

The Whistling Swan



NEWSLETTER OF THE MENDOCINO COAST AUDUBON SOCIETY

December 2010

FORT BRAGG CHRISTMAS COUNT PREVIEW

Ron LeValley

December 20

7 pm Town Hall Fort Bragg



House Finch

Ron LeValley

www.LeValleyphoto.com

December's special program is a review of the birds that spend the winter along the Mendocino coast. Ron LeValley will share photos of local wintering birds. He will take time to compare and contrast similar species that may be difficult to differentiate, such as House Finch and Purple Finch.

This program will also be an introduction to the new Fort Bragg Christmas Bird Count.

We will discuss what a Christmas Count is, how it works, what we learn, and how you can be an important participant, regardless of your identification skills. The count is a wonderful opportunity for beginning or intermediate bird watchers to go out with more experienced birders and learn to identify birds. We will also explain how you can participate from the comfort of your home by reporting feeder birds.

Christmas Bird Counts have been an Audubon tradition since 1900. Join us in celebrating the end of the year and the start of a new count circle in the Fort Bragg area. Holiday refreshments will be available. Feel free to bring some to share.

Purple Finch



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PRESIDENT'S CORNER**David Jensen**

Hello, my name is Dave and I'm addicted to Christmas Bird Counts. (Everyone smiles acceptingly and replies, "Hi, Dave"). My first time was in 1980. I was with a stranger, an experienced birder from outside the area. We were standing on the headlands south of Elk waiting for it to get light. Through the mist he started calling out Murrelets, Ancient Murrelets, and other things that I could barely see, let alone identify. I wasn't sure I could trust him, but I wrote them down anyway. By the end of that long day I had been able to

add some more common species that he had missed. I went home that evening knowing I had been part of something unique, and I wanted more.

Over the years I've enjoyed Christmas counts wherever I've been. My favorites include Western Sonoma, Southwest Ohio, Cincinnati, Suisun Bay, Mount Hamilton, Point Reyes, Moss Landing, San Francisco, Santa Rosa, Oakland, Manchester, Angwin and Ukiah. This year I will add Fort Bragg to that list.

If you've never been, you probably wonder why it's addictive. Each count offers memorable experiences and new friendships. On a count day, more than on other days, you truly feel that you are living in the moment. Your senses are sharp and you feel part of the natural world. It's the perfect blend of two of humankind's greatest basic desires: the thrill of the hunt and the joy of discovery.

I've counted in gentle sun, driving rain, bitter snow, even in gloomy fog. No matter how tired I become, count days are never long enough. As the light dims and it is time to leave for the compilation dinner, you keep hoping for that late addition to the day's sightings - that one woodpecker, sparrow, hawk or duck that has eluded you all day.

Finally, at the compilation dinner, when all the plates have been pushed aside and it's time to report your sightings, what can possibly compare to that feeling when they call out a name - "Virginia Rail" - no one responds; you hear the murmurs and feel the anxiety start to build, then you dissolve the tension with a proud and satisfied, "Yes!" Have you ever felt more alive?

So you see, I don't really want to be cured. In fact, I'd love to see you get hooked as well. Please join me and my counting friends this winter. Ukiah, Manchester or Fort Bragg. Pick your poison, as they say.

Marbled Murrelet

PAM HUNTLEY ON KXYZ FM 88.3, 90.7, AND 91.5

BAND-TAILED PIGEON



Band-tailed Pigeon photo Ron LeValley
www.LeValleyphoto.com

I usually hear the strong, flapping wings of Band-tailed Pigeons as the flock takes off from its perch at the tip of a tree. At fifteen inches the Band-tailed pigeon is the largest of the pigeon-dove family. They have a distinct, narrow band on their tails above a wide, light-grey band on the tip. They have a purple head. On the nape of the neck, below the white-crescent line, they are iridescent green. They have yellow legs and a yellow bill tipped with black.

They are found in mixed forest, woodlands, canyons and rural edges of suburbia, wherever there are oak trees and acorns, their favorite food. They eat other nuts and berries, such as elderberries, cascara and manzanita. During migration, when some travel as far as Nicaragua, they will eat seeds and insects.

All pigeons and doves share their unusual way of drinking; they immerse their entire bill in water and suck like a horse.

Band-tailed Pigeons are gregarious and can be seen in flocks of dozens. They are generally quiet. Breeding season is the best time to hear the owl-like call, given from a high perch. In courtship, the male performs a rapidly flapping flight. Landing in a tree, he bows to her.

Band-tailed Pigeons nest in scattered pairs. They build a fragile platform nest of loose sticks, laying one white egg that is incubated by both adults. Parents feed the young "pigeon milk" that's made from secretions in the crop, a storage space at the end of the throat. Both parents produce crop milk and feed it to the hatchling or squab for the first three weeks. It has more protein and fat than human or cow's milk.

Band-tailed Pigeons were close to extinction in the west due to hunting and their populations are still considered fragile.

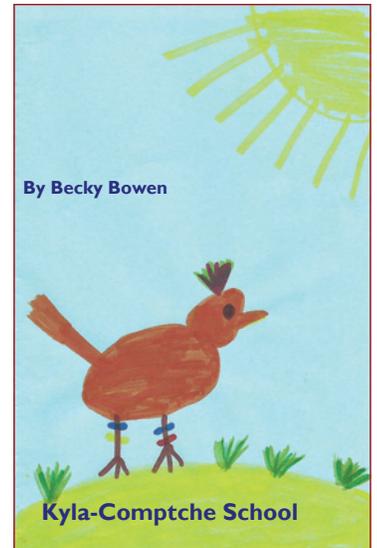
WOODBIDGE ECOLOGICAL RESERVE Donald Shephard

My wife and I visited our old birding haunt west of Lodi, just off I5. What a joy it is to see thousands of Sandhill Cranes and Tundra Swans amid hundreds of Snow Geese and White-fronted Geese in the reserve along Woodbridge Road. We continued west where farmers have flooded fields and saw so many shorebirds I yearned for a SOS trainer. We identified a Wilson's Snipe and Black-necked Stilts. We revisited old friends like American Pipits and Loggerhead Shrike. Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail and many more ducks brought back happy birding memories. In the past, we have seen a hawk atop almost every roadside pole. This time, we found four buteos and a Northern Harrier hunting the wetlands and an American Kestrel. Go there; the sheer numbers of birds in and above this reserve will reward you too.

Coastal Children Turn In Wave Reviews Of “The Life and Times of Pink Lady”

“Pink Lady” is a real bird – a Western Snowy Plover – who living on MacKerricher State Park beaches in 2005. Her story was put down on paper, illustrated by coastal school children and published in a book that was given back to those children recently by MCAS Save Our Shorebirds volunteers.

The “pink” in her name came from a hot pink band attached to her left leg by scientists who operate a recovery program for the bird, listed as threatened on the federal Endangered Species List. “The Life and Times of Pink Lady” was published by MCAS with a grant from the Cantus Fund and private donors of the Community Foundation of Mendocino County. The mission: Teach children how to protect this tiny bird that is disappearing from our beaches because of habitat loss and human disturbance.



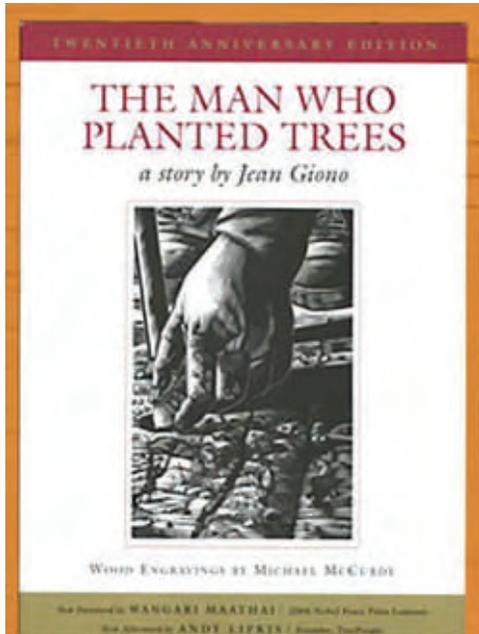
Volunteers visited classrooms, distributed more than 2,300 books to children, teachers and administrators and brought back this report: Children really “get it” when it comes to protecting wildlife. Here are some favorite reviews of the book in their own words:

- Thank you for the books and for coming to our school. I have already grown fond of Pink Lady and her story. I think she is cute. P.S. Send lots of love to Pink Lady if you see her.
- I am sad to hear the Pink Lady is endangered. I am glad you came, because you told us about the birds.
- Thank you for the bird book. I want to go to the Monuray Baye Uqwereeum (*editor's note – Pink Lady was raised by a team of scientists led by Christina J. Slager at Monterey Bay Aquarium after the bird's mother was killed by a Red-tailed Hawk*).
- Thank you for giving the books. You're amazing. I like nature, do you? I like reptile and amphibians. Do you?
- Thank you for coming and reading the Pink Lady with us. I really liked the picture of the baby plovers in the nest. I really like birds and animals.
- I love the book. My favorite part in the book is when she gets a little famous. One time I caught a crow. He was very soft. When I grow up I want to be a rancher. Do plovers really like shrimp?
- Thank you for the book. It was amazing. I like the Audubon Society. It is cool and good to do those things. So I like birds too. Me and my sister watch birds. When I'm old, I'm going to be an archeologist and discover birds, very old birds, dinosaur birds. It is my favorite thing to do.

MCAS Save Our Shorebirds is an ongoing citizen science research project in partnership with State Parks, College of the Redwoods and FLOCKworks. To participate in shorebird surveys or education outreach about shorebird protection, contact State Parks Environmental Scientist Angela Liebenberg at ALIEBENBERG@parks.ca.gov

THE MAN WHO PLANTED TREES by Jean Giono

Reviewed by Joleen and Autumn Ossello



This classic short story about one man's selflessness can be shared aloud with family during this holiday season. Joleen enjoyed the feeling of guided imagery as Michael McCurdy's intricate wood carvings illustrate the landscape. Autumn dislikes the traveler because he smokes a pipe and is in the military, however, she likes Elzéard Bouffier because he plants trees and cares about life.

The Man Who Planted Trees takes place in a small town located in Alpes-de-Haute Provence in Southeastern France during the early 1900's. There are two main characters; a young traveler and an older solitary man by the name of Elzéard Bouffier. When the young traveler arrives, he describes the landscape as barren and desert like with rolling hills, strong winds, and fields of lavender. Villages are few and far between with dilapidated houses that have been deserted due to

unlivable conditions.

The young traveler meets Elzéard Bouffier during one of his solitary journeys and immediately takes interest in his lifestyle. When Elzéard Bouffier shares his idea to plant a tree every day, the young traveler is clearly inspired. He wonders how someone could dedicate their life to this one cause.

"In spite of my youth, leading a solitary life, I understood how to deal gently with solitary spirits. But my very youth forced me to consider the future in relation to myself and to a certain quest for happiness. I told him [Elzéard] that in thirty years, his ten thousand oaks would be magnificent."

Elzéard Bouffier answered that if God granted him life, in thirty years he would have planted so many more, that these ten thousand would be like a drop of water in the ocean. The story continues through years of hardship for the people of Southeastern France. Unaffected by the chaos around him, Elzéard Bouffier successfully plants trees everyday throughout two world wars.

After spending several days with the old man, the traveler left for war. Years later, with the wars over, the traveler set out on a mission to breathe fresh air in the mountains and finds that he had all but forgotten about the old man's cause. At this point in the story you find out why the traveler then refers to Elzéard Bouffier as "One of God's Athlete's".

Author, Jean Giono (1895-1970), the only son of a cobbler and a laundress, was one of France's greatest writers and won the Prix de Monaco, for the most outstanding collected work by a French writer.

PURPLE MARTIN

Joleen Ossello



Large numbers of gourds arranged neatly in rows on what looked like huge television antennas amazed me in my Midwestern youth. Driving through southern Indiana as a child, I noticed a plethora of configurations. The artistry impressed me so, I gave little thought to their purpose. It seemed to me these creations came from a culture different from my own. Unbeknownst to me, these were single housing units, dedicated to returning families of the largest swallow species, the Purple Martin: order Passeriformes, family Hirudinidae and genus, species and local sub-

species *Progne subis arboricola*.

Notable for their dark blue-black sheen, and close proximity to human habitation, Purple Martins feed largely on flying insects. Martins spend their non-breeding season in the Amazon Basin, Brazil and migrate to North America to nest. Their adult plumage takes two years to develop, making it difficult to sex juveniles. These swallows are secondary cavity nesters. Traditionally, they nested in their natural sites: abandoned woodpecker cavities, lava tubes, and cliff faces. Today, the percentage using nest boxes west of the Rockies is: British Columbia - 100%, Washington 95%, Oregon 50%, California 1%. About 15% of the California population use bridges to support their nests. East of the Rockies they are almost entirely dependent upon human-supplied housing such as gourds and compartmented metal houses. Other nesting sites include pilings along rivers and road bridges.

The female lays two to seven pure white eggs at a rate of one egg per day. She incubates the clutch for approximately fifteen days. Parents both feed young for a period of 26-32 days until fledging. Once they have bred successfully, individuals will return year after year to that location. They may abandon the site if the housing is drastically altered or disappears.

In the Pacific Northwest, bird enthusiasts and biologists share their eastern counterparts concern for the destruction of native habitat for Purple Martins, forcing them to utilize man-made structures. They are vulnerable to starvation during extended periods of cool, rainy and windy weather that reduces or eliminates insect flight.

In 1978, the California Department of Fish and Game designated the Purple Martin as a Species of Special Concern, due in part to the increase of the European Starling. Here in Mendocino County, martin populations are still among the healthiest in the state, presumably due to abundant nesting sites and low starling numbers (limited by the amount of open foraging habitat). Here, martins use snags extensively for nesting. They also nest in weep holes in bridges, which protects them from both European Starling competition and predators. "Weep holes" are the small, round openings on the underside of "box-grinder" bridges that allow for airflow. Open

PURPLE MARTIN

continued

locations give bridges the environment needed by martins to catch flying prey. Local conservationists have recently made it a priority to monitor these bridge construction sites, working with Caltrans to track population size and retain existing habitat during construction phases.

Dan Airola, a Sacramento volunteer, spearheads a pilot study from the inland valleys to the coast. Dan says "In Sacramento, our efforts have become ever more urgent. The city's nesting population has declined by over 60% within the last 6 years to a mere 68 pairs. Stabilizing and increasing this remnant population is a high conservation priority, since it is the seed stock for any future recovery in the Central Valley." There is new evidence western martins will use gourds and clusters of single-unit boxes for nesting.

Chapter member and education volunteer Sarah Grimes helped locally by monitoring nesting Purple Martins at eight survey sites in Mendocino County, from Juan Creek north of Westport to Greenwood Creek south of Elk. The survey revisited sites that were known to be occupied in the 1990s, to determine if martins were still nesting. According to Dan Airola, 4 of these 6 sites occupied during the 1990s remained active in 2009 and supported 52 nesting pairs. Of particular interest was the presence of substantial nesting populations at the Juan Creek and Ten Mile Creek bridges, despite recent construction activities, and colonization of the new bridge over Noyo Harbor. Mendocino County is still an area with a substantial martin population.

Sarah and Dan initiated a nest box program for martins at several Mendocino County sites, including Navarro Vineyards in Anderson Valley and Elk Cove Inn. Specially designed nest boxes at nearby Shelter Cove in Humboldt County have attracted at least 10 new nesting pairs.

Local birders could provide more extensive and recent information on martin nesting populations in forested areas. MCAS encourages backyard birding and habitat provision. If you enjoy being a wild bird landlord and feel inspired to create your own habitat, additional information on local research and the local nest box program can be found by contacting the following links.

Sarah Grimes (zewa@mcn.org) or Dan Airola (d.airola@sbcglobal.net).

<http://purplemartin.org/>

<http://www.sacramentoaudubon.org/birdquestions/localbirdsinfo.html>

<http://www.purple-martin.org/WesternMartins/Reprint%202003%20PUMA%20article.pdf>

<http://www.saveourmartins.org/index.html>



BIRD FEEDERS UNITE FOR THE COUNT **Henri Bensussen**

On January 2nd, Mendocino Coast Audubon will hold a Christmas Bird Count. The count circle extends from Little Valley Rd. north of Fort Bragg to just south of Brewery Gulch Inn in Mendocino and 11 miles inland. We are looking for birders with backyard birdfeeders to participate: people who use binoculars and bird guides and who have a working knowledge of the birds at their feeders. Feeders, a great data resource for these counts, attract many different birds and help them survive the winter season. Contact us at gardnrz2@mcn.org or call Henri Bensussen at 964-8844 for more information.

Participants will be given instructions on how to count their birds. These numbers will complement those made by others who will be walking trails within the circle and scoping the ocean. It has been at least 40 years since this area last held a Christmas count. Last year there were a total of 2,160 Christmas Bird Counts with 382 in Canada, 1,671 from the United States and 107 from Latin America, the Caribbean, Bermuda and the Pacific Islands.

This will be the 111th year for the Audubon Christmas Bird Counts. Because of this long term commitment many wildlife scientists, state, and federal wildlife agencies use data from the counts to track the ups and downs of bird populations. Our count will help us learn how birds are faring in this time of climate change, locally and along the west

[Black-headed Grosbeak photo Donald Shephard](#)



BIRD SIGHTINGS

November 29 At Little River Headlands, one Wandering Tattler. At the mouth of the Navarro River with the Buffleheads there were at least 25 Common Goldeneye. Ron LeValley

November 28 Two pair of Harlequin Ducks, Dunlin, Whimbrel, American Pipit, Mew Gulls, Lincoln's Sparrow at Virgin Creek beach. Many Pacific Loon streamed by fairly close to shore heading south. Karen Havlena

November 26 Big River Estuary, three Virginia Rails, a Slate-colored Junco and a Swamp Sparrow in the marsh south of the road at about milepost 2.5. Ron LeValley

November 23 Four White-throated Sparrows at Little River. Richard Hubacek

November 22 "Al", the Laysan Albatross returned to Point Arena Cove. Robert Keiffer

November 22 "Wes", the Western Gull, at Van Damme Beach. Farallon banders tagged 0134 in 1989. Rick Harris found it on November 6th of this year. Richard Hubacek

November 21 A Rock Sandpiper south of Laguna Point in MacKerricher SP. Dorothy Tobkin

November 19 A female Summer Tanager end of north Harold Street, Fort Bragg. David Jensen

**Mendocino Coast Audubon Society
Presents**

Family Bird Walk Series

December 18, 2010

Saturday 9:00 a.m.

Stanford Inn Gardens



Spotted Towhee photo courtesy of Matt Coleman

Meet Sarah Grimes &
Sue Magoo Coulter
at the Garden Gazebo
RAIN OR SHINE

We will share bird stories,
explore the various bird habitats
throughout the gardens, work on our
bird lists and make our own pinecone birdfeeders to
take home.

Please R.S.V.P. to: Sarah at
zewa@mcn.org or 937-4322
Thank you Jeff, Joan and Dana

BIRD WALKS AND FIELD TRIPS

December 12 Sunday Field Trip: 9:00 am,
Point Arena and Manchester. Note: this is
a Sunday walk.

Meet at Hwy 1 and Miner Hole Road, Mile
Post 17.54

December 15 Bird Walk: 8:00 am,
Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens

December 30 Manchester Christmas Bird
Count. Call 964-8163 to participate.

January 1 Beginners' Bird Walk: 9:00 a.m.,
Mendocino Botanical Gardens.

January 2 Christmas Bird Count in Fort
Bragg: Call 937-4050 or 964-6216 to sign up
or for more information.

January 8 Field Trip: 9:00 am, Ten Mile
River and Beach. Meet at south end of Ten
Mile Bridge.

January 17 Chapter Meeting: 7:00 pm,
'Travel Australia', Speaker: Roger Foote



Ferruginous Hawk photo Ron LeValley

www.LeValleyphoto.com

MCAS BOARD MEMBERS AND PROGRAM CHAIRS 2010-2011

President	David Jensen	964-8163	djensen@mcn.org
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Treasurer	Judy Steele	937-2216	judys@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

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FORT BRAGG, CA, 95437

