

RNC PROPOSAL

Name/Names: Cindy Margulis  
Title: Executive Director  
Organization: **Golden Gate Audubon Society**  
Address: 2530 San Pablo Ave, Suite G, Berkeley, CA 94702  
Phone: (510) 843-2222  
Email: [cmargulis@goldengateaudubon.org](mailto:cmargulis@goldengateaudubon.org)  
Title for Proposal: Birds Are Natural Ambassadors for Nature, Science, Art, & Community

Please briefly describe what you are proposing.

Please mail a typed proposal, 10 pages maximum length to: Oakland Parks, Recreation & Youth Development Attn: Karis Griffin 250 Frank H. Ogawa Plaza, Suite 3330 Oakland, CA 94612 2

1. *Tell us briefly about your organization (max. 2 paragraphs)*

Golden Gate Audubon has been connecting people to the birdlife of our region and inspiring the protection of birds and their habitats for more than 100 years. The pillars of our work are community science (formerly called citizen science), effective conservation (including public advocacy for birds and hands-on ecological stewardship), and last but certainly not least, the education for people of all ages and backgrounds about birds and the natural world. Our organization has been involved at Lake Merritt for many decades. Golden Gate Audubon is proud to have provided Oakland's first naturalist, actually the first municipal naturalist in the entire nation, Paul Covel, from our own ranks. Paul educated countless people at the Lake from 1947-1972 and to this day our organization's outstanding environmental educator award bears his name. Golden Gate Audubon and its members had originally helped raise funds to establish the Rotary Nature Center to be the interpretive center for the nation's first wildlife refuge at Lake Merritt.

We remain deeply committed to connecting all Oaklanders to the city's truly astonishing variety of birds. Today, we do so through multiple programs, including our Eco Education STEM Science and ecological stewardship program which serves under-served schoolchildren (and their families) from Title 1 public schools in Oakland. Our year-long in-depth program inspired by wildlife of our local watershed has won both state and national awards for excellence in environmental education and is provided free of charge to the participants. GGAS also currently offers a docent program at Lake Merritt that serves the public free of charge, and provides free monthly field trips to discover birdlife around the Lake. We have myriad ideas for how to engage more Oaklanders in encountering and appreciating wildlife through a robust suite of programs we're proposing to deliver at the Rotary Nature Center.

2. *Tell us how your proposal will address one or more of the priorities associated with the Rotary Nature Center Framework? (see back page)*

The whole portfolio of programs Golden Gate Audubon is proposing addresses virtually every one of the key priorities in the framework for the Rotary Nature Center, but especially addresses these four stated priorities.

• *Developing Programs And Activities that Reach Out To All Ages (Youth, Adults, Seniors)*

We are focused on delivering high caliber programs that attract, educate, and inspire each of these age groups. We meet everyone where they are at, with culturally competent programming for all.

• *A Resource To Nurture Stem (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) for All Ages and Demographic groups*

One of the historic barriers to STEM/STEAM has been the lack of intriguing ways for audiences *of all ages* and backgrounds to be engaged on exciting accessible STEM learning opportunities. We know birds to be an ideal vehicle for STEM education that can get anyone and everyone interested and participating. Our achievements in community science from the earliest days of GGAS, and our world-record participation benchmark for field counters in our day-long Oakland Christmas Bird Count (CBC) demonstrates our ability to successfully engage wide audiences.

• *To Become Stewards & Educators Of Lake Merritt, The Wildlife Refuge, And The Pacific Flyway, A Natural Portal into the Wonders of Nature, Wildlife, And Science*

While GGAS believes firmly that it's valuable to educate about the natural world period, the ultimate goal for us is to leverage the wonder of birds to inspire ever greater public commitment to stewardship of local wildlife, the watershed, and ecosystem. Our SF Bay Estuary is a site of hemispheric significance for migratory birds. The RNC is a perfect venue for connecting people

to the phenomenon of avian migration along the Pacific Flyway right at Lake Merritt, a lagoon linked to the estuarine ecosystem. Birds are the most charismatic of messengers for all sorts of dynamic learning opportunities to connect with Nature, learn about life science, climate, water, and so much more.

• *A Hub For Encouraging the Relationships Of Art, Music, And Creativity Alongside Nature, Wildlife, and the Outdoors*

One of Oakland's greatest assets is the abundance of creativity and artistic expression that abounds in the local community. GGAS believes that particular elements in our program proposal will highlight how Nature inspires human expression, including in our combination nature+cultural bird themed programs and even more so through our vision of a vibrant Heron Festival at the lakefront. For such a Festival, we'd especially invite visual and musical creativity by Oaklanders to celebrate wildlife and Nature in vibrant ways that reflect Oakland's diverse cultural vitality beautifully.

3. Please describe your intended audience for this proposal. Who do you plan to reach? How do you plan to reach them?

Golden Gate Audubon wishes to deliver an extensive array of programming which serves a multitude of audiences, including families, youth, adults, and seniors. Here we briefly outline an initial litany of our program visions. Ideally, we'd co-promote many of these programs in conjunction with OPRYD but we have our own capacity to promote our programs and bring audiences to the Rotary Nature Center, where we hope to inspire their passion for the whole lakeside environment.

Building upon GGAS existing programs of **monthly free bird walks** at Lake Merritt, and our spring/summer Lake Merritt docent program, GGAS would like to deliver a much expanded series of new programs at the Nature Center to engage diverse constituencies through a variety of programs.

Currently GGAS holds the world-record for most in-the-field participants in any Audubon Christmas Bird Count globally, for our annual Oakland CBC. More than 300 people join us in an active daylong survey of the birdlife all over the Oakland area on one day each December. Leveraging our reputation for community science achievement, we'd like to explore ways to involve more Oaklanders locals in relevant community science projects, such as a **wintering waterfowl survey** of the Lake and Channel habitats, for instance. This could either be an adult community science engagement or a project involving local youth or nearby school groups. We could coordinate such a survey to foster STEM education. Such an effort would first benefit the participating group (whether adults, youth, school groups, families) but the findings could provide a valuable cumulative data set to inform city resources who manage habitat and water resources of the greater Lake Merritt area.

Leveraging our existing docent program for interpreting the colonial nesting waterbirds (Cormorants, Herons, Egrets) on the lake in spring and summer, we'd like to offer regular **docent observation hours at the lake at least 2x/month** during nesting seasons as well as regularly scheduled public **walking tours of the heronry relocation sites** on the edge of Lake Merritt. Such tours would help the public appreciate the massive collaborative effort that's happening to try to ensure safe areas for herons and egrets to nest in Lakeside Park. As always, our docent observation stations would be available for anyone in the park when they're happening but special time requests for docents with observational equipment (spotting scopes and binoculars to share) could be booked through us ahead of time to serve groups, such as (for instance) a senior walking club out for a circuit of the Lake at a particular time.

GGAS would like to create special bird-themed **science programs for diverse audiences, including families, seniors, and school/youth groups**. Each program could focus on any of myriad ecological issues, such as the diverse diets and behavior patterns of local heron species found at Lake Merritt, or the distinctive roosting and nesting habits of local Cormorants or why so many ducks spend the winter at Lake Merritt, etc. Family programs might offer a more general look at the primary theme but deeper curriculum on the topic could occur for school groups, leveraging for example the fishing catch data from Golden Gate Audubon's SFBayOspreys.org discovered through community science. In fact, the **livestream video of our SFBayOspreys.org** could be shown at the Nature Center throughout spring and summer, effectively opening a window on this especially charismatic wildlife species that represents our whole Bay watershed ecosystem so well. Showing on a big-screen monitor at any time, this only livestream

view of any Osprey nest on the entire Pacific Coast (located here in the Bay Area) could give the visitor center an immediate sense of vitality from April-July. And then the livestream becomes a powerful tool for either family or school-age science programs about local Osprey populations; the vivid HD livestream videofeed creates unparalleled opportunities for everyone to witness the majesty of our local wildlife. The beauty and behavior of Ospreys provides a vehicle for everyone to discover watershed ecology and be inspired to undertake stewardship actions, especially in local watersheds including at Lake Merritt. GGAS has created ready-to-use curriculum for secondary educators to **leverage Golden Gate Audubon's SFBayOspreys.org livestream** to drive STEM and STEAM science lessons for junior high and high school students. All the lessons are designed to satisfy California State Standards by grade level and are mapped to Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), too. This spring, we just added a new community science feature that encourages public participation. Watching the livestream, the public can help us witness and document the specific fish catch of Ospreys AND also log the troublesome manmade items that Ospreys do bring to their nest, as well.

Because **birds are inspirers and emissaries of culture, as well as iconic creatures of watershed ecosystems**, GGAS intends to curate a series of dynamic programs that combine both the natural science knowledge and cultural significance of several bird species found in Oakland. For instance: hummingbird are important birds for California Indian cultures and Central and South American cultures as well as crucial pollinators. Similarly, herons and egrets are referenced extensively in Asian and African cultures and they're significant participants in wetland and watershed ecosystems, too. Such programs would recognize the beauty and importance of birds to bring Oaklanders together for Nature discovery, refreshing learning encounters, and cultural arts appreciation all at once. Programs could also include an art or craft project that becomes a functional souvenir.

GGAS aims to develop **educational pamphlets** that help Lake Merritt residents (and visitors) appreciate the Lake's iconic birdlife, especially its colonial waterbirds and wintering waterfowl cohort. Such informational materials would be valuable for all audiences and could be made available in translations for diverse audiences and in digital format for access via mobile devices, too. Such content could become *de facto* self-guiding birding guide for Lake Merritt highlighting the tremendous biodiversity of the place. The content we develop could also be used as the basis for interpretive panel kiosks around the lake placed at ideal overlooks for observing certain species in abundance. GGAS has already developed information pamphlets and kiosk signage about wildlife for sites in Alameda, too.

For approximately 15 years, GGAS has been offering a year-long program for Title 1 underserved schoolchildren and their families focused on local watershed birdlife and ecological stewardship. The program involves a series of hands-on lessons including exciting field trips to creek, wetland, and ocean sites of the regional watershed full of hands-on engaging activities. Our signature **Eco Education Program**, was born in Oakland and has been recognized with both state and national awards for excellence in STEM and environmental education. We'd like to explore the possibility of using the Rotary Nature Center site to engage even more Title 1 school groups at the Lake Merritt ecosystem. It'd also be conceivable to create follow-on weeknight or weekend family science programs that complement our baseline curriculum to enable students and their families to stay engaged in nature discover over time. Oakland school groups in our hands-in Eco Oakland Program have been credited with creating more habitat for endangered Ridgway's Rails than any other, demonstrating that relevant ecological education involving stewardship practice yields benefits for both humans and wildlife.

Research on neurological development reveals complex benefits for all people who engage in natural journal keeping. GGAS would like to foster youth and seniors in creating and maintaining nature journals, especially about their discoveries at Lake Merritt and in the wider watershed of Oakland, too. John Muir Laws (Jack Laws) is a former Board Member of GGAS and we could invite him to kick-off a broad-based community effort to inspire **nature journaling by Oaklanders**. Eventually, art and findings from the community's nature journals would make for beautiful public storytelling projects (murals, quilts, videos) highlighting the community's passion for wildlife observation and the greater Lake Merritt ecosystem. The collective data contained in journals could also become important for **phrenology research**, offering insights on firsts of the season returning birds, butterflies, flower blooms, etc.

At present, GGAS offers approximately 20-24 moderately-priced classes each year for adults focused on birding and nature conservation topics. Hosting some of our **classes at the RNC would make these programs most accessible for Oakland residents**. Generally, our classes include an evening classroom component and then separate class meetings at field sites on weekends. Beyond our existing classes, we'd aim to develop a series of classes that meet at the nature center in the evenings and then meet

again on a weekday morning for excursions in the field to view what's been learned that week. Some examples of classes we offer are, *Birds of the Bay Area*, *Birding by Ear*, *Waterbirds & Shorebirds*, *Avian Evolution*, etc. We are interested in creating **seasonal birdlife discovery classes** available for Oaklanders, as well, and **classes could be offered at different times to best serve the needs of adults, families, &/or senior audiences.**

Golden Gate Audubon is interested in piloting some **mini-camp opportunities for local youth** who might be especially interested in future careers related to science, wildlife, and environmental stewardship. Through a short mini-camp during summer or a school vacation week, we can provide a wide range of activities that help young people gain a hands-on understanding of biology and eco stewardship and envision themselves as future leaders with primary responsibilities for caring for wildlife and ecosystems. Such programs may create natural cohorts for future youth development programs focused on nature stewardship. We'd partner with OPRYD to determine how best to fund programs like these on an ongoing basis if the pilots yield promising findings from the facilitators and youth who participate.

GGAS would like to co-produce a nature festival at Lake Merritt. Certainly, such an historically significant wildlife refuge deserves a signature festival celebrating its remarkable birdlife! Perhaps the festival could be called the Heron Festival as, across the nation, myriad birding and nature festivals are named for an iconic species even though most animals are honored within the festivities, too. **For such a festival, in addition to co-production**, GGAS could offer a number of elements, including docent-led birding observation stations of colonial waterbirds, a series of viewing stations to watch Cormorants, Herons, & Egrets. We could organize the signature visual art event, marshaling local artist to depict the local species of birdlife in sidewalk chalk around the lake trail as we'd done before in downtown Oakland, at The Presidio in SF, and in the City of Richmond, most recently, too. We'd invite still other local crafts people and artists to table their saleable items at the festival or do demos of their art, *if* their work is made from recycled (or sustainable) materials. We'd love to summon a costumed or "hatted" parade of Lake creatures as a fun focal way to invite families and kids to circuit the Lake "on parade". We'd also explore the potential of offering a city-wide "Lake Rap" contest in which kids write rap lyrics about Lake Merritt wildlife or ecology topics. The winners of such a contest in advance could perform on a stage at the Festival. The Nature center could also host special talks or presentations as part of such a festival, too.

Because GGAS and our membership of more than 7,000 feels so ardently about connecting people to the wonder of birdlife and because the Lake Merritt Wildlife Refuge and its Nature Center are the ideal place to inspire urban dwellers with thrilling and enriching nature experiences, we very much hope to provide a whole suite of programs for Oakland audiences at the Nature Center on an ongoing basis. In addition, we can offer the use of our very popular and colorful "*100 Years of Protecting Bay Area Birds*" exhibit as well as bird photography, and some life-size wall/ceiling photorealistic decals of large local bird species (Great Egret, Brown Pelican) to enhance the Nature Center's ceiling on a temporary (or permanent basis), as well. To honor our Centennial anniversary, we'd created this portable traveling exhibit. The exhibit features large compelling local bird imagery and was hosted in the lobby of the City of Oakland's Dalziel Building along with a local wildlife photography exhibit at Oakland's City Hall in spring of 2017. <https://goldengateaudubon.org/blog-posts/centennial-exhibit-oakland/>

4. If your proposal plans to use the Rotary Nature Center facility, what are the intended times for use?

Depending on the programming options which the committee wishes to see us implement, we'd be able to offer programming at different times. For example, we could deliver school-focused STEM ecology-focused programs or senior programs during weekdays, after-school and weekend programs for families and youth audiences, and evening programs that serve adults and family audiences, as well. At virtually no cost to OPRYD we'd be able to bring a vibrant suite of programming to the rededicated Rotary Nature Center. We believe the scope and quality of our program offerings would help to rapidly renew the public's affection connecting with nature at the RNC.

5. Please describe the budget for the program – Is there a fee for program participation? – Is the program cost recovery? – If cost recovery, what is the proposed financial split be with the center?

The range of programs we're suggesting means there may be different budget model for each program. For instance, we'd seek funding to subsidize programs for Title 1 Under-served schoolchildren and families so those programs would be entirely free-of-charge to low-income participants. We'd provide programs for adult education programs related to birds and ecology on a near or at-cost basis for which GGAS would seek our cost recovery through fees. For family programs or mini-camp programs we'd seek cost-recovery for audiences who can afford participation, and would like the City's help securing scholarship funds for those who'd require full or partial subsidy for participation. Primarily, GGAS proposes to deliver a significant variety of programming at our cost as a benefit which enhances the public's esteem for the Rotary Nature Center but at a *de minimus* costs for the City of Oakland. In some cases, such as public wildlife festival planning, we could explore a revenue-share model if it was decided to charge festival attendees or share revenues from sales and food concessions associated with the festival to make the event financially sustainable and support the professional staff time for planning and running an event on that scale.

6. Does the program require additional staffing support from OPRYD staff?

Our intention is to cooperate with OPRYD in such a way as to minimize the need for staffing support from OPRYD except for co-promotion of programs. Only for the most complex programs, like a Heron & Nature Festival, a more significant degree of cooperation would be required to ensure success.

7. How does your proposal demonstrate regard for diversity and inclusion? Are there plans for connecting with areas of Oakland or specific populations typically underserved?

GGAS has proven expertise in serving Title 1 under-served schoolchildren and their families through the nationally recognized Eco Education Program we pioneered. Yet, we'd like to examine the potential of offering more programming at the RNC to serve these audiences, as well.

Because Oakland is such a culturally diverse city, we believe GGAS has the ability to bring entirely novel programming, focused on birds, as ambassadors of both Nature and cultures to the Nature Center, as well. We'd do programs focused on a series of different birds and highlight the significance each holds in the ecosystem and also in the context of human cultures, too. For instance, Herons and Egrets are iconic species of healthy wetlands but also serve as culturally rich emblems in many Asian and African cultures, etc. Through programs such as these, we'd be outreaching to and honoring Oakland's distinctive ethnic communities and inviting everyone to come experience the nature center and discover the richness of the human cultures that Oakland and its birdlife can bring together beautifully. Birds, again as ambassadors, become ways to share and celebrate the Nature and the people of Oakland.

One of the most exiting aspects of leveraging birds as ambassadors of the Lake Merritt ecosystem is that audiences of all ages and all demographics can share equally in the excitement of discovering the array of birdlife at Lake Merritt. As the most graceful and natural of all ambassadors, birds can inspire all people to learn and become stewards of the watershed upon which wildlife and our human populations depend. Several local Oakland youth starred in a short film GGAS produced specifically for that goal of inspiring more eco stewardship of the watershed by young people who love local wildlife, see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aoVeHjO29Es>

8. What kinds of networking and potential collaborations are possible with your proposal? e.g. Are there individuals, agencies, artists, business, and other organizations or networks that you have or will be connecting with? Include examples both within and outside Oakland if relevant.

Golden Gate Audubon is a highly collaborative organization. Already, we recruit and engage nearly 3,000 volunteers to help us achieve our mission on an annual basis. Currently, we work at 8 different public land sites (administered by five different public agencies) restoring habitat for birds, which also serves to improve air and water quality for local communities, and improves climate resilience factors for urban landscapes, as well. GGAS does not own any land whatsoever; our work is wholly focused on engaging people on public land sites for the benefit of local wildlife and the human communities in our region. We also work with public educators and those with domain expertise of all kinds, including urban planners, architects, arborists, teachers, photographers, artists, and so much more.

In 2015, GGAS initiated our very first flashmob for heron and egret conservation in Oakland, called, “*Chalk it up to Compassion for #OaklandHeron*”. Since that time, we’ve done 4 signature chalk art events enlisting local artists, including a program in 2017 at The Presidio in San Francisco <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AixwYCnkctk> and most recently a program co-produced with the City of Richmond for Year of the Bird, which summoned 30 local artists to portray the birdlife of that city in sidewalk chalk renderings all over their Civic Center Plaza. We’d be delighted to bring this signature bird chalk art event to Lake Merritt as a part of a signature nature festival at Lake Merritt, perhaps to be called the Oakland Heron Festival. GGAS has worked closely with Oakland City staff, watershed team, planners, housing developers and wildlife biologists to attempt to draw the heron (and egret) population back to LM and Lakeside Park as more housing for humans gets built in Oakland’s busy downtown corridor and Chinatown area. Of course, the future human residents of these new housing developments rely on Lake Merritt as their nearest refuge for passive recreation and for connecting with Nature, too.

We have and continue to work very closely with East Bay Regional Park District on shoreline habitat restoration initiatives, including at MLK Regional Shoreline where our Eco Education program children are credited with creating more habitat for the endangered Ridgway’s Rail than any other group. On a monthly basis, GGAS produces 8 different public restoration events to encourage public stewardship of public shoreline/park lands.

We’d welcome the chance to collaborate more with the Lake Merritt Institute to encourage more public participation in their shoreline cleanups on the lakefront. In 2017, GGAS completed a short film featuring several Oakland-area students to encourage watershed stewardship and this is a tool that both our organizations can use to inspire more in the coming months and years. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aoVeHjO29Es> We’d also like to consider how we might collaborate on some public climate education topics in conjunction with LMI and other local watershed experts.

We’d also welcome the opportunity to explore future joint programming with the Pollinator Posse and others to promote wildlife-friendly plantings in the LM vicinity and in all Oakland neighborhoods and backyards. We have created a pamphlet for gardeners in the East Bay to encourage more wildlife-friendly planting.

If the committee approves our idea of an Oakland Heron/Nature Festival at Lake Merritt, we’d be keen to invite all local groups to table at and participate in organizing such an event that would provide a lively communal learning and nature discovery experience that’d become a signature event in Oakland each year.

We also know and work with current educators and retired public educators who are involved with our Eco Education Program for Title 1 schoolchildren and their families. This award-winning STEM/STEAM education program demonstrates GGAS’s commitment to ensuring inspiring science and eco stewardship learning opportunities for all families, regardless of income level.

9. How do plan to monitor the benefits of your proposal, such as number of people served, degree of satisfaction, impact etc.

Of course, we’d maintain statistics on attendance for all of our programs and develop appropriate evaluation metrics to guide future program offerings, as well.

10. Please include any relevant references from aligned organizations and community partners.

We have myriad formal partners, from land management agencies to local park authorities, to public educators, to project specific partners for our wide range of initiatives. If a specific reference partner’s insight is desired, please let us know.