



The Black Oystercatcher

Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Newsletter August, 2014

WATCHING COASTAL BIRDS IN THE BOTANICAL GARDENS

Tim Bray

Editors Note: Tim Bray leads the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society bird walks at 8 a.m. on the third Wednesday of every month in the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens. There is something magical about these walks. Here is Tim's report for July:



July 16, 2014 – In spite of difficult viewing conditions, a large group of birders tallied 58 species on the regular third-Wednesday bird walk at the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens. Highlights included:

- 2 Lesser Goldfinches (uncommon here)
- 2 Elegant Terns
- 5 Whimbrels
- 2 hatch-year Red-shouldered Hawks, apparently recent fledglings
- 1 Red-tailed Hawk, pursued and attacked by a Western Gull (the chase continued until both birds passed out of sight, probably more than an hour).



Swainson's Thrush photo by Matt Reinbold, Bismarck, North Dakota, appearing on Wikimedia Commons



Twenty participants turned out to watch birds in the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens July 16. The popular walks are led by Tim Bray on the third Wednesday of every month.

Photo by Charlene McAllister

Lowlight was the Brown-headed Cowbird chick begging food from a foraging Swainson's Thrush.

We were joined by an unusually large number of people, including birders from Nevada City; Colorado; and Belfast, Ireland.



Whimbrel (center) and Elegant Terns (bottom) photos by Becky Bowen

Masthead photo of Black Oystercatcher by Ron LeValley

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Joleen Ossello

Black Oystercatcher Research Reveals Highest Counts in Mendocino County

Many of you know that MCAS, in partnership with Audubon California, has been studying the Black Oystercatcher, an important indicator species along the intertidal coast of Mendocino, for several years. In 2011, our chapter was given the task of organizing a population study of the Black Oystercatcher, our own local "rock star shorebird."

Before that a boat-based shorebird study had been conducted by scientists in the mid 1980s. That study revealed a count of 10,000-12,000 individual birds between the Aleutian Islands and Baja California Sur.

It is with great pleasure that I announce the publication of the results of a statewide coastal effort. Mendocino County had the highest individual count in the state of California. Results of the *First Population Assessment*,

published by *Marine Ornithology* 42: 49-56 (2014) can be found on our website at http://www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org/mcas_cons_bloy.html

We could not have accomplished this overdue study without the cooperative effort of the following professional and citizen scientists: Marybeth Arago, Barbara Auerbach, Becky and Winston Bowen, Alison Cebula, Jan and George Chaniot, Lisa and Rob Doster, Randy Farris, Terra Fuller, Michelle and Tim Havens, Karen and Jim Havlena, Cate Hawthorne, Bill Heil, Richard Hubacek, Adam Hutchins, Dave Jensen, Carolyn Kinet, Jeff Laxier, Ron LeValley, Angela Liebenberg, Darcie Mahoney, Jean Mann, Louise Mariana, Charlene McAllister, Art Morley, Katrina Nystrom, Linda Perkins, Hayley Ross, Donald Shephard, Judy Steele, Dorothy Tobkin, Susan Tubbesing, and Ginger Wafford. Thank you for your time and energy.



President Joleen Ossello, an Interpretive Specialist at California State Parks, marched with the State Parks float in the Mendocino 4th of July Parade. Black Oystercatcher Staff Photo



Black Oystercatcher
Photographs by
Donald Shephard (left)
and Joleen Ossello



BLACK SKIMMER MAKES DEBUT IN MENDOCINO COUNTY

Dorothy "Toby" Tobkin

Editor's Note: The Black Skimmer observed by Dorothy Tobkin June 27, 2014, on 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. Kathy C. Molina, of the Section of Ornithology at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, has conducted Black Skimmer research for many years in Southern California. Less than a month after D. Tobkin's sighting, two Black Skimmers (unbanded) were seen at Virgin Creek Beach July 20 by Jan and George Chaniot, Potter Valley, and Fort Bragg residents Art Morley and Sarah Wagner.

Like Charlie Chaplin, this preposterous vagrant combines grace and comedy, wearing a bi-colored bill whose upper mandible is shorter than the lower (which makes skimming easier than would equal halves), legs so short it appears to be standing in a hole, but it flies with buoyant grace. The Black Skimmer which hung out on Virgin Creek Beach stayed just one day: Friday, June 27. Quite a few birders saw it that day. One beach habitué believes he saw it the next day, flying by.



Banded Black Skimmer, Virgin Creek Beach, June 27, 2014

Photo by Richard Hubacek, Green Birding Mendocino

It was a county first record and only the third recorded sighting in Northwestern California. The bird belongs in Baja, East Texas, or Florida. A band indicated it made its way here from among a relatively new breeding population in Southern California. One wonders why.

The Black Skimmer is placed in its own genus, *Rynchops* (from the Greek for "beak" and "face" – so "beak-face?"), and is closely related to terns. Identification of this species presents no problems!

A few years ago some "hard-core" local birders circulated a list of most likely/most wished-for new birds. The Black Skimmer wasn't on the list. It was truly an unexpected and gratifying treasure.

MCAS PRECISION SPOTTING SCOPE DRILL TEAM WOWS BIG CROWD AT 2014 FOURTH OF JULY PARADE IN MENDOCINO VILLAGE, CA, USA



Dave Jensen



Tim Bray



Alison Cebula



Johanna Jensen



Linda Perkins



Adam Hutchins

SAVE OUR SHOREBIRDS

YOU'RE INVITED TO BE A VIRTUAL SOS VOLUNTEER

Ever experienced a profound moment watching a bird? Has it inspired you to draw or photograph or write about that experience? That's exactly what SOS volunteers are doing, and we invite you to participate as a volunteer poet. Haiku is an ancient Japanese style of poetry that traditionally consists of three lines containing a total of 17 syllables (5-7-5 respectively). Haiku expresses deep thoughts about an experience, often in nature. Shorebirds will be the subject of our creative endeavor and your haiku can be as innovative and expressive as you like – feel free to relax the syllable counts (as we did in the example at right). Each haiku will be the caption of a photograph or illustration and will be produced on a page in an e-book to be published in 2015. Each poet will receive credit for the creation (we'll ask you to sign a release for the rights to reproduce the haiku).

These are the shorebirds we shall celebrate: Black-bellied, Pacific Golden, Snowy, and Semipalmated Plovers; Killdeer; Black Oystercatcher; Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs; Willet; Wandering Tattler; Whimbrel; Long-billed Curlew; Spotted Sandpiper; Marbled Godwit; Ruddy and Black Turnstones; Surfbird; Red Knot; Sanderling; Western, Least, Baird's, Pectoral and Rock Sandpipers; Short-and Long-billed Dowitchers; Wilson's Snipe; and Red-necked and Red Phalaropes. We'll include gulls and terns, too.

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and Rock Sandpipers; Short-and Long-billed Dowitchers; Wilson's Snipe; and Red-necked and Red Phalaropes. We'll include gulls and terns, too.

We accept submissions from poets of all ages and the invitation is open to anybody from anywhere. For us, this is a new way to inform and educate – and a way to celebrate these extraordinary birds. Our deadline is September 1. Please send your haiku to Becky Bowen at mendocinoshorebirds@gmail.com

Need inspiration? Visit our facebook page at www.facebook.com/SaveOurShorebirds to see photos of the birds on the beaches of Mackerricher State Park. This is where SOS volunteers conduct on-going surveys in a long-term citizen science MCAS project in partnership with State Parks. MCAS Treasurer Angela Liebenberg heads the SOS program. To find out more about the program or to participate in surveys, contact her at liebenbergs@mcn.org

Haiku of the Marbled Godwit



When no one is watching
I dance
With the waves.

Becky Bowen, Caspar, CA, USA

GREAT BLUE HERON**Donald Shephard**

Great Blue Heron showing all breeding colors
Photo by Donald Shephard

When we lived in San Joaquin County, my wife and I drove each spring to the base of Comanche Dam to view the heronry atop cottonwood trees in the Mokelumne riparian area. The balance displayed by these lanky birds amazed me. They stood on branches swaying in the breeze. Imagine that you weigh between four and eight pounds, measure about four feet tall, and spread your wings five or six feet across. Now stand a hundred feet up a tree in a nest of twigs and raise your young there.

These days, we live on the coast and gophers are a bane of my gardening life. I am a rowdy cheerleader for a Great Blue Heron when it blesses us with a hunt among our pocket gopher mounds. This bird shows several characteristics which make it an efficient gopher hunter. For one thing, it possesses more patience than I do. Bird flight requires feathers, but birds lack hands. To allow them to preen their feathers almost anywhere on their bodies, birds have evolved many cervical vertebrae: seven for you and me, versus sixteen for herons. Hence our intrepid gopher killer can

hold its neck in a tight sigmoid curve as it stalks its prey. When the luckless rodent peeks from its crescent-shaped hole, the heron snaps its neck straight, grabs the gopher by the head and retracts its neck into the former S-shape.

One sunny day, I aimed my camera at a heron: between point and shoot, he snagged a gopher. I watched as the bird twirled the gopher body around, snapping its neck. After a brief stroll across my grass, the heron tossed the gopher and opened its beak to swallow it. Through my binoculars I observed the lump descend the heron's throat as it stretched and shook its neck – perhaps not the most comfortable meal, but nutritious none the less. Herons have been known to choke on prey that is too large.

Great Blue Herons live across North America and Central America as well as the Caribbean and the Galapagos Islands. They rarely visit Europe, with sparse records from Spain, the Azores, England and the Netherlands. An all-white population found only in the Caribbean and southern Florida was once treated as a separate species and known as the Great White Heron.

continued

Carolus Linnaeus originally described the Great Blue Heron in his 18th century work, *Systema Naturae*.

Study this beneficial bird in your binoculars and you will soon notice the inadequacy of its name. You will note the blue-gray flight feathers, red-brown thighs, and paired red-brown and black stripe up the flanks. You will observe the rusty-gray neck, with black and white streaking down the front. Rather than blue, the face is nearly white with a pair of black plumes running from just above the eye to the back of the head. The feathers on the lower neck are long and plume-like. At the start of the breeding season, it also has plumes on the lower back; the bill (usually dull yellowish) becomes orange; and the lower legs (normally gray) become orangey. We must concede that the name, Great-gray-black-and-white-rusty Heron would not work, so Great Blue Heron must remain its name.

I admire the pure grace of their flight and their stealthy stalking. The heron stride is around eight inches, almost in a straight line. Two of the three front toes generally align closer together. In a track, the front toes, as well as the back, often show the small talons. Despite their aerial and walking elegance they should keep their mouths shut, like some of the Cockney girls of my youth. You will be forgiven for thinking a giant toad flies overhead when you hear its harsh croak. Non-vocal sounds include a loud bill snap, which males employ to attract a female or to defend a nest site, and which females use in response to bachelor males or within breeding pairs. The bill snap may be analogous to the territorial song of passerines. Paired herons frequently clapper: causing the tips of their bills to chatter rapidly.

Due to their size, adult herons have only few natural predators. Some of the larger avian predators kill both young and adults. These include Bald Eagles, Golden Eagles and, less frequently, Great Horned Owls and Harris's Hawks.

Either way, as predator or prey, scruples are alien to this graceful, elegant bird. As Wislawa Szymborska wrote in his poem, *In Praise of Self-Depreciation*, "There is nothing more animal-like than a clear conscience on the third planet of the sun."



Great Blue Heron with Pocket Gopher

Photo by Donald Shephard

MCAS PELAGIC TRIP SET FOR SEPTEMBER 14 **Karen Havlena**

On September 14, MCAS will again hold a half-day pelagic trip for beginners and for those who are reluctant to go on the all-day trips. Please consider joining this special boat trip to learn about seabirds and ocean mammals. MCAS hopes that you will sign up for this 4-hour morning trip, just a few miles off shore from Fort Bragg. The seas are usually CALM in September.

Your leaders for this excursion will be David Jensen and Jerry White, two of the most knowledgeable birders in this area. Most folks know Dave, former president of MCAS. Jerry is a Lake County native who has been birding along the coast and on the ocean for many years and is considered to be one of the best birders in Mendocino and Lake Counties. They will be looking forward to helping you find and identify the seabirds and share facts about ocean birds and mammals we may encounter.



Black-footed Albatross, 2010 MCAS Pelagic Trip

Photo by B. Bowen

The trip is by reservation only.

Please contact Karen

Havlena, jkhavlena@yahoo.com or 707-972-5440 (cell) before sending payment. Sorry, but we can't accommodate handicapped individuals or children under 11-years of age.

Meeting Date, Place and Time: September 14, 7:30 AM , Noyo Harbor/TELSTAR dock (return at 12 noon).

Cost: \$60 per person. Prepayment by check only. Payment details and directions will be given to you when you reserve a space.

A special confirmation will be sent outlining tips for snacks, clothing, and for Karen's trusted seasickness prevention – it works! Spaces are limited on the TELSTAR. We look forward to escorting you on a fun-filled, educational trip. We will be back to the dock in time for you to have a nice lunch, then go to the botanical gardens, go shore-birding, or go shopping in the afternoon.

Welcome aboard! Karen Havlena jkhavlena@yahoo.com 707-972-5440 (cell)

CALENDAR, BIRD WALKS, FIELD TRIPS

August 2014

Saturday 2 Beginner's Bird Walk 9 AM Meet Dave Jensen in parking lot of Botanical Gardens to determine location of walk. Regular route will change due to Art in the Gardens event

Monday 18 MCAS Board of Directors Meeting 3:30 PM Contact J. Ossello for Location

Wednesday 20 Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 8AM*

Saturday 23 Great Day in Elk 12N-4PM Contact Tim Bray to march with MCAS Precision Spotting Scope Drill in Great Day Parade down Main Street

September 2014

Saturday 6 Beginner's Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 9AM*

Saturday 13 Field Trip 9AM [Virgin Creek Beach](#)

Sunday 14 Beginner's Pelagic Trip 7:30 AM Noyo Harbor (see story Page 8)

**Monday 15 Meeting [Caspar Community Center](#) 7PM Speaker: Ed Pandolfino
Birds of the Sierras**

Wednesday 17 Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 8AM*

Saturday 20 [California Coastal Cleanup day](#) 9AM-Noon*

October 2014

Saturday 4 Beginner's Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 9AM*

Saturday 11 Field Trip 9AM [Glass Beach and vicinity](#)

Wednesday 15 Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 8AM*

**Monday 20 Meeting [Caspar Community Center](#) 7PM Speaker: Kate Frey
Landscaping for Birds and Insects**

**These walks are free, but there is an entry charge for participants who are not members of the Gardens.*

For complete calendar, updates, and useful links, visit: www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org

And please visit us on facebook: www.facebook.com/mendocinocoastaudubon

Mendocino Coast Audubon Society

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IT'S MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL TIME

The basic membership dues cover the cost of your subscription to the *Black Oystercatcher*. 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. Please don't let that happen!

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	Diane Rubin	(413) 658-7105	dianerubin12@gmail.com
Treasurer	Angela Liebenberg	962-9267	liebenbergs@mcn.org
SOS Program	Angela Liebenberg	962-9267	liebenbergs@mcn.org
Webmaster	Catherine Keegan	937-4422	keegan@wildblue.net
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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

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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