

# The Whistling Swan



NEWSLETTER OF THE MENDOCINO COAST AUDUBON SOCIETY

August 2011

## SEPTEMBER PELAGIC TRIP

**Karen Havlena**



**Pomarine Jaeger**



**Parasitic Jaeger**

**Photos Ron LeValley**

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

Please join us on the Sunday, 18 September pelagic trip sponsored by Mendocino Coast Audubon Society. Spaces are limited on the TELSTAR, which is a smaller boat than we have used in the past. The meeting place will be on North Harbor Drive, Noyo Harbor, Fort Bragg. Paid reservations are needed.

DATE: Sunday, September 18th, 2011.

COST: \$105

TIME: Now 8 hours. Meet at 7:00-am; we will return at 3:30-pm.

PLACE: Parking lot of TELSTAR, large sign on North Harbor Drive shortly after rounding the curve at the bottom of the hill. Prepay either by check or credit card.

MAIL your check, PAYABLE to MCAS for \$105 to:

K. Havlena, PO Box 40, Fort Bragg, CA 95437

CREDIT CARD: Send an email to [kahavlena@yahoo.com](mailto:kahavlena@yahoo.com) with your phone number and a good time to call.

Please commit as soon as possible; we don't deposit checks, etc, until trip

time. Remember spaces are limited. Sorry, but nobody under 11 years old or anyone unable to stand for long periods may participate. Confirmations will be sent out shortly before the trip date. Thanks.

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**HOLY WESA ON TEN MILE****Joleen Ossello**

Western Sandpiper  
Photo Ron LeValley  
[www.LeValleyphoto.com](http://www.LeValleyphoto.com)

Imagine, a cloudy day with the unlikely forecast for rain. I begin a Save Our Shorebirds survey of Ten Mile Dunes Nature Preserve on July 18<sup>th</sup> at 7:50a.m. At low tide the sky reveals an ever-so-slight drizzle of raindrops instead of the typical foggy mist of our coastal summers. I wear my safari hat and trade my inexpensive 10x binoculars for my light and handy waterproof 7x. I discover it difficult to downgrade as I immediately squint to identify a group of dabbling ducks along the river.

For the past two weeks I have surveyed Ten Mile in anticipation of the migrating shorebird arrivals. My surveys thus far have proved somewhat uneventful due to the presence of only a handful of the earliest migrants. Fond of the natural solitude in my surroundings, I also relish the change in weather from days of full sun, and continue along the mudflats.

I encounter a flock of Western Sandpipers (WESA). Carefully, I advance without flushing them in order to identify those little yellow feet and legs belonging to the Least Sandpiper. Eyes blurring and mind swirling, I estimate 300 WESA. To my mind, it is a typical large-sized flock and I see several fly westward down the river to another flock. "Another challenge," I say out loud. I estimate another 300 WESA. I now curve the dunes' bend to scan the dry sand for Snowy Plovers.

Perhaps you are thinking, "Where does the Holy WESA come into this picture?" Well, the next of many surprises catches my attention as I carefully calculate the dense number of Western Sandpipers before me. I decide there are 600. Now this is a much larger flock to guesstimate, I am, however, firm. Along the route I record a few Whimbrels, Heermann's Gulls, Brown Pelicans, and Sanderlings. I record 100 WESA in a flyby flock heading north. Then the surge of new arrivals gets underway. The beach is literally covered in a shorebird feeding frenzy. I stare in awe as I estimate 1,000 WESA, and no longer dare wonder if a few are Least Sandpipers.

## HOLY WESA ON TEN MILE continued

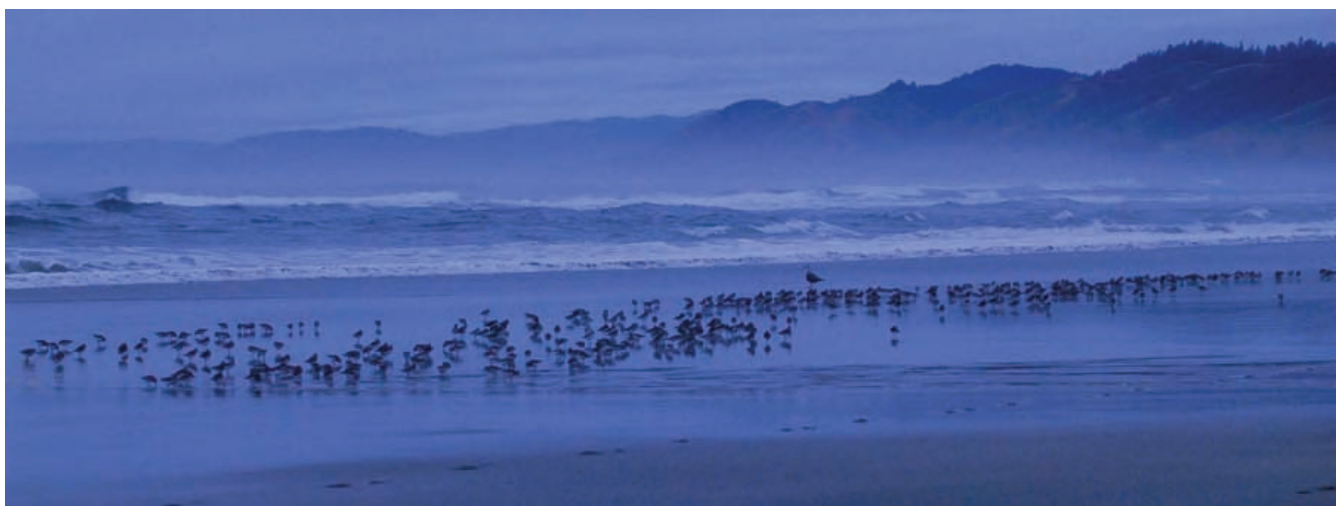
Shortly thereafter, I record three more flocks; 500, 1,000, and 50. At this point I can no longer ascertain who belongs to which flock, or which direction they came from. A conservative estimate, I conclude would be 3,850.

I turn around, facing north, to catch a distant glance at the immensity of avian fauna I had encountered, when suddenly a large flock flashes in a black and white strobe light pattern towards me. The sheer magnitude and multitude fills my visual field foreshadowing a thrilling epiphany of what is to come....remember Hitchcock's *The Birds*? The first flock flies straight towards me until the last minute, then jerking to my right with a flash of black and white in silent formation. Another flush skimming the air just above my face, I grin spontaneously in awe. How fortunate I feel to see this spectacle of nature.

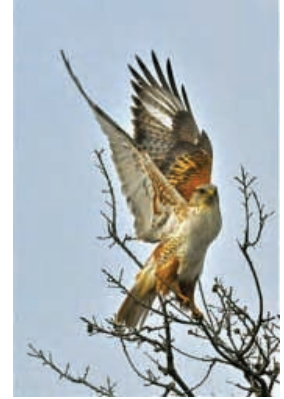
*In migration, the Western Sandpiper stages in huge, spectacular flocks, particularly along the Pacific coast from San Francisco Bay to the Copper River Delta in Alaska. Estimates suggest that as many as 6,500,000 individuals pass through the Copper River Delta during just a few weeks each spring. Breeding in coastal sedge-dwarf tundra, they migrate in winter along mudflats, beaches, shores or lakes and ponds, and flooded fields. ([http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/western\\_sandpiper/lifehistory](http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/western_sandpiper/lifehistory))*



Western Sandpiper flocks at Ten Mile Beach. Photos Joleen Ossello



## EYES OF THE WILD: WILDLIFE AND SCENIC PONTOON TOURS ON CLEAR LAKE



Osprey, herons, grebes, pelicans, and cormorants, to name a few, can be viewed on beautiful Clear Lake below Konocti volcano in Lake County - the destination of choice for wildlife and bird watching enthusiasts.

Also featured aboard our tours is Native American flute music and traditional storytelling for families by Native American Music Awards nominee Kevin Village Stone. So bring your field glasses and camera, and let us introduce you to the "Eyes Of The Wild" filled with photo opportunities and adventure.

Handicap accessibility. Two and a half hours with longer tours available. Call for Reservations. (707)262-2401 or (707)349-0026. \$40 per person. Four people minimum or \$150.00 minimum. Contact us at [www.EyesoftheWild.CA](http://www.EyesoftheWild.CA) or [faithrig@gmail.com](mailto:faithrig@gmail.com) Faith and Jim Rigolosi.

### MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

**Ginny Wade**

Thank you to all who renewed early. Our basic membership categories are Limited Income or Student \$15, Individual \$25, and Family \$30. We appreciate the support of every member. If you haven't sent in your membership dues as of April of 2011, you can easily rejoin by check or by Visa/Mastercard. It is easy to lose track of whether you have renewed your membership, especially if you receive the Whistling Swan electronically. So if you haven't sent in your dues, you will receive a reminder letter in August.

MCAS has a membership drive only once a year. By renewing your membership you support the mission of the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society to help people appreciate and enjoy native birds, and to conserve and restore local ecosystems for the benefit of native birds and other wildlife. Do you have a friend you can encourage to join MCAS? Please, either forward this and subsequent *Whistling Swans* to them, or print it out and give it to them. Spread the word.

Call Ginny Wade, Membership Chair, at 964-6362 for any questions about your membership status or to renew by credit card. Send your check made out to MCAS to P.O. Box 2297, Fort Bragg, CA 95437.

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

### AMERICAN KESTREL

At nine inches the American Kestrel is our smallest falcon. It has been also called sparrow hawk. This common year-round resident can be seen hovering over fields or perched on telephone poles along roadways, peering down intently for food. The American Kestrel's diet consists mainly of insects such as grasshoppers, dragonflies and beetles. They also eat mice, small birds, lizards and frogs.

The American Kestrel is a beautiful bird with two distinct black facial stripes. The male has a rufous or rusty back, blue-gray wings and crown, and a rufous cap. Its long red tail has a broad black band across it. The female has a rusty back and wings and the rusty tail is barred.

The kestrel is a solitary bird even in breeding season. Division of labor is so extensive that each of a mated pair spends most of its time alone. Once a pair has picked a nesting site, a hole in a tree or an old woodpecker cavity, the female stays close to the nest and the male brings food to her. This can last for as long as twelve weeks. The male defends a hunting territory, as large as 250 acres. Smaller territories are sometimes defended all year.

The female incubates 4-6 darkly-spotted, cream-colored eggs for up a month. The male provides breaks for her daily. They spend another month and a half caring for the young until the fledglings leave the nest. Needless to say, they usually raise only one brood per season.



American Kestrel male photo Ron LeValley  
[www.LeValleyphoto.com](http://www.LeValleyphoto.com)

### CALENDAR

We have bird walks each month at the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens on the first Saturday and the third Wednesday. This month those dates are August 6 at 9:00 and August 17 at 8:00. There will be no field trip this month. Programs resume at 6 pm on September 19 at Town Hall , Fort Bragg. MCAS board meets the fourth Monday of each month.

### CORRECTION

On this page in the July, 2011 edition of The Whistling Swan credit for the excellent photograph of the Hermit Thrush was omitted in error. Many thanks to Cary Maures for granting permission to use his fine work. You may see more of Cary Maures photography at <http://carymaures.zenfolio.com/>.

Editor

**PIGEON GUILLEMOTS****Donald Shephard**

Pigeon Guillemots photo Ron LeValley. [www.LeValleyphoto.com](http://www.LeValleyphoto.com)

Recent coastal fog gives me pause to contemplate. I delay garden work and think about another cup of tea as I watch the Pygmy Nuthatches, Black-headed Grosbeaks, and Red Crossbills on the feeder outside my window. Certain colors - the azure of Bluebirds, bright yellow of American Goldfinches jigger me from the gray doldrums induced by the weather. I keep my head down in my gulley garden, allowing the bright red of Flanders poppies and fuchsias, the yellows of daisies and hawksbit, or the orange of Montbretia or Crocosmia to lift my dampened spirits as an Allen's Hummingbird buzzes my red cap. Such is the elevating effect of color.

If you join Karen Havlena on our pelagic trip, do not expect the same result from ocean birds, where black and white predominate. Other colors present no advantage at sea. Yet the Pigeon Guillemots astound me every time I catch a glimpse of their crimson legs and feet or the identical color inside their mouths. These Alcids, have entertained me each of the last three years that I have monitored Pelagic Cormorant adults, nests and chicks on the bluff of the inlet north of the Point Cabrillo Lighthouse.

## PIGEON GUILLEMOTS **continued**

At thirteen and a half inches, Pigeon Guillemots are not easily spotted among waves, but quieter bays and inlets reveal their presence. At Point Cabrillo, they nest in crevices in the bluff masked by iceplant dangling over the entrance. I watch as a parent instructs by demonstration how to “fly” underwater and catch fish.

Last Thursday, my wife and I toted our optics, chairs and forms to the Pelagic Cormorant colony for our weekly monitoring session. We walked between the lighthouse and the LORAN antenna where, earlier in the year, two Peregrine Falcons perched, one on each beacon. This time, an Osprey glided, silent and low, above our heads. Two Western Gulls sat on the south rock pinnacle with still no sign of chicks, unlike previous years when both north and south pinnacles boasted three-chick nests. A skein of ten Brown Pelicans undulated north above the waves followed by another group of twenty-six. Two Black Oystercatchers stood motionless on a gray islet in the fog-dampened light. As we approached the bluff, a variety of high, squeaky, piping whistles rose from the water of the narrow inlet – a guillemot convention.

Two round-bodied, black birds with white wing patches huddled above an abandoned cormorant ledge. Two more flew up to their old nest site. Six swam on and in the water below. Another pair sat on the islet at a favorite leeward spot. Twelve Pigeon Guillemots had convened where we would normally see two parents and two fledglings. Why? What were they doing?

Was it three families on an outing? We know that guillemots that breed here fly north, their cousins in Alaska fly south, and Washington birds are year-round residents. Guillemots on the opposite pacific shore travel south from Siberia. It’s early, but perhaps our local birds are massing for the trek north.

Those sturdy wings that, when folded, propel Pigeon Guillemots in water faster than fish, produce relatively weak flight in air. So where do our birds go when they leave us? How fast and how far do they travel? Do they remain in family groups or in larger flocks? We do not know. Next Wednesday, when we again sit and count Pelagic Cormorant chicks, we shall see several fledged birds resting on the rocks like a random array of brown bottles but I doubt there will be a Pigeon Guillemot in sight.

I send our Pelagic Cormorant data to Ron LeValley along with a series of overlapping photos of the bluff, nests and chicks. I “photomerge” these shots with Adobe Photoshop and number the nests. Susan Tubbesing sends her data from a colony at the southern edge of the Point Cabrillo preserve and others add information for Noyo Harbor and the Mendocino Headlands. All our observations end up on ebird, which enables all birders and researchers to access our input and others for that and more species. Citizen science at its best. The more eyes on the birds, the better for us all.

To me though, joy comes not with raw numbers nor with technical charts. I marvel at nature’s splendid array of structures, textures and colors. When the Pigeon Guillemots leave us with a few white-spotted rocks, the only sign they ever dwelt here, I shall miss that flash of crimson leg and the bright gape of their mouths. I’ll drive home for a nice cup of tea and wonder where my birds have flown and anticipate their return next year, when they will again brighten my foggy days.

## MCAS BOARD MEMBERS AND PROGRAM CHAIRS 2011-2012

President	David Jensen	964-8163	djensen@mcn.org
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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

