



The Black Oystercatcher

Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Newsletter- October 2021

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE:

Brown Pelicans and the Marine Ecosystem



RHA

Brown Pelicans diving for fish along the south end of Ward Avenue on July 16. Photo by Roger Adamson

Anyone who has looked out at the sea recently has noticed the graceful flight of the Brown Pelicans. They are seemingly everywhere this year, often in large numbers. A high proportion of them are juveniles. We saw a big influx of these big birds in July, and numbers continued to increase into August. You could stand on a bluff and watch hundreds streaming by, or see huge flocks dive-bombing into the water for food. It has been a nonstop spectacle for two months.

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Want to participate in this year's October Big Day on the 9th? Learn more on page 6.



Brown Pelicans (adult on left, adolescent on right) taken September 25, 2021 at Inglenook Fen-Ten Mile Dunes Preserve in MacKerricher State Park. Photo by Becky Bowen

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Brown Pelicans are one of the great conservation success stories. In the 1960s their population declined rapidly, and in 1970 the breeding colony in the Channel Islands had dwindled to 552 pairs, who produced a single surviving chick.

The federal government listed them as endangered in 1970, and California followed in 1971. The principal cause of their decline was the pesticide DDT, which was being discharged from chemical manufacturing plants through municipal sewer systems directly into the ocean near their breeding grounds.

After this practice was halted, a massive cleanup and restoration effort (still ongoing) reduced DDT concentrations and eventually the birds began to recover. By 2009 Brown Pelicans were removed from the federal list of endangered and threatened species and there are now around 6,000 pairs breeding in the Channel Islands.

The Pelicans here are feeding mainly on anchovies, which are also unusually abundant this year - in fact I've never seen anything like it. The ocean is churning with schools of them. On a particularly calm day as I was fishing from a kayak I heard a sound like rushing water; it was caused by thousands of anchovies jumping at the surface a few yards away. Looking around at the glassy water, I could see rough patches of water, as if it was raining hard in spots - these were more schools of anchovy breaking the surface. Looking down into the water I could see their enormous mouths open as they swam through the water, filtering plankton.

Plankton is also abundant this year. Repeated bouts of wind caused repeated episodes of upwelling, stratification, and phytoplankton blooms. This in turn feeds zooplankton, the tiny animals of myriad species that are in turn the food for everything from anchovies to whales. There is so much phytoplankton this year, it sometimes covers the water surface with stringy green goo. Diatoms coat the kelp with a yellowish-green dust, partly obscuring the healthy iridescence of the fronds.

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Oh yes, the kelp... it made an amazing recovery this year, as many of you have noticed. From 2014 (year of the extreme warming event "El Blobino") to 2020, the kelp forests collapsed spectacularly as Purple Urchin numbers exploded. Many scientists predicted this would become a permanent condition, as kelp could not survive against the grazing pressure of so many urchins. Yet in 2021, the kelp reappeared in many places, even though the urchins are still extremely abundant. Marine ecologists are scrambling to understand what is happening, but for now it's just great to see the kelp beds again.

The wind blows, cold water wells up, diatoms grow, and the next thing you know we have thousands of Brown Pelicans. Even before they arrived here, we were seeing Common Murres, Pigeon Guillemots, Pelagic and Brandt's Cormorants feeding on baitfish and bringing them back to feed their chicks. When the Pelicans arrived, the Heermann's Gulls (who snatch fish from their bills) came with them, joining our resident Western Gulls and the returning California Gulls that bred inland. Sooty Shearwaters even swooped in from offshore to join in the "feeding frenzy."

All because the wind blew.



SAVE OUR SHOREBIRDS

By Becky Bowen

From May to September, 2021 – Our Summer of the Red-necked Phalaropes



Red-necked Phalarope May 14, 2021 Virgin Creek Beach



Red-necked Phalarope Sept. 3, 2021 Virgin Creek Beach

Like many shorebirds, Red-necked Phalaropes always seem to be on the-the-go, even when they are not migrating from Arctic breeding grounds to tropical wintering oceans. Perhaps weather or food events in 2021 diverted good numbers of migrating Red-necked Phalaropes from ocean flight paths closer in to our beaches. SOS surveyors were able to observe the birds in breeding (flying north in spring) and non-breeding plumage (flying south in fall). Between mid-June, 2007 to December 31, 2020 SOS surveyors recorded 2,315 sightings of Red-necked Phalaropes on 231 surveys in MacKerricher State Park. Every year was different. For instance, we recorded only 2 sightings in 2010. In 2019, we recorded 505 sightings, most of them from August through October. While the 2021 data is not all in, it looks like 2021 will have a noteworthy count of Red-necked Phalaropes.

The birds arrive in Arctic regions of North America, Europe, and Asia in stunning colorful plumage like that shown in the photograph above at left. This is a picture of one of 29 Red-necked Phalaropes counted on an SOS survey on May 14, 2021 on Virgin Creek Beach north of Fort Bragg. It's a handsome, or we should say beautiful ladylike bird, because females in breeding plumage are more colorful than males. Males also are smaller than females and breeding is only the beginning of their nest work. Males incubate eggs on tundra ground nests, and tend to chicks when they hatch. Females do not participate in raising chicks and often pick another partner and lay a second clutch during the short Arctic summer.

When it is time to fly south for the winter, plumage undergoes a radical transformation; the birds look like the photograph above right. It was taken September 3, 2021 at Virgin Creek Beach. Gone are the resplendent red neck feathers. The striking colorful back feathers morph into a subtler pattern.

The wardrobe may look different, but the bird's colorful, spirited behavior never changes. Red-necked Phalaropes twitter and chatter frequently, flit around in waves, and feed by twirling frenetically in circles to attract food to the water's surface where they snatch it in their beaks. That's why a group of phalaropes often is referred to as a "whirligig" of phalaropes.

Save Our Shorebirds is an ongoing Mendocino Coast Audubon conservation project in cooperation with California State Parks. To learn more, contact Becky Bowen at casparbeck@comcast.net and please visit us on facebook to see what we are observing on SOS surveys www.facebook.com/SaveOurShorebirds

FALL MIGRANTS

By Roger Adamson

The Eastern Kingbird and Clay-colored Sparrow are fall migrants. The Eastern Kingbird was found by Chris Lamoreux on September 7 at Lake Cleone. This is the sixth county record that is listed on eBird; they are all fall records. It is primarily an eastern species, although some birds breed in east Oregon, Washington and on into British Columbia.

The Clay-colored Sparrow breeding range is from the Great Lakes west into Montana and north into central Canada across the northern Great Plains. While we don't have them here every year, at least three have been seen during September 2021.

*Eastern Kingbird and Clay-colored Sparrow
Photos by Roger Adamson*



CLIMATE CORNER: ONLINE

By Pam Huntley

In September we looked at our food choices and how they impact climate change. This time, I want to examine our online carbon footprint and show how we can reduce our carbon emissions, even when we're online. Energy is needed for all the data we are producing and its storage in server farms for our cloud-based systems. A few years ago a report announced an alarmingly large amount production of CO₂ from our internet use. In fact, the internet accounts for 10% of electric demand globally and is predicted to rise to 30% by 2030.

Here are a few things we can do to help:

Buy less, buy better. It's said that the production and disposal of electronic devices such as laptops use more CO₂ than the device itself. To reduce your footprint, invest in higher quality items that will last longer. Consider buying refurbished.

Reduce streaming When possible, downloading the podcast appears to be a better option and one study shows it's better to purchase and download music you listen to more than 27 times.

Smarter online shopping When possible, pick the slowest shipping. Faster shipping drastically increases carbon emissions. Try to limit the frequency of orders and consolidate into fewer boxes.

Turn it off: Make sure devices are switched off when not needed. Unplug your chargers as well, as devices that are plugged in but switched off can still draw a small amount of electricity.

Carol Liao, a business law professor at the University of British Columbia says:

"We need to buy less, buy local, use local, recycle more. If we want to be operating within the planetary boundaries, we need to cut off things that are luxury, wasteful items that are not good for the climate that harms our carbon footprint and everyone needs to be more versed on climate going forward."

OCTOBER EVENTS



Greg and Trish Tatarian Present:

A BIRDER'S GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING BATS

Monday, October 18 at 7:00 PM

Via Zoom www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org

This presentation will address the decline of bat populations, particularly in California, with a focus on shrinking habitat across the landscape. Participants will get a better understanding of the special life histories and roosting ecology of these unique mammals, learn more about how bats use and depend on roost sites, and gain insights in how we as humans perceive their value. We'll also look at some of the ways we protect bats through regulations, and mitigate direct mortality of bats and loss of bat habitat.

Greg Tatarian and Trish Tatarian own and operate Wildlife Research Associates - a 2-person firm established in 1991 that provides a wide range of wildlife consulting services to agencies, agriculture, developers, businesses, and individuals. Mr. Tatarian is a bat specialist, holder of California Scientific Collection Permit and Additional Authorizations for Research on Bats through the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW). Mr. Tatarian has conducted bat surveys in more than 20 Counties in Central and Northern California. Services include bat habitat assessments, focused surveys for bats, and design and implementation of measures to prevent mortality of bats, and to mitigate for loss of roost habitat. He has conducted hundreds of humane bat evictions and surveyed thousands of structures for bats, and has designed successfully occupied replacement habitat, from bat houses to bridge roosts for several bat species. Mr. Tatarian also has extensive survey and trapping experience special-status amphibians under Mrs. Tatarian's permit from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

October 9 Big Day

7:30 AM Ten Mile River ~ 10 AM Ward Ave. ~ 11 AM Lake Cleone ~ 12 Noon Virgin Beach
All times are approximate

Big Days are 24-hour events with teams trying to see as many birds as they can find. We won't be quite as ambitious and we'll limit ourselves to daylight hours. Join us for all or part of a full day of birding the Mendocino coast. We'll meet at 7:30 AM at the Ten Mile parking lot on the south side of the river. The first part involves a steep descent down a sandy dune. Don't want to start that early? We should be at Ward Ave. at approx. 10 AM. From there we'll go to Lake Cleone and Virgin Beach. Lunch will be somewhere in Fort Bragg, and we'll continue on down the coast until we run out of steam. Bring water, snacks and good shoes. Call or text me at 707-533-7381 if you can't find us.

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.

OCTOBER 2021

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

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

Saturday 3 - Half Day Pelagic Trip - FULL 1:00 p.m.

Saturday 9 - Big Day All day along the Mendocino coast. See page 6.

Wednesday 13 - Audubon Society Board Meeting 6:00 p.m.

Contact Tim Bray for more information.

Monday 18 - Audubon Society Meeting 7:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m. via Zoom

Join us for a presentation on Bats. More information on page 6.

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

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

NOVEMBER 2021

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

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

Monday 15 - Local Barred Owl Study 7:00 p.m.

Wednesday 20 - 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 2020-2021

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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

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