Summer Vacation with Panama’s Birds

by Diane Hichwa and fellow birders

As school resumes in September most students write an essay or stand in front of their class to talk about “What I did on my summer vacation.” For nine Madrone Auduboners-- Diane and Bryant Hichwa, Carolyn Johnson, David Leland, Karen Nagel, Becky Olsen, Daphne Smith (and daughter Karen), and Rick Theis -- we can report on a trip to Panama for our vacation. Led by local Talon Tours expert Ken Wilson and by Carlos Bettencourt, Panama’s premier bird expert, the focus was on birds and animals of the rainforest and the special nature of the narrow isthmus bridging North to South America.

Yes, it is the beautiful, rare and unusual birds we seek: Blue Cotinga, Fasciated Tiger-Heron, Tawny-capped Euphonia, Whooping Motmot, Violaceous Trogan and Red-capped Manakin. And unusual animals like Night-monkeys, Tamaandus and the smiling slow-moving sloths. As most of us have discovered, foreign travel for birding-- or any other reason--is an educational experience.

Recent Breeding Bird Atlas skills came to the forefront. Our attention was drawn to a Food Carry of “catching a caterpillar and not eating it” or Nest Building activities of breeding behaviors. David especially keyed on these behaviors that have been his focus for the last 6 years around Sonoma County. He commented that atlassing has made him a much better birder and skills he honed come to the forefront of all of his birding—whether in Sonoma or Panama—making birding more enjoyable as he zeroes in on activities of each bird.

Those of us who often bird by ear at home found that the birds of a foreign country, as well as the people, speak a different language! The familiar call of a Western Wood Pewee MIGHT be a pewee in migration but more likely belongs to a totally different species of the rainforest. Each night we went over the list of birds seen, flipping quickly past pages 37-38. (Those pages listed warblers: 32 Eastern ones plus our familiar Yellow-rumped, Black-throated Green, Wilson’s and Northern Waterthrush – birds that Lyle and Deanna Madeson will be giving a program on their recent trip to Japan featuring the Red-crowned Crane, Stellar Sea Eagle, the Snowy Owl and Snow Monkeys.

In order for the Japanese Snow Monkeys to survive the cold, snowy environment, they spend the majority of the day in a natural hot springs (about 108 degrees). Photos will include family units interacting, the Alpha males, and the antics of the babies.

Of the total of 2,700 Red-crowned Cranes thought to remain in the world, about 1,000 of this endangered species reside on the island of Hokkaido, Japan. Other birds the Madesons photographed include the Black-tailed Kite, White-tailed Sea Eagle, and the magnificent Stellar Sea Eagle, which is on average, the heaviest eagle in the world. Several owls will also be featured in their program, including the beautiful Snowy Owl. As recently as four years ago, Snowy Owls have been migrating to parts of Japan.
PANAMA’S BIRDS
Continued from page 1

might be in our yards now but will be migrating long distances very soon. Carolyn Johnson, CJ, noted that we share the same birds (not just the same species) for part of the year. In Panama you might see a Baltimore Oriole, a Cliff, Barn, or Northern Rough-winged Swallow. It could be the same one flying over your yard or coming to your feeders!

CJ observed that “being familiar with our families of birds from the birdwatching I do at home near Graton helped me appreciate the families of birds in Panama. The vast diversity and variety of flycatchers helped me understand on a deeper level the abundance of flying insects available there. And while we love our home hummingbirds, it seems we live on the edge of hummingbird habitat. (We are lucky to have one species that stays with us year-round and get extremely excited if we have 3 or occasionally 4 species at our feeders at a time). But the tropics, that’s where the hummers thrive. We see so few of these western hemisphere order that has 102 genera and 328 species.” In Panama we watched: Violet-capped, Sapphire-throated, Scaly-breasteds, Spinetails, Hermits, Snowy-bellied and Starcaps, Mangoes and Thorntails in brilliant iridescence. One feeding area had more than 65 hummingbirds zipping about.

The inverse was true in learning about many new families of birds that are not represented in our area with even a single species! From the bizarre (Keel-billed Toucan) to the sublime (Green, Shining, and Red-legged Honeycreepers), it had us looking at the habitats and ecosystems and trying to understand the various strategies these new groups of birds used in this vastly different part of the world from our own. We were especially struck by the incredible variety of birds associated one way or another with ants: Antbird, Antwren, Antpitta, Antthrush, Antshrike, and Ant-tanager. Commented CJ: “Ants are like the krill of the rainforest. They provide a foundation for the food web. My favorite experience was the day we came upon the Army Ant swarm. And suddenly there were birds everywhere, completely oblivious to our presence. But it wasn’t the ants they were after! It was the insects the ants scared up that the birds were feeding on. And one of the species was an Army Ant swarm obligate! It was a remarkable experience, in part because it was scary too. (I didn’t want to become one of the subjects the ants carried off)”

Our thoughts turned to Fall as we saw a few groups of hawks, Gray-headed and Short-taileds, in migration above Canopy Tower. We had seen all these birds our neotropical migrants have to compete with when they travel so far south! Rainforests, described as the “Cradle of Global Biodiversity” are estimated to cover 2% of the earth’s surface but are home to more than half of the planet’s living beings. From canopy to understorey to forest floor we understood all the more why this diversity is critical to preserve.

Cliff Swallows in Petaluma – Third Year Settlement Comes to Close
by Susan Kirks

As our September 2016 Leaves goes to press, the last cliff swallows are fledging at the Petaluma River Bridge. Soon, the Cliff Swallows will return to Argentina on an approximately 7000 mile flight for the winter. The end of August 2016 also marks the end of the Three Year Settlement between Plaintiffs Veronica Bowers, Native Songbird Care & Conservation, Madrone Audubon Society, Marin Audubon Society, Golden Gate Audubon Society and Center for Biological Diversity v. the Federal Highway Transportation Administration and Caltrans. We thank our members and supporters, again, for your swift response with support and donations when we reached out three years ago, beginning a litigation process because of tragic deaths of Cliff Swallow and other birds due to shoddily applied netting at the bridge, and now following the settlement process to its conclusion this year.

The construction platform spanning the west side of the bridge, a potential new large nesting surface about which we were concerned, was removed by Caltrans prior to arrival of the Cliff Swallows. We credit and thank Assembly member Marc Levine who hosted a press conference in March 2016 to focus attention on the Cliff Swallows and the bridge construction. We also credit the effective communication of our legal team from Animal Legal Defense Fund and Winston & Strawn for following through before nesting season began with our concerns. The Caltrans construction process at the bridge then completed mid Summer.

Even in this third year, where ground level construction was Caltrans’ primary focus, we necessarily shared with Caltrans in June a strong concern about heavy equipment with a tall cage extension placed and operating just inches from active Cliff Swallow nests. Our observations via daily monitoring revealed the placement of this equipment, and its operation, obstructing the ability for adult swallows to reach the active nests, with a dangerously close placement of heavy equipment and activity so close to active nests. Caltrans was able to move forward and basically ignore our concerns because (1) the CA Department of Fish and Wildlife in 2013 amended their Lake and Streambed Agreement for a zero buffer zone (that is zero
**CLIFF SWALLOWS**
Continued from page 2

feet) between construction and active migratory bird nests, and (2) the contracted Caltrans biologist reported he did not observe any disturbance or problems with the swallows and the nests. When we queried what criteria the biologist used for such observations, we did not receive a response, except for correspondence from Caltrans’ attorney about how proud Caltrans was that no deaths or injuries had occurred to the Cliff Swallows in the three years of the settlement. A US Fish and Wildlife Service representative had related that, at a minimum, a 20 feet buffer zone is recommended between active nests and construction activity.

Caltrans has much room for improvement in processes of contractor practices and biological monitoring to ensure protection of active nests and effective exclusion of nesting. We found monitoring the construction process over these three years necessary and often observed practices or lack of practices that led to strong concerns.

Ending our settlement process in August 2016, we again thank our members for your support. We are also, again, grateful to our excellent attorneys from Animal Legal Defense Fund and Winston & Strawn. Madrone Audubon wishes to also express gratitude to our Co-Plaintiffs for standing together and standing strongly to ensure the requirements of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act are upheld. From this experience, we also received guidance from Dr. Charles Brown, national expert on Cliff Swallows, brought to our process by Veronica Bowers, with a new hard surface exclusion material used by Caltrans for exclusion of nesting, which we hope will continue to be used in bridge and hard surface construction projects.

... . . . . .

**West 9th Street Herons and Egrets in 2016**

*by Susan Kirks*

The last of the Black-crowned night herons, Snowy Egrets, Great Egrets and Cattle Egrets will likely have fledged, or have been rescued, rehabilitated and released, as our members read this issue of Leaves. Audubon Canyon Ranch, in the annual documentation process for the North Bay Heron and Egret Project, observed nests daily. While total nest count data is not finalized as we go to press, a general 2016 conclusion has emerged. We appreciate Audubon Canyon Ranch sharing their data with us. In 2016, there were a total of 239-269 nests (a decrease compared to 325 total nests in 2015).

![Emerging from the carriers](image)

**Courtesy of Diane Askew**

The 2016 data is comprised of 100 Black-crowned Night Heron nests (in 2015, 174 nests); 74 Great Egret nests (in 2015, 67 nests) and 65 Snowy Egret nests (in 2015, 55 nests). Approximately 20-30 Cattle Egret nests also sustained at the nesting site (in 2015, 29 nests).

Volunteer rescuers of Bird Rescue of Sonoma County dedicated hundreds of hours to monitor the area and rescue young fallen birds. Those that could be stabilized at Bird Rescue were then transported to International Bird Rescue (IBR) in Cordelia, where skilled rehabilitators cared for the egrets and herons until they were ready for release to their wild environment. A dedicated volunteer drove from Sonoma County to Cordelia on designated days and returned to the Laguna de Santa Rosa area where young egrets and herons, each banded at IBR for identification, were then carefully released into their new wild home. Our Madrone Audubon support project each year for this process includes setting up an enclosed area of padded straw under primary median street trees to help cushion falls and enclose an area where a bird will be discovered by rescuers. This area is maintained, including weekly cleanup and sweeping around the area, from late March to the end of August. We also install Migratory Bird Treaty Act signage at the site, as well as interface with community members, rescuers and others as needed for communication.

We provide this support project each year as a coordinating and connecting addition via an encroachment permit from the City of Santa Rosa. This year, the City of Santa Rosa also responded to rescuers’ concerns and our concerns by installing a speed limit tracking sign on W. 9th St. to identify speeding vehicles, which can be very dangerous for egrets or herons with no time to escape an oncoming speeding vehicle, sometimes striking and killing even adult herons or egrets. This is just one of the behind-the-scenes challenges of an urban nesting area hosting these magnificent birds, the adults of whom select this site and return to nest each year. The W. 9th Street nesting area is also a focal point of the annual Bird Festival hosted by Madrone Audubon and held each May at nearby Lincoln Elementary School. This is a day-long environmental and wildlife appreciation and education day for Lincoln Elementary students. On behalf of Madrone Audubon, we express gratitude for the continued dedication of the City of Santa Rosa, Audubon Canyon Ranch, Bird Rescue of Sonoma County, International Bird Rescue of Cordelia, Need a Hand Movers (who remove the used straw each year for us, a day-long process), Bay Area Barricade Services (who supply and help us replenish our fencing materials), and the community and residents of West 9th St. who are tolerant of and very often very supportive of the large nesting phenomenon, drawing tourists and photographers, in urban Southwest Santa Rosa.

![Juvenile Black-crowned Night Heron takes flight](image)

**Courtesy of Diane Askew**

Are you a National Audubon member?

Please consider joining our local chapter, Madrone Audubon.

(see membership form, back page)
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Volunteer to Help Local Blind Adults Enjoy Birding
by Carolyn Greene

Most of us probably wish we had more youthful eyesight when we’re out in the field, but what would it be like to bird if one were blind? Several Madrone volunteers are finding out! Past Board President Gordon Beebe was contacted by Denise Vancil, a program leader from the Earle Baum Center of the

Upper Midwest Road Trip – May, 2016
by Janet Bosshard

Janeann Erickson and I are back from the extreme boonies. Our first road trip, and we’re already planning the next in two years, to Big Bend National Park. It was a great experience and an alternative to a pre-planned group trip. We were gone 14 days and travelled 4,783 miles through eight states. Janeann got two subspecies and five lifers. I got three lifers and two subspecies: the Lark Bunting and the White-winged Junco, completing my Junco subspecies. My target bird,
the Chestnut-collared Longspur, was the ABA bird of the year. We saw Cave Swallows going in and out of the banks below the hot springs in Thermopolis, and at one point, Sharp-tailed Grouse crossed the road right in front of us. Altogether, we tallied 112 impressive species. Not bad for sometimes birding at 80 mph on Interstate 80. We missed seeing many we’d expected to see, but it wasn’t especially “birdie” anywhere. Animals observed along the way included Bighorn sheep, elk, a moose, marmots, prairie dogs, deer, Pronghorn antelope, wild mustangs, and countless cattle and sheep. We visited seven National Parks during this centennial year. At Mt. Rushmore, we saw the White-winged Junco, and at Devil’s Tower, an Ovenbird. We were going to camp, but 50 mph winds changed our mind, plus our days were full and long. We agreed that Wyoming and the Dakotas are states we won’t visit again for a long time….beautiful areas and good birds, but also lots of wind and many miles of grassland prairie.

Measure AA for a Clean and Healthy Bay Passes

by Susan Kirks

Thanks to Bay Area voters from the Nine Bay Area Counties, Measure AA passed in June. A two-thirds threshold was required for passage. Certified election results revealed 70.32% in favor of the measure.* Although Measure AA’s passage fell short in Sonoma, Napa and Solano Counties, cumulative votes mean all nine counties will benefit from the Measure’s passage.

A brief summary of Measure AA from the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority:

Funds from Measure AA will help:

• Reduce trash, pollution and harmful toxins in the Bay
• Improve water quality
• Restore habitat for fish, birds and wildlife
• Protect communities from floods
• Increase shoreline public access.

The Sonoma County Committee for Yes on AA, led by Ted Eliot and Maureen Middlebrook, is to be commended for their dedication and outreach to voters. We’re grateful to Madrone Audubon members who voted “yes” and contributed to an impressive final 64.3% in Sonoma County. In all nine counties, 1,282,182 ballots were cast to vote on Measure AA. This is surely an example of regional collaboration and regional benefit. For Sonoma County, benefits from Measure AA may be realized in South Sonoma County, the northernmost area of the San Francisco Bay.

*official results from all counties available at www.SFBayRestore.org.

The Latest in Bird Name Changes

by Gordon Beebe

It’s time again to relearn some bird names. Every July, the American Ornithologists’ Union (AOU) publishes a supplement of changes to the classification of birds in North America. While it may seem sometimes that the AOU is just out to confuse us poor birders with new names and shuffled locations of bird families in our field guides, the changes are all based on the latest, peer reviewed scientific studies.

More and more, these studies involve DNA testing, which is changing our understanding of the avian family tree.

Perhaps the biggest change for most birders in the west is the splitting of the Western Scrub-Jay. It is now considered two species; one we are familiar with is now called the California Scrub-Jay, whereas the paler ones in the Great Basin states are called Woodhouse’s Scrub-Jay.

Another species that has been split is Leach’s Storm-Petrel, although the ones we might see on a local pelagic trip are still called Leach’s. The other two new species both live on small islands off of the west coast of Baja California. The real field guide shuffle, however, is in the placement of bird families, which is based on an estimate of how old each family is. Many long-time birders are familiar with the previous sequence, starting with loons, then grebes, etc. All of the recent field guides now start with geese and ducks, then pheasants, then loons and grebes. Things have changed again, in a big way, though how soon that will translate to your field guide remains to be seen. It still starts out with geese and ducks (whew!), then pheasants and quail, then grebes. But wait, what happened to loons, you ask? Loons have moved almost to the center of the book, past gulls and terns. In the opposite direction, pigeons, cuckoos, nighthawks, and hummingbirds have all moved up just after grebes! There are many other shifting of the deck as well, too many to discuss in this short article. A good synopsis can be found online at audubon.org/news/heres-biggest-changes-aou-
checklist-north-american-birds.
CONSERVATION COMMITTEE exchanges information by phone and email as soon as possible when an issue surfaces. Please contact Diane Hichwa at 785-1922 or dhichwa@earthlink.net.

Wednesday, September 7, 7:00 PM
BOARD MEETING. Sonoma County Environmental Center, 55A Ridgway Avenue, Santa Rosa. For agenda information, contact Susan Kirks at susankirks@sbcglobal.net.

Saturday, September 10, 8:30 AM to Noon
ELLIS CREEK WATER RECYCLING FACILITY. Bird Walk. We are timing this trip to visit the ponds during their drawdown cycle, so at least one should be almost empty of water, with much bird activity out in the open. Meet at the Ellis Creek Water Treatment Facility in the parking lot, near the bathroom. From Highway 101 in Petaluma, go East on 116 (Lakeville Highway), turn right (south) on South McDowell, turn right on Cypress Drive. Go to the end of the road and through the gates. Parking is to the left. Leader: Gordon Beebe, 583-3115.

Monday, September 19, 7:00 PM
GENERAL MEETING. First United Methodist Church, 1551 Montgomery Drive, Santa Rosa. “Japan-Red-crowned Cranes, Stellar Eagles, Snowy Owls, and Snow Monkeys.” This is a free event and all are welcome.

Wednesday, September 21, 8:30 AM – 2:30 PM
BODEGA BAY. Bird Walk at Bodega Bay Harbor and environs. To meet the group, drive north on Highway 1 in the town of Bodega Bay. On the edge of town, turn left at East Shore Road (the Bodega Head turnoff), then turn right at the stop sign, and continue 0.3 miles to the unpaved parking lot on the right. The group will search the harbor and adjacent seas and woodlands for birds, including Doran County Park. Weather permitting, the group will eat a picnic lunch at the Westside County Park on the west side of the harbor. A Sonoma County park permit or $7 entrance fee is required for both Westside and Doran County Parks. Leader: Tom McCuller, t.sisyphus@comcast.net, 707-546-1812.

Saturday, October 1, 8:00 AM to Noon
RAGLE RANCH REGIONAL PARK. Bird Walk. Join us to look for fall migrants, as well as a wide variety of our familiar county birds. Meet in the parking area near the dog park and Peace Garden (from entry kiosk, the road slowly veers left - continue to the parking lot). Parking fee ($7) for non-permit holders. We will be walking the Blackberry Trail, about 1.5 miles long. Leader: Gordon Beebe, 583-3115.

Out & About

Sunday, September 11, 2016, 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM
Wine Country Optics & Nature Festival
Sonoma Plaza, 20 Spain Street, Sonoma, CA 95476
Swarovski Optics along with manufacturing representatives from all of the major binocular and spotting scope companies will return to Sonoma for the 5th Annual Optics & Nature Festival. Sonoma Birding will team up with Out of This World Optics and California State Parks to host this event. Artists and nature non-profits from across Northern California will also be invited to participate. For more information, go to www.sonomanature.org or call 707-939-8007. This is a free event and all are welcomed. Do stop by our Madrone Audubon booth!

“Winging It Wednesdays” Bird Walk

Wednesday, September 28, 2016, 8:30 – 10:30 AM
Cloverdale River Park
31820 McCray Rd
Cloverdale, CA 95425
Join experienced birding guide Dave LaCasce at Cloverdale River Park as he helps you identify and learn about local birds in Sonoma County regional parks. The walk lasts 2 hours, moves at an easy pace, is free, interactive and fun for all ages. If you cannot stay the entire time, you may return to the starting location at your convenience. Carpooling is encouraged. Parking is $7 or free for Regional Parks members. Heavy rain cancels. Additional walks are planned for October 26th at Sonoma Valley Regional Park in Glen Ellen and November 30th at Shollenberger Park in Petaluma (see http://parks.sonomacounty.ca.gov/Activities/Calendar.aspx).
Snow Goose 5/15 Ellis Creek/Shollenberger Park, remaining LH, et al
Cassin’s Auklet 8/ Inside Bodega Harbor, near Owl Canyon LH, et al
Bonaparte’s Gull (8) 5/15 Shollenberger Park LH
Bonaparte’s Gull (5) 6/16 Shollenberger Park LH, BB
Franklin’s Gull (ad.) 6/9 Drake’s Beach/ Horseshoe Pond (photos) KC
Black Skimmer (2) 5/14 Salmon Creek; flying/skimming ocean to Bodega Head J Kelly
Black Skimmer (2) 5/26 Vintage Oaks Shopping Center pond, Novato RC
Hawai’ian Petrel 5/21 47 km due W. of Bodega Head (NOAA research boat) KL, JT
Swainson’s Hawk (2) 6/14 Reclamation Road LH
Peregrine Falcon 5/15 Shollenberger Park LH, BB
Peregrine Falcon (2) 7/28 Bodega Harbor DN
Black Vulture 6/11 Sir Francis Drake Blvd. over Oyster Farm LK
White-faced Ibis (1) 6/16 Shollenberger Park LH, BB
Sandhill Crane (1) 8/5 Pt. Reyes - Pierce Point Road “Teal” Pond J White
Ridgway’s Rail (1) 7/20 Alman Marsh, NW of Shollenberger Park ALeC
Black Oystercatcher 5/29 Benicia Pier area, 1st nesting record for Solano Co. (1 egg) EP
Spotted Sandpiper 5/15 Shollenberger Park LH
Wandering Tattler 7/16 Bodega Head D Hofmann
Lesser Yellowlegs (1) 7/27 Carmody Road pond BB
Wilson’s Phalarope (1) 5/8 Giacomini Wetlands, Marin Co. DW, et al
Wilson’s Phalarope (1) 5/15 Shollenberger Park LH
Bank Swallow (1) 8/2 Wharf Road, Bohnas PP
Bank Swallow (2) 8/3 Wharf Road, Bohnas PP
Purple Martin (2) 5/15 Annapolis Rd. D Hichwa
Dusky Flycatcher (1) 5/16 Mt. St. Helena, near summit GH
Townsend’s Solitaire 5/16 Mt. Tamalpais, Hoo Koo E Koo trail MD
Mountain Chickadee 5/26 Bodega Head - ocean into cypress near outer lot (Photo) M Berner
Hooded Warbler 6/3 Redwood Creek, Muir Beach (singing male) MD
Hooded Warbler 6/5 Nunes Ranch, Pt. Reyes (singing male) NA
No. Parula Warbler 6/6 Drake’s Beach Monument BB, et al
American Redstart 6/5 Pt. Reyes Lighthouse (adult male) ES
American Redstart 6/7 Bodega Marine Laboratory trees JS, JB
MacGillivray’s Warbler 5/19 Annapolis Road at Twin Bridges D Hichwa
Yellow-breasted Chat 5/19 Annapolis Road at Twin Bridges D Hichwa
Yellow-breasted Chat 6/2 Santa Rosa Creek trail, W. of Willowside Rd. LH
Yellow-breasted Chat 6/29 Santa Rosa Creek trail, W. of Willowside Rd. RR
Yellow-headed Blackbird 5/14 Ellis Creek ponds T Schweitzer
Yellow-headed Blackbird 6/18 Chalk Hill Rd., between Mayacama Cr. and Thomas Rd. RR
Hooded Oriole (3) 7/21 Stinson Beach; in willows beachside, probable siblings DN
Lawrence’s Goldfinch(pt.) 5/6 Taylor Mountain Reg. Park PL, GW, IM
Blue Grosbeak (male) 7/31 S. of Kelly Pond, along Laguna Trail LH
Indigo Bunting (male) 5/12 Loma Alta trail; Lucas Valley, Marin Co. (returnee) LH, et al
Red Crossbill (15-20) 5/6 Timber Ridge trail, The Sea Ranch BL, PL
Red Crossbill (25) 5/15 Sea Ridge Rd., The Sea Ranch D Hichwa
Rose-breasted Grosbeak 5/19 Santa Rosa; residence near Spring Lake R Winning
Rose-breasted Grosbeak 7/1 Spring Lake, Fisherman’s trail T Reynolds
September 2016

Madrone Leaves is published bimonthly from October through May, plus one issue each in June and September.

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MADRONE LEAVES

Madrone Audubon Society meets on the third Monday of each month, except in June, July, August, and December. Meetings start at 7:00 PM at First United Methodist Church, 1551 Montgomery Dr., Santa Rosa. All membership meetings and walks are open to the public. Information: e-mail - info@madroneaudubon.org.

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