



# The Black Oystercatcher

Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Newsletter April , 2015



Cuban Trogon - Richard Kuehn photo

**RICH KUEHN PRESENTS**  
**"BIRDING THE ISLAND NATION**  
**OF CUBA"**  
**MONDAY, APRIL 20, 2015**  
**7 P.M.**  
**GUALALA ART CENTER**  
**46501 Gualala Road**  
**Just off Old State Highway**  
**south of Gualala**

Please join us at the Gualala Art Center on April 20 for a presentation by Richard Kuehn about the birding adventure he and his spouse, Dean Schuler, completed in April, 2014. At the time, tourism to the island was restricted; the Sea Ranch couple were part a small "bird survey" group organized through the Caribbean Conservation Trust and led by a government-approved birding leader named Gustov.

The group met Orlando H. Garrido, principal author of *The Field Guide to the Birds of Cuba*, who showed skins or mounts of 21 endemic species as well as other species the group members were likely to see on the two-week survey.

Dr. Kuehn will share stories and photographs of Cuban birds, including the Cuban Trogon (the national bird), Cuban parrots, the Cuban Tody and Fernandina's Flicker.

*Black Oystercatcher masthead photo by Ron LeValley*

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***Dave Jensen to Lead***  
***New Trail Tours***  
MCAS Vice-President  
*Dave Jensen will lead free MCAS birding tours every fourth Sunday along the new all-access trail on former Georgia Pacific property. The first tour is Sunday, April 26. Meet at 9 a.m. in the parking lot at the foot of Elm Street, Fort Bragg.*

## MCAS BLACK OYSTERCATCHER STUDY Joleen Ossello



*Photograph by Don Shephard*



*Photograph by Joleen Ossello*



*Photograph by Joleen Ossello*

**Citizen scientist call to action.** Have you ever wondered who these intriguing shorebirds are? Why they make such a ruckus from the rocks? Here's your opportunity to find out. Attend the 2015 **Black Oystercatcher** Workshop on Sunday, April 19, from 9am-12pm at the Russian Gulch Recreation Hall. Learn something new, meet other bird aficionados, and hike to observe these birds in action.

The workshop trains volunteer citizen scientists to perform weekly nest monitoring from May through September. Join a survey team this summer to observe and learn firsthand how these feathered friends survive the clutches of nature. There are eight different sites along the dynamic rocky coastline to choose from. You may witness group flight, territorial displays, copulation, and nest building (also known as rock tossing). Perhaps you'll experience the heartwarming sight of a brand new chick learning how to forage for its own food. If you would like to learn more or participate, reserve your seat at the April workshop with Joleen Ossello at 707-391-7019 or [j\\_ossello@earthlink.net](mailto:j_ossello@earthlink.net).

To learn more about this project visit [www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org](http://www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org) where you'll find the Black Oystercatcher Conservation Project under the conservation tab.

*This project is sponsored by Mendocino Coast Audubon Society and Audubon California*

## PAM HUNTLEY ON KZYX FM 88.3, 90.7, AND 91.5

### PIED-BILLED GREBE

The scientific binomial for Pied-billed Grebe, *Podilymbus podiceps*, is Latin for “diving rump foot.” It’s a fitting description of the small bird’s legs and feet, which are attached toward the back of its body. This is a perfect arrangement for underwater diving, but it makes for awkward walking in the rare instances when the bird gets onto dry land.

Pied-billed refers to the dark ring that circles the middle of the bill in summer. The bill is chunky and chicken-like. The bird is a small, stocky grebe with a large head and dull brown feathers. It is 13 inches long. It appears to have no tail. There is a narrow white ring around a dark eye.



*Pied-billed Grebe, April 2012, South Padre Island, Texas, Birding and Nature Center. B. Bowen Photo*

Although it is one of the most common grebes, it is often hidden among rushes on sluggish streams, ponds and marshes. The Pied-billed Grebe has been called “part bird, part submarine.” It can trap water in its feathers and deflate them so that it submerges straight down. Sometimes, only the eyes are visible above water. The thick bill is used to stab crayfish, amphibians and fish. It also forages on seeds and insects on the water’s surface.

Courtship is more vocal than visual. The male and female sing together. The nest, a floating platform anchored and hidden in reeds or rushes, is constructed with grass, reeds, and decayed plants – and often plastered with soft green pond scum. Both parents incubate the 5-7 bluish-white eggs for three weeks. The striped chicks typically leave the nest the first day after hatching. Chicks spend three weeks riding around on the parents’ backs, even back-riding when parents dive.

### MAY CHAPTER MEETING TO OPEN WITH MCAS BOARD ELECTIONS

The May 18 MCAS meeting will begin with a brief chapter business meeting to elect Board Members and officers. Our by-laws provide for staggered elections so that the entire board is not up for election every year. Nominees for the upcoming two-year terms are: Dave Jensen, President; Tim Bray, Vice-President; Diane Rubin, Secretary and board members Marybeth Arago, Sarah Grimes, Angela Liebenberg and Catherine Keegan. The office of Treasurer is open. If you are interested in a board position or serving as editor of the *Black Oystercatcher* newsletter, please contact nominating committee members Charlene McAllister [charm@mcn.org](mailto:charm@mcn.org) or Judy Steele [judys@mcn.org](mailto:judy@mcn.org)

# SAVE OUR SHOREBIRDS

Becky Bowen

## THE BIRD’S EYE VIEW FROM PLOVERDALE



We often wonder how the world appears to a Western Snowy Plover. If it likes how a beach looks, it stands to reason the bird will stay there – and maybe even go on to raise a family. Now, there is good news on the Mendocino Coast for this tiny bird listed as threatened on the Endangered Species list. According to the original plover federal recovery plan for Western Snowy Plovers, there are only about 28 suitable nesting areas remaining on the West Coast. Mackerricher State Park’s Ten Mile Beach is one of them. In early, 2014, State Parks completed most of a habitat restoration project on the beach which is part of a natural preserve. The high count and average numbers of Western Snowy Plovers began to increase. Many variables apply, but the data tell us something. Invasive non-native plants are being removed by hand and the habitat looks and feels open and shorebird-friendly. The plovers are coming to Ten Mile – and it seems they like what they see.

**Western Snowy Plover Yearly High Count June, 2007-December 2014 Ten Mile and Virgin Creek Beach–Combined**  
 Source—Save Our Shorebirds, Cornell University Ornithology Lab, e-bird High Counts

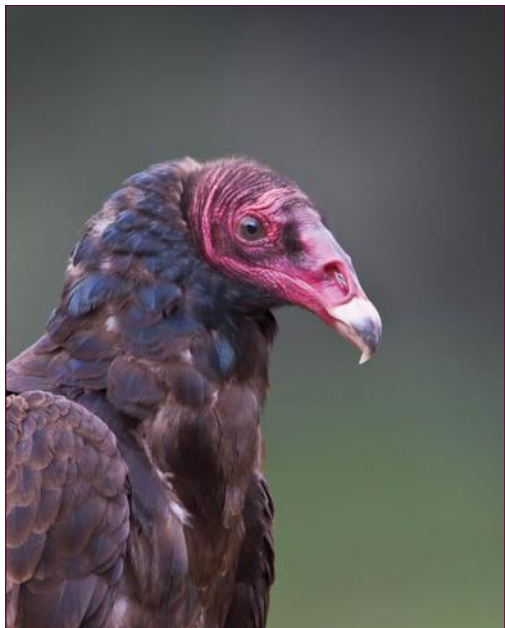
	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
<b>2007</b>						1	12	21	24	42	8	32
<b>2008</b>	25	31	5	7	0	1	5	14	16	34	29	31
<b>2009</b>	33	31	14	1	2	0	8	23	24	33	38	38
<b>2010</b>	41	31	34	11	2	0	10	23	28	38	31	42
<b>2011</b>	27	32	16	13	1	0	14	22	34	45	53	55
<b>2012</b>	55	49	35	2	2	0	18	28	45	37	53	48
<b>2013</b>	36	38	23	13	3	1	14	30	41	53	53	48
<b>2014</b>	48	42	41	28	0	2	31	47	52	63	70	63

Save Our Shorebirds is a long term on-going Mendocino Coast Audubon Society citizen science project in partnership with State Parks. See Page 6 for a new SOS opportunity and please visit us at

[www.facebook.com/SaveOurShorebirds](http://www.facebook.com/SaveOurShorebirds)

## TURKEY VULTURES – NATURE’S WASTE MANAGERS

DONALD SHEPHARD



Turkey Vulture photo Steve Zamek

On March 10 this year, I heard an Osprey call and scanned the sky to spot one toting a fish. We live close to the southernmost stand of Sitka spruce where Ospreys nest each year near the Caspar Cemetery. This bird, which carried its lunch home, flew amid circling Turkey Vultures. At noon, I hurried in from my garden to tell my wife I had seen my first Osprey of the year. She preempted my joyful message with a question. “Why are all the Turkey Vultures sitting on the fence outside our kitchen?”

I usually respond by shaking my fist at them as Robinson Jeffers had done on a bare hillside near Big Sur, telling the bird: “These old bones will still work; they are not for you.” You might even remember, as Jeffers apparently did, the ancient custom of exposing the dead to be consumed by vultures, still practiced in parts of Asia: “What a sublime end of one’s body, what an enskyment; what a life after death,” he wrote. You may think of William Leon Dawson, an early celebrant of California

birds: “...when the buzzard sweeps low to bend upon you an inquiring eye, you shudder...It is really the grave which appraises you in that deferential, hopeful gaze.”

On inspection, nature’s waste managers had assembled on my fence to dine on venison. It appeared to me a 2014 fawn had died of some kind of dysentery. I photographed three parallel indentations about three inches long and half an inch wide above a four inch flap of skin. This injury may have been caused by a predator – both mountain lion and bear have been recorded in the area in previous years. They may simply be the entry point of the vultures. After all, the name “vulture” is derived from the Latin word *vultur*, meaning “tearer,” a reference to its feeding habits.

I set up my trail camera to video any crepuscular or nocturnal visitors to the carcass. We have skunk, who surely can stand the smell of putrid flesh; gray fox, and raccoons in the area. One of the four raccoons I regularly video crept slowly toward the carcass, twitched his nose, and retired rapidly. We visited sons in the Bay Area and a Fresno friend over the weekend. I set the trail camera to record the last rites of the fawn while we travelled. I tied the camera to a two-by-two stake, which a Turkey Vulture used as a perch, launching from it to the patio fence. Even though I sat through twenty gigabytes of video, no other shots of interest emerged. All I recorded were the approximately three hundred flies that shared the vultures’ venison.

Mary Roach wrote a wonderful book, *Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers*, in which she devotes a chapter (with necessary humor) to the various insects that invade us if we are left

**continued**

unguarded upon departure. CSI fans will know all about it. I recall my days in the Agricultural Commissioner's Office in San Joaquin County where the economic entomologist knew much about the *Dermestid* family of beetles. Those little guys are a major contributor to nature's clean up crew.

You may have attended the presentation to MCAS by Greg Giusti and Robert Keiffer recently on Turkey Vulture nesting sites. They found that the Turkey Vultures at the Hopland facility select large hollow trees – either dead or alive, either shaded or in the sun – to lay eggs and rear their young. The tree species in the study included blue oak, interior live oak, Oregon white oak and valley oak. They counted 417 trees in all; seven of them had suitable nesting elements for turkey vultures.

"We have seen the vultures jump inside the hollow, the middle of the tree, some 8 to 10 feet down," Giusti said. "Since there is not sufficient diameter for them to fly up from the inside, we surmise that they shimmy up to the top. When the hatchlings are about a month old and able to fly, almost full size, they, too, must shimmy up to get out."

What appears as a naked head is not quite bare, but flecked with short hair-like black feathers called semi-plumes or bristles. Loss of head plumage is an adaptation for feeding on messy carcasses that New World vultures and condors share with the superficially similar, but not closely related, Old World vultures and a few stork species. Conventional plumage would become matted with gore.

This vulture is often seen standing in a spread-winged stance, which ornithologists believe serves multiple functions: drying the wings, warming the body, and baking off bacteria. New World vultures, Old World Vultures, and storks practice this same behavior, often following damp or rainy nights. Like storks, the turkey vulture often defecates on its own legs, using the evaporation of the water in the feces or uric acid waste to cool itself, a process known as urohidrosis.

It cools the blood vessels in the unfeathered tarsi and feet, and leaves white streaks on the legs. The Turkey Vulture has few natural predators. It also garners few admirers, but consider how deep in corpses we would be by now, if nature provided no waste managers like fly maggots, *Dermestid* beetle larvae, and the unbeloved Turkey Vulture.

**Turkey Vulture spreading wings to dry**  
**Photo by M. C. Voorhis**



## BROWN SHRIKE VISIT MAKES COUNTY BIRDING HISTORY!!!

It's not often that county bird record-keeper Robert Keiffer is moved to write with anything but dispassionate objectivity. But the sighting of a Brown Shrike on the south coast in early March prompted Keiffer's announcement on the Mendobirds listserve, which he punctuated with three exclamation points. Here is an abridged excerpt from the posting: "12 March 2015...**BROWN SHRIKE!!!** seen twice and photographed twice on Manchester Beach State Park property during the last week....Alison Cebula, who works for the California State Parks, was conducting a survey last Thursday, March 5, when she digiscoped a shrike along Alder Creek and assumed it was an immature Northern Shrike. Review of the photo (first by MCAS member Richard Hubacek and then by Jon Dunn and Peter Pyle) confirmed it to be a Brown Shrike. Nikki and Jerry White visited the location...on March 10, and after searching for 40 minutes or so were able to re-find the bird (2 PM) across Alder Creek, within 100 yards of the original observation...." The Brown Shrike is an Asian species. According to Jon Dunn in National Geographic's *Field Guide to the Birds of North America*, there are only four fall and winter records from California. Since this posting, the bird has been observed several times at the same location. For updates and instructions about protecting sensitive species and respecting private property, visit Mendobirds <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/Mendobirds/info>

## OPPORTUNITY TO REACH OUT, EDUCATE ABOUT SHOREBIRDS

Do you like to learn – and teach? Do you love birds – and people? Then we have an opportunity for you.

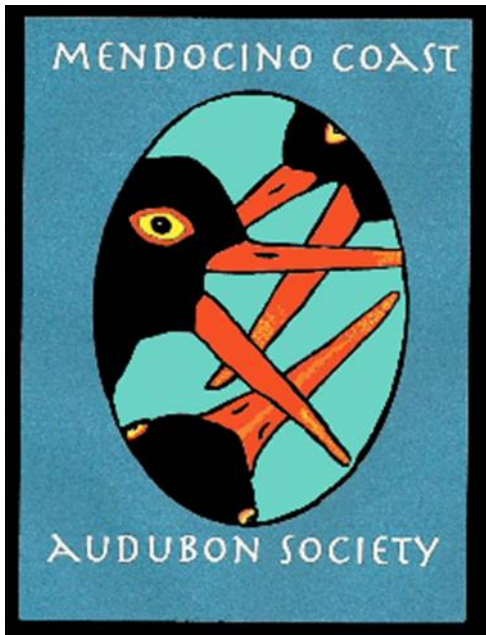
Mendocino Coast Audubon's Save Our Shorebirds has partnered with State Parks to expand the education and public outreach program that is designed to help Western Snowy Plovers, listed as "threatened" on the Endangered Species List. The bird has nested in the past on Ten Mile Beach and is present there for most of the year.

We're seeking an independent contractor to be in the field to conduct outreach and education with beach-goers, and to act as a liaison with law enforcement in order to improve visitor awareness of wildlife protection, principally in The Inglenook Fen-Ten Mile Dunes Preserve. The contract will be in effect during two Western Snowy Plover nesting seasons, and will be determined by nesting activity between May-September, 2015 and 2016. SOS has received funding from State Parks to support this effort. Bird-watching expertise is helpful, but not required. We are seeking a contractor who enjoys talking with people about wildlife and who will distribute educational materials to park visitors in the field. To learn more, please contact Angela Liebenberg, Environmental Scientist and MCAS Save Our Shorebirds Director, at [liebenbergs@mcn.org](mailto:liebenbergs@mcn.org)

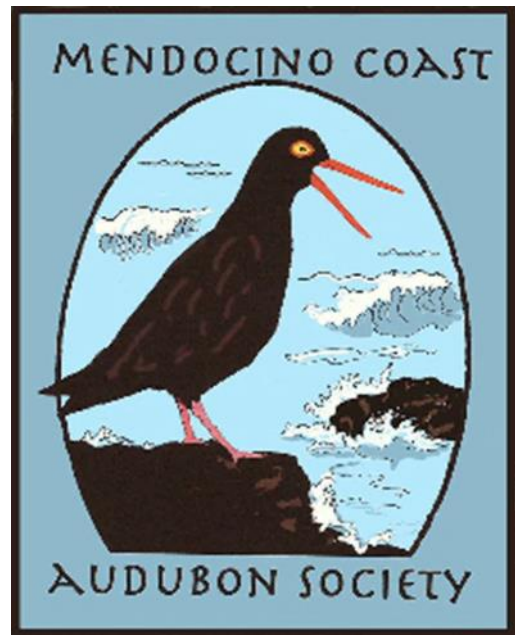
Save Our Shorebirds is a long term, on-going MCAS program in partnership with State Parks. Since 2007, volunteer surveyors have spent more than 7,500 hours in the field in Mackerricher State Park, gathering data on shorebirds and making it available (at no charge) to researchers, schools, agencies and members of the public.

## CREATING A NEW LOGO

Catherine Keegan



**Number 1**



**Number 2**



**Number 3**



**Number 4**

In the March *Black Oystercatcher*, we asked members to submit artwork for a new MCAS logo. The 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. We have four logo submissions for your consideration. Which one of these four would you like to see used? Indicate Number 1, Number 2, Number 3, or Number 4 (numbers centered beneath each submission).

Email your choice to [audubon@mcn.org](mailto:audubon@mcn.org) We'll make a decision by April 15. At press time, we learned at least one more submission may be coming, so check the MCAS website before you vote

[www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org](http://www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org)



## CALENDAR, BIRD WALKS, FIELD TRIPS

### April 2015

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

**Saturday 11 Field Trip** Hendy Woods 9AM - Meet at 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**

**Saturday 18 Family Bird Walk [Spring Ranch](#)** 9-11AM - Meet at the pullout opposite Gordon Lane on Highway 1 (pullout is on the west side of the highway). Leaders: Sarah Grimes, Sue "Magoo" Coulter

**Sunday 19 Black Oystercatcher Training** 9AM - Russian Gulch Recreation Hall.

Trainer: Joleen Ossello (see page 2 of this newsletter)

**Monday 20 Meeting [Gualala Art Center](#)** 46501 Gualala Road, off Old State Highway south of Gualala (follow signs) 7PM Speaker: Richard Kuehn—Birding the Island Nation of Cuba

**Sunday 26 MCAS Fourth Sunday Bird Tour** New All-access Trail Tour on former GP Property 9AM - Meet in parking lot at foot of Elm Street, Fort Bragg. Leader: Dave Jensen

### May 2015

**Saturday 2 Beginner Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#)** 9AM\* Leader: Dave Jensen

2-3 [Heron Days](#) Lakeside County Park near Kelseyville and Redbud Park, Clearlake

**Saturday 9 Field Trip** Navarro River and Beach 9AM - Meet at the south end of the Navarro River bridge. Leader: David Jensen

**Saturday 16 Family Bird Walk [Big River Haul Road](#)** 9-11AM - Meet at the east end of the large parking area north of Big River, next to the yellow gate at the entrance to Big River haul road. Leaders: Sarah Grimes and Sue "Magoo" Coulter

**Monday 18 Meeting [Caspar Community Center](#)** 7PM Election of Mendocino Coast Audubon Board Members and Officers, followed by Speaker: Floyd Hayes—Adventures in Paraguay, Argentina and Brazil

**Wednesday 20 Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#)** 8AM\* Leader: Dorothy Tobkin

**Sunday 24 MCAS Fourth Sunday Bird Tour** New all-access Trail Tour on former GP Property 9AM - Meet in parking lot at foot of Elm Street, Fort Bragg. Leader: Dave Jensen

### June 2015

**Saturday 6 Beginner Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#)** 9AM\* Leader: Dave Jensen

**Saturday 13 Field Trip** Kayak Trip on Noyo River with Liquid Fusion 9AM - Meet at Liquid Fusion Kayak, Noyo Harbor Leader: Cate Hawthorne (reservations required)

**Wednesday 17 Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#)** 8AM\* Leader: Tim Bray

**Saturday 20 Family Bird Walk [Lake Cleone](#)** 9-11AM Meet at the Lake Cleone parking lot, Mackerricher State Park. Leaders: Sarah Grimes, Sue "Magoo" Coulter

**Sunday 28 MCAS Fourth Sunday Bird Tour** New All-access Trail Tour on former GP Property 9AM - Meet in parking lot at foot of Elm Street, Fort Bragg. Leader: Dave Jensen

*\*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)

## **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>
<b>Vice President</b>	<b>David Jensen</b>	<b>964-8163</b>	<b>djensen@mcn.org</b>
<b>Secretary</b>	<b>Diane Rubin</b>	<b>(413) 658-7105</b>	<b>dianerubin12@gmail.com</b>
<b>Treasurer</b>	<b>Angela Liebenberg</b>	<b>962-9267</b>	<b>liebenbergs@mcn.org</b>
<b>SOS Program</b>	<b>Angela Liebenberg</b>	<b>962-9267</b>	<b>liebenbergs@mcn.org</b>
<b>Webmaster</b>	<b>Catherine Keegan</b>	<b>937-4422</b>	<b>keegan@wildblue.net</b>
<b>Membership</b>	<b>Marybeth Arago</b>	<b>962-0724</b>	<b>mmbarago@mcn.org</b>
<b>Programs</b>	<b>Charlene McAllister</b>	<b>937-4463</b>	<b>charmac@mcn.org</b>
<b>Conservation</b>	<b>Linda Perkins</b>	<b>937-0903</b>	<b>lperkins@mcn.org</b>
<b>Education</b>	<b>Sarah Grimes</b>	<b>937-4322</b>	<b>zewa@mcn.org</b>
<b>Newsletter</b>	<b>Charlene McAllister</b>	<b>937-4463</b>	<b>charmac@mcn.org</b>
<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**

**P.O. BOX 2297**

**FORT BRAGG, CA, 95437**

