

Winter/Spring 2022

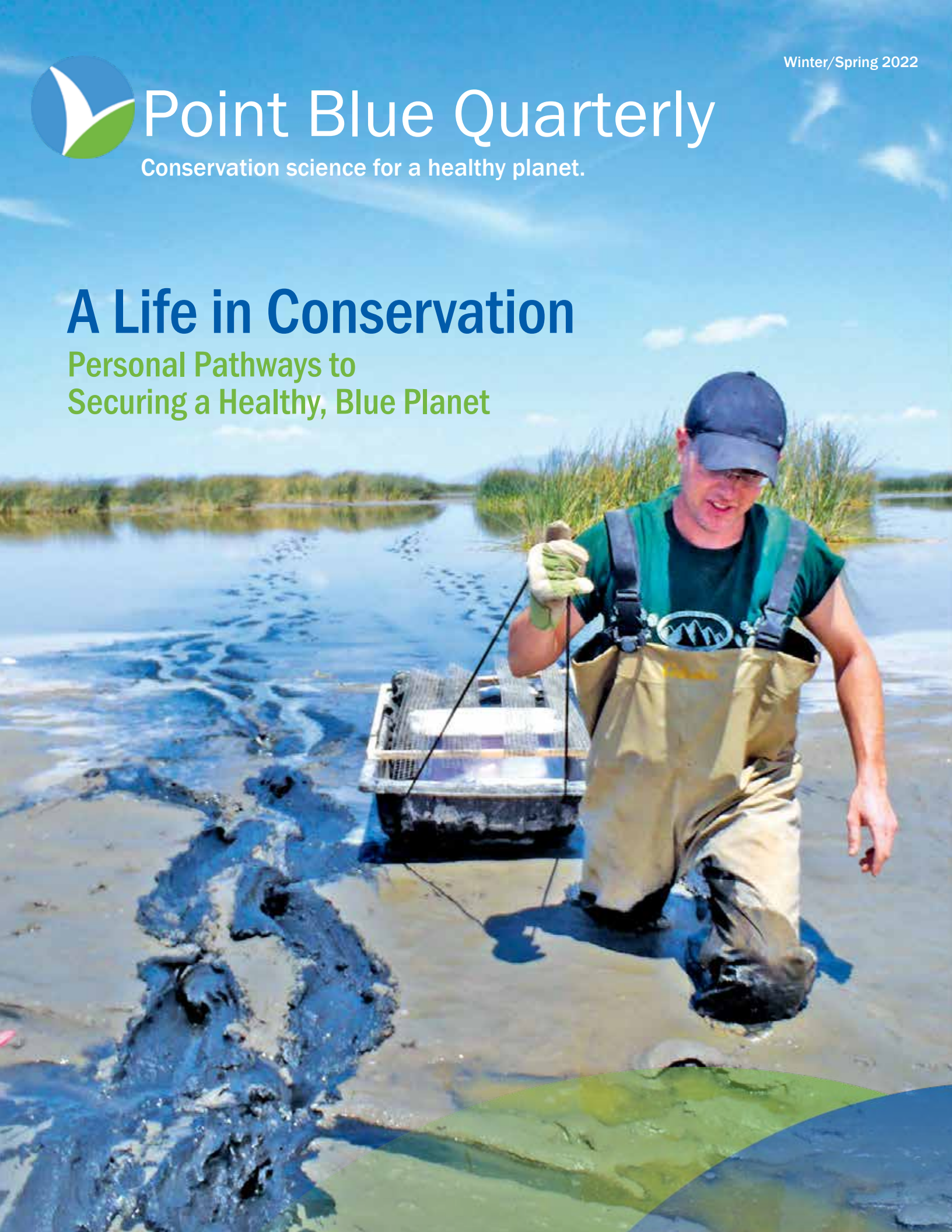


Point Blue Quarterly

Conservation science for a healthy planet.

A Life in Conservation

Personal Pathways to
Securing a Healthy, Blue Planet



FROM THE CEO Choosing a Life of Purpose

In December 2021, the world lost two great conservation biologists: Thomas Lovejoy and E.O. Wilson. Lovejoy was perhaps best known for popularizing the term “biological diversity” (often shortened to “biodiversity”) and while many know Wilson just for his extensive study of ants, it was really his study of the group dynamics that they exhibited and the way groups within species self-organize to perpetuate survival that made him a luminary. Although each traveled different paths, they were alike in dedicating themselves not just to scientific study, but to conservation of the natural world. Like the scientists, educators, and restorationists at Point Blue, Lovejoy and Wilson saw that there was an imperative for their science to be the basis of a movement aimed at slowing the extinction of species and the associated loss of biodiversity.

In this issue of the *Point Blue Quarterly*, we celebrate members of our community who

have dedicated their lives to conservation. As an organization that has been studying and protecting the natural world for 57 years, there was no shortage of outstanding candidates to choose from. The handful of individuals we chose span the full career range, from emerging conservation professional to group director, from agency partner to longtime funder.

Point Blue is tackling immense and urgent threats to our planet, and that requires bold solutions, continued dedication, and diverse conservation strategies that are championed throughout our community. Our approach blends rigorous scientific study, close partnerships with those who can scale our findings, on-the-ground implementation, and education and training of early career conservation scientists. And at the core of our work is the undying hope and optimism you’ll see in the stories featured in this issue.

As we have been inspired by those that came before us, we hope to help inspire the next generation, who will come from very different backgrounds and challenge all of us to be more innovative, to work with more diverse communities, and to reconsider how we measure success. The challenges before us are daunting, but I know that, working in partnership with all communities, we can always make a difference for the better.

And that’s why all of us, including our staff and broader community, have dedicated our lives to this important work.

Sincerely,



Manuel Oliva
Chief Executive Officer



What’s Your Conservation Legacy?

When you join Point Blue’s Tern Society, you help harness the power of science to maximize nature’s benefits for wildlife and people. Contact us to learn more!

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Shared Journeys

Migratory Shorebirds Inspire a Connective Worldview

Birds have been my inspiration ever since I learned about their life cycles when I was a teenager. Over the twenty years since then, the incredible journeys of migratory birds that mirror predictable seasons around the earth have become my life's passion. Today, I strive to grow our collective understanding of how we can better balance the needs of humans with those of migratory birds.

Watching ecosystems rapidly change firsthand, and tracking how birds and other animals respond, has taught me the meaning of perseverance. Having lived in nine US states throughout my life—including four before graduating high school—I understand what it means to take a leap of faith and journey to a new place, uncertain of what lies ahead. Birds like the Long-billed Dowitcher, a medium-sized sandpiper that weighs about as much as an apple, travel at least 5,000 miles roundtrip between nesting and wintering grounds each year. They must persist in the face of a myriad of unpredictable challenges along the way. Some challenges, such as predators, they evolved to anticipate. Other challenges, such as humans developing their habitats and impacting the climate, are relatively new and impossible for them to anticipate.

I have spent years tracking the movements of Long-billed Dowitchers and other migra-




tory shorebirds during my career at Point Blue. This has required countless hours of observation and effort, walking through muddy wetlands and flooded agricultural fields trying to carefully catch them and tag them with small transmitters that allow us to track their geographic coordinates.

Capturing small and elusive migratory shorebirds requires seeing the world from their perspective, and in doing so I have developed deep empathy for their plight. These birds inhabit wetlands that are inhospitable to humans, and only falcons can fly fast enough to hunt them. I have been humbled by the patience and persistence required to catch them. I often imagine a world where all humans have had similar experiences in nature.

Migratory birds create connections between distant locations and seemingly separate human communities. I have always been driven to work collaboratively, and working at Point Blue has made me an expert partner. For more than six years, I have worked with the Migratory Shorebird Project, a multinational collaboration initiated in 2011 by Point Blue, which unites communities to conserve migratory shorebirds. This partnership network spans the Western Hemisphere and now educates conservation practitioners in all 13 countries across the Pacific coast of the Americas, from Alaska to Chile. Everyone that I encounter in this network embodies the field of conservation science: they are passionate, emphatic, and mentally tough. These qualities are not unique, but they usually define those committed to conservation of the ecosystems that sustain us all.



My career in conservation has also taught me the importance of diverse human perspectives. I believe the biggest failure of environmental conservation in my lifetime has been its exclusiveness. Each of us has the ability to care about each other; about the earth's plants, animals, lands, and waters; and about strengthening the connections between us all. However, not enough of us have had personal experiences connecting to nature in meaningful ways—something I see as a critical step to developing an ethic of care for our planet. I have been fortunate enough to experience sunrises over wetlands, oceans, and mountaintops, and to feel the inner calmness that those experiences create. The future of climate-smart conservation must involve more equitable access to the diverse lands and life that surrounds us. The more each of us sees ourselves as part of the intertwined community of nature, the more invested we will be in protecting it. 

by Blake Barbaree, Senior Waterbird Ecologist

Clockwise from opposite top: Manuel Oliva, Point Blue CEO. Photo by Lishka Arata/Point Blue. Blake Barbaree, Senior Waterbird Ecologist, monitors shorebirds. Photo courtesy Blake Barbaree. Transmitter tags are carefully placed on a Long-billed Dowitcher. Photo by Blake Barbaree/Point Blue. Long-billed Dowitcher. Photo by Mick Thompson.

Spreading the Joy of Nature

A Career Dedicated to Connecting People and Planet

Nature versus nurture is a tension often explored in the context of parenting, but when asked what shaped my formative commitments to conservation, the question is relevant. Born with a love and curiosity for animals (and if you know me, especially horses), I had an abundance of life experiences that allowed those feelings to be nurtured. I'd try to catch and hold any living creature I could, running through the forest surrounding my grandparents' sheep, apple, and prune ranch. I learned to identify the wildflowers and trees by name from my grandmother, caught crawdads in the creek, built rock walls to corral the water skeeters, and turned over logs to find Pacific giant salamanders. At home I listened to my family's stories about living off the land as we sat around the wood stove.

My path was easy, I had all kinds of privilege that allowed my passions to be nurtured and pursued. My public elementary school prioritized outdoor learning and field trips, including a 3rd grade visit to watch bird banding at the Point Reyes Bird Observatory (now Point Blue Conservation Science!). As a 5th grader, the assignment to study a famous woman scientist introduced me to Jane Goodall and culminated in my mom taking me to hear



Melissa Pitkin, age 4. Photo courtesy Melissa Pitkin.

her infamous pant-hoot call resonate through the Convention Center in downtown Sacramento. All of this led me to pursue college to become a wildlife veterinarian. Somehow I still thought that was the only way to help wild animals and make a living—an early mindset I reflect on frequently as I work to make career paths into conservation more accessible.

While chasing my dream, I learned of the wildlife biology major. When one of my professors, Dr. Tim Caro, concluded the semester's Conservation Biology course with a strong assertion that including local communities in conservation action was the only way to protect endangered cheetahs, it was a lightbulb moment for me. There was more to conservation than science and knowledge—people needed to be included in creating and implementing the solutions to the big challenges we face. That shifted my mindset and career path towards conservation that included communicating and connecting with people.

Over the last 25 years, I've completed an MS in Science Education, grown the education program at Point Blue to become a \$2.5 million program connecting students, teachers, and community members with habitat restoration, and worked side by side with scientists to translate science into on-the-ground action. More recently, I've been exploring how Point Blue can become a more inclusive organization for any person, regardless of race, gender, culture, age, identity, or economic status,



Melissa Pitkin, birding with the "STRAW-lings" Bird-A-Thon team. Point Blue photo.

with the help of excellent mentors from the Center for Diversity and the Environment.

What I'm continually learning is that it's all about people and mindsets. In order to find solutions that work for all, it is essential that we build connections with the full range of people in our communities. This requires listening to *all* voices, not just the ones that have been prevalent and successful in the field of conservation—one that has been predominantly white.

As I envision the future of conservation, I see a movement to build inclusion in society; in the conservation field; in Point Blue's culture, operations, and partnerships; and, fundamentally, in my own life. In my work, I'm exploring how to build inclusion into our science, policy, career training, and education programs. I'm

MEET THE TEAM

Dante Khan, STRAW Restoration Technician

Point Blue's STRAW (Students and Teachers Restoring A Watershed) program engages thousands of K-12th grade students (more than 50,000 young people to date!) in watershed education and hands-on habitat restoration each year. As a STRAW restoration technician, Dante Khan facilitates student and staff planting days, leads work groups, and organizes the considerable logistics that make for successful days in the field.

Dante was first introduced to Point Blue through our STRAW Community College Conservation Internship (CCCI) program, which prepares the next generation of conservationists of color to become environmental leaders.

We spoke with Dante about his career path thus far and his thoughts on the future of conservation.

What or who inspired you to pursue a career in conservation?

My formative commitments towards conservation grew from a seed that was planted by my older sister, who also works in the environmental field. And I learned from my school that there was an internship program called CCCI. I met many STRAW teammates who inspired me very much to continue pursuing conservation.

asking questions with a dedicated Point Blue team, such as *What does inclusion look like when we are hiring new apprentices to work with us? What does including schools in low socioeconomic status communities require us to change about how we work? What is a relational worldview and how can that shape how we form new partnerships at Point Blue? What voices are missing from the conversations we are having about projects and programs?*

I often reflect back and wonder how different my path would have been if my early years

Did you encounter any significant obstacles or opportunities that shaped your path?

Yes, during the end of the CCCI program I was left with inspiration but no exact place to apply it. Luckily enough, that was maintenance season for STRAW, so I got on board as a field assistant for about 6 months. And that turned into a big opportunity to becoming a restoration technician.

What has surprised you the most so far about working in conservation and conservation education?

What surprised me the most is that it is very rewarding and leaves me with a feeling of satisfaction.

What are the challenges you most want to address through your work?

There are many challenges that I have encountered, but the one thing that I would like to address is that everything happens for a reason, and we are a giant web of life that depends on one another to thrive. Just like the work that we do, the relationships that we build with each other are just as important. We must all practice being a little more conscious and thoughtful of our environment, community, and the bigger picture.

running through the hills had also included a more honest understanding of why and how our family was able to homestead the land that is still in our family today. What if I grew up with an awareness of the brutal colonialism that removed the native Pomo people from the lands of Sonoma County, or a connection to the Pomo people who still live in our community today? I believe that connection may have set me on the path to build inclusion in conservation sooner.

After 25 years I am still learning and growing, especially when it comes to creating culture

Where do you see the future of climate-smart conservation going, and how do you foresee contributing to it?

I see many opportunities with climate-smart conservation. I foresee more community learning and engagement, whether it's being knowledgeable with planting native plants in your yard, being more efficient with water usage, or inspiring our future generation to go out and learn more about climate change and what the real root cause of it is. 🌍



Dante Khan harvests snowberry cuttings for use in STRAW restorations. Photo by Jessie Dittmore/Point Blue.

change. I'm truly excited to be part of creating a movement to build a more inclusive culture, at the personal, organizational, and systems level. 🌍

by Melissa Pitkin, Education and Outreach Director

PARTNERSHIP

Dr. Tom Peters, Marin Community Foundation

Tom Peters, PhD, recently retired as president and CEO of Marin Community Foundation (MCF). The well-respected and oft-admired leader has been a force for good in the Bay Area for decades. He first distinguished himself during the tough early years of the AIDS epidemic, working at the San Francisco Department of Public Health from 1974-1990, with eight of those years spent as chief of staff. He then served as director of the Marin County Health and Human Services Department until 1998, when he assumed the helm of MCF.

During his tenure at MCF, Tom grew the organization into one of the largest community foundations in the nation. Overseeing the distribution of more than \$2 billion in grants in support of the arts, education, community development, health, the environment, and more, Tom helped make a significant philanthropic impact in Marin County communities and beyond.

In addition to growing relationships with local philanthropists—more than 500 families now give through MCF donor-advised funds—Tom built trusted partnerships with non-profit organizations throughout the region, including Point Blue. The seeds of our partnership date back to before we moved our headquarters



Dr. Tom Peters, retired president and CEO of Marin Community Foundation. Photo courtesy Dr. Peters.

to Petaluma. “I love Point Blue,” he says. “We go back to the West Marin days way out there. And a number of our donors have participated since then and will continue to.” He reflects: “The organizational vision has always struck me, having a worldview that has honored and respected the myriad natural elements that it takes to have a healthy, vital environment. For whatever magic sauce reasons,” he continues, “I’ve been struck by the quality of the people who have been involved in this region, as a scientific center in the North Bay—the dedication, no matter what, to this vision. It’s always appealed to me.”

As Tom thinks back on his many career accomplishments, helping to fund climate action is one of the things he’s proudest of. “Climate change is a crisis that puts everything under its rubric,” he explains. “We’re proud of the partnership we’ve engaged in and funding we’ve been able to provide to the Coastal Conservancy for some of the mitigation. And we’ve loved our funding relationship with Point Blue.”

And work MCF has done to support community engagement on climate issues is especially meaningful to him. “I’m proud of Patti’s (Director for the Environment Patti D’Angelo Juachon) leadership, working with community-based volunteer groups in Marin City and the Canal to draw in people whose lives are generally most immediately affected by climate change issues, to bring them into the planning as the community-rallying force that they are.”

He strongly believes that environmental funders need to give with an aim toward ending the disproportionate impacts of climate change on BIPOC and low-income communities. “Some portion of funding, without undercutting the moral imperative of preventive activities and reversal, needs to address the issue of inequitable negative impact for some communities way more than

others,” he says. “Broadly dreaming of funding for the environmental world needs to have a continued focus on inequitable gaps.”

Looking forward, Tom believes that it’s this very type of community engagement that will move the needle on climate change. “The future will be dependent on how successful some of the current efforts are to stimulate and encourage the combination and responsibility we have as a thundering force on the planet to actively engage in policy setting and taking the actions that are necessary,” he says.

He also has a lot of faith in the next generation to lead the way to a brighter future for our planet. “I have loved watching kids from Point Blue’s STRAW program near my office,” he says. For Tom, seeing community impact has been one of the most rewarding parts of his career. “One of the reasons I love operating at the local level is that this is where change is happening. The international convenings are important but I just happen to get a bigger kick out of watching a bunch of STRAW youngsters at the creek,” he muses. “You can feel it—that for some of those kids, nurturing their commitment is going to be lifelong, and who knows where they’re headed into corridors of power. My bet’s on them.”

As for his personal next steps, Tom is looking forward to new adventures. “I look at the years ahead as a fourth quarter, and as a longtime 49ers fan I know some of the most exciting things have happened in the fourth quarter,” he says. At least some of the quarter will be spent reconnecting with nature. “Way back, I backpacked the High Sierra Loop and, while I might have to change a few routes now, I’d love to get back there,” he shares. For Tom, it’s the perfect place to reflect on all he’s accomplished, and to consider what cultivating a community of giving has given him in return: “I want to take a pause and think about my blessings.” 🌿

Getting to 30x30

A Conversation with Dr. Jennifer Norris

California continues to be a leader in nature-based climate solutions. I recently spoke with Dr. Jennifer Norris, deputy secretary for biodiversity and habitat at the California Natural Resources Agency. She is leading the charge on the State's "30x30" goal to conserve 30% of California's land and coastal waters by 2030 in order to counter biodiversity loss, advance equitable access to nature, and combat climate change. Point Blue is excited to support this ambitious effort with our science and through our participation in the California Biodiversity Network, the collaborative body supporting the development and implementation of 30x30 conservation actions. —Mani Oliva, CEO

One of your objectives is to assess baseline biodiversity conditions across California's diverse ecosystems—an effort Point Blue is proud to support with our 55+ years of long-term monitoring data and our expertise in habitat assessment. How will this type of groundwork help inform which lands and waters to prioritize for protection or restoration?

Good baseline information, knowing how habitat and biodiversity are distributed across California, is absolutely essential to ensuring we strategically conserve lands and coastal waters most in need of protection. At the same time, long-term monitoring of our natural and working lands is needed to inform their stewardship and adaptive management, especially in light of climate change.

Point Blue uses science and partnerships to strengthen the ecological value of California's agricultural lands and help them provide as much benefit as possible to the communities and wildlife that depend on them. How do California's 43 million acres of agricultural land factor in the State's 30x30 goals?

Agricultural lands are a key piece of the puzzle. Some agricultural areas, those with higher levels of protection—such as rangelands with conservation easements—will



Dr. Jennifer Norris, deputy secretary for biodiversity and habitat at the California Natural Resources Agency
Photo courtesy Dr. Norris.

help us reach our 30% goal. But our 30x30 conservation areas exist within a matrix of other land and coastal water uses. The value and effectiveness of those conserved areas are enhanced when adjacent areas are managed in ways that provide habitat, protect species, increase connectivity, or enhance ecosystem function. Agricultural practices that support resilient and functional ecosystems are vitally important to meeting our biodiversity and climate goals.

Climate-smart conservation—an approach that ensures that human and wildlife communities continue to thrive, even under changing climatic conditions—is at the core of Point Blue's work. In your view, what long-term strategies will be critical to protect conserved lands and coastal waters for biodiversity in the decades to come?

We need to start with the science. What are the likely future conditions that humans and species will experience? How will they and we move and migrate as conditions change? This will help us plan our conservation with

the future in mind and ensure we safeguard the resources and ecological systems that will sustain us.

As you reflect on your distinguished career thus far, which conservation achievements are you most proud of? Were there any pivotal moments that altered your path and led you to where you are today?

My mantra is that conservation problems are fundamentally people problems; we can't solve them if we don't come together to find common ground. Early in my career I worked to develop a conservation strategy for the Lesser Prairie-Chicken in southeastern New Mexico. I was part of a collaboration of state and federal governments, environmentalists, ranchers, and the oil industry to develop management solutions to protect the species and local economy. The early days were hard: our first meeting involved shouting and open hostility. But over time, as we met over maps and coffee and drove around the range getting to know each other, things changed. We built trust and we were able to develop a plan that we could all get behind. We did not agree on everything and our solutions were not perfect, but we developed a set of solutions that are being implemented today. That experience colored my career and influences everything that I do.

What keeps you personally energized and hopeful?

As you can probably see, I believe deeply in the power of people to come together and get things done. This year has shown me that people across California care and want to be part of this movement. They love and know they need nature—for our health, well-being and ultimately, our survival. I am energized by the momentum in California and across the globe to protect our planet. That gives me hope. 🌍

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focus

Rich Stallcup (1944-2012) was a Point Blue co-founder and naturalist extraordinaire. His original *Focus* essays inspired a love of nature and conservation. The column excerpted below was originally written in winter 1991.



Spring: Timing is Everything

Here in temperate western North America, migration is very different in spring than in fall. Not only does it go in the opposite direction, it's also much more orderly, timely, and tightly compacted. If you're not paying close attention, spring migration might slip right by you, unnoticed.

In fall, migrants can be found scattered all about, many of them babies on their first journey. With only a powerful need to go and a built-in compass, they leave their nest trees and hurtle themselves into black unknown skies. For many of them, the internal compass is off a click or two (or 180 clicks), causing far-flung vagrancy—birds showing up where they don't belong—due to poor navigation.

Spring migrants are all travel veterans: they've survived the trip at least once without making fatal mistakes. Waves of spring migrants are rare in the West, except at desert oases and other "islands" of shelter. Often the first clue that the flow is on is the presence one morning of singing, territorial birds where yesterday was only the presence of quiet.

During spring migration, birds have no time for wandering or milling around. Each species has a programmed date and time to depart its winter home. Travel to its summer home is direct and, weather permitting, as quick as possible. The first males to return get the best territories and (soon) the strongest females, but they also take a chance of being caught in a late freeze. Timing is everything.

There's a five-month span here from the earliest spring migrants, such as Tree Swallows in late December, to the latest ones, like Common Nighthawks and Yellow-billed Cuckoos around Memorial Day (in case you forget). The vast majority of spring migrants rush by between late March and early May.

Just what influences timing of travel by different species is unresolved and remains a curiosity, but some causes can be deduced. Since spring happens later in the far north and high mountains than it does in the south and in lowlands, birds that nest in the latter regions can start sooner and enjoy longer seasons (giving many the chance to produce

two or even three clutches). This notion applies to individuals within a species, as well: the first Say's Phoebe to reach the slopes of Mount Denali in June to begin nesting activity may have flown over another, on Mount Diablo, with young ready to fledge! It's even possible that a northbound migrant—let's say a Least Sandpiper—heading for the northernmost point of its nesting range could pass a southbound one that had already fledged chicks in the southernmost part of the range.

Following are some generalized arrival dates for coastal central California. Maybe your first glimpse of each will be earlier this year, perhaps later, or comparable. Or maybe they will slip right by you unnoticed...

Pacific Slope Flycatcher, 6 March. Wilson's Warbler, 17 March. Black-headed Grosbeak, 3 April. Yellow Warbler, 5 April. MacGillivray's Warbler, 9 April. Vaux Swift, 15 April. Flammulated Owl, 20 April. Western Kingbird (coastal), 25 April. Yellow-billed Cuckoo, 25 May. Common Nighthawk, 1 June. 