

The Whistling Swan



NEWSLETTER OF THE MENDOCINO COAST AUDUBON SOCIETY

January 2011

Monday, January 17

7:00 Pm

Fort Bragg Town Hall

Journey Through Australia:

Birds, Mammals, Landscapes and People

Roger Foote, retired biologist and former president of Peregrine Audubon Society, will share fascinating facts and images from Down Under during a slide presentation entitled "Journey through Australia: Birds, Mammals, Landscapes, and People". Roger spent nine weeks in Australia, traveling from the tropics in the extreme north to the temperate southern tip of Tasmania. While his talk will mainly focus on Australia's living birds and mammals, he will also touch on the evolutionary history of Australia's flora and fauna. In addition he will share photos of aboriginal art, along with audio and video clips to illustrate some of the more memorable aspects of his trip.

Black-necked Stork and Rainbow Lorikeet

photos by Roger Foote.



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Crescent Honeyeater



Belford Melidectes



PRESIDENT'S CORNER**David Jensen****WE CAME, WE SAW, WE COUNTED**

Nuttall's Woodpecker

Photo Ron LeValley

www.LeValleyphoto.com

The 111th Audubon Christmas Bird Count has ended. Although the final numbers will not be recorded for a few more weeks (like Santa, they're making a list and checking it twice) I would like to share a few observations concerning the three counts in which I was fortunate to participate: Ukiah, Manchester and Fort Bragg.

I'll start with the last one first. Our first Fort Bragg count was an inspiring success. More than fifty field observers and about ten feeder watchers participated in the inaugural count. There were walkers and drivers, bicyclers and kayakers, owlers and seabirders, veterans and beginners. A total of 142 species of birds were seen on count day, including some that I have never found locally: Nuttall's Woodpecker, Oak Titmouse and California Towhee.

Although the total number of birds seemed to be low this year, the Ukiah and Manchester counts both set new records for total species (138 and 149 respectively, pending further review).

Despite the series of recent storms, the weather was fairly benign on each count day. The storm that was predicted to hit during the Ukiah count turned out to be nothing more than a set of showers, heavy at times, that made the morning rather uncomfortable. Lighter showers on the morning of the Fort Bragg count fouled our binoculars but produced brilliant rainbows, including a couple of double rainbows. The day of the Manchester count was surprisingly pleasant after the cold and windy day that preceded it.

Birders from many different chapters worked together to make each count a success. Dave Bengston, George Chaniot, Geoff Heineken, Bob Keiffer and his son Ryan, Chuck Vaughn, Cheryl Watson, and others that I am forgetting at this late hour came over from Peregrine Audubon in Ukiah to help with the Manchester and Fort Bragg counts. Jerry White from Redbud Audubon in Lake County, Bryant and Diane Hichwa and Jim Weigand from Madrone Audubon in Santa Rosa, and Kim Kuska from Sequoia Audubon in San Mateo also drove to Point Arena to help with the Manchester count. Jim and Karen Havlena, Richard Hubacek and others from the coast drove over to Ukiah to help out that count. These one-day annual counts foster a spirit of friendship and community that unites our regional organizations and strengthens our conservation and educational

California Towhee photo Ron LeValley

www.LeValleyphoto.com

PRESIDENT'S CORNER**continued**

initiatives throughout the rest of the year.

In each count, the volunteers were happy to make the necessary sacrifices. Some gave up peaceful winter sleep to rise hours before dawn. Bob Keiffer from Ukiah began owling at two o'clock in the morning for the Fort Bragg count. They stayed out in the rain. The wet noses, fingers and toes were a nuisance, but the wet binoculars and scopes really hurt. One birder stayed out all day with a broken foot, another climbed down to the beach with a broken toe. They used up vacation days and tanks of gasoline. For the most part, these citizen scientists worked all day to see birds that they'd seen a thousand times - in many cases, birds they had seen the day before. Nevertheless, nearly everyone learned something new, saw something they'd never seen. More importantly, they contributed valuable information that will continue to be understood and appreciated for years to come. They recorded for future generations how it was in this part of the world on one particular day in the winter of 2010. They recorded a brief snapshot of a rapidly changing world. They came together, they worked hard, and they had fun doing it.



Oak Titmouse

PAM HUNTLEY ON KXYZ FM 88.3, 90.7, AND 91.5**YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER**

This time of year, you see mixed flocks of birds, known as guilds, foraging among the trees for insects. You might catch a glimpse of yellow on a small, grayish bird, which has patches of yellow on chin, flanks and back. It is appropriately named the Yellow-rumped Warbler. I affectionately call them Butter Butts. These five-and-a-half inch guys are one of the easiest warblers to see because of their habit of sitting at the end of prominent twigs exposing their yellow rumps and flitting up to catch flying insects. I learned their name as Audubon's Warblers named after you-know-who, but years ago Audubon's was lumped with the Myrtle Warbler which also has the yellow rump, although the adult Myrtle has a white throat, and a distinct white eye-line. They were lumped with the Yellow-rumped when it was discovered that some interbreed in the north and are hybrids, a mix of the two. So the Myrtle and the Audubon are known as subspecies of the Yellow-rumped Warbler. Both of these groups are seen here at this time of year but the Myrtle returns north to breed and has the distinction of being Canada's most common warbler. So I hope you'll look up and catch a glimpse of these Butter Butts.

Yellow-rumped Warbler by Ron LeValley
www.LeValleyphoto.com



SAVE OUR SHOREBIRDS**Becky Bowen****42**

DECEMBER 24, 2010: TEN MILE BEACH, MACKERRICHER STATE PARK – Save Our Shorebirds volunteers found 42 Western Snowy Plovers here today and reported all members of the winter flock look healthy.

Every one of the plovers (described as threatened on the Endangered Species List) has a story and the bird shown at left is no different.

Volunteers (certified and trained to record Snowy Plover observations) began to watch this bird at Ten Mile Beach in August, 2009. Distinguishing leg band colors are green, white, aqua and blue. Last week, we learned from Point Reyes Bird Observatory Research Associate Frances Bidstrup that this bird is no newcomer to our beaches. The same bird (with different bands) was first spotted by Ron LeValley and Charlene McAllister at Ten Mile Beach December 9, 2007. It was rebanded in South Beach, Oregon in 2009, and continues to return to Ten Mile Beach every year (along with a number of other plovers that hatched and fledged in Oregon).

Here are SOS reports of high Snowy Plover December counts at Ten Mile since 2007:

2007	32
2008	31
2009	38
2010	42

Save Our Shorebirds is an on-going long-term citizen science project conducted by members of the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society and scientists at California State Parks. To learn more, contact Angela Liebenberg at:

ALIEBENBERG@parks.ca.gov



Western Snowy Plover
photo Becky Bowen

BIRD SIGHTINGS

December 30, 2010 A [Swamp Sparrow](#) and a [Little Green Heron](#) in the reeds and brush near the mouth of Greenwood Creek during the South Coast CBC. Tim Bray.

December 28 Many [American Dippers](#), a dozen [Wood Ducks](#), a [Green Heron](#). Jeff Laxier.

December 27 [Lincoln Sparrows](#), a [Swamp Sparrow](#), heard two [Soras](#) calling. Big River, under Highway 1 bridge. Richard Hubacek.

December 27 [Hooded Merganser](#) with 3 [Common Mergansers](#) on the Caspar Pond. Karen Havlena.

December 26 [Bullock's Orioles](#) near the northwestern-most Banksia tree in the Fort Bragg cemetery. David Jensen.

December 24 Five [Black-Crowned Night-Herons](#) and "Squeaky" the [Harlequin Duck](#). Cate Hawthorne.

December 24 [Long-tailed Duck](#) at Ward Avenue, [Rock Sandpiper](#) at Laguna Point. [Black-legged Kittiwake](#) at Van Damme SP. [Cattle Egret](#) on Garcia Flats, [Eurasian Wigeon](#) at Gasker Slough N of Miner Hole Rd. Two [Sandhill Cranes](#) at Garcia River mouth, a [Long-billed Curlew](#) at Garcia River mouth. Chuck and Barbara Vaughn.

December 23 [Rock Sandpiper](#) at Laguna Point. Dorothy Tobkin.

December 18 Six [American Dippers](#) Noyo above the estuary. Cate Hawthorne.



Sandhill Crane photo Ron LeValley

www.LeValleyphoto.com

BIRD WALKS AND FIELD TRIPS

Bird Walks at Mendocino Botanical Gardens.

February 5th at 9 AM.

February 19th at 8:30 AM.

We have extra binoculars and an expert to guide you.

Upcoming Field Trips:

Saturday, February 12, Owling, Time and Location TBA

Saturday, March 12, MacKerricher State Park, 9AM

Sunday, April 10, Van Damme Beach and State Park, 9 AM

Saturday, May 14, Navarro River and Beach, 8 AM

Sunday, June 12, Hendy Woods, 9 AM



Hooded Merganser photo

Ron LeValley

www.LeValleyphoto.com

BLACK TURNSTONE**Donald Shephard**

Black Turnstone winter plumage

A double rainbow arced over the Point Cabrillo lighthouse early on the second day of January. Our group of Christmas Bird Counters, David Jensen, Peter Gealey, Joel Franks and myself, had walked down the trail from the parking lot in cold wet weather. We strolled around to Frolic Cove in hopes of spotting something other than Yellow-rumped Warblers. On the surf-splattered rocks a group of Black Turnstones flashed their wing pattern and called. The Black Turnstone is a defining species for our

rocky, wave-battered Pacific Coast. It blends in well with the dark rocks, but a careful winter observer will find it from Canada through Baja California.

In winter the head and breast become largely dark brown with little white. Juveniles appear similar to winter adults but browner with buff fringes to the wing-coverts and scapulars and a grey-brown tip to the tail. As the birds flew among the rocks, their bold wing pattern allowed us easy tracking. White feathers along the flanks, a white wing stripe, and a white lower back produce this pattern. A black band terminates the white tail.

The Ruddy Turnstone (see November 2010 Whistling Swan) is similar but has rufous-brown markings on the upperparts and more white on the head and breast. The narrower wings of Ruddy Turnstones accompany narrower white wingbars. Ornithologists classify both Black and Ruddy Turnstones in the genus *Arenaria* within the sandpiper family but once placed them in the plover family.

The Black Turnstone has a variety of calls, especially a rattling trill. Other calls include a loud, screeching alarm call and a soft, purring call uttered to young chicks.

Food consists mainly of invertebrates, particularly crustaceans and mollusks in winter. They do not eschew seeds, eggs and carrion. On their summer breeding grounds in Alaska where they forage among wet sedge meadows, they switch to protein-rich insects to raise and feed their young.

In winter, its typical habitat is rocky coasts but it also feeds on beaches, mudflats and man-made structures such as jetties and breakwaters. Black Turnstones forage by walking along rocks

BLACK TURNSTONE

continued

and using their short, pointed bills to pry open or hammer preferred food items like barnacles and limpets. On sandy beaches, a turnstone uses its bill to turn over stones, shells, and seaweed in search of food.

Individuals of this species often show strong site and mate fidelity when breeding, nesting at the same exact site with the same mate year after year. Males perform a display flight in which they climb high in the air and dive abruptly like a Common Snipe, with vibrating feathers producing an audible sound. For nests, Black Turnstones line a shallow depression with grass on the ground near water. She lays three to four eggs, which are incubated by both sexes for about three weeks. Chicks leave the nest shortly after hatching, and find all their own food. Both parents care for the young at first, but the female often departs after two weeks, leaving further parental care to the male.

Relative abundance, threats both on breeding grounds and non-breeding grounds, and most importantly, its very small breeding area place this bird as a Species of High Concern. All 80,000 birds breed in a narrow stretch of coastal plain in western Alaska which is susceptible to oil spills. Black Turnstones use Prince Williams Sound, Alaska, site of the Exxon Valdez oil spill, as their major spring staging site.

The Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta in Alaska, home to breeding Black Turnstone, and Kachemak Bay, Alaska, an area used by many turnstones in spring and autumn, have both been included in the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network. Increased numbers of wintering Black Turnstones associate with restored kelp beds off the coast of Palos Verde Peninsula in California. That is good conservation news, but Christmas Bird Count data suggest that winter populations of Black Turnstone in the Pacific Northwest may have decreased.

Join the Save Our Shorebirds volunteers and you will surely spot this characteristic shorebird in the rocky intertidal zone along with its fellow "rockpipers"-- Ruddy Turnstone, Wandering Tattler, Surfbird, and Rock Sandpiper. Certainly, you will enjoy sharing birding with knowledgeable local birders. Perhaps you will see Black Turnstones. A double rainbow will, at least metaphorically, arc above you.

Black Turnstone photo Jim Wedge



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MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society is to help people appreciate and enjoy native birds, and to conserve and restore local ecosystems for the benefit of native birds and other wildlife.

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