



The Black Oystercatcher

Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Newsletter- February 2021

CAROLINE BRADY PRESENTS:

MANAGING BREEDING WATERFOWL ON A LANDSCAPE DOMINATED BY AGRICULTURE



MONDAY, FEBRUARY 22 AT 7:00 P.M.
VIA ZOOM

During this presentation you'll learn about some of the challenges that California's locally breeding mallards face, as well as some of the novel approaches being used to help recover the declining population.

Caroline hails from New York, but has been working for CWA (California Waterfowl Association) since 2011 as the Waterfowl Programs Supervisor. Although she has conducted field work in every flyway, the Pacific is her favorite because it has such a wide variety of species, habitats, and conservation issues. California is of particular interest because while millions of birds fuel up and spend much of the fall and winter here, the state is unique in that it also hosts sizeable breeding population

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Western bluebird feeding young.
Photograph by Catherine Keegan

Are your nest boxes ready for Spring? See page 3.

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of locally breeding species; mallards, gadwall, cinnamon teal, wood duck. Much of the field work conducted by CWA is to evaluate conservation actions and support the hunting regulation process by providing pertinent population data; thus much of the work Caroline and her crew does involves capturing and banding birds throughout the late winter through to the fall. In her down time, she likes to explore other regions of the Flyway, using working vacations to assist colleagues at the Alaska Department of Fish & Game with various waterfowl projects.

ZOOM MEETINGS: HOW TO CONNECT

To join our Zoom Meeting via desktop, laptop, tablet, or smart phone:

At 6:45 PM, go to the [MCAS website](#) and click the zoom link.

Meeting ID: 838 3391 1815 **Passcode:** 110982

Want to see past meetings or brush up on your birding skills? Check out our helpful videos on the [MCAS YouTube Channel](#).

ALEUTIAN CACKLING GEESE

by Doug Forsell

On Tuesday February 2nd I just saw my first 2 flocks of Aleutian Cackling Geese flying North just south of Point Arena. I think of them as the first spring migrants although they're actually just kind of moving their wintering area a bit north. They usually spend three to four months in the middle Central Valley then in late January to early March they move to the Castle Rock area north of Crescent City and the Southern Oregon area to spend another couple months feeding on coastal grasses. Then they head back to their breeding grounds in April and early May.



*Neck-collared Aleutian Cackling Goose.
Photograph by Dave Irons*

Along with Bald Eagles they are one of the most successful stories of the endangered species program using and often pioneering techniques of color banding, predator removal, captive breeding, transplanting, habitat protection, mitochondrial DNA analysis, and restricting hunting of all Canada Geese for several years in in California's Central Valley. Their populations have increased from about 350 birds in the early 1970's to over 170,000 birds today!

PREPARE FOR SPRING

Tim Bray

As I write, we are finally getting our first true winter storms, with high winds, drenching rains, and even snow on the high ground. It may seem odd to be thinking about Spring and preparing for the inrush of breeding birds, but now is the time to be preparing so they have the best chances of success. Do you have nest-boxes for Bluebirds, Chickadees, or Swallows? Now is the time to clean them out and make sure they are ready for use. If you don't, now is the time to make or obtain some and get them installed so they are in place and ready when the birds are. It's remarkable how quickly and enthusiastically these birds will occupy artificial nest cavities. In part, that is because there is a critical shortage of the natural cavities, and that leads me to my next point.

This is also the best time to look at your yard or property from a bird's perspective. Where could a bird nest? Dense brush or weedy tangles may be eyesores to us, but they look inviting to Song Sparrows and Wilson's Warblers. Dead branches, or standing dead trees, are vital for Pygmy Nuthatches, several kinds of Woodpeckers, and a wide range of other birds that nest in cavities. Standing dead trees ("snags") have been so thoroughly removed from the landscape in many developed areas that these cavity-nesting birds are reliant on artificial cavities for nesting. Even here, where there are still several patches of "snag forest" with abundant old woodpecker cavities available, artificial nest boxes can be preferable if they are constructed to give advantages to native birds over invasives. The entrance hole diameter is a critical factor; it needs to be just large enough for the target species to squeeze through, so the larger competitive and predatory birds like European Starling cannot enter. You can find detailed information at

<http://nestboxbuilder.com> and <http://www.sialis.org/nestboxguide.htm> for a variety of species.

If you are planning to have some tree work done, or brush removal, or even just pruning and thinning, think about timing that work to avoid the prime nesting and chick-rearing season. In our area, Anna's Hummingbirds are already nesting, as are some raptors, and Mourning Doves can nest pretty much all year long. Some of the other resident species begin nesting in mid-April, and for most songbirds the prime time for nesting is May and June. During that period, tree work should be avoided, as well as heavy pruning or mechanical trimming of hedges or brush. Most songbirds begin fledging in July and are largely finished by August, so it's safe to schedule work then. The birds will thank you by eating many of the insects and grubs that emerge in your gardens.

Birding remains one of the safest activities we can participate in as we await vaccination and a return to social life. It's something you can do all by yourself, without being alone. Share your sightings with everyone, and improve the local abundance records, by using eBird. We are constantly asked for data on bird species or abundance at various places, often when a development is proposed, and we rarely have much information to share because not enough of us have been keeping such records. A notable exception is the Save Our Shorebirds program, which has created an invaluable record of the species diversity and abundance on parts of the Mendocino coast. It's an example of how a small, dedicated group can persevere and make a lasting contribution on local and regional levels.



*Swallow in a nesting cavity
Photograph by Catherine Keegan*

MANCHESTER CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT RECAP Dave Jensen

*Bald Eagle seen on Barnegat Road
Photograph by Roger Adamson*

The morning of the forty-seventh Manchester Christmas Bird Count broke quiet and dim. A smoky fog shrouded the landscape but the rains that had been predicted just days earlier failed to arrive.

Despite limitations imposed by the Coronavirus, thirty-one birders arrived from Fort Bragg, Philo, Ukiah, Gualala, The Sea Ranch, and points beyond to participate in this annual event. Some rose well before dawn to search in the dark for owls. Some hunted through the woods. Some walked the sandy beaches. Some scoped for seabirds from the shadow of the Point Arena lighthouse. Others slowly patrolled the yards

and feeders of Irish Beach and Manchester. After sunset some even resumed their search for owls, while most returned to the comforts of home. Alas, there was no post-count dinner this year.

Overall, the teams reported that the number of birds seemed lower than usual. A total of 130 species were observed, which is well below the ten-year average of 137 species. This year's total ranks as the third-lowest since 2010. The low count for that time span was 127 in 2019 when it rained all day, while the high count was 149 in 2010.

Despite the low number of birds observed, there were a few species that set new records. New high totals included American Coots (658), Says Phoebe (15), Western Bluebirds (88), Gold-crowned Sparrows (339) and Pine Siskins (2509).

Among the highlights of this year's count were a Long-eared Owl seen near Miner Hole Road, one Sandhill Crane on the Garcia River flats, two Tundra Swans, at least three Bald Eagles, five Black-crowned Night Herons, and a flock of 1,946 Pine Siskins photographed by Ryan Keiffer and later meticulously counted in groups of ten by Bob Keiffer. A link to the complete roster of birds observed on this count will be posted on our website, mendocinocoastaudubon.org



Tundra Swans over Hunter's Lagoon, seen this year on the Manchester CBC. Photograph by Roger Adamson

Each year there are some common species that, for whatever reason, are missing from the final tally. This year was no different. The following species have been observed on more than half of the previous Manchester counts but were missing in 2021: Rock Pigeon, Northern Mockingbird, Lincoln Sparrow, Purple Finch, and American Goldfinch.

To paraphrase the late great Robin Leach, we hope that next year's Manchester CBC will fulfill our sunshine wishes and birding dreams. If not, we'd settle for a post-count dinner. In any case, we hope you can join us on Sunday, January 2, 2022 for another enjoyable day on the south coast.

SAVE OUR SHOREBIRDS

Becky Bowen

2021 - THE WINTER OF OUR FULL CONTENTMENT



Photographs by B. Bowen



We always find pleasant surprises by participating in the National Audubon Christmas Bird Counts. Matter of fact, it's no surprise to us that winter is an excellent time to bird on the Northern Mendocino Coast. Here's a look at a few sightings on the January 5, 2021 Save Our Shorebirds survey to Glass Beach. At top, Black Oystercatchers hustle a Surfbird off their onshore rock. A human couple in a passionate embrace on a bluff top were unaware of an alert mature Peregrine Falcon (middle left) perched less than six feet away from them. The falcon was motionless, focused on the neighboring bluff top in the line of sight of a young falcon that was resting in an iceplant patch. Not far away was a small flock of Western Meadowlarks. Falcons predate shorebirds. Meadowlarks are only one of several species that forage in grasslands along the tops of coastal bluffs.

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

REMEMBERING GREG GRANTHAM BY HELPING A STUDENT

Greg Grantham loved to award scholarships to science students and made it a point to arrive every spring at the College of the Redwoods award ceremonies in appropriate marine biology wardrobe. But his students will remember him for much more than his fashion statements.

Greg developed the Marine Science Technology Program at the Fort Bragg Campus of College of the Redwoods where he taught from 1984 to 2012. The program put scores of students on the path to higher education and careers in science.

So it was fitting that friends will remember him by supporting a science student at a local community college. Greg died November, 25, 2020, after a short battle with esophageal cancer.

His friend, Ginny Rorby, made a generous donation to the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society. Her gift will make it possible for Audubon to sponsor a scholarship in his memory to a science student at Mendocino College in the spring of 2021.

Many MCAS members were introduced to birding at his Birds of the North Coast classes at College of the Redwoods. When Save Our Shorebirds was established in 2007, Greg helped us develop our citizen science spreadsheets. The first two SOS Directors, Nate Cooley and Joleen Ossello, were his students.

Greg was born in Oakland in 1948. He graduated from College Park High School in 1966 and enlisted in the Army. He was a Vietnam veteran. He attended College of the Redwoods at the Fort Bragg campus and continued his studies at Sonoma State University where he earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology and Geography, and a Master's Degree in Marine Science 1983.



Greg awards a science scholarship to College of the Redwoods student Jennifer Valadao at the 2012 awards ceremony at the Fort Bragg campus. Photographs by B. Bowen



Professor Greg Grantham at the 2011 College of the Redwoods scholarship ceremony.

He is survived by his wife Sarah Quentin, daughter Kelly Grantham-Rhinehart (Ian), brother Ronald (Claudia), sister Sandi, sister-in-law Amy Murphy and nieces and nephews.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made in his memory to local scholarship funds, Noyo Center for Marine Science, or Mendocino Coast Hospice.

To learn more about MCAS support of student scholarships, please contact B. Bowen at casparbeck@comcast.net

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.

FEBRUARY 2021

Saturday 6 - Beginner's Bird Walk 9:00 a.m. - Noon**

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

Wednesday 10 - Audubon Society Board Meeting 6:00 p.m. via Zoom

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

Wednesday 17 - Early Bird Walk 8:30 a.m. - Noon**

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

Monday 22 - California Waterfowl Association 7:00 p.m. via Zoom

MARCH 2021

Saturday 6 - Beginner's Bird Walk 9:00 a.m. - Noon**

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

Wednesday 17 - Early Bird Walk 8:30 a.m. - Noon**

Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens, 18220 CA-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.
- There will be limited access to restrooms. The interior Display House restrooms are the only available restroom facilities onsite.
- 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
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Newsletter Editor	Megan Smithyman	mesmithy@gmail.com	

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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

P.O. BOX 2297

FORT BRAGG, CA, 95437

