



# The Black Oystercatcher

Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Newsletter- January 2020

TROUT UNLIMITED PRESENTS:  
**NORTH COAST SALMON AND  
STEELHEAD RECOVERY STRATEGIES**



*Coho Salmon photo by Tom & Pat Lessen*

**MONDAY, JANUARY 27 AT 7:00 P.M.  
CASPAR COMMUNITY CENTER**

This presentation will include an overview of Northern California recovery strategies for endangered and threatened Coho Salmon and steelhead trout as well as an in-depth discussion of the importance of Mendocino County populations.

Anna Halligan is the Project Director for Trout Unlimited's North Coast Coho Project. The North Coast Coho Project is a unique public-private partnership with landowners on California's north coast dedicated to restoring habitat and fish passage and to recovering steelhead and Coho Salmon. Her professional background ranges from invasive species management to enhancing water quality and water conservation through rainwater harvesting, stormwater retention, and riverine and wetland restoration. Anna has worked for a variety of nonprofits and state agencies in NC and CA across a range of working landscapes. Anna also serves on the CA Fish Passage Forum and is a Board Director for the CA Salmonid Restoration Federation.

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*Sandhill Crane by Ron LeValley*

*Join us for the Central Valley  
Refuges trip. See more page 6.*

**SEA RANCH CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT****Dave Jensen**

*The Sea Ranch Chapel by Craig Tooley*

This newsletter has regularly reported on the Christmas Bird Counts in Manchester and Fort Bragg. In fact, the Manchester count predates this newsletter by many years. But there is another annual event, just as important and just as enjoyable, that merits greater attention – the Sea Ranch Christmas Count. This January will witness the 23rd annual tally of wintering birds in the lands that comprise The Sea Ranch community.

Ray Hudspeth, Ev Wadsworth, Lee Kosso and Bev Sloane organized the first Sea Ranch count in 1998. For several reasons they and others decided to forgo the rigid requirements of an official Audubon Christmas Count area. They recognized that the requisite 15-mile circumference would encompass a great expanse of private timberland that could not be surveyed. Also, they were uncertain whether they could solicit enough volunteers to sustain such a large effort. Perhaps most wisely, their decision to remain independent freed them from the mandatory count date that plagues other counts. The Sea Ranch count regularly occurs on the second weekend of January, one week after the Manchester count. Weather permitting, they count on that Saturday, but if it is stormy, they have the option to wait and go out on Sunday. Very wise, indeed.

The Sea Ranch count covers the boundaries of that community. It is approximately ten miles long and nearly one mile wide. Like other count areas, it is divided into several territories, each with a responsible team leader. The territories are roughly organized according to habitat types: deep forest along the ridgeline, mixed forest and open space, meadows, coastal headlands, and the golf course. A final territory was added to this assembly – a transect that crosses the middle of The Sea Ranch from the ridge top to the ocean.

Not surprisingly, the transect territory, with its variety of habitats, regularly records the highest

species count. Birders in that area generally observe about 60 species, nearly twice as many as other territories. In 2015 a total of 122 species were reported for the entire count. That is a very respectable species count for an area that is approximately 10 square miles. Official circles with the 7.5-mile radius are 176 square miles large, and many of them report fewer than 120 species on count day.

One major benefit of the annual Christmas counts is their ability to record long-term changes in bird populations, and The Sea Ranch count is no different. Observers have documented the expansion of Acorn Woodpeckers in the count area. In 1998 two Acorn Woodpeckers could be found in a specific tree at a single location. Their population has steadily increased, until thirty-two were observed at multiple location in 2015. Similarly, Tricolored Blackbirds, once absent from that area, have been recorded since 2010. Black Oystercatchers seem to have expanded across the territory as well. In 1998, three were reported, but that number has increased to as many as 116 individuals. Unfortunately, it seem that Harlequin Ducks can no longer be found in their former haunt.

There are also important educational and social benefits for those who participate. New birders are encouraged to join in this effort. As a new birder, I rapidly improved my knowledge of birds by going on Christmas counts with experienced leaders. I didn't know how to identify many species. Fortunately, I didn't have to. The experienced leaders with me knew who was who, and I was able to learn from them.

Christmas counts are also great social events. Many residents and neighbors have participated over the years, as many as 63 in any year. Dard and Mary Hunter, who have joined in every count, exemplify the dedicated support of that coastal community for this annual event. The participants gather on Sunday afternoon to report their observations, share interesting events that occurred during the count, and enjoy the company of those with whom they have shared this journey into the natural world. It's what we've come to know as "The Fellowship of the Field Glasses."

So, if this sounds the least bit interesting, please consider joining the 23rd annual Sea Ranch count. You can reach Diane Hichwa at [dhichwa@earthlink.net](mailto:dhichwa@earthlink.net) or call her at 707-785-1922 for more details. The count day will be Saturday, January 11 - weather permitting. If not, then on Sunday the 12th. We can't guarantee the weather, but we can guarantee that it will be a memorable and enjoyable event.

*Special thanks to Diane Hichwa and Dorothy Gregor for their assistance in the preparation of this article.*



*by Craig Tooley*



**SAVE OUR SHOREBIRDS****Becky Bowen****PROTECT THE WORLD'S WADERS**

Picture yourself on a bird count in Kalametiya, Sri Lanka. On a lucky day you may spot the birds in this photograph taken by Elis Simpson on the sixth international Wader Conservation World Watch in early November, 2019. It's a group of Pheasant-tailed Jacanas with a Wood Sandpiper.

Three Mendocino Coast Audubon Society members participated in the global event by submitting local observations to Wader Quest, an international wader conservation non-profit. Shorebirds are known as "waders" in most countries. Results of the watch are now available at:

<https://www.waderquest.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/WCWW6-SpecialR3.pdf>

It's a species list guaranteed to fascinate those of us who are passionate about counting and conserving shorebirds.

To participate, Elis Simpson, and her husband, Rick, made their way from their home in Buckinghamshire, England, to Sri Lanka where they found several hoped-for sightings, including Great Thicknee, Small Pratincole and Oriental Pratincole. The Simpsons co-founded Wader Quest, and are quick to point out that some 48 per cent of the world's wader populations are in decline. Six species are now extinct, and 59 species are critically endangered, vulnerable, or near-threatened.

While some participants in the world watch submitted counts; others simply recorded the species observed on nine flyways on six continents. The goal was outreach and education about the plight of the world's shorebirds. The two-day bird watch/count "...encouraged 250 people to get out into the field, in 32 countries, in celebration of wader conservation, and together see over half of the world's wader species between them," Rick Simpson says. For some, the final species list provides a global snapshot of shorebirds across the globe in early November, and a realization that we must get out and appreciate them – while there's still time.

The rarest wader spotted was the Spoon-billed Sandpiper. The tiny bird breeds in Eastern Russia on coastal tundra and flies south on a 5,000-mile migration to mudflats in Myanmar and a few other sites in Southeast Asia. World Watch participants spotted a high count of ten at only one site: Jiangxi, China. According to National Audubon, there currently are about 300 Spoon-billed Sandpipers in the world, a frightful decline since the 1970s when scientists estimated there were some 2,000-2,800 pair in the world.

## SAVE OUR SHOREBIRDS

Becky Bowen



*Elis Simpson – Wader Quest*  
*The Pheasant-tailed Jacana, like this one spotted in Sri Lanka during Wader Conservation World Watch 6, is a tropical Asian shorebird that ranges generally from Oman to the Philippines. Elongated feet are perfect for walking across pads in lily ponds.*

We humans are killing off shorebirds. We steal critical habitat, disturb wildlife, and contribute to the change in climate that poisons the air, water and soil that sustains life. World Watch participants in Australia, a winter destination for so many migrating species, reported the numbers of shorebirds were down from previous years. Wildfires that followed widespread drought last year left most of the country under a relentless “blanket of smoke.” At the time of our deadline for this newsletter issue, a press release from Australia confirmed that the entire continent currently is encircled by a ring of wildfires with no relief in sight until the rains come (weeks – or maybe months – away). At the same time, two typhoons hit Japan. Participants in other areas were kept off the highways and roads that took

them out into the field because of political turmoil, so not everything was easy for birds – or people.

But for those of us who were able to take part, it was a way to connect with those who share our dedication to keep track of – and protect – shorebirds. It was no surprise to find out people on the other side of the earth have the same issues we do with human disturbance to shorebirds, including developments in wetlands and on shorelines that are wildlife havens.

The final species list of Wader Conservation World Watch 6 is a good read – like browsing through a family album of stories and photographs of splendid rare birds that we may never see in the wild. But there were familiar birds, too, like Sanderlings. World Watch participants reported sightings of the little shorebird in the following countries: Anguilla; Rio Negro, Argentina; Sao Paulo, Brazil; Dobrich, Bulgaria; Jiangxi, China; Magdalena, Colombia; Cleveland, Essex, Norfolk, Tyne & Wear, England; La Reunion, France; Chiba, Japan; Inhambane, Mozambique; Porto, Portugal; KwaZulu, Western Cape, South Africa; Southern Province, Sri Lanka; and Mendocino Coast, California, USA.

The oh-so-familiar Killdeer, on the other hand, was not as common as we might think. World Watchers reported sightings of the bird only in Anguilla, Florida, and California. The most numerous counted species was Dunlin (8,175 individuals). The most often-sighted wader reported on the watch was the Eurasian Curlew.

It seems we have a lot to learn – and a long way to go.

*Save Our Shorebirds is an ongoing year-round Mendocino Coast Audubon shorebird conservation program established in 2007. Volunteers survey the coast of MacKerricher State Park and provide shorebird data that are made available to schools, agencies, and the public at no charge. We have participated in Wader Conservation World Watch for several years as part of an outreach and education effort. If you would like to participate locally in Wader Conservation World Watch 7, please contact B. Bowen at [casparbeck@comcast.net](mailto:casparbeck@comcast.net) The event will be held around the globe on Oct. 31 and Nov. 1, 2020. To follow what we currently are seeing on SOS surveys, please visit us at [www.facebook.com/SaveOurShorebirds](https://www.facebook.com/SaveOurShorebirds)*

## FIELD TRIPS AND EVENTS

### CENTRAL VALLEY REFUGES

**SATURDAY 18 - MONDAY 20 JANUARY 2020**

We are going back to the Central Valley again this January to enjoy the great gathering of winter waterfowl. This will be a multi-day field trip on the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday. It begins on Saturday, January 18 and ends on Monday, January 20, but you can join us for any or all of the three-day experience.

We will be staying in Williams and visiting as many of the refuges as time allows, including the Colusa, Sacramento, Gray Lodge and Llano Seco units. We may also leave the valley floor to search for Roadrunners and Rock Wrens.

Once we gather in Williams, we will carpool to the refuges, linked together with walkie talkies. There will be a small amount of walking on level terrain, but no arduous hikes. At the risk of jinxing us, I will share that I have visited the Central Valley on this weekend for the past fifteen years, and only once during that span did it rain for more than one day. Nevertheless, if you plan to stay with us overnight, I suggest that you make a room reservation that can be canceled in case the weather forecast is unfavorable. For more information, please call me at 326-8815 or email me at [djensen@mcn.org](mailto:djensen@mcn.org). I hope you can join us for what should be an unforgettable experience.



*Sandhill Cranes by Ron LeValley*

### LAKE CLEONE

**SATURDAY 8, FEBRUARY 2020**

Lake Cleone in MacKerricher State Park is the largest accessible freshwater marsh habitat in our region. It attracts a wide variety of waterfowl and songbirds, and many uncommon species have been found there. There is a trail all the way around the Lake, providing great views of the edges and the open water. Damage from winter storms and vandalism have restricted access for several years, but we are hoping to complete the circuit. More information will be in the February newsletter.



*Blue Heron by Ron LeValley*

Our programs are brought to you with the support of Harbor Lite Lodge, offering discount lodging for Mendocino Coast Audubon Society guest presenters.

[www.HarborLiteLodge.com](http://www.HarborLiteLodge.com)

**Harbor Lite  
LODGE**



(707) 964-0221

120 N. Harbor Drive  
Fort Bragg, CA 95437

## CALENDAR

### JANUARY 2019

**Saturday 4 - Christmas Bird Count** - Manchester

Contact David Jensen for more information: [djensen@mcn.org](mailto:djensen@mcn.org) (707) 964-8163

**Wednesday 8 - Audubon Board Meeting** 6:00 p.m

Contact Tim Bray for more information: [tbray@mcn.org](mailto:tbray@mcn.org) (707) 734-0791

**Saturday 11 - Beginner's Bird Walk\* 9:00 a.m. - Noon** Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens  
18220 Highway 1, Fort Bragg, CA

Meet in the parking lot. Wear comfortable shoes and bring a hat and water.

**Wednesday 15 - Early Bird Walk\* 8:30 a.m. - Noon** Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens  
18220 Highway 1, Fort Bragg, CA

**Saturday 18 - Monday 20 Central Valley Refuges Field Trip**

Williams, CA. See page 6 for details.

**Monday 27 - Audubon Society Meeting 7:00 p.m.** Caspar Community Center  
**Trout Unlimited Restoration in Mendocino County**

### FEBRUARY 2020

**Saturday 1 - Beginner's Bird Walk\* 9:00 a.m. - Noon** Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens  
18220 Highway 1, Fort Bragg, CA

Meet in the parking lot. Wear comfortable shoes and bring a hat and water.

**Saturday 8 - Field Trip - Lake Cleone**

**9:00 a.m. - Noon** MacKerricher State Park. More information coming soon.

**Wednesday 12 - Audubon Board Meeting** 6:00 p.m

Contact Tim Bray for more information: [tbray@mcn.org](mailto:tbray@mcn.org) (707) 734-0791

**Monday 17 - Audubon Society Meeting 7:00 p.m.** Caspar Community Center  
**Mountain Lions in Mendocino County**

**Wednesday 19 - Early Bird Walk\* 8:30 a.m. - Noon** Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens  
18220 Highway 1, Fort Bragg, CA

*\*These walks are free, but there is an entry charge for participants who are not Garden members.  
Those who are not MCBG members can request a "Guest of Audubon" discount.*

**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 2018-2019

President	Tim Bray	tbray@mcn.org	(707) 734-0791
Vice President, Field Trips	David Jensen	djensen@mcn.org	(707) 964-8163
Secretary	Nicolet Houtz	nicolethoutz@gmail.com	
Treasurer	Jim Havlena	havlenas@fix.net	
SOS, Conservation	Becky Bowen	casparbeck@comcast.net	(707) 962-1602
Education	Sarah Grimes	zewa@mcn.org	
Membership	Adam Hutchins	raptorous@me.com	(707) 734-3470
Programs	Terra Fuller	fullerterra@hotmail.com	(707) 964-4675
Programs	Hayley Ross	hayleyhross@gmail.com	
Off-Board Chairs:			
Webmaster	Catherine Keegan	keegan@mcn.org	
Newsletter Editor	Megan Smithyman	mesmithy@gmail.com	

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

