



SAN MATEO COUNTY BIRD ALLIANCE

Volume 76, No. 4

October - December 2025

Join SMCBA's 2025 Christmas Bird Counts!

The nation's longest-running community science project first started in December 1900. Rather than a shooting competition, hunters were asked to count live birds instead. Did you know that the data collected by CBC participants over the past century has become one of only two large pools of information informing ornithologists and conservation biologists how the birds of the Americas are faring over time?

The annual Christmas Bird Counts (CBC's) for San Mateo County are among SMCBA's favorite traditions. Each count encompasses a circle with a diameter of 15 miles. SMCBA has 2 circles: Crystal Springs and Año Nuevo. Our first Crystal Springs count took place in 1948, in collaboration with Santa Clara Audubon. Regular annual counts began in 1955. The Año Nuevo Count began in 1972.

This year, the Crystal Springs count will take place on Saturday, December 20, and the Año Nuevo count on Saturday, January 4, 2026. Participation is free and usually very enjoyable. If your home is within a circle, you can register and participate by counting birds that visit your feeders on count day. Please visit the website for more information and the registration link. <https://www.smcbirdalliance.org/CBC.html>

Our CBC Coordinator, Chris MacIntosh (cbc@smcbirdalliance.org), is responsible for organizing and overseeing the Christmas Bird Counts. The compiler, Curt Bianchi, is responsible for collecting and organizing the data from the counts.

If you are new to Christmas Bird Counts, read on. At the CBC, new counters are always welcome. We'll pair you with someone more experienced for your first count, ensuring you feel supported and part of the team. It's a terrific way to contribute to science for birds and have a fun day out, too. If this is your first Count, thank you for stepping outside your comfort zone into a wet/sunny/muddy/warm/cold December day. (Who knows what the weather will be?)

Before the count day: When you contact the coordinator, let them know your level of birding skill. Be clear about whether you prefer to stay on paved paths or if you enjoy hiking, whether you are available all day or only part of it, and if you have any special accommodations. If your group will be counting behind a locked gate in a permit-only area, discuss in advance whether there is an option to leave early.

The coordinator will assign you to a team leader. That person is responsible for counting a small portion of the count circle. They will contact you before the count day with meeting logistics and other details. You may be invited to join pre-dawn owling, but you aren't obligated to accept. Ask if you should bring lunch or if you will be able to purchase food somewhere. If you don't have binoculars, let us know so we can provide you with some for the day. Be sure to wear and bring appropriate gear for the day – layers are good, as is sturdy footwear. Snacks, water, and sunscreen are also important.

On the count day: Be sure to arrive punctually. Unlike a typical birding outing, the group will only stay at the rendezvous point long enough to complete the paperwork and discuss the day's plan. Late arrivals cause delays. Depending on the area and number of volunteers, the team leader may subdivide the group.

If you are a beginning birder, don't be intimidated by other people in your count group. We were all newbies once, wondering how someone could know there were 10 ruby-crowned kinglets in the Douglas fir forest.

Everyone helps by calling out birds they notice. It's OK if you don't know what species of bird: the more skilled people can figure that out (or not), but you can help "get" them on the bird. You may have sharp ears and be able to alert the group to bird calls that others may not hear.

You may be assigned to tally the birds found. The checklist for each CBC contains only birds likely to be seen in this count circle and is arranged in taxonomic order. Some people use a clipboard to tally the birds counted, perhaps changing to a new copy of the list when moving to a new location. Some tally in small notebooks or on folded pieces of paper. Many now use the mobile eBird app. Just so long as you can read and understand your counts and don't lose them! At the end, all will be added and transferred to a clean copy of the list. If you are unable to attend the dinner, please submit all paperwork to the leader.

Please join us at the count dinner – not for the food or elegant dining, which it's not – but for camaraderie, the fun of swapping "how was your day" stories with others, and then the countdown: listing what birds were seen, followed by the excitement of learning what rare birds turned up.

Meeting Programs

2nd Thursdays at 7:00 pm
(except as noted)

October 9 - Zoom

**Once in a Lifetime Work:
The Wall of Birds Turns Ten**

Jane Kim

November 13 - Zoom

Motus Tracking
Teresa Ely

December 11 - Zoom

My Start in Birding
Cello Caruso-Turiello

MEETING PROGRAMS

October 9 – Zoom

A Once in a Lifetime Work: The Wall of Birds Turns Ten
With 2025 marking the 10th anniversary of the “Wall of Birds” at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, artist Jane Kim takes the audience on a spectacular 375-million-year artistic journey celebrating the evolution and diversity of birds. Jane reflects on how the mural has shaped her career and reveals lessons and tales learned from the project that hold more relevance today than ever before.



November 13 – Zoom

Border to Border: Tracking American Kestrels in California
Using the Motus Wildlife Tracking System

Teresa Ely is a raptor biologist specializing in migration and long term monitoring. She is currently using the Motus Wildlife Tracking System to study American Kestrels across California, with a focus on wintering populations at the Salton Sea. She has also applied Motus to track Sharp-shinned Hawks, expanding our understanding of raptor movements across the region.



Teresa is a Golden Eagle Biologist with East Bay Regional Parks and contributes to international raptor research collaborations through Boise State University’s Raptor Research Center. She previously managed a long-term fall raptor migration banding station in the Marin Headlands, where she trained hundreds of volunteers and led large-scale monitoring projects. Her broader fieldwork experience includes studies of Swainson’s Hawks, Turkey Vultures, Ospreys, and Great Gray Owls, providing her with a comprehensive perspective on raptor migration and movement patterns across diverse landscapes.

December 11 – Zoom

Cello Caruso-Turiello, a young birder from Redwood City, will speak about how the San Mateo County Bird Alliance has furthered his love of nature more than he could have imagined. His childhood love of snorkeling led to a love of diving, which led to a love of underwater photography, and then to a love of wildlife photography; though, it wasn’t until receiving a scholarship to the ABA’s Camp Colorado from SMCBA that Cello considered himself a true birder—a title he’s since carried with him around the globe.

Cello’s first outing with SMCBA was just over two years ago, and you’ll be astonished to learn about his sightings and see some of his fantastic photos.



Oilbird, 2/19/25 at el Cañon del Río Claro en Colombia



SMCBA Field Trips



Please note that rain or Air Quality Index over 150 cancels unless otherwise stated. Bring binoculars, water, snacks, sunscreen, and dress in layers as the weather can change.

Sunday October 5, Sulphur Creek Nature Center, Hayward (9:00 – 11:30) Join us on this beautiful trail through oaks, offering a family-friendly easy 1.3 mile outing. After we will tour the wildlife education and rehabilitation facility that features local wildlife on display, a discovery center, educational programs, and a wildlife hospital. \$15 admission fee.

Register: <https://bit.ly/4IXww2H>

Thursday October 9, Central Park, San Mateo (9:00 – 10:00) A morning outing for those with limited time or mobility. This is a terrific opportunity if you've not been to Central Park. This 16.5 acre park was the first in San Mateo! The hour-long walk will introduce you to some year-round residents and SMCBA's Cavity Nesters Recovery Program. Directions: Meet in front of the Japanese Tea Garden. **Leaders:** Doug Brown and Ed Ching **Register:** <https://bit.ly/3I4UpaE>

Friday October 10, Filoli: Estate Trail, Woodside (9:30 – 12:00) This is a 2–2.5 mile moderate walk. Habitats include mixed oak, redwood, madrone woodlands, riparian corridor, and historic horse pastures. Directions: From Hwy 280, exit at Edgewood Rd and head west. At the T intersection, turn right onto Canada Rd. In ½ mile, turn left into the property. Admission fee. **Leader:** Kimberlie Moutoux **Register:** <https://bit.ly/3V2PmdN>

Saturday October 11, Oyster Point Bay Marina/Park, South San Francisco (8:30 – 10:30) Join us for a new field trip at this 33 acre bayside park offering many shore birds and terns, as well as some sparrows. There is little elevation and this roughly 2 mile walk will start at the marina park, then we will head towards the canal and turn back to the start. Easily accessible through mass transportation. Meet at ferry building. **Leaders:** Max Hollenback and Doug Brown **Register:** <https://bit.ly/4nfMyWG>

Sunday October 19, Bedwell Bayfront Park, Menlo Park (10:00 – 12:00) Beginner and family-friendly bird walk on fairly level trails exploring the upland and wetland areas of the park. Fall migration will be in full swing with raptors, egrets, and LBBs (little brown birds) being seen. Loaner binoculars available. Meet near the restrooms. **Leader:** J.R. Blair **Register:** <https://bit.ly/3I8iuNR>

Friday October 24, Filoli: Spring Creek Trail, Woodside (9:30 – 12:00) Join us for a 3 mile hike. This trail gains 100' elevation in ¼ mile on a dirt path - not recommended if you have mobility issues. We will spend most of the morning on the California Trail in the Oak and Madrone forest and the Spring Creek Trail through the Redwoods. The California Trail is over dirt paths with a slight incline and is one mile long. The Spring Creek Trail is ½ mile on a narrow dirt track with a 100' elevation gain. Admission Fee. **Leader:** Kimberlie Moutoux **Register:** <https://bit.ly/468O8D0>

Saturday October 25, Sign Hill Park, South San Francisco (8:30 – 10:30) Sign Hill is a 30 acre hilltop preserve and a wonderful place to hike. This easy-paced 1 mile trail has a mild incline and features good views of South San Francisco. Notable species can be found here in the middle of the city from warblers to the purple finch. No restroom, use 520 Diamond Ave., meet under Eucalyptus tree by water tank. **Leader:** Max Hollenback **Register:** <https://bit.ly/4IZHIRK>

Wednesday October 29, Palo Alto Baylands, Palo Alto (9:00 – 12:00) Meet at the Lucy Evans Interpretive Center at the Palo Alto Baylands for a leisurely walk where we will explore this San Francisco Bay treasure. We should see a variety of ducks and other waterbirds and we will look for wintering sparrows. 2775 Embarcadero Rd. **Leader:** Donna Pomeroy **Register:** <https://bit.ly/4g9VB9e>

Friday October 31, Cypress Lawn Cemetery, Colma (8:30 – 10:30) Established in 1892, Cypress Lawn is a historic garden cemetery and arboretum occupying over 200 acres. 1370 El Camino Real, meet at the gate. SamTrans stop. **Leader:** Max Hollenback **Register:** <https://bit.ly/4g5ipXK>

Sunday November 2, Coyote Hills Regional Park, Fremont (10:00 – 12:00) This park comprises 1,266 acres of marshland and rolling grassland-covered hills located along the eastern shore of San Francisco Bay. eBird cites 222 species at the Vistors Center! \$5.00 vehicle admission fee, 8000 Patterson Ranch Road **Leader:** J.R. Blair **Register:** <https://bit.ly/3I7SEcU>

Monday November 3, Filoli: Estate Trail, Woodside (9:30 – 12:00) See October 10 description **Register:** <https://bit.ly/468csom>

Saturday November 8, Wavecrest, Half Moon Bay (9:30 – 12:30) Bioblitz, not the typical field trip, this event focuses on finding and identifying as many species as possible in a specific area over a limited period of time using the iNaturalist



app on electronic devices. With completion of more of the Coastal Trail there is a need for a baseline survey. Join SMCBA and Coastsides Land Trust for this fun community science event. **Leaders:** Cat Chang, Davena Gentry, and Barbara Dye
Register: <https://bit.ly/4nthYcw>

Sunday November 9, San Bruno Mtn, San Bruno (8:30- 11:30) San Bruno Mountain Park is a unique open-space island amid the peninsula's urbanization. It is home to a wealth of wildlife, hidden pockets of woodland, and sheltered canyons. We'll walk about 1 mile on mostly flat dirt and asphalt trails. \$6.00 Vehicle entry fee. 555 Guadalupe Canyon Parkway.
Leader: Doug Brown **Register:** <https://bit.ly/3V5jqpd>

Tuesday November 11, Union Cemetery, Redwood City (9:00 – 10:00) If you've not been to the Historic Union Cemetery, here's a great opportunity to learn some of its fascinating history. The hour-long walk will also introduce you to SMCBA's conservation efforts through the Cavity Nesters Recovery Program. 316 Woodside Rd. **Leader:** Christin New **Register:** <https://bit.ly/4gdFTKs>

Friday November 14, Nob Hill Pond, Redwood Shores (9:00 – 11:00) This is a very productive area for a variety of ducks and other waterbirds. Easy, mostly level trails. Bring scopes if you have them. Restrooms in the nearby shopping center. Directions: From Hwy 101 take Redwood Shores Parkway, go past the Nob Hill shopping plaza and turn right on Bridge Parkway. Turn right at Tiller Lane, continue to Spar Lane and go left. There is a cul-de-sac at the end where we'll meet. **Leader:** Donna Pomeroy **Register:** <https://bit.ly/4mUjbtm>

Saturday November 15, Wavecrest, Half Moon Bay (9:00 – 12:00) SMCBA provides docents for this outing to benefit Coastsides Land Trust. Wavecrest is the single most important site on the San Mateo Coast for wintering raptors, which can be seen hunting in the property's broad fields. Raptors and other species rely on its expansive grasslands, wetlands, and roosting sites. \$15 fee to attend. **Register:** coastsidelandtrust.org/events

Sunday November 16, Lower La Honda Creek Open Space, La Honda (9:00 – 11:30) The main trail of Lower La Honda Creek OSP is the old Ranch Road, with a gentle slope uphill through coastal grasslands. This is an active grazing area, so please use caution around cattle. After an out and back of 1.8 miles, we will jot off onto the Grasshopper Loop trail, which is a 1.1 mile loop that goes from grasslands through oak woodland and then redwood forest, back to grasslands. Meet 900 Sears Ranch Rd, off Hwy 84. **Leader:** Christin New **Register:** <https://bit.ly/4mQ72FX>

Monday November 17, Filoli: Spring Creek Trail (9:30 – 12:00) See October 24 description **Register:** <https://bit.ly/4nbzYry>

Saturday November 22, Sign Hill, South San Francisco (8:30 – 10:30) See October 25 description **Register:** <https://bit.ly/483u3jX>

Sunday November 30, Wavecrest, Half Moon Bay (8:30 – 12:00) This is a 2-3 mile level walk through a vital hawk and raptor wintering site ending with an ocean scan for loons and other seabirds. Scopes are useful. We expect to see Northern Harriers, American Kestrels, White-tailed Kites, and others! Directions: Meet at 399 Wavecrest Rd by Smith Field, 1.5 miles south of SR 1 & 92. **Leader:** Ginny Marshall **Register:** <https://bit.ly/462kuz7>

Saturday December 13, Nob Hill Pond, Redwood Shores (10:00 – 12:00) Perfect for beginners, this eBird hotspot is a wonderful place to easily see many species and an excellent place if it's your first time joining us! Time permitting, we may check some other birding sites nearby. Restrooms are available in the nearby shopping center. Directions: From US 101, take the Redwood Shores Parkway east. Turn right at the second traffic signal on Twin Dolphin Dr. Follow the road to parking at 1050 Twin Dolphin Dr. **Leader:** J.R. Blair **Register:** <https://bit.ly/4699iRx>

Wednesday December 17, Pillar Pt Bluffs, Half Moon Bay (9:00 – 12:00) This small County Park has sweeping views of the agricultural land and the ocean, with an uncrowded trail system. There is a nice mix of birds here including breeding California Thrashers. The trail is moderately easy with a short, but steep descent at the end of the loop. Directions: Meet at the Pillar Point Bluff parking lot on Airport Street, across from the Half Moon Bay airport on the west side. **Leader:** Donna Pomeroy **Register:** <https://bit.ly/4m2rmCD>

Sunday December 28, Coyote Pt Recreational Area, San Mateo (8:30 – 11:30) The diversity of habitats at Coyote Point offers the chance to see a number of species. With luck, we may see the resident Harlequin Duck. Directions: Exit Peninsula Ave. from US 101 and follow the signs 1701 Coyote Point Drive—\$6.00 admission fee. Meet near the yacht club. **Leader:** Doug Brown **Register:** <https://bit.ly/4ncSWhn>

Small Birds, Big Challenges: Giving Chickadees a Chance

I used to think that chickadees were able to hold their own against other birds because they act so tough, their staccato fussing hurled at any bird that dares get in their way. They act impossibly bold for their size and seem capable of taking care of themselves in any situation. Yet over time, I've learned that chickadees, despite their brave efforts, are really the little guys on the block, and they can use some help.

I have several nestbox trails in San Mateo County and had Chestnut-backed chickadees (CBCH) nesting at several of them. Typically, CBCH are among the earlier nestbox inhabitants, starting their nests in early March. This year, they were later than usual, as were most of the other species that I typically get in the boxes: Western Bluebird (WEBL), Tree Swallow (TRES), Violet-green Swallow (VGSW), Oak Titmouse (OATI), Bewick's Wren (BEWR), and White-breasted Nuthatch (WBNU).

It was a relatively cold spring, and we were still running cooler here in mid-June than 'normal'. That was likely the reason for this season's late arrivals, resulting in more birds competing for boxes within a shorter period of time. I've seen WEBL and TRES/VGSW fight over boxes, and in response, have paired boxes with good results. Pairing is the placement of two nestboxes close to each other, so that two different species of cavity nesting birds can coexist and not fight over one nestbox. However, I've never placed smaller hole guards on boxes to favor chickadees, as there was never an apparent need to do so. But after losing two and then nearly a third CBCH nest to other cavity nesters this spring, the need has become evident.

The first case was a CBCH nest with six healthy nestlings. The nestbox was located in a small oak tree, approximately 30 feet away from a Monterey cypress, where it had been occupied by TRES the previous year. This spring, a large branch of the cypress cracked and broke off, taking the box with it. The box was subsequently saved and relocated to the oak. After several weeks of monitoring, the CBCH nestlings were nearing their fledging date, and when I carefully opened the box, it appeared that they had fledged. As I emptied the box, however, I realized that what I was seeing was the start of a new nest on top of the CBCH nest, and all the nestlings were dead underneath the new material, which is always a tough thing to see. I suspected that TRES were building a new nest in the box.

Nesting fidelity is well known for WEBL and TRES, and I wish I had recognized that the TRES pair might return to claim the box they had used the previous year, even though it had been moved to a new tree. Had I thought about it, I would have paired another box close to the one in the oak. It might have made all the difference. The TRES did rear a brood in that box.

In another instance, a WEBL very quickly built a nest over a CBCH nest and laid five eggs. I never even realized that there were CBCH eggs, as I only saw five lovely blue WEBL eggs in the nest. The WEBL must have moved in right after the CBCH laid her eggs and promptly got to laying her own. When I cleaned out that box after fledging, I found unhatched CBCH eggs under the scant WEBL nest material.

The third instance was unusual due to the late nesting of both species. At a new trail in Foster City, where there had been no activity since the boxes were placed in mid-March, the monitor contacted me on June 10th to report that she had decided to check all the boxes again and found one occupied by CBCH, with new hatchlings. The box was rehung after the nest check, and shortly afterwards, the monitor noticed a pair of WEBL trying to enter the box.

I asked her to place another box close to the CBCH box in the same tree to see if the WEBL would use it, but they continued to try to enter the CBCH box. The only way to ensure the safety of the CBCH was to install a 1 ½ inch metal hole guard on their box. Once installed, the WEBL male tried unsuccessfully to enter the box, and he and his mate eventually flew off. The CBCH continued to feed and care for their young. The second box was then moved to another nearby redwood tree, with the opening facing the same direction as the CBCH box, essentially a mirror image of that box. Fortunately, the WEBL accepted the box and started a nest.

In the future, then, I'll ensure that many boxes on each trail have 1 ½ inch metal hole guards to prevent larger birds from entering. It's evident that CBCH are seeking out boxes for their nests, and I want to give them a fair shot at succeeding. They may act tough, but clearly the odds are against them. I hope that other nestbox monitors consider providing boxes for chickadees too. I, for one, look forward to being scolded by more CBCH in the future! *Ronnie K. Eaton, Cavity Nester Recovery Program Coordinator*

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MISSION STATEMENT

San Mateo County Bird Alliance protects native birds and other wildlife and their ecosystems in San Mateo County by engaging people of all ages in conservation, education, advocacy and enjoyment.

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