



NEWSLETTER OF THE MENDOCINO COAST AUDUBON SOCIETY

March

2008

“Birding Western and Northern India”

Speaker: Rich Kuehn

Monday, April 14, 2008

Dinner 6:00 p.m. Program 7:00 p.m.

Gualala Art Center, Gualala, CA

Dinner: \$30.00 Reservation required Program Only: \$5.00

In August 2006, Richard Kuehn and his domestic partner, Dean Schuler, both MCAS members, departed on a trip around the world to fulfill a boyhood dream and celebrate their first 25 years together: 84 days and 31,000 miles later, they returned. As part of this adventure, they flew from Doha, Qatar on the Persian Gulf, into Mumbai (Bombay), India on the Arabian Sea. There they began a 24-day guided tour through the states of Gujarat, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Uttaranchal in search of new bird species, Bengal tigers and Asian elephants in the wild, and the cultural experience that is Incredible India before flying on to Bangkok, Thailand from Delhi. Please plan to join them when Mendocino Coast Audubon Society (MCAS) holds their annual South Coast meeting at the Gualala Arts Center beginning at 6 PM, April 14, 2008.

India has an extraordinary diversity of landscapes and vegetation, which support a rich variety of wildlife. The country is bounded to the north by the majestic Himalayas. Along their foothills, where Rich and Dean traveled, are the fertile, densely populated Indo-Gangetic Plains that sweep across the breadth of Central India. To the west, the sand dunes of Rajasthan give way to the barren salt-flats and marshes of the Rann of Kutch, which were also on their itinerary. Here one finds the wild Asiatic asses and a multitude of water birds, including the endangered Painted Stork and the national bird of India, the Indian Peacock, as well as ancient Hindu shrines and nomads in camel carts.

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**2007-2008 MCAS
BOARD MEMBERS**

President

David Jensen
964-8163, djensen@mcn.org

Vice President

Tony Eppstein
937-1715, tonyepp@mcn.org

Secretary

Tanya Smart
964-4235, wrismart@mcn.org

Treasurer

Judy Steele
937-2216, judys@mcn.org

Membership

Ginny Wade
964-6362, wwade@mcn.org

Field Trips

Art Morley
964-2541 agmorley@hotmail.com

Programs

Charlene McAllister
937-4463, charmac@mcn.org

Education

Jeanne Coleman
937-1838, jeanne@mcn.org

Conservation

Warren Wade
964-6362, wwade@mcn.org

Newsletter

Donald Shephard
962-0223
donshephard@comcast.net

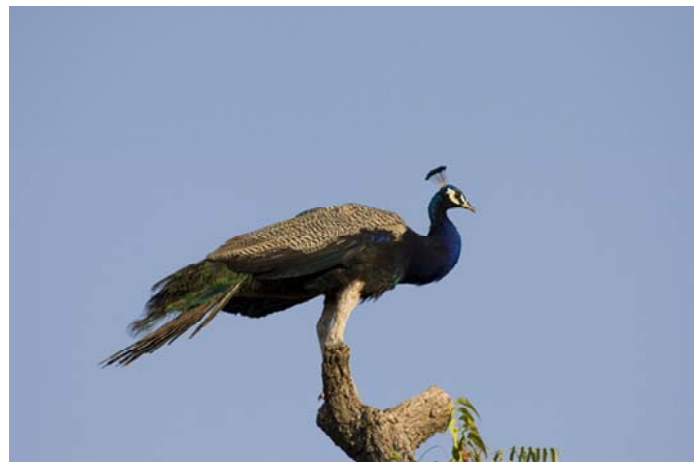
The mission of the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society is to help people appreciate and enjoy native birds, and to conserve and restore local ecosystems for the benefit of native birds and other wildlife.

**Birding Western and Northern India –
Continued**

This adventure across western and northern India provided many photographic moments, which are sure to please in this video presentation.



Painted Stork



Peacock

Photos by Dean Schuler

MENU: The Indian-themed Dinner, catered by Leslie Bates of Savory Coast, will include an appetizer of Verenaga (spiced peanuts). This will be followed by a main course of spiced chicken with lime and cilantro; a vegetable curry with potatoes, cauliflower, chickpeas and peas; and a Basmati Pulau of seasoned rice with raisins and cashews. This will be served with Naan and Pita bread, onion relish and yogurt. As always, tea and coffee will be available. Indian beer and wine will be available by donation. Though payment will be at the door, reservations and cancellations **MUST** be made by **April 4th**; respondents will be billed if they fail to show. Please contact either Ginny Wade at 964-6362 or Rich Kuehn at 785-3415 to reserve.

A Closer Look at the Varied Thrush

Donald Shephard

Three years ago a female Varied Thrush posed in my garden several times during the three days of her residency. She jumped from limb to limb in the Wax Myrtle and Tan Oak, along the stream that babbles through our property, and foraged among the woodchips on my garden floor. The silent patience of the bird struck me as unusual. The shutter sound of the camera did not disturb it. I was able to lie on the ground within a few feet and take this close-up picture without the benefit of a long zoom lens.



This particular bird did not display what Audubon referred to as its “desultory manner” when he wrote:

“. . . they flit through the forest in small flocks, frequenting usually low trees, on which they perch in perfect silence, and are at times very timorous and difficult of approach, having all the shy sagacity of the Robin, and appearing at all times in a very desultory manner.”

Audubon also recorded that naturalists with Captain Cook’s third expedition discovered the Varied Thrush, which the Chinooks called “Ammeskuk”. This cover-bird for Sibley’s *Field Guide to Birds: Western North America* is somewhat similar to the American Robin but has a dark breast band, orange eye stripe, and orange wing bars. The female, pictured above, is duller and slightly smaller than the male. The Varied Thrush is a characteristic bird of the mature, dark coniferous forests of the Pacific Northwest. It is an altitudinal migrant.

In winter, its diet becomes especially dependant upon fruits and berries, but also upon seeds, acorns, and other nuts. During migration, cultivated food sources such as berry patches, apples, and olives attract it. Since 1988, Varied Thrushes have shown a remarkable biennial cycle, increasing in numbers one year, and decreasing the next. (See Wells J. V. and Rosneberg K.V. 1997. *The Rise and Fall of the Varied Thrush*. *Birdscope*, Spring 1996, Volume 10, Number 2: 1-2.) Since Varied Thrushes like acorns, and

many species of oak produce acorns in regular two-year cycles, these researchers theorized that the cyclic changes in Varied Thrush abundance result from changes in acorn production. Clearly, this is a low census year so watch for them to irrupt next year.

The Varied Thrush breeds from Alaska and Yukon south to Oregon, California, Idaho, and Montana and spends winters from coastal Alaska southward. Known for its vagrant habits, this species often wanders out of its normal winter range to show up at feeders throughout eastern North America and the southwestern United States. One pale individual turned up in England in 1982.

They are not endangered in any portion of their range, but deforestation and clear cutting threaten their habitat, although they may benefit from laws protecting the Spotted Owl. A closer look at a flock of American Robins foraging in an open area might reward you with the sight of this winter visitor. Also, watch for this bird in wooded areas along streams where you might get an opportunity to photograph its “desultory manner”.

Report from the Northern California Audubon Council Meeting

California Audubon and the Altacal (Chico) Chapter hosted a meeting of the Northern California Audubon Council on Saturday, February 23. State Audubon staff and members of six local chapters participated in this lively event. Colleen & Don Shephard and Johanna & David Jensen drove to Chico to represent the Mendocino Coast chapter.

The primary focus of this year’s meeting was state and local conservation efforts. Dan Taylor, the Public Policy Director for Audubon California, presented the organization’s slate of proposed legislative and policy priorities. Andrea Jones, the California Important Bird Areas Coordinator, discussed the current effort to review and update the mapping information for each IBA in the state. She also gave a brief summary of an active Audubon California study that investigates the impacts of climate change on California bird distributions.

Ron Cole, manager of the Klamath Basin National Wildlife Refuges Complex, presented the latest information on a tentative agreement to resolve the continuing water allocation disputes in that area. The goal of this complex proposal is to improve the salmon runs in that area while ensuring a stable supply of water to farmers as well as to the refuges. The proposed settlement also includes the controversial removal of three hydroelectric dams along the Klamath River. This tentative agreement, which faces an uncertain future, could end years of legal and political wrangling between farmers, fishermen, Indian tribes, county, state, and federal agencies, power companies, and environmental groups.

The local chapters described the conservation challenges in their areas, including their successes and frustrations. Several of the chapters, especially those in the Central Valley, are struggling to protect dwindling resources from relentless development pressures. In the face of well-funded opposition, these small Audubon chapters have developed innovative methods to convey the need for conservation and, with the help of the state organization, help sway public opinion and protect bird habitat.

The next meeting of the Northern California Audubon Council is tentatively scheduled for this fall, to be hosted by MCAS in Fort Bragg.

BLM and Mendocino Coast Audubon Sign Coastal Monument Partnership Pact

We are proud to announce that The U. S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and Mendocino Coast Audubon Society have signed a partnership agreement focusing on conservation of natural resources in the California Coastal National Monument.

The California Coastal National Monument includes the rocks, small islands, and exposed reefs along the length of the California coast, from the mean high tide line out 12 nautical miles. It was established by presidential proclamation in January 2000.

In a recently signed memorandum of understanding, BLM and your chapter have agreed to coordinate in monitoring natural resources and informing members of the public about the national monument and its resources. The chapter will also work with BLM and other partners in a group establishing and managing the Point Arena Gateway to the Monument.

“Members of the Audubon Society chapter have deep knowledge and understanding about the natural resources of the Mendocino Coast,” said Rick Hanks, BLM’s California Coastal National Monument Manager. “We look forward to their insight as to the best ways to protect these resources and inform the public about them.”

Audubon Society Chapter President David Jensen added, “We welcome this opportunity to work more closely with our friends at BLM and assist their efforts to protect the natural resources along our coastline. Our chapter assisted with BLM’s original purchase of the Stornetta property in Point Arena. We continue to monitor the bird populations in that special area and support BLM in the development of their management plan. This agreement formalizes our ability to expand those efforts to the critical offshore nesting and feeding habitats.”

BLM, working collaboratively with a wide range of partners, is responsible for protecting the important geologic features and habitat they provide for plants and animals including seabirds, seals and sea lions.

North coast communities including Trinidad and Point Arena are establishing “gateways” as locations for the public to learn more about the monument and coastal communities and natural resources. With this MOU in place, Mendocino Coast Audubon Society is prepared to take an active role in the development of the future Fort Bragg gateway.

Bird Walks

The Mendocino Coast Audubon Society will host two walks at the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens during the month of February. Our monthly beginners’ bird walk will be held on the first Saturday of the month, March 1, at 9:00 a.m. Our midweek bird walk will be held on the third Wednesday of the month, March 19, at 8:00 a.m. The April beginners’ bird walk will be held on Saturday, April 5, at 9:00 a.m.

Birders with all levels of experience are invited to attend these walks. Binoculars will be available for those who need them. Admission is free for Botanical Garden members. For more information on these and other activities, please call 964-8163, or visit our website "mendocinocoastaudubon.org."

Audubon Goes to the Whale Festival

Mendocino Coast Audubon members invite you to join them again this year at the annual Mendocino Coast Whale Festival. We will be at the Point Cabrillo Light Station and Preserve on all four days of the festival. Join us on one of the bird walks that leave the upper parking lot at 9:15 each morning. If you can't get there that early, come visit us at the lighthouse as we share our message of education, appreciation, and conservation. There's no better place to enjoy the spectacle of our spring gray whale migration. We'll see you at the lighthouse!

March Field Trip to View the Birds of Van Damme State Park

On Sunday, March 9, the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society will host a field trip to view the birds of Van Damme State Park. Participants are invited to meet at 9:00 a.m. in the beach parking lot. Don't forget to set your clocks ahead one hour the night before!

The field trip will begin with a survey of the gulls, loons, cormorants, and other pelagic birds that might be present on the bay. We will then proceed into the forested park to look for resident and wintering birds, including, hopefully, the resident group of Gray Jays. This bird is typically found only in higher elevations throughout the Rockies and into Washington, Canada, and Alaska. However, Mendocino coast residents can view this delightful bird and still be home in time for dinner. Interested persons with all levels of experience are invited to join this free event. Binoculars will be available for those who need them. Heavy rain cancels, but the trip will proceed in showers, drizzle, or sunshine!

Black Angels

With a sharp *aark* of command four ravens wheel,
inches from cliff face. Their black wings,
iridescent in sunlight, dazzle the eye.
The air stings with salt spray as
in close formation at the edge of sea
the ravens loop, roll, swoop lower to the waves,
lift and graze the cliff again and again.
They are not practicing for any show
where crowds of spectators might crane their necks
and gasp. Rather, it seems they fly for sheer joy of it,
here, now, the moment radiant as the spume that hangs
briefly motionless over a spent wave.

From *Quickening* by Maureen Eppstein

