



Photo by Ron LeValley

# The Black Oystercatcher

Mendocino Coast Audubon Newsletter November 2016



DAVID RICE PRESENTS  
**WHY WE BIRD**  
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 2016  
7 P.M.  
CASPAR COMMUNITY CENTER



What makes birders get up early to walk through the woods or tromp through wet fields? Why do we drive a hundred miles to catch a glimpse of a rare species? Why do we keep the feeder full?

Our November speaker, David Rice, answers these questions. His book, *Why We Bird*, published in 2013 by Golden Gate Audubon, describes a lifetime of experiences in short essays about the allure and attraction of birdwatching.

There are as many reasons to bird as there are bird lovers. He will discuss several reasons including flight, song, color, identifications, surprises, conservation, stories, and solace.

*Why We Bird* is a collection of stories, such as birding with a friend after the friend developed dementia; telling a grandson about owls; analyzing a great misidentification; listening to cranes; and chasing rare birds, pelagic birds, and life birds. The book also identifies several hot birding spots in California, from Tule Lake to the Salton Sea.

David describes himself as a knowledgeable birder, not an expert. His experience includes conducting censuses for two breeding bird atlases, co-leading a Golden Gate Audubon Society (GGAS) birding backpack trip to Lassen Volcanic National Park for thirty-plus years, and finding at least 150 birds in each of California's 58 counties. He was on the board of directors of GGAS in the 1980s, and is a co-author of the *Alameda County Breeding Bird Atlas*. He is a psychologist in private practice and lives in Berkeley, California.

He will read selections from his book and engage with the audience to answer questions and to share birding experiences.

**PRESIDENT'S CORNER****Dave Jensen**

As I've written before, I love the months of October and November. This special season offers a living lesson on bird migration and the dynamics of the Pacific Coast Flyway. Here on the coast we have a unique opportunity to witness a phenomenon that has played out each year for who knows how long. Since before Lucy and her clan climbed down from trees and walked in the Awash Valley of Ethiopia 3.5 million years ago, scoters and loons have flown along the coast of what we now call California. And although many Paleolithic phenomena have passed into oblivion, migration along the flyways remains.

Unfortunately, most of us are static observers of this dynamic event. I have not seen the Snow Geese, Black Turnstones, or Western Sandpipers nest along the northern coast of Alaska and Canada. I do not know where they rest along the way. I only know that they leave and return. I have not seen where the Swainson's Thrushes, or the Western Tanagers, or the Olive-sided Flycatchers go for the winter. I do not know where they rest along the way. I only know that they return and leave.

Therein lies the danger of my complacency. The successful return of these migratory species each year relies entirely on maintaining the integrity of the flyway. If the chain of resting, feeding and breeding areas is broken, the system and the species will collapse. We do not live in the world of a million years ago, nor in the world of one hundred or even twenty years ago. We live in a rapidly changing, crowded world where natural resources and open space are disappearing, even without the added pressures from climate change.

National Audubon president David Yarnold reminds the us that "the birds lead us to our work." With that principle in mind, he has realigned Audubon operations according to the pattern of the four major North American flyways. Along each flyway, those areas needed for refuge, feeding and nesting are given conservation priority. Here in California, such priority areas include the Central Valley, San Francisco Bay wetlands, the Salton Sea (an important resting and feeding area for migrating waterfowl in southern California) and Humboldt Bay, with its eelgrass beds that are critical to the survival of Brant Geese.

As member of the Board of Directors of Audubon California, I am lobbying for closer ties between the flyway chapters. It is sad to say that although we share many of the same birds, we know very little about the Audubon chapters in Oregon, Washington, or Alaska. What challenges are they facing? What successes have they realized? What lessons can we learn from one another? By strengthening the communication and cooperation of birders along the flyway, we will strengthen the protection and integrity of the flyway.

I encourage each of you to become more informed and engaged in flyway activities. Join me as a member of the Audubon Action Network. It is quick and easy to send a message to our elected officials, reminding them that birds matter. Take time to read and learn about where your summer birds have gone and consider how they got there. For my part, I will share the lessons and insights I receive from other chapters along our flyway. I will also share opportunities for you to take meaningful actions to protect our birds and their habitats. Although they have lost some diversity along the way, the birds were here long before we climbed down from the trees. With our help, many of them will still be in the trees when we meet whatever fate awaits us.

## MCAS BOARD RECOMMENDS NO VOTE ON COUNTY MEASURE AF

The Board of Directors of the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society (MCAS), during their regular meeting on Monday October 10, voted to endorse a NO vote on Measure AF (formerly called The Mendocino Heritage Act). The vote was unanimous, with one abstention. (Dave Jensen recused himself from the discussion and vote, citing a potential conflict with his county office duties.)

We oppose this industry-sponsored initiative because, as an initiative measure, it would bypass the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) review process. The CEQA process allows for public comment, and resource agency review, to identify potentially significant adverse environmental effects. The Measure would repeal existing county requirements, including those intended to protect wildlife, and it would place no restrictions on use of rodenticides (rat poisons, commonly used in cannabis cultivation), which are known to spread through the ecosystem and kill owls and raptors. Measure AF includes few restrictions on where or how cannabis may be cultivated, and would prevent any modification or amendments before June 2018.

The County of Mendocino currently is drafting a set of regulations to provide a regulatory framework for cannabis cultivation, processing, transport and use, including all state-approved licensing types. Unlike Measure AF, the county ordinance will be subject to public and agency environmental review, and can be amended by a vote of the supervisors after public review and comment. The MCAS Board believes this process is likely to include better environmental protections than the industry-sponsored initiative.

We therefore recommend a NO vote on Measure AF.

### *Bills We've Been Following:*

#### **STATUS OF STATE LEGISLATION SUPPORTED BY AUDUBON CALIFORNIA**

- SB1363 introduced by Sen. Bill Monning (D-Carmel) establishing the Ocean Acidification and Hypoxia Reduction Program. The bill will, in part, help protect eelgrass beds in Humboldt Bay, a critical food source for scoters and Pacific Brant. Passed by the legislature and signed into law by Gov. Brown on September 29, 2016. The bill takes effect January 1, 2017.
- AB2148 introduced by Assembly Member Chris Holden (D-San Gabriel Valley/Pasadena) establishing regulations for operating and use of drones above state-managed lands or waters. Audubon California sponsored the bill citing a need statewide regulations, especially for public lands where wildlife is protected. The bill was vetoed by Gov. Brown on September 29, 2016. His message to the legislature read, in part: "...This bill prohibits the operation of a drone over lands managed by the Department of Parks and Recreation or the Department of Fish and Wildlife. These departments have authority to promulgate regulations regarding drone use within their respective jurisdictions. In fact, the Department of Parks and Recreation is in the process of developing a regulatory approach to this issue."

### **Audubon California recommends "Yes" on Proposition 67**

Audubon California issued a press release Oct. 5 recommending a YES vote on Proposition 67 on the November ballot. The proposition "affirms the statewide ban on plastic grocery bags passed by the California Legislature in 2014." Several studies confirm plastic bags are deadly for wildlife, especially marine birds. For a message from Makana, the Laysan Albatross, and Monterey Bay Aquarium, please visit <http://ca.audubon.org/node/26036> Audubon California also urges a NO vote on Proposition 65.



## SAVE OUR SHOREBIRDS

Becky Bowen



### BIRDING AT MIDNIGHT IN BROAD DAYLIGHT

From the beginning of Save Our Shorebirds ten years ago, we've nurtured a passion and fascination for shorebirds. Migration was the greatest mystery. Why such long trips to and from the Arctic breeding grounds? Why did so many adults leave their young behind? How did the young birds know where to migrate without an adult to show them the way over to another hemisphere? Why? Why? Why?



It was time to follow the birds – literally. My husband, Winston, and I took off to Alaska in mid June. We travelled as far north as Barrow to learn more first hand. Here are a few things we found:

- If you think like a bird, it's clear that tundras are the perfect breeding and nesting grounds. In summer, the earth is spongy and full of flowers and bugs. You could literally lean over the nest and have breakfast in bed all day. This depends on perfect timing. If plant and bug cycles are thrown off for any reason, the food is not there when the migrators arrive. The chicks won't survive.
- When everything goes right, conditions are ideal for raising young with warm summer days that last 24 hours. Of course, when the weather goes south, so do the birds.
- The more isolated and more northern-most the nest, the fewer the predators. Here at home, our surveyors record beach sightings of shorebird predators: Common Raven, Merlin, Red-tailed Hawk, Northern Harrier, Peregrine Falcon, Kestrel, and White-tailed Kite. The closest thing we saw to a non-mammal predator in Barrow was a Snowy Owl holding court on a tundra hillock with an audience of attentive Semipalmated Sandpipers. The location of Arctic shorebird nests also discourages human and dog predators, both of which cause no end of physiological stress to shorebirds. It's chilly even in summer (Barrow is 350 miles above the Arctic Circle) and the tufted tundra footing is just as difficult to navigate for canines as it is for people.

Some of the shorebirds we saw in Barrow (the northern-most city in the U.S.) fly more than 14,000 miles a year to spend the summers in the Arctic and winters in places much lower than the Lower 48. We look forward to telling their stories.

*Above: Snowy Owl and Semipalmated Sandpiper. Below: Semipalmated Sandpiper chick. Photographs in downtown Barrow, Alaska, by B. Bowen*

Save Our Shorebirds is a year-round ongoing MCAS conservation program in partnership with State Parks. To learn more, please contact Director Angela Liebenberg at [liebenbergs@mcn.org](mailto:liebenbergs@mcn.org) and visit us at [www.facebook.com/SaveOurShorebirds](http://www.facebook.com/SaveOurShorebirds)

## CLIFF SWALLOW

Donald Shephard

When I monitored Black Oystercatcher or Pelagic Cormorant nests in the Point Cabrillo Light Station State Historic Park, I often witnessed Cliff Swallows swooping in and out of the caves in the inlet south of the lighthouse. White forehead, buff rump, and short, squared-off tail distinguish this stocky swallow from its cousin the Barn Swallow, with the long, forked tail.

This is the species of the song *When The Swallows Come Back to Capistrano*, by Leon René. A festival still celebrates the return from Villa Ventana, Argentina every year to Mission San Juan Capistrano. Although the birds actually return to the general area in late February, tradition has it that the main flock arrives on March 19, Saint Joseph's Day, and flies south on Saint John's Day, October 23.



**Cliff Swallow – Photograph by Glen Tepke**

For centuries, this species has flown the six thousand miles from the Goya area of Argentina to the San Juan Capistrano area every spring. According to legend, they first took refuge at the mission when an irate innkeeper destroyed their mud nests. The mission's location near two rivers provided a constant supply of mud for nests and insects for food. The ruins of the old stone church ensured an ideal location for the swallows to nest, giving excellent protection for young birds. But do not rush to the mission next spring because the "Capistrano swallows" now are nesting in the Chino Hills, north of the mission due to urban sprawl. Thousands of them construct their mud nests in the eaves of the Vellano Country Club, and community buildings situated around a golf course.

Trivia it's true, but it illustrates a characteristic of successful species. They adapt to man's alteration of their habitat. This species has expanded its range into the Great Plains and eastern North America in the past 150 years. Man-made structures, especially bridges, provide excellent nesting sites for Cliff Swallows.

The nest is a gourd-shaped mud cone with a small entrance hole built, and is in tightly packed clusters forming large colonies.

*Continued on Page 6*

**DONALD SHEPHARD***Continued from Page 5*

I recall seeing these distinctive nests close up on a balcony at the di Rosa Museum in Napa. Both sexes begin by dabbing a circle of mud onto a wall and then adding mud-balls from the bottom of the rim up and out, eventually forming a jug-shaped nest. Unlike Barn Swallows, they do not add sticks or straw to the mud structure, but they do line the nest with grass and feathers. They may repair and reuse an old mud nest, even one of another species. Occasionally, a female will lay eggs in its own nest and also carry one in its bill to another female's nest.



**Cliff Swallow nest – Photograph by Bill Hubrick**

Cliff Swallows sleep in trees for most of the year, but a breeding bird will sleep in the nest as soon as the structure is partially finished. They fight for home sites by grappling in half-built nests or on the bare wall. Fighting birds sometimes fall into the water and manage to row with their wings to reach the shore. They defend completed nests by sitting in the entrances, puffing up their head and neck feathers to look larger, and lunging at intruders. Each bird has one mate for raising

young, but the pair does not associate away from the nest, and both members frequently mate outside the pair bond.

Cliff Swallow predators include Sharp-shinned Hawks, American Kestrels, Prairie Falcons, Peregrine Falcons, Barn Owls, Great Horned Owls, Magpies, Loggerhead Shrikes, Acorn Woodpeckers, and domestic cats.

Next month, Colleen and I are off to Argentina where we hope to see a "gulp", "herd", "kettle", "richness", and "sord" of Cliff Swallows. Maybe we will also see Ospreys among other local birds escaping north Pacific storms.



**Cliff Swallow collecting mud – Photograph by Steve Creek**



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

### SAVANNAH SPARROW

I always thought Savannah Sparrows were named for their grassland habitat. But the birds are named for a specimen found in Savannah, Georgia, by 19th century ornithologist Alexander Wilson. The scientific binomial, *Passerculus sandwichensis*, comes from their presence in Sandwich Bay in the Aleutian Islands of Alaska. According to Cornell University's Laboratory of Ornithology, they are one the most numerous song bird species in North America. In California, alone, seven subspecies have been identified.

Savannah Sparrows are six inches long with mottled brown backs. They have pale streaked underparts with finely-streaked breasts. A yellow patch, called a "lore," is between the eye and the bill. Bills and legs are pale pink.



Savannah Sparrow, Glass Beach B. Bowen

I see Savannah Sparrows in grasslands on coastal bluffs. They breed there as well as in coastal marshes, grassy valleys, and agricultural fields. Usually, I hear the faint, wheezy song and see the sparrow perched on a dry stalk a foot or so off the ground. Savannah Sparrows often run through grass rather than fly. They eat seeds (especially grass seeds), insects, spiders and snails.

Savannah Sparrows nest on the ground in natural or scraped depressions. Nests are woven with grass and lined with fine materials. They are concealed under overhanging grasses or vines. Three to five pale greenish-blue eggs with brown spots are laid. Females perform about 85% of incubation, which lasts for about 12 days. The young leave the nest two weeks after hatching. In some Savannah Sparrow populations, polygamy is common.



Painted Bunting

Photograph by Ron LeValley

### Rare Bird Sightings

#### AREA BIRDERS DISCOVER RARE BUNTING, WARBLER

Luck and coincidence brought two birds into the field of vision of two Humboldt County birders on Sun., Sep. 25, in Chadbourne Gulch north of Fort Bragg. A Painted Bunting and a Mourning Warbler were some 50 feet apart when Rob Fowler and Cedric Duhalde saw and heard them. Both birds are first county sightings. The bunting was found the day before by Rob Hewitt, of Arcata. Hewitt's sighting was posted on the Mendobirds listserv. On Sept. 24 and 25, several area birders were able to locate the bunting, including Ron LeValley (his photograph is at left). Sightings of both birds are under county (Painted Bunting) and state (Mourning Warbler) review.

## MCAS FIELD TRIPS

Tim Bray

**November 12 Field Trip:** South Coast Raptors (Elk to Point Arena). Leaders: Dave Jensen and Adam Hutchins. Meet at 9 AM in the Navarro River parking area (just south of the bridge) to carpool. This is an all-day trip; bring lunch. We drive along Highway 1 and stop at a number of pullouts to scan the fields between Elk and Point Arena, wintering grounds for a large number of raptors, including Ferruginous Hawk.

**December 10 Field Trip:** Field Trip to Rose Memorial Park and Pudding Creek . Leader: Tim Bray. 9 AM - noon. Meet at east end of Spruce Street in Fort Bragg. The Banksia trees in the cemetery attract winter rarities, including Orioles, Sapsuckers, and Warblers, and astonishing numbers of Anna's Hummingbirds. Along Pudding Creek we may hear Virginia Rail and Sora; the brushy habitat alongside the tracks is a good place to find Lincoln's Sparrow.

**January Field Trip:** For the January field trip, we are planning something more ambitious: an expedition to the Sacramento Valley to view the magnificent spectacle of wintering waterfowl. This will be a one-day tour of the Colusa National Wildlife Refuge and nearby areas, with an optional second day at the Sacramento NWR and nearby fields.

We plan to spend some time at the Colusa observation platform getting familiar with the geese and ducks, and then carpool for the Auto Tour route before searching nearby fields for Tundra Swans, Sandhill Cranes, and Long-billed Curlews, among others. At the end of the day we may return to the Colusa platform to experience "liftoff," and watch Black-crowned Night-herons and Great-horned Owls fly out from their daytime roosts.



Snow Geese

Photograph by Tim Bray

The second day will include both a walking tour and auto tour at the larger Sacramento NWR, ending around mid-day with lunch at the Visitor Center while we decide what else to pursue. These plans are tentative and we would like to solicit your input. In particular, we would like to know which of these options you would prefer:

1. Would you prefer Friday-Saturday, or Saturday-Sunday?
2. It is about a 4-hour drive to Colusa, so to meet at 11:00 you will need to leave the coast by 7 AM. Would you prefer to drive over the night before and start the field trip earlier?
3. Do you plan to stay for the second day?

Please send answers to these questions, and any suggestions, to Tim Bray.

You will be responsible for your own lodgings; there are a number of motels in Williams, where Highway 20 meets I-5, about 10 miles from the Colusa NWR. We can arrange a sandwich lunch; you will be responsible for your own dinner.



## CALENDAR, BIRD WALKS, FIELD TRIP ANNOUNCEMENTS

### November 2016

4-6 [Audubon Assembly](#) Tenaya Lodge, Yosemite

**Saturday 5 Beginner Bird Walk** [Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens](#) 18220 Highway 1, Fort Bragg. 9AM-Noon.\* Bring water, wear comfortable walking shoes, binoculars available, heavy rain cancels. Leader: TBA

**Saturday 12 Field Trip** South Coast Raptor Trip. 9AM-Late Afternoon. Meet at the Navarro Beach turnout on Highway 1. **Carpooling required.** Bring a lunch and water. Heavy rain cancels. Leaders: Dave Jensen, Adam Hutchins

**Monday 14 Meeting** [Caspar Community Center](#) 15051 Caspar Rd, Caspar. 7PM  
Speaker: David Rice. Subject: Why We Bird. More information at [whywebird.com](http://whywebird.com)

**Wednesday 16 Bird Walk** [Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens](#) 18220 Highway 1, Fort Bragg. 8:30AM-Noon\* **Note Time Change.** Leader: Tim Bray

### December 2016

**Saturday 3 Beginner Bird Walk** [Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens](#) 18220 Highway 1, Fort Bragg. 9AM-Noon\* Bring water, wear comfortable walking shoes, binoculars available, heavy rain cancels. Leader: Dave Jensen

**Monday 5 Board Meeting** (tentative) contact Dave Jensen to confirm date, time, place

**Saturday 10 Field Trip** Christmas Bird Count Tune-up at [Rose Memorial Cemetery](#) 9AM-Noon. Meet at the east end of Spruce Street, Fort Bragg. See story, page 8. Leader: Tim Bray

**Monday 12 Meeting** [Caspar Community Center](#) 15051 Caspar Rd, Caspar. 7PM  
The annual Christmas Bird Count slideshow **Note Date Change from the 21st**

**Saturday 17** [Ukiah Christmas Bird Count](#)

**Wednesday 21 Bird Walk** [Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens](#) 18220 Highway 1, Fort Bragg. 8:30AM-Noon\* Leader: Tim Bray

**Monday 26** [Fort Bragg Christmas Bird Count](#) There will be a dinner for the participants at the Caspar Community Center. The hall will open around 4PM, and dinner (lasagne and salad) will be at 5PM. Bring your own beverage. We will ask for an RSVP to help plan how much food to prepare.

### January 2016

**Monday 2** [Manchester Christmas Bird Count](#) Details to be announced.

*\*These walks are free, but there is an entry charge for participants who are not Garden members*

For complete calendar, updates, and useful links, visit: [www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org](http://www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org)

And please visit us on facebook: [www.facebook.com/mendocinocoastaudubon](http://www.facebook.com/mendocinocoastaudubon)

## MCAS BOARD MEMBERS AND PROGRAM CHAIRS 2015-2016

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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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