Notes based on Joe Morlan's Ornithology class lecture November 5th, 2009.
Joe Morlan is not responsible for these notes, any errors or omissions in them are mine.

Some changes in July:
Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow is now **Nelson's Sparrow**.
Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow became **Saltmarsh Sparrow**.
Taiga Bean Goose and **Tundra Bean Goose** have been split.
Several of the gulls got their scientific names changed and their sequence was changed.

Juvenal **Rockfish** is the main **prey base of breeding seabirds**. They are very vulnerable to changes of water temperature. Whenever you have an El Niño event the Rockfish fail to breed, leeding to collapses of breeding seabirds on the Farallon Islands.

A **Willow Flycatcher** has been reported in Strybing Arboretum this last weekend. Willow Flycatchers are mostly gone by the middle of October, there are only a few winter records.
One reported two years ago on St Bruno Mountain turned out to be an Eastern Phoebe.
Joe's photographs of it are here: http://fog.ccsf.cc.ca.us/~jmorlan/eaph010108.htm
The **Eastern Phoebe** can be confused with the Willow Flycatcher. Neither one of them has an eye ring. Both pump their tails. There is a difference in the way they pump their tails. Phoebes tend to pump their tails down, the Willow Flycatcher goes more up and spreads it a bit more. The Eastern Phoebe has faint wing bars, as does the Willow Flycatcher. A number of things are similar between the two, more things are different. The lower mandible of the Willow Flycatcher is all yellow or light pink, the whole bill of an Eastern Phoebe is black. The Phoebe is a larger headed bird and it is a grayer bird, the Willow Flycatcher tends to be brown. The vocalizations are rather different. the Eastern Phoebe's call is more like that of a Black Phoebe, the Willow Flycatcher has a wit-call more like other species of *Empidonax*-flycatchers. The Eastern Phoebe is much more likely to be sitting out in the open. The Willow Flycatcher like most *Empidonax*-flycatchers tends to forage within cover.

There has been a paper published that proposes the split of the **Snowy Plover** into the Snowy Plover (America) and the **Kentish Plover** (Europe). There are other populations of Snowy Plover-like birds found as far away as Australia. Some of them are isolated. some of them have quite a bit of red on the top of the head. There are subtle plumage differences and some habitat differences between these different populations. This particular study tried to determine the genetic distance between the Kentish Plover and the Snowy Plover and concluded that they were quite different. This does not mean that a change will take place immediately. It is a proposal in a peer-reviewed publication that needs to be looked at. As far as the AOU is concerned, there are no records of Kentish Plover in the Americas. They would not add Kentish Plover to the list, but the scientific name of the Snowy Plover would be changed. It is now *Charadrius alexandrinus*, certainly based on a European bird that would have been described before an American bird had been described to science.

American Wigeon

Used to be called the "Bald-Pate"

OCCURRENCE

More common in the West than it is in the East. Increasing in the East.
Pretty common around the Bay Area as a migrant and winter visitor. They have just started to arrive.
Pretty common in GG Park, where they tend to become fairly tame, probably taking social cues from some of the domestic ducks that have been released into the park.

FIELD MARKS

Head rather peaked directly over the eye, the forehead may be quite steep (depending on whether the crown feathers are raised or lowered down).
Bill bluish-gray, outlined in black, including a black line at the base of the bill.
Be cautious, the white underwings can appear to be gray when back-lit, even though the belly may still appear to be white! That is claimed to be a field mark for the Eurasian Wigeon, beware!
Contrasting white belly.

Bright Male

Crown white or pale buffy. When they arrive in the Bay Area in November and December they all have a creamy crown. It will change color during the course of the winter, by February most will have a crown that is pure white.
Shiny iridescent green ear patch, starts at the eye, extends out behind the eye down the side of the face.
Neck and lower face speckled.
Some individuals do not just have a creamy buffy crown, but a creamy buffy face as well with less speckles on the cheeks and on the neck, this is a variation.
Body purplish brown vermiculated, more purple on chest, than becoming more brown.
The back can look quite grayish, especially when the bird is facing away.
White upper wing coverts visible as a white patch on the side of a swimming or standing bird. (Most of the wing is concealed by scapulars from the back and by body feathers coming up from the side.)
The tertials have black outer webs with narrow white edge.
Tail black.

First Cycle Bright Male

More female-like body, green and pale buff on head just growing in.
Upper wing coverts mottled, they don't get the white patch before the wing molt in their second summer.
When these birds first arrive in November they still retain a lot of juvenal plumage or some vestiges of eclipse plumage.

Female

Entire head and neck speckled with dark gray.
The gray neck contrasts with the brown chest.
The color on the sides and flanks lacks the purple tone, it is a rich chestnut-brown color.
Wing coverts gray with pale tips in all ages.

VOCALIZATIONS
Males have a two or three syllable whistle.

Eurasian Wigeon

OCCURRENCE
Replaces the American Wigeon in Eurasia.
Regular but scarce visitor to the Americas, particularly in coastal areas.
Also in the Central Valley of CA, where there is probably a greater number of Eurasian Wigeons than anywhere else in NA.
Records of males are outnumbering the females by about 9:1. They are the ones that people recognize and report.

FIELD MARKS
No black outline at the base of the bill.

Bright Male
Crown always gold-buffy.
Whole head dark coppery rufous in color.
Can have a variable amount of green around and behind the eye.
Breast about the same pinkish brown as American Wigeon.
Back and sides vermiculated gray.

First cycle bright male
First cycle birds have the wing coverts spotted with gray like American Wigeon.
Face and crown more freckled than on later cycle birds.
They may retain quite a few juvenal body feathers, which are brown.
They often seem to have the head of a Eurasian Wigeon and the body of an American Wigeon. All this does not mean that the bird is not a pure Eurasian Wigeon!
Hybrids do occur, but they are much rarer than pure Eurasian Wigeons.

Eclipse Male
Similar to female but upper parts darker, flanks richer rufous.
Has the white wing patch (in females it is speckled like in American Wigeon).

Female
Very similar to American Wigeon.
Browner head, often with some reddish or rufous tone in it. (Compare to gray stippled pattern of the female American Wigeon.)
Head somewhat more uniform in color, less speckled than American Wigeon.
In rufous morph the color of the neck is very slightly darker than the color of the chest.
Gray morph has a head pattern that is pretty much identical to that of an American Wigeon. A little bit darker, a little bit more chocolatey. To Joe's knowledge no one in CA has ever successfully identified a gray morph female Eurasian Wigeon.

Northern Pintail

One of the hunters' favorites, called "sprig" by them.

OCCURRENCE

NA and Eurasia, pretty much identical in both places.
Feed on plants in shallow water, often by tipping. You often see them with just the rear end sticking out of the water. The tail helps them balance.
Joe finds the numbers in the Bay Area have collapsed in 30 years from being a very common bird in SF Bay in salt marshes and fresh marshes to being very much more localized and far fewer birds. Likewise he sees fewer of them in the Central Valley where they used to occur in very large numbers. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Department of Fish and Game set bag limits on huntable species to keep a sustainable population. Hunting season is usually in October and November when the population is at its largest because it includes adults and young of the year. There is not a lot of hunting on SF Bay. Water quality? Joe does not know what the reason is.

FIELD MARKS

Bill long and graceful.
Both male and female in flight appear to have dark wings with a thin white trailing edge just on the secondaries. No other duck has that kind of pattern in flight.

Bright Male

Brown head with a white stripe on the side of the neck.
Long neck, can feed in slightly deeper water than wigeons.
Gray vermiculated body.
Long, pointed tail.
Blue bill with a black culmen. Looks like there is a reflection of light on the side of the bill.
Black undertail coverts (like wigeon).
Sometimes a salmon staining on the neck and chest, probably from iron oxide that was dissolved in the water.
Very long scapular feathers.
Speculum dark, in good light dark green, with a buffy leading edge and a white trailing edge.

Female

Plain brownish head.
A little bit of an eye ring.
A trace of the male pattern on the bill, the bill tends to look blacker.
Bill bigger than on a wigeon and without the crisp black tip.
Rather long neck.
Body quite beautifully marbled. The pattern is intricate but it isn't fine. It consists of loops and swirls on the feathers that are quite large compared to most other female ducks.
Shorter tail than the males, but still a rather attenuated rear end and pointed tail.
Belly whitish, but it does not contrast like on a wigeon.

Eclipse Male

Different pattern on back and flanks than female, head a little bit browner.
Eclipse plumage is often incomplete, with leftovers of the basic bright winter plumage.

White-cheeked Pintail

Native to the Bahamas and the Caribbean, all the way down into South America.
There are records from Florida and possibly Texas.
The species is not very migratory and it is frequently kept in zoos and waterfowl collections.
Sightings on the Gulf Coast are sometimes of questionable natural occurrence, in most cases you never really know where the bird came from.

Males and females look alike.
That is something we see in tropical ducks, all tend to look like females.
Ducks breeding in temperate climates usually have strong sexual dimorphism.
Those birds are migratory for the most part. There may be an advantage for the males to appear sexy in a regime in which there is migration and pair formation in another place than where actual mating is going to take place. (Joe's hypothesis)
The Black Duck is sort of the exception, it is migratory.