

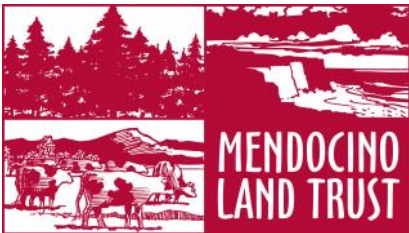


The Black Oystercatcher

Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Newsletter, March 2014



Dorothy King Young Chapter
CALIFORNIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY



You Are Cordially Invited
To Join Us For the
Annual Environmental Potluck
And Presentation Of The
Matt Coleman Environmental
Service Award

Monday, March 17, 2014
Russian Gulch State Park
Recreation Hall

6 p.m. Dinner

7 p.m. Program – MAPA, A Nonprofit Operating
Standish-Hickey State Recreation Area

7:30 p.m. Organization Updates

This Year's Potluck Hosted by MAPA
Please bring your own plate, silverware, beverage
and a potluck dish for 8

Contact: Carolyn Cathey, MAPA Executive Director
carolyn@mendoparks.org 707 272-5397

Masthead Photograph by Ron LeValley

NOTES FROM THE JOURNAL OF AN ACCIDENTAL CONSERVATIONIST

Editor's Note: After Pam Huntley's story about "Creating a Backyard Habitat" appeared in the September *Black Oystercatcher*, we received requests for more information about backyard bird feeding. On a mission to find the perfect birdseed for backyard birds, one MCAS member stumbled on to a lazy-lady way to feed yard-birds that transported her to another level of bird watching. What is your experience? Please share your story by sending it to Charlene McAllister at charmac@mcn.org We hope this is the first in a series.



May 13, 2012 – Hiked at Glass Beach, Fort Bragg, CA. State Parks crews cleared a huge amount of non-native invasive plants along the main trail. Scotch broom and Himalayan blackberry bushes were yanked out, and up popped the most stunning group of native plants – especially salal. *Gaultheria shallon* is native, usually an understory plant in North Coast coniferous forests – but until now, I didn't see it on the sunny windy ocean bluffs. The White-crowned Sparrows were in food heaven. This plant would work in my yard. I like the pink bubble blossoms.



October 27, 2012 – Finally made yard decision: Native plants – practical and economical. Looked around the yard, watched birds to see where they perched and what they ate. The coyote brush is everywhere and it's always green. It's the bush of choice for sparrows, warblers, a rare-for-here Common Yellowthroat (!), California Quail, Western Bluebirds and the Yellow-rumped Warbler that keeps bringing the seed up to the deck for a feast. It's coyote brush for me. The Yellow-rumped Warbler told me so.



B. Bowen Photos

Spring, 2013 – Birds taught me how to landscape. And the American Goldfinch reminds me why I never clean spider webs off the hog wire on the deck. The web threads are perfect for nests and if I'm lucky, I can watch her fashion it into a tidy little bow. This yard is full of green plants that I didn't have to plant and don't need to water. The birds are feasting on seeds and there are plenty of them, and they are free. There is no plastic feeder to clean. I'm glad I stuck with what the birds and bugs "told" me. Somewhere along the way, I went through a profound change in the way I looked at birds. It was a lovely journey. B. Bowen

PRESIDENT JOLEEN OSSELLO'S COLUMN WILL RESUME NEXT MONTH

PAM HUNTLEY ON KZYX FM 88.3, 90.7, AND 91.5

COMMON RAVEN



© Ron LeValley

Common Raven

Photograph by Ron LeValley

For many, the Common Raven represents magic.

Somehow the word “common” doesn’t fit this bird that is known for its intelligence, aerial acrobatics and impressive repertoire of vocalizations.

The Common Raven is the largest passerine. The male is two feet long; the female is slightly smaller. Feathers are jet black and iridescent. A large curved black bill is described as “Romanesque.” When perched, their necks look shaggy. In flight, their wings are broad and blunt at the tips. The tail are wedge-shaped.

Common Ravens are renowned for flying skills that include spectacular midair dives. Some believe these impressive flights are a form of play.

During courtship, the pair flies wingtip to wingtip. Courtship involves vocalization and grooming of partners. The pair bonds for life. Pairs build nests on cliffs and ledges, man-made structures or tall conifers. Nests are constructed of large sticks and branches, and lined with fur and plants. Both parents feed the young food and water. Nests are built in early spring to take advantage of an abundant food source: other birds’ eggs and nestlings. The young ravens’ falsetto croaks are a familiar summer sound in our forests and neighborhoods.

In an upcoming column, we will look at how human interaction with crows and ravens impacts our environment.

GARDENING WITH A HERMIT THRUSH

Donald Shephard



Hermit Thrush photo by Matt MacGillivray

This mild winter gave me the opportunity to clear five tree stumps from my gully garden. I hacked away at them over a period of two months, removed the wood, filled in the holes, and raked over the soil. This coastal black sandy loam works easily. Old-time farmers would have called it a one-horse soil – meaning they needed to hitch only one horse, not two or three, to the plow. When I grab a handful and squeeze, it holds together then crumbles easily when I rub it between my hands; it is nicely friable. I think about what I am raking. Mother earth consists of sand, silt and clay. Air and moisture support a multitude of organic matter, both living and decaying.

Crawling around between soil particles there are insects, mites, nematodes, and various annelids, including earthworms. With a microscope you could see bacteria and fungi. I once used a Berlese funnel, an apparatus with a light above an inverted metal cone, with some preservative in a jar underneath. The heat of the lamp drove living things down the funnel, through the soil and into the jar. That way I collected minute beetles, millipedes, centipedes, and other arthropods.

As I stood leaning on the rake the other day, I watched an orange centipede wriggle to bury itself. Alas for the arthropod, a Hermit Thrush gobbled it up. The hungry bird stuck around to see what else I uncovered for its dinner. A couple of earthworms joined the centipede in the bird's crop. The sun dipped low, painting my garden with a golden glow, and I retired to my own dinner, leaving the Hermit Thrush singing its lovely melancholy song.

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Birds have a sound-producing organ called the syrinx, the equivalent of our larynx. The syrinx is near the bottom of the windpipe, where it divides into the main bronchial tubes that lead to the lungs. Each lung has its own drum-like syrinx, enabling songbirds to create two sounds at once, hence the beauty and complexity of Hermit Thrush vocals.

Once in my garden, I discovered a Hermit Thrush carcass. Ants had devoured its entrails and left only feathers and skeleton. A little forceps work, a good soaking in bleach, and I had a Hermit Thrush skeleton. Live birds of this species weigh about 1.1 ounces, measure 6.75 inches long, and spread their wings 11.5 inches. Compare those figures to the numbers for our most common thrush, the American Robin: weight 2.7 ounces, length 10 inches, wingspan 17 inches. I imagine our specimen weighed about an ounce at death. With guts and feathers removed, you have a gossamer-like skeleton weighing a fraction of an ounce. At various times, I have placed it gently on a child's hand and the kid hardly feels it. I say, "That is why birds can fly and you cannot."

The Hermit Thrush has a rich brown back and smudged spots on the breast, with a reddish tail. It stands upright, often with its slender, straight bill slightly raised, as do American Robins. Like other thrushes, its head is round and its tail fairly long. Its underparts are pale with well defined spots on the throat and smudged spots on the breast. With a close look you may see a thin pale eye-ring (not a bold one). Hermit Thrushes hop and scrape in leaf litter while foraging. They perch low to the ground on fallen logs and shrubs, often wandering into open areas such as forest clearings or trails. Sometimes a Hermit Thrush will cock its tail and bob it slowly, while flicking its wings.

Walt Whitman wrote of the Hermit Thrush this way:

*In the swamp in secluded recesses,
A shy and hidden bird is warbling a song.
Solitary the thrush,
The hermit withdrawn to himself, avoiding the
settlements,
Sings by himself a song.
Song of the bleeding throat,
Death's outlet song of life, (for well dear brother
I know,
If thou wast not granted to sing thou would'st
surely die.)*



Hermit Thrush skeleton photo by Donald Shephard

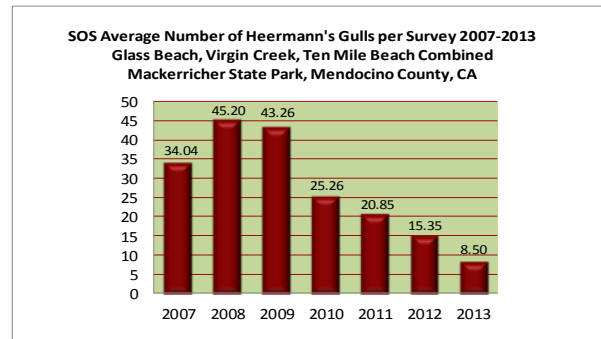
When I leaned on my rake watching this lovely vocalist, I followed poet Amy Clampitt's advice:

*we drop everything to listen as a
hermit thrush distills its fragmentary,
hesitant, in the end
unbroken music.*

SAVE OUR SHOREBIRDS**Becky Bowen****WHERE HAVE ALL THE HEERMANN'S GONE?**

Save Our Shorebirds' mission is to compile data and not draw conclusions. But that doesn't stop us from asking questions. In 2013, for example, we recorded fewer sightings of Heermann's Gulls than any other year since the beginning of SOS. The chart below shows the average number of Heermann's Gulls counted on those surveys which had sightings.

We gather data about Heermann's Gulls because they are listed by Audubon and the American Bird Conservancy as birds in decline, they are easy to identify, and we like them. They have been a real presence on the north county beaches from July through October, especially at Ten Mile. Besides, who wouldn't be curious about a bird that chases waves and snatches fish out of Brown Pelican pouches.



Cornell University scientists described a slight improvement in the number of Heermann's Gulls in the last few years that resulted in attempts by the gulls to nest along the Pacific Coast – a radical departure from nesting that was confined (90-95% of the entire world's population) to the Isla Raza in Baja California's Sea of Cortez. After breeding, the gulls migrate (in summer) as far north as the coast of British Columbia. We continue to record data about these birds because they may be one of many indications that changes are coming to this part of the Pacific Coast.

And to answer the obvious question, the Heermann's Gull (*Gaviota mexicana* in Spanish) was named by American ornithologist John Cassin to

honor Dr. Adolphus Lewis Heermann. Heermann was an Army surgeon and naturalist involved in the mid-nineteenth century exploration of California that produced the Pacific Railroad Reports – historic manuscripts that recorded California plants and wildlife. Heermann died of gunshot wounds suffered in a hunting accident in San Antonio in 1865. He was 38.

Save Our Shorebirds is an ongoing long-term MCAS citizen science program in partnership with State Parks. To participate in surveys, contact Angela Liebenberg at liebenbergs@mcn.org and please visit us at

www.facebook.com/SaveOurShorebirds

AUDUBON SEEKS HELP FOR CALIFORNIA BROWN PELICANS



We all have California Brown Pelican stories. Like Linda Perkins: On July 5, 2012, she counted 204 Brown Pelicans in offshore flights at Virgin Creek Beach on her Save Our Shorebirds survey. We are lucky to see the subspecies traveling up and down our coast and we were happy when the bird was saved from extinction. The Brown Pelican was listed as endangered in 1970 after scientists at the Channel Islands identified DDT as the cause of breeding failure. Birds consumed contaminated fish in waters that flowed into the ocean from mainland sewers. Chemicals in the pesticide affected the birds' calcium metabolism and egg shells were so thin they broke under the weight of the parent birds. Nesting pelicans warm eggs with their feet. More than 30 years of conservation followed, and the birds were removed from the Endangered Species List in 2009. At that time, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service committed to follow-up monitoring and planned for a 5-year de-listing report in 2014.

Now, California Brown Pelicans are in trouble again and we can help. The promised federal de-listing report will not be ready because budget cuts stopped monitoring that would help make sense out of a five-year-long failure of breeding on West Anacapa and Santa Barbara Islands in Channel Islands National Park (the only breeding colony of California Brown Pelicans in the Western United States). The birds won't survive if we don't have the scientific knowledge to answer questions caused by this breeding failure and starvation events in California and Oregon. USFWS needs to do the job it promised to do and determine if the bird should be put back on the Endangered Species List.

California Audubon joined International Bird Rescue and Pacific Seabird Group to urge USFWS to put in place a post-delisting monitoring program for the Brown Pelican. Your letters and e-mails make a difference. To help, visit the CA Audubon Action e-Alert announcement at <https://secure3.convio.net/nasaud/site/Advocacy?cmd=display&page=UserAction&id=1569>

or write a real letter to:

Gary Frazer
Assistant Director for Endangered Species
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
1849 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20240
Re: Post-delisting Monitoring of the California Brown Pelican

40th MANCHESTER CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT Karen Havlena

This Christmas Bird Count was first held 40 years ago, in 1974. The remote location on the Mendocino Coast is near Manchester, with the center of the circle placed at Irish Beach. The original organizers wanted to draw attention to wintering Tundra Swans that once numbered in the hundreds (the high count was 434 in 1985). Unfortunately, we hit an all-time low this year when we found only 7 Tundra Swans.



Loggerhead Shrike

Photograph by DickDaniels

With the dry weather, we were concerned about low fresh water levels. That was the case in a few locations, such as the mouths of Brush Creek and Alder Creek, but other ponds and creeks had average amounts of water. Also, with the dry conditions came more counters than usual – 40. As a result, we had more species (144) and more individual birds (11,327). A thick fog hugged the immediate coastline, causing problems for our dedicated spotters at the Point Arena lighthouse. But they managed to see three species worthy of required documentation. Highlights included a returning (fifth year) PACIFIC GOLDEN-PLOVER, a 2nd-cycle RING-BILLED GULL, and two PIGEON GUILLEMOTS seen close to shore.

As for land birds, a NUTTALL'S WOODPECKER was a first ever for the count. A seldom-seen LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE and a BLACK AND WHITE WARBLER were found. We had some other nice birds, such as Eurasian Wigeon, Osprey, Ferruginous Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk, Sora, Gray Jay, Palm Warbler, and Common Yellowthroat.

I was successful in having National Audubon's CBC Administrator, Geoff LeBaron, change the official name of this count to Manchester (the code CAMN fit right in). Since the newly formed Fort Bragg count (CAFB) is also located on the coast of our county, the former name, Mendocino Coast, did not work. Thanks to all of the participants and to David Jensen for organizing the counters and for providing our delicious dinner. We all celebrated the 40th anniversary with cake for dessert. Next year will be the 115th Christmas Bird Count conducted by National Audubon. The Manchester CBC will be Saturday, January 3, 2015, rain or shine.

Next Month: Fort Bragg Christmas Bird Count

Mendocino Land Trust to Resume Big River Bird Surveys in May

The Mendocino Land Trust will renew its Big River Breeding Bird Surveys this spring. Mendocino Coast Audubon members with all levels of birding experience are especially welcome to volunteer. Training will be offered in April, and surveys will begin in May. Specific dates and times will be posted in our next newsletter.

Dave Jensen

CALENDAR, BIRD WALKS, FIELD TRIPS

March 2014

Saturday 1 Beginner Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 9AM* **Cancelled**

Sat-Sun 1-2 Bird Walk at Point Cabrillo for the [Whale Festival](#) 9AM, meet at Lighthouse parking lot at entrance on Point Cabrillo Drive, bird walk leader Sarah Grimes

Saturday 8 Field Trip - Mackerricher State Park (Lake Cleone and Laguna Point) 9 a.m., meet at Lake Cleone parking lot, field trip leader Dave Jensen

Sat-Sun 15-16 Bird Walk at Point Cabrillo for the [Whale Festival](#) 9AM, meet at Lighthouse parking lot at entrance on Point Cabrillo Drive, bird walk leader Dave Jensen

Monday 17 Environmental Potluck, Presentation of Matt Coleman Environmental Service Award 6 PM, Russian Gulch State Park Recreation Hall (MCAS, [MLT](#), [CNPS](#) and [MAPA](#)), bring a dish for 8 and your own plates, silverware and beverage. Host organization MAPA. Program at 7 PM (See Page 1 of this newsletter)

Wednesday 19 Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 8:30AM*

Thursday, 20 MCAS Board Meeting 7PM, contact J. Ossello for location

Saturday, 29 Family Bird Walk, Big River Haul Road 9 AM, meet on north side of Big River at the yellow gate entrance to haul road, bird walk leaders Sue "Magoo" and Sarah Grimes

April 2014

Fridays 4, 11, 18, 25 Save Our Shorebirds in-field training Virgin Creek Beach 9AM, contact Becky Bowen, casparbeck@comcast.net or 707 962-1602 for meeting place

Saturday 5 Beginner Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 9AM*

Saturday 12 Field Trip - Van Damme State Park 9 AM, meet at Van Damme Beach parking lot on Highway 1, field trip leader TBA

Wednesday 16 Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 8AM*

Thurs-Wed 17-23 [Godwit Days](#), Arcata

Monday 21 Meeting **Gualala Art Center 7PM** Program TBA

Saturday 26 Family Bird Walk, Point Cabrillo 9 AM, meet at Lighthouse upper parking lot, birdwalk leaders Sue "Magoo" and Sarah Grimes

May 2014

Saturday 3 Beginner Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 9AM*

Thursday, 15 MCAS Board Meeting 7PM, Contact J. Ossello for location

Saturday 17 Field Trip - Navarro River and Beach 9AM, field trip leader TBA

Monday 19 Meeting [Caspar Community Center](#) 7PM Annual Meeting, Board Election
Speaker: Matthew Mattheissen on Ethiopia

Wednesday 21 Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 8AM*

Saturday 24 Family Bird Walk Series - [Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens](#) 9 AM*
Meet at the front entrance, birdwalk leaders Sue "Magoo" and Sarah Grimes.

**These walks are free, but there is an entry charge for participants who are not members of the Gardens.*

For updates and useful links, visit the MCAS website: www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org
and please visit us on facebook: www.facebook.com/mendocinocoastaudubon

MCAS BOARD MEMBERS AND PROGRAM CHAIRS 2013-2014

President	Joleen Ossello	391-7019	j_ossello@earthlink.net
Vice President	David Jensen	964-8163	djensen@mcn.org
Secretary	Open		
Treasurer	Angela Liebenberg	962-9267	liebenbergs@mcn.org
SOS Program	Angela Liebenberg	962-9267	liebenbergs@mcn.org
Webmaster	Catherine Keegan	937-4422	keegan@wildblue.net
Membership	Marybeth Arago	962-0724	mmbarago@mcn.org
Programs	Charlene McAllister	937-4463	charmac@mcn.org
Conservation	Linda Perkins	937-0903	lperkins@mcn.org
Education	Sarah Grimes	937-4322	zewa@mcn.org
Newsletter	Charlene McAllister	937-4463	charmac@mcn.org
Field Trips	Tim Bray	937-4422	tbray@wildblue.net

Mendocino Coast Audubon Society e-mail address: audubon@mcn.org

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.

MENDOCINO COAST AUDUBON SOCIETY

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