

# THE WANDERING TATTLER

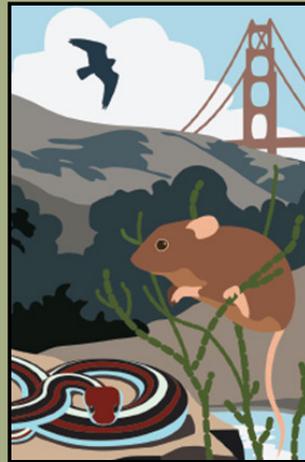
THE NEWSLETTER OF  
THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA CHAPTER  
OF THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

\*\*This newsletter is desktop-friendly, but may have formatting issues on your mobile device. Please use a computer because, we don't want you getting excited and breathing heavy into your mask and fogging up your phone.

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## IN THIS ISSUE:

Board News  
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..and more.



## COVID 19: Conducting field work while maintaining social distance and safety

*Editor*

The Board of Directors would like to extend their warmest thoughts to everyone as we transition through this critical period in human history. We are especially sympathetic to those of you who have been personally impacted by this virus or who have friends and family members that have suffered as a result. Loss in any way: life, financially, medically, or socially, has been at the forefront of concern for our members and their loved ones.

Like many of you, our Board has been meeting via "Zoom" and "Google Meet" on a monthly basis; not what we were expecting this year. This has created some hardship but has also led to creative sharing and cooperation to continue to manage

important items that are tabled for action this year. Unfortunately, our fieldtrips and outings are curtailed until this pandemic takes a dramatic turn for the better.

As this virus continues to disrupt “normal” life, we have seen many cope in a variety of ways, not the least of which has been to implement seasonal surveys and fieldwork under strict protective guidelines. Typically, these guidelines are mandated by employers and in many cases, are self implemented by individuals concerned for their or other’s health. It is truly an unusual situation within which we find ourselves. I am sure that all of you have a story to share about how the virus “modified” your annual surveys. I can share a few with you here.

Dr. Douglas Bell, East Bay Regional Park District Wildlife Manager and I have been involved in research on the impacts of wind turbines on raptors for many years. I started to work in the Altamont Pass Wind Resource Area (APWRA) in Livermore in the mid-80’s with Dr. Judd Howell from the GGNPS. The work, and unfortunately, the bird deaths continue. Doug and I have been trapping golden eagles and entering nests to attach satellite telemetry units to nestling and adult birds. It’s been both exciting and frustrating to follow the life (and death) of these birds and the evolution and build out of the APWRA for the last 25 years. There is no easy solution to the mortalities although many continue to search for one. This juxtaposition of support for “green energy” and the loss of these majestic birds has been a continual challenge.

That said, we decided 2020 was the last season for attaching transmitters to the birds and we scheduled our fieldwork amid the Covid pandemic. Taking precautions to protect ourselves, we headed to the field and conducted our work. As you can see from the photo below, PPEs were in order. The hood on the eagle is for calming purposes and not an attempt to shield the bird from any virus.



Joe DiDonato (Wildlife Consulting and Photography) and Dr. Douglas Bell (EBRPD) attach a satellite telemetry unit to an 8-week old golden eagle nestling in the Altamont Pass, Livermore, Ca.

In another case this season, I worked with a group of staff from *Sequoia Ecological Consulting* to conduct pond surveys for CA red-legged frogs and CA tiger salamanders. These surveys “had to be done” in order to keep on track with our schedule mandated by the management plan for the Ohlone West Conservation Bank, a preserve established for these species by Fletcher Conservation Properties in the hills south of Livermore. The crew was more than willing even though it required masks and gloves, driving in separate vehicles to the site, and maintaining safe working distances while in the field. At times it felt odd but it all worked out.



Staff of Sequoia Ecological Consulting, San Ramon, CA and members of Fletcher Conservation Properties, Livermore, CA, survey a pond for CA tiger salamander and CA red-legged frogs while using proper PPEs.

## SF Bay TWS Gives Back, Pays it Forward, and Looks Inward for Change

*Natalie Reeder, President*

As part of our ongoing efforts to support the Black Lives Matter movement and to diversify the outdoors, the SF Bay TWS Chapter offered to match all donations to Outdoor Afro in June up to \$500. Our membership responded in a big way and a total of \$1290 was donated!

Outdoor Afro is a national network dedicated to “inspiring black connections and leadership in nature” ([outdoorafro.com](http://outdoorafro.com)). In a country where our cherished wild places have not often been safe or welcoming to non-white people, their important work makes sure the outdoors are for all.

In addition to this matching challenge, SF Bay TWS outlined concrete steps we are taking to diversify the outdoors. We are adding a Diversity Chair to the Executive Board and planning a grant or scholarship program for students and early career professionals that have been excluded from wildlife fields by racism in all its forms. We are always looking for new ways to achieve this goal, so please send your ideas our way!

Also in June, SF Bay TWS donated \$500 to Suisun Wildlife Center. The Center had recently been damaged by a fire and needed support to rebuild and return to rescuing and rehabbing wildlife. In light of the current and widespread wildfires, wildlife rescue centers like the Suisun Wildlife Center can be critical for treating wildlife displaced or injured in California’s increasingly extreme annual fire seasons.

## Housing Shortage?

*Editor*

This year I witnessed a few interesting things in relation to bird nesting which led me to question how frequently it occurs. The first was a western bluebird that I saw nesting in a cliff swallow nest. The bluebird was going in and out of the nest presumably feeding young. The nest was a mud sphere with one entrance hole, part of a large colony of cliff swallows at Point Reyes National Seashore near the Bear Valley Visitor Center. Bluebirds typically utilize a cavity in a tree but take to nest boxes regularly. This bird happen to discover the convenience of a ready built mud house in the eaves of a building.

The second bird that I found in a different structure was house finch nesting in an abandoned black phoebe nest. Black phoebes build a mud and vegetative cup nest under an eave of a building or other structure. This nest was occupied and successfully fledged a group of finches this year. House finches typically make a cup nest out of grasses and other non-woody vegetation. At the ranch where I conduct surveys, I have found their nests in cabinets, cabins, tucked into a pair of hanging earmuffs and under the cover of an RV’s propane tank.

Lastly, in Humboldt county where I live, I documented a successful western wood peewee nest in an abandoned black phoebe nest. The nest structure that a peewee builds is similar to the cup nest of the black phoebe but usually contains less mud and more vegetation. I observed two peewee nests: one in a phoebe's abandoned cup and another in a nest built by the peewee itself.

A few years ago while stopped at a traffic light in Livermore, I noticed a kingbird entering the cover of a stoplight. A few weeks later I saw a couple of nestlings ready to fledge from the structure. The last time I came by it was "lights on, nobody home" I guess they got the green light to fledge!!



House finch nesting in a black phoebe nest Western kingbird in a stoplight on Vasco Road, Livermore



Western kingbird nesting in a traffic light on Vasco Road, Livermore, Ca

We know that birds will use other bird's nest structures or structures developed by humans. The kingbird above successfully fledged from a traffic light at a very busy intersection in north Livermore. Eventually, it was lights on, nobody home. The classic parasitism of the cowbird goes beyond just laying an egg in the structure for the host to raise but also ejects the competitive eggs and young of the host. Great horned owls do not make nests and, because they nest earlier than other raptors and

are very powerful, regularly take over nests from red-tailed hawks and golden eagles.

The two larger falcons native to the East Bay, peregrines and prairie falcons, compete with each other for nest cavities in the same cliff. Due to the recovery of the larger and often more aggressive peregrine falcon over the last twenty years, the number of available cliffs occupied by prairie falcons has declined.

In short, there appears to be a willingness and likely a long history of birds utilizing other species' nest substrate or odd man-made structures when it is advantageous to their needs. I was fortunate to witness a few this year and wanted to bring that to your attention. No doubt, you've all got a few stories and examples to share. I look forward to hearing them.

Story of Impact

Fisher conservation in the southern Sierra Nevada

## **Story of Impact Fisher conservation in the southern Sierra Nevada**

*Rachel Roberts, President Elect*

"Back in the late 1970s, Dr. Reg Barrett at the University of California Berkeley told the US Forest Service that their biggest looming conservation problem in the Sierra Nevada was going to be a large weasel called the fisher. Dr. Barrett saw the fisher's dependence on large, old trees and dense canopy forest as a source of conflict with timber and fire management. It took almost 30 years for Dr. Barrett's prediction to come true, but by the early 2000's the conflict between fisher habitat conservation and fire and fuel management that was playing out in federal courts reached the point where a whole new approach, based firmly in field research and an open, transparent analytical process, was needed to restore trust and reconcile conflicts. On May 14, 2020, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service officially listed the Southern Sierra fisher population as an endangered species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA)."

This bit caught my attention from the Conservation Biology Institute newsletter back in June. Having worked with the crew studying the Southern Sierra Nevada Fisher population this story was one I was familiar with, except for the part about Dr. Reg Barrett. I remember meeting Dr. Barrett at one of the Western Section conferences; in fact that was the same conference where I was asked to give a short talk to the SF

Bay Chapter about the fisher work I was doing. Dr. Barrett had been in the audience.

You see the thing is, I really have no idea of all of the great Bay Area wildlife biologists who have come before me. So much work, so many discoveries, all of the wonder that has been floating down through the generations, and here I am one tiny little piece of this huge community. So, I just want to take a moment to say that I am proud to be part of the San Francisco Bay Wildlife Biologist community and thank you to all of the great scientist who have come before me.

My local Creek Education Group (shoutout to "Friends of Sausal Creek") shared a great resource to get involved with a monarch study!

*Carli Baker*

More information can be found here: <https://www.monarchmilkweedmapper.org/>

The study goes from July 24- Aug 2 and involves taking pictures of monarchs and/or milkweed in your area!



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**More on Monarchs!!**



## Thanksgiving western monarch counts

Chapter members, want to get involved/ register to volunteer? You can start keeping eyes out this month and report timing of arrival at overwintering sites, even though the official Thanksgiving counts wouldn't be until later in Nov. See link below for opportunity.

<https://www.westernmonarchcount.org/step-by-step-dmonitoring-guide/>

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Hali'a goes to Texas!!



(In her own words) Student Affairs Committee Chairperson, Hali'a Eastburn, has accepted a graduate teaching assistantship to Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, TX where she will complete an MS in Biology under the mentorship of Dr. John Horner. Her research focuses on the effects of herbivory on volatile organic

compounds (VOCs) in *Sarracenia alata* flowers which will be part of a larger body of work documenting pollinator ecology of this lesser studied carnivorous pitcher plant species.

While in-person classes and field work have been paused due to COVID19, Hali'a has been enjoying coursework in wetland ecology and management and improving her pedagogy as a TA for undergraduate biology labs. She's looking forward to spending her limited free time hiking, paddleboarding and fishing when it's not unbearably hot and also hopes to finally take up hunting during her time in Texas. Hali'a has relocated to Fort Worth for the fall semester but remains the Student Affairs Chair through the end of 2020 and is excited to connect with Texas TWS members.

## Deer Disease in Northern CA



The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) has confirmed outbreaks of adenovirus hemorrhagic disease in deer in several northern California counties, and is asking California residents to help curb the spread by not feeding wild animals, and reporting potential cases to the department.

“Providing attractants for deer – food, salt licks or even water – is against the law for good reason,” said Dr. Brandon Munk, senior wildlife veterinarian with CDFW’s Wildlife Investigations Laboratory. “Because these artificial attractants can congregate animals and promote the spread of disease, it’s particularly imperative to leave wildlife alone during an outbreak. There is no cure or vaccine for this disease, so our best management strategies right now are to track it carefully, and to take preventative measures to limit the spread.”

Beginning in May, CDFW began receiving increased reports of mortality in deer, both free-ranging and at fawn rehabilitation facilities. With the assistance of wildlife

rehabilitation facilities and the California Animal Health and Food Safety Laboratory, CDFW confirmed cervid adenovirus 1 (CdAdV-1) as the cause of hemorrhagic disease outbreaks in Napa, Santa Clara, Sonoma, Tehama and Yolo counties.

The disease is typically fatal to deer and can be spread by animals in close contact with each other. The virus is not known to affect people, pets or domestic livestock.

CdAdV-1 was the cause of a 1993-1994 outbreak of hemorrhagic disease in black tailed deer and mule deer that spanned at least 18 California counties. Since then, CdAdV-1 has been identified as the cause of sporadic, often widespread, outbreaks of hemorrhagic disease in California and other western states. Deer fawns are at greatest risk, with high rates of mortality following infection. Yearlings and adult deer are more resistant but mortalities in these age groups occur as well. Outbreaks can be widespread and have significant impact on affected deer populations.

Affected deer are often found dead without any obvious symptoms. They may be found near water. Sick animals may have excessive salivation (drooling or foaming at the mouth), diarrhea, regurgitation or seizures.

In addition to removing food and other attractants, Californians can help wildlife veterinarians track and study the disease by reporting sightings of sick or dead deer. Anyone who observes a deer exhibiting symptoms, or encountering a deer that has died from unknown causes, can submit the information to CDFW through the department's [online mortality reporting system](#).

<https://cdfgnews.wordpress.com/2020/08/03/disease-outbreak-strikes-california-deer-herds/>

Posted: 03 Aug 2020 12:33 PM PDT

**Media Contacts:**

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## Lunch: An Incredibly Quick Story

*Mary Yan, Chapter Historian*

Right as we got out of our cars, a large brown bird started gliding down towards us from a tree up the hill. We watched it in synchronized silence until it flew out of sight.

After a minute of sputtering, disbelief, awe, and recounting the field markings we observed, we decided that yes, a moment ago a Golden Eagle flew right above our heads as we stared.

We spread out and scanned the area for Purple Starthistle, Tree of Heaven, and I forget what other plant we were looking for. We found some, looked around some more for signs of animals, and decided it would be safe for the work crew to remove the invasive plants. Lunch was imminent and, as this was a good a place as any we decided to stop for lunch. It was a hot day and there was actually shade and some residual water in the canal where we sat.

By the time I got my lunch and hopped over the water, the only good spot still in the shade was a few feet from a swarm of wasps drinking frantically in the mud. They didn't seem bothered by me. I watched them as I ate my chalky protein cookie. Survey ran a little long again today. I really thought we would make it back for a real lunch. This always happens, and I never learn. That's why I have a chalky overpriced protein cookie. A really cool-looking white butterfly came by and hovered around the wasps' watering hole. It was completely off-white with a slightly tan colored maze-like pattern all over its wings. We had reception, but no luck identifying it before it flew away.

We sat in silence for only a minute before my eagle-eyed co-worker spotted a tiny tree frog. It floated like a piece of debris in the pool of water, perfectly camouflaged. We watched it swim, stop, swim, drag itself onto a piece of leaf, and go back into the water. I was watching it through my binos when suddenly the tip of a wing dipped into the water in a flash and the frog was gone. I lowered my binos and looked at my co-workers who were frozen mid-bite and wide eyed. The bird that snagged the frog wasn't perched too far away. I had no idea Black Phoebes hunted frogs. (According to Cornell's bird website, there's literature citing Black Phoebes capturing minnows, goldfish, and mosquitofish.) I wasn't sure if the Phoebe dropped the frog or ate it, but in a moment, it too was gone.

My co-worker had exclaimed, "Skink!" earlier, but no one else saw it before it disappeared, and we forgot about it. After the Phoebe left, she again exclaimed, "Skink!". The juvenile western skink was fearless. It scampered across the bottom of the canal over and over about a meter away from me while we watched. I was beginning to wonder if this brazen behavior was going to end up in another bird snatch when it finally disappeared on its own.

Well, that was lunch. My cookie was awful, and I would skip a proper meal again if every lunch was like this.

## Rep the SF Bay Chapter!



[Click here](#) to buy high performance t-shirts and Monarch (i.e. "one of a kind") pins. Visit our online store [here](#)! These items are also available at our workshops and field trips.

### OFFICER DIRECTORY

#### **Elected Board Members:**

President.....Natalie Reeder  
President-Elect.....Rachel Roberts  
Past-President.....Natalie Paloma Greer  
Western Sec Chapter Rep.....Kathleen Grady

#### **Appointed Board Members:**

Secretary.....Carli Baker  
Treasurer.....Ricka Stoelting  
Newsletter Editor.....Joe DiDonato  
Media Director.....Meghan Bishop  
Conservation Affairs.....Patricia Valcarcel  
Historian.....Mary Yan

#### **Committee Chairs:**

Professional Development.....Molly Peterson  
Professional Development.....Leslie Koenig  
Diversity Chair.....Hailey Pexton  
Student Affairs.....Halia Eastburn  
Public Outreach.....Laura Duffy

## SUBMISSION DEADLINE

Are you a photographer or have something you want to share? Submit your photographs and stories to the editor by November 1 for inclusion in the next newsletter.

Editor: Joe DiDonato  
jedidonato@gmail.com

## BLAST FROM THE PAST

If you have any interesting wildlife tales from your adventures in the field, or photos that you would like to share, please write to us at

<https://www.sfbaywildlife.org/contact>

## Photo Credits

Deer, birds, butterfly, field workers: Joe DiDonato

Hali'a Eastburn: Selfie

Merchandise/Monarch Pin: Ricka Stoelting



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