator management. SFBBO looks forward to helping Burrowing Owls recover in the South Bay, and will be reaching out to our volunteers with opportunities to help us in habitat enhancement tasks and owl surveys soon—stay tuned!

With these and other new projects on the horizon, 2015 is sure to be an exciting year for SFBBO's Habitats Program. We will keep you posted.

By Cat Burns, SFBBO Executive Director

## A Time for Transition

After two and a half wonderful years with SFBBO, I will be leaving the organization in a few weeks to take a new position with The Nature Conservancy's California Chapter working toward state-wide migratory bird and freshwater conservation. As I have related to many of you in our recent correspondence, I have truly loved working at SFBBO, in large part due to the wonderful opportunities I've had to interact with our members, volunteers and partners, who have shared with me their passion for birds. I have also been inspired by the dedication and tireless enthusiasm of SFBBO's staff and Board of Directors, without which the organization's work would simply not be possible, and by the strong impacts of this relatively small group on bird and habitat conservation.

Although my time with SFBBO has been brief, it has been an eventful and very positive period of growth for the organization that I feel privileged to have been a part of. With the largest annual budget in over 10 years approved for 2015, and increases of nearly 20% in the financial support we've received from our donors over the past two years, SFBBO is in a great place right now, and I'm confident that the organization will continue to thrive. I will miss being a part of the excitement, but I can't wait to see what 2015 has in store for SFBBO!

Thank you so much for taking me into the SFBBO family, and for allowing me to lead this wonderful organization. After I step down as Executive Director, I will remain available as a resource to ensure a smooth transition to the new director. I will also continue to be one of



CAT BURNS

the organization's most avid members, cheerleaders and supporters. I look forward to seeing you at SFBBO events in the future. Thank you so much for your ongoing support of SFBBO as we embark on a new phase of our journey!

.....  
*Cat Burns, Ph.D.*

*SFBBO Executive Director*

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## Message from the SFBBO Board Co-Chairs

Our Executive Director Catherine Burns is leaving SFBBO at the end of February to take a job with the Nature Conservancy and we are sorry to see her go. Catherine Burns, known by her friends and colleagues as Cat, has been an enormous asset to all aspects of the organization—helping us to advance our science, grow our outreach, and increase our financial base. Whether you are an SFBBO member, staff, volunteer or a collaborating partner, Cat's intelligence, devotion to conservation and SFBBO's mission, and genuine enthusiasm made working with her a thoroughly enjoyable experience.

Cat took the reins from our previous executive director, Jill Demers, in 2012 and quickly became a strong leader representing SFBBO as part of the wider Bay Area conservation community. Cat gave the same high level of dedication and effort to the administration and operations of the organization that she did to our science and outreach. During her tenure, she helped put SFBBO in a strong and balanced financial situation, expanding our contracts with federal, state and local land management agencies and increasing our fundraising. She also supported the growth of our outreach program and was passionate about our citizen science initiatives.

The opportunities that Cat created for SFBBO are a testament not only to her strength in leadership, but also to her devotion to wildlife conservation. She was always available to participate in challenging field projects, offered support and guidance to SFBBO staff, pitched innovative ideas, and celebrated our success. Cat was also supportive of our fledgling Habitats Program and supported staff through some challeng-



BRIAN FULFROST



LYNNE TRULIO

ing times, especially drought conditions that made restoration projects difficult, and this program is now going strong!

It has been a pleasure for us to work with Cat as board members, and we believe she created a positive environment for the staff and the board through her clear thinking, compassion, and hard work. She has been a great spokesperson for us and, fittingly, thanks to a partnership with Facebook, trail users will soon be able to see her video along the Bay Trail explaining SFBBO's work in the South Bay. Cat will be greatly missed (and hard to replace), but we wish her the best in her future efforts and want her to know she will always be part of our community!

.....  
*Brian Fulfro, Board Chair and Lynne Trulio, Board Chair*

# Volunteering...Is for the Birds!

For more than 30 years, SFBBO has relied on our volunteers to help us conduct research and outreach activities to conserve birds and their habitats. Every year, they donate thousands of hours to help us conduct surveys, band birds, enter data, restore habitat, repair nets, work in the office, and share information about our work with the public. Thank you to all of our current volunteers for their help. We'd also like to say a special thank you to the following volunteers who have helped us in our science, outreach and fundraising initiatives.



**Bill Rose** volunteers in our Colonial Waterbird Program as a monitor, mentor, scout, and ambassador. He carries out data entry, compiles case histories, and leads trips for our CFC.



**John Robeson** volunteers in our Colonial Waterbird Program and Plover Program. He is a monitor, mentor, scout, and ambassador and also conducts data entry and compiles case histories.



**Jean Halford** is a volunteer in our Colonial Waterbird Program. She also volunteers in the office and helps us raise money by managing our monthly membership renewal mailings.



**Martha Castillo** is a volunteer at our Coyote Creek Field Station. She's an ambassador, gives banding demonstrations, and makes and donates felt birds for SFBBO to teach families about birds.



**Tom Stewart** is an SFBBO Board member and volunteer at our Coyote Creek Field Station and in our Colonial Waterbird Program. He's an ambassador, gives banding demonstrations, and leads a fundraising team for our CFC.



**Lynne Trulio** is a Board member and serves on our Science Committee and Science Advisory Board. She also has led bird watching trips for our CFC.

## Volunteer Appreciation Party

This spring, we'll host 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 our observing, monitoring, counting, capturing, and banding birds or our community outreach and fundraising activities without our volunteers. Please come and celebrate all of our shared achievements with staff and fellow volunteers, and enjoy good food, great people, and a bird walk to visit with our local birds. The optional bird walk begins at 5:30 pm and the event begins at 6:30 pm. Date TBA, please stay tuned for more details.

## 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 and teach the community about your colony.

**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.

### Habitats Program

Help us with activities like weeding, planting, and surveying to support our tidal marshes and create habitat for the Western Burrowing Owl.

### Governance

Serve on our Board, Science Advisory Board, or on our fundraising or other committees.

### 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 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 Communications Director Kristin Butler at 408.946.6548 or [kbutler@sfbbo.org](mailto:kbutler@sfbbo.org).

# 2014 Colonial Waterbird Monitoring Program—Year in Review

SFBBO’s Colonial Waterbird Program combines scientific research with community outreach to build awareness and action to benefit birds. In 2014, SFBBO continued to grow this versatile program and expand the many ways it accomplishes conservation of birds and their habitats.

## Science

Colonial waterbirds are important constituents of aquatic habitats and are biological indicators of environmental health and function. For more than 30 years, citizen scientists in this program have worked with staff biologists to monitor nesting colonies throughout the Bay Area.

Birds studied through this program include California Gulls, Forster’s Terns, Caspian Terns, California Least

Terns, Great Blue Herons, Great Egrets, Snowy Egrets, and Double-crested Cormorants. American Avocets, Black-necked Stilts, Black Skimmers, and Black-crowned Night Herons are also monitored when they’re seen nesting with the above species. In 2014, more than 50 volunteers and a few partners and staff spent one or two mornings a month from February through August monitoring 70 active waterbird colonies using observational methods. Fourteen volunteers also scouted 15 former or potential colonies. Please see the table below for a summary of results.

Each year SFBBO biologists and citizen scientists also conduct walkthrough counts of California Gull colonies in the South Bay. Over the last 30 years, SFBBO has documented a nearly exponential increase in the number of California

Gulls nesting in the San Francisco Bay, from fewer than 20 gulls in 1980 to tens of thousands today. In 2014, we documented 10 active California Gull colonies in the South San Francisco Bay that ranged in size from a low of 80 individuals to a high of 14,414. Altogether, there were an estimated 53,024 California Gulls breeding in the South Bay in 2014, a small decrease (<1%) from the 53,458 estimated in 2013.

In addition, this year SFBBO expanded the role citizen scientists played in our research. In 2014, six citizen scientists served as mentors in the field for new volunteers, including our first high school group. Five citizen scientists were also trained to enter data into SFBBO’s waterbird database this fall. In addition, two citizen scientists spent one day a week in the office with SFBBO compiling case history information that will help orient new volunteers, streamline the training process, and provide information for future reports and presentations to the public.

## Outreach

In 2013, SFBBO piloted a new Ambassador Program to give our citizen scientists the opportunity to share their knowledge and passion about birds with the community. In 2014, this program expanded to include ambassadors leading bird viewings in Livermore, Alameda, and Newark, educating employees at the Seaport Center business park in Redwood City, and helping SFBBO share data about their colonies with land managers and conservation organizations, including the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society, the Sequoia Audubon Society, the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, and park managers at Lake Cunningham Regional Park.

Ambassadors also participated in several other SFBBO outreach events—including our first Family Science Night and Women in Science Day—and staffed an SFBBO table at various events, including the Fremont Nature Center Open House, Wildlife Center of Silicon Valley’s Walk on the Wildside, and an

## 2014 Colonial Waterbird Program Season Highlights

Below are the combined peak nest counts for colonies monitored by SFBBO, detailed by species. The colony with the highest seasonal peak nest count is identified in the right-hand column.

### GULL/TERN (GUTE) PROGRAM

Bird Species	Combined Peak Nest	Highest Seasonal Peak
American Avocet	184	112 at Hayward Shoreline
Black-necked Stilt	34	30 at New Chicago Marsh
Caspian Tern	96	75 at Coyote Hills
Forster’s Tern	663	280 at Hayward Shoreline
Black Skimmer	12	11 at Hayward Shoreline
California Gull	26,563	7,207 at Alviso A19/A10/A11/A14

### HERON/EGRET (HEP) PROGRAM

Bird Species	Combined Peak Nest	Highest Seasonal Peak
Double-crested Cormorant	784	164 at Steinberger Slough
Great Blue Heron	183	31 at Ovation Court
Great Egret	128	36 at Shorebird Way
Snowy Egret	192	74 at Lakeshore Park
Black-crowned Night Heron	114	33 at Lakeshore Park

Total Colonial Waterbird Volunteer Hours in 2014: 904 hours and 59 volunteers

SFBBO information table at the Patagonia Store in Palo Alto. In addition, members of this team helped SFBBO raise money for our science and outreach programs. One volunteer organized our monthly membership renewal mailings, and others took leadership roles in our California Fall Challenge by serving as judges for our Click Off photo contest, leading guided birding trips, donating silent auction prizes, and organizing fundraising teams.

### 2015 Season

We are excited to announce that this past fall SFBBO received two grants—from the Oiled Wildlife Care Network and Patagonia—to help us continue to grow this important program. Volunteer opportunities in the Colonial Waterbird Programs are open to adults, high school



SNOWY EGRETS.

PHOTO BY ANNE CONLON

groups (chaperoned by an adult), college students, and families. For more information or to see the full 2014 report, please visit our website at [www.sfbbo.org](http://www.sfbbo.org)

or contact [outreach@sfbbo.org](mailto:outreach@sfbbo.org).

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*Kristin Butler, MS, Outreach and Communications Director*

### Science Report

## SFBBO Managed Pond Waterbird Research—2014 Season Highlights

Since 2005, SFBBO has conducted waterbird surveys and brine (water) quality sampling at salt and managed ponds that ring the Bay in San Mateo, Santa Clara, and Alameda counties. We conduct this research for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project, and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, with funding provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The purpose of our study is to learn how regional conservation, management, and habitat restoration efforts that are being conducted through the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project are impacting the birds that use these ponds.

Initially, SFBBO surveyed 22 ponds, while the U.S. Geological Study surveyed the remaining 60. However, starting in January 2014, SFBBO took over conducting surveys on all the ponds, and hired new waterbird staff and interns to carry out the study.

During our September 2013 – August 2014 annual reporting period, we recorded 946,728 waterbird sightings of 75 species. Our biologists examined differences in species richness and abundance, and in the behavior of

waterbirds observed within and between pond complexes. We also grouped the species into guilds based on how and what the birds ate.

### Results

We observed that bird abundance patterns were patchy and seemed to be determined by the salinity of the ponds and the availability of roosting and nesting habitat. For example, we often observed Eared Grebes, phalaropes, and shorebirds foraging in moderate to high salinity ponds where brine shrimp and brine flies are available, and we rarely found fish-eating birds feeding in high salinity ponds where fish cannot live.

Also, we observed high proportions of birds using islands, levees, and man-made structures such as blinds and fence posts as roosting or nesting habitat, so we concluded that these features may also be quite important in explaining some guild distributions.

As the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project progresses, we suggest that managers preserve ponds at a variety of salinity levels and water levels, and give special consideration to birds that prefer medium to high salinity ponds (such as

phalaropes and Eared Grebes) because the project has already reduced this type of habitat. We also suggest that managers continue to create islands or undisturbed levees to provide ample nesting and roosting habitat.

In 2015, scientists at the U.S. Geological Survey will analyze the 10 years of data that we and they have collected to assess changes in waterbird communities during the past decade, and to make more detailed recommendations for pond management and restoration in the South Bay.

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*Kristin Butler, MS, Outreach and Communications Director*



DUNLINS.

PHOTO BY RICHARD CASSERLEY

## "Look Up Campaign"—Upcoming Events

### Bird Walks

Learn about butterflies, wildflowers, and birds on these guided walks.

DATE & TIME	TITLE	SITE	COST
Saturday, March 15 10 am - 1 pm	Butterflies with a Board Member	Alum Rock Park, San Jose	\$10 <small>(members free)</small>
Saturday, March 28 10:30 - 11:30 am	Wildflower Day	Ulistac Nature Area, Santa Clara	Free
Wednesday, April 22 9:30 am - 12 pm	Earth Day Birding	Picchetti Winery, Cupertino	\$10 <small>(members free)</small>

### Birds in Your Neighborhood

Join SFBBO citizen scientists, learn about local birds, and have hands-on fun.

DATE & TIME	TITLE	SITE	COST
Sunday, April 19 10 am - 3 pm	Earth Day Egrets and Herons	City of Fremont Nature Center/Lake Elizabeth	Free
Saturday, June 6 11:30 am - 1:30 pm	Alameda's Egrets	Bay Farm Island Library, Alameda	Free
Wednesday, June 17 10 am - 12 pm	Hérons and Egrets	Lakeshore Park, Newark	Free

### Banding

Join the Young Audubon group from the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society in a bird banding demo for families.

DATE & TIME	TITLE	SITE	COST
Saturday, April 25 8 - 10 am	Young Audubon Banding Demo	The Coyote Creek Field Station, Milpitas	\$25 per family
Saturday, August 15 8 - 10 am	Young Audubon Banding Demo	The Coyote Creek Field Station, Milpitas	\$25 per family

### Upcoming Birds in Your Neighborhood Events

We're always adding new events—check [www.sfbbo.org](http://www.sfbbo.org) for dates of events near you.

Great Blue Heron Event	Sycamore Grove Park, Livermore
Forster's Tern, American Avocet, and Black-necked Stilt Event	Pond A16, Alviso
Great Blue Heron and Double-crested Cormorant Event	Lake Merced, San Francisco
Great Blue Heron Event	Coyote Ranch Road, San Jose
Great Egret and Snowy Egret Event	Ruus Park, Hayward
Great Blue Heron Event	Vasona Park, Los Gatos
Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, and Double-Crested Cormorant Event	Shadow Cliffs, Pleasanton

For more information or to register for events visit [www.sfbbo.org](http://www.sfbbo.org).

## Workshops for Birder and Naturalist—2015

### OWLS

Tuesday, March 24th (instruction),  
6:30 - 9:00 pm

Thursday, March 26th (instruction),  
6:30 - 9:00 pm

Saturday, March 28th (field trip)

Owls have a loyal following, even among people who generally don't pay much attention to birds. Why are owls so special? This workshop will address identification, habitat and how to find local owls. You'll also learn more about owls and their fascinating ecology and behavior. We will study their sounds and get participants ready to find owls in the field. We are excited to get out and see these amazing creatures! Birding Level: Beginner and up. The field trip will require light to moderate hiking. \$150 fee.

### MIGRATION

Tuesday, April 28th (instruction),  
6:30 - 9:00 pm

Thursday, April 30th (instruction & field trip), 6:30 - 9:00 pm

Sunday, May 3rd (field trip)

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. We 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.



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

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



*Thank you new and returning members and generous donors October–December, 2014*

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And thank you to the 164 people who gave up to \$59 each.

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## Staff Migrations



### *Congratulations to Waterbird Program Director Natalie Washburn!*

This January, Natalie was promoted to Waterbird Program Director from Waterbird Program Coordinator. She will continue to manage the Waterbird Program, including our managed pond study, gull and corvid research, and our Avian Disease Prevention Program, and will take over as lead biologist for the Colonial Waterbird Program (co-leading with Outreach and Communications Director Kristin Butler). Natalie will be taking on additional responsibilities for project management, partnership building, and writing proposals for new funding to advance SFBBO's waterbird research.



NATALIE WASHBURN

### *Congratulations to Waterbird Field Biologist Jason St. Pierre!*

As of January, Jason has been promoted to a full-time, permanent biologist position on our Waterbird Program team. Jason will continue to conduct surveys for our managed pond study, our gull and corvid abatement work at Newby Island Landfill, and our Avian Disease Prevention Program. Jason also will provide essential support for SFBBO's two waterbird program interns during 2015, serving as a mentor and trainer alongside Natalie.



JASON ST. PIERRE

### *Farewell to SFBBO Accountant Gail Richardson!*

In February, Gail will be retiring as Accountant at SFBBO. Gail joined the SFBBO team nearly eight years ago. During her tenure, she has been instrumental in developing more advanced accounting practices at SFBBO, including leading the transition to accrual basis accounting, authoring a guide to non-profit accounting that guides Board members in interpreting financial documents, and much more. Prior to joining our staff team, Gail was a volunteer at our Coyote Creek Field Station. Thank you, Gail, for all you've done for SFBBO. You will be missed!



GAIL RICHARDSON

### *SFBBO Welcomes New Accountant Marianne Bristol!*

Marianne has substantial experience working as an accountant in the corporate sector, including cost accounting experience which will be very valuable to SFBBO. In recent years, Marianne has taken some time off of work to spend more time with her children—during this time Marianne has remained active in the field of accounting by volunteering her time with a new nonprofit organization here in the Bay Area.



MARIANNE BRISTOL