



The Black Oystercatcher

Photograph by Ron LeValley

Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Newsletter May, 2015

PROF. FLOYD HAYES PRESENTS
ADVENTURES IN PARAGUAY, ARGENTINA, AND BRAZIL
MONDAY, MAY 18, 2015
7 P.M.
CASPAR COMMUNITY CENTER



Please join us Monday, May 18 at 7 p.m., at the Caspar Community Center for a presentation by Floyd Hayes, Professor of Biology, Pacific Union College. Dr. Hayes began research in 1987 as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Paraguay, where he worked as an ornithologist in that country's National Museum of Natural History. He returned in the 1990's and conducted ornithological research there for his doctoral dissertation. He has taught ornithology and environmental management at the National University of Asuncion and San Carlos University in Asuncion. He has traveled and studied for years in the southern cone of South America, and is considered an authority on wildlife in Paraguay, Argentina, and Brazil.

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THE WINNER IS...

Our members recently voted for a new MCAS graphic logo design and here is the stunning Black Oystercatcher image by Patrice Crawford, Bay Area artist and friend of MCAS.

KAYAK BIRDING ON THE NOYO RIVER**Tim Bray**

Liquid Fusion Kayaking Photograph

**MCAS June Field Trip**

Kayak Birding on the Noyo River

Saturday June 13, 2015

Leader: Cate Hawthorne

Charge: \$20 adults; \$10 kids (18 or younger)

Kayaks, life jackets, paddles provided

Reservations required (limited to 12 participants)

Contact Liquid Fusion Kayaking, 962-1623

or liquidfusionkayaking@gmail.com

Enjoy the birds of the Noyo River Estuary from the water. This is a gentle, slow-paced kayak trip for all ages and abilities. We will travel through different habitats, including riparian, Bishop Pine Forest, North Coast Coniferous Forest, and estuarine which offer the opportunity to see the birds of these different habitats in a short period of time. Sightings of harbor seals, sea lions, river otters and other interesting mammals also are likely.

The meandering course of the Noyo River, combined with its narrow and wooded canyon, typically offers paddlers and wildlife a respite from the winds and fog of the coast. The canopy of riparian trees along the Noyo is host to Downy Woodpeckers, Western Tanagers, Black-headed Grosbeaks, and a variety of finches and warblers. Numerous species of swallows and flycatchers enjoy the rich insect life of the Noyo. And, of course kingfishers, Osprey, herons, cormorants, and mergansers fish along the Noyo.

No previous kayaking or birding experience necessary. We will be using tandem recreational and sea kayaks that are comfortable and stable. Participants should bring a hat for sun and/or warmth, a jacket, and wear footwear that can get wet.

Meet at Liquid Fusion Kayaking on Dolphin Isle, South Harbor Drive, Fort Bragg, at 8:30 AM. We plan on launching at 9AM and returning to Dolphin Isle by 11am. Participants may bring their own kayak or canoe.

Liquid Fusion Kayaking's Cate and Jeff are avid wildlife watchers and birders so the birds of the Noyo have a couple of keen eyes and ears keeping tabs on them. If you can't join us on June 13, Cate and Jeff run wildlife watching/birding trips on the Noyo River most days in the summer. Check out the "Noyo Meander" and "Sunset Bird Paddles" at

www.liquidfusionkayak.com

The *Black Oystercatcher* staff will take a summer vacation. See you in the fall with a new look, a new staff, and continuing coverage of Mendocino Coast Audubon Society stories and news.

PAM HUNTLEY ON KZYX FM 88.3, 90.7, AND 91.5

BLACK SKIMMER

Editor's Note: The Black Skimmer found by Dorothy Tobkin on June 27, 2014, at Virgin Creek Beach is the first reported in Mendocino County. The bird was banded at the Salton Sea in 1999 or 2000, according to Robert J. Keiffer, Superintendent at the University of California Hopland Research and Extension Center. Less than a month after D. Tobkin's sighting, two other Black Skimmers (unbanded) were seen at Virgin Creek Beach July 20 by Jan and George Chaniot, of Potter Valley, and Fort Bragg residents Art Morley and Sarah Wagner.



Photo by B. Bowen

Sightings of Black Skimmers on our coast in June and July, 2014, gave me an excuse to write about these unique birds. Black Skimmers are very rarely seen in our area but are known to nest around the Salton Sea. They are more common in the Gulf of Mexico and on the East Coast.

Skimmers are one of a kind. They are the only bird that has a lower bill which is longer than the upper. They are also the only bird with a vertical pupil. This helps it fish by reducing reflected glare off the surface of water. Skimmers are about 18 inches long and have a 44-inch wingspan. The bill is very thin, red at the base, and black on the outer portion. Body feathers are black on top and white underneath. Their feet are bright red like their bills. A Black Skimmer feeds in the early evening and night when waters are calm and fish and shrimp are near the surface. The bird rarely locates food by sight. Instead, it flies along the surface of water with its bill open, slicing through water with the lower bill till it feels the food. Then the top mandible clamps down. They "fish" on the water's surface and never dive.

Black Skimmers roost during daylight in dense flocks on beaches, all standing with heads pointed in the same direction. They nest in small colonies, often located near gulls and terns. Nests are shallow depressions, scraped in dry sand. Three to five eggs are laid in the depression. The eggs are light blue with gray, brown, and lilac-colored markings. Both parents incubate eggs for 25 days, then feed the young for another month. The distinctive lower bill doesn't grow longer than the upper bill until chicks are almost fully grown.

MEMBERS TO ELECT MCAS DIRECTORS, OFFICERS AT MAY CHAPTER MEETING

Members will elect MCAS board members and directors at a brief business meeting prior to our presentation by Floyd Hayes at the May 18 meeting. The following persons have been nominated for election to the board members for 2015-2017: Dave Jensen, Mary Beth Arago, Catherine Keegan, Terra Fuller and Jim Havlena. Nominated for election of officers are: President, Dave Jensen; Vice President, Tim Bray; and Treasurer, Jim Havlena (Diane Rubin continues as Secretary with the term ending 2016). Current board members continuing until 2016 are Sarah Grimes and Angela Liebenberg. Joleen Ossello, Charlene McAllister and Linda Perkins will not be continuing as board members but will be serving the organization on off-board committees.

COMMON NIGHTHAWK**Donald Shephard****Common Nighthawk photo by Gavin Schaefer**

My path has crossed with Common Nighthawks only twice. In another century, in another lifetime, I worked as a Deputy Agricultural Commissioner in San Joaquin County. Among my duties I inspected bee hives for strength and diseases. Beekeepers, like well drillers, are notoriously bad at drawing location maps. On the day I first saw a Common Nighthawk, I found the target apiary in the Sierra foothills only two miles off the beekeeper's hand-drawn map. I took advantage of a valley live oak to assess the site within its shade. There, on a low branch, I saw a lump. A canker, I wondered. On closer inspection, I recognized the shape of a bird hunkered down, blending perfectly with the craggy, grey bark of the oak. Its long, slender wings extended beyond the notched tail. This medium-sized crepuscular bird typically shows dark gray, black and brown, displaying cryptic coloration and intricate patterns which rendered it virtually invisible by day. The nighthawk slept through my inspection, remaining motionless, even when I returned to bid it adieu.

My second meeting with this species occurred higher in the mountains when I backpacked with a friend in an area open to both hikers and off-road enthusiasts – for the first and last time. I had settled onto a warm granite outcrop above a trout stream when a four-wheel drive vehicle appeared. The driver stopped and pulled out his fishing gear. While his first cast arced toward the water, his wife announced over a loudspeaker, "Mr. Culbertson the mosquitoes are eating us up!" Her voice echoed through the valley. They soon disappeared.

That evening, in the peace of mountain twilight, I strolled along the stream and saw Common Nighthawks eating up the mosquitoes. Analyses of stomach contents have revealed single bird may eat more than five hundred mosquitoes a day. They fly with long, pointed wings and medium-long forked tails. I observed barring on the sides and abdomen, and white wing-patches. Only the small tip of the bill shows, belying the massive size of the mouth, and this combined

continued

with the large eye and short neck gives the bird a big-headed look.

I doubt Mrs. Culbertson knew she had these allies, but if she did she probably called them goatsuckers from an archaic, erroneous idea that the birds fly into barns at night and suck dry the teats of goats. The Latin for goatsucker is *caprimulgus*.

Here, you may find a Common Nighthawk zooming above pygmy forest mostly at dusk and dawn, or during the day in fog. Ordinarily, you will see one or two at a time, but when damp-wood termites swarm after a rain, you may be lucky enough to see a dozen.

Locally Common Nighthawks are mostly found migrating to or from their breeding grounds. There, males dive at a female on the nest from two hundred feet, pulling up in a sharp arc which produces a whooshing *Hooooov* sound when air escapes through their wing feathers. The male also gives a rasping, nasal buzz. Although females generally remain silent, they sometimes utter a low clucking note. Perhaps they are hushing their mates or chicks.

Surprisingly, Common Nighthawks have adapted to urban life. In the Yukon and other sparsely populated areas, they nest on the ground, but in cities, where they feed on insects attracted to street lights, they nest on gravel-topped flat roofs.

Common Nighthawks undertake one of North America's longer migrations, travelling between 1,600 and 4,200 miles. They migrate to and from Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and primarily Argentina. They fly by day or night in loose flocks which frequently number in the thousands. Hence the group name, a kettle of nighthawks. The northbound journey commences at the end of February; the birds reach destinations as late as mid-June. The southbound migration commences mid-July and ends in early October.

Next time you visit a pygmy forest at dusk, look for these long-winged birds flying in graceful loops, flashing white patches just past the bend of each wing as they chase insects. Scan the darkening sky and you'll likely find some bats zipping around with their frenzied flapping – but look for a larger, bounding, long-winged shape. If you don't see one, listen for low, buzzing calls. Watch their erratic flopping flight pattern alternating with gliding on raised wings, and enjoy these cryptic, crepuscular birds.

Common Nighthawk photo by Gregg Thompson



SAVE OUR SHOREBIRDS

Becky Bowen



It began suddenly in mid-April. Migrating shorebirds were surging through the north Mendocino Coast on the way to Arctic breeding grounds. Mixed flocks of Western Sandpipers, Semipalmated Plovers, Dunlins and Least Sandpipers were rushing by, stopping only to rest and refuel. We were seeing large numbers of Whimbrels (with an occasional Long-billed Curlew), Sanderlings, dowitchers and Black Turnstones. On April 25, SOS surveyors saw three Bonaparte's Gulls on Ten Mile Beach. Two days earlier a group of 10 Greater Yellowlegs was at Inglenook Creek. Perhaps the splashiest show was put on by migrating Black-bellied Plovers in various stages of breeding plumage. According to *The Shorebird Guide*, by Michael O'Brien, Richard Crossley, and Kevin Karlson, they stagger departure times, which may explain why we are likely to see at least a few Black-bellied Plovers here year-round. There is a dip in Black-bellied Plover sightings in April-June, when most birds have flown to breeding grounds in the Arctic tundra. After June, we see them fly through again, heading toward wintering grounds along the coast as far south as the tip of South America, where they are known as *Chorlitos gris*. The chart below is a record of high counts of Black-bellied Plovers found on SOS surveys since 2007. Data of all shorebirds observed by our SOS surveyors in Mackericher State Park are posted on the MCAS website at www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org

SOS Black-bellied Plover High Counts 2007-2014 Glass Beach, Virgin Creek, Ten Mile Beach, Trestle Loop, Lighthouse Loop

Source: SOS e-bird High Counts

	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
2007						1	100	35	36	43	50	45
2008	20	20	2	0	0	3	50	39	45	32	25	5
2009	25	19	0	0	7	0	16	44	27	25	60	16
2010	17	0	0	4	9	1	32	22	43	58	40	28
2011	28	15	5	0	1	0	14	54	41	56	57	1
2012	68	56	13	10	10	1	24	35	28	48	80	47
2013	40	36	15	6	10	1	18	25	26	47	76	59
2014	51	56	7	10	4	3	31	37	37	130	86	105

Save Our Shorebirds is an ongoing year-round long term Mendocino Coast Audubon citizen science program in partnership with California State Parks. For more information, contact Angela Liebenberg liebenbergs@mcn.org
Please visit us on facebook at www.facebook.com/SaveOurShorebirds

CELEBRATING THE EXTRAORDINARY LIFE OF BRANDON PILL



Audubon Scholarship recipient Brandon Pill with MCAS Treasurer and Scholarship Committee member Judy Steele at College of the Redwoods academic awards ceremony at the CR Mendocino Coast campus in April, 2013.

Brandon Pill, 20, died suddenly March 12, at the Mendocino Coast District Hospital, and our whole community mourned.

Brandon received a \$1,000 MCAS award for environmental science students at the College of the Redwoods' 2013 spring scholarship ceremony. In his communication with the Audubon scholarship committee, he said, "I am a first generation college student in my family, so for my family, me continuing on is something very exciting." His parents are Leann and Ben Pill, of Fort Bragg.

"My educational career goals are to obtain my Marine Science Technology degree at C.R. here on the Mendocino Coast campus and then transfer to a four-year university and major in math and science," he wrote. His chosen majors reflected a

passion for wildlife, especially birds and tropical fish, which he bred and raised. He graduated with honors from Fort Bragg High in 2012 and entered College of the Redwoods the next fall.

Richard Ries, his mathematics professor, wrote, "Brandon is truly one of the best that we have here at College of the Redwoods. I have no question about his ability to succeed." And succeed he did: He was a member of Phi Theta Kappa Honors Society and earned a grade point average that hovered around a perfect 4.0, no easy achievement in the Marine Science Technology program.

Nothing came easy to Brandon. He wrote, "One obstacle that I am continually overcoming is my hereditary skin disorder. I have a skin disorder called Epidermolysisbullosa that affects my skin and makes it very fragile because I am missing fibers that hold the layers together. Every day imposes some kind of obstacle that I have to overcome, and I look forward to beating all of them."

And he beat the obstacles – in every way. At the celebration of his life on April 11, family and friends filled Portuguese Hall in Fort Bragg and shared stories about a childhood that included parties, pranks, mischief, and hard work. Videos and family photographs showed a young Brandon who was active, funny, kind to people and animals, and always busy. His hands and forearms were often wrapped in post-operation bandages, but he did all the things young people do, including driving, dancing, teaching his grandmother how to use the internet, traveling, taking pictures, cooking, being the life of family parties, boating, and pursuing his passion for natural history. In 2012, he edited and published a book of his photographs depicting his favorite subject. The title of the book is *Nature's Splendor*. It could have been called *Brandon's Triumph*. [Becky Bowen](#)

RARE BIRD SIGHTING AND FIELD TRIP NEWS

The Shrike at Alder Creek: Identification Update

The shrike (first seen by State Parks' environmental science intern Alison Cebula on March 5) continues to be seen at Manchester near Alder Creek. Details about sightings, location, and thoughts on which species we are privileged to have visit our coast can be found on Mendobirds, NW Calbirds and CalBirds (Yahoo groups). While it was initially reported as a Brown Shrike, pictures sent by Robert Keiffer to experts around the world raised questions about the identification. The bird continues to draw birders to Alder Creek from near and far. We wait for it to complete its molt and then (with luck) before it leaves us, photos will give additional information which could lead to a definitive identification. There are a few different opinions amongst the experts: Red-backed Shrike x Isabelline Shrike hybrid, or Brown Shrike subspecies *lucionensis* (although three Eurasian experts have dismissed this possibility), or a hybrid between two subspecies within the species group of Brown/Red-backed/Isabelline. Thus far all identification is strictly speculation. Meanwhile, the shrike busily catches its prey and ignores us all.



Photograph by Sean McAllister

Charlene McAllister

Saturday May 9, 2015 Field Trip to Navarro River and Beach Leader: David Jensen

Meet at 9 AM at the park-and-ride just south of the Navarro River Bridge on Highway 1. We will walk down the road, then carpool to the beach. This is always a productive trip. We encounter several types of habitat during the peak of Spring passerine activity. Singing warblers, sparrows, wrens, and Black-headed Grosbeaks will provide the soundtrack: there is always the potential for unusual sightings. Last year we found Western Kingbird and Bullock's Oriole, and the year before we found a gorgeous singing male Rose-breasted Grosbeak. A highlight for me was Dave Jensen's discovery of a Bushtit nest, watching adults return with food, and listening as they fed the young inside the pendulous pouch. **Tim Bray**

April Field Trip Report – Hendy Woods State Park

More than a dozen birders from Anderson Valley and the coast, plus visitors from Stockton, assembled on the bridge over the Navarro River to view swallows and listen to the morning birdsong chorus. Catherine Keegan located a singing male Black-headed Grosbeak, of which we had fine views of it through the spotting scope. Moving into the oak savannah, we could hear singing Black-throated Gray Warblers, and eventually found one high in a tree, allowing several people their first looks at this bird. Then we entered the park proper, where Purple Martins gave themselves away by their distinctive calls. David found a pair high in a redwood snag, got them in the scope, so we all got to watch them checking out a nest cavity. Eventually we moved farther into the park and took a route different from past trips. We encountered a tree full of birds - among them a bright Hermit Warbler and a female Western Tanager. Construction at the picnic area hampered birding the meadow, so after a brief look at the river (where David Jensen sneaked up on a Sharp-shinned Hawk), we wrapped it up with 49 species. Another great birding day. **Tim Bray**

CALENDAR, BIRD WALKS, FIELD TRIPS

May 2015

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

Saturday 2, Sunday 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](#) 9AM - Meet at the east end of the large parking area on the north side of Big River, next to the yellow gate at the entrance to the 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 Fourth Sunday Bird Tour New all-access trail on former GP Property 10AM
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: David Jensen

Thursday 11 MCAS Board of Directors Meeting, Contact David Jensen for time and place

Saturday 13 Field Trip Kayak Trip on the Noyo with Liquid Fusion 9AM - [Liquid Fusion Kayaking](#) Leader: Cate Hawthorne [Cate](#) or 962-1623. Reservations required.

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

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

Sunday 28 Fourth Sunday Bird Tour New all-access trail on former GP Property 10 AM
Meet in parking lot at foot of Elm Street, Fort Bragg. Leader: David Jensen

July 2015

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

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

Sunday 26 Fourth Sunday Bird Tour New all-access trail on former GP Property 10AM
Meet in parking lot at foot of Elm Street, Fort Bragg. Leader: David Jensen

August 2015

Saturday 1 Beginner Bird Walk [GP Millsite Meet at Glass Beach Parking Lot](#) 9AM **Note Site Change Due to Art in the Gardens** Leader: David Jensen

Wednesday 19 Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 8AM* Leader: Tim Bray

Sunday 23 Fourth Sunday Bird Tour New all-access trail on former GP Property 10AM
Meet in parking lot at foot of Elm Street, Fort Bragg. Leader: David 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

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
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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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