



The Black Oystercatcher

Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Newsletter- March 2021

BALD EAGLES HAVE RETURNED



Becky Bowen

Bald Eagle, seen on the the SOS survey Sunday, Feb. 21 at Ten Mile River in a treetop near the south end of Ten Mile Bridge.

Many people have been seeing Bald Eagles recently in a few places along the Mendocino Coast. This is part of a statewide, and indeed nationwide trend of Bald Eagles re-colonizing nearly all of their former range - a great conservation success story.

We began seeing pairs of adult birds in the spring of 2017 near the mouth of the Navarro River and sometimes flying back and forth between there and the Albion River. Around the same time, people reported seeing an adult eagle near the mouth of the Ten Mile River. Each year since then there have been sightings of adult birds in those locations as well as sporadic sightings elsewhere on the coast. Most sightings are in early spring.

It seems likely they are nesting in at least two places, but to date no nest has been found. Bald Eagles construct the largest bird nests in North America, and yet they can be extremely well hidden and difficult to find. The best evidence for nesting is to see an adult bird carrying nest material, often large sticks.

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Pine Siskin at seed feeder. Photo by Wayne Laubscher

Bring in your bird feeder? Learn more on page 3.

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The next-best is to see one carrying food, usually fish, away from the immediate coastline. Successful nesting is indicated if you see a juvenile bird with adults in late spring or early summer, April-June. If you happen to see such evidence, please report it to Adam Hutchins, raptorous@me.com.

It's wonderful to see these beautiful birds here again - though I suspect the Ospreys are not as happy about it, as Bald Eagles regularly harass them for food and can even take chicks from the nest. It's a tough world out there.

MENDOCINO ENVIRONMENTAL PARTNERS 22ND ANNUAL

Virtual Environmental Partners Award Ceremony

WITH EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM FROM

Terra Fuller

Senior Specialist Environmental Scientist,
California State Parks Sonoma-Mendocino District

MONDAY, MARCH 15, 2021 • 7-8 P.M.

REGISTER HERE NOW!

Help us celebrate the 10th annual
Matt Coleman Environmental Service Award recipients:
Katherine Gabrielson • Steve Jahelka • Nicholle Kohls

MENDO PARKS

MENDOCINO LAND TRUST

CALIFORNIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

Mendocino Coast Audubon Society

Contact MendoParks for more information: elizabeth@mendoparks.org

MENDOCINO ENVIRONMENTAL PARTNERS 22ND ANNUAL AWARD CEREMONY

MONDAY, MARCH 15TH
AT 7:00 P.M.
VIA ZOOM

https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_KEqJdt_eRs2JtYgLV8wZTg

Join MendoParks, Mendocino Land Trust, Mendocino Coast Audubon Society, and California Native Plant Society (Dorothy King Young Chapter) celebrate the 10th annual Matt Coleman Environmental Service Award recipients:

**Katherine Gabrielson
Steve Jahelka
Nicholle Kohls**

Educational program from Terra Fuller, Senior Specialist Environmental Scientist, California State Parks Sonoma-Mendocino District.

SISKINS AND SALMONELLOSIS

Tim Bray



Pine Siskins at a feeder by Catherine Keegan

Back in December we noticed an irruption of Pine Siskins, with very large flocks appearing on the two coastal Christmas Bird Counts. This happens in some years when the seed crop in the northern forests isn't robust enough to support the population of finches, causing several species to spread out in search of adequate food supplies. This year's irruption was unusually large and widespread, becoming national news when huge flocks descended on backyard bird feeders. The excitement this caused has given way to dismay at the sight of sick and dying birds. Pine Siskins normally reside in northern conifer forests, feeding by picking seeds out of cones.

This naturally keeps them dispersed and moving about, rarely congregating at a single spot, a strategy that reduces transmission of infectious diseases. Unfortunately that also means they have little resistance to certain bacteria that are common in more temperate climates like ours. Pine Siskins are particularly susceptible to Salmonellosis, a disease spread through bird feces.

Large flocks of susceptible birds crowding together at feeding stations often leads to outbreaks of disease. It is always important to regularly clean and sanitize feeders to reduce disease transmission, but during a Siskin irruption, it becomes exponentially more important and more difficult. What should you do? The safest course is to remove your feeders until the Siskins have moved on. This will happen soon, as they begin heading back north toward the breeding grounds; and in any case, without a concentrated food supply they will move on and stop visiting your yard. What about the other birds? Without the intense competition from the big flocks of Siskins, they should have little difficulty finding food in the natural landscape. Studies indicate that even the most feeder-habituated birds, like Chickadees, rarely take in more than 40% of their nutrition from the feeders and have little trouble adjusting if the feeder is taken away.

But what if you really want to keep feeding birds? There are ways to reduce the risk of disease. First, adopt a rigorous habit of cleaning and sanitizing your feeders - weekly at minimum and daily if possible, especially if you have the tray-style or any kind that allows feces to accumulate. (Tube or sock feeders that don't have a tray are much safer.) Take the feeder down at the end of the day, empty it, wash it, and sanitize with bleach. Let it dry overnight, then refill in the morning and hang it out. Easier, get a second feeder and rotate them daily, cleaning and bleaching the one not in use. A solution of one part bleach to 9 parts water is recommended.

It's extra work, but it will save you the unpleasant task of dealing with sick and dying birds in your yard. It might also save your cat, as they can contract the same disease from sick birds. There is also a human health aspect to all this, as the same *Salmonella* bacteria can infect us. Be extra-careful to keep yourself safe by wearing disposable gloves, washing your hands, and using sanitizer every time you handle a feeder.

We do not have a bird rescue facility anywhere in Mendocino County at present, so there is no local place you can take sick birds for treatment. The nearest is the Bird Rescue Center of Sonoma County.

Wash your hands, don't touch your face, and use sanitizer... familiar advice by now. I hope you and your friends, feathered and otherwise, stay safe and healthy.

SAVE OUR SHOREBIRDS

Becky Bowen



Becky Bowen



Western Snowy Plover nest at Manchester State Park.
Photo by Angela Liebenberg



SAVING SNOWY PLOVERS ONE STEP AT A TIME

Every year about this time, Western Snowy Plovers on local beaches begin to leave flocks and drift by pairs on to dry patches of sand where they “build” nests and lay eggs. We use the term “build” loosely because these birds are not good at construction. Nests are created by scrapes of tiny feet and the nest cup is decorated more or less by accident—like the one pictured to the left.

This means Snowy Plover nests are critically exposed and in danger of destruction by human or horse footsteps. Take a look at the top photo: Somewhere on this stretch of dry sand on Ten Mile Beach, is a plover on a nest—hard to spot and heartbreakingly vulnerable.

So during Snowy Plover breeding season (March 1 – September 15), if you are at Inglebrook Fen-Ten Mile Dunes Preserve, Virgin Creek Beach, or beaches in Manchester State Park Preserve, there are three ways to enjoy ocean views and wildlife, protect nests, and literally save lives of Snowy Plover chicks:

1. Respect State Parks signs, especially on protected coastal breeding grounds where dogs are not allowed (even on a leash). Humans and horses are asked to stay on pounded wet sand only.
2. Avoid entering any roped-off nesting areas.
3. Keep your distance from any snowy plovers you see, especially chicks who are at extreme stress-related risk for 28 days until they fledge.

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

A LETTER TO THE CITY

Tim Bray

Tabatha Miller
City Manager
City of Fort Bragg
TMiller@FortBragg.com

RE: Feeding Ravens On the Fort Bragg Coast Trails and City Parks

Dear Ms. Miller,

This e-mail comes to request help and action by the City of Fort Bragg to stop people from feeding Common Ravens and ground squirrels on our city coastal trails and in our city parks.

The number of Ravens attracted to our parks, especially the coastal trails, has escalated to the point where they are a threat to other bird populations. The Black Oystercatcher in particular, our iconic bird of the rocky shoreline, is vulnerable to predation by Ravens during nesting season.

It's time to listen to what biologists are telling us about our interaction with wildlife. When people feed birds and ground squirrels on city trails, it's not good for humans or wildlife. We support the California Fish & Wildlife Keep Me Wild program that educates us about deeply serious health issues related to feeding wildlife. The California Code of Regulations (Title 14, section 251.1) is a basis for creating a city ordinance to help protect people and animals. This is nothing new and not a trivial matter. We request that it be put on the agenda for the upcoming March meeting of the City Public Safety Committee for a problem-solving discussion and consideration of a city ordinance to prohibit feeding wildlife in public parks and on the Fort Bragg Coastal Trails.

We advocate for all wild birds. Our concern when we see people on public beaches feeding Common Ravens is for the effects on many other birds, as well as the Ravens themselves. Ravens are so intelligent, they recognize and remember cars and people who bring them food, forming large flocks to take advantage of the concentrated food source. This is abnormal behavior for Ravens, which are naturally territorial. When large numbers of such birds congregate, as we are seeing at both ends of the Coastal Trail, it raises the possibility of disease transmission.

They are well-adapted to search for and obtain food from a variety of sources, and they continue doing this even when given food by humans. It's heartbreaking to watch Common Ravens eat their hand-outs, then fly directly to nearby bluffs where they rob nests of Black Oystercatchers and prey on oystercatcher chicks. We've seen this happen over and over, especially at Glass Beach (part of MacKerricher State Park). Now, we hear from fellow hikers and out-of-town visitors, that the same thing is happening along the Fort Bragg Coastal Trail.

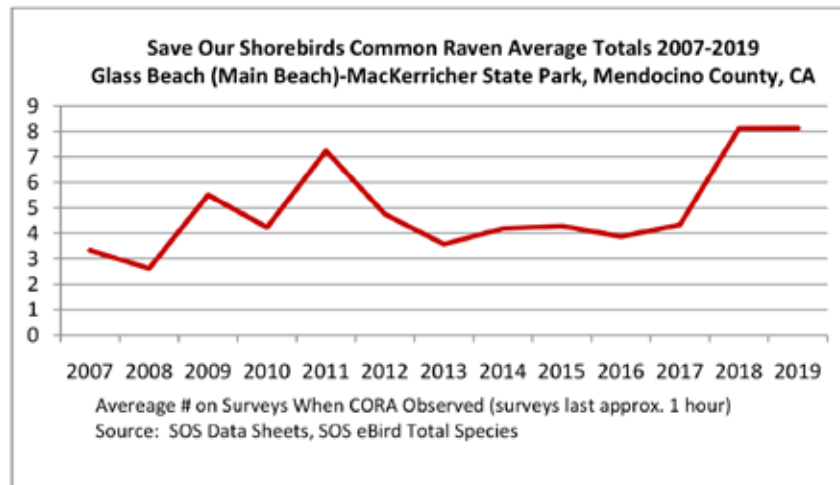
It may be helpful to get input from California Fish & Wildlife, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, wildlife feeding ordinances in other cities (like the city of Davis, CA), and people from our local scientific community.

Local journalist Frank Hartzell decided to "dig into" the history of Common Raven interaction with humans in a September, 2019 article for the Mendocino Coast Real Estate Magazine that was a good introduction to the relationship between ravens and people. You can read it here:

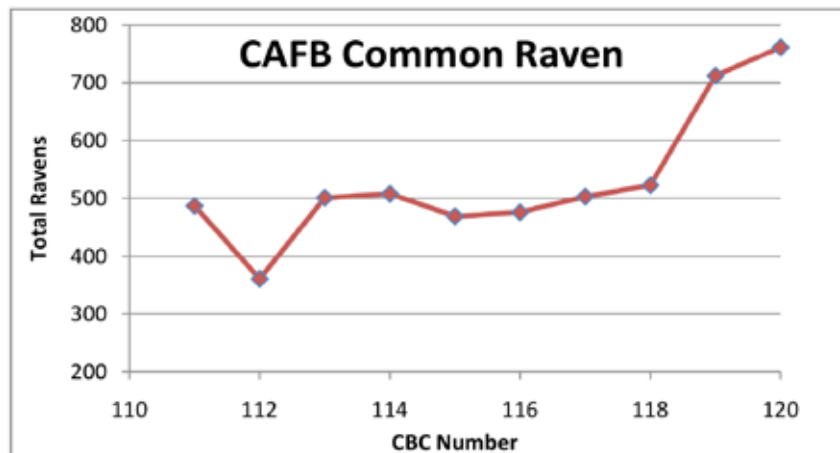
<http://www.realestatemendocino.com/images/REM%20726.pdf>

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A local Audubon conservation team has surveyed Glass Beach (adjacent to the city's Coastal Trails) year-round for the past 14 years and gathered data about birds along the coastline of MacKerricher State Park from Glass Beach north to Ten Mile River. On the main beach of Glass Beach, 494 surveys were conducted and 2,612 Common Ravens were observed. The chart below indicates an increase in the average number of Common Ravens counted on the beach, particularly in the last three years. Based on what we saw during 2020 (including ravens being fed by people), we think that increase continued and will be reflected in our upcoming annual report.



Our Chapter has conducted a Christmas Bird Count in Fort Bragg for ten consecutive years. The chart below shows the total count for Common Ravens each year. The sharp increase in the last two Counts is largely from the population increase at the former millsite.



We are willing to devote a considerable amount of energy into bringing this crisis to the attention of the public and public officials. We would like to be kept in the loop about this issue in consideration before the city's Public Safety Committee and the City Council.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Tim Bray, President
Mendocino Coast Audubon Society

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.

MARCH 2021

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

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

Monday 15 - *Mendocino Environmental Partners 22nd Annual Award Ceremony* 7:00 p.m.

This year's event will be hosted via Zoom. See page 2 for more information.

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

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

APRIL 2021

Saturday 3 - *Beginner's Bird Walk* 9:00 a.m. - Noon. Rain cancels**

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

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. via Zoom

Wednesday 21 - *Early Bird Walk* 8:30 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.
- 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

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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

