



The Black Oystercatcher

Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Newsletter, June 2013

You are Cordially Invited to Join Us

Monday, June 17, 2013

7-9 p.m.

Caspar Community Center

Meet and Greet

Your Audubon Project Leaders

Come on in for Refreshments

And an Informal Meeting

Find Out What's Up

On the Ocean, In the Woods, and In the Air



*Pelagic Cormorant and Black Oystercatcher
masthead photos by Ron LeValley*

- **Ron LeValley - Cormorants**
- **Joleen Ossello - Black Oystercatchers**
- **Angela Liebenberg - Save Our Shorebirds**
- **Sarah Grimes - Education and Family Bird Walks**
- **Tim Bray- Field Trips and Botanical Garden Birdwalks**
- **Dave Jensen - Big River, Point Cabrillo Surveys**

*All Mendocino Coast Audubon Chapter meetings are open to the public
Small donations gladly accepted*

MCAS Birding and Kayaking Trip on Noyo River June 8 at 9 A.M.

Please Call Cate Hawthorne at 962-1623 for reservations and details. Space is limited. More information on our Website:

www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Joleen Ossello

A Tern's Dive or My Turn to Drive?

Welcome, members, to the beginning of a new year for the MCAS Board of Directors. I am delighted and honored to serve you as a fellow birder, conservationist, educator, and leader.



Caspian Tern on Ten Mile Beach-Photo by Ron LeValley

Just as the Caspian Tern plunges with assertion and confidence into the water for its prey, my own steady hands are decidedly upon the MCAS wheel. Spinning its revolution each year, the wheel represents that which I believe we all have in common, the innate desire for migration. Perhaps I do not spend my winters in Florida and summers in Canada, just yet, for I have dedicated myself as a mother and Mendocino County resident for the past fifteen years. Still, I have experienced migratory movement within the course of my life.



Photo by Donald Shephard

You see, I've met this tern before. My last major migration from being a naturalist in West Virginia to a naturalist in California changed my life, when I witnessed a most amazing display in nature. Bold contrasting colors mixed with speed, rhythm, and a splash. That day, atop the Terwilliger Trail at Richardson Bay Audubon Sanctuary in Marin County, was my turn to fall in love with the elegance and mystery of birds. I look forward to my turn as your board president, and to a productive year with a dedicated and enthusiastic board. Members, I am available for your suggestions and comments.

PAM HUNTLEY ON KZYX FM 88.3, 90.7, AND 91.5

SPOTTED TOWHEE

You often hear Spotted Towhees scratching on the ground under bushes. They are so loud you expect a large animal to emerge from the brush, but the bird is only 8-inches long. If it is curious about you, it will perch on a low branch and make a loud raspy call.

I learned their names as Rufous-sided Towhees, but years ago they were split from their Eastern cousins, which lacks spots, and are called Eastern Towhees.

Spotted Towhees are beautiful birds sporting an all-black back, wings, tail and head. They have a gorgeous red eye, rufous flanks and white under parts.

The wings show white spots and the outside tail feathers bear white tips that show during flight. The female looks the same as the male, but is duller.

Spotted Towhees are year-round residents. They are found in riparian thickets, chaparral, brushy edges of woodlands, and undergrowth. Because of their foraging habits, they are sometimes called Ground Robins. They feed by hopping back and forth on both feet, noisily scratching leaf litter for insects, spiders, seeds and berries.

In courtship the male chases the female, perches on low branches and spreads its tail to display its large white spots.

Their nest is a cup constructed of leaves, grass, and bark shreds. It is built on the ground or in low branches in a bush. The female incubates three or four creamy speckled eggs for a few weeks. The female leaves the nest and begins a second brood while the male feeds chicks. In summer, after breeding season, the whole family forages together.



Photo by Becky Bowen

SAVE OUR SHOREBIRDS

By Becky Bowen

Spring Up North, Fall Back Down South



Semipalmated Plover on Ten Mile Beach, April, 2013 – photo by Becky Bowen

Save Our Shorebirds surveyors observed a good number of Semipalmated Plovers during a busy spring migration that takes shorebirds from points far south all the way up to the Arctic Circle for breeding season. The birds pick the far North to breed and raise chicks because food is plentiful and predators are not.

We look forward to compiling the numbers for 2013 to get an accurate picture, but our sense is there were more Semipalmated Plovers and Dunlins passing through town this spring to rest and refuel on their long journeys – and fewer Western Sandpipers.

There are only four shorebirds that are year-round coastal residents: Spotted Sandpipers, Western Snowy Plovers, Killdeer and the kings and queens of chatter, Black Oystercatchers.

*Save Our Shorebirds is a long-term ongoing Mendocino Coast Audubon Society program developed in partnership with California State Parks and FLOCKworks. To learn more contact State Parks Environmental Scientist Angela Liebenberg
angela.liebenberg@parks.ca.gov*

and please visit us at www.facebook.com/SaveOurShorebirds

A View and a Survey from the Mendocino Coastal Bluffs

By Joleen Ossello

It is during the June surveys that we can begin to answer some of May's questions. To pair or not to pair? The Black Oystercatcher Conservation Project is under way. Some twenty MCAS volunteers stand on the bluffs and peer through binoculars and spotting scopes, observing reproductive behavior among bird pairs occupying countless sea stacks. This season, May-September, marks the second nest survey of the resident Black Oystercatchers funded through a collaborative grant between Audubon CA, California State Parks, Fish & Wildlife Service, and MCAS. New to the project is a public outreach grant from The Bureau of Land Management's California Coastal National Monument program. This contribution allowed our grant committee to provide surveyors with informational magnets as handouts designed to educate and inspire curious visitors along the bluffs of Mendocino County. Survey teams are in place from Hardy Creek south to Little River actively recording nesting pairs that are defending territory, tossing rocks, and incubating eggs. It is not uncommon to observe and hear individuals competing for nesting territory while attempting to share rock space with Pelagic Cormorants, Rock Pigeons, Western Gulls, and even Canada Geese. Now is a great time to look for eggs as the adults perform an incubation exchange of duty. Join us on a survey to see for yourself or follow our progress on the MCAS Facebook page.



Photo by Bill Delemeter



Donald Shephard surveys Black Oystercatchers at Point Cabrillo – photo by Joleen Ossello

LEAST SANDPIPER**Donald Shephard**

Imagine that you have an incredible lightness of being, weighing only three-quarters of an ounce. Your wingspan is thirteen inches and you are six inches long. Your mother left the tundra before you hatched; your father then raised you for a few more weeks. Now, you must find your way from Alaska to South America along a narrow strip of coastal rocks, mudflats and beaches. Such are the first experiences of Least Sandpipers.



Least Sandpiper photo courtesy Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge

Becky Bowen, volunteer coordinator of Save Our Shorebirds (SOS), tells me observers saw a lot of Least Sandpipers coming through this April on their way north to sub-arctic tundra breeding grounds. Early in May, she stood on a Glass Beach bluff wondering why a small offshore rock was so knobby. On focusing her spotting scope, she found eight Least Sandpipers huddled together in a stiff wind. Becky also sees them travelling with mixed groups of Western Sandpipers and Semipalmated Plovers. Arthur Cleveland Bent, in his *Life Histories of North American Shorebirds*, recalls seeing Least Sandpipers running around among Greater Yellowlegs "like pygmies among giants." SOS volunteers often find that three or four hang around for a while in summer, wading and foraging in the shallow fresh waters of Inglenook Creek at Ten Mile Beach.

Least Sandpipers can challenge a beginning birder. Semipalmated Sandpipers, a similar species, but one rarely seen in our area, show more gray on the back and have black legs. Western Sandpipers also show a plainer chest, and have black legs. Least Sandpipers forage by pecking along the upper edge of mudflats or along drier margins of inland ponds, while other small sandpipers will forage in wetter places, by probing.

First described in 1819 by Louis Jean Pierre Vieillot, a French ornithologist, Least Sandpipers are the smallest shorebirds in the world. Their small size and high voice have earned them the familiar name of "peeps." Take a stroll along one of our beaches and you may spy a small shorebird with a short neck. Look for a moderately long bill, which may droop slightly at the tip; moderately long yellowish legs; a black center to the rump and tail; back reddish with black spots (in breeding plumage) and two thin white lines down the back. Above all, Becky advises, "Keep looking for those yellow legs." In flight, Least Sandpipers show a white stripe down their wings and white on either side of their tail. The underwings are slightly darker than those of the other two peeps. Juveniles may be brighter rufous than adults, especially in comparison to the faded fall breeding plumage of the adults.

They migrate all across North America. Look for coastal migrants along tidal creeks, salt marsh edges, and mudflats. They rarely visit sandy ocean beaches. Inland migrants inhabit small, shallow ponds, sandy riverbanks, sewage treatment ponds, and lakeshores.

LEAST SANDPIPERS

continued

Least Sandpipers usually roost by themselves or in small groups. They generally feed at the upper edge of mudflats, often in the vegetation, higher than Western or Semipalmated Sandpipers. When foraging, they walk slowly with their heads down, picking at food on the surface rather than probing into the mud. On the breeding grounds and in inland areas, Least Sandpipers primarily eat fly larvae and other insects. On the coast, they eat small crustaceans, snails, and other marine creatures.

Males arrive on the breeding grounds about a week before females and establish territories. Monogamous pairs form quickly once the females arrive. The nest is located on the ground near water, and usually on a tuft of grass or moss. The male begins the shallow scrape, and the female finishes it, lining it with grass, leaves, and moss.

This is how Arthur Cleveland Bent describes their courtship: "The bird springs into the air on quivering, down-turned wings and circles about, now lower, now higher, reaching at times a height of fifty or more yards. In the air it emits a short sweet trill which is rapidly repeated, and with each song burst the wings are rapidly vibrated."

Both parents incubate the four eggs for about twenty days. As incubation progresses, the male takes a larger and larger share. Chicks leave the nest within a day of hatching, and feed themselves. Adults brood and tend the young; the male generally stays with the brood until they fledge at about three weeks. In later clutches, the female may actually leave before the young hatch, but usually she helps tend the chicks for the first week or so.

Least Sandpipers migrate across North America and winter mainly from the southern United States into northern South America. Many stage at the Copper River Delta in Alaska in spring, but out on the winter range, they spread out, not concentrating in a few spots as many other shorebirds do.

The Canadian Wildlife Service estimates the Least Sandpiper population at 600,000 birds. Christmas Bird Count data suggest that wintering Least Sandpipers have declined. Population estimates tend to be inaccurate for this species, however, as it is often lumped with the other small sandpipers and therefore may be undercounted. Also, winter numbers in North America have always been small and are probably not an indicator of the overall health of the population. Least Sandpipers are adaptable and can quickly colonize new breeding habitat. This, and their tendency not to congregate in major wintering areas, should help the Least Sandpiper to survive in the face of habitat loss, increased disturbance, and contamination.

So take a tip from Becky Bowen, wander along our beaches with an eye for "knobby rocks" that morph into our smallest shorebird. If you are lucky, you will see a "bind", "contradiction", "fling", "hill", or "time-step" of sandpipers. Then, how can you not share Becky's great passion for these tiny creatures?

Please Help Us Pick 'Em Up and Put 'Em Down for the Birds and For MCAS

Time to get out your three-legged friend and shine up that scope for Independence Day maneuvers. The MCAS Precision Spotting Scope Drill Team is forming NOW to participate in the Mendocino 4th of July Parade. We had a great time last year and want you to join us in 2013. Don't have a scope and tripod? No problem, we can get you equipped for our choreographed jaunt through town. To know when, where, get more information, and to sign up please contact Adam Hutchins 707 962-9055 (raptorous@mac.com)



2012 MCAS Precision Spotting Scope Drill Team – Photo by Donald Shephard

Mendocino Coast Audubon Society

P.O. Box 2297 • Fort Bragg • CA 95437
 audubon@mcn.org www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org

IT'S MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL TIME

The basic membership dues cover the cost of your subscription to the Whistling Swan. Please consider joining or renewing at a higher level to support the important environmental education and conservation projects critical to the protection of wildlife and the environment. *Note: membership in Mendocino Coast Audubon does not make you a member of National Audubon and joining NAS does not include membership in MCAS.*

I am a new member I am a renewing member
 Basic membership \$25.00 Low Income/Student \$15.00
 Family \$30.00 \$ _____ Tax Deductible Contribution Amount

Please make your check payable to **Mendocino Coast Audubon Society (MCAS)** and mail to **P.O.Box 2297, Fort Bragg, CA 95437**. If you wish to pay by credit card, you may use the Pay Pal button on the web site www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

OUR MEMBERSHIP YEAR IS JULY 1- JUNE 30. Renewals not received by 9/1 will result in your being dropped from our membership list. Don't let that happen!

BIRD WALKS, FIELD TRIPS, and PROGRAMS

for a 2013-2014 calendar and helpful links visit www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org

June, 2013

- Saturday, 6/1 Beginners Bird Walk at Botanical Gardens 9AM*
18220 North Highway One, Fort Bragg
- Saturday, 6/8 Noyo River kayak birding 9AM
Please call Liquid Fusion for reservations and information 962-1623
- Monday, 6/17 MCAS meeting Caspar Community Center 7PM
Meet and Greet, Eat Cookies, Find Out About Our MCAS Programs and Leaders
- Wednesday, 6/19 Botanical Gardens Bird Walk 8AM*

July, 2013

- Thursday, 7/4 Come watch Mendocino Coast Audubon Society's One and Only Precision Spotting Scope Drill Team at the 4th of July Parade, Mendocino Village Main Street 11:30AM
- Saturday, 7/6 Beginners Bird Walk at Botanical Gardens 9AM *
- Wednesday, 7/17 Botanical Gardens Bird Walk 8AM*

August, 2013

- Saturday, 8/3 Beginners Bird Walk at the Botanical Gardens 9AM*
- Wednesday, 8/21 Botanical Gardens Bird Walk 8AM*

*Our MCAS Bird Walks in the Botanical Gardens are free, but there is an admission fee charged by the Gardens for non-members. The Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens phone is 964-4352.

A NOTE FROM OUR PAST PRESIDENT

I have deeply enjoyed my six-year tenure as chapter president. It has gone by all too quickly, but I have savored each moment.

As I looked back on all that we have accomplished since 2007, I realized that I have simply been a small part of those successes. The credit all belongs to others who have labored tirelessly, often unnoticed, to help this chapter to grow, to serve better our community and to gain the recognition we now enjoy.

So thank you to all who formed this chapter from a dream. Thank you to the ones, too many to mention, who carefully nurtured and grew this chapter. Thank you to all the board members with whom I have had the pleasure to work for the past six years. To them goes the credit for anything we have accomplished. Thank you to Joleen, Cate, and the others who have stepped up to lead this chapter into the future. And thanks most of all to you, the members of this chapter, who continue to support and encourage our efforts.

Although I must spend my weekdays in Ukiah, I will continue to be an active member. I will also continue to represent our interests and needs on the board of Audubon California. I hope to slip the occasional article into this newsletter. But most of all, I hope to see you on one of our bird walks.

David Jensen

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	Cate Hawthorne	962-1623	thorn91@hotmail.com
Treasurer	Open		
SOS Program	Angela Liebenberg	962-9267	aliebenberg@parks.ca.gov
Membership	Charlene McAllister	937-4463	charmac@mcn.org
Webmaster	Catherine Keegan	937-4422	keegan@wildblue.net
Programs	Open		
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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

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

