

Dr. Nathan Van Schmidt Biography

Dr. Nathan Van Schmidt is Director of Regional Strategies at the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory, where he leads interdisciplinary research at the intersection of water management, land use, climate change, and waterbird conservation. His work combines field-based ecological research, stakeholder engagement, and advanced simulation modeling to better understand how waterbirds, their habitats, and human water-management decisions interact and evolve over time.

Dr. Van Schmidt serves as the lead researcher for migratory waterbirds associated with the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project, the largest tidal marsh restoration effort on the U.S. Pacific Coast. His research focuses on California Gulls, phalaropes, and other migratory bird species, including investigations into how the displacement of California Gulls from Mono Lake has affected San Francisco Bay ecosystems and how declines in phalarope populations may influence restoration outcomes. He also leads efforts to model phalarope population dynamics across the saline lake ecosystems of the Great Basin.

Prior to joining the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory, Dr. Van Schmidt worked with the U.S. Geological Survey, where he contributed to national assessments of saline lake ecology and helped develop integrated land-use, water-management, and climate-change models used to evaluate long-term water sustainability. He currently serves as a Lead Author for California's Fifth Climate Change Assessment and founded the Regional Climate Analysis Coordination Workgroup.

Dr. Van Schmidt earned a B.S. in Zoology from the University of Wisconsin–Madison and a Ph.D. in Environmental Science, Policy, and Management from the University of California, Berkeley. His doctoral research examined how drought-related irrigation restrictions affected wetland habitats critical to the persistence of California Black Rails during California's historic 2012–2016 drought.