



The Black Oystercatcher

Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Newsletter- September 2021

Gillian Martin Presents:
**THE WONDERFUL LIFE
OF A DYING TREE**
Monday, September 20 at 7:00 PM
Via Zoom



Bluebird feeding young. Photo by Peggy Honda

A dead tree needlessly cut down and hauled away is a tree deprived of its commendable destiny. Gillian Martin’s presentation unveils the habitat value of dead trees. She persuasively illustrates their contribution to the health and sustainability of forests, yes, even the urban forest. Attendees will learn what to consider when selecting and converting a hazardous tree as a habitat tree. They will forever view a dead tree with greater interest and appreciation.

As a passionate bird advocate, naturalist, public speaker and writer, Gillian Martin has invested the last 20 years advocating for birds. One of her earliest missions was to establish the Cavity Conservation Initiative to encourage the safe retention of dead trees as habitat. She is also the co-founder of Tree Care for Birds and other Wildlife Program of the Western Chapter International Society of Arboriculture. Her articles have been published in numerous professional journals and newsletters.

Learn more at: www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org

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Photo by Peggy Honda

Western screech owl finds a home in an old tree. Learn more at Gillian Martin’s presentation at 7:00 PM on September 20.

SEPTEMBER BIRDING

By *Tim Bray*

Songbirds and raptors are on migration from summer breeding territory to wintering grounds. You may already have noticed an occasional Sharp-shinned or Cooper's Hawk hunting songbirds in your yard, especially if you have a bird feeder. These raptors prey almost exclusively on other birds, and some of them have learned to hunt around houses and yards where songbirds often congregate. They will be moving through our area for the next month or more, and the hawk you see in your yard one day will probably be gone the next. Some of them will settle down here for the winter, giving us opportunities to watch their spectacular prowess as they fly straight through dense shrubs or trees in pursuit of their prey.

Experienced birders who enjoy a challenge look forward to this time of year. Juvenile birds often differ from adults in plumage and vocalization, so even your familiar garden birds like Spotted Towhee or Dark-eyed Junco can be confusing. Most ducks are in eclipse plumage, aka Brown Duck Season, when drakes look like females and field marks nearly disappear. Toughest of all are the "Difficult Fall Warblers."

Notoriously tricky to see clearly enough for identification in the best of times, there are now immense numbers of hatch-year birds with relatively drab plumage that make them extremely difficult to identify as they dart through the trees and shrubs. Many of the young birds take a wrong turn on migration and end up far from their normal range, so it is possible to find rare "vagrant" warblers - if you can identify them.

If we are very lucky, we might experience the phenomenon of mass nighttime migration. Many species of songbirds migrate mainly at night, apparently because they navigate by starlight. On some nights there may be millions of songbirds in the air, completely invisible in the darkness, but if it is calm and quiet enough you can hear them calling to each other as they stream overhead. Clear nights when stars are visible, with little wind, are the best times to stand outside after dark and just... listen.

Mass migration is also happening over the sea, as millions of Sooty and Short-tailed Shearwaters loop around the Pacific. Recently, experienced birders with good optics (and good eyes) have been able to discern hundreds of these birds from shore, especially on days when fog descends on the ocean. They are a lot easier to see from a boat, and we usually see many of them on pelagic birding trips

The severe drought we are all experiencing will be affecting birds as well. Dry conditions across northern California will cause birds to fly farther in search of water. In previous dry years, we have noticed an increase in the number and diversity of waterfowl and water-loving songbirds at the few freshwater ponds in our region. If you have a pond in your yard, or if there is one in your neighborhood, watch it closely for migrant songbirds and waterfowl. Our little backyard pond recently attracted three Chipping Sparrows for a few minutes - they stopped long enough to get a drink, preen a little, and then they continued on their journey.

It's a great time to add water to your garden, if you can spare any - even just a birdbath can provide much-needed water for migrating songbirds. Just remember to keep it clean and fresh; birdbath water gets messy quickly, and is great for watering your flowers.



Brown Pelican by B. Bowen

SAVE OUR SHOREBIRDS

By Becky Bowen

Ruddy vs. Black Turnstone – A Simple, Good Field Mark



Ruddy Turnstone August 21, 2021 Ten Mile Beach



Black Turnstone April 17, 2018 Ward Avenue Beach

Autumn shorebird migration from breeding grounds in the Arctic to points south started July 1st and right now, we're looking forward to the arrival of large numbers of Black Turnstones. Many chose to winter here and sightings are so common from September through December that we sometimes are fooled into thinking that every turnstone we see is a Black Turnstone. But right when we least expect it, up pops a Ruddy Turnstone in the middle of a Black Turnstone flock. It's easy to spot Ruddy Turnstones during spring migration when they show up here in outrageously colorful breeding plumage. But in fall, when breeding plumage is replaced by drab winter feathers, the Ruddies are the devil to identify next to their Black Turnstone cousins. Here's how to tell the difference: Look at the "bib" across the chest of both birds. The Ruddy Turnstone bib (at left above) is shaped like a "W" while the Black Turnstone bib is straight across the chest.

We are taught that all Ruddy Turnstones have

red legs, but some Black Turnstones have reddish-colored legs, too, so check the chest feather pattern as well as leg color. And take great delight in your Ruddy Turnstone sighting. Ruddy Turnstones are few and far between on the Mendocino Coast. From 2007-2020, SOS surveyors reported 492 sightings compared to 28,308 Black Turnstone sightings during the same period. Ruddy Turnstones are listed as uncommon here in spring, summer, and fall – and rare in winter.



Black Turnstone (left) and Ruddy Turnstone in breeding plumage, July 13, 2011 Ten Mile Beach.

B.Bowen Photographs

MCAS SCHOLARSHIPS OPENING THE DOOR FOR MENDOCINO COLLEGE STUDENTS

The story of Mendocino Coast Audubon's Scholarship Program is one of helping science students at our local community college. Through ups and downs, loss and hope, the opportunities these scholarships have provided to our local students is a story worth telling.



College of the Redwoods science student Brandon Pill with MCAS Scholarship Chair Judy Steele, at the awards ceremony on the Fort Bragg campus, April 4, 2013.

In 2004, MCAS awarded a \$1,000 scholarship to Angela Forgery, a science student at College of the Redwoods, Fort Bragg campus. Over the next few years, similar awards went to College of the Redwoods marine science students including Marc Mangahas, Amanda Admire, Adam Floyd, Luke Pederson, Angelica Rosa, and Catherine Murty. MCAS members who took continuing education classes at the Fort Bragg campus got a first-hand look at student life—and how some classmates got through school on a shoestring budget. Some students carried a full academic load and held two (or more) jobs. Some had no homes. Every penny counted.

In May 2013, Brandon Pill received the last MCAS scholarship awarded at the Fort Bragg College of the Redwoods campus. On July 26, 2013, Huldie Schoener Clark died in Santa Rosa at age 64.

Ms. Clark, a retired state employee, lived on the Mendocino Coast for several years and had an appreciation of water fowl. Her attorney informed former MCAS president Dave Jensen that our society would be one of the beneficiaries of her estate, the settlement of which would take about three years. We were unable to award scholarships to community college students again until 2017. That year, the land, facilities and services at the Fort Bragg campus were transferred from College of the Redwoods (head-quartered in Eureka) to Mendocino College (headquartered in Ukiah). The 2017 scholarship was awarded to Leah Shirley, of Fort Bragg. Thanks in large part to the generous gift of Huldie Schoener Clark, our society has been able to continue to fund scholarships as well as support the Mendocino College Coastal Field Station near Point Arena.



Greg Grantham, retired College of the Redwoods biology and marine science professor at the scholarship awards ceremony April 26, 2012.

The Brandon Pill Scholarship honors the 2013 College of the Redwoods MCAS scholarship recipient who died suddenly in 2015 at age 20. MCAS awarded scholarships to Mendocino College science students in Brandon's memory starting in 2019: Jasmin O'Neill-Martin (2019), Taylor Woodruff (2020), and Missael Barosa (2021). The awards are based on academic performance, faculty recommendations, and financial need.

A second MCAS memorial scholarship for a Mendocino College science student was established in 2021 to honor Greg Grantham, retired College of the Redwoods professor of biology and marine science. He died in November, 2020 in Fort Bragg. The 2021 Grantham Scholarship was funded by community activist Ginny Rorby, whose initial \$500 contribution was supplemented by contributions from local people. A \$2,650 scholarship was awarded to Erin Orth, who graduated in May.

The MCAS budget, approved this summer by our board of directors, provides funding for two 2022 scholarships: The MCAS Brandon Pill Scholarship (\$2,000) and the MCAS Greg Grantham Scholarship (\$1,000). If you would like to donate to either of these scholarships, please contact our Treasurer Jim Havlena. Thank you for keeping this story, and these dreams, alive.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By Tim Bray

The Board of Directors of the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society met on Sunday August 22 and developed our plans for the next several months. After more than a year of limited activity, we are eager to get back to our mission of helping people appreciate and enjoy birds and conserve their habitats. Our agenda is ambitious and I will be sharing elements of it with you over the next few months. Right now I want to introduce a new Board member and a new off-Board chair.

Roger Adamson has joined the Board and accepted the position of Secretary, ably filled for the past several years by Nicolet Houtz. Nikki will continue in the role of "Zoom Czar," facilitating our online Chapter Program presentations. Roger is known for the beautiful photographs that have enlivened this Newsletter, as well as his expertise as a birder. He has previously served on the Board of the Yolo Audubon Society. We are enriched by his experience and clarity of thought, and our meetings are enlivened by his keen sense of humor. I am deeply grateful to him for joining the Board.



Tess McGuire has accepted nomination as the Chair of the Field Trips committee. She is well known around Northern California as an expert birder, avid kayaker, and Christmas Bird Count aficionado. Tess has been helping lead the bird walks at the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens, for which David Jensen and I are grateful. She brings a fresh perspective to the schedule of field trips, and you will have the opportunity to bird some new places in the coming months.

CLIMATE CHANGE

By Pam Huntley

With smoky skies and lack of water, we are all experiencing climate change. The Audubon Society has said up to two-thirds of birds species are threatened by it. The United Nations is asking for immediate, everyday action from everyone. Climate change activist Greta Thunberg echoed the plea for immediate action and tweeted "It doesn't tell us what to do. It is up to us to be brave and make decisions based on the scientific evidence provided in these reports. We can still avoid the worst consequences, but not if we continue like today, and not without treating the crisis like a crisis."

If you're like me, the bird you might identify with could be the Ostrich, burying its head in the sand in hopes everything just goes away. 'Eco-anxiety' can make us not want to absorb any more bad news. However, we all can make a difference with some simple actions. At our last board meeting, our fearless leader Tim Bray said "Action is the antidote to despair." (I think Joan Baez has been given credit for that first.)

One of the biggest impacts we could have on climate change is shopping at our local Farmers' markets. Makes sense. Local means using less fuel to bring it to us, eating food in season, fewer pesticides, less packaging, and directly supporting our local economy. Reducing our food waste is also one of the largest for fighting the climate crisis. One-third of all food produced goes to waste: food that took an area larger than China to grow and 25% of the world's freshwater. In most developed countries, over half of the food waste is in the home. If global food waste were a country it would be the third-largest emitter of greenhouse gases.

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And of course, one of the best ways to reduce your impact on the environment is going to a more plant-based diet. The meat and dairy industry is one of the largest contributors to global warming and emits a considerable amount of greenhouse gases, such as nitrous oxide, methane, and ammonia. The World Resources Institute notes that if you can halve your consumption of animal protein you can reduce your diet's carbon footprint by 40%.

Ok, remember it's still little by little, I'm off to rescue the veggies in the back of the fridge. And as David Suzuki said "In a world of 7 billion people, each of us is a drop in the bucket. But with enough drops, we can fill any bucket."

SEPTEMBER EVENTS

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 9:00AM - 12:00PM
WARD AVE: HAUL ROAD & BEACH
with Tess McGuire

Directions: Take Hwy. 1 north just past the MacKerricher State Park entrance and turn left on to Ward Ave. Go to where the road makes a sharp left turn. We'll meet in the parking area there.

We'll walk north as far as time and energy allow us to. The first part is on the old haul road and we may venture down onto the beach. Shore bird migration is in full swing and we should get a nice selection sandpipers, turnstones and hopefully whimbrels and some interesting gulls, as well as loons, grebes and terns out on the water. Wear sturdy shoes and bring, binoculars, water and snacks.



Brown Pelican by B. Bowen



SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 18,
9:00AM - 12:00PM

Art Morley will lead an Audubon team for Coastal Cleanup Day. Meet at the parking lot south of the Ten Mile Bridge at 9 AM. Bring gloves and a trash bag or other receptacle.

Learn more at:

www.coastal.ca.gov/publiced/ccd/ccd.html

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.

SEPTEMBER 2021

Saturday 4 - Beginner's Bird Walk* 9:00 a.m. - Noon

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

Saturday 11 - Field Trip to Ward Avenue, Cleone 9:00 a.m. - Noon

Meet at the parking lot at the end of Ward Ave. See page 6 for more details.

Sunday 12 - Field Trip: Pelagic Seabirding 1:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.

Reservations required. Contact Tim Bray for details.

Wednesday 15 - Early Bird Walk 8:00 a.m. - Noon**

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

Saturday 18 - Coastal Cleanup Day 9:00 a.m. - Noon

Meet at the Ten Mile parking lot. Bring work gloves and a garbage receptacle.

Monday 20 - Audubon Society Meeting 7:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m. via Zoom

Join us for a presentation The Wonderful Life of a Dying Tree. See cover story and go to www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org to join the zoom meeting.

OCTOBER 2021

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 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 in next month's newsletter.

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

P.O. BOX 2297

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