



The Black Oystercatcher

Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Newsletter- December 2023

David Jensen and Tim Bray Present:

WINTER BIRDS OF THE MENDOCINO COAST Slide show, Quiz, and Drinking Game Monday, December 11 at 7:00 PM

Via [Zoom](#)

www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org



The Mendocino coast is a winter birding hotspot, with more than 130 species regularly found on each of our Christmas Bird Counts. Instead of trying to review all of them in one presentation, and wearing everyone out, we have created a series of video tutorials on the Mendocino Audubon YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@mendocinoaudubon6053/videos>

Look under "Playlists" for "Birding Tutorials." There you will find a recording of the last time we tried, and failed, to get through a slide show in under two hours. You will also find ten shorter, focused videos focused on certain taxonomic groups, providing more detail on what to look for when trying to identify these birds in the field. These let us spend the extra time to really get into the weeds on some of the more challenging aspects of birding: Raptors, Owls, Woodpeckers, Sparrows and Finches, Grebes, Cormorants, and Gulls. You can go through those at your own pace, skipping through the stuff you already know and slowing down to let the new information soak in.

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Cascadian Warbler? (Currently Townsend's). See page 3 for more. Photo by Ron LeValley

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Having done those, we now feel free to loosen up and have some fun with the annual slide show of winter birds. Instead of trying to teach you anything, we want to find out what you've already learned. Last year we learned that some of you really know your birds (and we're taking credit for that), so look for some new challenges this year.

David and Tim are the compilers of the Manchester and Fort Bragg Christmas Bird Counts, and past and current Presidents of the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society.

COUNTING BIRDS FOR SCIENCE AND FUN



California Towhee, photo by Becky Bowen

Audubon's Christmas Bird Count is the largest and longest-running citizen-science effort in the world. Started by Frank Chapman in 1900, it quickly became a popular alternative to the "side hunt" of the 19th century. Last year almost eighty thousand people participated in the Count.

Participants join field teams, or bird their own yards, within a defined circle 15 miles in diameter. The goal is to identify and count every bird you see within the circle in a 24-hour period. Some of us start in the early morning darkness, calling and listening for owls, and sometimes linger after dark hoping for just one more. Others just pop out for a couple of hours in the morning, or even stay indoors and count birds through the window. It's all good and it all counts!

The Fort Bragg Count will be held on Saturday December 30, 2023. The circle extends from the south bank of Big River north to Little Valley Road. If you live anywhere within that region, you can participate simply by counting birds in your yard. Or you can join a team birding in the field - walking, driving, bicycling, kayaking, and possibly taking a boat out to sea. At the end of the day, we will meet at the Caspar Community Center for a Count Dinner and tally up the finds. Contact the Compiler: Tim Bray, tbray@mcn.org for team assignment, checklist and protocols.

On December 15, 1974, nine birders gathered for the initial Manchester (nee Mendocino Coast) Christmas Bird Count. Friday, January 5, 2024, will mark the 50th anniversary of the oldest CBC in Mendocino County. The count circle includes the coast from Elk south to Lighthouse Point. This year the catered compilation dinner will be held in Saint Anthony's Hall at St. Aloysius Church on Highway 1 in Point Arena. Contact David Jensen at djensen@mcn.org or 707.326.8815 to participate.

Click to download eBird
mobile to your phone:



BIRD NAMES FOR BIRDS by Tim Bray

The American Ornithological Society (AOS) [recently announced](#) they will begin a project to rename all North American birds that are currently named after people. This is a controversial decision, with many birders enthusiastically in favor and some vehemently opposed. Personally I welcome it, having long felt that birds should be given their own names rather than implying they belong to individuals.

I had somehow missed the “Bird Names For Birds” movement that ultimately led to this decision. While they focused mainly on the cultural aspects of naming birds after people, some of whom are not now regarded as worthy of recognition, I think there is a lot more to consider. The AOS Ad-Hoc English Bird Names Committee went into considerable detail about the many ramifications of bird naming conventions. They provided a very detailed [explanation of their work](#), including the justifications and reasoning behind the recommendations, directly addressing every objection people have raised. I recommend anyone interested in this topic read that document before making up your mind.

Some of you who have been on birdwalks with us know that Chris Lamoureux and I often propose alternate names for birds, often whimsical but sometimes serious, and it is fun to discover that many others do so as well. A [wonderful essay](#) published by the American Birding Association recognized that birds have always been given different names by different groups of people, and suggested that a thesaurus - acknowledging multiple synonymous English-language names for one bird with a single scientific name - would have been a better model than a checklist. No official body seems to have considered that option.

I propose the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society engage in this project by developing a list of proposed new names for the birds in our region that will be under consideration (see sidebar), and forward those to the AOS for their consideration. We have plenty of time to think about and debate such proposals, as the AOS will be conducting its pilot program to involve the public in 2024. Let’s have some fun with it!



Steller's Jay

Western Birds to be renamed:

Ross's Goose
 Barrow's Goldeneye
 Clark's Grebe
 Vaux's Swift
 Anna's Hummingbird
 Allen's Hummingbird
 Wilson's Snipe
 Wilson's Phalarope
 Baird's Sandpiper
 Cassin's Auklet
 Scripps's Murrelet
 Sabine's Gull
 Bonaparte's Gull
 Franklin's Gull
 Heermann's Gull
 Forster's Tern
 Leach's Storm-Petrel
 Brandt's Cormorant
 Cooper's Hawk
 Lewis's Woodpecker
 Nuttall's Woodpecker
 Hammond's Flycatcher
 Say's Phoebe
 Hutton's Vireo
 Cassin's Vireo
 Steller's Jay
 Clark's Nutcracker
 Bewick's Wren
 Townsend's Solitaire
 Swainson's Thrush
 Cassin's Finch
 Harris's Sparrow
 Lincoln's Sparrow
 Bullock's Oriole
 Brewer's Blackbird
 MacGillivray's Warbler
 Townsend's Warbler
 Wilson's Warbler

IN THEIR OWN WORDS: Notes from MCAS Scholarship Recipients

By Zachariah Linville

Editor's Note: *Zachariah Linville, a Mendocino College graduate who received Mendocino Coast Audubon Society's Greg Grantham Memorial Scholarship in 2022, is earning his bachelor's degree in Biology with a concentration on Zoology at Sonoma State University. We re-connected with him recently during a brief Facebook exchange about Archaeopteryx lithographica and the prehistoric connection between dinosaurs and birds. Some twenty years ago, I was a member of Prof. Greg Grantham's class on the former College of the Redwoods coastal campus – dutifully memorizing the physical similarities of dinosaurs and Archaeopteryx. We asked Zachariah to give us an update on the state of the reptile/bird research after our discussion. His response made me smile. I know it would have made Prof. Grantham smile, too. - Becky Bowen, Member, MCAS Scholarship Committee*

The origin of birds and their relationship to other diapsids, particularly non-avian theropods, is a topic that I have always found fascinating.

There have been many discoveries in the last few decades that have considerably blurred the line between dinosaur and bird. What's fascinating is how the transitional mosaic of reptilian and avian traits persisted until the very end of the Mesozoic era, with ancient birds possessing a wide variety of basal and derived characteristics before the K-Pg extinction event.

Archaeopteryx lithographica, from the late Jurassic (approximately 150 million years ago), is an incredible animal and the similarities it shares with modern birds and the non-avian dinosaurs are striking. It represents an amazingly well-preserved example of a transitional species, with pennaceous feathers, a long, bony tail, clawed fingers, a furcula, and teeth. Ever since its discovery in 1861, it has remained an icon of bird evolution. However, there are several other ancient animals worth mentioning when discussing the history of avians. *Xiaotingia*, which lived in what is now China, actually predates *Archaeopteryx* by around five to ten million years. Like *Archaeopteryx*, *Xiaotingia* displays a blend of traditional dinosaurlike characteristics, such as toothed jaws in place of a beak and a long, bony tail, as well as birdlike features, such as feathers and a pubis that points backwards. It was originally classified as a member of Deinonychosauria, the same group that contains the popular Velociraptor, but has recently been reclassified as an anchiornithid, a very basal family of avialans (what we would consider to be birds in the most general sense). Studies suggest that *Xiaotingia* also may have been capable of limited flight, possibly aided by the second set of "wings" on its hindlimbs.

The recently-discovered *Cratonavis*, also from China, lived about 30 million years after *Xiaotingia* in the early Cretaceous period, and displays even more birdlike characteristics. While the animal still possesses prominent claws on the fingers and a dinosaurlike skull with teeth, *Cratonavis* also has a pygostyle, just like modern birds. The bones that once made up the long, stiff tails in theropods like *Archaeopteryx* and *Xiaotingia* had fused to form the much smaller structure still seen in birds today. *Cratonavis* also possessed a long, reversed hallux much like those seen in extant anisodactyl birds, like raptors and passerines. *Archaeorhynchus*, which lived around the same time as *Cratonavis*, is one of the earliest known birds to possess a beak in place of a more traditional, dinosaurlike snout, as well as a keeled sternum to support flight muscles.

Although not a specific genus, the Enantiornithes are also worth mentioning. Enantiornithes are a clade of birds from the Cretaceous period. They were the most diverse and successful avialans during the Mesozoic era, ranging from the sparrow-sized *Intiornis* to the vulture-sized *Mirarce*.

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This fossil of *Archaeopteryx lithographica*, discovered in a limestone quarry in Southern Germany circa 1861, currently is on display at the Museum für Naturkunde in Berlin. For years, scientists considered the fossil to be evidence of a possible “missing link” between reptiles and birds. But recently, researchers in China have recorded discoveries of much earlier examples of reptiles with physical characteristics similar to modern birds.

Photograph credit:
Wikimedia Commons H. Raab

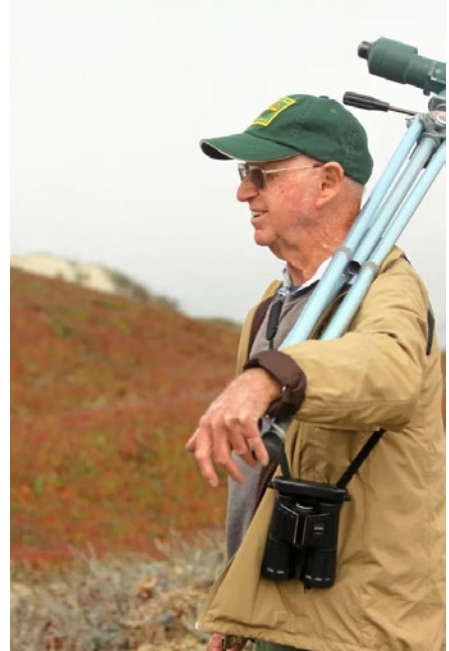
Although they still possessed teeth and clawed fingers, they were otherwise practically indistinguishable from modern avians, with pygostyles, beaks, and the capacity for sustained, powered flight. Other notable avialans from the Cretaceous include the highly-specialized, aquatic hesperornithes, the gull-like ichthyornithes, the giant, emu-like *Gargantuavis*, and the confuciusornithids, which possessed long, ornamental tail feathers. Despite the high amount of avialan diversity during the Cretaceous period, only one group, Aves, survived the K-Pg extinction event 66 million years ago. It is believed that the toothless birds we’re familiar with today were able to withstand the harsh conditions because they could exploit more food sources than their toothed relatives. All other avialan groups ultimately perished along with the rest of the dinosaurs. Regardless, it’s interesting that basal traits such as teeth and clawed fingers persisted well after the overall recognizable bird body plan had evolved. More interesting still is that a few birds, like ostriches and emus, still possess hooked claws on their wings showing how their dinosaur roots run deep.

Mendocino Coast Audubon Society supports funding for annual science scholarships at Mendocino College. Recipients are selected by science faculty staff based on academic achievement and financial need, and have participated in laboratory research at the college Field Station near Point Arena: <https://www.mendocino.edu/about/mlccd/our-campus/mendocino-college-coastal-field-station>

Financial support comes from the society’s scholarship program and donations from Audubon and community members. We welcome donations which can be made to the MCAS Brandon Pill Memorial Scholarship Fund and/or the MCAS Greg Grantham Memorial Scholarship Fund. Please contact MCAS Scholarship Chair Judy Steele for more information judys@mcn.org

REMEMBERING ART MORLEY 1926 - 2023

“Art Morley was already something of a local hero when I arrived on the Mendocino coast 23 years ago. He had already completed a 20-year career in the Navy and another 18 years as a California State Parks ranger with his wife Jean, before they returned to his hometown in 1993. For him, retirement was an opportunity to throw himself into volunteerism. Soon he was known throughout the coast for his work with the Dorothy King Young chapter of the California Native Plant Society, the Mendocino Area Parks Association (now MendoParks), the Mendocino Land Trust, the Sierra Club, and not least the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society, among other groups. Our earliest records indicate he was organizing and leading field trips as early as 1991. I remember meeting him on a field trip and being astonished at the breadth of his knowledge, which went far beyond the birds. If you saw a flower, or a butterfly, or almost any living thing, all you had to do was ask Art; chances were good he could tell you a lot about it, and if he didn’t know it he would just say so. There was no pretension, no effort to impress you - if you were interested he would enthusiastically share whatever he knew, which was often encyclopedic, and if you weren’t that interested he would just let it go.



As time went on I kept hearing about the other things Art was involved with, like trail maintenance, invasive weed removal, digging out Pampas Grass, Coastal Cleanups... it began to seem as if he was omnipresent, and I started calling him Superman. He would chuckle at that and just go on doing whatever he thought needed doing. He took pride in his work, though always in a humble way, and seemed to think of himself as an ordinary man despite his extraordinary contributions to our community.

He aged as gracefully as anyone I have ever known. Hearing loss cut into his birding but he would still show up on occasional field trips, including pelagics, and continued leading teams on Christmas Bird Counts until this year. He was still working the mattock and shovel to dig out Pampas and other weeds into his 90s. I and many others admired him, respected him, and loved him. We will long remember him.”

- Tim Bray

“On life’s journey we often follow those who lead the way. On my journey, Art Morley was such a leader, and I continue to follow the path he showed me. I first met Art on a Gardens walk in 2001, shortly after I had returned to the coast from a fifteen-year journey through the Bay Area and the Midwest. He patiently reacquainted me with the local species: Swainsons in the summer, Hermits in the winter; Ravens not Crows – lessons I still repeat on the beginner bird walks. That December he invited me to join his Manchester CBC team, Area 3, which is



centered around the Irish Beach settlement. Two years later he handed me that territory, an area I will cover in a few weeks for the twenty-third time. Art also served as the compiler for the Manchester count, and this will be my eighth year with that responsibility. In 2003 Art invited me to attend a chapter board meeting. We met in the Audubon store at the Botanical Gardens. Two meetings later I joined Art as a member of the board; twenty years later I will attend the next meeting. Art led me to other endeavors- chapter field trip coordinator, Point Cabrillo breeding bird survey, beach clean-ups, and (of course) invasive plant removals. So as you can see, Art has had a very strong influence on my life since the day I met him. Art Morley was the quintessential effective leader. He quietly led by example, earning the trust and respect of those he inspired to follow. He was a treasure to those he touched. We shall long remember and miss him.”

- Dave Jensen



“During a magical few days at the end of August and beginning of September, 2009, at least 3 Hudsonian Godwits visited Ten Mile Beach, Virgin Creek Beach, Glass Beach, and Pudding Creek. Many of us never believed we would ever ever EVER see a Hudsonian Godwit in our lifetimes. I got a call on one afternoon from Karen Havlena. She was so excited about the sightings I think she was calling several of us birders to let us know. She said, “Come out to Glass Beach right now. Jerry White just saw a Hudsonian Godwit down on Glass Beach. I saw you driving down Main Street and I tried to yell at you to stop, but you didn’t pay any attention to me. The godwit is on Glass Beach now, and I just saw Art Morley running down Elm Street to the beach with his binoculars!” That vision of Art on the run will stick with me for the rest of my life...”

- Becky Bowen

UPCOMING EVENTS



*Lincoln's Sparrow,
photo by Ron LeValley*

CBC WARM-UP - DECEMBER 9TH Birding on the Mill Site with eBird

The coastal trail along Fort Bragg's former mill site offers a great opportunity to view birds of the onshore, nearshore and offshore habitats. Our December field trip will explore this area with a special eye for late season migrants. But wait- there's more!

More birders are using the eBird app to record and report their sightings. Unfortunately, many new users struggle to learn some of the app's most useful functions. During this field trip Tim Bray will briefly review basic functions and teach us how to create a trip list. CBC members will find this especially helpful as we prepare for this season's event.

Meet us at 8 a.m. (note the early start time) in the Cypress Street parking lot on the old mill site (south end across from Taco Bell). Bring your device with the eBird mobile app if you have one, or simply join us for a morning of birdwatching along Fort Bragg's coastal trail. Loaner binoculars will be available for those in need.

THE RETURN OF THE MCAS SHIRTS!

There have been several inquiries about shirts or hoodies with our Black Oystercatcher logo. My printer has a thirty-six shirt minimum. All shirts are cotton and black. If you're interested, let me know by emailing: keegan@mcn.org

Type out your order with a few blank lines before and after, and please don't abbreviate. Example: 1 - long sleeve - XL

Prices listed are for sizes S-XL, add \$2 for XXL, add \$3 for 3X-4X
Short sleeve \$19.95, Long sleeve \$22.95, Pullover Hoody \$29.95, Full Zip Hoody \$31.95

If there's enough interest, I'll contact you via email about payment. ALL shirts must be picked up, preferably at a meeting, field trip, or early bird walk.



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

www.TheWharfFortBragg.com

The Wharf
RESTAURANT, LOUNGE & LODGING

CALENDAR

The Beginner's Birdwalk and the Early Birdwalk at the Gardens are continuing on the regular schedule. As always, check our website for the most up-to-date information, and keep up with the postings on our Facebook page.

DECEMBER 2023

Saturday 2 - Beginner's Bird Walk 9:00 AM - Noon

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

Tuesday 5 - Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Board Meeting 6:00 PM

Saturday 9 - CBC Warm-up on the old mill site 8:00 AM (Note early start time).

See page 8 for more information.

Monday 11 - Winter Birds of the Mendocino Coast 7:00 PM via [Zoom](#)

See front page for more. **Meeting ID:** 883 2856 6837 **Passcode:** 101280

Wednesday 20 - Early Bird Walk 8:30 AM - Noon

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

Saturday 30 - Christmas Bird Count, Fort Bragg circle (contact Tim Bray for details)

JANUARY 2024

Friday, January 5 - Christmas Bird Count, Manchester circle

(contact David Jensen for details)

Saturday 6 - Beginner's Bird Walk 9:00 AM - Noon

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

Wednesday 17 - Early Bird Walk 8:30 AM - Noon

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

Monday 22 - Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Chapter Meeting 7:00 PM - 8:00 PM

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

www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org

www.facebook.com/mendocinocoastaudubon

MCAS BOARD MEMBERS AND PROGRAM CHAIRS 2023-2024

President	Tim Bray	tbray@mcn.org	(707) 734-0791
Vice President	David Jensen	djensen@mcn.org	(707) 964-8163
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Newsletter/Website	Megan Smithyman	mendobirding@gmail.com	
Off-Board Chairs:			
Scholarship Chair	Judy Steele	judys@mcn.org	
Social Media	Catherine Keegan	keegan@mcn.org	
Programs	Terra Fuller	terrafuller74@gmail.com	(707) 964-4675
Programs	Hayley Ross	hayleyhross@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

