



MALT News

31 Years Preserving Marin County Farmland

Wildlife Biologist Wendell Gilgert © Paige Green

Rangeland Is for the Birds

“**L**isten. Do you hear that?” asks PRBO Working Landscape Program Director Wendell Gilgert as he stops during a hike across the upper slope of Black Mountain Ranch this spring.

The song of a Western Meadowlark stops all conversation. But it turns out to be only the sound of an uncannily lifelike iPhone ringtone.

“We should be hearing the real thing this time of year,” says Wendell with a laugh.

He’s been a wildlife biologist for more than three decades so knows something about Western Meadowlarks and what time of year their lovely song can be heard.

Wendell is walking this West Marin ranch to explain how grassland agriculture enhances critical nesting and foraging habitat for grassland birds such as the Burrowing Owl, Northern Harrier, Golden Eagle, Ferruginous Hawk, White-shouldered Kite, Horned Lark, Savannah Sparrow, Western Bluebird, and the Western Meadowlark.

These birds and many others depend on grassland in Marin that is grazed by cattle, sheep and goats, much of which has been protected from development by MALT. Of the 44,100 acres of farmland under agricultural conservation easement, 80 percent is rangeland. That’s significant habitat for grassland birds, which more than any other kind of bird are in decline across the country.

But before discussing the details of grassland habitat and the many birds that depend on it, Wendell says it’s important to understand something about the history of grazing.

“California has always had big grazing animals, really for the last 2 million years. The vegetation and bird species didn’t just show up here. They’ve coevolved with herbivory,” he says. “Those who might question the value of cattle grazing don’t recognize that history and its importance to the plant and animal species that evolved with it.”



Red-Shouldered Hawk

Grazing has been a central feature of the Marin landscape since the Pleistocene epoch—which began 2.6 million years ago and ended 10,000 years ago—when gigantic predators

such as saber-toothed cats, dire wolves and short-faced bears chased grazing mammoths, bison, and ground sloths through Marin’s hills and valleys, he explains.

“This land is breathing a sigh of relief compared to the rough treatment it received then,” he laughs.

Over thousands of years the species of herbivores have changed, as have the predators that follow them. And as the human population has grown and taken over much of the

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Rangeland Is for the Birds

landscape, the delicate balance between predators and grazing animals that together served as natural land managers no longer fulfill that role.

That's where domestic livestock such as the cattle that graze Black Mountain come in. Without appropriate and often prescriptive grazing, the composition of the plant community would change and along with it the rich diversity of birds that thrive in Marin. Coastal brush and nonnative woody plants would overrun the rangeland, Wendell explains.

In addition if exurban or "ranchette" development were to encroach on the rangeland here as it has in many places across the American West it would result in the "simplification of our natural heritage" and a decline in the magnificent diversity of native plant and bird species, according to biologists. Populations of Scrub Jays, Common Crows and other birds that are often found in suburbs would increase and simply push out other species.

"Everything is attached to this grazing landscape fabric," Wendell says.

Today, ranchers like Mike Giammona and Dave Osborn of Black Mountain Ranch, Sally and Mike Gale of Chileno Valley Ranch, and Loren Poncia of Stemple Creek Ranch manage rangeland both for the quality of the pastures for their organic, grass-fed cattle operations and to enhance wildlife habitat.

Proper management of rangeland not only increases productivity of the pastures for cattle and sheep operations, but also maintains important habitat for wildlife, including grassland birds. Ranchers allow livestock to move across the land in order to maintain patterns of grazing that replicate natural



Sally and Mike Gale

© Michael Woolsey

ones, such as a balance between tall and short grasses. This provides the varied habitat depended on by a variety of birds, from songbirds to raptors. For example, the Horned Lark, which is a species of concern, depends on areas of moderate to heavily grazed grassland where the grasses are grazed nearly down to the soil. On the other hand, the Grasshopper Sparrow, another species in decline, needs large swaths of lightly grazed grasses that are tall and dense.

Sally Gale has been working with PRBO Conservation Science to monitor birds on her 600-acre ranch. She and her husband Mike host a bird count two times each year. In addition to managing rangeland, they have restored Chileno Creek and others through putting in a bridge, fencing them off from cattle, planting native trees, and re-enforcing their banks. They've also put up Barn Owl, Tree Swallow and Western Bluebird boxes along their fences.

"Chileno Creek and the area where Chileno Creek and Walker Creek meet, their confluence, is wonderful habitat," she says. "It is all ranchland and stretches over five ranches. Maintaining a dense, protected creek area next to an open pasture, such as is maintained by cattle, provides safe nesting sites as well as feeding sites for birds."

And living on a ranch surrounded by so much birdlife provides other kinds of benefits.

"I do have to say that I enjoy being around all this beauty. The landscape is stunning, the animals, plants and birds are beautiful," says Sally. "Being a rancher is way different from what it is like having an office job. You are outside a lot. What you accomplish is tangible. It's physical. You are involved with living things, not inanimate things."



Loren Poncia

© Paige Green

“People remark on the sound of the ranch, not only the domestic sounds of the cows, sheep, chickens, pigs, but also the natural sounds like the rushing of the creek, the calls of the hawks and owls, the songs of the songbirds, and then, the quiet, the sound of the evenings and nights. Then, of course, the color. When I go into town it seems all gray, but here it is very green now, sparkling clean and bright. Dewy. Glittering.”

Many bird species thrive at Stemple Creek Ranch, where fourth-generation rancher Loren Poncia raises cattle and sheep. Loren has fenced off more than three miles of creek beds and planted more than 1,000 trees to control erosion, provide shade to cool creeks and create habitat for birds. He’s spotted many different bird species on his sustainably managed ranch, from Red-Winged Blackbirds to Great Horned Owls. But one bird in particular always gets his attention.

“The Red-Shouldered Hawk is the most majestic bird. I see them every day and watch them perch, fly and hunt. It’s an amazing hunter,” says Loren. “I love being able to do the dance with Mother Nature to produce the most productive forage that will create the best product.”

Dave Osborn is the son of Margaret Nobmann, who owns the 1,192-acre Black Mountain Ranch. He has a working partnership with longtime rancher Mike Giammona to build the ranch’s beef operation through direct-to-consumer marketing. What Dave says he finds most rewarding about his work is restoring the land so that it will provide the best possible habitat for wildlife, such as maintaining a pond for wintering waterfowl.

“We are simply stewards,” he says. “We are here for a short period of time and really want to preserve the rangeland, and work to make it become more vibrant through our management.”



Black Mountain Ranch, Chileno Valley Ranch and Stemple Creek Ranch sell organic, grass-fed beef and other meat products directly to consumers. For more information and to place orders:

Black Mountain Ranch Beef

Email: blackmountainranchbeef@yahoo.com

Chileno Valley Ranch

www.chilenobnb.com

or call 707.765.6664 or toll free: 877.280.6664

Stemple Creek Ranch

www.stemplecreekranch.com

Join MALT this summer to learn more about rangeland and the birds that thrive there!



MARIN SUN FARMS: ROGERS RANCH & BIRD HABITAT TALK *Saturday, June 30*

PRBO bird specialist Ryan DiGaudio will talk about how rangeland provides important habitat for a variety of bird species, followed by a tour and lunch at Marin Sun Farms grass-fed beef and pastured chicken ranch.

RYAN-TOCALINO RANCH HIKE *Saturday, July 14*

Join Marin County Parks & Open Space naturalist David Herlocker and landowners Jerry Gause and Chick Kretz for a hike up the steep hills of this beautiful 865-acre ranch and bird habitat overlooking Stafford Lake.

COW TRACK RANCH: OWL AND BLUEBIRD BOX BUILDING & HIKE

Saturday, August 4

Be a part of the effort to help local farms ensure that owls and other important bird species continue to thrive in Marin! The Hungry Owl Project will teach us about owls and bluebirds, and we will hike on the 500-acre cattle ranch owned by Bruce and Liz Daniels. Then, after our picnic with salad from the ranch’s garden, we’ll learn how to build bird boxes that will go to farms and homes around Marin.

To learn more and register, flip to the Hikes, Tours & Talks schedule on pages 5-6 or go online to www.malt.org.



Carol Peek paints at Thornton Ranch

© Michael Woolsey

For the past 15 years, as a part of MALT's Ranches & Rolling Hills art show, artists have captured the special rural beauty of West Marin

on canvas in order to help protect it forever. This dedicated group sells *plein air* paintings of family farms to raise awareness of their significance to this magnificent countryside — the iconic barns, cattle-dotted hills, habitat-rich fields and waterways.

Ranches & Rolling Hills artist Carol Peek spent an afternoon in March painting the recently protected Thornton Ranch for this year's art show. Born and raised in Marin, Carol became aware of the fragility of the area's unique beauty at a young age.

"I grew up riding horseback throughout the hills and beaches of Marin and feel intimately connected to this landscape," she says. "I saw the open spaces and farms disappearing. As I made my way through college and art school I felt inspired to paint the local landscape before it became developed and I could lose the opportunity to do so."

Thanks to the commitment of dedicated MALT supporters such as Carol, the beloved West Marin landscape still exists today much as it did 150 years ago. To date, the art show has raised more than \$1 million for farmland protection — a significant contribution to MALT's easement program that has saved more than 40 percent of West Marin's at-risk farmland.

"I remember the thrill I felt when I first became aware of MALT and learned of its purpose," Carol says. "I feel honored to be working toward the same end, to preserve and share with others the beauty that is uniquely Marin."

For his part, rancher Gary Thornton decided to host Ranches & Rolling Hills painters in order to raise greater awareness of the farms MALT is protecting.

"I want to share this place with many people who would not be able to see it otherwise," says Thornton.

To learn more about Ranches & Rolling Hills and to purchase tickets to the lunch, please go to www.malt.org or call 415.663.1158.

MALT thanks the following businesses
for their generous support of the 15th Anniversary
Ranches & Rolling Hills Landscape Art Show and Sale:

Autodesk, Cowgirl Creamery, Edible Marin & Wine Country,
Marin French Cheese Company, Point Reyes Cheese Company, Point Reyes Vineyards,
Three Twins Ice Cream, and United Markets Grocery

To learn more about business sponsorship opportunities, please contact Development Associate Michael Woolsey at 415.663.1158.

Ranches & Rolling Hills Landscape Art Show & Sale

Saturday & Sunday, 5/19–20

Join us in Nicasio for the 15th anniversary of the art show and sale. The art show features world class art that has raised more than \$1 million to help MALT protect family farms and ranches here in Marin.

Time: Sat. 2:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. **Place:** Druids Hall, Nicasio

Sun. 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. / Preview Lunch: Sat. 11 a.m. – 2 p.m.

Cost: Art show and sale FREE / Preview Lunch \$150, limited space available

Western Weekend and Parade

Saturday & Sunday, 6/2–3

Celebrate farming and ranching in Marin during Western Weekend. On Saturday, the whole family can enjoy 4-H exhibits and petting zoo. On Sunday, join MALT at the parade at noon, followed by a BBQ at Toby's Feed Barn.

Time: Sat. 11:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. **Place:** Point Reyes Station

Sun. 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. / Parade at noon

Cost: FREE

Biking, Beef & Beer at Black Mountain Ranch

Saturday 6/9

Ride 33 or 55 miles through the hills and back roads of West Marin, past beautiful MALT-protected farmland. The tour will be led by Allan Reeves, owner of the touring company France from Inside, and members of the Marin County Bicycle Coalition will provide support for this spectacular ride. Return to Black Mountain Ranch for a BBQ of the ranch's delicious grass-fed beef or veggie burger, organic salad, Lagunitas Brewing Co. beer and Straus Family Creamery ice cream.

Time: 8:45 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. **Place:** Point Reyes Station

Cost: \$55 MALT members / \$65 nonmembers, includes lunch

Difficulty: Strenuous

Preregistration is required

Marin County Wine Celebration at Escalle Winery

Saturday 6/23

Enjoy celebrated local wines and food at this benefit for MALT. The 8th Annual Marin County Wine Celebration will include some well-known labels and some promising new ones including: Dutton-Goldfield, Pacheco and Skywalker Ranches, Sean Thackery, Coulier, Pey-Marín, Point Reyes Vineyards and Stubbs Vineyards. Wine by the bottle and by the case will be for sale at a discounted price.

Time: 3:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m. **Place:** 771 Magnolia Ave., Larkspur

Cost: \$55, includes valet parking and wine glass

Preregistration is suggested

Marin Sun Farms: Rogers Ranch & Bird Habitat Talk

Saturday 6/30

PRBO bird specialist Ryan DiGaudio will talk about rangeland and the important habitat it provides for a variety of birds. Then we will join 4th-generation rancher David Evans, owner of Marin Sun Farms, for a tour of the Rogers Ranch that he leases to raise his grass-fed beef and pastured chickens. After the tour, we will lunch at the Marin Sun Farms restaurant.

Time: 9:30 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. **Place:** Point Reyes Station

Cost: \$55 MALT members / \$65 nonmembers, includes lunch

What to Bring: Water, walking shoes, layered clothes

Difficulty: Moderate

Preregistration is required

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Register online at www.malt.org
or call 415.663.1158

Dolcini Family Day

© Mia Pelletier



Ryan-Tocalino Ranch Hike

Saturday 7/14

Join Marin County Parks naturalist David Herlocker and landowners Jerry Gause and Chick Kretz for a hike up the steep hills of this beautiful 865-acre ranch overlooking Stafford Lake. Enjoy panoramic views of San Francisco and West Marin at the top. Learn from Chick about the history of this ranch that was once the Ryan Dairy. The ranch includes grasslands for grazing, oak woodlands and deep redwood groves that provide habitat for a variety of birds and wildlife.

Time: 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. **Place:** Novato

Difficulty: Very Strenuous

Cost: \$35 MALT members / \$45 nonmembers

What to Bring: Water, lunch, hiking shoes, layered clothes, sunscreen

Preregistration is required

Hog Island Oyster Co. & Straus Dairy

Tuesday 7/17

Join local oystermen for a tour of their farm, taste fresh oysters, and enjoy your picnic lunch on the shores of Tomales Bay. Then carpool to Straus Dairy to see the organic operation along with the methane digester and other clean energy innovations. Watch cows being milked and enjoy a delicious Straus Family Creamery tasting.

Time: 12:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. **Place:** Marshall

Difficulty: Easy

Cost: \$35 MALT members / \$45 nonmembers

What to Bring: Water, picnic lunch, shoes that can get dirty, layered clothes

Preregistration is required

Family Day at Dolcini Ranch & County Line Harvest

Saturday 7/21

Visit this picturesque farm and picnic on the lawn enjoying the view. Feed the chickens, learn about the bees, and tour the fields full of vegetables. Play games, make ice cream, and create a salad with vegetables fresh from the field. The farm stand will be open and you can purchase eggs, vegetables and snacks.

Time: 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. **Place:** Point Reyes — Petaluma Rd.

Difficulty: Easy

Cost: Adults \$20 MALT members / \$25 nonmembers

Children \$10 MALT members / \$12 nonmembers

What to Bring: Water, picnic lunch, layered clothes, sunscreen

Preregistration is required

Cow Track Ranch — Owl and Bluebird Box Building & Hike

Saturday 8/4

Be a part of the effort to help local farms ensure that owls and other important bird species continue to thrive in Marin! The Hungry Owl Project will teach us about owls and bluebirds, and you can hike on Bruce and Liz Daniels' 500-acre cattle ranch followed by a picnic lunch, with salad from the ranch's garden. Then we'll learn how to build owl and bluebird boxes that will go to farms and homes around Marin. You may buy a box at discount at the end of the day. This event is open to adults and children 7 and up.

Time: 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. **Place:** Nicasio

Talk begins at 10:00 a.m.

Cost: \$15 MALT members / \$20 nonmembers / Free for children 7-18

What to Bring: Water, lunch, hiking shoes, layered work clothes, sunscreen

Preregistration is required

Photo © Michael Woolsey

Register online at www.malt.org
or call 415.663.1158

Cris Chater, MALT Legacy Giving Donor



Cris Chater

Mill Valley native Cris Chater was one of MALT's first and youngest donors back when the organization was founded in 1980. She grew up with MALT cofounder Phyllis Faber, whom Cris counts as a close family friend and mentor, and wanted to do what she could to support Phyllis's new organization. This enthusiasm and support for MALT has continued from Chris's teenage years through the past three decades.

"Marin County is special because of the state parks, the county open space district, the national parks, and MALT," she says. "MALT has played a key role in preserving the natural beauty and rich agricultural heritage that the county was largely founded on. This contributes enormously to the quality of life we all enjoy and too often take for granted."

MALT was the first land trust in the country to focus on agricultural preservation and has been conserving farmland for 31 years, and is "a model land trust."

With that in mind, Cris became a MALT Legacy Giving donor by including a bequest to MALT in her estate plans.

"I want to give back to my community that has enhanced my quality of life," she says. "Every time MALT acquires an easement and protects another farm or ranch from development, I feel proud that my philanthropic efforts are making a difference."

Cris now lives in Point Reyes Station and serves as Executive Director of Senior Access, known in Marin as the favorite social club for people with memory loss. As an avid runner, swimmer, hiker and backpacker (she completed her 15th consecutive trek along the John Muir Trail this year — 200 miles from Yosemite to Mt. Whitney), she dedicates much of her free time to the outdoors in the landscape MALT has helped to preserve.

To find out more about ways to support MALT's farmland conservation work, please go to www.malt.org or contact Director of Development Kristine Ball at 415.663.1158.

We would like to thank the **Taproot Foundation** for its generous service grant to create a brochure for MALT's Legacy Giving program. The program enables you to make a lasting gift to MALT in your estate plans and receive tax or income benefits now.

To learn more about MALT's Legacy Giving program, please contact Development Director Kristine Ball at 415.663.1158 or kball@malt.org

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Photo © Michael Woolsey

“What I notice about life here is the great variety of wild creatures that coexist with our domestic animals, and the great variety of native plants that live with our forage plants. It still feels like a wild place.”

~ Marin County Rancher Sally Gale



Marin Agricultural Land Trust (MALT) is a member-supported nonprofit organization created in 1980 by a coalition of ranchers and environmentalists to preserve farmland in Marin County, California.

With financial support from individuals, public agencies and private foundations, MALT has permanently protected nearly half of the working farm and ranch land in Marin County. MALT also encourages public policies that support and enhance agriculture.

To learn about Marin's working farms and ranches and the food they produce, visit www.malt.org.