



SAN MATEO COUNTY BIRD ALLIANCE

Volume 77, No. 2
April - June 2026

The Williams Sisters Ranch Sanctuary (WSR) is a 1,100-acre ranch running along Skyline Blvd on the western slope of the Santa Cruz Mountains within San Mateo County. It includes a variety of habitats: grasslands, deep ravines, mixed forests, riparian corridors, coastal chaparral, and spectacular ocean views. The Ranch is also a snapshot of early California, with historical barns, ranch house, and other working structures. Birds are the muse at WSR, but other wildlife find refuge in the sanctuary, including bobcat, puma, coyote, badger, skunk, fox, and many prey species.

WSR was formed by Thomas (Tom) Marion Williams, M.D., and his wife, Dora Estey Moody Williams, who began purchasing acreage around 1907. Tom, Dora, their two daughters, Elizabeth (Betty) and Rhona, would eventually combine 11 plots for their mountain ranch. Their first purchase is believed to be 700 acres from one of the first homesteads, which included the dilapidated, original farmhouse. The Williams family was deeply engaged in the daily operations of raising hay and cattle, and in the pure joy of their mountain ranch. They hired Lou Bordi in the 1950's to help with fencing and, eventually, as the ranch manager, a position he held until 2024. Lou and his wife, Joan, were offered the old ranch house to live in, but they would first have to kick the cattle out and fix it up themselves. They did, and raised their three children ranching the hills, raising draft horses, and loving the land. Joan's artistic talents showcased the beauty of the land through watercolor paintings and collages crafted from materials from the ranch.

To preserve the ranch, the surviving family member, Rhona Williams, granted it to the National Audubon Society in 1989. Her wish was that the ranch remain intact in its natural, undeveloped state, restrict public access, and be dedicated to education, agriculture, ecological awareness, and the enjoyment of its natural beauty. In 2015, with the end of active farming and cattle grazing on the Ranch and the required restrictions to public access, the Bordis recommended that WSR be designated as a wildlife sanctuary. Surrounded by open space preserves with popular (and dog-friendly) hiking trails, the Ranch's mosaic of diverse, undisturbed habitat is a uniquely valuable sanctuary and refuge for foraging, resting, breeding, and migrating species.

Our chapter began conducting bird surveys in the early 1970's. As with many volunteer projects, surveys were clustered in active cycles with occasional long breaks as volunteers' lives drew them away from clambering over the ranch's hills and pastures. COVID and the Bordis no longer in residence have resulted in non-consecutive survey records. As Williams Sisters Ranch Sanctuary enters its next chapter, it offers exciting new opportunities to engage in Community Science through field trips, camera-trap data, volunteer workdays (including establishing a pollinator garden), a Nature & Art program, and more. The chapter coordinates access and activities at WSR through California Audubon's leadership, in partnership with National Audubon.

San Mateo County Bird Alliance (SMCBA) surveys document the biodiversity of flora and fauna, with particular attention to species of special concern, endangered, critical, or climate-threatened; regional and flyway connectivity; road-crossing hazards; and the presence of invasive species. Field trips are designed to enjoy the beauty of the ranch, its history, and its wildlife. Please contact the chapter for opportunities to participate. - *Pati Rouzer*

Meeting Programs

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

April 9 - Zoom

**Northern California Condor
Restoration Program**
Chris West, Program Manager

May 14 - Zoom

**The most overlooked birds in
North America: Females**
Joanna Wu, Galbatross Project

June 20 - San Mateo Garden Center
**Annual General Meeting,
Potluck & More!**

MEETING PROGRAMS

April 9 – Zoom

Northern California Condor Restoration Program, Chris West
Chris is the Northern California Condor Program Manager and Yurok Wildlife Department Senior Biologist. He began working with California condor as an intern with Ventana Wildlife Society in 1999 after graduating from the University of California at Santa Cruz. His passion for condors led to his master's research at Humboldt State University investigating condor vigilance behavior while feeding. He began employment with the Yurok Tribe in 2008, working to set up the first reintroduction site in the Pacific Northwest and is now the Manager of the Northern California Condor Restoration Program, a joint Program between the Yurok Tribe and the National Park Service.



May 14 – Zoom

The most overlooked birds in North America: Females, Joanna Wu

Female birds often hide in plain sight. Typically drabber and more inconspicuous than males, there is an unconscious bias towards male birds in birdwatching, photography, and even in our scientific knowledge about birds. This talk explores the history of focus on male birds, why it's important to focus on females, and gives female bird identification tips. Joanna challenges the audience to confront their own biases towards a more equalized birding experience.

Joanna Wu is a PhD studying female birds in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at UCLA. She previously worked at National Audubon Society and is a member of the Galbatross Project, a group of birders, scientists, writers, and conservationists who are passionate about spreading awareness about female birds.



June 20 – In-person Annual General Meeting (Note Date)

We will be meeting at the San Mateo Garden Center for a potluck lunch, photography contest, and a presentation by Peter Cowan, PhD, Director of Conservation Science at Peninsula Open Space Trust, and the election of new board members. Last years' meeting was a rousing success and we're looking forward to it again!

from page 1, left to right:

Williams Sisters Ranch from Spring Ridge; Birding at the Pond at WSR.





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.

Saturday April 4, Cypress Lawn Cemetery, Colma (8:30 – 11:00) Established in 1892, Cypress Lawn is a historic garden cemetery and arboretum occupying over 200 acres and eBird Hotspot. 1370 El Camino Real, meet at the stone gate. SamTrans stop. **Leader:** Max Hollenback **Register:** <https://bit.ly/4b8mskg>

Tuesday April 7, UC Santa Cruz Arboretum, Santa Cruz (9:00 – 12:00) We will look for spring visitors and spend some time observing Allen's and Anna's hummingbirds. 120 Arboretum Rd off High Street/Empire Grade, meet in the Arboretum parking lot. No fee on the first Tuesday of the month. **Leader:** Nelle Lyons **Register:** <https://bit.ly/3N67JOH>

Friday April 10, 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/4ugGIJa>

Sunday April 12, 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/3P4DcRT>

Monday April 13, Arrowhead Marsh, Oakland (8:00 am – 12:00 pm) This is a fun and easy place to find mostly water birds with level trails and a diverse species list. We will meet at the furthest parking lot and immediately start looking for rails, as high tide at 9:30 is the best time to find Ridgway's, Sora, and Virginia Rails. Bring scopes if you have one. **Leader:** Donna Pomeroy **Register:** <https://bit.ly/4smqgoJ>

Friday April 17, Pinnacles National Park, San Benito County (8:00 – 3:00) We will look for California Condors, Canyon Wren, Lawrence's Goldfinch, migrating warblers and more. Meet at the Pinnacles Campground and Visitor Center at 8:00 a.m. Entrance fee is \$30 per car unless you have a National Parks Pass. <https://www.nps.gov/planyourvisit/passes.htm> Bring lunch, liquids, and a flashlight for walking through the caves. (Headlamps are best). Directions, including carpooling options, will be provided to confirmed reservations. Maximum 12 participants. **Leader:** JR Blair **Register:** email fieldtrips@smcbirdalliance.org

Sunday April 19, Burleigh H. Murray State Park, Half Moon Bay (8:00 – 12:00) This is a leisurely 3-4 hour walk of ~3 miles in this bird-rich gem on a mostly level, gravel road leading to the historic barn. Migrating breeding birds will be arriving. We'll emphasize identifying by sound. Directions: Take SR1 south from Half Moon Bay and then turn east at Higgins Canyon Rd. **Leader:** Ginny Marshall **Register:** <https://bit.ly/47qOPc2>

Friday April 24, Filoli; Estate Trail, Woodside (9:30 – 12:00) A 2–2.5 mile moderate walk. This eBird hotspot recorded 69 species during February '26! Habitats include mixed oak, redwood, madrone woodlands, riparian corridor, and historic horse pastures. Admission fee. **Leader:** Kimberlie Moutoux **Register:** <https://bit.ly/4d0IqrJ>

Friday April 24, Waddell Beach and Rancho del Oso (8:30 -12:30) We will bird at Waddell Beach and then explore on the east side of the highway around the Rancho del Oso Nature Center or the Welcome Center and horse camp. Meet at the Waddell Beach parking lot on the ocean side of the highway approximately 2.5 miles south of the main entrance for Ano Nuevo State Park. Restrooms are available at Waddell Beach. The buildings on the east side of the highway are closed on weekdays. **Leader:** Nelle Lyons **Register:** <https://bit.ly/4d0IqrJ>



Saturday April 25, Littlefield/Colma Creek, South San Francisco (9:00 – 11:00) An easy walk along the Bay Trail. This loop will take us to Colma Creek and back. **Leader:** Max Hollenback **Register:** <https://bit.ly/3PigAgM>

Friday May 1, Lower Windy Hill OSP, Portola Valley (8:00 am – 11:00 am) We will meet at the parking lot on Portola Road to explore this mixed oak woodland habitat for some of the oak specialties like White-breasted Nuthatch, Oak Titmouse and Nuttall's Woodpecker. Our hike will cover about two miles of trail with easy to moderate grades. One of the specialties of this park is the shy Wood Duck, which we hope to sneak up on with our early start. **Leader:** Donna Pomeroy **Register:** <https://bit.ly/47plEGk>

Saturday May 2, Natural Bridges State Park, Santa Cruz (8:30 – 12:30) Meet at the walk-in entrance to the park at the intersection of Natural Bridges Drive and Delaware Avenue. We will look for a variety of species in the trees and scrub. We may also see nesting Brandt's cormorants and other shorebirds. There is a fee for parking inside the park, but there is free street parking. **Leader:** Nelle Lyons **Register:** <https://bit.ly/3NfJYUp>

Wednesday May 6, Filoli; Spring Creek Trail, Woodside (9:30 – 12:00) See April 10 description **Register:** <https://bit.ly/4aR2J9L>

Friday May 8, Neary Lagoon, Santa Cruz (8:30 – 11:00) This is a fun trail through the lagoon. We'll look for wood ducks among other species. Meet at the restroom building by the parking lot near the intersection of Bay Street and California Street. The parking lot is small but there should be street parking available. **Leader:** Nelle Lyons **Register:** <https://bit.ly/46KcX9v>

Saturday May 16, Shorebird Park, Foster City (10:00 – 12:00) Beginning Nature Journaling Nature journaling is a practice of recording observations, questions, and reflections about the natural world, no artistic skills required. Learn about, view some examples of nature journaling and try your hand at it. SMCBA will supply pens and small notebooks, but feel free to bring your own materials. **Leaders:** Stanton Chan & Inna Magner **Register:** <https://bit.ly/3OR74RR>

Sunday May 17, Burleigh H. Murry State Park, Half Moon Bay (8:00 – 12:00) See April 19 description **Register:** <https://bit.ly/408AvRL>

Wednesday May 20, Filoli; Estate Trail, Woodside (9:30 – 12:00) See April 24 description **Register:** <https://bit.ly/4b8JHKK>

Wednesday May 20, Pillar Pt, Half Moon Bay (9:00 – 11:30) Pillar Point is a wonderful place for birding, with a variety of resident birds, shorebirds, and water birds. Walking will be on a mostly level dirt trail and some sand. Meet in the Mavericks parking lot. **Leader:** Cedric De Bryl **Register:** <https://bit.ly/4bywmNf>

Saturday May 23, Sign Hill, South San Francisco (8:30 – 11:00) 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 from warblers to purple finch can be found here in the middle of the city. **Leader:** Max Hollenback **Register:** <https://bit.ly/46Ky9fr>

Saturday May 30, Pescadero Marsh, Pescadero (8:30 – 12:30) Meet at the middle of three parking lots for Pescadero State Beach (the sign specifies Pescadero Marsh Natural Preserve); the lot is on the west side of Highway 1 approximately 1/4 mile north of Pescadero Creek Road. We will view birds from the bluffs overlooking the ocean. We will choose a trail into the marsh depending on conditions. We should have opportunities for shore/ocean birds and marsh birds. **Leader:** Nelle Lyons **Register:** <https://bit.ly/46IDfch>



Saturday June 6, Beginning Bird Photography, Coyote Pt, San Mateo (8:30 – 11:30) Want some hints on capturing those beautiful birds in their habitats, in flight, or in other activities? Join this field trip with two experienced bird/wildlife photographers for tips on how to set up your camera to catch them in motion or still. We'll help with camera settings, using various automatic and manual settings to get the best results with the capabilities of modern digital (and film) cameras. Recommended equipment: telephoto lens (fixed or zoom) and tripod. **Co-Leaders:** Sonny Mencher and Marshall Dinowitz **Register:** <https://bit.ly/4aTDEuU>

Wednesday June 10, Pearson-Arastradero Preserve, Palo Alto (8:00 am – 11:00 am) This Palo Alto gem has a rich mix of rolling grassland, mixed woodland, and even a pond. We often find birds here that are much harder to spot in San Mateo County. We'll meet at the main parking lot with bathrooms and walk across the road to the preserve as a group. We will stay on one of the easier dirt trails with a 2-3 mile loop. **Leader:** Donna Pomeroy **Register:** <https://bit.ly/40dBqQQ>

Saturday June 13, Wunderlich Park, Woodside (7:30 – 10:00) Young Birders Focus! Wunderlich is a fabulous park with redwood forest, open meadows, oaks and madrones. It has well-maintained trails with varied terrain. Shade in the summer is enjoyed. Carpool if you can, parking is limited. **Leader:** Michael Long **Register:** <https://bit.ly/4cWBYCn>

Sunday June 14, 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 most flat dirt and asphalt trails. \$6.00 Vehicle entry fee. Directions: Meet at 555 Guadalupe Canyon Parkway. **Leader:** Doug Brown **Register:** <https://bit.ly/4b9Db6w>

Wednesday June 17 – Saturday June 20, Gold Lakes Basin, Sierra Valley for Beginning and Intermediate Birders – Multi-day field trip!

Sierra Valley is a year-round birding paradise. In summer it is home to breeding songbirds, waders, and waterbirds. Sierra Valley's habitats support the Sierra Nevada's greatest diversity and abundance of birds. We will also spend some time in the Yuba Pass area. Our trip leader, J.R. Blair is the former Director of the San Francisco State University, Sierra Nevada Field Campus. The trip will commence at 1:00 PM on Wed, June 17 at the Field Campus in Sierra City and end about 12 PM on Sat, June 20. Our days will begin at 8:30 am. Participants are responsible for their own food, lodging, and transportation. Carpooling may be an option. Limit 10 people. Accompanied young birders welcome. Email fieldtrips@smcbirdalliance.org for reservations.

Sunday June 21, Burleigh H. Murray State Park (8:00 – 12:00) See April 19 description **Register:** <https://bit.ly/4s4bHq4>

Thursday June 25, Filoli; Spring Creek Trail (9:30 – 12:00) See April 10 description **Register:** <https://bit.ly/4s4bHq4>

Sunday June 28, Devil's Slide, Pacifica (9:00 – 10:30) This trail, a former segment of Highway 1, is an easy 1.3-mile out-and-back walk along a paved road that's accessible for all. The first segment takes you through a canyon rich in coastal plants, songbirds, and woodpeckers. As you turn the corner heading south, you join the cliffside path that is made of granite and sandstone layers that have been twisted by time and fault activity. On a clear day, the ocean view is spectacular, and many shorebirds can be seen in the water as well as on Egg Rock. There are bathrooms at the start of the trail and several benches. Directions: Devils Slide Trail Northern Overlook – Parking on the right just north of the entrance to the Lantos Tunnel. **Leaders:** Kimberlie Moutoux & Max Hollenback **Register:** <https://bit.ly/4ralIRl>

SMCBA Conservation Update

Foster City Geese. SMCBA has been providing input on this issue and following the activities aimed at reducing the Canada Goose population in ways that are appropriate for both birds and humans. Following city council approval of contract for hazing Canada geese, the contractor has been doing camera surveillance, banding, and GPS tracking to establish goose travel patterns. They are setting up a nest ID program for the public to report nests, as they will then addle the eggs (oiling, shaking, or puncturing an egg during incubation to render the embryo unviable). This depends on finding the nest at the right time. Hazing is currently being done in several ways, including using a dog and remote-control boats. Aerial drones were not effective. Hazing works, at least for moving geese out of Foster City.

Redwood Shores. We are actively participating in order to speak up about wildlife as most of the discussion, beyond the technicalities of requiring levees, is around human-centered amenities. The levees around this area are now insufficient and must be modified in order to avoid being designated a Special Flood Hazard Area. The city's consultant held two community meetings. Immediately after these, city council voted to approve one of two options for raising levees: what is referred to as "FEMA+1". This means raising levees to one foot above that required by FEMA so that residents don't have to purchase flood insurance. After several more decades, the levees will have to be raised again. The current levee plans will enable height to be added later. The Bay Trail will run along the levees.

SAFER Bay Project. In January SMCBA joined Loma Prieta Chapter Sierra Club, Green Foothills, Citizens Committee to Complete the Refuge (we all need shorter names) on a letter commenting on the very imperfect DEIR for the SAFER project, which addresses sea level rise along the shorelines of East Palo Alto and Menlo Park. SAFER "is a multi-benefit, multi-jurisdictional, public-private collaboration that will protect critical infrastructure, protect and restore critical habitat, provide community resilience to current tidal flooding and projected sea level rise, and improve recreational access, using both engineered structures and nature-based flood protection."

If any topic is of interest to you and you'd like to help, please email the Conservation Committee at conservation@smcbirdalliance.org. You can see that we have a lot going on, and to have someone spend a couple of hours walking the site and describing concerns to us, or to follow city council meetings when a topic affecting wildlife is on the agenda, can be a tremendous help.



Williams Sisters Ranch Museum Barn and Pastures

When the Bird Flies by Crystal Llamas

12:39 pm. *Woosh*. Ah! I looked up — a small, brownish bird stood perched on a wire, overlooking my backyard. *What was that?* My hand reached towards the back of my head, stroking my beanie at the point of contact. *Is it a sign of sorts?* Lately, I've been keeping myself open to any and all signs: dreams, peculiar coincidences, and the like. It may sound odd, but sometimes we just need a little guidance and reassurance in times of grief and transition. A "green light," so to speak, *keep going, you're on the right path, you can do this*.

I grabbed my phone to take a picture. It's blurry, and, unfortunately, I lack any bird-identifying skills...I'm limited to "there's a bird!" and "I love birds!" But that's the beauty of nature, isn't it? Appreciation and enjoyment are within close reach. And even if we can't label our external landscape, we can still have a pulse on our inner one.

Nonetheless, I'm curious. I want to find answers to the questions persistently buzzing within me: How do birds take flight? Why do they migrate? Do they always come back to the same spot? What's the purpose of birdsong? And why do they sometimes bump into your head?

Writing seems to be something I'm drawn towards. Navigating the world as a queer, autistic, and disabled person is often overwhelming. But writing helps me process, and in doing so, I feel one step closer to freedom — similar to the way birds make me feel. It's taken me quite some time to learn how to grab hold of all these words flapping about inside of me. They feel like a million tiny birds, fluttering and waiting to be released. And yet, every time I brainstorm ways to free my little birds, I'm left with more questions: How will they take flight? Why do I need to let them migrate? Will they ever come back? What's the purpose of my birdsong? And why do they keep bumping around in my head all day? But most importantly, who would I be if I finally released them?

I often wish I could have a bird's eye view. Maybe then, I'd know how to answer all of these questions.

While relaying the bird-bumping-into-my-head incident to my therapist the following week, they told me about Merlin, a bird-identifying app. *Aha!* I put my blurry little photo through and out comes a list: several types of thrush. I scroll — there it is: Hermit Thrush...I think? I add this puzzle piece to my quandary of "was it a sign?" Not sure what exactly it adds, but I add it anyway.

A few weeks later, I strolled into the library. Weyward by Emilia Hart was sitting on the Hold shelf for me, but before checking out, I took my time browsing through various genres. A children's picture book pops out at me: *The Atlas of Amazing Birds* by Matt Sewell. *Aha!* I grabbed it.

I settled on the couch and flipped it open. I had more questions than could be answered in the pages in front of me, so I turned to Google. While scrolling, something catches my eye: Learn more about becoming a cavity nest monitor. *Aha!* Sounds fantastic. I head to the website.

10:30 am. Training begins with introductions: name, where we live, and what brings us here. The sun's out, the birds are out, and I'm out too. "Hi, I'm Crystal!" I nervously begin my little speech but wind up veering off course, hesitantly adding, "I also like to write...kind of about birds... Well — not about birds — but...it has bird symbolism, stuff..." I add a disclaimer, "Although — I don't know anything about birds!" My staccato eventually smooths out, and I exhale. Public speaking always brings me jitters. But I feel I'm in good company. And I think I'm at the beginning of something nourishing and meaningful.

The training ends, but before I leave, I hear, "Crystal, what are you writing about?" Oh boy! I gather my thoughts...what *am* I writing about exactly? Although I'm typically quiet and reserved, I can definitely commence a monologue in the right conditions — and these are the right conditions. After doing my best to explain, I'm relieved to see I haven't lost them.

"Would you like to write something for our newsletter?"

"Yes!" *Aha!* Green light: *Keep writing. Keep going. I'm on the right path. I can do this*.

The sky feels extra pretty today, so before heading out, I take a walk, meandering my way closer to the water. The bridge sits to the right, far off in the distance. I feel free. And ready for the next chapter.

I also feel the birds fledging about inside me. And I'm met with that same question: *Who would I be if I finally released them?*

I turn away from the bridge and take a moment to set an intention:

"I'm going to do it. I don't know who I'm going to be when I do it, but I'm going to do it." I close my eyes and picture the day when my little birds can fly, their wings tracing the word *freedom* high up in the sky.

With my heart full and spirits high, I make my way to my car. I briefly take stock of the year thus far, and all of the little signs I've come across along the way. I suppose it's not that odd to look for signs, but I also don't think I have to look too hard for them either. I see them everywhere: when the wind blows, when the sun shines, and when the moon sits in the night sky. *Let go...you can shine, too...you're not alone*. I take these messages straight to my heart. I need them to prepare for what's next — because when the bird flies, freedom calls. And I have to answer.

Keep up with Crystal: <https://ontheflyway.substack.com/>.

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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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Mark Your Calendars - Save the Date

**Saturday, June 20
11:30 am - 2:30 pm**

**Annual General Meeting
San Mateo Garden Center**

Potluck registration: <https://bit.ly/4bzLbz2>



San Mateo County Bird Alliance Membership

Senior or Student membership	\$20.00
Individual membership	\$25.00
Family membership	\$45.00
Supporter	\$100.00
Donation to SMCBA	\$ _____
Total	\$ _____

Yes, I am interested in volunteering _____

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