

# POINT REYES LIGHT

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**POINT REYES** > People's bank would keep money inside local economy. / 6



**PARK** > Giacomini wetlands get a makeover with mowing and baling before restoration. / 10



**MUIR BEACH** > Roadside cherry vendor from Greece enjoys work sans computers. /14



**CALENDAR** > Point Reyes man shows wildlife photos at Toby's gallery. / 20



The Dolcini family sold a \$2.7 million agricultural easement to Marin Agricultural Land Trust last week, protecting the 100-year-old ranch from future development. Photo courtesy of MALT.

## Dolcinis sell development rights

by Clark Merrefield

Owners of the Dolcini Ranch closed on a \$2.7 million deal with the Marin Agricultural Land Trust (MALT) last Saturday to protect their property from future commercial and residential development. Kitty and Doug Dolcini used the money to buy out their five brothers and sisters.

The agricultural conservation easement will eliminate development rights for all future sales and leases on the 582-acre Hicks Valley ranch, where Kitty also runs a small nursery and 25 acres are leased to County Line Harvest for growing organic produce.

Please turn to **page 9**

## Local birds in decline

by Jacoba Charles

Birds are beleaguered and have been declining in numbers throughout North America for decades. Songbird populations have dipped, Rufous hummingbirds are seen less and less frequently, and migrant birds pass head south later each year.

The problem was called to the fore last Thursday in a presentation to the United States House of Representatives.

"Many species are declining in abundance and shrinking in their geographic distribution," said PRBO Conservation Science chief science officer John Wiens, who was one of six scientists to offer testimony during the presentation. "Some that were once common are now uncommon, and others that were uncommon

Please turn to **page 15**

### HABLANDO /4

El fenómeno de gente que no lee ni escribe

### OBITUARY /8

Bolinas man made small scale worlds, art with toys

### ASK MISSY /15

Being friendly is close, if not equal, to being godly

## Loyal, Ohana race Pacific

by Alex Lowther

A gunshot at 2 p.m. on Wednesday signaled the start of the Pacific Cup, a 2,070-mile yacht race to Hawaii. Aboard *Ohana* is Loyal Tarbet, a softspoken seaman and wooden boat restorer who grew up, learned to sail, and still lives in Inverness. Five years ago Tarbet was in a car accident and fell into a week-long coma; he survived and recovered, making his crewmanship of the yacht even more remarkable, though he swears it isn't remarkable in the first place.

"Thousands of people do this every year," he said on Monday, standing in the rosewood-trimmed cabin of the *Ohana*.

The 12 day race is the first race of such magnitude Tarbet has sailed, and he said the actual number of miles covered could be as high as 3,000. The ship will scoot well south of the direct line to avoid the Horse Latitudes, a windless stretch of subtropical ocean, in order to find what he called "good air."

"Those who work the weather best are the ones who do well in the race," Tarbet said. "Squalls can have 30 to 40 nautical-mile-per-hour winds and in this case they need to be worked with. Normally you might throttle down and weather it out; we're going to have to use them."

Please turn to **page 12**

## >> Birds

continued from page 1

are becoming rare.”

In West Marin, a haven for birds and birdwatchers, the decline is less drastic than elsewhere—due largely to our wealth of open space, parks and other undeveloped areas—but still is significant.

“Marin has fairly healthy populations of birds,” said Tom Gardali, the associate director of the PRBO terrestrial ecology division. “I don’t intend to say that everything is fine here, but relative to those places that have fewer natural areas than we do we are doing quite well.”

Many songbirds have become less common on Point Reyes over the last three decades, according to a study published by PRBO. Observances of sixteen species dropped noticeably, while none increased.

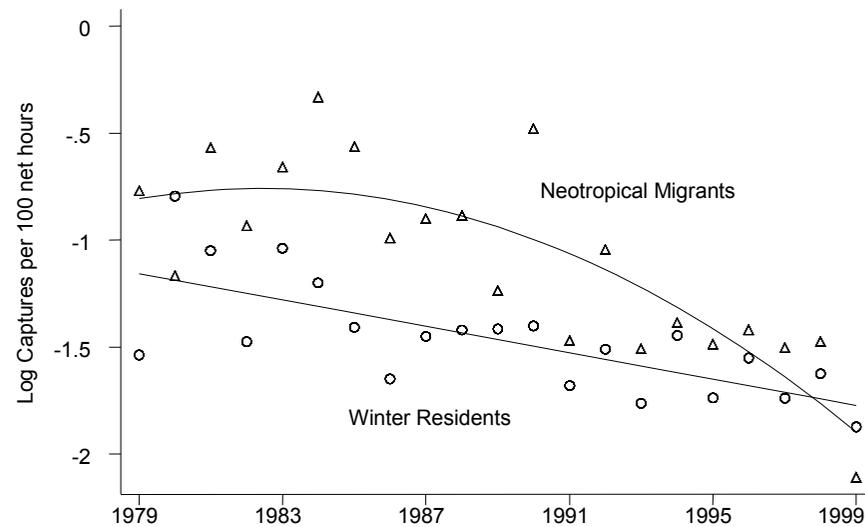
Birds in local decline include the Rufous hummingbird, black rail, and warbling vireo. Tri-colored blackbirds, which winter in huge flocks on ranches, are declining throughout California. They nest in wetlands and silage fields, which regularly are developed or mowed.

The most common causes are habitat loss and degradation both in this country and abroad, said Gardali. Other challenges include invasive plant and animal species, native and non-native predators, and disturbance.

“The problem isn’t any one stressor, its these stressors in context of a whole suite of problems,” Gardali said.

Birds that depend on more fragile and more heavily disrupted habitats suffer the most. The prairies of the Midwest have been converted to agriculture on a massive scale, for example, and their bird populations are suffering.

“Grassland bird populations have shown steeper, more consistent, and more geographically widespread declines than any other guild of North American bird species,” testified David Erickson, assistant director of the Missouri Department of Conservation, adding that nearly



**Local songbird populations have declined**, as shown in this a 20-year study carried out by Point Reyes Bird Observatory. Graphic courtesy of PRBO.

70 percent of grassland species surveyed have decreased.

A number of species that are in jeopardy nationwide are thriving locally, such as the spotted owl and the brown pelican.

“Good things are happening in Marin,” Gardali said. “The wetlands are being restored, lots of our streams are being restored, and groups like the [Marin Resource Conservation District] are raising money and coordinating projects.”

A number of declining birds, such as the black rail or the San Francisco common yellowthroat, are likely to benefit from the Giacomini Wetland Restoration Project, Gardali added.

Some population declines occur through natural processes. “White crowned sparrows are declining on our study site because they like an open grassland scrub, but the area is slowly becoming a forest,” said Gardali.

“Not all birds are declining everywhere,” Wiens said. “Many songbirds, such as northern cardinal, blue jay and great-tailed grackle have expanded their ranges. Roughly equal numbers of species are increasing and decreasing, although there are more significant changes among the decreasing species.”

Many increasing species are often

thought of as pests, such as crows or Canada geese, he added. Increases in abundance tend to go hand in hand with land-use changes, such as the reforestation of the East Coast and the spread of trees across the Great Plains.

Climate change will also put ever-greater pressure on the bird populations. Anticipated problems include a mismatch between the timing of breeding and resources such as insect outbreaks. Sea level rise, a warmer arctic and more frequent extreme weather events such as droughts and storms will also impact birds.

Already migrant birds are passing through Point Reyes at a noticeably later date as they head south, according to a study published by PRBO.

“Some species will be able to deal with it and some won’t,” Gardali said. “We just don’t have a good sense of how that will play out.”

In the last four decades, 20 common birds have lost over half of their population. Some species have fallen by as much as 80 percent, according to surveys done by the National Audubon Society.

“This isn’t just about bird decline, it’s a about the habitats that they represent,” Gardali said. “There are implications well beyond birds.”

## Friendliness

ASK MISSY

BY MISSY PATTERSON

They say Cleanliness is next to Godliness, but I prefer “Friendliness is next to Godliness” (seems to me some knit-pickers carry Cleanliness too far).

To be Friendly doesn’t take to much effort, a Smile, an Acknowledgment, you know—just being friendly. It’s amazing how people who don’t like you respond and after awhile, they are Genuinely Friendly back. Half the time they’ve forgotten what it was they didn’t like about you, and in some cases you even become Really, yes, Really Good Friends.

I will never forget my tenth grade history teacher, Mr. Kiesling. As the school year came to a close, all of us students were busy signing Year Books while he was lecturing us. Finally, he hit his fist on his desk and said “Friends? When you get to my age you’ll know you’re lucky if you have Even One. Now close those Dratted Books and Get down to Business.” I felt so sorry for him. He obviously wasn’t anyone’s favorite teacher. And at the time I thought he was so old and cynical (he must have been around 50, which in 2008 is Young!).

In thinking of him I realized there are all different kinds of friends. There are all the wonderful, cheerful, helpful people who serve all of us every day. You know—everyone at the Post Office, the Doctor’s Offices, the Bank, the Restaurants, all the Stores, whether it be food, clothing, oh you know, Everything from Art to Knitting to Photography, all the Specialties. And I must include the Carpenters, Plumbers, and Electricians, people who Serve Us when ever We Need Them. But at the same time, some of them have become close friends.

And then there are Social Friends, who sometimes are Best Friends, but in Whatever Society you are in with them. There is Agreement, Cooperation, Helpfulness—you know, like the Dance Palace, the Gym, the Lions, the Rotarians, the Garden Club, All the churches, your Neighbors and of course your Co-Workers.

Close Friends, those whom you entertain, call on the phone, just to talk, to ask a favor or who call you for the same reasons. Close Friends make you smile just thinking about them and delight you by showing up for an Unexpected Visit. And then of course there is Family, Children, Grandchildren (now most of mine are Adults and they’re wonderful). There is Unconditional Love for you, for them and for each other.

Then I ran across a quote, from whom I don’t know: “They come, they go, we meet, we part and there the pleasure ends. Save for the few who really care. Our joys increase, our sorrows share. And these we call our friends.” Yes, to me Friendliness is not next to Godliness, it’s part of it.

## >> Letters

continued from page 5

say about anyone involved.

In recent years I have had a policy of not talking to the press, and I am going to renew that policy with vigor. The problem is that in any conversation I have with a reporter, I have no control over how the story will be written. In this case, a few observations I made about the situation were selectively chosen and portrayed in a way that made a good story, but were misleading and cast me in what might be construed as an adversarial relationship with

the Park Service, which is inaccurate.

Specifically, I was asked by the reporter why people are afraid of change, and I gave a candid discourse of my understanding. Unfortunately, the article did not print the entire conversation, but rather some selected quotes, which I would not have chosen as representative of my position.

I am neither a politician nor a press secretary, a public relations officer or other spin meister. I wish the reporter had called me back and read me what was going to be printed. It seems to me that this would be good journalistic practice, and would ensure future cooperation between press and the public.

Maury Ostroff  
Muir Beach

Write to  
the editor



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