

# The Whistling Swan



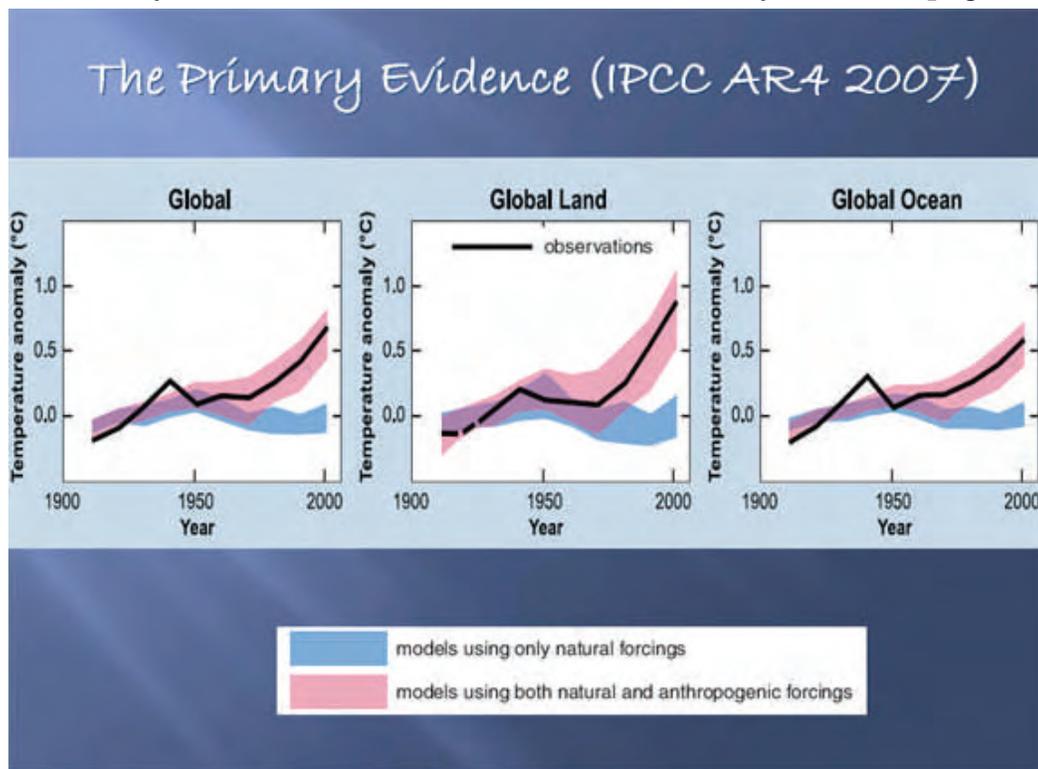
NEWSLETTER OF THE MENDOCINO COAST AUDUBON SOCIETY

July 2012

## GLOBAL WARMING

On June 24, many gathered at a "Ronathon" in support of Ron LeValley and Sean McAllister. Ron contributes several bird photographs to this newsletter each month. Dr. William J. Sydeman, President and Senior Scientist at the Farallon Institute for Advanced Ecosystem Research, in his address at that gathering, presented the slide shown below. The succinct explanation bears repeating here for those of you who missed it.

Add all the natural causes of global temperature increase and you get the blue lines in each box: global, land, and ocean. Observations exceed the blue shaded areas. Not until you add in the anthropogenic causes do you match actual observations. More Dr. Sydeman on page 5.



The next MCAS program will be on September 17th.

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Bristle-thighed Curlew NPS photo  
Bryan Harry

## REPORTING BLUE-BANDED PELICANS

International Bird Rescue puts numbered U.S. Fish and Wildlife stainless steel bands on the legs of all of the birds we release so that they can be identified in the future and we can evaluate their survivability. We get some return visits and re-sightings of these birds, but most live in remote regions and are never seen again. To increase the chance of recognizing our former Brown Pelican patients in the wild, we have been using an additional band made of blue plastic with large white letters and numbers, which are much easier to read.

Last week, while surveying for banded birds on the outer breakwaters of the Los Angeles Harbor, we spotted 7 of the blue bands and were able to read 6. Two of these birds, A65 and A91, were released on February 17, 2009 in San Francisco Bay. They had been part of a large pelican crisis during which we had hundreds of soaking wet, cold and emaciated pelicans come to our Center. Now, three years later, they are alive and well in Los Angeles. Two of the other blue-banded pelicans were released last year, after being treated for health issues at International Bird Rescue's Los Angeles Center, and the remaining two were released within the past few months.

Last year alone we released 363 rehabilitated Brown Pelicans. We put a lot of time, money and care into these amazing birds. We want to know where they go and if they survive, because the information gained from bird sightings helps us to refine our rehabilitation protocols. We will share more blue-banded Brown Pelican adventures as we receive more data.

If you see a blue-banded Pelican please report it to us. From the scene of the sighting, you can call the band number, location, and condition of the bird to 707.207.0380 ext. 7. There is also a ["Report Blue-Banded Pelicans"](#) form available online under "Found a Bird" at [www.Bird-Rescue.org](http://www.Bird-Rescue.org).

Thank you for supporting this important project.

**Jay Holcomb**  
Director Emeritus  
International Bird Rescue



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

### SPOTTED SANDPIPER

With warmer weather, I am spending time by the river where I always see a solitary bird bobbing along the rocky shoreline. The Spotted Sandpiper is named after its spotted chest, but is best recognized by its stiff-winged, quivering flight low over the water and the funny bobbing and teetering way it walks.

This eight-inch shorebird is found throughout northern California and is a year-round resident on large streams. It picks and gleans bugs from rocks and sometimes snatches them out of the air.

In breeding plumage, the legs and beak are a yellow-orange and the beak has a black tip. It shows a white eyebrow and has a spotted chest during breeding season. Non-breeding birds and juveniles have a pure white chest.

The Spotted Sandpiper flies close to the surface of the water, displaying a white stripe on the upper wing. You often hear the bird before you see it.

In 1972 it was discovered that it is the female who defends the territory and the male who rears the young. The nest, among logs or under a bush, is a shallow depression lined with grass. The female lays four brown-green spotted eggs. For about three weeks the male incubates, tends and feeds the young, which are precocial that is, able to run around when hatched. The female might mate with four or five other males. This polyandry behavior is only found in about one percent of the bird world.



Spotted Sandpiper courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

### BIRD WALKS

July 2012:

7 Beginners' Bird Walk: 9:00 a.m., Mendocino Botanical Gardens.

18 Bird Walk: 8:00 am., Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens

August 2012:

5 Beginners' Bird Walk: 9:00 a.m., Mendocino Botanical Gardens. (Note: Change of day)

15 Bird Walk: 8:00 am, Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens



Rufous Hummingbird photo  
Ron LeValley

[www.LeValleyphoto.com](http://www.LeValleyphoto.com)

## STATE PARKS JUNIOR RANGER PROGRAM

Angela Liebenberg



On a sunny morning in early summer, “Ranger T” - a.k.a. Teresa Hurray - gathers a handful of bright-eyed children around a picnic table at MacKerricher State Park. She begins the program by teaching the Junior Ranger Rules, prompting the kids to brainstorm ways to be safe, and respect plants and animals while in the park. She is a joy to watch. The children eagerly answer her questions, designed to lead them to what she wants them to learn, and they giggle giddily at her jokes.

### Ranger Teresa Hurray and Junior Rangers

Now informally deputized, this new class of Junior Rangers is led across the road to the beach to learn more about the natural history of Western

Snowy Plovers and other shorebirds – how to share the shore, and how to help protect these sensitive birds. They will receive their badges, log books, and other materials after about 45 minutes of enjoyable activities and instruction.

Teresa is a California State Parks Interpreter, who has worked with SOS on Junior Ranger programs since 2010 (for more on Teresa, see the August 2010 *Whistling Swan*). Children ages 7-12 – and their adults – are invited to participate in Teresa’s Western Snowy Plover Junior Ranger program, presented each Sunday at 10:00 am, now through September 2, meeting at the Lake Cleone parking lot.

If you would like more information about this summer’s Junior Ranger programs, or would like to volunteer to participate in the ongoing Save Our Shorebirds project, contact Angela Liebenberg at [aliebenberg@parks.ca.gov](mailto:aliebenberg@parks.ca.gov). A California Department of Fish and Game grant is funding these interpretive programs for 2012 and 2013.



## UPWELLING

Dr. William J. Sydeman

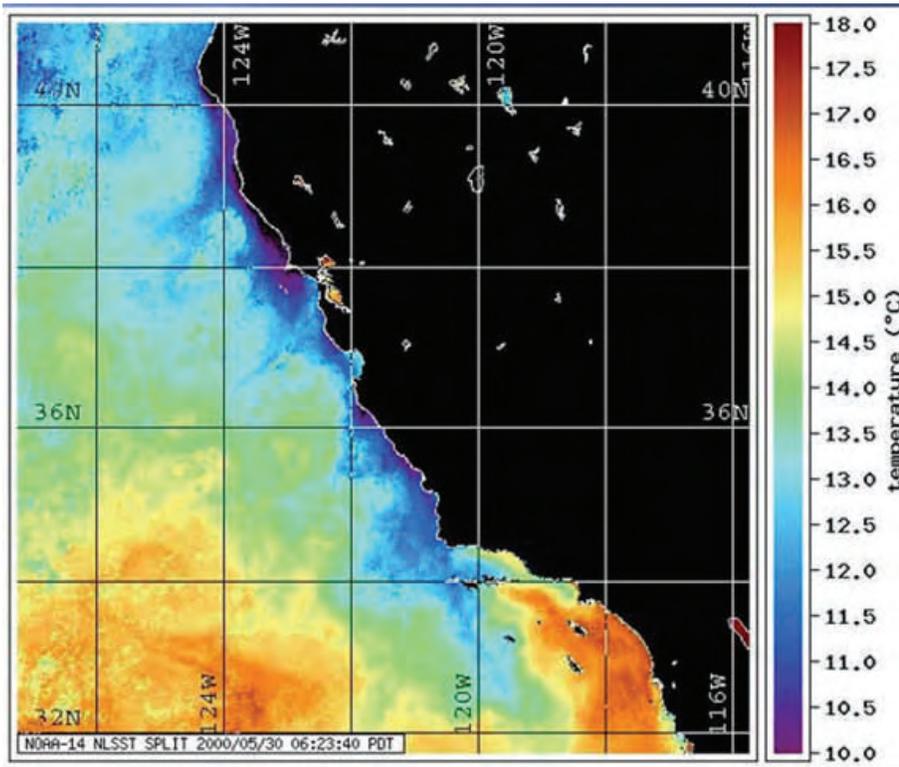


Image courtesy of  
William J. Sydeman,

The California Current is an upwelling system. The satellite image (above) shows cold water along the coast as a result of coastal upwelling from Cape Mendocino in the north to the Mexican border.

The strongest upwelling cell is located in central-northern California from Point Arena downstream to Point Reyes. Here, upwelling can occur year-round, but is strongest in May and June. The legend on the right shows variation in sea surface temperature as revealed by National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Advanced Very High Resolution Radiometer satellite sensor. The date shown is May 30, 2000, a time of strong upwelling along the entire west coast. Plumes of cold, newly upwelled waters can be seen extending westward from the coast. The warm waters (orange, 17 C) of San Francisco Bay clearly contrast with the colder waters (blue, magenta) of the Gulf of the Farallones and Point Reyes.

Upwelling affects the food chain in the CA Current by enriches the upper layer of the ocean with nutrients which phytoplankton use for growth and reproduction. Zooplankton feed on phytoplankton, forage fish feed on zooplankton, and larger fish, marine mammals, and seabirds feed on these forage fish. Therefore to understand changes in populations of fish, marine mammals, and seabirds in relation to climate change and upwelling, one needs information on zooplankton and forage fish.

(Ed. Note: The California Current flows south past Cape Mendocino, creating a circular current off our coast. This often results in productivity differing from other northern California areas.)

**WHIMBREL****Donald Shephard**

Pam Huntley, in her radio talk on Spotted Sandpipers (page 3), said you often hear them before you see them. "Heard before seen" could also be the motto of the Whimbrel. Its characteristic rippling note carries a long way and is given frequently. A common colloquial name in England is the "seven whistler", as the single note is frequently given about seven times. Just to create confusion, it also emits a *cur-lee* reminiscent of a curlew call. Other Brits call it the "May bird" because it arrives on their shores during that month.



**Whimbrel photo Andreas Trepte**

This large, relatively short-legged shorebird shows a long down-curved bill, striped head, brown speckled upperparts and light underparts with streaking on the neck and upper breast. The underwings are light. Juveniles are buffier with lighter feather edgings on the back and wings. On a foggy day along our coast, you might confuse a Whimbrel, a Long-billed Curlew and the very rare Bristle-thighed Curlew as they are similar species. The Long-billed Curlew, as its name suggests, has an extremely long bill. It lacks the dark crown striping, has a buff belly, and is cinnamon-colored under the wings. Cinnamon also distinguishes the Bristle-thighed Curlew. In this case, the cinnamon is bright on the rump and upper tail. Identify the Whimbrel in flight by its large size, strong wing beats, plain color, and pointed wings. At a distance, distinguish curlews, including Whimbrels, from godwits by pale gray legs and more graceful foraging actions.

The Whimbrel (*Numenius Phaeopus*) is a wader in the large family Scolopacidae. One of the most widespread of the curlews, it breeds across much of subarctic North America, Europe and Asia. In Europe it is found as far south as Scotland particularly around Shetland, the Orkneys, and the Outer Hebrides as well as the mainland at Sutherland and Caithness.

It migrate along coasts in Africa, South America, south Asia into Australasia and southern North America. You might even come across this species around one of Australia's inland seas. I saw them along the Essex coast of my youth in England, in irrigated pastures and shallow wetlands of the Central Valley in my middle years, and now here in my dotage.

A Whimbrel uses its long, down-curved bill to probe deep in the sand of beaches and

**WHIMBREL****continued**

mudflats for invertebrates, especially crabs, but also feeds on berries and insects, abundant on its breeding ground. Berries are pulled from a branch with the tips of the bill. The bird then flips its head back and swallows. Insects are eaten in the same way.

Early in the last century, Bernard Hantzsch, a man whose parents could not afford many vowels, described the male Whimbrel's nuptial flight: "Perched on a hillock, he utters a rolling *di-di-di* with wide-opened bill. Now he is off with long legs trailing and head and neck outstretched. With short, rapid wing strokes, he rises into the sky until almost out of sight, uttering his soft, fluty *du-du-du*, sometimes for minutes together. Then follows a higher, faster series of notes ending with a beautiful, soft trill, which is louder and faster than that of any Golden Plover. He descends, spiraling to the nest."

Breeding occurs May through July. Females usually lay four eggs in a depression they scraped out of the ground and lined with leaves. After 22-28 days of incubation, the eggs hatch. Young take about another month to fly. My mind boggles at a young bird, weighing about fourteen ounces, flying from Alaska to the Galapagos. How is that possible?

The species begins migrating south from its breeding grounds in July, when individuals may be seen in coastal areas of North America. Whimbrels winter along the coast from California south through Central and South America. Some birds even make it to the Galapagos and Falkland Islands. The U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan places this species in the category of shorebirds in significant decline. The Hudson Bay population has declined from an estimated 42,500 in 1973 to only 17,000 today.

Whimbrels probe the shorelines of many countries, but their decline reminds us of their precarious position in this world that man continues to modify in harmful ways. Imagine yourself as fourteen ounces of life flying from Juneau to the Galapagos Islands or Vladivostok to Sydney. Your chances of success are slim, especially without help from the Transportation Security Administration

**Whimbrel (left) and Long-billed Curlew****Photos Ron LeValley, [www.LeValleyphoto.com](http://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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