



# The Black Oystercatcher

Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Newsletter March, 2015



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 16, 2015  
CASPAR COMMUNITY CENTER



6 p.m. Dinner  
7 p.m. Award Ceremony  
7:10 p.m. Program Jeanne Jackson:  
"Amazing Sights: Natural Wonders  
On the Mendocino Coast,"  
7:45 p.m. Organization Updates



This Year's Potluck Hosted  
By the Dorothy King Young Chapter, CNPS  
Please bring your own plate, silverware, beverage and a  
potluck dish for 8

Contact: Nancy Morin, President, Dorothy King Young Chapter , CNPS  
nancy.morin@nau.edu 707/882-2528

Masthead Photo by Ron LeValley

## BIRDING THE SOUTHERN EDGE OF THE EARTH Jim Griswold and Trudy Jensen

Photo by Jim Griswold and Trudy Jensen



“A dentist’s nightmare is the first thing that comes to mind,” says Trudy Jensen about this up-close-and-personal photo of a Rockhopper Penguin.

The picture was taken on West Point Island, Falklands, where Rockhoppers shared a nesting area with Black-browed Albatross. Trudy and Jim Griswold recently returned from a trip to the Southern Hemisphere. The *Black Oystercatcher* staff was delighted to see a few of their 7,000+ trip photos.

A recent study published in *Current Biology* examines the inside of a penguin’s mouth, so richly captured in Jim and Trudy’s picture. According to a story in the *Washington Post*, Jianshi “George” Zhang, professor in the University of Michigan Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, confirmed penguins have no tongue receptors for sweet, bitter or umami tastes. Vertebrates typically have receptors that distinguish sweet, sour, salty, bitter and umami (a savory meaty taste). Rockhoppers, along with Chinstrap, King, Adelie, and Emperor penguins, were part of the University of Michigan study.

These findings may mean the birds use their tough, grooved tongues to fish without enjoying the taste of their slippery catches. Prof. Zhang hypothesized ancient climate change contributed a loss of this sense that brings so much pleasure to human vertebrates.

A recap of how birds taste in a story published Feb. 26 in the United Kingdom’s *Daily Mail* indicates most birds are poor tasters because their tongues have few receptors and their beaks have no teeth. In the case of the Rockhopper in front of Jim and Trudy’s camera lens, what they lack in taste, they make up for in good looks.

### NATIONAL AUDUBON LAUNCHES EXCITING NEW WEBSITE

Love to dream about travel and photograph exotic wildlife? Maybe you’d rather stay home and create a bird-friendly yard. Audubon’s brand new website contains stories, photos, new material including a mobile-friendly bird guide with descriptions by Kenn Kaufman and illustrations by David Sibley, news, and coverage of Audubon’s conservation activities. Our favorite tab is “Get Outside,” a lifelong mission and dream for every birdwatcher on the face of the earth. Take a look and enjoy: <http://www.audubon.org>

## SAVE OUR SHOREBIRDS

Becky Bowen

Photos by Becky Bowen



May 11, 2014 Dunlin (right) and  
Sanderling Ten Mile Beach

**2014:  
It Was  
A Very Good  
Year  
For Dunlins  
On the Coast**



November 1, 2014 Ten Mile Beach

Dunlins are giving us something to talk about. The data tell the story. On October 16, SOS surveyor Richard Hubacek commented about 54 Dunlins he observed on Virgin Creek Beach: "Unusually large numbers of Dunlins passed through the northern Mendocino County coast during the second two weeks of October, 2014. They were traveling in good-sized flocks (typically, we see a few at a time drop down from migration, mixed in with Sanderlings)."

We don't have an explanation, but the increase was dramatic. The medium-sized sandpipers pass through here in spring in brilliantly-colored plumage on their way to tundra breeding grounds at the top of North America. They pass through again (usually in October) looking like they were dipped in dust.

We'll continue to watch the numbers with interest, because this little shorebird was placed on the U.S. State of the Birds Watchlist in 2014 by scientists working on the North American Bird Conservation Initiative, a listing of birds that need urgent conservation efforts to keep them from being endangered or threatened. Below is a table showing the high count on SOS surveys for the last eight years. Our data are compiled and entered into the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's international data base. A new annual report showing all SOS shorebird recordings appears on the MCAS website (click on Conservation) at [www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org](http://www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org)

## Dunlins: SOS Surveys 2007-2014, MacKerricher State Park Beaches

## High Counts -Source SOS e-bird

	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
2007	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	30	1	50	0	0
2008	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	18	0	0
2009	0	0	0	2	14	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
2010	0	0	0	25	0	0	0	0	0	4	6	0
2011	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	13	4	0
2012	0	0	0	21	5	0	0	0	3	22	26	0
2013	1	1	0	7	21	0	0	0	1	16	12	5
2014	6	6	2	12	36	0	0	1	2	54	37	30

Save Our Shorebirds is an ongoing long-term Mendocino Coast Audubon citizen science project. Volunteers, who survey five Mackerricher State Park sites, have logged more than 7,000 hours in the field. To volunteer, please contact Angela Liebenberg at [liebenbergs@mcn.org](mailto:liebenbergs@mcn.org). To see photographs of the birds we find on SOS surveys, visit Facebook [www.facebook.com/SaveOurShorebirds](http://www.facebook.com/SaveOurShorebirds)

## WINTER BIRDS IN BRITAIN Donald Shephard

A bitter wind blew down from the Pennines when my wife and I landed in Manchester Airport last month. It hurled fluffy snowflakes at us horizontally. Fortunately I did not have to drive from Lancashire over the Yorkshire moors in the snow. That chore went to my niece's husband, who opted for a T shirt and no jacket. No creatures stirred in the whitened wilderness.

We saw our first bird the next day, a European Robin, *Erithacus rubecula*. Brits know it simply as the Robin. Jackdaws, *Corvus monedula*, perched on the snow-encrusted ridge of my sister's cottage in Skelmanthorpe near Huddersfield.

My wife is a keen knitter, and makes a pilgrimage to Holmfirth, which is close to Skelmanthorpe, whenever we visit. While she selected Rowan yarns, I raided the local bakery for a chocolate éclair and ate it as I watched a Grey Heron, *Ardea cinerea*, a relative of our Great Blue Heron, *Ardea herodias*. This handsome bird stalked fish below a bridge over the River Holme which runs through town.



**Grey Heron**  
photo by Charles J. Sharp



**Jackdaw**  
photo by Maxwell Hamilton

On our travels around pubs for food and some fine Yorkshire bitter, we often heard and sometimes saw Woodpigeons. Their cooing brought memories of wandering in the Essex countryside of my youth. When we worked summer jobs on farms, my brother and I cooperated on weekend projects. On Saturday afternoons, he shot Woodpigeons, (considered a pest by farmers). On Sunday mornings, I cleaned them and my sister baked them into egg and pigeon pies for our lunch pails. Anything to augment the meager family coffers.

On the return drive to Manchester, we spotted a Hen Harrier swooping over the moors. We know the same species, *Circus cyaneus*, as Northern Harrier and formerly as the Marsh Harrier, a name used for *Circus aeruginosus* in the U.K.

We flew from Manchester to Heathrow to be greeted most unexpectedly by a Pied Wagtail, *Motocilla alba*, a delightful small, long-tailed and rather sprightly black and white bird. It patrolled the taxi rank under the overhang at the airport. When not standing and frantically wagging its tail

## DONALD SHEPHARD

up and down, it dashed about the car park in search of food. A surprise to me, it often gathers at dusk to form large roosts in city centers.

The weather improved in London, enabling us to visit favorite haunts. A giant blue cockerel stands atop a plinth in Trafalgar Square. We saw two bird species on the Thames,

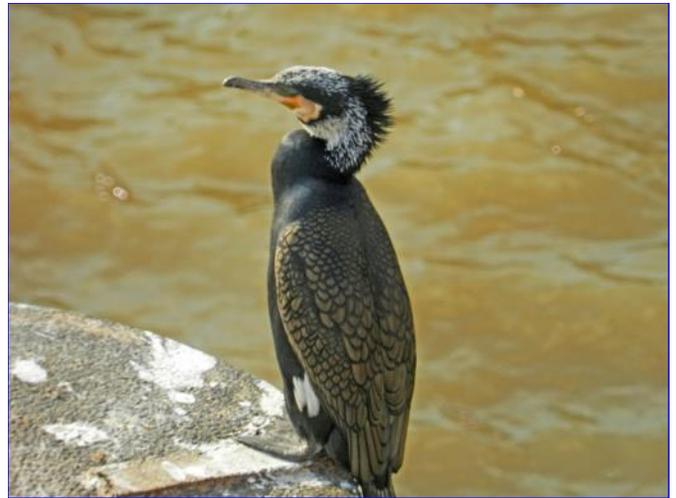
Cormorants and Black-headed Gulls. Brits call members of the genus *Phalacrocorax* by two names. The one is simply Cormorant, *P. carbo*, and the other Shag, *P. aristotelis*.

The other bird on the Thames was the Black-headed Gull, *Larus ridibundus*, the same species that has been seen about six times on the Northern California coast.

We took the London Underground to the Royal Gardens at Kew where raucous Ring-necked Parakeets, obviously nonnative, blessed our ears. It is the UK's only naturalized parrot. It is large, long-tailed, has green plumage, a red beak, and a pink and black ring around its face and neck. Often found in flocks, numbering hundreds at a roost site, it can be very noisy. Other noise polluters, Magpies, *Pica pica*, strutted around the tea shop. In the many specimen trees, I spotted a Jay, *Garrulus glandarius*, an appropriate name for this beautiful unmusical bird.



**Pied Wagtail photo by Bob Coyle**



**Cormorant photo by Donald Shephard**



**Jay photo by Luc Viatour**

I noticed the peaceful setting is undisturbed by a jet approaching Heathrow every five minutes. So, time to return to our stunning coast.

Perhaps it is just as well we require a monstrous machine and acres of landing strips in order to fly. Birds have paid a great price for their special gift – they have no hands, no opposable thumbs. They must manipulate everything with their beaks. On the other hand they do not suffer the tedious security system at airports, which is part of the price we pay for not being able to fly unassisted.

## **THE SEARCH FOR A NEW MCAS LOGO** Catherine Keegan

Once upon a time, the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society had a logo.

This beautiful line drawing of Whistling Swans headed our newsletter for years. In 2012, our organization opted to change its mascot from the *The Whistling Swan* to the *The Black Oystercatcher*.

The website and the newsletter have used one of Ron LeValley's photos as banners. However beautiful the photo is, it does not make a good logo.



The Mendocino Coast Audubon Society needs a logo, something that can be used on the website, the newsletter, stationery, rack cards, coffee mugs, t-shirts, white boards, and on everything else we need to stamp as ours.

What we need is our Black Oystercatcher, a challenging bird to render. He's kind of bulky, without a lot of contrast, with a long orange bill, and pink legs, but he's our bird. Can you design a logo with clean lines that can be used both as a black and white drawing and as a colored illustration? If you're interested, please email your drawing as a high resolution PNG, PSD, JPG, or GIF file to [Audubon@mcn.org](mailto:Audubon@mcn.org). Artwork can also be scanned into a usable format.

### **FOLLOW UP ON DR. GALLO'S FEBRUARY PRESENTATION** Charlene McAllister

At our February Program meeting, Dr. John Gallo presented us with an overview of citizen science. He brought us up to date on what is happening worldwide and the growing support for involvement by the public in projects. He left us all inspired to continue the work we are doing and to do it even better. Members who were present asked that we publish the links that he shared. Here they are: Scistarter.com, Matchmaker, Citsci.org, Mental Modeler, DataBasin.org, and iNaturalist.org, and Cornell University's e-bird.

Dr. Gallo talked about sites that have just come on line: <http://citizenscienceassociation.org/> <http://www.aaas.org/> (Advancing Science, Serving Society) and <http://www.citizensciencealliance.org/>

He just got back from participating in the Citizen Science Association inaugural conference and the link to that program is <http://programme.exordo.com/cs2015/>

For further questions, you can reach Dr. Gallo at [john.gallo@consbio.org](mailto:john.gallo@consbio.org)

**PAM HUNTLEY ON KZYZ FM 88.3, 90.7, AND 91.5****SPOTTED OWL**

The Spotted Owl's habitat of old growth forests has dramatically influenced timber management practices in the Pacific Northwest.

The owl is named for the white spots on the chocolate brown feathers that cover the back and chest. It has a very round head, large dark eyes and a yellow bill. It is 16-19 inches tall and has a wingspan of 45 inches.

The Spotted Owl is a nocturnal hunter. Fuzzy feathers with serrated edges allow it to swoop silently down on prey of mice, wood rats, rabbits and tree voles. Scientists analyze regurgitated pellets of fur and bones to determine the owl's diet.

Spotted Owls have long-term mates. They nest in tree hollows, broken tree tops, or crevices in caves or cliffs. They may use the same nest site for years.

The female incubates 2-3 whitish eggs for a month, during which the male feeds her. The pair cares for the young for several months. Survival rate of chicks is very low, only 11%. The pair usually nests every other year.

Spotted Owls are intolerant of even moderately high temperatures because of thick plumage and an insufficient ability cool down. Their day-time summer roosts are on north facing slopes in cool canyons with dense overhead canopy.

Each pair requires 1400-4500 acres for a home range. Since the 1800's Spotted Owl habitat has declined by 88%. It competes with its cousin, the Barred Owl, which has spread here from the eastern U.S. Scientists estimate the Spotted Owl population here is declining by 3.9% each year.



*Northern Spotted Owl USFWS Region 5 (Pacific Southwest) Photograph by John and Karen Hollingsworth*

## OWLING FIELD TRIP REPORT

Tim Bray

Mike Stephens led 15 people on a wild owl chase Feb. 14 along Road 409 near Caspar, on the border between Jackson Demonstration State Forest and Russian Gulch State Park. Mike began by giving us some history and biology about two species: the Northern Spotted Owl and the Barred Owl. This is a dramatic and fascinating story, with serious economic, scientific, and political implications, and Mike gave us a great overview of the situation.

Once it got dark enough for the owls to become active, Mike showed us various tools of his trade, from the remote-operated loudspeaker to play calls (keeping the operator distant enough to avoid being attacked by aggressive territory-defending owls) to the live mouse on a string. He also explained the two key aspects of Owling: Patience and Perseverance.

Initially calling for Spotted Owls, we heard wing-rustling and got a tantalizing glimpse in the deepening gloom, just enough to identify the bird as a *Strix* sp., and not the Barn Owl we could hear screeching in the distance. Following the bird up the road, we then began playing Barred Owl calls. Again we could glimpse an owl moving around above us, and eventually it began vocalizing. Barred Owls are LOUD, especially when they are right above you. The bird ran through several different sequences, including the classic "who-cooks-for-you, who cooks for you-all" song.

Mike then produced the mouse and explained that sometimes the owls will just watch them for a long time without attacking. We waited, and waited... nothing happened. A few people left. Then, suddenly, Mike said "there," shining a light into the tree right in front of us - and there it was, the Barred Owl, not 20 feet up, staring intently at the mouse below it. The bird would look around, give us a glare, then go back to staring at the mouse. Eventually it decided not to eat it, choosing instead to fly up into the treetop (giving us a great view of its wing-spread) and resume vocalizing. For most of us, it was our first sighting of this alien invader.

Barred Owls arrived in Mendocino County in the 1980s, after navigating across the northern Great Plains, through the Rocky Mountains, and down the Cascades. Understanding the context of its presence here and the potential implications made the experience of seeing this bird that much richer. Many thanks to Mike Stephens for sharing his time, expertise, and understanding of the science and policy implications surrounding these fascinating birds

***Additional Owl Notes from the Botanical Gardens Birdwalk:*** A Western Screech-owl has been seen regularly in the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens, since we first found it on the January early-bird walk. Follow the south trail, through the gate and across the bridge, and when you reach the junction with the path running between the Dahlia Garden and the Vegetable Gardens, turn around and look to the north. You should see a flat-topped dead tree standing by itself, with several old woodpecker nest holes; the owl is often occupying the uppermost and largest of these, with its face sticking out.

## CALENDAR, BIRD WALKS, FIELD TRIPS

### March 2015

**Saturday 7 Beginner Bird Walk** [Botanical Gardens](#) **Cancelled due to Whale Festival**

**Saturday 7-8 Whale Festival** Point Cabrillo Light Station Birdwalks 9AM Saturday and Sunday.  
Meet at upper parking lot off Point Cabrillo Drive. Rain cancels. Leader: Dave Jensen

**Saturday 14 Field Trip** [MacKerricher State Park](#) 9AM Meet at Lake Cleone parking lot. Heavy wind, rain cancels. Leader: Dave Jensen

**Monday 16 Environmental Partnership Potluck, Matt Coleman Environmental Service Award**

Program hosted by CNPS, Dorothy King Young Chapter

6 p.m. dinner (see invitation page 1), 7 p.m. Award Presentation

7:10 p.m. Speaker: Jeanne A. Jackson: "Amazing Sights: Natural Wonders on the Mendocino Coast." Ms. Jackson is author of *Mendonoma Sightings Throughout the Year*, featuring photographs by Craig Tooley. She writes a weekly column in the *Independent Coast Observer*.

**Wednesday 18 Bird Walk** [Botanical Gardens](#) 8:30AM\* Leader: Tim Bray

**Saturday 21-22 Whale Festival** Point Cabrillo Light Station Birdwalks 9AM Saturday and 9 AM Sunday. Meet upper parking lot off Point Cabrillo Drive. Rain cancels. Leader: Dave Jensen

**Saturday 21 Whale Festival** Family Bird Walk joins Dave Jensen on the Light Station Whale Festival walk 9 AM. Meet at upper parking lot off Point Cabrillo Drive. Leaders: Sarah Grimes, Sue "Magoo" Coulter

**Thursday 26 MCAS Board of Directors Meeting** - Contact J. Ossello for time and place

### April 2015

**Friday 3, 10, 24 In-field Training Save Our Shorebirds** Contact B. Bowen 962-1602

**Saturday 4 Beginner Bird Walk** [Botanical Gardens](#) 9AM\* Leader: Dave Jensen

**Saturday 11 Field Trip** Hendy Woods 9AM Meet south end of bridge outside the park. Leader: Dave Jensen

**Wednesday 15-24** [Godwit Days](#) Arcata

**Wednesday 15 Bird Walk** [Botanical Gardens](#) 8AM\* (**Note Time Change**) Leader: Tim Bray

**Saturday 18 Family Bird Walk** Spring Ranch State Park 9AM Meet at Highway 1 pullout opposite Gordon Lane. Leaders: Sarah Grimes, Sue "Magoo" Coulter

**Monday 20 Meeting** **Gualala Art Center** 7 p.m. Speaker: Rich Kuehn on Cuba

*\*These walks are free, but there is an entry charge for participants who are not Garden members*

For complete calendar, updates, and useful links, visit: [www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org](http://www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org)

And please visit us on facebook: [www.facebook.com/mendocinocoastaudubon](http://www.facebook.com/mendocinocoastaudubon)

### HERE'S AN OPPORTUNITY TO SERVE ON YOUR AUDUBON BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The MCAS Nominating Committee is looking for volunteers to join the Audubon Board of Directors. Meetings are only 6 times a year and we guarantee you will enjoy company while working for a good cause. We also are looking for a Newsletter Editor so if this is your skill, we'd love to meet with you. If you are interested in learning more, contact Charlene McAllister at [charmac@mcn.org](mailto:charmac@mcn.org) or Judy Steele at [judys@mcn.org](mailto:judys@mcn.org) for more information.

## **MCAS BOARD MEMBERS AND PROGRAM CHAIRS 2013-2014**

<b>President</b>	<b>Joleen Ossello</b>	<b>391-7019</b>	<b>j_ossello@earthlink.net</b>
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<b>Field Trips</b>	<b>Tim Bray</b>	<b>937-4422</b>	<b>tbray@wildblue.net</b>

**Mendocino Coast Audubon Society e-mail address: [audubon@mcn.org](mailto: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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