



# The Black Oystercatcher

Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Newsletter- January 2023

## FORT BRAGG CBC REPORT

by Tim Bray



Ring-billed Gull by Lisa D Walker-Roseman.

Dry weather and calm seas on Monday, December 19, made the Fort Bragg Christmas Bird Count a lot more productive and enjoyable, compared to the awful conditions last year. Teams went out on foot, on bicycles, by car, and by boat this year. We also had a bilingual (Spanish-English) team led by Esme Plascencia of Latino Outdoors [latinooutdoors.org](http://latinooutdoors.org). We held a Count Dinner at the end of the day, the first since 2019. It's hard to express in words how satisfying that was. Big thanks to Catherine Keegan for organizing the dinner, and to Pam Huntley and Peter Steele for running the hall. Thank you also to Sarah Grimes for helping with the cleanup.

Our preliminary tally is 143 species of wild birds. For comparison, our highest tally so far was 152 and our lowest was 132, so this year's count is right in the middle of the range. A complete list of all the birds that were tallied on eBird checklists can be found here: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/86701>

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Western Tanager in the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens on 12/21/2022 by Roger Adamson. More on page 4.

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*Buffleheads and Harlequin Duck (at right), by Lisa D. Walker-Roseman*

“Best Bird” was probably the Black-and-White Warbler found by Penny Lancaster and Sarah Grimes on the Big River haul road trail. This bird was found again four days later, in the same spot. A Swamp Sparrow at Lake Cleone was first reported pre-Count by Lisa Walker-Roseman and found again on Count Day by Sean and Charlene McAllister.

Tennessee Warbler and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker were stakeout birds at Rose Memorial, found by Roger Adamson and Chris Lamoureaux. Remarkably, a second Tennessee Warbler appeared in Roger’s yard and was counted by Grete Adamson. This species was first noted here in the winter of 2018 and has been found every year since.

Wandering Tattlers are scarce here in late winter, so it was remarkable to have no less than three at Glass Beach found by Esme Plascencia. The Rock Sandpiper that had been found before the Count was found again by Sean McAllister in a different spot. Sean also had the only Iceland Gull identified this year.

Calm weather made seawatching from shore productive (a big change from last year). Chuck Vaughn found a Marbled Murrelet and five Ancient Murrelets. Chuck also found a single Heermann’s Gull off the south Mendocino headland. The only Brown Pelican of the day was found off Point Cabrillo by David Jensen’s team. Jerry White had a fly-by Brant, only the fourth time this species has been tallied on this Count, and he found the only Clark’s Grebe this year. Calm seas allowed six of us to get out on a boat to search for seabirds, adding Sooty Shearwater, Pink-footed Shearwater and Northern Fulmar to the list. Alas, no Albatrosses this time.

Harlequin Duck has not appeared in several years. Lisa Walker-Roseman and Shannon Underhill found one off Virgin Creek beach. They also contributed a Ring-billed Gull, a bird that is common inland and on sandy beaches elsewhere but uncommon-to-rare here.

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“Count Week” additions include the Western Tanager and Black-legged Kittiwake found on the early birdwalk at the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens two days after the Count.

This year there were few notable misses. Black-crowned Night-heron is probably the only expected bird we didn’t find; a small number have become regular in the Noyo River but escaped detection on Count Day. We didn’t have many people owling the timberlands, so no Barred or Screech-owls, nor any Barn Owls. Other birds such as Northern Pintail, Bewick’s Wren, and Red Crossbill are not regularly found here, although each of these has been found on more than half of the previous Counts. No Bald Eagles appeared this year.

There were however several near-misses, expected birds that were only found by one party: Band-tailed Pigeon, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Merlin, Pileated Woodpecker, Bushtit, Cedar Waxwing, American Goldfinch, and Pine Siskin. Almost every team contributed at least one unique species to the Count this year.

Many, many thanks to all who participated this year, especially to those who organized field teams and put up with my pestering.



*Early bird walk photos of Peregrine Falcon and Cooper’s Hawk by Tess McGuire*

## RECENT SIGHTINGS

by Roger Adamson



*Rhinoceros Auklet and Ancient Murrelet found during the Fort Bragg CBC on 12/19/2022.  
Photos by Roger Adamson*

Since mid-November Mendocino birders have found several rare birds. On Nov 16 a Nashville Warbler made an appearance (TB). On Nov 29 two very good birds, a Swamp Sparrow and an Eastern Phoebe, were seen at Lake Cleone (EH). An exceptional observation, the Phoebe was only the third reported for the county. At Riverside Park in Ukiah on Dec 2 a Mountain Bluebird was spotted (GG). We had Tropical Kingbirds in Albion (HG) on Dec 2 and another a few days later in Fort Bragg (TB), totaling about ten TKs this year. On Dec 4 a Slate-colored Dark-eyed Junco was feeding at a seed feeder in Willits (MC). A Great-tailed Grackle was reported at the Ukiah Water Treatment Plant Dec 11 (CV). Also Dec 11, a possible Garganey was photographed in a passing flock of Cackling Geese (SU); the bird was submitted to the California Bird Records Committee and, if accepted, it would be the first county record of this Eurasian species. On the Ukiah CBC, Dec 17, three birds, all unusual for this time of year, were recorded (MF, JF, DJ, SGo). They were a Pacific-slope flycatcher (possibly a Cordilleran), a Yellow Warbler, and a Nashville Warbler. All three should be well south of here in December. Another exceptional report was a Black-and-White Warbler, found about a mile east on Big River Trail during the Fort Bragg CBC on Dec 19 (PL & SGr). This is only the fifth county record for that east-of-the-Rockies warbler. Several other good birds were seen on the Fort Bragg CBC; see the accompanying report in this Newsletter issue. A Rose-breasted Grosbeak visited a backyard feeder in Ukiah on Dec 20 (CV). On Dec 23 birders found 4 Rock Sandpipers at Laguna Point, an unusually high number of this nearly annual visitor (LW, SU). During our Early Bird Walk on Dec 23, we found a female Western Tanager, which should have been in Southern California or Mexico by that date (RA). And last, on Dec 25 a Yellow-headed Blackbird was seen in Anderson Valley and the same observer reported another Western Tanager in Boonville (KK).

Thanks to these birders for their reports. Tim Bray (TB), Ed Harper (EH), George Gibbs (GG), Howard Guyer (HG), Mike Curry (MC), Chuck Vaughn (CV), Shannon Underhill (SU), Matt Franks (MF), Joel Franks (JF), Dave Jensen (DJ), Sam Goldberg (SGo), Penny Lancaster (PL), Sarah Grimes (SGr), Lisa Walker-Roseman (LW), Roger Adamson (RA), and Katharine Khamhaengwong (KK).

## PHOTO SUBMISSIONS



The first birds sighted on the Save Our Shorebirds survey on December 17 were two Bald Eagles feeding on salmon on the banks of Ten Mile River. In one of those rare moments where the morning light was right, we were able to capture this image that made us appreciate the uncompromising golden feet--as well as the eagle eye. --**Becky Bowen**



While driving in Cleone on December 13, I saw the strangest thing in my neighbor's yard. Among the many American Robins I normally see this time of year, there was a pale one, almost white. It really stuck out! I rushed home for my camera and got as close as I could to document it. I have never seen a leucistic bird in the wild before. --**Megan Smithyman**

## SEA TRIP REPORT

by Esmeralda Plascencia



I could barely sleep the night before because of how excited I was to be going out to sea! I may have dreamt that I was out in the ocean because I felt a little lightheaded in the morning. This was my second time going on a boat to go birdwatching with MCAS and I am thankful to all the board members who agreed to sponsor me for this trip.

There were so many birds I saw this day that I hadn't seen before. It was very interesting to observe the spot where the whale is sunken, and the flock of birds that were attracted to it. I learned that the birds will drink the oils of the whale and scraps of its meat that rise to the surface. It was quite a trip. I believe there were birds that were dive-bombing down to it.



There were so many types of Gulls from Western, California, Herring, and Glaucous-Winged to Short-billed. There were a couple of Western x Glaucous-winged Gull hybrids. It was a bit difficult to see them all because they were so clustered together. They were also moving quickly, and the moving boat also made it a bit difficult to keep steady track of all the birds.

Birdwatching on the sea is quite different from walking or hiking on land, and it may take a bit to get used to, especially if you're not used to sea motion. I felt a bit nauseous in my stomach from the sea motion. I made sure to bring some ginger candy to help and it made me feel better but I was not prepared for the cold.

I made sure to wear a scarf, gloves, a warm hat, a blanket, and warm layers but it still felt cold! I recommend wearing or bringing more layers than you need to if you're going to go birdwatching this winter, especially out to sea.

One of my highlights was seeing a Surf Scoter (*Melanitta perspicillata*) on our way back to land. I had not seen this sea duck before, and there was only one to be seen. The black spot on its beak reminded me of ear gauges for some reason. I learned that they're nicknamed "Skunk Duck," from Cartoonist Rosemary Mosco. Weird duck time for sure!

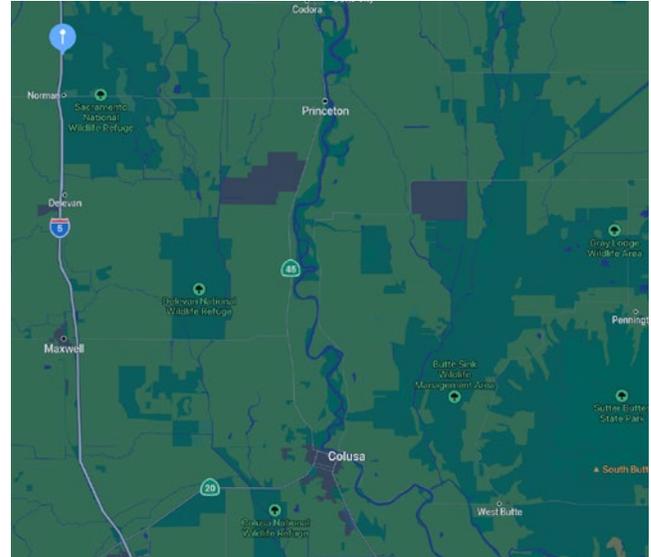
## EVENTS

### JANUARY FIELD TRIP: CENTRAL VALLEY REFUGES

**FRIDAY JAN. 20 - SUNDAY JAN. 22**  
(note that the dates have changed this year)

Hosted by Tess McGuire: 707-533-7381  
tmcguire9130@gmail.com

We're going back to the Central Valley again to enjoy the gathering of winter waterfowl, but the dates have changed. This year's trip will be three days, Friday to Sunday Jan. 20-22, on the third weekend of the month. You can join us for any or all of the three-day event. Covid vaccination is recommended, carpool at your own risk.



We will visit as many of the wildlife refuges as possible, including Colusa, Sacramento, Grey Lodge and Llano Seco. Each day we will gather in front of Granzella's (great coffee and pastries), and carpool to the refuges. Those who chose to spend Thursday night in Williams can join us at 8 AM for the morning expedition. For the rest we'll reconvene at Granzella's at 12 PM. The drive from Fort Bragg to Williams takes about three hours, so plan accordingly. Call or text me at 707-533-7381 to find out where we are if you arrive late.

We will NOT be stopping at restaurants for lunch. You can purchase sandwiches at Granzella's or bring an ice chest from home. For dinner you can join us at one of the restaurants or order take-out. Several motels are in the immediate area. Reservations are recommended as it will still be hunting season.



Entrance fees for the Sacramento refuge is about \$7.00, Grey Lodge is about \$5.00. Most refuges have auto tour loop that we will drive. There will be a small amount of walking on level ground but no arduous hiking. This trip will take place rain or shine, unless it looks like there's a heavy deluge is forecast for all three days.

If you let me know that you're coming and when I'll text or email you any last-minute changes. I hope you can join us for an awesome experience.

## EVENTS

*Janelle Chojnacki Presents:*

### **TRACKING COMMON RAVENS TO UNDERSTAND THEIR MOVEMENT AROUND WESTERN SNOWY PLOVER NESTING BEACHES**

**Monday, January 23 at 7:00 PM  
Lions Club hall, 430 East Redwood Street, FB.**



From their twisting aerial displays, intimate partner bonding activities, and complex social behaviors, common ravens can be exhilarating to observe. These large, glossy black birds are native to Humboldt County's dune ecosystems, but food subsidies from human activities have enabled them to become problematic for many other native species. One such species is the federally threatened Western Snowy Plover, a cryptic beach-nesting shorebird that breeds in Humboldt

County. Ravens are the number one nest predator of snowy plovers, so Cal Poly Humboldt graduate student Janelle Chojnacki is using GPS units and colored leg bands to track and observe beach-going ravens in order to better understand the resources influencing these ravens' behavior. This seminar will discuss the fascinating ecology and interactions of ravens and snowy plovers as well as what we can all do to sustainably enjoy both species.

I am a graduate student in Dr. Barbara Clucas's lab at Cal Poly Humboldt and hope to use my current research to develop solutions to mitigate the causal factors of high raven numbers and, subsequently, decrease raven predation of protected species. Before joining Cal Poly Humboldt, I received my undergraduate degree in Conservation and Resource Studies from UC Berkeley then spent several years in a variety of field positions, largely ornithological, working on projects studying migratory songbird stopover ecology, the role of songbirds in dispersal of native forest seeds, long-term bird banding projects, and other wildlife positions. In addition to my graduate research I also work for California State Parks monitoring Humboldt's snowy plovers, I organize field trips for the Redwood Region Audubon Society, am treasurer of the California North Coast Chapter of The Wildlife Society, and generally enjoy being involved in the wildlife community that is so robust in our neck of the woods!

## 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. As always, check our website for the most up-to-date information, and keep up with the postings on our Facebook page.

### JANUARY 2023

**Monday January 2 - Christmas Bird Count, Manchester circle**  
(contact David Jensen for details)

**Saturday 7 - Beginner's Bird Walk 9:00 AM - Noon**  
Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens, 18220 Highway 1, Fort Bragg, CA 95437

**Wednesday 18 - Early Bird Walk 8:30 AM - Noon**  
Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens, 18220 Highway 1, Fort Bragg, CA 95437

**Friday 20 - Sunday 22: Central Valley Refuges Field Trip**  
Trip leader Tess McGuire. See page 7 for details.

**Monday 23 - Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Chapter Meeting 7:00 PM - 8:00 PM**  
Corvid research presentation by Janelle Chojnacki. Join us for an in-person at the Lions Club Hall, 430 East Redwood Street, Fort Bragg.

### FEBRUARY 2023

**Saturday 4 - Beginner's Bird Walk 9:00 AM - Noon**  
Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens, 18220 Highway 1, Fort Bragg, CA 95437

**Wednesday 8 - Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Board Meeting 6:00 PM**

**Monday 13 - Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Chapter Meeting 7:00 PM - 8:00 PM**  
Join us for a presentation of JDSF Research Projects.

**Wednesday 15 - Early Bird Walk 8:30 AM - Noon**  
Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens, 18220 Highway 1, Fort Bragg, CA 95437

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

[www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org](http://www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org)  
[www.facebook.com/mendocinocoastaudubon](https://www.facebook.com/mendocinocoastaudubon)

**MCAS BOARD MEMBERS AND PROGRAM CHAIRS 2022-2023**

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	
Field Trips	Tess McGuire	tmcguire9130@gmail.com	
Newsletter Editor	Megan Smithyman	mesmithy@gmail.com	
Social Media	Catherine Keegan	keegan@mcn.org	

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

