

BAY BIRD REVIEW

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



SAN FRANCISCO BAY
BIRD OBSERVATORY

Director's Message

I am truly thrilled to have come on board as San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory's Executive Director this fall. In only a month I have found the organization to be a great fit with my interests and my previous experiences, and I have been inspired by the work we are all doing together.

As long as I can remember, I've been committed to contributing to conservation through sound scientific investigation. Prior to coming to SFBBO, I served as the Director of Science for the North Carolina Chapter of The Nature Conservancy where I led a team devoted to applying science to on-the-ground conservation challenges. Prior to my time with The Conservancy, I led scientific research to understand the impacts of climate and landscape changes, primarily habitat loss and alteration

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE *continued on page 2*



Black-necked Stilt by Scott Norton.



COMMON YELLOWTHROAT.

PHOTO BY WILL SIGNAL

Science Report

Determining the Range of Common Yellowthroat Subspecies in San Francisco Bay

The San Francisco Common Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas sinuosa*), also called the Salt Marsh Common Yellowthroat, is an endemic songbird subspecies that breeds exclusively within tidal marsh, freshwater marsh, and riparian wetlands in the San Francisco Bay region. This subspecies has undergone substantial population declines over the past 150 years and is currently listed as a California Department of Fish and Game Bird Species of Special Concern.

The exact breeding area of the San Francisco Common Yellowthroat has not been delineated, and another Common Yellowthroat subspecies (*G. t. arizela*) breeds throughout most of California excluding the San Francisco Bay and thus surrounds the breeding range of the San Francisco Common Yellowthroat. Grinnell and Miller in 1944 drew the boundary between the two subspecies through Santa Clara County; however, this boundary apparently was not based on identification of individual Common Yellowthroats within the boundary zone.

Grinnell and Miller collected individual breeding San Francisco Common Yellowthroats in northern Santa Clara County (including Palo Alto, San Jose, and Santa Clara) whereas *G. t. arizela* was only collected breeding as far north as Monterey and San Benito counties. Consequently, while Common Yellowthroats breed in distinct areas of Santa Clara County, the subspecies of Common Yellowthroats breeding beyond the habitats that ring the San Francisco Bay is unknown. Both subspecies overlap in some aspects of coloration and morphometric measurements (e.g., wing and tail length). To separate these subspecies, we captured individuals and used a statistical model to attempt to classify individuals to subspecies using their morphometric measurements.

In the field, we captured a total of 89 male Common Yellowthroats at sites in Alameda, Santa Clara, and San Benito counties. We developed our model using birds captured within locations where

SCIENCE REPORT *continued on page 3*

in urban landscapes, first as a student and ultimately as a faculty member of Wildlife Ecology at the University of Maine. I have always valued working with volunteers (i.e. citizen-scientists), and much of my research has involved close-knit teams of scientists, managers and volunteers. I am delighted to find myself part of an organization that has always been dedicated to citizen-science and teamwork. The strength of SFBBO's science was a large part of what attracted me to the organization, and I have not been disappointed!

I am excited about what the coming months and years will bring for SFBBO, and I could not be happier with the community of volunteers, staff members and Board of Directors that come together to make SFBBO an incredibly strong voice in avian science and conservation in the Bay Area. In the coming months I will be focusing on ensuring that our staff remain energetic and focused as this transition period comes to a close, on strengthening current partnerships and forging new ones, and on working with the rest of the staff to build on SFBBO's strong scientific programs. We will also be focused on identifying new ways to grow SFBBO's outreach and membership programs and to more broadly communicate with others about the important work that SFBBO does. It promises to be an exciting year!

I was fortunate to have the chance to meet many of you during the California Fall Challenge and Annual Meeting, and greatly enjoyed our conversations. There are still many of you that I have not yet met, but hope to meet soon. Please feel free to drop into the office to say hello, or call to set up a time to talk or get together. Thank you for all that you do for SFBBO! Your support helps us grow the organization and shape the future of avian conservation in the Bay area, and we could not do it without you.

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

Staff Migrations

Welcome Catherine Burns

The Bird Observatory's new Executive Director is **Catherine Burns, Ph.D.** Cat has a B.S. in Biology from Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, and a Ph.D. in Ecology & Evolutionary Biology from Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut. Her Ph.D. research focused on understanding the impacts of habitat loss and habitat alteration on wildlife populations in New England. Prior to coming to the Bird Observatory as Executive Director in 2012, Cat served on the Wildlife Ecology faculty at the University of Maine, and most recently was the Director of Science at The Nature Conservancy in North Carolina. Throughout her career, Cat's interests have focused on applying science to achieve wildlife conservation in a rapidly changing world. This has included conservation work focused primarily on birds and mammals in several areas of the United States, South Africa, Belize and Australia. Cat looks forward to leading the Bird Observatory's programs in new directions to help fulfill our mission of using science to conserve birds in the San Francisco Bay Area and beyond.



Catherine Burns, Ph.D., Executive Director

Welcome Kristin Butler

Kristin Butler is SFBBO's new Outreach and Membership Coordinator. Kristin is a communications specialist with experience developing stories and managing public relations and fundraising initiatives for nonprofits and the media. Before joining the Bird Observatory, Kristin worked for several conservation and youth serving organizations, including Earthjustice, Girls Inc., and the East Bay Regional Park District. Before that, she was an environmental reporter for the Argus newspaper in Fremont and covered Bay Area issues, including endangered species, habitat loss, and wetlands regulation. She has a B.A. in Political Science from Whitman College, and an M.S. in Mass Communications from San Jose State University.



Kristin Butler, Outreach and Membership Coordinator

Farewell to Caitlin Robinson-Nilsen

We say good by to Waterbird Program Director **Caitlin Robinson-Nilsen** and send our congratulations to Caitlin and her husband Christian on the birth of their son Leif Alexander Nilsen on August 4th. Caitlin started with SFBBO in 2005 as a field biologist and later earned a Masters of Science at San Jose State University while researching the federally threatened Western Snowy Plover. Through her leadership, SFBBO greatly expanded our Snowy Plover Recovery Program and our collaborations with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and California Department of Fish and Game. We thank Caitlin for her many contributions and wish her and her family the best.



Caitlin Robinson-Nilsen and Leif Alexander Nilsen

Farewell to Sandy Moore

We thank **Sandy Moore**, our volunteer Membership Coordinator, for her seven years of volunteerism at SFBBO. Sandy recently retired from her volunteer position, and we extend our deepest thanks for her dedication to SFBBO and our members. We will miss seeing her smiling face every Wednesday. Thank you Sandy for your continued dedication, support and contributions to SFBBO!



Sandy Moore

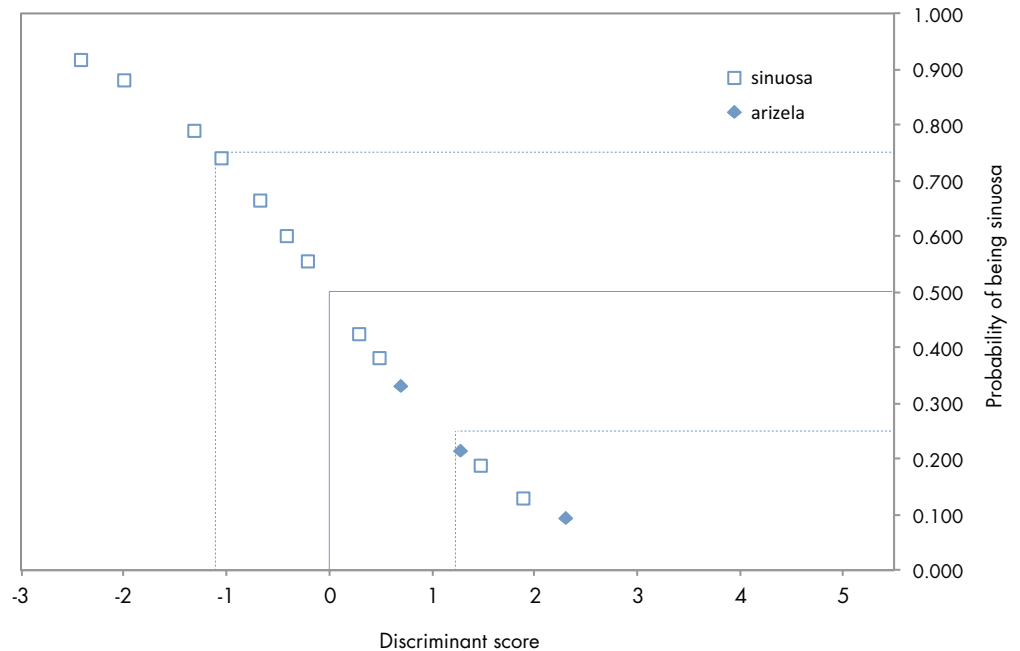
either the San Francisco Common Yellowthroat (*G. t. sinuosa*) or *G. t. arizela* are known to breed. We determined that tail length, the difference between the longest primary and primary 9 (hereafter P-P₉), and the difference between the longest primary and primary 5 (hereafter P-P₅) best separated the subspecies of Common Yellowthroats. We then tested this model, and when we excluded any bird with less than a 75% chance of being correctly classified, 100% of *G. t. arizela* (3 of 3) and 75% of *G. t. sinuosa* (6 of 8) were correctly classified (Figure 1).

When we applied this function to 40 male Common Yellowthroats of unknown subspecies status, and excluded any bird with less than a 75% chance of being correctly classified, 17 (43%) birds were not classified. Of the remaining 23 birds, we classified 13 (57%) as *G. t. sinuosa* and 10 (43%) as *G. t. arizela*. Twelve of the 13 individuals classified as *G. t. sinuosa* were within the *G. t. sinuosa* boundary as defined by Grinnell and Miller while 1 individual that was classified as *G. t. sinuosa* was captured at Calero Reservoir, south of the *G. t. sinuosa* boundary defined by Grinnell and Miller. Of the 10 individuals classified as *G. t. arizela*, 6 were found within Grinnell and Miller's *G. t. sinuosa* range and 4 were captured south of this boundary.

Based on our analysis, we assume that San Francisco Common Yellowthroat (*G. t. sinuosa*) breeding range includes the tidal and freshwater wetlands north of the San Jose airport. However, it remains unclear which subspecies of Common Yellowthroats breeds in central Santa Clara County, including Calero Creek, Coyote Creek between Metcalf Road and US-101, and Guadalupe River between Blossom Hill Road and Almaden Expressway. We assume the Common Yellowthroats breeding in the Gilroy area (Llagas Creek) are *G. t. arizela*. Increasing our sample size may increase the accuracy of the model and reduce the number of birds excluded because of low probability of classification.

We acknowledge that subspecies concepts have long been debated and recent advances in molecular genetics have led to further debate on the role of genetics in defining a subspecies. In

Figure 1. The probability of being *G. t. sinuosa* in relation to the discriminant scores based on the length of the tail, $P - P_9$, and $P - P_5$ of male Common Yellowthroats captured in Alameda, Santa Clara, San Benito counties, 2012. Lines indicate the cutoff points for discriminant scores of -1.10 and 1.10 if the probability of being *sinuosa* were set to 0.75 and 0.25, respectively. This leaves 7 of the birds not classified and 82% of individuals outside of the cutoff points correctly classified.



birds, the designation of subspecies as it has been done in the past (e.g., AOU 1957) is not often supported by genetic distinctness and recently studies report that only 3–36% of designated subspecies are genetically distinct. This lack of distinctness is most pronounced among continental North American and Eurasian subspecies. It is important to note that despite this controversy, subspecies designation has been widely accepted as an important conservation designation.

The California Department of Fish and Game uses subspecies when prioritizing birds in the *California Bird Species of Special Concern*, and 43% of birds on the federal Threatened and Endangered list are subspecies.

We thank the Santa Clara Valley Water District, H.T. Harvey & Associates, and our SFBBO members and volunteers for support and field assistance.

Jill Demers, Former SFBBO Executive Director, and Josh Scullen, SFBBO Biologist



Biologist Josh Scullen examines Common Yellowthroat museum specimens.

Revegetating Warm Springs for Burrowing Owls

The Western Burrowing Owl (*Athene cunicularia hypugaea*) is a California species of Special Concern whose populations have declined from habitat loss and degradation. Western Burrowing Owl nesting habitat is characterized by short, sparse vegetation and the existence of underground burrows. Burrowing Owls have been observed to nest and forage in the Warm Spring Seasonal Wetland Unit (Warm Springs) of the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Refuge (Refuge).

The site is managed to provide habitat to several endangered and special status species. The Warm Springs site is dominated by alkali grassland and seasonal wetlands. Vegetation height at the Warm Springs site is low, except in the highly weedy patches. Nonnative weed management at this site mainly focuses on the removal of invasive nonnative forbs such as Black Mustard and Italian Thistle. These plant species propagate readily on areas with sparse grass coverage or disturbed sites and can establish dense stands of stalks taller than one meter. The ample seeds produced by these stands can further disperse in nearby areas and significantly alter plant community dynamics and wildlife habitat.

The Refuge has attempted to revegetate several highly weedy areas of Warm Springs, with varying results. In one 0.8 acre site, revegetation efforts have been unsuccessful. This area is one of the weedier places in the Warm Springs Unit colonized by nonnative weeds. Since the area is in close proximity to burrows that could potentially be used by Burrowing Owls, there are concerns that further habitat deterioration could occur from weed invasion. Due to the physical properties and the management concerns, this site is an ideal location to investigate the effectiveness of different revegetation methods to establish a plant community dominated by native species. The results of this experimental approach will be relevant to the future restoration projects that will take place in the Pacific Commons Unit, a 444-acre parcel adjacent to the Warm Springs Unit that the Refuge started managing in

2012. In fall 2012, The San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory is beginning a pilot experimental study to compare experimentally the effectiveness of different mechanical soil treatments, amendment applications and plant propagation techniques to the establishment of native vegetation cover. Successful establishment of native plants will suppress colonization by nonnative invasive weeds and thus will contribute to habitat enhancement for Burrowing Owls and other species.

The study involves the set up and monitoring of experimental plots in a 0.8-acre area in the Warm Springs Unit. We will analyze soil samples to acquire a rough profile of soil attributes that could potentially be used as a reference in future projects employing the same treatments on different sites. To test the effects of soil preparation methods and topical application of compost, we will establish 30 plots measuring 5x7 meters with six treatments assigned following a split-plot design. Preparation of the plots will involve the use of machinery and manual preparation. Prior to the application of the treatments, we will collect

baseline vegetation data. After plot installation the study site will be fenced using a portable electric fence to exclude cattle grazing for the first year only.

We will collect seeds from plant species on the Warm Springs site to use for seeding experimental plots and for plant production in the nursery. The produced plants will be planted in fall 2013 within the plots. Seeds that cannot be collected on site will be purchased by a commercial vendor specializing in native seed for restoration projects. A seed mix of native grasses and forbs will be broadcasted on the prepared plots, and then we will monitor the results.

This pilot study will provide useful information on choosing efficient revegetation methods for future restoration projects, produce container stock using local genetic material to further enhance the habitat quality of the target area after the end of the experiment, and hopefully result in high quality Burrowing Owl nesting habitat. We look forward to sharing the results of this pilot study with you in future issues of the *Bay Bird Review!*

.....
By Aidona O. Kakouros, SFBBO Ecologist



Burrowing Owl by Eleanor Briccetti.

The 2012 Annual Membership Meeting

The 31st Annual Membership Meeting was held this year at the South Bay Yacht Club in Alviso, a wonderful and historic setting for our membership to gather and celebrate the successes of 2012. Richard Jeffers and Lisa Myers led the morning bird walks at Alviso Marina, and afterwards the membership enjoyed brunch at the Yacht Club. The Annual Meeting is the time when SFBBO performs business functions, such as informing members about the state of the organization and reporting the financial status. Board Chair Troy Rahmig called the meeting to order, gave a general overview of the day's events, and presented the membership business. New Board of Directors Treasurer Anne Hepburn and Executive Director Catherine Burns were formally voted onto the Board by the membership. Troy then turned it over to Outgoing Executive Director Jill Bluso Demers. Jill presented the "State of the Observatory" address and gave an eloquent goodbye



PHOTO BY PATTY MCGANN

Membership meeting attendees.

presentation to SFBBO's staff, members, volunteers and partners. We also had the chance to meet new Executive Director Catherine Burns and learn about her background and vision for SFBBO.

This meeting was a time to reflect on the past and look forward to the future under new leadership. As we enter into our 32nd year, we have never been more excited about the prospects for SFBBO

to expand and become more involved with avian research and education in the Bay Area and beyond. We look forward to seeing our members often in the next year, and expect that we will have much to celebrate in the future.

.....
*By Shannon McMannon,
SFBBO Board of Directors Secretary*

Message from the Chair

After several months of hard work by the Board of Directors and Executive Search Committee, I am pleased to share with you that Catherine Burns, Ph.D. is the new Executive Director of SFBBO!

Cat brings a well-rounded background in conservation science, citizen-science initiatives, and nonprofit management to SFBBO. The Board is very excited about SFBBO's future and the leadership that will be in place to guide this organization. We value SFBBO's strong tradition of creative science, long-term monitoring, and utilizing our volunteers to effectively and efficiently contribute to on-the-ground conservation. We are confident that Cat will help us achieve our mission. Cat began her tenure as Executive Director on October 8th.

The Board would like to thank outgoing Executive Director Jill Bluso Demers for her dedication and time at SFBBO. For more than four years Jill has created a strong foundation for the future and in her time as Executive Director has elevated SFBBO's presence in the South Bay.

Many of our members were able to meet Cat and say farewell to Jill at our Annual Meeting on October 28th at the South Bay Yacht Club in Alviso. The event was a fantastic way to celebrate Jill's time at SFBBO and to welcome Cat aboard. As we look towards SFBBO's bright future, I invite you to make



PHOTO BY PATTY MCGANN

Incoming Executive Director Catherine Burns, Ph.D., Outgoing Executive Director Jill Bluso Demers, and Board Chair Troy Rahmig.

a gift today to honor Jill's legacy and help Cat begin her work at SFBBO. With your investment in our future, we can ensure that the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory can continue our vision of sound science with our dynamic new leader.

Thank you for your continued support of SFBBO,
.....
By Troy Rahmig, SFBBO Board Chair



Northern Harrier.

PHOTO BY SUSAN TEEFY

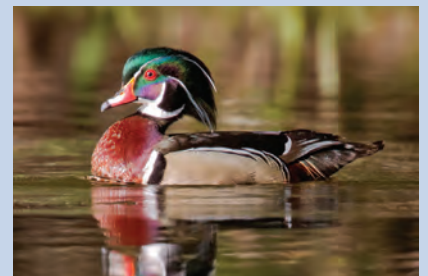
CALIFORNIA FALL CHALLENGE 2012

Thank you to our Sponsors and Donors!

The 2012 California Fall Challenge has come to a close, and we thank all who participated for making the Fall Challenge another success. Between September 15th and October 14th, over 100 people attended one of our 12 guided birding trips, led by some of the best birders and conservation scientists in our region. The Mewaldt Cup Bird-a-Thon fostered competition from around the state. This year, the Refugees (Mike Rogers, Mike Mammoser, Lea Crisp, and Francis Toldi) won the Mewaldt Cup with 163 species seen in San Mateo and Santa Clara County. We also hosted our first Coyote Creek Field Station Band-a-thon. During the Fall Challenge period, we banded 487 birds and raised funds to help support our year-round bird banding station. We thank all who participated or donated during our California Fall Challenge!

A Great Gift for the Birds
Why not give a Gift in Honor for the holidays this year 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. The card features this beautiful, full-color photograph of a Wood Duck by Conrad Tan.

Your donation will support our scientific research and monitoring projects that conserve birds and their habitats. All donations are tax deductible. Contact us at 408.946.6548 to tell us how many cards to send. Mail a check in the amount of your choice or make a secure online donation at www.sfbbo.org. Thank you for celebrating a loved one by conserving birds.



Mewaldt Cup winners Mike Mammoser, Lea Crisp, Francis Toldi and Mike Rogers.

MEWALDT CUP WINNERS

The Refugees: Lea Crisp, Mike Mammoser, Mike Rogers and Francis Toldi.

TOP FUNDRAISERS

Mike Mammoser, Lisa Myers, Robin Leong, Phil Gordon, Gina Barton, Sherry Hudson, Matthew Dodder, Jan Hintermeister, Tom Stewart, Robert Furrow

FALL CHALLENGE GUIDED TRIP LEADERS

Karen DeMello, Jill Demers, Matthew Dodder, Alvaro Jaramillo, Lisa Myers, Kay Partelow, Ryan Phillips, Bob Power, Troy Rahmig, Caitlin Robinson-Nilsen, Mike Rogers, Josh Scullen, Scott Terrill, and Denise Wight



A row of bird bags holds birds waiting to be banded at Coyote Creek Field Station during SFBBO's first Band-a-Thon.

PHOTO BY PATTY MCGANN

PHOTO BY JOSH SCULLEN

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



Thank you new and returning members, and generous donors, July - September 2012

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Sarane Bowen

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And thank you to the 30 people who gave up to \$40 each.

STILT SOCIETY

Jacqueline Deely, Eric Feuss and Rebecca Alex, Janet and Jay Hanson, Jan Hintermeister, Sheri Howe, Ed Lombard, Sandy and Steve Moore, Troy and Corina Rahmig, Jennifer Rycenga and Peggy Macres, Jane Such

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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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Message of Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving is the time of year to reflect on what we are thankful for. At SFBBO, we are thankful for YOU! Your support through gifts and volunteering enables us to continue our research and monitoring in the San Francisco Bay. These projects are crucial to the conservation of birds and management of healthy avian habitats. We are grateful for your continued support and dedication to SFBBO.



Solitary Sandpiper.

PHOTO BY MICHAEL MAMMOSE



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Calendar

BIRDING PLEASANTON WITH RICH CIMINO


January 6th, 2013 at 8:30 a.m.


SITE: MARILYN MURPHY KANE TRAIL,
PLEASANTON

We will bird the Marilyn Murphy Kane Trail system, which includes a black walnut forest, mitigation pond, and grass parkway habitat. We'll bird our way about one-half mile past waterbird and waterfowl ponds and a lush riparian habitat restoration site, finishing at a large agriculture field used by several local bird species. This site is a count area of the Eastern Alameda County Christmas Bird Count and yields a good mix of ducks, geese, sandpipers, herons, egrets, raptors, woodland species and black birds. Level and easy walking, great for beginning birders.



SPECIAL EVENT

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

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

Workshops for the Birder and Naturalist – 2012

WITH: *Alvaro Jaramillo, SFBBO Senior Biologist*

SITE: *Sobrato Center for Nonprofits in Redwood Shores*

GULL WORKSHOP

Tuesday, January 29 and Thursday, January 31, 2013 (instruction)

Sunday, February 3, 2013 (field trip)

Gulls can be a challenge to identify; this workshop will help you understand the general concepts of gull identification to give you the confidence to go out there and give the local gulls a name (and age). Apart from identification, we will touch on topics such as human influence on gull distribution, the impact of gulls on other breeding birds, gull behavior, and migration. Birding Level: intermediate and up. A \$150 fee is required to attend this workshop.



SPARROWS—THE LITTLE BROWN JOBS

Tuesday, March 26 and Thursday, March 28, 2013 (instruction)

Sunday, March 31, 2013 (field trip)

Well-camouflaged and perfectly adapted to living 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. Birding Level: Beginner and up. A \$150 fee is required to attend this workshop.



Check your membership status, RSVP, or register for a workshop, at www.sfbbo.org, 408.946.6548, or kkendrick@sfbbo.org and we will be happy to assist you!