

The Whistling Swan



NEWSLETTER OF THE MENDOCINO COAST AUDUBON SOCIETY

November 2010

THE SANDWICH ISLANDS: GEOLOGY, HISTORY, AND BIRDS OF HAWAII

BOB KEIFFER

November 15th, 7:00 p.m.

Fort Bragg Town Hall, Main and Laurel Streets



Nene

Bob Kieffer, Hopland-based naturalist and photographer, has long been fascinated by the unique features of the Hawaiian Islands. His interest in the history, the culture, the geology and the wildlife began during a trip to Maui in 2000. His visit in 2008 to Kauai is the basis for this presentation, which will not only feature a sweeping overview of the geology of Hawaii, but will include the evolution of the endangered endemic birds of the region. Add in information about the Polynesian migration and this talk, illustrated with more than 120 photographs, is bound to have us all wanting to make travel reservations.

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER

David Jensen

MARINE LIFE PROTECTION ACT



About a year ago I was contacted by Anna Weinstein, the Audubon California seabird conservation coordinator, and asked if I would be willing to serve as a regional stakeholder for the North Coast Region of the Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA). I had already attended a couple of public meetings and knew that this was likely to be a contentious process (supposition confirmed), but after considering the potential impacts to our coastal community and the marine ecosystem, including seabirds, I reluctantly

agreed to apply. Later, when I learned that Ron LeValley would serve on the MLPA Science Advisory Team, I could not back out. I was selected to serve, and now that a final array, or set of preserves, has been proposed, ratified and sent to the Fish and Game Commission for approval, I would like to share with you some of the highlights, especially as they relate to the protection of nesting seabirds.

The Science Advisory Team had identified ten biological hotspots that warranted special protection: eight of them were important rookeries for seabirds, including species of special concern such as Tufted Puffins, and two were important rookeries for the endangered Stellar Sea Lions. After a great deal of effort, we were able to secure protection for all but one of those areas (False Cape Rocks in Humboldt County). Both sea lion rookeries (Southwest Seal Rock and Sugarloaf Island) as well as the largest seabird rookery in this region (Castle Rock) were designated as year-round closures (no boat entry within 300 feet of the island, except during hazardous weather). Four seabird rookeries (False Klamath Rock, Steamboat Rock, Rockport Rocks and Vizcaino Rock) will be closed from March 1 through August 31. In response to political and economic pressures, two very important rookeries near Trinidad Harbor (Green Rock and Flatiron Rock) were removed from the list of special closures. Instead, the Trinidad Rancheria, Bureau of Land Management, and Audubon California will work together to implement a program of public outreach and education, systematic monitoring of resident birds and mammals, and enforcement of existing regulations. We hope that this cooperative effort will serve as a model for future conservation efforts.

Throughout the process, we were hampered by the State's failure to resolve its jurisdictional conflict with the California tribes and tribal communities. Although many of us believed that tribal traditional ceremonial non-commercial gathering had a *de minimus* impact on coastal marine resources and should be allowed in all areas, Fish and Game maintains that they cannot treat tribal groups differently, despite their status as sovereign nations. I fear that this will become another source of income for lawyers.

PRESIDENT'S CORNER MARINE LIFE PROTECTION ACT

continued

Unfortunately, the process is far from over. The Fish and Game Commission must still review and ratify our proposal. We need to stay involved so that the hard-won protections for seabird rookeries are not weakened or lost. But for now, there are many reasons to smile. We have created an array of refuges, similar to our national forests, that will serve as nurseries for marine species. We have done so with minimal impact to the local fishing industry. And together with the region to the south, we have protected a cohesive set of critical seabird rookeries that stretch from Devil's Slide, through the Farallon Islands and Point Reyes, along Cape Mendocino and up to the Oregon border. On behalf of all the stakeholders, I thank you for your support.

PAM HUNTLEY ON KXYZ FM 88.3, 90.7, AND 91.5

BALD EAGLE

In 1782 the Bald Eagle was chosen as our national symbol for its strength, fierce demeanor, and loyalty. Others, including Ben Franklin, mumbled that they are pirates who steal fish from Ospreys and are scavengers that feed on carrion. They also spend a lot of time hanging out at dumps. Still, I think all are awed by the sight of this majestic bird.

Bald Eagles are recognized by their giant size. They can stand three feet tall and have a wingspan of six feet. It takes four years for them to get that pure white head and tail of an adult. Adults have a large, yellow beak and yellow lower legs that are not feathered. Their fierce-looking eye is also yellow.

In winter, they are a rare and exciting visitor to the coast. In summer, some nest around northern California's lakes and large rivers but most head farther north. Pairs are extremely loyal and most mate for life. Still, each spring courtship is dramatic, including flight displays when pairs lock talons and plummet to earth in a series of whirling summersaults.

They are known for making the largest single nest, which can be over fifteen feet across. One nest has been used for thirty-five years. Both male and female incubate the two white eggs for three weeks. One chick will hatch first. In most years the second chick will not survive because of starvation or harassment by the larger one. This is termed obligate siblicide.

Our national symbol is also a symbol of hope. Bald Eagles were extremely threatened, due to pesticides and to being shot by ranchers. In 1963, there were 417 nests in all the United States. Now, because of protection, there are over 10,000 nesting pairs. In 2007, they were removed from the endangered species list.



**Bald Eagle photo Ron
LeValley**
www.LeValleyphoto.com

NOTES FROM SAVE OUR SHOREBIRDS

September 9 Data Sheet

Becky Bowen



Thursday, September 9, 2010

2 p.m. Virgin Creek Beach, north of Fort Bragg, CA

58 degrees, sunny, calm, outgoing tide

SOS Volunteer Lydia Rand spotted this Gull spat on her survey.

We took the shot to biologist and nature photographer Ron LeValley who confirmed this was a Western Gull with a tail-hold on a California Gull. Surveyors noted aggressive gull behavior at Virgin Creek during the summer of 2010. Adult and immature Western Gulls and California Gulls were involved, but there are no observations of participation by Heermann's Gulls.

Save Our Shorebirds is an on-going Mendocino Coast Audubon Society citizen science project in partnership with California State Parks, College of the Redwoods and FLOCKworks. Volunteers conduct shorebird surveys on Glass Beach, Virgin Creek Beach and Ten Mile Beach in MacKerricher State Park, concentrating on shorebirds watchlisted by National Audubon and American Bird Conservancy. Activity includes contact with the community and educational shorebird programs. To participate, contact State Parks Environmental Scientist Angela Liebenberg ALIEBENBERG@parks.ca.gov

FAMILY BIRD WALKS

Sarah Grimes

Sue Coulter and Sarah Grimes drummed up fun ideas for the MCAS Family Birdwalk Series. We will conduct our first two walks at The Stanford Inn Gardens, where we will observe different habitats and food sources. Some of the highlights include a "Nectary", native grasses, overgrown rose & berry hedge habitat corridors, sunflower seed heads, pond, river and A COVERED COMPOST AREA. Yes. Dana Ecelberger, Master Gardener, ran with an idea to create an "inside-out aviary" and the ravens at "The Ravens" are hopping mad about it.

Joan and Jeff Stanford generously offered the Conference Room (in case of rain), or the covered Garden Gazebo, as well as Sunflower seed heads for our seed packet project. Many Thanks.

MCAS will provide binoculars, checklists, and peanut butter for our holiday peanut butter pinecone project. Our spring walks will include a trip to Lake Cleone and a return to Stanford Inn to look over our bird lists, and to see what's new in the gardens. We will give an Audubon bird from the "Box O Birds" to those who made all four walks or have the longest list, or Walks and activities will start at 9:00 a.m., and should last about an hour. The dates are November 20th & December 18th. (Spring walks TBA).

RSVP to Sarah Grimes zewa@mcn.org or 937 4322.



Common Raven photo Ron LeValley

www.LeValleyphoto.com

BIRD SIGHTINGS

Oct 23. Canvasback at 10 Mile River and a Bonaparte's Gull at Lake Cleone. Horned Lark at Mendocino Headlands. Jerry White

Oct 18. A Clay-colored Sparrow near Navarro Beach, Jerry White

Oct 18. Eleven Black-legged Kittiwakes at Laguna Point, Dorothy Tobkin.

Oct 15. Western Tanager along the Trail to Virgin Creek Beach, Ron LeValley

Oct 15. Miner Hole Road, Pectoral Sandpipers, Greater Yellowlegs and a locally uncommon Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher. Rich Trissel

Oct 13. At Chadbourne Gulch, a White-throated Sparrow, Jerry White

Oct 13. A Sora by Navarro Inn, and eight Virginia Rails. Richard Hubacek

Oct 8. A locally rare Blue-gray Gnatcatcher near College of the Redwoods, Dorothy Tobkin

Oct 8. A Clay-colored Sparrow on Stoneboro Road, Rich Trissel

Oct 5. At Gualala River Bridge, a White-throated Sparrow, Rich Trissel and Rich Kuehn

Oct 4. Red Cross-bills at Caspar Cemetery. Black-and-white Warbler at Russian Gulch State Park Richard Hubacek

Oct 3. A Bobolink at Little River Airport, Richard Hubacek

WANDERING TATTLER

Donald Shephard



Wandering Tattler photo Ron LeValley

www.LeValleyphoto.com

danger, hence the name tattler, and you will note a trill of accelerating, descending notes of decreasing volume.

Arthur Cleveland Bent introduces our bird: "Along the rocky and stony portions of the Pacific coast, and especially on the islands and outlying reefs, this ocean wanderer is a common and well-known bird. It is much at home among the surf-swept rocks, drenched in ocean spray and often enveloped in fog; it has no fear of foaming breakers, which it nimbly dodges as it seeks bits of marine food among the kelp and barnacles on the rocks. It is, at most seasons, essentially a bird of the seashore, seldom seen on the sandy or muddy shores. The dark color of its upper plumage matches its surroundings and it is not easily seen among the gloomy rocks, unless you catch it silhouetted against the sky or water as it poses on top of some prominent rock to watch the intruder."

Bent enjoyed quoting letters from birders of his day. Here he samples Dr. E.W. Nelson's well-chosen words in 1887: "Across the broad ocean it ranges to those bits of paradise dotting the South Seas, tripping its way daintily on the beaches of the coral-enclosed islands, their feet laved by the warm waters of the tropics, and their eyes familiar with the luxuriant face of nature in its gentlest and most lovely state. The next season may find them thousands of miles to the north, under the shadow of the stupendous cliffs and grand but desolate and repellent scenes of the Aleutian Islands." These gentlemen anthropomorphized a tad but they clearly were not texting with their thumbs.

Wandering Tattlers are the only shorebird in this region that is plain gray above and below. The thin, white supercilium (eyebrow) is prominent. Short dark-yellow legs and a dark-

Rain beats a paradiddle on my garret's roof. A gray day for a gray bird but a good day to peruse a *Life Histories of North American Shorebirds*, compiled by Arthur Cleveland Bent in 1928. In those days, the Wandering Tattler held the binomial *Heteroscelus incanus*. In Greek, the genus name, *Heteroscelus*, means "different leg" referring to the small scaling on their feet, which differentiates these tattlers from other sandpipers.

Modern DNA testing persuaded ornithologists to rename this species, *Tringa incana*. I thought *incana* related to an incantation, a "ritual recitation of magical words or sounds", magical but not musical. But no, it means gray. Listen to a Wandering Tattler call while alerting other shorebirds to

WANDERING TATTLER

continued

gray bill of medium length for a shorebird, will aid your identification. Juveniles appear similar to adults, but lack the barring below. In quick, direct flight with rapid wing beats, the Wandering Tattler shows entirely gray above, with a solid gray tail and gray wings.

They feed on aquatic invertebrates such as crustaceans and marine worms. During breeding season, they also eat insects. While foraging actively, they bob and teeter like Spotted Sandpipers.

Dipping into Bent again, I find this telling note from 1912. "The Wandering Tattler was found nesting on a gravel bar near a small stream flowing into the Arctic Ocean..." He continues, "The nest was first observed by Sir Frederick Lambart of the Canadian Coast and Geodetic Survey."

In his treatise, *The Game Birds of California*, the esteemed naturalist, Joseph Grinnell, observed what he believed to be the species' breeding grounds. Indeed, 5 years later in the same general area predicted by Grinnell, colleagues Olaus and Adolph Murie collected a nest and eggs. Presumably they shot the bird. Grinnell could not predict that to this day the Wandering Tattler remains one of North America's least known birds. Long-distance migrants, Wandering Tattlers travel from their breeding grounds along rivers in Alaska and northwest Canada to the southern California coast and beyond, with some birds crossing the Pacific Ocean to spend the winter in Australia and on South Pacific islands.

The Canadian Wildlife Service estimates the population of Wandering Tattlers at 10,000 birds, with half of them breeding in Canada. They are widely dispersed across their breeding and wintering range. This distribution makes the population difficult to survey, but probably also helps their numbers remain stable.

Becky Bowen, volunteer coordinator for Save Our Shorebirds, sent me a list of sightings in MacKerricher that Arthur Cleveland Bent would have admired. Art Morley saw one on Glass Beach. Other volunteers spotted twelve solitary birds on so many days at Virgin Creek. But on August 18, Trudy Jensen and Jim Griswold saw four Wandering Tattlers. Ironically, old-timers called a group of tattlers a whisper.

Low numbers and gray plumage blending with background color combine to make this shorebird disappear in the non-breeding season. Lucky birders in the Great White North may see Wandering Tattlers engaged in elaborate and vocal flight displays, but here they are less conspicuous. Take your time looking for Wandering Tattlers, and when you spot one don't whisper but spread the word or indeed tattle.

THANKSGIVING BIRD COUNT

Ginny Wade

For the 44th year, Dr. John Hewston, Humbolt State University is organizing a Thanksgiving Bird Count. He needs bird counters for November 25th . Select a circular area on the ground (may include water area), 15 feet in diameter, to include feeders, bird baths, shrubs, etc. as you wish. Imagine the circle extending upward as a cylinder. Count individual birds of each species which come into this cylinder during one hour. Judge as best you can the actual number of individuals visiting the cylinder, or flying through it. . We will send further details by email.

SOUTHERN NOTES

Diane Hichwa

The Mendonoma area, as southern Mendocino County and northern Sonoma County is known, although far from the population centers of Fort Bragg or Santa Rosa is not far as the raven flies. We seldom see crows along our coast but ravens are common. Birders in the area enjoy wildlife and helping with research. They are often members of both Mendocino Coast Audubon Society (Mendocino County) and of Madrone Audubon Society (Sonoma County). Over the next few months we will let you know about some current research and opportunities to help....as well as what birds we see locally.

An extensive survey for a Breeding Bird Atlas (BBA) update begins in January in Sonoma County and help is welcome. Madrone Audubon published the BBA for their county ten years ago. It is time to record what has changed due to development, climate, and range expansion, among others. Atlas territories or blocks come up along the coast to the Gualala River and then run eastward along the river and the county line. We will conduct final training sessions in Santa Rosa and parcel out territories then. This spring, if you are birding and locate evidence of nesting, forward that information to Bob Speckels, who will get it to the correct block for verification. Please contact him at robertspeckels@yahoo.com for more information or to offer help.

A variety of studies continue in the California Coastal National Monument (CCNM). This National Monument comprises all the islands, rocks and pinnacles above mean high tide along the entire length of the California Coast. At The Sea Ranch there is a Stewardship Task Force focused on ten miles of that coast. Through fall and winter once a month volunteers monitor at four sites overlooking some of the largest islands. During an hour of observation they record the species and numbers of birds and mammals on each island. This gives a record of the changing seasonal use as wintering birds differ in species and abundance from the breeding birds of summer.

In the third week of November and again in February, volunteers walk sections covering all ten miles of the Sea Ranch coast and record use of every rock island in the CCNM by birds, mammals, invertebrates and plants. This will establish baseline information about the marine resources.



Aerial photo of Brandt's Cormorant nest colony on Gualala Point Island

SOUTHERN NOTES

continued

Volunteers, Rich Kuehn, Dean Schuler, and George and Michele Marshall monitoring Gualala Point Island



Then just for fun and camaraderie, there is an informal local bird walk once a month. Contact Connie Schimbor schimbor@mcn.org to learn more about that or to join the email notification list. It is usually on the first Monday of the month but for December that walk will be on Saturday, December 4, 9-11 a.m. This particular Saturday is chosen to generate interest for participation in an "unofficial" Christmas Bird Count of Sea Ranch. Unofficial since it is not a National Audubon count circle but a rectangle of The Sea Ranch; it is done just outside the official count period (Jan. 8+9) so as not to conflict with the Audubon counts; and, it's on a more relaxed timetable. This year will add the fourteenth year of accumulated data of species and numbers of birds seen.

If you live in the Mendonoma area and would like more information about any of these activities please contact me, Diane Hichwa dhichwa@earthlink.net (707) 785 1922.

BIRD WALKS AND FIELD TRIPS

November 6 Bird Walk: 9:00 am, Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens

November 13 Field Trip: 9:00 am, Hawks of the South Coast. Meet at the south end of Navarro River Bridge to caravan south. We will likely see Ferruginous Hawks (right) among others.

November 17 Bird Walk: 8:00 am, Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens

Birders of all levels are welcome. We have spare binoculars and a spotting scope.

Ferruginous Hawk photo Ron LeValley,
www.LeValleyphoto.com



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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.

MENDOCINO COAST AUDUBON SOCIETY

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