

# The Whistling Swan



NEWSLETTER OF THE MENDOCINO COAST AUDUBON SOCIETY

June 2011



Short-tailed Albatross photos Ron LeValley  
[www.LeValleyphoto.com](http://www.LeValleyphoto.com)

## Short-tailed Albatross

Ron LeValley bubbles with enthusiasm about all things outside his window. He especially sparkles when talking about seabirds. No wonder he wore out the exclamation point on his computer keyboard while

reporting a special find on our May pelagic trip. He had seen a Short-tailed Albatross, the biggest seabird in the Northern Pacific, but why all the excitement about one bird? After all, he had seen others before, on Midway Atoll.

To understand Ron's excitement, let us go back to 1780 when P.S. Pallas described this species and its range: the China coast, Kamchatka, the Bering Sea ice edge as far as the Arctic Ocean, and the Pacific coast of North America south to Baja California. Archeologists studying bones recovered from prehistoric middens found Short-tailed Albatross played an important dietary role for native shore-dwellers in California, Oregon and Alaska. The Ainu people of Hokkaido, Japan used living bird as a guide to swordfish and used its skull for shamanistic rituals.

In 1887, the South Seas Trading Company established a settlement on the main breeding ground, Tori-shima Island in the southern Izu off Japan. The company employed fifty Japanese laborers to kill nesting Short-tailed Albatross in order to provide a range of products from feathers for stuffing and decorating hats to fat used for food and fertilizer. The tameness of nesting parents earned them the

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nickname *aho-dori* or fool birds and the men each killed hundreds every day. They also ate the eggs.

By 1903, the company had massacred five million Short-tailed Albatross. The Tori-shima volcano erupted in the off-season that year, killing all the human occupants. In 1932, only a few thousand birds remained so the Japanese government prepared to ban hunting on Tori-shima for ten years, to allow recovery. The inhabitants of the island, anticipating the legislation, killed 3,000 birds in December 1932 and January 1933. Only 100 birds returned to Tori-shima in 1934. The 1939 volcanic eruption buried the remaining nesting sites under ten feet of lava.

Other breeding islands fared no better. Itinerant fishermen wiped out the population on Bonin Island despite its designation as a preserve in 1926.

Oliver Austin, a prominent American ornithologist, stated in 1949, "the chances that any of these fine birds remain alive today are remote indeed... Steller's (Short-tailed) Albatross has become one of the more recent victims of man's thoughtlessness and greed." But, as Mark Twain said, "Reports of my death are greatly exaggerated."

Weather station personnel on Tori-shima reported a few pairs breeding in 1954. About fourteen percent of other albatross species stay at sea during the breeding season, thus avoiding land-based disasters. This may be the case for Short-tailed as well. Young Short-tailed Albatross take three or four years to attain adult plumage and do not breed until seven or eight years old. Even then, they lay but one egg every two years. One-third to one-half of hatched chicks do not survive to fledge, dying from starvation, ticks and other parasites, and indigenous crow predation. Inexperienced young birds flopping onto the sea may also fall prey to sharks.

In the 1970's, Hiroshi Hasegawa, a graduate student at Toho University, set out to save the species. He has since spent most of his adult life helping this seabird. In begin his studies, he landed in 1977 alone on the volcanic island where the birds nested on the steep slope. He found 71 adults and 15 chicks. Eggs often rolled into the sea. He planted native eulalia grasses to stabilize nests. Egg survival changed from 30% to 60% in one year but in 1987 a landslide buried

chicks and washed away eggs. The Japanese government helped Professor Hasegawa terrace the slope, erect barriers to divert mudslides, and replant native grasses.



The other side of the island, with gentler gradients and abundant vegetation, offered a better nesting site. Hasegawa set up dozens of life-sized hand-painted decoys in a variety of courtship displays to lure albatross to the new site. To add realism, he broadcast courtship and mating sounds. The ruse worked. Within hours, several bachelor males soared overhead, some performed mating dances. Soon pairs

arrived and established nests.

Hasegawa knew that island extinctions are more common than continental ones. He recognized that volcanic activity could decimate the population again so, in 1991 when annual egg production reached fifty, he began hand rearing a few chicks and transporting them by helicopter to Minami-kojima Island and in 2000 to Mu-kojima.

In 2000, the Oceanic Wildlife Society, a Japanese nonprofit headed by Professor Hasegawa, placed sixteen decoys on Eastern Island, a part of the Midway Atoll, 1,370 miles north-west of Honolulu. Eventually, these decoys and recorded mating calls attracted a pair to nest. Their leg-bands indicate both birds were born on Tori-shima; the male left in 1987 and the female in 2003. On January 14, 2011 a chick hatched.

Leg-bands tell an incomplete story of the foraging range of this albatross. The United States Fish and Wildlife Service in cooperation with Oregon State University and Professor Hasegawa attached satellite transmitters to 31 young albatross. They left Tori-shima in May, arrived off Honshu where they fed, flew to waters off Hokkaido and the Kuriles before visiting the ocean around the Aleutians until August when they reached the Bering Sea. Transmitters on chick-rearing albatross found the overlap between human and avian fishing grounds.

Today, long-line fisheries and volcanic eruptions present the greatest dangers. Most commercial long-line fisheries use bycatch mitigation devices. Short-tailed Albatross soar to the waters off Choshi, one of the world's foremost fishing grounds, where the Kuroshio and Oyashio currents collide. Whether there will be enough fish left for them to eat is a matter of grave concern.

The trend is good: from 25 Tori-shima nests in 1954 to about 250 birds in 1982. Today, an estimated 3,000 Short-tailed Albatross roam the Pacific from Tori-shima to Alaska and at least one has flown south close to our shores where Ron LeValley spotted its pink beak and jumped with joy. Ron says, "Thanks to Hiroshi and all the people who have worked on this, an important part of our coastal ecosystem looks like it might return. And we get to see this species in California!"

### **Donald Shephard**





**Marbled Godwit – May 8, 2011, Ten Mile Beach in MacKerricher State Park**

## **GET READY, THE GODWITS AND CURLEWS AND SURFBIRDS ARE COMING**

**Save Our Shorebirds**

**Summer, 2011**

**By Becky Bowen**

We never know what summer and fall will bring to our beaches, but Save Our Shorebirds volunteers are on the lookout and we learn something every year during this on-going long-term MCAS citizen science project. We need your help in July, August and two weeks in September. Curious? Here's how it works:

- On July 1, 2011, daily shorebird surveys start on three MacKerricher State Park beaches (Glass Beach, Virgin Creek Beach, Ten Mile Beach).
- Daily surveys continue until September 15, 2011. After that, data are collected and compiled once a week by a team of "winter SOS" volunteers.
- Surveyors select a beach and dates and schedule their choices with SOS leaders. Some volunteers survey once or twice a month, some go out once a week. The choice is yours. On survey day, pick a convenient time, then count birds on the assigned beach. There is a protocol for each beach and a data sheet to fill out. The data sheet is placed in an envelope on the bulletin board of Cowlick's Ice Cream Parlor in Fort Bragg or submitted electronically to the SOS Director.
- SOS Director Joleen Ossello collects survey data sheets, which also record disturbance to shorebirds, and submits bird count information to Cornell University's international bird database. Disturbance data go to State Parks and raw data are on the SOS listserve.
- Surveys are on foot and take from one to five hours (Glass Beach 1.5 miles; Virgin Creek 2 miles; Ten Mile Beach 4.5 miles one way, 9 miles roundtrip).
- SOS surveyors work under the supervision of State Parks Environmental Scientist Angela Liebenberg.
- In-field training will be at Virgin Creek Beach every Friday in June at 8:30 a.m. Call for directions: 962-1602.

We appreciate your help. Our aim is to protect and monitor shorebirds, some in deeply serious decline. To learn more, contact Angela Liebenberg at [ALIEBENBERG@parks.ca.gov](mailto:ALIEBENBERG@parks.ca.gov)

*This project is supported by Audubon California*

## PRESIDENT'S CORNER

David Jensen



Last month I attended National Audubon Society's quarterly Board of Directors meeting and met the new president for the second time this year. We first met in San Diego, where I gave a talk on my experiences negotiating protection for sea bird rookeries as part of the Marine Life Protection Act. Between those two meetings, we exchanged several emails. Since he is unlikely to visit us, I will share my impression of this new leader and offer some thoughts as to why this change is important to our small local chapter.

Last year when the Chairman of the Board, Holt Thrasher announced that Audubon President John Flicker had resigned, I feared that they might select Robin Yount, Phoebe Snow or even Jack Sparrow as his replacement. Fortunately, they selected the former Executive Director of the Environmental Defense Fund and Pulitzer Prize winning reporter for the San Jose Mercury-News, Mr. David Yarnold, to serve as the tenth president of the organization founded in 1905.

David takes control at a critical time for the Society. While Audubon has gained strength and respect in public perception, the organization itself has become weakened by lack of direction and the unfortunate rift between its national headquarters in New York and the local chapters, the heart and soul of the organization.

Like many of you, David Yarnold and I missed those struggles over dues -sharing and regional control. We neither know nor care about who wronged whom. We bear no grudges. David's message is clear: We are One Audubon. That is how the world sees us.

The second part of his message also rings true with me: Audubon is first and foremost a conservation organization. The National Audubon Society was founded to protect birds from the predations of the feather trade. We hired the first game wardens. We helped pass the first environmental protection laws and established the first wildlife refuges. We will remain active in the Gulf until all damages have been assessed and, if possible, repaired. That is our heritage. It provides the backbone of all the things we do, including education and citizen science.

David points out that "Audubon follows where the birds lead us." To save our shorebirds, we must be as actively involved in the protection of the northern breeding areas as we are along our beaches. Otherwise, we will simply document dwindling returns each fall. To save our songbirds, we need to be as active in their southern wintering grounds as we are in our local fields and forests. The good folks at Ducks Unlimited understand this principle well and have devoted much effort and expense to preserving the northern potholes that are vital for waterfowl reproduction. Audubon must continue to do the same.

With your indulgence, on page 6, I repeat a column I wrote for the November 2007 newsletter. It emphasizes in a simple way that each leg of the Audubon platform is important. Without the support of each - education, enjoyment, and conservation - we cannot succeed. On behalf of David Yarnold, the National Audubon Society and your local chapter, thank you for your continuing support.

## A BIRDER'S LAMENT David Jensen, President



I have a couple of confessions to make.

True Confession Number 1: I've never really cared for the National Audubon Society. I'm sorry, but it is true. You see, I have always had a love for birds, even as a boy. When I began to get serious about studying birds over 30 years ago, I joined the National Audubon Society to learn all I could. I faithfully read each copy of their magazine but soon realized they wanted to talk about habitat and conservation, not feather patterns and field notes. I didn't care about grasslands in the Dakotas or swamps in the

Carolinas, so I threw their renewal notices in the trash and instead joined what might be called a birding club. I enjoyed birds and wanted to be the best birder I could be.

True Confession Number 2: I didn't miss being part of Audubon for over 30 years. I was happy watching the birds in my back yard. I studied bird songs. I visited the birding hotspots. I joined lots of Christmas Bird Counts. I slowly developed a set of skills and a modest life list. Birding was a personal pleasure for me, devoid of politics and conflict. Meanwhile, grasslands were converted to housing tracts, marshes turned to shopping malls, and the birds became scarcer and scarcer. Still, I enjoyed birds and simply wanted to be the best birder I could be.

True Confession Number 3: I may have learned how to identify many birds with only the slightest glimpse of feather, beat of wing or phrase of song, but I have not been a very good birder. Good birders truly care about the future of the species they enjoy and act to ensure that all birds are protected. Good birders speak out and support efforts to preserve habitats that are necessary for avian survival. Good birders not only enjoy the beauty of wild birds, but repay them with time, talent and treasure. A selfish birder will never be the best birder possible.

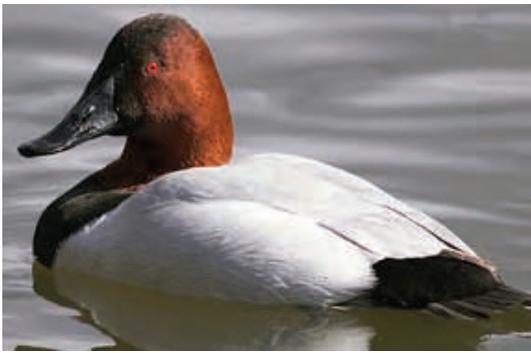
So please join with me and all the best birders around. Help save what we have left so that there is something to leave for future generations. You don't need to write a big check. You don't need to quit your day job. You don't even need to put a bumper sticker on your car. Simply show your support and concern in any way possible. If you have internet access, check the Issues and Actions page of the California Audubon website at [audubon-ca.org](http://audubon-ca.org). Write or call your elected officials - city, county, state, federal, any and all of them. Let them know that you care about birds and that you vote. Write letters to the local newspaper. Conservation doesn't just happen in the Arctic Refuge, it happens at home as well - at the mouth of the Garcia River and on the beaches of Ten Mile.

Each of us has different talents and interests, but we are all bound by a common interest in birds. Your Mendocino Coast Audubon Society is more than a birding club. We are also a conservation organization that speaks out for, and takes action in, the interest of birds and our own survival. I ask you to learn from the youthful mistakes of the person I was some thirty years ago. Support us in our efforts to preserve and protect the wild things we love. You will become the best birder possible.

## THANK YOU David Jensen, President

On behalf of the Board of Directors and the entire Mendocino Coast Audubon Society, I thank everyone who so generously responded to our recent fundraising request. In addition to several new memberships, the chapter has received nearly \$1,000 in donations to help support our education, scholarship and citizen science programs. We continue to receive donations, and it is our hope that others will include a small gift with their annual membership renewal. We value your trust and are touched by your generous support. Thank you again for all that you do to help us fulfill our mission.

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



Canvasback photo Doug Greenberg

### CANVASBACK

The Canvasback duck can be recognized from a distance by its Roman profile. They show a continuous line from their dramatic sloping foreheads down to their large dark bills. The male has a red eye, a deep red-chestnut head and a black neck and hindquarters. Their backs are very light gray and the sides are whiter. The female head and neck are pale brown and the back and sides grayer than the male. They are nineteen to twenty-two inches long.

The name Canvasback comes from delicate dotted and lined wave-like pattern on their backs, which resembles canvas. Canvasbacks are diving ducks. Sometimes they dive as much as thirty feet to the lake bottom, where they feed on roots and tubers. They will also feed on young aquatic insects, clams and snails. They are especially fond of wild celery seeds.

Their feet are located far back on their body, which is ideal for propelling them under water, but makes them clumsy when walking on land, which therefore they rarely do. Since they need a running takeoff for flight, they are found on larger lakes, estuaries and reservoirs.

Canvasbacks are wary and so join into large flocks rafting together far from shore. We see them here in the fall and winter. Most Canvasbacks in the U.S. nest in the Great Plains and Great Basin marshes. Their breeding grounds are marshes and small ponds known as potholes. They build a concealed nest on top of reeds or rushes growing out of the water.

After the seven to nine gray-green eggs are laid, the male leaves. The female incubates the eggs for twenty-four to twenty-nine days. During this time she loses seventy percent of her body fat. The downy hatchlings soon leave the nest but don't fly for ten to twelve weeks. Interestingly, the female Canvasback is highly philopatric, returning to breed in the same area as she was born. Males virtually never return: consequently a given pair mates for only one season.

### PELAGIC TRIP LIST



Manx Shearwater

May 15, 2011

Nearshore portion from Noyo harbor to about 4 miles offshore.

California Sea Lions	3
Harbor Seals	4
Mallard	2
Surf Scoter	80
Red-throated Loon	8
Pacific Loon	120
Common Loon	1
Brandt's Cormorant	4
Pelagic Cormorant	14
Brown Pelican	11
Turkey Vulture	1
Osprey	1
Western Gull	50
California Gull	1
Pigeon Guillemot	15
Rhinoceros Auklet	2
Common Raven	1
European Starling	6
Song Sparrow	1
Offshore portion	
Humpback Whale	6
Pacific White-sided Dolphin	5
Dall's Porpoise	12
California Sea Lion	1

Pacific Loon	60
Black-footed Albatross	320
Short-tailed Albatross	1
Northern Fulmar	10
Pink-footed Shearwater	170
Sooty Shearwater	400
Manx Shearwater	1
Leach's Storm-Petrel	1
Red-necked Phalarope	900
Red Phalarope	1100
Sabine's Gull	360
Bonaparte's Gull	9
Western Gull	140
California Gull	30
Black Tern	1
Common Tern	8
Common/Arctic Tern	1
Pomarine/Parasitic Jaeger	1
Common Murre	40
Pigeon Guillemot 5 miles out	1
Cassin's Auklet	18
Rhinoceros Auklet	120

Ron LeValley and Rob Fowler led the trip. We headed to the south towards Navarro Canyon but only got within about 5 miles of it due to our constantly running into flocks of birds. We made it about 12-13 miles offshore at the farthest point. It was a very busy day with seabirds throughout the day.



Leach's Storm-Petrel

## BIRD WALKS

The Mendocino Coast Audubon Society will host two walks at the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens during the month of June. The monthly beginners' bird walk will be held on Saturday June 4 at 9:00 a.m. and the monthly midweek bird walk will be held on Wednesday, June 15, at 8:00 a.m.

Birders with all levels of experience are invited to attend these walks. Binoculars will be available for those who need them. Admission is free for Botanical Garden members. For more information on these and other activities, please call 964-8163 or visit our website [mendocinocoastaudubon.org](http://mendocinocoastaudubon.org)

## SPECIAL FIELD TRIPS IN JUNE



[Hendy Woods State Park near Philo](#)

On Sunday, June 12, the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society will hold a field trip to view the birds of Hendy Woods State Park near Philo. Interested persons are invited to meet at the Harvest Market (Boatyard Center) parking lot at 7:30 to carpool to the park or to meet at the park entrance at 8:30. Bring a picnic lunch to enjoy in this warm and peaceful setting.

On Saturday, June 25, we will launch a kayaking trip to view the birds along the Noyo River. This is a wonderful opportunity to observe these birds from a unique perspective. Interested persons should meet at 9:30 a.m. at Liquid Fusion kayaking in Dolphin Isle Marina. Take South Harbor Drive east, upriver, all the way to the end. Liquid Fusion Kayaking is located just beyond the small restaurant.

We will explore the river in very stable tandem (two-person) kayaks. There will be an equipment rental fee of \$20 per person. The trip is expected to last from 10-12, but participants are invited to linger at dockside to enjoy lunch in this beautiful setting. This trip will be limited to ten participants, so call Dave Jensen at 964-8163 for reservations.



## MCAS BOARD MEMBERS AND PROGRAM CHAIRS 2010-2011

President	David Jensen	964-8163	djensen@mcn.org
Vice President	Tony Eppstein	937-1715	tonyepp@mcn.org
Secretary	Becky Bowen	962-1602	casparbeck@comcast.net
Treasurer	Judy Steele	937-2216	judys@mcn.org
SOS Program	Angela Liebenberg	962-9267	aliebenberg@parks.ca.gov
Membership	Ginny Wade	964-6362	wwade@mcn.org
Programs	Charlene McAllister	937-4463	charmac@mcn.org
Conservation	Joleen Ossello	391-7019	j_ossello@earthlink.net
Newsletter	Donald Shephard	962-0223	donshephard@comcast.net

### Off-board chair:

Education	Sarah Grimes	937-4322	zewa@mcn.org
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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  
P.O. BOX 2297  
FORT BRAGG, CA, 95437

