



The Black Oystercatcher

Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Newsletter- April 2021

LISA ANDREANO PRESENTS:

**SEABIRD MONITORING AT CAPE PEIRCE, USFWS
TOGIAK NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE, ALASKA**



MONDAY, APRIL 19 AT 7:00 P.M.

VIA ZOOM LINK ON OUR WEBSITE:

WWW.MENDOCINOCOASTAUDUBON.ORG

Join us for a presentation by Lisa Andreano that will discuss population and reproduction trends for pelagic cormorants, common murre and other species along Alaska's wild and scenic landscape.

Lisa graduated from CalPoly SLO with a Bachelor's degree in Ecology and Systematic Biology and is now working towards her Master's in Biological Sciences. She currently works for California State Parks as an Environmental Scientist where her duties include conducting Biological Resource Inventories, Forest management, Prescribed and Wildland Fire Management and Wetland restoration, and monitoring of various sensitive species. Lisa is also an adjunct professor at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo for Natural Resource Management Departments where she teaches Dendrology and Fire Ecology. She has worked for USFWS Migratory Bird Management and the USFWS Refuge system conducting seabird population and productivity monitoring in various remote Alaskan locations. Lisa.Andreano@parks.ca.gov

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Snowy Plover nesting season is here. Nests are built on dry sand. If you visit Ten Mile, Virgin Creek or posted beaches in Manchester State Preserve (no-dog areas) please walk on pounded wet sand. Help the birds by giving them at least 100 feet of wildlife social distance.

SPRING

Tim Bray

The days are now longer than the nights, the wind is blowing, trees are budding out, and the Orange-crowned Warblers have begun singing. It's Spring and the birds are on the move. Have you seen Fox Sparrows in your yard lately? It's always more difficult to notice the last bird to leave than the first to arrive. Try to keep track of the winter migrants and see if you can pin down the days when they depart for the breeding grounds: Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Golden-crowned and Fox Sparrows, Pine Siskin, California Gull.

Easier and arguably more fun, keep a close watch and note the days when you see the first arrivals of the summer breeders: Pacific-slope and Olive-sided Flycatchers, Orange-crowned and Wilson's Warblers, Swainson's Thrush, Warbling Vireo, and the Swallows (Barn, Cliff, and Violet-green). If you haven't already been doing so, try going outside first thing in the morning and listening to the chorus. You may notice daily changes in the songs you hear, as resident birds begin singing and are joined by arriving migrants. Recently, we have been treated to the sound made by large skeins of Aleutian Cackling Geese migrating north high overhead.

You may already have noticed the early returning Ospreys. They immediately went to their nests and some are already laying eggs. The males will soon be seen flying back and forth, bringing food to the females who remain on the nests incubating. Some of them will now have to contend with Bald Eagles that often try to rob them of their fish - a difficulty they have not faced here for decades.

Out on the ocean there is a great deal of movement as well. Pigeon Guillemots began arriving in March, and I heard the first report of Brown Pelicans just a few days ago. April is the best month to see Caspian Terns as they move north, especially on windy days when they are sometimes blown over land. The ubiquitous Western Gulls have already staked out their nesting territories.

It's a challenging time for the birds. They are expending a great deal of energy in migration, finding mates, and building nests, all in addition to the constant search for food. Give them some thought as you plan your yard work. Leave dead and dying trees standing if you can, and prune off as little as possible to keep yourself safe. If you have a corner of your yard where you can leave a pile of prunings or other vegetative matter, it might be used by Wilson's Warbler or Spotted Towhee as a nest site. Pruning, hedge-trimming, and tree work should be done before mid-April or after June if possible, to avoid disturbing or destroying active nests.



*Song Sparrow Nest, Pelican Bluffs 2017
photo by Megan Smithyman*

If you have nest-boxes out already, make sure they are clean and ready for a new season. If not, you probably still have a few days to get them into position. Chestnut-backed Chickadees and Western Bluebirds will soon begin nest construction, and Violet-green Swallows won't be too far behind.

It's an exciting time for us birders, with all this migratory and breeding activity going on, and the prospect of restarting our social activities as more and more of us get vaccinated against COVID-19. We probably won't get field trips going just yet, but that day is getting closer. Hang in there and stay safe, we will see you soon.

SAVE OUR SHOREBIRDS

Becky Bowen



Wandering Tattler July 27, 2019 SOS Lighthouse Loop



Black Turnstone April 22, 2013 SOS Glass Beach Loop



Western Sandpiper June 30, 2014 SOS Virgin Creek Loop

GET READY, GET SET: THE RACE IS ON, AND OFF, AND ON AGAIN

Spring shorebird migration gears up in April and May on local beaches. By June 1, the number of migrating shorebirds we see here drops significantly. That's because almost all of them are done with spring migration and have arrived in the Arctic where they have the month of June to breed, incubate, and see their chicks hatch. Then in July, it's time to get back in the air and head south. So spring migration ends in June and fall migration begins in July.

This table shows monthly numbers of total sightings of watchlisted shorebirds from 2007-2019 in MacKerricher State Park.

Month	Total Sightings
Jan.	14,722
Feb.	12,368
Mar.	7,661
Apr.	9,188
May	7,999
June	529
July	42,866
Aug.	39,134
Sept.	22,975
Oct.	14,601
Nov.	14,242
Dec.	18,452
Total	204,737

Watchlisted shorebirds are birds in serious decline primarily because of human disturbance and habitat loss. Watchlisted species we see here include Long-billed Curlew, Marbled Godwit, Surfbird, and Sanderling. Less frequently-seen watchlisted shorebirds include American Golden-Plover, Rock Sandpiper, and Semipalmated Sandpiper. Western Snowy Plovers are watchlisted and classified as threatened on the Endangered Species List. They are year-round residents. Also on the watchlist are the three shorebird species shown at left that were photographed during either spring or fall migration at MacKerricher State Park. They are either getting into or getting out of breeding plumage. From top: Wandering Tattler, Black Turnstone, and Western Sandpiper.

Save Our Shorebirds is a year-round long term MCAS conservation program in cooperation with CA State Parks. To learn more, please visit us at: www.facebook.com/SaveOurShorebirds

BIRD FEEDING: GOOD OR BAD?**Tim Bray**

Many of us maintain bird feeders in our yards and enjoy the many songbirds attracted by seed and suet. Sparrows, Finches, and Jays are probably the commonest feeder birds, but in our region Chickadees, Nuthatches, Woodpeckers, and even Band-tailed Pigeons regularly visit feeders. It's fun to watch the amusing antics of all these birds as they compete for the resources that our feeders provide. But is it good for the birds?

In the March issue of the *Black Oystercatcher* we described the irruption of Pine Siskins and the consequent outbreak of Salmonellosis to which this species is particularly susceptible. This highlighted the risk of disease transmission when birds congregate at feeders. The risk can be mitigated by rigorous attention to sanitation, or by periodically taking the feeders down to force the birds to disperse. We still have a few Siskins here as I write this, but the large flocks seem to have dispersed and soon they will migrate back to their breeding territories. So it should be safe to put your feeders back up, but you still need to be careful about sanitation and watch for any sign of disease.

If you have House Finches coming to your feeders, watch them closely for signs of House Finch Eye Disease (Mycoplasmal conjunctivitis). Common symptoms include red, swollen, runny, or crusty eyes; scratching at their eyes, or just sitting quietly by themselves, often puffed up as if cold. This is a "zoonotic" disease that jumped from domestic chickens and turkeys to House Finches in the eastern US in the early 1990s. It spread rapidly, perhaps in part as a result of low genetic diversity in the eastern House Finch population. (All House Finches east of the Rocky Mountains were descended from approximately 50 individuals that survived release in New York City in the 1940s.) In the early 2000s it reached the West Coast and then spread south, and is now more or less endemic throughout the country. The birds are



Cooper's Hawk by Jim Culp

developing resistance, though the bacterium is also becoming more virulent. It occasionally infects other finch species as well. If you notice any signs of this disease among birds in your yard, take down your feeders and leave them down for at least a few days, so the birds will disperse. Social distancing flattens the curve.

Congregations of songbirds around feeders also often draw attention from raptors, particularly Cooper's and Sharp-shinned Hawks, which learn to hunt around houses and yards where feeders are present. The songbirds also quickly learn to watch for the raptors and employ group protective strategies. Although seeing predation can be disturbing to some people, it is a natural phenomenon. The hawks are essentially doing the same thing as the songbirds: making use of a convenient food source.

If done carefully, feeding songbirds in your yard has more benefits than drawbacks. Make sure you are feeding them proper bird food, such as wild-bird seed, sunflower seed, Nyjer, suet, mealworms, or other natural foods. Bread is not appropriate food for any wild birds. Keep the feeders clean and if possible, clean the area under and around them as well. Watch the birds closely - that's the fun part!

What about feeding birds away from your home? This is nearly always a bad idea. The attraction is understandable, but it creates real problems. Feeding in parks or other public places often creates abnormally large congregations of birds, much larger than backyard feeders will attract, with consequently large risk of disease transmission and behavioral change. Since you are only there briefly to feed them, you may not see the problems as they arise, as you might in your own yard. And once people start feeding birds in public, others join them, compounding the problems. We have this problem right now at several places on the coast where people are feeding Common Ravens, with adverse consequences for the Black Oystercatchers nesting nearby. MCAS is working with the City of Fort Bragg on a program of public education to address this situation.

GETTING TO KNOW OUR NEW MCAS CONSERVATION CHAIR

Note from B. Bowen--There was a moment during a long-term service as an MCAS Board member when I thought, "it's time to pass the torch." So the torch is passed. I'm delighted to introduce you to Shannon Underhill, who has agreed to serve as our next Conservation Chair. I met Shannon in the spring of 2018 when he volunteered to serve as a Save Our Shorebirds surveyor. It's been a pleasure to volunteer with him and get to know him better.

Shannon Underhill is a general contractor on the Mendocino coast. He was born in Oklahoma, completed his high school education at the Oklahoma School of Science and Mathematics, and proceeded to obtain a Bachelor's in Liberal Arts from Evergreen State College. He focused on the psychosocial history of pre-20 th century capitalism beginning with the early Modern period and into the centuries of colonialism. This fascinating, but hard-to-sell, bit of scholarship leads to only one place: becoming a general contractor. As such, Shannon has been a general contractor for the last 15 years both here on the coast and in Boston, specializing in remodeling and complicated projects.



Still unaware of his inevitable fate to join other Liberal Arts majors in the building trades, Shannon spent many years in the international non-profit sector. He worked as a consultant in Mozambique for a year, rewriting human resources policies for international non-profits into policies that followed Mozambiquan labor law. He managed the grants department for a small international non-profit called World Neighbors where he wrote proposals and reports for grants totaling \$2 - 4 million dollars per year. His patient colleagues around the world taught him another Bachelor's degree worth of information. Consequently, Shannon became well-versed in and wrote extensively about wide ranging topics including sustainable agriculture, capacity building, gender equity, reproductive and community health, and community based natural resources management.

Shannon also ran the Employment Program for a refugee resettlement agency in Chicago. Whether a doctor from Azerbaijan, a rural farmer from Liberia, or a young woman that was born and raised in the refugee camps of Kenya—Shannon was tasked with locating a job for them before their six months of benefits ran dry. He built relationships with hundreds of employers, introducing the story of refugees fleeing war and persecution to human resource managers and business owners. With the remaining hours of his workday, Shannon attempted to explain the absolute strangeness of the American employment system to refugees from around the world.

When not working, Shannon is often seen walking two aging Labradors with his amazing wife, Linda Jo Stern. His wide-ranging interests include birding, backpacking, and building furniture, and is constantly scheming to find more time to indulge in all of them.

SHARE THE BEACH DOCENT PROGRAM ANNOUNCEMENT



Do you love parks? Do you enjoy meeting people and sharing information about birds, plants, wildlife, and our beautiful and unique coastal areas? If so, please consider joining State Parks as a Volunteer for the new Share the Beach docent program.

Learn about our coastal habitats and marine environment. Share your knowledge and enthusiasm with park visitors. Help State Parks protect our wonderful natural heritage. As a bonus, earn a State Park pass!

Training will take place in early May with an online session, followed by educational field visits in an outdoor setting. Volunteer opportunities are available throughout the summer at both MacKerricher State Park and Manchester State Park.

For more information, please contact our Natural Resources staff:

Alison Cebula (707) 937-9176 Alison.Cebula@parks.ca.gov

2021 MCAS BOARD NOMINATIONS REPORT

The bylaws of the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society state that officers and members of the board of directors be elected by a voice vote of the membership at an annual business meeting in May. Currently there is one vacancy on the board and the committee has nominated Shannon Underhill to replace Becky Bowen as Conservation Chair. Mr. Underhill has agreed to serve, the board has approved his appointment, and his nomination will be put to vote by a vote of our membership at the next scheduled program meeting when we can assemble.

Members of the Nominating Committee are Becky Bowen (chair), Jeanette Boyer, Charlene McAllister, and Angela Liebenberg.

CALENDAR

Although the strict Shelter-In-Place order has been relaxed to allow some group activities, the risk of contracting COVID-19 remains high and we remain extremely cautious. The Early Bird walks are continuing with restrictions. Our monthly Chapter meetings and presentations will be conducted remotely via Zoom. We will notify you of any changes via e-mail, our Facebook page and our website.

APRIL 2021

Wednesday 14 - Audubon Society Board Meeting 6:00 p.m. via Zoom

Are being conducted remotely on Zoom. Contact Tim Bray for more information.

Monday 19 - Seabirds in Alaska 7:00 p.m. Join us via Zoom (see page 1)

Link is posted at www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org

Wednesday 21 - Early Bird Walk 8:00 a.m. - Noon**

Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens, 18220 Highway 1, Fort Bragg, CA 95437

MAY 2021

Monday 17 - Saw-whet Owls 7:00 p.m. via Zoom

Wednesday 19 - Early Bird Walk 8:00 a.m. - Noon**

Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens, 18220 Highway 1, Fort Bragg, CA 95437

****Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens (18220 Highway 1, Fort Bragg, CA)**

The following safety precautions will be required::

- Leave 6 feet of space between you and others not in your party. If passing another visitor on a trail, please announce yourself and provide space for fellow guests to pass.
- All visitors must wear face masks that cover the nose and mouth in accordance with the Mendocino County Health Order at all times to protect yourself, other guests, and our staff.
- Bring your own water and binoculars.

For complete and current calendar, updates, and useful links, visit:

www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org

www.facebook.com/mendocinocoastaudubon

MCAS BOARD MEMBERS AND PROGRAM CHAIRS 2018-2019

President	Tim Bray	tbray@mcn.org	(707) 734-0791
Vice President, Field Trips	David Jensen	djensen@mcn.org	(707) 964-8163
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Newsletter Editor	Megan Smithyman	mesmithy@gmail.com	

Mendocino Coast Audubon Society e-mail address: 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

