

# The Black Oystercatcher

Photo by Ron LeValley

Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Newsletter  
December 2015 & January-February 2016



Dave Jensen

*President's Corner*

## SOMETHING FOR EVERYBODY ON CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

Every year we save the best for last – the Christmas Bird Counts. For me, they are the highlight of the entire holiday season. As a child, I had no trouble falling asleep on Christmas Eve, but now I find it hard to sleep the night before a count. And one is never enough. Like many of my fellow birders, I will attend all three Mendocino

counts again this year: Ukiah, Fort Bragg and Manchester.

Like all bird walks, a Christmas count is a treasure hunt. On a good day you find something really special; on a bad day you have a great time. Some of my best birding memories are from count days: ducks and geese in the afternoon sun on Suisun Bay, woodpeckers in the snow on Mount Hamilton, owls calling in the dark, a bobcat hunting ground squirrels in Manchester, one particularly stormy afternoon when the Garcia River kept rising over the highway while we watched. How well do you remember what you did last Saturday? If you join us on either of our coastal counts, I promise it will be a memorable day.

You do not need to be a master birder to join the counts. Everyone has a chance to be a productive team member. Each team will have at least one experienced birder who can identify the difficult species. That said, nobody can identify them all. Ironically, that's a big part of why we keep coming back. If you are a beginning birder, you

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*Thank You,  
Marybeth*  
*We learned at press time that our colleague, Marybeth Arago will be leaving the MCAS board. Thank you, Marybeth, for serving two terms as our membership chair. Due to your efforts, we are a stronger, smarter organization.*

## President's Corner *Continued*

Dave Jensen

may want to count in the territory that includes your home or your favorite local birding spot in order to become more familiar with the species you regularly see. If you are an experienced birder, you already know that you still have a lot to learn by being in the field. If you want a refresher, visit our MCAS website to view Ron LeValley's slide shows of local birds. Checklists from past CBCs also are on the site.

One of the reasons I love Christmas counts is that they are great social events. There is a strong feeling of camaraderie throughout count day from the time you get out of the car, sip on a hot cup of coffee and meet your teammates in the dim light of a winter morning, until the end of the compilation dinner when the last rare bird sighting is revealed. You sense that you are sharing a special experience not only with the persons in your team, but also with the others in your count circle and beyond. On that day, in the same hour, there are thousands of like-minded folk walking through woods and grasslands and city parks all over North America looking for birds and tabulating what they find.

Participating in a Christmas Bird Count is also a meaningful way to contribute to our knowledge of the natural world. This is the longest running citizen-science bird study in the nation. Professional scientists and environmental policy makers recognize the value of Audubon's annual CBC observations collected over a span of decades. As just one example, the Manchester Circle results document how the number of Tundra Swans in the Garcia River valley has decreased dramatically since 1977. On a larger scale, CBC results clearly show the gradual but undeniable effects of climate change on populations of wintering birds across the continent.

If you want to burn some holiday calories, grab your hat and coat and come along. Although most territories are surveyed via short walks from multiple starting points, both local counts also have territories that involve longer hikes. Those of us with limited mobility can join a team that counts from a vehicle. If you are unable to leave your house, you can still participate by keeping a feeder list. Just count the birds in your backyard and give the results to Sarah Grimes.

The Christmas counts are more than just another bird walk. Each one provides a unique opportunity to get outside, be active, learn, make friends, and contribute to the common good – but mostly to have fun. So come join us. And if you have trouble sleeping the night before, know that you'll sleep like a rock when it's over.

**PLEASE JOIN US  
ON OUR ANNUAL MCAS  
CHRISTMAS  
BIRD COUNTS**

**CONTACT LEADERS  
TO SIGN UP FOR CBC  
AND TO MAKE YOUR  
RESERVATIONS  
FOR THE POST-COUNT  
DINNERS**

**FORT BRAGG CBC  
SUN., DEC. 27, 2015**

**LEADER:  
TIM BRAY  
(707) 937-4422  
tbray@mcn.org**

**Fort Bragg CBC  
Backyard Feeder  
SUN., DEC. 27, 2015**

**Count  
LEADER:  
Sarah Grimes  
(707) 937-4322  
zewa@mcn.org**

**MANCHESTER CBC  
SAT., JAN. 2, 2016**

**LEADER:  
DAVE JENSEN  
(707) 964-8163  
djensen@mcn.org**

**NEED TO REFRESH YOUR  
I.D. SKILLS?  
VISIT THE MCAS  
WEBSITE [here](#)  
TO VIEW  
RON LEVALLEY'S  
EXCELLENT IMAGES  
OF LOCAL BIRDS  
AND SEE CHECKLISTS  
FROM PREVIOUS  
CBC COUNTS**

## UPCOMING MENDOCINO COAST AUDUBON SOCIETY PROGRAMS



*Northern Spotted Owl – photograph  
by John and Karen Hollingsworth,  
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Region 5*

MIKE STEPHENS PRESENTS

### OWLS!

MONDAY, JANUARY 18, 2016

7 P.M.

CASPAR COMMUNITY CENTER

Mike Stephens started working with Spotted Owls in 1996, and has been employed by the U.S Forest Service, Redwood Sciences Lab, and The National Council for Air and Stream Improvement.

Since 2006, Mike has owned and operated his own business, now called Strix Wildlife Consulting. He moved to the Mendocino Coast in 2000 to undertake a five-year radio-telemetry study tracking Spotted Owls' use of habitat in redwood forests.

He decided to stay on the coast when the project was completed. He currently provides Northern Spotted Owl surveys for landowners throughout the county, including the Conservation Fund, Redwood Forest Foundation, Jackson Demonstration State Forest, and Mendocino Redwood Company.

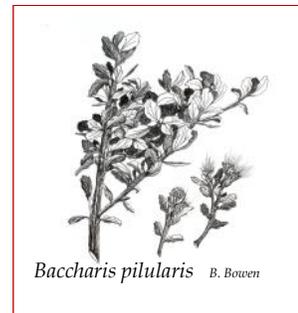
MARIO ABREU PRESENTS

### LANDSCAPING FOR BIRDS AND WILDLIFE

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2016

7 P.M.

CASPAR COMMUNITY CENTER



*Baccharis pilularis* B. Bowen

Please join us at the MCAS February 15, 2016 program. Mario Abreu will give a talk about landscaping for birds and wildlife. Mario is Natural Areas Coordinator/Plant Collections Curator/Gardener at the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens.

He studied plant science at the University of California at Berkeley and currently serves on the board of directors of the Dorothy King Young Chapter of the California Native Plant Society. He is the 2011 recipient of the Matt Coleman Environmental Service Award and is a naturalist and horticulturist who has grown many of the plants available through the local California Native Plant Society.

## BLACK OYSTERCATCHER MONITORING PROGRAM SOARS IN 2015 JOLEEN OSSELLO

In the summer of 2015, bird surveyors (new and returning) successfully recorded the breeding behavior and lifestyle of the Black Oystercatcher, our local “Rock Star” shorebird.

Twenty-one volunteers, two California State Parks environmental resource professionals, and the Mendocino Project Coordinator surveyed weekly from May through September, monitoring breeding pairs along the Mendocino Coast.



*Adult Black Oystercatcher (left) teaches surviving youngster how to feed. Photographed on Mendocino Headlands by Joleen Ossello.*

In its fifth season, the program gained four volunteers, added two new survey areas, and worked with biologist Laurie Harvey, of Sutil Conservation Ecology. Laurie coordinated efforts with Audubon California’s Anna Weinstein, and regional coordinators in five coastal counties. The goal was to streamline data and insure effective fate data (reproductive success) analysis. The initial 2011 statewide population study indicated Mendocino County provided the highest percentage of suitable habitat for the oystercatcher and the highest number of pairs nesting in the state of California. A three-year reproductive success report will be forthcoming. The monitoring project is scheduled to continue through 2017.

The mission of the Black Oystercatcher Monitoring Program is to record baseline data on nest success and fledging success in Mendocino County. Audubon California’s Seabird Program Manager will ultimately use these data to assist United States Fish & Wildlife Service’s range-wide working plan to identify the best conservation practices that will best address threats and reverse declines for the Black Oystercatcher.

Here are highlights of the 2015 reproductive study on the Mendocino Coast:

- 73 territorial pairs were identified and monitored at twelve locations
- 63 pairs laid eggs
- 5 of those pairs re-layed (re-nested) with two successfully fledging young
- A total of 42 chicks fledged
- 39 percent of nesting pairs succeeded in fledging young and sixty-one percent of nesting pairs failed
- MCAS volunteers logged more than 1,000 survey hours
- Approximately 100 public outreach magnets were distributed and contact was made with 350 visitors

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**BLACK OYSTERCATCHER MONITORING PROGRAM** *Continued*

**Joleen Ossello**



*Joleen Ossello, Mendocino County Project Coordinator, and Laurie Harvey, Statewide Scientific Data Coordinator.*

The project's public outreach component, sponsored by the California Coastal National Monument Program, provides Mendocino Coast visitors with "rock star" magnets, a souvenir and reminder that birds matter.

This conservation project is made possible through MCAS chapter volunteers, a chapter grant from Audubon California, California State Parks, and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management's California Coastal National Monument Program. Reports and additional information can be found at [www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org](http://www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org) under the conservation tab.

This project was carried out by the following dedicated volunteers: Dave Jensen, Dan Knowles, Marcia Riwney, Linda Perkins, Bill Heil, Don Shephard, Judy Steele, Louise Mariana, Art Morley, Jean Mann, Ron LeValley, Charlene McAllister, Peggy Martin, Randy Farris, Sonya Popow, Gail Nsentip, Marcy Snyder, Elaine Charkowski, Richard Hambright, David and Jesse Yeomans. Renee Pasquinelli, Terra Fuller and Alison Cebula, of California State Parks Department of Resources, provided professional support with project dynamics and field surveys.



*Attending the Black Oystercatcher Monitoring 2015 End of Season Workshop: Standing: Joleen Ossello, Jean Mann, Dan Knowles, Marcia Riwney, Don Shephard, Laurie Harvey, Peggy Martin, Art Morley, Charlene McAllister, Ron LeValley. Seated: Gail Nsentip, Sonya Popow, Linda Perkins, and Bill Heil.*

**SAVE OUR SHOREBIRDS**

Becky Bowen



On December 12, SOS surveyors found Sanderlings bathing in a gentle current created when Inglenook Creek waters began to flow into the ocean after weeks of closure. A group of Western Snowy Plovers and Dunlins watched for a few minutes, then took the plunge, too. It was a great way to end the survey year and a good time to look forward to 2016, year ten of MCAS's Save Our Shorebirds program.

Our annual report will be available on the MCAS website in January. Knowledge of local shorebirds increases every year, made possible by volunteers' commitment to wildlife. This year's surveyors were Henri Bensussen, Becky and Winston Bowen, Jeanette and Jim Boyer, Maureen and Tony Eppstein, Karen and Jim Havlena, Bill Heil, Richard Hubacek, Peggy Martin, Elly Montoya, Cindy Moyer, Jose Orellana, Linda Perkins and Dorothy Tobkin. We also thank Renee Pasquinelli, Terra Fuller, Alison Cebula, and Robert Kunicki, and the Rangers of California State Parks.

*Save Our Shorebirds is an ongoing year-round Mendocino Coast Audubon Society citizen science program in partnership with California State Parks. To participate, please contact Angela Liebenberg at [liebenbergs@mcn.org](mailto:liebenbergs@mcn.org) To see more photographs of birds recorded on our surveys, please visit our free exhibit at Fort Bragg's C.V. Starr Community Center or visit us at: [www.facebook.com/SafeOurShorebirds](http://www.facebook.com/SafeOurShorebirds)*

**MCAS EDUCATION'S BIG OCTOBER**

Sarah Grimes

"The Mendocino Spartans," our local 4-H chapter, participated in this year's MCAS Big October Birding Class. Every Saturday in October, the class went birding to a different "hotspot." Each participant was challenged to see, identify and document as many different species as they could.

Angelino was the winner. The prize was a Sibley field guide. He observed 56 birds. All participants observed approximately 50 birds and now are confident in identifying at least 20 of our most common birds.



A few adult birders also participated. Catherine Keegan identified 121 birds and Sarah Grimes identified 99. Please join us next October. You could win a prize or just have fun birding.

## BAND-TAILED PIGEON

Donald Shephard

Born outside London in 1940, and raised in "Peacetime," I find it eludes us. This time of year begs for optimism, for belief in the dove of peace. I find solace only in my immediate surroundings. Beyond them my influence and expectations rapidly dwindle.

The French, who may also have difficulty finding the dove of peace at the moment, call pigeons by the name *pigeon* and doves by *colombe*. The word "dove" comes from the Dutch word *duif*, which also refers to pigeons. The terms "pigeon" and "dove" do not refer to separate taxonomic groupings within the family, although "pigeon" is often used to describe larger species, while "dove" is used for smaller ones.

Had Noah a choice of doves and pigeons to set forth to find evidence of Mount Ararat, he might have chosen a Band-tailed Pigeon for its sturdy size. The biggest columbid in North America, measuring thirteen to sixteen inches and weighing up to eighteen ounces, the Band-tailed Pigeon frequents forests and woodlands of the West. They have two distinct breeding populations in the United States, one along the damp West Coast and one in the dry Southwest.

Spot one of these beautiful birds and you will observe blue-gray upper parts, black-gray flight feathers and a black-gray tail with a broad pale-gray terminal band. Also note a lavender tinge to the gray head and breast, and a narrow white half collar across the upper hind neck with iridescent greenish below. The short bill is soft at the base and hard at the tip. The feet show yellow (good identification marks at sufficiently close range). Juvenile birds have white feather edges above, giving a scaly appearance. The wings produce loud clapping on take-off and during display flights. While walking in the forest you may hear them calling with deep, slow coos.

Named for the bands on their broad square tails, they wander forest edges in restless flocks during winter, moving as food or fancy leads them. Size made them a favorite game bird of Pacific Coast States. This species verged on extinction, but early twentieth century legislative protection came in time and it recovered. Over the last thirty years, they have significantly



Band-tailed Pigeon photo by Joseph V. Higbee

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**DONALD SHEPHARD** *Continued*

decreased in the US and Canada according to the Breeding Bird Survey, partly because of habitat destruction, and partly because they are still legally hunted in some states, including California. According to the North American Breeding Bird Survey, our populations declined 2.7 percent per year between 1966 and 2010 (amounting to a cumulative decline of 70 percent).

In grain fields, Band-tailed Pigeons feed on the ground in rolling flocks, as individuals in the rear fly over their flockmates and land at the front to continue foraging. In forests and orchards, the pigeons may hang upside down to pick acorns, fruit, or buds. They swallow capless acorns whole. A Band-tailed Pigeon stores food in its large crop and grinds it up with the aid of grit in its muscular gizzard. This ability allows the birds to forage briefly in areas where they are at risk from predators, then process the ingested food in a safer location. They spend long periods of time perching in the tops of tall trees between short, concentrated feeding bouts.

They consume berries when available, but otherwise their diet of dry seeds, especially acorns in winter, leads them to drink copiously. All columbids are able to suction water into the esophagus, so they can drink without raising their heads. Other birds must dip their bill into water and raise their head to allow it to run down their throat. Band-tailed Pigeons can drink up to fifteen percent of their body weight each day.

For the first ten days after the young hatch the parents feed them “crop milk” derived from sloughed-off liquid-filled cells that line the crops of adult males and females. Rich in fats and proteins, crop milk meets nestlings’ nutritional needs in the same way that insects and animal protein do for most other bird species. Curiously, flamingos also feed their young a milk-like substance. The Band-tailed Pigeon chick feeds by placing its head inside the adults mouth.

Predators include Peregrine Falcons, Prairie Falcons, Cooper’s Hawks, Sharp-shinned Hawks, Northern Goshawks, and Great Horned Owls. Nest predators include Common Ravens, Western Scrub-Jays, and tree squirrels. A brooding parent may hiss, droop its wings, and bristle its feathers in an attempt to scare away a nest predator, even resorting to striking the intruder with its wings.

Should they survive a predatory attack, they may succumb to a parasite long thought extinct. Scientists recently rediscovered on Band-tailed Pigeons the parasitic louse *Columbicola extinctus*, which they believed had disappeared with the extinction of the Passenger Pigeon. Another major conservation concern is Avian Trichomonosis. During periodic winter die-offs, large numbers of individuals, at times in the thousands, fall victim to this disease, which is caused by the protozoan parasite *Trichomonas gallinae* and the newly described and named *Trichomonas stableri*.

Many of the Band-tailed Pigeons that breed along the northern Pacific coast migrate to central California or farther south in the fall, while many individuals from the Southwest move over the Mexican border. In each of the two breeding populations, southern individuals may stay in one place all year.

Whether you have migrated here or are “local,” I hope you find solace on the coast. If Noah did choose the Band-tailed Pigeon as his dove of peace, that bird’s descendants have led a hunted, harried, and less-than-peaceful life ever since — quite the metaphor.

## CALENDAR, BIRD WALKS, FIELD TRIPS

### December

**Saturday 19** [Ukiah Christmas Bird Count](#)

**Sunday 27** [Fort Bragg Christmas Bird Count](#) There will be a dinner for the participants at the Caspar Community Center. The hall will open around 4PM, dinner (lasagna and salad) will be at 5PM. Please RSVP to Tim Bray (707) 937-4422 [tbray@mcn.org](mailto:tbray@mcn.org) so we have an idea of how much food to prepare. Bring Your Own Beverage.

### January

**Saturday 2** [Manchester Christmas Bird Count](#) Please RSVP to Dave Jensen (707) 964-8163 [djensen@mcn.org](mailto:djensen@mcn.org) so we can plan how much food to prepare and to get directions and time for countdown dinner.

**Saturday 5** **Beginner Bird Walk** [Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens](#) 18220 CA-1, Fort Bragg, CA 9AM **Canceled due to Christmas Bird Count**

**Saturday 9** **Field Trip** [Ten Mile River and beach](#) 9AM-Noon, meet at parking area at south end of bridge. Leader: Dave Jensen

**15-18** [Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival](#)



**Monday 18** **Meeting** [Caspar Community Center](#) 15051 Caspar Rd, Caspar, CA, 7 PM  
Speaker: Mike Stephens, Strix Wildlife Consulting. Topic: Owls

**Wednesday 20** **Bird Walk** [Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens](#) 18220 CA-1, Fort Bragg, CA 8:30AM-Noon\* Leader: Tim Bray

**Sunday 24** **Coastal Trail Bird Walk - Coastal Trail** 10AM-Noon, meet near rest room at east end of parking lot at foot of Elm Street, Fort Bragg. Bring water, wear comfortable walking shoes, binoculars available, heavy rain cancels. Leader: Dave Jensen

### February

**Saturday 6** **Beginner Bird Walk** [Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens](#) 18220 CA-1, Fort Bragg, CA 9AM-Noon\* Leader: David Jensen

**Saturday 13** **Field Trip** Owling – Please let Tim Bray (707) 937-4422 [tbray@mcn.org](mailto:tbray@mcn.org) know if you are coming, and he will provide time, meeting place and other details. He will also contact you if the field trip is cancelled due to rain or rescheduled.

**Monday 15** **Meeting** [Caspar Community Center](#) 15051 Caspar Rd, Caspar, CA, 7PM  
Speaker: Mario Abreu, Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens. Topic: Landscaping for Birds and Wildlife

**Wednesday 17** **Bird Walk** [Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens](#) 18220 CA-1, Fort Bragg, CA 8:30AM-Noon\* Leader: Tim Bray

**Thursday 18** **MCAS Board of Directors Meeting Tentative** – Contact Dave Jensen for time, place

**19-21** [San Francisco Bay Flyway Festival](#) Mare Island/Vallejo

**Sunday 28** **Coastal Trail Bird Walk - Coastal Trail** 10AM-Noon, meet near rest room at east end of parking lot at foot of Elm Street, Fort Bragg. Bring water, wear comfortable walking shoes, binoculars available, heavy rain cancels. Leader: Dave Jensen

*\*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**

President	David Jensen	964-8163	djensen@mcn.org
VP, Field Trips	Tim Bray	937-4422	tbray@mcn.org
Secretary	Diane Rubin	(413) 658-7105	dianerubin12@gmail.com
Treasurer	Jim Havlena	964-1280	havlenas@fix.net
SOS, Conservation	Angela Liebenberg	962-9267	liebenbergs@mcn.org
Webmaster	Catherine Keegan	937-4422	keegan@mcn.org
Education	Sarah Grimes	937-0903	zewa@mcn.org
At-large	Terra Fuller		fullerterra@hotmail.com

Off-board Chairs:			
Programs, Membership	Charlene McAllister	937-4463	charmac@mcn.org
Newsletter	Becky Bowen	962-1602	casparbeck@comcast.net

Mendocino Coast Audubon Society e-mail address: [audubon@mcn.org](mailto:audubon@mcn.org)

**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

