

The Whistling Swan



NEWSLETTER OF THE MENDOCINO COAST AUDUBON SOCIETY

October 2009

BIRDING THE STANS

A TRIP THROUGH KYRGZSTAN AND KAZAKHSTAN

Mathew Matheissen

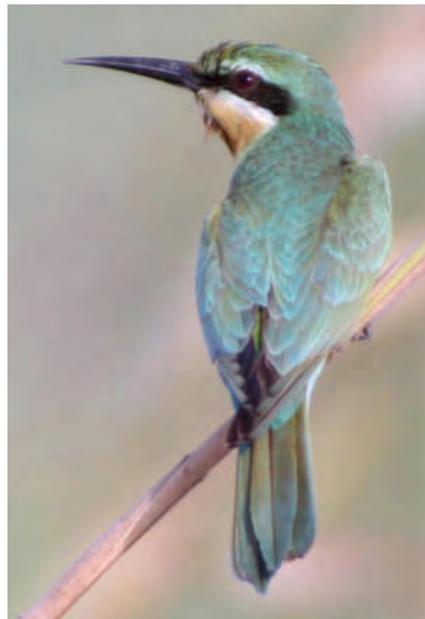
TOWN HALL Main Street, Fort Bragg

October 19, at 7:00 p.m.

Peregrine Audubon refers to him as the "Incomparable Matthew Matthiessen". He's a member of the "Twitch Whiffers", a group that does a Big Sit Birding Circle. He does an annual trip to locations around the world that most of us will never see. And every October Matthew comes to the coast to share one of his unusual adventures with Mendocino Audubon. While birds are always a feature, Matthew gives us a picture of the regions, the peoples and all the wildlife. Don't miss the opportunity to visit two of the "Stans" with Matthew this month.



Left
Demoiselle
Crane
Right
Blue-
cheeked
Bee-Eater
Far right
Hoopoe
Photos
Copyright
Asakar
Isabekov



Inside this issue:

<i>President's Corner</i>	2
<i>Bird Walks</i>	3
<i>Glass Beach Trip</i>	3
<i>Bird Sightings</i>	3
<i>10 Mile Hike Bird List</i>	4
<i>SOS Summer Memories</i>	5
<i>Dorothy Tobkin</i>	6
<i>Big River Bird Survey Training</i>	8
<i>Pam Huntley Blue Grouse</i>	9
<i>Board and Mission</i>	10



PRESIDENT'S CORNER**David Jensen**

People often ask me, "Why do you look at birds? And once you have seen them, what makes you go back out to look at them again?" I suspect that there is no one answer to that question. The rapid increase in the number of bird watchers in this country suggests that there are probably many reasons for the popularity of this activity. As we invite others to join us, it is good to stop for a moment and consider why we do what we do.

Part of the attraction is the subject matter. Because they are plentiful, colorful and active during the day, birds are relatively easy to watch. Think of the challenges faced by those who want to watch nocturnal desert rodents. On a deeper level, the apparent freedom of flying birds has touched the soul of humans since we first began to record our thoughts. We are drawn to their beauty and grace, and we long for the ability to join them in flight.

The activity of bird watching brings other pleasures as well. The most exciting reward is the close personal encounter with nature. With the exception of a few park pigeons and bread-begging geese, bird watchers encounter animals that are completely wild, their behavior unchanged by human interaction. That is such a rare commodity in this age when virtually everything has been tamed, controlled or eliminated for the benefit of our survival and success. For the next two months I will stand at the end of Laguna Point and watch the waves of loons and ducks as they sweep down over the ocean from the north, like they have done every fall for the past untold thousand years. This rhythm of life, a living heritage that remains unchanged despite all we have done, remains unknown to those who do not take the time to witness.

We can observe unique natural behaviors, such as the mating dance of the Cedar Waxwing, the passing of food by a male Northern Harrier to his brooding mate, or the paternal care of a Common Murre for his floating chick. These simple yet profound events enrich our lives, if only we take the time to watch. The beautiful, yet confusing, mix of songs and calls from surrounding bushes and trees takes on real meaning when we patiently listen and watch. With time and tranquility, we recognize the identity of the singer, sometimes even the meaning of the message, and then the world becomes richer.

Ironically, the length of time spent birding is directly proportional to the number of birding books in your library. Birding can also be a humbling pastime. The longer you bird, the more you realize that you don't really know that much. Or perhaps it's that you desire to learn even more. In any case, birding is not a destination, but rather a journey that becomes richer and more interesting the longer you pursue it.

These are a few of the answers to the question: "Why?" The beauty and romance of the birds, the richness of nature, and the opportunity to learn more about this wonderful world we share. Why not go birding? Please come with us. And bring your friends.

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 3, at 9:00 a.m. Our midweek bird walk will be held on the third Wednesday of the month, October 21, 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

OCTOBER TRIP TO GLASS BEACH

On Sunday, October 11, the Audubon Society will host a field trip to view the birds of Glass Beach in Fort Bragg. Please note the change from our usual Saturday date. Participants with all levels of experience are invited to meet at 9 a.m. at the west end of Elm Street. This is an exciting time of year to look for shorebirds along our coast. Other possible sightings include Harlequin Ducks and wintering Peregrine Falcons. Binoculars will be available for those who need them. This field trip should end by noon.

BIRD SIGHTINGS



Sept 27 Clark's Grebe, Point arena, Lisa Walker

Sept 26 Greater White-fronted Goose, Little River Airport, Richard Hubacek

Sept 25 Dunlin, Pectoral Sandpiper, Hudsonian Godwit, Virgin Creek Beach, Karen Havlena (posting for Dorothy Tobkin).

Sept 25 Yellow-headed Blackbird, Fort Bragg, Lisa Walker

Sept 23 Palm Warbler, Point Cabrillo, Richard Hubacek

Sept 20 Pelagic trip from Noyo Harbor, a disappointing 26 species of birds and a thrilling 4 orcas within 10 feet of the Seahawk

Sept 20 Hudsonian Godwit, Marbled Godwit, Snowy Plover, Virgin Creek Beach, Lisa Walker

Sept 16 Summer Tanager, Lake Cleone, Karen Havlena

Summer Tanager photo by Gerhart Hofmann, Smithsonian National Zoological Park, Migratory Bird Center

SECOND ANNUAL TEN-MILE TEN MILE HIKE

SUNDAY, September 6, 2009

PELECANIFORMES

- Brown Pelican *Pelecanus occidentalis*
- Double-crested Cormorant *Phalacrocorax auritus*
- Pelagic Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pelagicus*

CICONIIFORMES

- Great Blue Heron *Ardea herodias*
- Great Egret *Ardea alba*

ANSERIIFORMES

- Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*
- Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*
- Common Merganser *Mergus merganser*

FALCONIFORMES

- Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*
- Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*
- Turkey Vulture *Cathartes aura*

CHARADRIIFORMES

- Black-bellied Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*
- Western Snowy Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus nivosus***
- Semipalmated Plover *Charadrius semipalmatus*
- Killdeer *Charadrius vociferus*
- Black Oystercatcher *Haematopus bachmani*
- Marbled Godwit *Limosa fedoa**
- Sanderling *Calidris alba**
- Western Sandpiper *Calidris mauri**
- Baird's Sandpiper *Calidris bairdii*
- Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*
- Heermann's Gull *Larus heermanni**
- California Gull *Larus californicus*

CORACIIFORMES

- Belted Kingfisher *Ceryle alcyon*

PASSERIFORMES

- Black Phoebe *Sayornis nigricans*
- Common Raven *Corvus corax*
- Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*
- European Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*
- Savannah Sparrow *Passerculus sandwichensis*
- White-crowned Sparrow *Zonotrichia leucophrys*
- Red-winged Blackbird *Agelaius phoeniceus*
- Brewer's Blackbird *Euphagus cyanocephalus*
- Brown-headed Cowbird *Molothrus ater*



SAVE
OUR
SHOREBIRDS

SPECIES LIST BY ORDER

Ten Mile River south to
Pudding Creek Trestle
Mendocino County, CA

Clear, 46° F, calm, becoming
foggy near Inglenook Creek.

**"Watchlisted" by National
Audubon and American Bird
Conservancy as birds in decline

** Endangered Species List -
threatened

By Becky Bowen



SAVE OUR SHOREBIRDS 2009
A SUMMER
OF GOOD MEMORIES
Becky Bowen



Shorebird surveys continue every week through October, then once a month through May. Contact Becky at casparbeck@comcast.net to join us.

DOROTHY TOBKIN

On Wednesday, August 26th, Dorothy Tobkin, better known as Toby, scanned Glass Beach for activity taking her time and making little noise. Five shorebirds fed together. Clearly, one was a Marbled Godwit but the other four spiked Toby's attention with their smaller stature, duller coloring and pale "eyebrows", could they possibly be Hudsonian Godwits? She observed two methods of feeding; one, deep jabs of their slightly upturned bill up to their eyeballs into the sand; and another, rapid shallow probe.

Only twenty-five times before had anyone identified and recorded Hudsonian Godwits in California and then only one at a time. This new county record deserved an immediate alert to other birding enthusiasts, or twitchers, to use the English term.

Toby hurried home to call Karen Havlena, David Jensen, Ron LeValley, Art Morley and others on the coast plus some inland twitchers. The virtual wires of Mendobirds buzzed with the find. Others confirmed the identification and photographed the birds.

Sightings of Hudsonian Godwits west of the Rockies are rare. They breed at several places in Alaska, and also at Hudson Bay, Canada, hence their name. The Alaskan birds probably fly over the ocean to winter in the South Pacific. The Hudson Bay birds fly over the Atlantic to the Pampas of South America. A brood usually consists of four eggs so this group may have been sibling juveniles.

Toby's habit of daily walks has led to previous first county records. Four years ago, while strolling up the Haul Road above Virgin Creek Beach, as rain began, she sighted a Yellow Wagtail but could not confirm it. After a night worrying that the bird flew away, she returned to find it again, the thirteenth sighting of Yellow Wagtail in California and a new county record.

That Toby found these rare visitors surprises nobody who knows her. When she moved from west Marin County to Fort Bragg twenty-four years ago she initially worked as a clinical social worker at the county Mental Health Clinic. Toby left the board of directors of the Marin Audubon Society and gave her time to the MCAS board for seven years. She brought birding skills developed in Marin County, especially outer Point Reyes. Her penchant for long hikes nurtured her interest in all of nature, but botanical studies lacked the excitement of watching bird behavior.

At the time of Toby's northerly migration, there were more than three hundred species on

DOROTHY TOBKIN

continued

Hudsonian Godwit photo by Ron
LeValley www.LeValleyPhoto.com



the county list. Now it contains in excess of four hundred, about twenty, such as the Hudsonian Godwits and Yellow Wagtails, recorded by Toby. You may pick up a 283-species checklist of MacKerricher State Park birds she compiled, from the visitors' center there, or from Ford House. But there is more to birding than marking a check on a list.

Toby first tracked Western Snowy Plovers in Marin County many years ago. She sent her findings to the Point Reyes Bird Observatory, where the combined studies of many observers led, in 1993, to their listing as a threatened population. She observed two flocks of Western Snowy Plovers here, one at Virgin Creek Beach, and the other at Ten Mile Beach. In recent years, Virgin Creek Beach has held a late fall flock that goes to Ten Mile Beach to winter. Toby has also volunteered with the Save Our Shorebirds program and walks beaches for this program once a week during shorebird migration, as she has for the past four years.

Besides the two beaches mentioned above, Toby favors the mile walk around Lake Cleone, where you may be rewarded with the sight of a Summer Tanager; Van Damme State Park, home to Gray Jays; and Russian Gulch State Park. She enjoys the Garcia mudflats especially for winter birds including the beautiful Tundra Swan, once called the Whistling Swan.

Even when chores confine Toby to her home, her identifying skills shine. She has listed one hundred and eighteen species in her yard in the middle of Fort Bragg, including Clay-colored Sparrow, California Towhee, Nashville Warbler, and Greater White-fronted Goose.

In 2005, Toby received the Environmental Award at a combined meeting of the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society, Mendocino Area Parks Association, the local chapter of the California Native Plant Society, and the Mendocino Land Trust, in recognition of her contribution to conservation. At 78, Toby does not rest on her laurels. She recently persuaded the CalTrans biologist to arrange for the delay of the destruction of the old Ten Mile Bridge to maintain the support for a thousand gourd-shaped nests of Cliff Swallows. Now that the young have safely fledged, the demolition is underway.

The beauty of birds, their behavior, the community of twitchers, all boost Toby's spirits. Toby taught bird watching for several years and continues informal lessons at the Botanical Gardens. Come tap into her joy of birding; join Toby on her next walk on October 21st at 8:00 a.m., or any third Wednesday. You may also join her in volunteering for the Save Our Shorebirds program next year. You will certainly catch her enthusiasm for birds and, who knows, together you may spot a rare visitor.

by Donald Shephard

BIG RIVER BIRD SURVEY TRAINING

Matt Coleman

Join the Mendocino Land Trust's Big River Stewards for the Fall bird survey training on Saturday, October 3rd from Noon to 4pm at the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens.

This free workshop will focus on identifying birds by sight and sound and will be lead by expert birder, wildlife photographer and endangered species consultant Ron LeValley. LeValley, founder of the avian consulting firm, Mad River Biologists, will train participants in identifying birds by visual and audio cues, as well as bird survey methodology.

The goal of the workshop is to prepare for the annual Fall Big River Bird Surveys during which volunteers document the bird species present at 30 point-count stations in areas throughout the park during October and November.

Training participants will have the opportunity to put their new skills to work by signing up for the sixth year of the Big River Fall Bird Surveys. This ambitious "citizen science" project, begun in 2003 and co-sponsored by the Mendocino Land Trust, the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society and California State Parks, seeks to monitor trends in the population of bird species at Big River over time. For more information, visit the Mendocino Land Trust's website www.mendocinolandtrust.org and see the "Report on 2005 Big River Breeding Season and Fall Bird Surveys Conducted by the Big River Stewards." Data from the previous six years of Spring surveys and five years of Fall surveys will be presented at the workshop.



Pileated
Woodpecker

Photo Ron
LeValley
[www.LeValley
Photo.com](http://www.LeValleyPhoto.com)

To attend the workshop, or participate in the surveys, please RSVP to Stewards coordinator Matt Coleman at 962-0470, or, by e-mail, to mcoleman@mendocinolandtrust.org Seating is limited. Participants should bring a bag lunch, binoculars, field guide and dress warmly in layers for an outdoor practice session.

To make it a full day, consider joining the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society for their monthly bird walk at the Botanical Gardens that morning at 9 a.m. For more information about the walk, call 964-6835.

PAM HUNTLEY ON KXYZ FM 88.3, 90.7, AND 91.5

BLUE GROUSE

The Blue Grouse is the common resident grouse of our mountains. In early spring, while there is still snow on the ground you can hear their courtship hooting.

The Blue is one of the largest grouse at 17-22". They are mottled brownish gray with a broad gray band at the tip of their tail. Their short legs are feathered. The males have a blue gray cap and an orange bare spot or "comb" over the eye. They have yellow patches on their throat surrounded by white feathers, which inflate for courtship.

The Blue Grouse are unique in their vertical migrations on mountain slopes. In spring they move down from the high coniferous woods to the upper edge of the deciduous forest where courtship is carried out. The male calls from a stump or tree perch and inflates his yellow air sacs to amplify his hooting and growling. Most of the male's song is so low the human ear cannot hear it. Courtship also involves elaborate displays with short fluttering flights off the ground and strutting with air sacs inflated and tail fanned, much like a turkey gobbler.

After mating the male return upslope to the conifers and alpine meadows. The female stays below and raises 7-10 young. Their diet is mainly insects to start and then expands with berries, leaves, seeds and flowers. The winter diet is mainly conifer needles and buds.

By September all return to higher elevations to winter in the branches of conifers or burrows in the snow. They even grow their own snowshoe with a fringe of scales around their toes.

For the Mendocino Coast Audubon I'm Pam Huntley wishing you happy birding.



Blue Grouse photo
courtesy Tom
Bouchert.

Pam broadcasts on KXYZ
once Tuesday evenings on
Community News with
Christina Anastat at 5:00
p.m. The segment is
rebroadcast on Friday
mornings at about 7:55 a.m.

MCAS BOARD MEMBERS 2007-2008

President	David Jensen	964-8163	djensen@mcn.org
Vice President	Tony Eppstein	937-1715	tonyepp@mcn.org
Secretary	Tanya Smart	964-4235	wrismart@mcn.org
Treasurer	Judy Steele	937-2216	judys@mcn.org
SOS Program	Becky Bowen	962-1602	casparbeck@comcast.net
Membership	Ginny Wade	964-6362	wwade@mcn.org
Programs	Charlene McAllister	937-4463	charmacc@mcn.org
Education	Jeanne Coleman	937-1838	jeanne@mcn.org
Conservation	Warren Wade	964-6362	wwade@mcn.org
Newsletter	Donald Shephard	962-0223	donshephard@comcast.net
Emeritus	Art Morley	964-2541	agmorley@hotmail.com

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**

