

# The Whistling Swan



NEWSLETTER OF THE MENDOCINO COAST AUDUBON SOCIETY

October 2008

Matthew Mattheissen

on the

Birds and Wildlife

of Northern India

**Monday, October 20, 2008 7:00 p.m.**  
**College of the Redwoods, Room 112**

In December of 2007 Ukiah's expert birder-photographer Matthew Mattheissen traveled across northern India for 16 days with a group of avid bird watchers. As the group explored the foothills of the Himalayas, the Chambal River, two of India's national parks, and the area around the Taj Mahal, Matthew took photographs of birds and other wildlife. Just before the end of the trip Matthew's cameras and photos were stolen. Not one to let people down, Matthew will use slides borrowed from other members of his tour group to make his presentation. If Matthew's three previous slideshows "Birds of Borneo," "Birds and Wildlife of Uganda," and "Birds of Cameroon" are any indication, the



Saurus Cranes. Photo by  
Marcus Lilje

approximately 250 images in the upcoming presentation will flash by so fast the audience will be left wishing for more. Matthew's skillful arrangements of images, his prodigious memory, and his snappy and often-humorous delivery combine for a vividly entertaining experience.

[\(continued\)](#)

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Red-faced Liocichla  
of Northern India

## Birds and Wildlife of Northern India (continued)

This program will feature images of birds such as Tawny Fish Owl, Malabar Pied Hornbill, and Red-billed Blue Magpie, as well as four-footed animals such as deer, a strange crocodile known as a Gharial, and maybe even some tigers. "I'd seen photographs of Gharials before," Matthew laughs, "but I was totally taken aback when I saw one in real life. They are fantastic creatures. Much larger than I was expecting.

"India is the Serengeti of Asia," says Matthew. "It's astonishing how much wildlife there is. The birds were very cooperative on this trip and the photographic opportunities were fantastic." Some of his other favorite birds were the stunning Greater Yellowthroat, the Brown Hawk-Owl, and the Wallcreeper. The Hawk-Owl and Wallcreeper were two of the five birds on his wish list for the trip.

The slideshow will also include some pictures of India's people and culture, including photographs of the Taj Mahal and scenes of cows walking down the middle of streets. "My main interest is birds," says Matthew, whose day job is at Ukiah Valley Medical Center, where he serves as Controller, "but a few photographs of less important things like people and buildings always creep in to my slideshows." This program is free to the public, but donations will be warmly accepted.

Come and see and hear more Monday, October 20, 2008 7:00 p.m. College of the Redwoods, Room 112.

Article by Kate Marianchild.

### **BIRD WALKS**

The Mendocino Coast Audubon Society will host two walks this month at the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens. Our monthly beginners' bird walk will be held on the first Saturday of the month, October 4, at 9:00 A.M. Our midweek bird walk will be held on the third Wednesday of the month, October 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 visit our website [www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org](http://www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org)

Savannah Sparrow

### PRESIDENT'S CORNER

During the past month most of you have renewed your membership in the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society. I thank each of you for your continued support and give a special note of appreciation to those of you who included an extra donation with your annual dues. We are most grateful for your generosity.

I thought it appropriate during this period of renewal and recommitment to let you know how the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society is using your generous contributions to accomplish the mission of this organization. In recent days, the term "leverage" has taken on negative connotations. Unlike certain financial institutions, we have successfully leveraged your investment to significantly magnify its impact.

I hope that you have heard one of Pam Huntley's educational and inspirational vignettes on the local public radio station KZYX/KZYZ. If not, try tuning into that station just before 8 o'clock on Friday mornings. Pam's stories are wonderful, and my heart swells with pride every time I hear her say, "brought to you by the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society." It's at that moment that I know for certain that everything we give and everything we do is worth it.

We recently received a generous grant from the Bureau of Land Management to conduct research on selected islands off our coastline that are part of the California Coastal National Monument. We will be working with Ron LeValley of Mad River Biologists to study the reproductive success of nesting seabirds and with Teresa Sholars of College of the Redwoods to study the distribution of endangered plant species. This grant was made available to us because of what we had been able to accomplish previously through your generous support.

We were also recently informed that we are one of only forty-three successful applicants nationwide in a very competitive innovative grant program that was jointly offered by a major national conservation organization (to be named later) and a well known international manufacturing firm (also to be named later). Unfortunately, the co-sponsors have asked us not to issue a press release yet, so I am unable to tell you more. I will say this: the grant will allow us to continue what has been a very successful conservation program, and it will allow us to expand the educational component of that program in ways that I find very exciting. Once again, success breeds success. You have given us the resources to start a program that has been recognized on the national level, and now your initial investment will be compounded with interest - the interest of people in high places.

So I thank you again for your generosity, your commitment, and your trust in the leadership of this organization. Please share with us any ideas you might have on how to improve what we do, how to increase membership, or how to better serve our community. Our address is P.O. Box 2297, Fort Bragg, CA 95437. We would love to hear from you. This is your chapter. Congratulations! You have a good one.

## AT MENDOCINO HEADLANDS – THE COMMON MURRE

By Donald Shephard



Common Murres nest on an island off the Mendocino Headlands and last year prospected among the Brandt's Cormorant colony on Gualala Point Island for nesting sites. This activity illustrates their recovery in California from past human impacts and the expansion of the breeding population in southern Mendocino County. The uninitiated might easily mistake this bird for a penguin, with its white belly, dark head, upright posture and short wings, perfect for diving and flying underwater. This medium sea bird with brown-black upper parts, throat, white under parts, and long, dark bill, and short tail spends 8-9 months a year continuously at sea. Outside the breeding season, the chin and lower half of the face are white with a black line descending from the back of the eye through the white area. They dive to an impressive 240 feet to feed on fish and invertebrates.

They range from coastal islands and headlands in California to Alaska and breed along the Arctic and sub-arctic coasts south to Central California and east to the Gulf of St. Lawrence preferring rocky coasts like ours. Common Murres winter south to southern California and Massachusetts, and in Eurasia. They forage closer to rocky shores during the breeding season but further offshore during non-breeding time.

The short wings that serve them well underwater give their flight a labored look. Although silent on the ocean, they emit a soft murr sound in flight.

They eat polar cod, capelin, sprat, sand eels, small Atlantic cod, and herring, also marine worms, amphipods, shrimp and mollusks. They forage by diving from the surface, and can remain underwater for a minute.

Colonies exhibit densely packed nests of 28-34 birds per square meter. Incubating adults actually touch their neighbors on both sides. They first breed at 4-5 years, laying one white, green, blue or brown egg directly on a rock or a rock shelf with no nesting material added. Both sexes incubate the egg for 4 to 5 weeks and feed the newly hatched chick. At two to three weeks after hatching, before it is able to fly, the chick leaves the colony with one of its parents and moves into the water. A murre chick leaves the cliff in dramatic style. Even without proper flight feathers, it hurls itself off the edge and glides down to sea. The male feeds and cares for the chick until it can fly. [\(continued\)](#)

## AT MENDOCINO HEADLANDS – THE COMMON MURRE continued



An attempt is underway to reestablish a colony of murres on a small stack called Devil's Slide Rock, on the San Mateo coast near Pacifica. The breeding colony held close to 3,000 murres in early 1980's but died out from human causes. Tens of thousands of murres in Central California drowned in gill nets between the mid 1970s and mid 1980s. Then in the winter of 1986 the oil barge, Apex Houston, accidentally discharged 26,000 gallons of oil while en route from San Francisco to Long Beach Harbor. About 9,900 sea birds died from the spill, including 6,300 murres. After the spill, no murres bred on Devil's Slide Rock and the colony disappeared. In the spring of 1996, six pairs of murres raised three chicks, the first breeding in ten years on Devil's Slide Rock and that expanded to 190 breeding pairs in 2004.

The expansion of the breeding range of this Chaplinesque bird is a drop of good news in an ocean of bad. If it includes Gualala Point Island, we are all that much richer.



All Common Murre photos courtesy of Ron LeValley ([www.LeValleyPhoto.com](http://www.LeValleyPhoto.com))

### PELAGIC TRIP SIGHTINGS

Observation date: 9/14/08

Notes: Mendocino Audubon sponsored pelagic. Leaders: Ron LeValley and Rob Fowler. Due to the calm seas Ron decided to steer the trip south to Navarro Canyon.

Other wildlife: Blue Shark-6, Orca-at least 2 individuals seen but more probably present, of course- very distant views, Harbor Seal-1 Elephant Seal-3. No other cetaceans seen.

Number of species: 40

Surf Scoter - *Melanitta perspicillata* 3  
 Red-throated Loon - *Gavia stellata* 1  
 Pacific Loon - *Gavia pacifica* 3 (2)  
 Pied-billed Grebe - *Podilymbus podiceps* 1  
 Western Grebe - *Aechmophorus occidentalis* 5  
 Black-footed Albatross - *Phoebastria nigripes* 20  
 Northern Fulmar - *Fulmarus glacialis* 6  
 Pink-footed Shearwater - *Puffinus creatopus* 530  
 Flesh-footed Shearwater - *Puffinus carneipes* 1  
 Buller's Shearwater - *Puffinus bulleri* 45  
 Sooty Shearwater - *Puffinus griseus* 200  
 Short-tailed Shearwater - *Puffinus tenuirostris* 2 Early.

Brown Pelican - *Pelecanus occidentalis* 20  
 Brandt's Cormorant - *Phalacrocorax penicillatus* 41  
 Double-crested Cormorant - *Phalacrocorax auritus* 4  
 Pelagic Cormorant - *Phalacrocorax pelagicus* 25  
 Great Blue Heron - *Ardea herodias* 1  
 Great Egret - *Ardea alba* 2  
 Turkey Vulture - *Cathartes aura* 1

Peregrine Falcon - *Falco peregrinus* 1 juvenile bird approx. 8 miles offshore from the nearest point of land that took a couple of swipes at the male cowbird!

Black Turnstone - *Arenaria melanocephala* 6 Noyo Harbor.

Sanderling - *Calidris alba* 20  
 Red-necked Phalarope - *Phalaropus lobatus* 25

Heermann's Gull - *Larus heermanni* 45  
 California Gull - *Larus californicus* 330  
 Western Gull - *Larus occidentalis* 130  
 Western x Glaucous-winged Gull (hybrid) - *Larus occidentalis* x *glaucescens* 1

Common Tern - *Sterna hirundo* 2  
 Common/Arctic Tern - *Sterna hirundo/paradisaea* 7  
 Elegant Tern - *Thalasseus elegans* 2

Elephant Seal



Surf Scoter



Left: Red-necked Phalarope

Right: Red Phalarope

Continued

### PELAGIC TRIP SIGHTINGS (continued)

South Polar Skua - <i>Stercorarius maccormicki</i>	3	
Pomarine Jaeger - <i>Stercorarius pomarinus</i>	6 (4)	
Parasitic Jaeger - <i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>	2 (4)	
Common Murre - <i>Uria aalge</i>	45	
Pigeon Guillemot - <i>Cephus columba</i>	1	
Cassin's Auklet - <i>Ptychoramphus aleuticus</i>	4	
Rhinoceros Auklet - <i>Cerorhinca monocerata</i>	12	
Belted Kingfisher - <i>Megaceryle alcyon</i>	3	
warbler sp. - <i>Parulinae</i> sp.	1	long-tailed yellow un-
der-sided warbler sp that flew away.		
Brown-headed Cowbird - <i>Molothrus ater</i>	1	(approx. 8.2 miles offshore from the nearest point of land)



Cassin's Auklet

This report was generated automatically by eBird v2(<http://ebird.org>)



Peregrine Falcon

All photos courtesy of Ron LeValley  
([www.LeValleyPhoto.com](http://www.LeValleyPhoto.com))

### MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

**Do 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? Have you renewed your membership? Is there someone you can encourage to join MCAS? We accept, cash, checks or Visa and Mastercard.**

**You will be notified, by email if possible, of your membership status.**

**Call Ginny Wade at 964-6362 or send your dues to:**

**Membership,**

**MENDOCINO COAST AUDUBON SOCIETY**

**P.O. BOX 2297**

**FORT BRAGG, CA, 95437**

**Thank you.**



Oyster Catcher

**MCAS BOARD MEMBERS 2007-2008**

<b>President</b>	<b>David Jensen</b>	<b>964-8163</b>	<b>djensen@mcn.org</b>
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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.**

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