



The Black Oystercatcher

Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Newsletter- April 2022

MARCH 2022 SIGHTINGS

by Roger Adamson



Cliff Swallow, one of hundreds nesting under the Ten Mile River bridge on Highway One on June 18, 2021

There were no reports of truly “rare” birds in March. However, spring migration got under way and many species have been moving. Several observers noted both Brant and Cackling geese flying north, and a few early shorebirds have appeared. Many early arriving passerines have been seen. Also, our resident Pelagic Cormorants have already begun nesting. An American Avocet was reported Mar 9 (CV) at the Ukiah Waste Water Treatment Plant and on the 16th a Black-necked Stilt (RG) was seen at the same location. On the 17th the first Whimbrel (RA) of the season was sighted at Ward Avenue. Violet Green Swallows arriving early in March were noted by several observers and will be frequently reported from now through late summer (JJ, LWR, EF). Northern Rough-winged Swallows were sighted in Gualala Mar 13 (MR), and the first Cliff Swallows appeared at Low Gap Regional Park on the 20th (GG).

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*Osprey spotted on the Lake County field trip. Photo by Tess McGuire
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A Warbling Vireo arrived at the Hopland Research and Extension Center the 11th (CV) and a Cassin's Vireo was seen in Willits on the 22nd (MC). The first Wilson's Warbler was reported on the 23rd (CV) at the Mendocino Coast Botanical Garden, just right for the first spring arrival of this species. The first Western Kingbird of the season was fly-catching at the Mendocino College grounds in Ukiah on the 24th (GG). The first Hooded Oriole of the season appeared in Ukiah on the 23rd (GG).

A very interesting observation was that of a yellow Purple Finch (EF) at a feeder just outside Fort Bragg reported on Feb 23rd. The yellow coloration is very rare in Purple Finch, in contrast to the relatively common yellowish appearance in the related House Finch. It is not known whether the mechanisms for color variation is the same in the two species. These colors in House Finch are largely due to the presence and proportions of 13 carotenoids and are thought to depend on aspects of nutrition, genetics, and health.

Perhaps the "best bird" of March was an adult male Black-chinned Hummingbird that arrived at a feeder near Willits on March 8th (MC). This is the least reported hummingbird in Mendocino County. They frequent riparian habitat that includes trees such as oaks, sycamore, or cottonwood, preferences which are not widely available in Mendocino County. While the adult male with chin and throat black and its purple to violet band can be identified relatively easily, the females can be difficult to identify and readily confused with female Anna's Hummingbird which are very common in our area.

Thanks to the following for their reports. Chuck Vaughn (CV), Rishab Ghosh (RG), Roger Adamson (RA), Jeanne Jackson (JJ), Lisa Walker-Roseman (LWR), Erica Fielder (EF), Michelle Richardson (MR), George Gibbs (GG), Mike Curry (MC).



Orange-crowned Warbler was singing in MacKerricher State Park Mar 26, 2022.

2022 BLOY SURVEY

By Dave Jensen

Some people say that you just can't get too much of a good thing. Evidently, a group of your fellow chapter members agrees. Mendocino Coast Audubon volunteers started to systematically monitor the reproductive success of local Black Oystercatchers in 2012. From MacKerricher State Park all the way down to the Navarro River, teams have been watching as these iconic birds form breeding pairs, stake out a nesting territory, toss pebbles in preparation to build what may be one of the simplest nests in the avian kingdom, incubate up to three eggs, feed and protect their young, and, if all goes well, forage together as a family unit once the young have fledged.

Ten years of data have been pooled with those of similar efforts from San Luis Obispo to Oregon to help us gain a better understanding of the population status of this species.

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When we started, ten years seemed like a monumental commitment. But when the 2021 season ended and we reached the end of the study period, many of us had become so invested in the effort that we decided we should continue.

Besides the emotional attachment that has developed from years of watching these birds struggle to raise their young, there is a profound recognition that our ocean is undergoing unprecedented changes which will have serious impacts on all of us. With the birds' visibility and territorial fidelity, continued observation Black Oystercatcher reproductive success can provide a useful indicator of the resultant ecological changes.

So, our volunteers will be back on the headlands again this year, and we would love for you to join us. As I said earlier, from MacKerricher to the Navarro there is a breeding territory somewhere near you. Each team will have a leader, so do not be afraid. We will show you how it is done. If you are interested, please contact Amelia Schall, the project's volunteer coordinator, at Amelia.Schall@Parks or contact me at 326-8815. Who knows what we will find this year - maybe another white chick.

LAKE COUNTY FIELD TRIP

By Tess McGuire



March 11 and 12, 2022

Six intrepid birders met at Clear Lake State Park on a beautiful Friday morning. After settling into a couple of campsites we explored the various habitats in the park. An osprey platform allowed us to observe the very vociferous birds up close. They'd recently arrived from points south and were in the process of reclaiming their nest and refurbishing it. We saw everything from Bonaparte's gulls to Western and Eared grebes, quail and four species of swallows. The birding was so good we decided to spend the whole day in the park and ended up with 62 species.

Everyone contributed something to a potluck dinner, and after a somewhat chilly night, we reassembled at Clearlake Campground for a leisurely paddle down Cache Creek, the outflow of Clear Lake. Despite the low lake level, we were able to float over the riffle, the high spot on the creek, only to be attacked by two domestic geese that have for years made a sport out of harassing unsuspecting boaters. We encountered many Wood ducks, two Bald and two Golden eagles as well as a Cooper's and two Red-shouldered hawks, and two peregrines. Mockingbirds and White-breasted nuthatches were singing everywhere and large schools of good-sized carp were swimming beneath our kayaks. After a picnic lunch on the deck at Clearlake campground it was time for most folks to head home. We all enjoyed visiting some new places and seeing birds not often seen in the coast.

SAVE OUR SHOREBIRDS

Footsteps of Spring and Love on the Wing

By Becky Bowen

Mother Nature blew into spring this year in more ways than one. It seemed like everything bloomed early – from fruit trees to California Poppies. Not that we're complaining. Who doesn't love the golden blossoms of buttercups, Footsteps of Spring, Butter-and-Eggs and Monkeyflowers?

Yellow, it seems, is what attracts pollinating insects to flowers. On the other hand, what breeding birds want to attract is each other, so the springtime color of love for many shorebirds is rosy – and the redder the better. Red Knots and Ruddy Turnstones are stunning examples. Bright red or red-orange breeding plumage also appears in Sanderlings, Western Sandpipers, Dunlins, dowitchers, Red Phalaropes, and Red-necked Phalaropes – all species that spend winter in wardrobe that can only be described as mousy.

Many of the vibrant shorebirds we see on local beaches from April through August are in nearly full breeding plumage. Most of the birds are migrating north to Arctic breeding grounds or returning to wintering grounds as far south as Australia. April and May are the best months to watch these birds as they drop down to our beaches to refuel.



Red Knot (upper left), Dunlin (upper right) and Sanderlings all getting into breeding plumage—photographed in Inglewood Fen-Ten Mile Dunes Preserve, MacKerricher State Park, in April, 2019 and May, 2021. B. Bowen

The best etiquette when you come to the beach to take in this wondrous show is to walk on pounded sand slowly and quietly, remembering that these birds are focused on getting enough food to get up north and to get to breeding. When you walk on pounded sand, you protect those year-round resident shorebirds that build nests on the surface of dry sand. These nests are in plain view and are little more than scrapes meant to blend into the habitat. They are small and hard to see, and are profoundly vulnerable to walkers who can destroy the exposed eggs with one unthinking step. For instance, a Western Snowy Plover egg is a little bigger than a grape, and there typically are three eggs in a nest. The careful human beachgoer will avoid any likely plover or Killdeer nesting areas and will respect all signs posted to protect shorebirds from disturbance from dogs, vehicles, motorized toy vehicles, and drones. The only other shorebirds that nest here are Black Oystercatchers and Spotted Sandpipers.



Western Snowy Plover nest.
Angela M. Liebenberg photo

The rewards of thoughtful springtime shorebird watching are great. How lucky we are to be able to get good looks at these colorful birds at the water's edge and in the air? Even tiny shorebirds get into the act. The two-ounce male Western Snowy Plover, for instance, grows breeding feathers that cover the top of its head in a rufous wash. The "peachy heads" may be too subtle for some showier breeding shorebirds, but to a little female plover, it may be just the thing to strike her fancy.



Migrating shorebirds in breeding plumage: Red-necked Phalarope (upper left), Ruddy Turnstone (upper right). The breeding plumage of the male Western Snowy Plover (a year-round shorebird resident) at the far right of the bottom photo includes darker head and neck feathers and a "peachy head" that is subtle enough to blend in to the habitat, but striking enough to attract a female.
B. Bowen photos taken in May, 2021 in Inglebrook Fen-Ten Mile Dunes Preserve, MacKerricher State Park

APRIL EVENTS

ANDERSON VALLEY BREWERY

Saturday April 16, 2022

9:00 AM - Noon

Birds and beer! The 26-acre property surrounding the Anderson Valley Brewing Company facility includes huge old Liveoak trees, meadows, and riparian willows along Anderson Creek. It's a great place to find many of the oak-woodland birds, such as Bullock's Oriole, Chipping Sparrow, Oak Titmouse, and White-breasted Nuthatch, that are rare on the coast. We can wander about the grounds and then return to the Tasting Room for a picnic lunch. If there is time and inclination, we can carpool up Highway 253 to look for Golden Eagle.



Anderson Valley Brewing is located at the junction of Highways 128 and 253. The entrance is from Highway 253 (the Boonville-Ukiah Road). Go through the gate and past the Tasting Room parking areas; continue straight ahead and park just off the pavement on the grassy area.

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Roger Adamson Presents:
**A PHOTOGRAPHIC TOUR OF
UGANDA WILDLIFE**
Monday, April 18 at 7:00 PM

Via Zoom www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org



From the Virunga Mountains of the southwest to the River Nile and Lake Albert in the west, our 2019 Uganda birding safari traversed several habitats. The vegetation varied from papyrus marshes to semi-arid acacia savannah and mountain bamboo forests to lowland jungle. Target birds included Shoebill in Mabamba Wetlands, African Finfoot at Lake Mburo, several Albertine Rift endemics including Grauer's Broadbill, Regal Sunbird, and Rwenzori Turaco. We also trekked for Mountain Gorilla and Chimpanzee, and encountered numerous other mammals, and other wildlife. Join us for a photographic tour of Uganda wildlife and an introduction to this fascinating East African country.

Roger Adamson became an enthusiastic birder about 25 years ago in California's Central Valley, where he spent his spare time pursuing a career at UC Davis. Roger and Grete retired to Fort Bragg in 2017. He has been an avid bird photographer for nearly 20 years and now continues to chase and photograph birds and other wildlife

CALENDAR

Our field trips and birdwalks are open to anyone who is fully vaccinated against COVID-19. The Beginner's Birdwalk and the Early Birdwalk at the Gardens are continuing on the regular schedule. Our monthly Chapter presentations continue via Zoom. As always, check our website for the most up-to-date information, and keep up with the postings on our Facebook page.

APRIL 2022

Saturday 2 - *Beginner's Bird Walk 9:00 a.m. - Noon**

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

Wednesday 13 - *Audubon Board Meeting* 6:00 p.m. via Zoom

Saturday 16 - *Field Trip - Anderson Valley Brewery* 9:00 a.m. - Noon

17700 Boonville Rd, Boonville, CA 95415. See page 6 for more information.

Monday 18 - *Audubon Society Meeting* 7:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

Presentation by Roger Adamson. See page 6 for more information.

Wednesday 20 - *Early Bird Walk 8:00 a.m. - Noon**

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

MAY 2022

Saturday 7 - *Beginner's Bird Walk 9:00 a.m. - Noon**

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

Wednesday 18 - *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.
- 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 2021-2022

President	Tim Bray	tbray@mcn.org	(707) 734-0791
Vice President	David Jensen	djensen@mcn.org	(707) 964-8163
Secretary	Roger Adamson	radamson@mcn.org	
Treasurer	Jim Havlena	havlenas@fix.net	
Education	Pam Huntley	pjhuntley@hotmail.com	
Membership	Adam Hutchins	raptorous@me.com	(707) 734-3470
Zoom Czar	Nicolet Houtz	nicolethoutz@gmail.com	
Programs	Terra Fuller	terrafuller74@gmail.com	(707) 964-4675
Programs	Hayley Ross	hayleyhross@gmail.com	
Off-Board Chairs:			
Scholarship Chair	Judy Steele	judys@mcn.org	
SOS Coordinator	Becky Bowen	casparbeck@comcast.net	(707) 962-1602
Field Trips	Tess McGuire	tmcguire9130@gmail.com	
Webmaster	Catherine Keegan	keegan@mcn.org	
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

