



# The Kite Call

## Ohlone Audubon Society, Inc.

*A chapter of the National Audubon Society*  
*Serving Southern & Eastern Alameda County CA*  
**Our Mission:** *To celebrate and protect birds and their habitats in*  
*Southern and Eastern Alameda County*  
[www.ohloneaudubon.org](http://www.ohloneaudubon.org)

## Membership Meetings

### Calendar

- Jan 4**     **FIELD TRIP**  
Solano Grasslands
- Jan 7**     **GENERAL MEETING**  
Via Zoom
- Jan 11**    **FIELD TRIP**  
Arrowhead Marsh
- Jan 25**    **FIELD TRIP**  
Livermore/Springtown
- Feb 2**     **FIELD TRIP**  
Shadow Cliffs RP
- Feb 1,2,3,4,5** —**FIELD TRIPS!!!!**  
Owling Garin Park
- Feb 4**     **GENERAL MEETING**  
Via Zoom



### ZOOM MEETING INSTRUCTIONS:

Welcome! You are invited to join a meeting: Ohlone Audubon Membership Meetings. After registering, you will receive a confirmation email about joining the meeting.

[https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZlzf-iupj4iGNwWOZRGoiFQxSQ-ANIL8dNP#/registration](https://us06web.zoom.us/join/https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZlzf-iupj4iGNwWOZRGoiFQxSQ-ANIL8dNP#/registration)



### 60 years of Conservation Science and Counting with Lishka Arata, Point Blue Communications Manager

**Date:** Tuesday, Jan 7, 2025 **Time:** 7:30 PM  
**via Zoom** (instructions below left)

Join Point Blue Communications Manager **Lishka Arata** to learn about what's happening with Point Blue Conservation Science as they near their 60th birthday! Lishka has been with the organization for 20 of those sixty years. She started as a bird banding intern then migrated through field biology and education to where she has now landed in conservation communications. She'll share an introductory overview of the California-based organization as well as ways you can get involved with the far-reaching, climate-smart work happening today. Learn more about Point Blue at [www.pointblue.org](http://www.pointblue.org) and follow them on Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, and X.

**Lishka Arata** graduated from Humboldt State University in 2003 with a B.S. in Biology and joined the Point Blue team in 2004 as a bird banding intern at the Palomarin Field Station in Bolinas, CA. She has worked as a field biologist in Point Blue's San Francisco Bay Tidal Marsh, Central Valley Riparian, and Northern Sierra Forest projects. Outside of her work with Point Blue, she has conducted Marbled Murrelet surveys in Southwest Oregon, Yellow-billed Cuckoo monitoring in Southeast Arizona, and plant (tropical liverwort) research on the Island of Trinidad. In 2007 she migrated from field biology to conservation education to disseminate Point Blue's science to various audiences and help inspire the current and next generation of conservation scientists and environmental stewards. And in 2017 she took a natural step towards the communications aspect of conservation in hopes to evolve and increase her positive impact towards achieving Point Blue's mission.



### Bay Area Wildlife: An Irreverent Guide By Jeff Miller

**Date:** Tuesday, February 4, 2025  
**Time:** 7:30PM **Via Zoom** (instructions to the left)

*February Meeting (continued)*

**Bay Area Wildlife: An Irreverent Guide** was published by Heyday books on November 12, 2024. This quirky and entertaining wildlife guide to the greater San Francisco Bay Area invites readers to connect with and conserve local species. Featuring over 100 native creatures, spanning mammalian, marine, piscine, avian, amphibian and invertebrate species, this informative primer is a treasure map for regional wildlife that enlists readers to join the ranks of the world's wildlife defenders. Learn about the Bay Area's furred, feathered, and fork-tongued neighbors—from "screaming death parrots" (aka Peregrine falcons) to "bad-ass Looney Tunes velociraptors" (Roadrunners). The book's colorful descriptions offer a compilation of each species' natural history and fun facts, tips on when and where to find watchable wildlife, and notes on each animal's conservation status. The book features watercolor illustrations by Obi Kaufmann (author and artist of the bestselling *The California Field Atlas* and *State of Fire*), and color photos.

You can preorder the book through Heyday: <https://www.heydaybooks.com/catalog/bay-area-wildlife/>  
Follow Jeff's events and eco news through the Irreverent Naturalist website:  
<https://irreverentnaturalist.com/>

**Jeff Miller** has dedicated several decades to championing protection of endangered species and native wildlife habitat in the Bay Area. He's the founder of the nonprofit Alameda Creek Alliance and has served as its executive director since 1997, working to restore steelhead trout and salmon to Alameda Creek and protect the Bay Area's largest local watershed. He's a senior conservation advocate with the Center for Biological Diversity, spearheading biodiversity protection campaigns throughout the Bay Area and California, preparing endangered species listing petitions, writing press releases, and doing public outreach and organizing around wildlife protection issues. Over the last quarter century he has been involved in conservation efforts for dozens of the most iconic imperiled wildlife species in the Bay Area, from tule elk to steelhead trout to Burrowing Owls.



## Field Trips

**Solano County Grasslands**  
**Saturday, January 4, 8am - 1pm**  
**Leaders: Bob Toleno and Juli Chamberlin**  
**RSVP: [birding@toleno.com](mailto:birding@toleno.com)**

The expansive grasslands of Solano County can be wonderful to visit in winter. Wintering raptors are a major attraction, with Prairie Falcons, Ferruginous, and Rough-legged Hawks regularly seen hunting here. Burrowing Owls, while declining, are still regularly seen in places. And best of all, Flannery Road is the most reliable place anywhere in the Bay Area to see Mountain Plovers. We'll also look for wintering geese, grassland shorebirds like Long-billed Curlew, and other birds of the open prairie.

RSVP required! Please mail [birding@toleno.com](mailto:birding@toleno.com) to reserve a spot. The trip will be canceled if significant rain is forecast.

**Directions:** Take I-880 North to I-80 East to Hwy 12 East. Continue for 4 miles on Hwy 12 then make a left turn onto Sunset Ave in Suisun City. We'll meet at the Starbucks at 193 Sunset Ave in Suisun City.

**Arrowhead and New Marsh -  
MLK Regional Shoreline**  
**Saturday, January 11, 8:30am – 11:00am**  
**Leaders: David Riensche & Maggie Clark**

A 7.9 high tide will hit Arrowhead Marsh creating an opportunity to see Ridgway's Rails, Virginia Rails, and Soras. Wintering ducks and shorebirds will be plentiful. We will use "Doc Quack's" special access code to visit the New Marsh and "peep at" the newly finished "Shorebird Sanctuary" island. Dress in layers. The area is completely paved. This is a wheelchair-accessible field trip.

RSVP: [maggielclark99@gmail.com](mailto:maggielclark99@gmail.com) The trip will be canceled if inclement weather is forecasted (i.e., high wind and rain)

**Directions:** From I-880, go west on Hegenberger towards the airport and turn right on Pardee. Make a left at Swan and turn right into the entrance to Martin Luther King Regional Shoreline. Follow the entrance road all the way to the end. On the way to the parking lot, drive slowly and keep an eye out for Burrowing Owls on the berms to the right.

*(Field Trips Continued)***North Livermore/Springtown****Saturday, January 25, 9:00am – noon****Leaders: Kathy Robertson & Karen Kramer**  
**katbirdca@aol.com**

We will walk along the Arroyo, where we can expect wading birds such as stilts and egrets, ducks, incl. Cinnamon Teal, and many wintering and resident songbirds. Rails and snipe are possible. The open fields are productive for raptors - Golden Eagle and Ferruginous Hawk have been seen here. Wide, level trails make walking easy. Bring your scope if you have one. Heavy rain cancels.

**Directions:** Take I-580 east to Exit 54 for First Street/Springtown Blvd; turn left onto First Street, which becomes Springtown Blvd. Turn right (east) on Bluebell Dr. and continue about a mile and a half to Marlin A. Pound Neighborhood Park. We will meet at the bridge crossing the Arroyo. Park on either side of the street. No restrooms are on our route, so you may wish to make a pit stop before arriving at the meeting point.

**Shadow Cliffs****Sunday, February 2, 9:00am – noon****Leaders: Kathy Robertson & Karen Kramer**  
**katbirdca@aol.com**

Join us at Shadow Cliffs Regional Recreation Area to explore the lake, levees, and marsh for wintering waterfowl, Common Gallinules, egrets, herons, and grebes. Osprey are found around the lake and ponds, while the trees hold woodpeckers and nuthatches. Notable sightings in past years included Bald Eagle, Golden Eagle, Great-tailed Grackle, California Thrasher, Common Loon, Common and Hooded Merganser, and Peregrine Falcon. Wide, level trails make walking fairly easy except for one short, steep uphill section to get onto the levee. Scopes are helpful.

**Directions:** From I-580 eastbound, take the Santa Rita Road exit, keep right and follow signs for Downtown to merge onto Santa Rita Road. Turn left on Valley Avenue and left on Stanley Boulevard. Turn right in to the park. Meet in the first parking lot by the swimming beach. \$6 parking fee/park pass.

Look—  
special trips!

**Owling in Garin Regional Park****February 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, 5:30pm - 7pm****Leader: Bob Toleno RSVP: bob@toleno.com**

Though highly sought after, owls are often the most difficult birds for us to see, for the obvious reason that most are typically only out after dark. On this trip, we'll take a short walk (less than a mile over flat ground) into Garin Regional Park with the primary goal of finding Western Screech-Owls, and getting a flashlight on them so all participants can get a look. February is when they're starting their nesting cycle, so they should be active and vocal as soon as it gets dark. We will likely also hear Great Horned and American Barn Owls.

These trips will be limited to only FIVE participants per outing. **You MUST RSVP to bob@toleno.com** and specify which date you would like to go. Try to have a back-up date in mind, also, in case the date you choose is already full. The meeting location and directions will be provided via email before the trip. If all trips fill up, there will be a waiting list. Any rain or wind at all will cancel an outing, though Bob will do his best to reschedule cancelled trips, if possible.

**Reporting Banded Birds**

If you have found or harvested a banded bird, please report it at [www.reportband.gov](http://www.reportband.gov). You'll need the band number, or numbers, if the bird has more than one band. See link below for more information on reward bands. You'll also need to know where, when and how you recovered the bird. Your contact information will be requested in case there are any questions. The U.S. Geological Survey Bird Banding Lab (BBL) will send you a certificate of appreciation that includes information about the sex, age and species of the bird, and where and when it was banded. You can keep the band. Please note: Even if the band you recover is inscribed with a 1-800 telephone number, as of July 2, 2017, you can only report it at [www.https://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/BBL/bblretrv/index.cfm](https://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/BBL/bblretrv/index.cfm)



## President's Corner

Hope you are enjoying winter birding in northern California. I spent time at two great winter birding festivals, the Lodi Sandhill Crane Festival and the Central Valley Birding Symposium. I always enjoy these festivals and try to go every year. If you are looking for a festival coming up, there is Morro Bay in January, San Francisco Bay Flyway Festival in Vallejo in February, and Point Reyes and Godwit Days in Arcata in April.

There is a podcast called *BirdNote* that I listen to every morning. I have written about it before. It is a two-minute presentation on some aspect of bird ID or conservation. Today, I learned something new. Early morning or evening, you can hear pairs of Great Horned Owls calling to each other. Did you know you can tell which is the male and which is the female by the call? Male Great Horned Owls, even though they are the smaller in size, have the lower-pitched call. Females, larger in size, have the higher pitched call. Next time you hear a pair calling to each other, see if you can tell them apart.

I hope you were able to make it to the annual cookie exchange. It is always one of the highlights of the year. And it is one of the three times we get together in person. Next time, it will be the potluck that we always hold at Lake Chabot in late Spring. Will be looking for you there.

Time to take a look at your 2024 birding resolutions. I will give you an update on how mine went in the next *Kite Call*. This is some of the best days to bird in our area. I hope you are out there seeing and enjoying the birds.



Great Horned Owl pair, try to tell male from female from their calls

## Hayward-Fremont CBC—2024—Best Ever!!!!

On December 15, 2024, about 90 field observers and feeder watchers participated in the annual Hayward-Fremont Christmas Bird Count, and we had a spectacular day! We were blessed with perfect, sunny weather in between two rainstorms, much nicer than the midday downpour that doused counters in 2023.

And...drum roll, please...we set a new record with our total number of species!!! We found an incredible **183 species** on the day of the count, beating our old record of 181. Four of those species were brand new for our count, too! Those four were a **VERMILION FLYCATCHER** along the northern Alameda Creek Trail (found by Liam Murphy), the continuing **SNOW BUNTING** at Hayward Regional Shoreline, plus an incredible second **Snow Bunting** (found by Dave Riensche on the southern Alameda Creek Trail), a remarkable three **GRASSHOPPER SPARROWS** in Garin Regional Park (found by Dominik Mosur), and, in a sign of their expanding range, our count's first **PYGMY NUTHATCHES** in East Avenue Park (found by Mick Griffin). Amazing to add four new species in one year!

Other exciting species found that day included our second ever **RUFF** in Don Edwards NWR (found by Caitlin Chock), **SWAMP SPARROW** at the Tule Pond (found by Logan Kahle), **PRAIRIE FALCON** at Coyote Hills (spotted by Rich Nicholson), **CASPIAN TERN** at Eden Landing (seen by Pat Gordon), and **FERRUGINOUS HAWK** at Garin (spotted by Eva Seay and Stephanie Woods).

Thanks so much to all the great birders who helped make this record-breaking CBC so memorable!

-Bob Toleno, compiler

(Ed. Note: and many thanks to Bob!)

## Birding Observations

Winter 2024

by Vicki Robinson

We are finally getting to winter birding. The days are shorter and colder.

Our expected geese have arrived, to mix with the local **Canada Geese** at many parks and shorelines. **Cackling** and **Greater White-fronted Geese** were seen, along with the still present **Brant**, at the MLK Regional Shoreline. **Snow Geese** have been sighted at Hayward Shoreline.

The expected winter visitors, **Common Goldeneyes** and **Ring-necked** and **Ruddy Ducks**, are found in various freshwater streams and lakes, including Alameda Creek and Quarry Lakes. **Eurasian Wigeons** can be found, along with the more common **American Wigeon**. The harder-to-find **Barrow's Goldeneye** has been seen at Coyote Hills on the bay.



Barrow's Goldeneyes



Common Merganser



Hooded Merganser

**Hooded Mergansers**, as well as **Common Mergansers**, can be seen at Quarry Lakes and on Alameda Creek, and **Red-breasted Mergansers** can be found on the bay.



Lark Sparrow



Phainopepla



Mountain Bluebird

Cedar Mountain Winery in Livermore has always been the go-to place to find **Mountain Bluebirds**. Also seen there have been **Red-breasted Sapsucker**, **Lark Sparrow**, and **Phainopepla**.



Prairie Falcon

**Ferruginous Hawks** are again flying over Pacific Commons, and **Merlins** are showing up at Coyote Hills and other places. A **Prairie Falcon** and **Golden Eagles** were also seen on a recent OAS field trip at Pacific Commons.



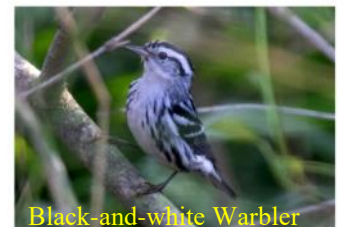
Varied Thrush

**Varied Thrushes** have been spotted at Lake Chabot and also at Redwood Regional Park.



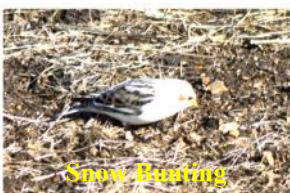
Swamp Sparrow

A **Nelson's Sparrow** is once again wintering at MLK Arrowhead Marsh. A **Swamp Sparrow** has also been seen there.



Black-and-white Warbler

We see our common winter warbler, the **Yellow-rumped Warbler**, everywhere, but a rare **Black - and- white Warbler** has been seen in Albany.



Snow Bunting

The rarity of this winter is a **Snow Bunting**. This very rare visitor was found at Mt. Trashmore at the Hayward Regional Shoreline and seen by just about every birder in Alameda County. (Late note: another one found during CBC 12/15/24 at Coyote Hills!)

(all photos by V. Robinson)

## Conservation

### Livermore City Council Approves Garaventa Hills Project

Following decisions by California courts clearing the way, the Livermore City Council approved the development of 44 residential units at Garaventa Hills. Proposed in 2011, the Livermore Lt Ventures Group LLC Garaventa Hills plan originally proposed building 76 homes on the 32-acre site north of Altamont Creek Drive between North Vasco Road and Laughlin Road. The land was zoned for residential development in 1976, but project opponents wanted it to be kept as open space habitat for native plants and endangered species. They convinced the developer to pare the project to 44 units, and the City Council certified an environmental impact report and approved the project in 2019. The community organization, Save the Hills Group, led a suit, claiming the EIR failed to include the fact that Livermore had \$19.5 million available in funds that could be offered to the landowners as an alternative to developing the site. In 2022, California's 1st

District Court of Appeal ruled that the EIR should have disclosed the funds' availability. As a result, the City Council revoked its approval of the project. In August this year, the developer reapplied to the city with an EIR updated to include the city's funding options. Despite this, the landowners were unwilling to sell to the city. It was this latter EIR that the city approved. The future promises more litigation.

### Altamont Landfill OpenSpace Committee approves funding for land acquisition in Livermore

The Altamont Landfill Open Space Committee approved \$2.65 million to help the City of Livermore buy three parcels, totaling more than 209 acres, as open space. The 86-acre Collier Canyon Property is located north of I-580 and west of Las Positas College, the 82-acre Goecken Road Property is in the Altamont Hills north of I-580. Finally, the 41.3-acre Quint Property is located between Vasco and Laughlin roads, north of Altamont Creek.

### Eden Housing Returns 3 Acres In Castro Valley To Indigenous Land Trust The San Lorenzo Creek site will be preserved under Indigenous stewardship

CASTRO VALLEY, CA — Eden Housing has transferred three acres of land along San Lorenzo Creek, also known as Lisjan Creek, to the Sogorea Te' Land Trust, marking a significant step in returning ancestral lands to the Indigenous Lisjan Nation.

*"My people are named for this waterway, my ancestors would gather here," said Lisjan Nation Tribal Chairwoman and Land Trust co-founder Corrina Gould. "This place is important for our cultural and environmental restoration work. We are honored to be able to be in relationship with these land and waters again and contribute to their healing."*

The land, historically significant to the Ohlone people, will be managed under a conservation easement with a perpetual endowment.

*"We celebrate this land return and the included endowment," said STLT Landback Coordinator Francis Randstead. "We are excited for the possibilities of projects that support the community and the environment while in meaningful collaboration with Indigenous people of the land they are on."*

Restoration efforts will include habitat revitalization and reintroducing native plants, honoring the area's cultural and environmental legacy for future generations.

**- Bea Karnes, Patch Staff 11/26/24**



**Follow us on Facebook!**

*See updates and photos from our activities that you can share with your friends!  
Find us by doing a Facebook search for Ohlone Audubon Society*





We thank each of you for your invaluable support—whether renewing, donating, or joining us this year. Your generosity is greatly appreciated.

### *New Members and Renewals*

Ken & Linda Back  
Vinnie Bacon  
Barry Balk  
Melanie & Glen Barnett  
Janet Barton  
Mark Batenburg  
Liz & Bob Bathgate  
Rosa Bazzani  
Allen & Jackie Bertillion  
Kathleen Boswell  
Forrest & Barbara Bottomley  
Thomas Browne  
Karalee Brune  
Alexa Budde DVM  
Michael Christopherson  
East Bay Nature/Joanie Smith  
Beth Farmer  
Rebecca Flanigan  
Paula Flessatti  
Norma Foss  
Karina Fox  
David Furst  
Tim Gavin

John Giles  
Alan Goggins  
Anne Marie Gonsalves  
Phil & Pat Gordon  
Joyce Gross  
Helen Hancock  
Georgeann Hardy  
Lloyd Hartshorn  
William & Tanya Hoppes  
George Horogh  
Irene Jones  
Joe & Angie Kitzer  
Barbara Kornblom  
Paula Krauter  
Eric & Angela Korpela  
Don & Roberta Lenkeit  
Sherman Lewis  
Regina Lin  
Patricia Lindsey  
Sandra Love  
Ray Miranda  
Jennifer Moran  
Ethel Murphy  
Prasanna & Sumath Narayana  
Rich Nicholson

Carolyn Norman  
Henry & Julie O'Brien  
Kathleen O'Sullivan  
Duke Otoshi  
Deborah Pan  
Jenn Price  
Stefanie Prugel  
Victoria Robinson  
Steven Rothi  
Patricia Shannon  
Tom Southworth  
Stan & Vicki Stadelman  
Srinivan Suresh  
John Taylor  
Diane & Irv Tiessen  
Jessica Traugott  
Martin Vitz  
Kenneth Walters  
Mr. & Mrs. James Watts  
Paul & Carol Weicker  
Fred & Marge Woods  
Judy Wuelfing  
Kathleen Yamamoto  
Esteban Zapiain

### *Donations*

Ken & Linda Back  
Vinnie Bacon  
Barry Balk  
Janet Barton  
Ken & Linda Back  
Liz & Bob Bathgate  
Allen & Jackie Bertillion  
Kathleen Boswell  
Forrest & Barbara Bottomley  
Thomas Browne  
Karalee Brune  
Michael Christopherson  
Barbara Correa  
Edward Duerr

East Bay Nature/Joanie Smith  
Beth Farmer  
Paula Flessatti  
Karina Fox  
Norma Foss  
David Furst  
John Giles  
Alan Goggins  
Anne Marie Gonsalves  
Helen Hancock  
Georgeann Hardy  
Lloyd Hartshorn  
Christine Hayamizu  
William & Tanya Hoppes

George Horogh  
Irene Jones  
Bruce & Judy Jund  
Jeanette King  
Barbara Kornblom  
Eric & Angela Korpela  
Karen Kramer  
Paula Krauter  
Don & Roberta Lenkeit  
Sherman Lewis  
Patricia Lindsey  
Sandra Love  
David Lovejoy  
Ray Miranda  
Jennifer Moran

Ethel Murphy  
Prasanna Narayana  
Rich Nicholson  
Henry & Julie O'Brien  
Kathleen O'Sullivan  
Duke Otoshi  
Deborah Pan  
Jenn Price  
Steven Rothi  
Brenda Senturia  
Donna Stanley  
John Taylor  
Diane & Irv Tiessen  
Martin Vitz  
Kenneth Walters  
Paul & Carol Weicker  
Terri Wills

*In Memory of Nancy Mendoza*  
Judy Wuelfing

*In Honor of Phil and Pat Gordon*  
Bob Battagin

## Swans in California

By Bill Hoppes

They are usually included among the most graceful and beautiful birds in the world. We see them in numbers in California, especially in the Central Valley during the winter. Of course, they are swans. Swans belong to the genus *Cygnus*, which was introduced in 1764 by the French naturalist, Francois Alexandre Pierre de Garsault. The English word swan is derived from the Indo-European root “swen” meaning “to sound or sing”. Young swans are known as cygnets, from Old French *cigne* or *cisne* (meaning ‘little’). An adult male is a cob, from Middle English *cobbe* (leader of a group). I have also read that cob comes from the “knob” on the top of the male’s bill. Take your pick. An adult female is a pen. I had a hard time finding the origin and definition of “pen”. The only one I could find was from Old English describing the way a female swan holds her wings back in a “penned” manner. Finally, a group of swans is called a bevy or a wedge.

*Danse des petits cygnes* is my favorite part of Tchaikovsky’s *Swan Lake*. Translated from French, it means “Dance of the Little Swans”, also known as “Dance of the Cygnets”. It is challenging, because the dancers must coordinate their leg movements while holding hands. The choreography is meant to imitate the way cygnets huddle and move together for protection. Four dancers enter the stage in a line and move across with their arms crossed in front of one another, grasping the next dancers’ hands. They move sideways, doing sixteen *pas de chat* (step of the cat). Ideally, the dancers move in exact unison. At the very end, they break their chain and try to “y”, only to drop to the ground. According to the ballet writer, Jean Battey Lewis, the Little Swans are usually portrayed by unknown, up-and-coming dancers. Ironically, in view of the conformity required of the quartet, being cast as a Little Swan may be seen as a chance to be singled out, noticed, and given more important roles.



Dance of the Cygnets, my favorite part of *Swan Lake*

Anyway, enough culture. On to birds. There are six extant swan species in the world. Four, the Mute Swan of Europe, Black Swan of Australia, Black-necked Swan from South America, and the Whooper Swan of Eurasia, are not found naturally in North America. Three species are found in the US; two, the Tundra and Trumpeter are native, and the Mute Swan is introduced.

The Tundra Swan is the one we see in the Central Valley in the winter. It is found throughout the northern hemisphere. As their common name implies, the Tundra Swan breeds in the tundra of the Arctic and subarctic, where they inhabit shallow pools, lakes, and rivers. Their winter habitat is grassland and marshland. They like to visit fields after harvest to feed on discarded grains. Birds breeding in western Alaska winter along the Pacific coast from southern Alaska to California. Some cross the Rocky Mountains and winter as far east as Utah and south to Texas and northern Mexico. Birds breeding along the Arctic Ocean coast migrate via Canada and the Great Lakes region to winter on the Atlantic coast of the United States, mainly from Maryland to North Carolina, with some moving as far south as Florida.

The Trumpeter Swan is found in Alaska, the Rockies, and the Great Lakes. Trumpeter swans were once fairly widespread in California, although likely not as abundant as further north. Historical records indicate Trumpeter Swans bred and wintered across much of the state prior to the 19th century. By 1910, only a few breeding pairs remained and, by the 1930s, Trumpeter Swans were extirpated from California. After being absent for over 60 years, Trumpeter Swans began appearing again in California in the 1990s. These initial vagrants possibly wandered west from reintroduced populations in Nevada and Oregon. *(cont'd on page 9)*



*(Swans continued)*

Over the past three decades, the number of Trumpeter Swans observed wintering, or even attempting to breed, in California has gradually increased. However, there is still no established, self-sustaining, wild population in the state. Most Trumpeter Swan observations in California still occur during the winter months. The Central Valley holds the majority of wintering Trumpeter Swan records, especially in the following regions:

- Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta: Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area, Cosumnes River Preserve, Sacramento NWR, Grey Lodge WA, Upper Butte Basin WA
- Suisun Marsh
- San Luis Refuge Complex

Coastal wintering is rarer, but flocks have been spotted at locations like Morro Bay, Crescent City Marsh, and Humboldt Bay. In 2020, the number of observations of Trumpeter Swans in California were:

- Sacramento Valley – 18
- San Joaquin Valley – 14
- Suisun Marsh – 12
- Southern California – 4

The third swan we have in California is the introduced Mute Swan. The Mute Swan is native to much of Eurasia. It is an introduced species in North America. The name "mute" derives from it being less vocal than other swan species. Mute Swans have been domesticated in Western Europe since the 12th century. They were intentionally brought to the United States by private breeders for display at zoos, parks, and private estates. A small number of these swans escaped captivity, and others are believed to have been intentionally released. Mute Swans continue to be purchased in many states for aesthetic purposes, control of algae and aquatic plants, and to manage nuisance populations of waterfowl. In California, Mute Swans are sometimes kept as "pets" at private residences and city park ponds. They have been observed in the wild in Suisun Marsh (Solano County) and Petaluma Marsh Wildlife Area (Marin and Sonoma Counties). Mute Swans are on California's restricted species list and cannot be imported, transported, or possessed without a permit.

Mute Swans are voracious feeders of submerged aquatic vegetation, with each adult consuming up to 8 pounds per day and destroying much more in the process. Submerged aquatic vegetation is an important part of aquatic ecosystems, as it provides food and shelter for native waterfowl, fish, and invertebrates. By consuming massive amounts of submerged aquatic vegetation, Mute Swans negatively impact the structure and the function of aquatic habitats that native species depend upon. Additionally, Mute Swans are aggressive towards other birds, as well as people. Mute Swans disrupt nesting activity of native waterfowl by chasing birds from their nests and have been reported to physically injure, or even kill, other birds. Mute Swans have been reported to attack people and, in some cases, have injured children and pets.

Now, let's figure out how to tell these swans apart. The swan we see in numbers in winter in the Central Valley is the Tundra Swan. Our swans breed in the coastal plains of Alaska and Canada and head for their wintering grounds in October, arriving in December and January. Tundra Swans are by far the most common swan species of North America, estimated to number almost 170,000 individuals. Their numbers seem to be slowly declining in the western part of its range since the late 19th century. Eastern populations seem to be increasing somewhat.



Size comparison of all three swans, Especially note the difference between the Trumpeter on the right and the Tundra Swan on the bottom left. You can also see the difference in bill size and just see the yellow spot at the base of the bill of the Tundra

*(Swans continued)* There are three swan species we could encounter when out birding. One abundant in winter and two rare, one rare in winter, and one rare in all seasons. Let's work on ID, starting with the swan we are most likely to see, the Tundra Swan.



**Heads of Trumpeter and Tundra Swans.  
Not the elongated bill on the Trumpeter.**

**These photos are not on the exact small  
scale so the length of the bill on the Trum-  
peter appears smaller.**

**Also not the yellow spot at the base of the  
bill of the Tundra Swan**

Tundra Swans are very large waterfowl with very longnecks. They are entirely white. In flight, you might confuse them with American White Pelicans, but they do not have the extensive black on the wings seen on pelicans. Now welcome to the important bit – in Tundra Swans the bill is mostly black, with a yellow spot at the base. This yellow spot can range from slight to distinct, so look closely for it. We will come back to the bill color again when we compare the Tundra to the other two species. So, a large white bird with a long neck and a black bill with yellow at the base, seen in the Central Valley in winter in larger groups, you have a Tundra Swan.

Telling Tundra from Trumpeter Swans gets trickier. Remember, Trumpeter Swans in California are rare. The first clue is size. If you have them side by side, it is easy. Trumpeter Swans are half again as large as Tundra Swans.

Unless you have lots of experience, this difference can be tough to see in isolated birds. The next clue is bill size and color. The length of a Trumpeter Swan's bill is 4-5 inches; that of a Tundra Swan is half that length, at 2-3 inches. Remember the yellow spot on the Tundra Swan; the Trumpeter lacks it and its bill is all black. However, around 10% of Tundra swans do not have this yellow spot, and their bills are solid black like those of Trumpeters. Remember, we are not working so that you can ID all individuals, just so that you can confidently ID an individual. You need to use all the clues. So, you are in the Central Valley in winter, you see a swan much larger than any others around it, with a long all black bill. You likely have a Trumpeter, but to be safe, try to take a photo to get an opinion from more experienced birders.



Now on to Mute Swans. Remember, Mute Swans have a very restricted distribution in our area. Their locations are fairly well known. You will not see them in flocks, but in isolated pairs or single birds, as they tend to drive other birds away. They are about the same size as Trumpeter Swans but, referring back to the bill, they look very different. The bill is orange with a black base and is very distinct. There are other features of behavior and how they hold their wings, but usually the bill is sufficient.

**Mute Swan head. Note the bright orange bill and compare to  
that of Trumpeter and Tundra Swans above.**

That should be enough to tell these three apart. Remember, by far, the most common swan in our area is the Tundra. That should be your default. You should be able to ID the Tundra from the yellow at the base of its bill. A very large swan with an all black, very long bill could be a Trumpeter. Try to get a size comparison with other swans and get a photo to confirm your ID. A single pair of swans off by themselves with bright orange bills are Mute Swans, particularly if you are in a known location.

Swans are some of the most graceful, beautiful birds that visit us during winter. Go out and see them and be ready to ID one of the two rarer species, if they show up. And while you are at it, catch a showing of Swan Lake and applaud the cygnets.

## She's Back! She's Back!

Most birds, when they return for nesting season, don't garner media coverage from *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, CNN, and NPR. But most birds don't have a red band on their leg reading Z333.

Z333, a Laysan albatross, is better known as Wisdom, who at 74 is the oldest known wild bird in the world. She was first banded on Midway Atoll in 1956 by Chandler Robbins. Robbins is probably more well known as the author of *Birds of North America: A Guide to Field Identification*, a.k.a. the "Golden Guide," which would not be published for another decade.

You might quickly do the math and think that 1956 was not quite 74 years ago, but Wisdom was banded on the nest, and Laysan albatrosses are not known to breed before the age of five. So she is at least 74.

Wisdom is older than punk rock, New Coke, the comic sans typeface, the internet, the formation of the Beatles, space flight, color television, Disneyland, Hawaii as a state, the birth of David Sibley, the first big year, and *BWD Magazine*.

Not only did Wisdom return to the Midway Atoll but she did a courtship dance with a new suitor and—and—laid an egg!

Wisdom has laid 50 to 60 eggs in her lifetime and hatched at least 30 chicks. Her most recent chick hatched in 2021.

Jonathan Plissner, a supervisory wildlife biologist at the refuge, told *The Washington Post*, "None of us want to be here the year that she doesn't show up."

We hope Wisdom continues to impress us for as long as is albatrossly possible. (*Birdwatchers Digest*, Dec 2024)



## New Sierra Valley Preserve and Nature Center is now open!

You can now visit the new North Entrance at the Sierra Valley Preserve whenever you like!

The Nature Center is open:  
Thursdays through Sundays  
10am to 3:30pm

The trails and outdoor facilities are open:  
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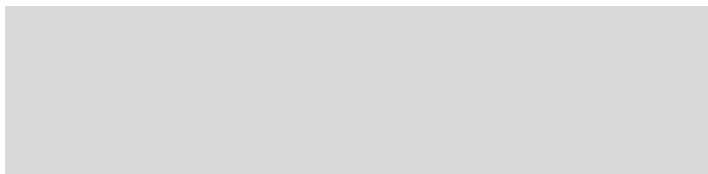
The Sierra Valley Preserve is located at the headwaters of the Wild and Scenic Middle Fork of the Feather River. A paradise for birders and nature enthusiasts, Sierra Valley supports the greatest diversity and abundance of birds in the entire Sierra Nevada. The Preserve offers the only year-round public access to the wetland and meadow ecosystems of Sierra Valley. <https://www.frlt.org/outdoor-adventures-lost-sierra/sierra-valley-preserve-nature-center>



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