



The Black Oystercatcher

Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Newsletter- January 2022

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE:

Fort Bragg Christmas Bird Count Preliminary Report

Two questions occupy the minds of Compilers for Christmas Bird Counts each year. The first and most exciting is, what unusual or rare birds will be found? The second, less eagerly anticipated, is - how bad will the weather be?

To answer the second question first: Very bad indeed. The wind was already blowing strongly at dawn, accompanied by a cold rain, punctuated by intermittent showers. Some of those showers contained hail, which is very unpleasant in a 15-20 mph wind. We found ourselves walking backward to avoid getting hail in our faces. I can tell you this is not the best way to find birds. Eventually, the rain tapered off and the wind really got down to business. Out on the bluffs where our party spent the day, scoping was practically impossible and even binoculars were difficult to hold steady. It was, in a word, brutal.

It is a wonder to me that so many people persevered in those conditions and found so many birds. Our preliminary species count is 133, one more than our lowest total. As always, there were some unexpected finds and some puzzling misses.

On the beach north of Ward Avenue, near the north edge of the Count Circle, Charlene and her son Sean found a single Ruddy Turnstone - a first for this Count. They also found two Snowy Plovers, which are fairly regular on Ten Mile Beach in winter but have only been found once before within the Count Circle.

Tess and her team found and photographed another "first" for this Count: a drake Blue-winged Teal at the Ocean Shores pond. These ducks are uncommon anywhere and very rare on the coast. They also found two Cinnamon Teal for the second consecutive year.

David found a female Long-tailed Duck in Caspar cove, a bird we haven't found on this Count since 2011.

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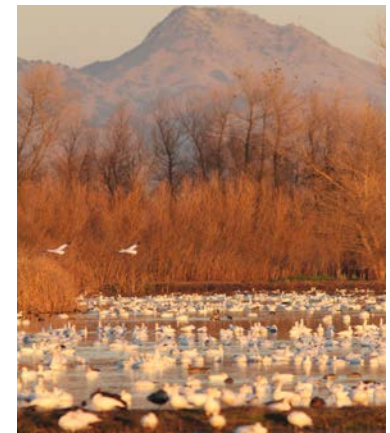


Photo of Colusa pond by Dave Jensen. Join us for a field trip to the Central Valley Refuges. Learn more on page 7

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Possibly the same bird that was recently seen at Ten Mile River?

Jerry found my "target bird" for the day: Black-legged Kittiwake. This is a pelagic bird that only occasionally comes close to shore, and we both suspected the wind would bring some close enough to see. Despite the extremely poor visibility, one did come close enough that Jerry could positively identify it. This is another bird that has only been found once before on this Count.

Roger found the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, a stakeout bird, at Rose Memorial. The Tennessee Warbler that has been seen regularly there did not appear in spite of multiple attempts to find it. A Palm Warbler was a nice consolation prize.

Northern Fulmars, another pelagic seabird, were seen by several observers, but David took the prize with a total of 300. That's an amazing number for a bird rarely seen from shore.

A single flock of about 100 Greater White-fronted Geese flying south was independently observed by three different parties: Erica's party at the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens, Ryan and Bob at Gibney Lane, and Jerry at Caspar Pond.

I found a Burrowing Owl off the Noyo Headlands trail, a Clark's Grebe and a Rhinoceros Auklet in Soldier's Bay, and two White-winged Scoters in a flock of Surf Scoters flying south over the ocean.

Bald Eagles were seen by several parties this year. David watched one soar over the ocean, then swoop down and snatch a seabird off the water.

Notable misses included Killdeer, again - we missed them in 2019 as well. Wilson's Snipe was a surprise miss; perhaps the abundance of wet-meadow habitat this year has scattered them away from the places we usually find them. Shorebirds, in general, were poorly represented this year, despite intensive searching by experienced birders, and owling was unproductive. American Goldfinch was undetected by the field birders, but I am hoping it showed up on someone's Feeder Watch.

Many thanks and much respect to everyone who ventured out in the field in such miserable conditions. Your perseverance is remarkable and admirable.

WINTER BIRD FEEDERS - SUET

By David Jensen



Yellow-shafted Flicker on a suet feeder.
Photo by Peggy Mabb via Feederwatch.org

In last month's article, I gave a brief introduction to the use of bird feeders in winter. In that article I briefly mentioned suet feeders, which are the easiest to maintain. Now I would like to say a bit more about them.

The simplest suet feeders are nothing more than suspended rectangular cages designed to hold a square cake of suet, often mixed with seeds or dried fruit. These suet cakes are readily available at most feed stores, hardware stores, and even grocery outlets. I usually select one that contains sunflower or other seeds, but the choice is yours. Depending on the number and type of birds that visit your feeder, each cake will last from two weeks to over a month. They typically cost less than three dollars each, much cheaper than my monthly seed bill.

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My suet feeder hangs from the eaves outside my kitchen table. I used to think that only jays and woodpeckers would eat suet. Wrong. Virtually all of my common yard birds will dine on suet: Song Sparrows, Gold and White Crowns, Chickadees, Yellow Rumps, Downy and Acorn Woodpeckers, Stellar Jays. For whatever reason, only the Fox Sparrows, towhees and doves forsake this feeder. Be aware that if you have Starlings in your yard, you may need to abandon the standard cage feeder for a design that forces the birds to hang upside down in order to access the suet.

In addition to affordability and the extended time between refilling, the primary advantage of a suet feeder, at least for me, is that there is virtually no clean-up required. Prior to refilling, I simply wash the cage with hot water and dish soap. There are no seed husks to remove.

I feed with seed year-round, but when the spring weather begins to warm, I remove my suet feeder and store it away until the cold weather of late fall returns. If you choose to include a suet feeder in your yard, put it in a place where you can regularly watch it. I won't say you'll be killing two birds with one stone - because you won't. And I know you wouldn't. But you get the idea.

SIGHTINGS: NOVEMBER-DECEMBER

By Roger Adamson

Apparently not satisfied with his American Tree Sparrow in November, Mike Curry found another great bird at his feeders in December. Mike was surprised to find a bright green Painted Bunting among his juncos and sparrows in Willits on Dec 8 (still present through Dec 30). This species breeds primarily in Texas and Oklahoma (a second breeding population is in Georgia and South Carolina) and winters from Mexico south well into Central America. The adult male with bright blue, red and green feathers is one of the most colorful North American songbirds. Immatures of both sexes closely resemble the green adult females. Mike very generously allowed numerous birders to visit his location and see this bird, only a second county record.



Painted Bunting. Photo by Roger Adamson

Other notable sightings include two Rough-legged Hawks, one near Manchester on Nov 13th (TB) and one on the Newport Rangeland on Nov 23 (AS). A Tropical Kingbird was spotted in Fort Bragg Nov 16 (JR). A Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (CL), possibly the same individual that was here last winter as a juvenile, was reported Nov 23 in the Rose Memorial Cemetery and was joined by a Tennessee Warbler (RA) and a Nashville Warbler (CL) within a few days. All three birds were feeding in the flowering banksias which have been a reliable location for wintering nectar-sipping and insectivorous birds. A second Tennessee Warbler was reported in the Rose Memorial Cemetery on Dec 17th (LW). A Long-tailed Duck was photographed at Seaside Beach on Dec 16 (JB & IR). Finally, on Dec 18th two Rock Sandpipers were found and photographed at Laguna Point (TF). Long-tailed Duck and Rock Sandpipers are expected almost annually along our coast, but occur in very limited numbers, and are welcome when seen. A Short-eared Owl made an afternoon appearance on Dec 23 at Noyo Headlands Park (CK & TB)-more about this next month.

Thanks to the following for their reports: Mike Curry, Tim Bray (TB), Asa Spade (AS), Janet Rayner (JR), Chris Lamoureux (CL), Roger Adamson (RA), Lisa Walker-Roseman (LW), Jayde Blair (JB), Isaac Rath (IR), Teale Fristoe (TF), and Catherine Keegan (CK).

SAVE OUR SHOREBIRDS

By *Becky Bowen*

Our Volunteers Reflect on 2021 SOS Surveys and Get Ready for 2022



Wilson's Phalarope under the bridge, on the hunt.
Photo by Shannon Underhill



White-faced Ibis wading in Virgin Creek.
Photo by Shannon Underhill

At the end of 2021, we asked SOS volunteers to tell us about special moments they experienced during last year's surveys. Here are the thoughtful – and insightful – responses:

Shannon Underhill: I'm not sure it's a shorebird story, but I was pretty excited to see a pair of White-faced Ibis at Virgin Creek. Shorebird-wise, I saw my first Wilson's Phalarope hunting no-see-ums below the bridge (also at Virgin Creek). I don't know if all Wilson's forage this way, but this particular one would crouch very low like a prowling cat with its beak horizontal very close to the ground, occasionally snatching some microscopic snack.

Charlene McAllister: For all of us, it was certainly the Brown Pelican that dominated fall surveys, but what always brings a smile to my face is seeing Wandering Tattlers. And while counting ravens can bring groans, on one solo survey I watched a raven at Glass Beach pick up a piece of driftwood, fly up with it, toss it in the air and catch it, doing this until others joined in the fun trying to grab the toy away. We do our surveys on Monday mornings and I've found that it's the perfect way to start a week.

Peggy Martin's entry on her data sheet for an SOS survey May 10, 2021 on the Trestle Loop survey route: Six Wandering Tattlers were resting on an offshore rock. A couple moved around and bobbed tails. I took photos and a short video. It was a surprise to see so many in one place. Towards the end of the survey route another tattler was located on the rocky shore of a pocket beach. *Editors's Note: This is an all-time high count for Wandering Tattlers on one Save Our Shorebirds survey.*



Wandering Tattler September 16, 2021

B. Bowen

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Black Oystercatchers, Surf Screech Owl Jan. 5, 2021 B. Bowen

Barbara Auerebach: My favorite are the oyster catchers who sometimes appear magically around a rock or perching above a lounging harbor seal. If there is one, then there are two.

Sandy Schmidt: What really struck me this year was how much larger the groups of birds were. 14 Marbled Godwits one count, 17 Black-bellied Plovers another, for example. In past years, I saw just a very few individuals from those species, and more species that I had not seen before, like the three Red-necked Phalaropes paddling around and enjoying the estuary. But more than this, it is the feeling of sharing the beach with the true denizens. I always dress in tans to match the sand and move slowly, so one count two Long-billed Curlew flew so close to me I could feel the wind from their wings and they then landed on the sand as if I wasn't there at all. A sublime feeling of being connected to the web of life. Thank you for the opportunity to feel that connection.



Long-billed Curlews May 2, 2021

B. Bowen

Tess McGuire: I get to survey shorebirds in the Central Valley in a couple of weeks. People are always baffled by the idea. Shorebirds in the rice fields? It's the unexpected aspect of it that makes it such a great adventure.

Jeanette Boyer: You had asked what each of us SOS Surveyors had found memorable this year ... but I failed to think of a sighting or experience that stood out in my mind. Oh, not that I didn't have plenty of glorious moments; what I cherish most, however, is the joy and peace I feel each and every time I am out there. Elsewhere, I all too easily get lost in my head and lose focus on what is right in front of me, but that never happens when I am surveying. I am so attentive to the birds and their surroundings that the rest of the world – with all its upheavals – slips away and I am absorbed by the beauty of life. So once again, I thank you for giving me the most wonderful of gifts: the gift of awe.

MENDOCINO COAST AUDUBON TO FUND TWO 2022 SCHOLARSHIPS TO MENDOCINO COLLEGE NATURAL SCIENCES STUDENTS



Greg Grantham scholarship recipient Erin Orth celebrates her graduation from Mendocino College in May, 2021.

Two Audubon scholarships will be presented to Mendocino College science students this fall by the Mendocino College Foundation. The awards are funded by MCAS in connection with the society's continuing support of the Friends of the Mendocino College Coastal Field Station and Natural Sciences. The college Field Station is located on the south Mendocino Coast. It is where students complete natural sciences lab work.

The MCAS scholarships are awarded in memory of Brandon Pill, a 2013 Marine Science Technology graduate of College of the Redwoods and College of the Redwoods Prof. Greg Grantham, who died in 2020.

Funding comes from Mendocino Coast Audubon and members of the community. Funding for the 2022 Brandon Pill Scholarship currently is \$2,200. After Prof. Grantham's death in 2020, author and community activist Ginny Rorby made a donation to MCAS to establish the Greg Grantham Memorial Scholarship. Funding for the 2022 Grantham Scholarship currently is \$2,300. If you would like to learn more about the scholarships or donate to either fund, please contact Scholarship Committee Chair Judy Steele or MCAS Treasurer, Jim Havlena. The deadline for donations to the 2022 scholarships is January 31, 2022.

We recently connected with Erin Orth, who graduated last spring from Mendocino College. Her goal is to study environmental science at the graduate level. Ms. Orth was the recipient of the 2021 Greg Grantham Memorial Scholarship.

Here is what she wrote us: "I have been working extremely hard and am very proud to be able to say that I have maintained a high academic average and a place in Phi Theta Kappa. As a mother of four small children and a full-time student, it is so important to me that I set a good example for them, especially to my daughters whom I hope will find successful careers in science themselves someday. Additionally, it is wonderful to have the opportunity to show them that hard work and determination do matter and that diligence is truly rewarded. I can promise you that I will continue to do everything I can to maintain my excellent academic status and uphold the prestigious reputation of the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society and make you proud.

With your generous contribution to my academic career, I will be able to alleviate some of the financial burdens of attending school and focus on my pilgrimage to becoming a leader in our mission towards environmental preservation and conservation. My hope is that someday I will be able to contribute to your foundation to assist hard-working, struggling students such as myself in achieving their dreams as well. Thank you again for believing in me."

JANUARY EVENTS



Terra Fuller Presents:
BIRDS, PLANTS, AND STREAMS: SURVEYS AND RESTORATION IN MENDOCINO STATE PARKS

Monday, January 17 at 7:00 PM

Via Zoom www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org

The Sonoma-Mendocino Coast State Parks contain ecologically rich habitats, including 900 acres of old growth redwood forests, 65 miles of salmonid streams, 30,000 acres of forest, 62 miles of coastline and habitat for 18 federally threatened and endangered species within 23 parks units.

Senior Environmental Scientist Terra Fuller with California State Parks will provide an overview of the Natural Resource Program in the Mendocino Sector for the Sonoma-Mendocino Coast District and discuss survey efforts for threatened and endangered birds, invasive species removal, and restoration work in terrestrial and stream habitats. The presentation will also highlight recent efforts to restore coastal prairie habitat for a federally listed butterfly species.

Terra Fuller received a B.S. in Natural Resources, Watershed Management and a M.S. in Wildlife Management from Humboldt State University. Prior to State Parks, she worked for various agencies surveying high elevation lakes and mountain streams for amphibians, reptiles, and fish. In her professional career, prior to State Parks, she worked for the Department of Fish and Wildlife where she reviewed timber harvest plans, streambed alteration permits, water rights and coastal development permits.

FIELD TRIP TO THE CENTRAL VALLEY REFUGES Saturday 15 - Monday 17

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. Our safari begins on Saturday, January 15 and ends on Monday, January 17, but you can join us for any or all of the three-day experience. This trip is designed to accommodate vaccinated persons only. If you are interested in visiting the central valley refuges but have not been vaccinated, please contact me for possible itineraries and other advice. Given the infectious nature of the Omicron variant, I will be tested at the Fort Bragg Veterans Hall on Tuesday prior to the trip. I encourage all attendees to do the same.



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JANUARY EVENTS

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We will visit as many of the wildlife refuges as possible, including the Colusa, Sacramento, Gray Lodge and Llano Seco units. If time allows, we may also leave the valley floor to search for Lewis' Woodpeckers and Rock Wrens. Each day we will gather in Williams at the Granzella's parking lot and carpool to the refuges, linked together with walkie talkies. Tess McGuire is the co-leader of this trip, so if necessary, we will divide into two groups.

I plan to arrive in the valley on Thursday and scout the area on Friday. Those who choose to arrive on Friday night can meet us at the Granzella's lot at 8 AM on Saturday for a morning expedition. Those who leave Fort Bragg on Saturday morning will meet us at the Granzella's lot at noon. It takes about three hours to travel the 130 miles from Fort Bragg to Williams, so plan accordingly. We will visit the Colusa or Sacramento refuge Saturday afternoon, so call or text me at 707-326-8815 to verify our location if you arrive late. On Sunday and Monday mornings we will meet at the Granzella's parking lot at 8 AM.

We will NOT be stopping at restaurants for lunch. You should plan to purchase a lunch from Granzella's before we leave each morning (they have excellent sandwiches) or pack whatever you prefer to eat. For dinner you can join us at one of the (few) restaurants in the area, order dinner to go, or reheat something in the microwave at your room. This was all so much easier three years ago!

The Colusa refuge is open free to the public, but there is a small entrance fee to the Sacramento refuge (about \$6 per day) and to the Gray Lodge refuge (about \$5 per day). The fee is waived at Sacramento if you have one of the federal passes, such as America the Beautiful or the Interagency Senior Lifetime Pass, commonly referred to as the Geezer Pass. The fee at Grey Lodge, which is managed by California Department of Fish and Wildlife, is waived if you have a 2022 hunting or fishing license or a valid Lands Pass. Be aware that hunting is allowed on or near each refuge, but distant from the viewing areas. Waterfowl hunting season will not end until January 31, so we will hear occasional gunshots, especially in the morning.

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 sixteen 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 cancelled in case the weather forecast is unfavorable. And be sure to bring warm clothes.

On the internet you can find information about several lodging options in Williams. In recent years I have been staying at the Traveler's Inn. It is quiet, about 5 blocks from the freeway, clean, well-managed, and has only one story, which means that no one will be pacing the floor over your room in the night. They have refrigerators and microwaves, but a pretty skimpy free breakfast. I'll be bringing my milk and Cheerios.

For more information, please call or text me at 326-8815 or email me at djensen@mcn.org. If you let me know that you intend to attend, I will send you any last-minute changes to our plan. Otherwise, please check our website before leaving home. I hope you can join us for what should be an unforgettable experience. Until then, stay safe and healthy.

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.

JANUARY 2022

Sunday 2 - Manchester Circle CBC

Saturday 8 - Beginner's Bird Walk* 9:00 a.m. - Noon

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

Saturday 15 - Monday 17 - Field trip to the Sacramento Valley

Weather permitting: Sacramento Refuge, Colusa Refuge, Grey Lodge, Leesville Road and more. Contact Dave Jensen for details. See page 5.

Monday 17 - Audubon Society Meeting 7:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

Join us for a presentation by Terra Fuller: Birds, Plants, and Streams: Surveys and Restoration in Mendocino State Parks

Wednesday 19 - Early Bird Walk* 8:30 a.m. - Noon

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

FEBRUARY 2022

Saturday 5 - Beginner's Bird Walk* 9:00 a.m. - Noon

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

Wednesday 9 - Audubon Board Meeting 6:00 p.m.

Wednesday 16 - Early Bird Walk* 8:30 a.m. - Noon

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

Monday 21 - Audubon Society Meeting 7:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

Join us for a presentation on coastal tree and shrub pathogen issues.

****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 2020-2021

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	
Conservation	Shannon Underhill	shannon.underhill@gmail.com	
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:			
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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

