

The Black Oystercatcher

Photo by Ron LeValley

Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Newsletter January 2015

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THE NATURAL HISTORY OF TURKEY VULTURES

Turkey Vultures Glass Beach – Staff photo

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MONDAY, JANUARY 19, 2015

7 P.M.

**CASPAR COMMUNITY CENTER
GREG GIUSTI, ROBERT KEIFFER**

The ubiquitous Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*) is often taken for granted and even reviled by some, but Greg Giusti and Robert Keiffer both find the Turkey Vulture fascinating and worthy of study, which is what they are doing at the University of California’s Hopland Research and Extension Center. They will discuss the biology of these birds as well as what they have discovered about the nest tree characteristics in relation to the local oak forest structure. Please join us for a presentation about one of nature’s most important creatures. Robert is Center superintendent and a frequent speaker at our meetings. Greg is Lake-Mendocino County Director and Advisor of Forests and Wildland Ecology at the University’s Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources Cooperative Extension.



Rock Sandpiper (above) and Bonaparte’s Gull on Fort Bragg CBC, p. 2 Steve Stump photos

FORT BRAGG CBC – BIRDS: 144 WEATHER: 0 TIM BRAY

On December 20, intrepid birders began and ended the Fort Bragg Christmas Bird Count in rain. In spite of little cooperation from the weather, the preliminary count stands at 137 on Count Day with records for another 8 species for 144 during Count Week, including four not on the checklist: Eurasian Wigeon, Heermann's Gull, Bullock's Oriole, and Swamp Sparrow. By next month's issue of the *Black Oystercatcher*, I hope to have the feeder-count results and total population counts.

The list of people to thank profusely for the CBC is almost as long as the list of birds we found. I'll start by thanking Angela Liebenberg, who single-handedly set up the hall and prepared dinner for 50+ hungry birders! Several people pitched in to help with cleanup, including Sarah Grimes, Pam Huntley, Joleen Ossello, Victoria Rideneur, and of course Catherine Keegan, who is always there to do whatever needs doing.

All of the Area Leaders deserve praise for taking on the task of assembling and managing teams. Thanks to Alison Cebula and Adam Hutchins for taking on Area 1, ably meeting the challenges of covering a large and diverse area with a hastily-assembled team. Charlene McAllister likewise took on an unfamiliar role as Area 2 leader with help from Dorothy Tobkin, and did a great job. Ginny and Warren Wade, Bob Keiffer, Art Morley, Dave Jensen, and Richard Hubacek managed their areas with little help from me and with no drama whatsoever, for which I am always grateful.

Several members of Ukiah's Peregrine Audubon Society made the trip; the total count would be much smaller without their help. Bob and Ryan Keiffer, Geoff Heinecken, Cheryl Watson, Dave Bengston, and Jerry White, all played key roles. I particularly want to thank Steve Stump for finding and photographing so many good birds along the shore.

The weather was adverse, to put it mildly; rain began around 4:30 AM and continued all day, with a short break mid-morning, and intensifying in the afternoon. Everyone who went out in that and persevered in finding birds deserves effusive praise, and maybe counseling! It was a tough day to be outside and an even tougher day to find and identify birds, with wet optics, watery eyes, and runny noses. Yet the dining hall at the Caspar Community Center at day's end was filled with laughter and good cheer as we traded stories of nearly-birdless walks and tallied up what we did find.



Willet, Black Turnstone, and Black Oystercatchers at Fort Bragg Christmas Bird Count. Photograph by Steve Stump

PAM HUNTLEY ON KZYX FM 88.3, 90.7, AND 91.5

California Gull

Birders don't use the term "sea gull" because many gulls spend most of their lives far from the ocean.

The California Gull breeds around Mono Lake, but spends so much of its time in Utah that it's the state bird. A Salt Lake City monument honors California Gulls because the birds twice saved crops of Mormon settlers from grasshopper plagues.

It takes four years for California Gulls to attain adult plumage. Adults have gray backs, show white spots on their black wing tips; their feet and legs are greenish-gray. Bills have black spots on the lower mandibles. Breeding adults have clean white heads, and narrow red rings around dark eyes, and they add a red spot to the black on the bills. First winter California Gulls are dark brown with black-tipped pink bills and pink legs.

California Gulls are common migrants and winter visitors. They feed at lakes, marshes, agricultural fields, estuaries, cities, garbage dumps, and at sea. They will feed on the surface for small fish. On land, they eat bugs, carrion, and eggs and young of other birds. In summer, when they move inland, they are considered an aid to farmers because they eat grasshoppers, cutworms and mice.

California Gulls nest on islands in fresh water or alkaline lakes. They make nests of sticks, weeds, rubbish and feathers. The pair incubates three darkly blotched eggs for 25 days and both feed the young.



California Gull (center) gets a territorial tail-yank from a Western Gull on Virgin Creek Beach in Mackerricher State Park. The photograph was taken in September, 2010.



Local Birder Finds Banded Goose On Haul Road North of Fort Bragg

Story and Photo by Richard Hubacek, Greenbirding Mendocino

In October, I reported a banded Aleutian Cackling Goose in a field along the Haul Road north of Fort Bragg. It had a silver band on its right leg and a blue neck collar with the number 695. In December, I received a certificate of appreciation from the United States Geological Survey for reporting the banded bird. According to the certificate, it was a female Aleutian Cackling Goose banded on 1/8/2012 near Manteca, CA. The age of the bird was listed as "Hatched in 2011 or earlier." It was banded by an employee of California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

To find out more about reporting federally-banded birds, contact the USGS Patuxent Wildlife Center in Laurel, MD at

<http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bbl/>

GREEN HERON**Donald Shephard****Green Heron photo by Hermann Luyken**

Ten years ago, my wife and I retired from the heat of the Central Valley to cool off in Mendocino. We lived and watched birds in Lodi. To escape from the pressures of raising a nest of precocious boys we walked along the Mokelumne River in the wilderness area of Lodi Lake. When Louis T. Mason farmed the area, his hogs wallowed in an oxbow now affectionately called Pig Lake, although it is really only a pond. There we often saw Wood Ducks, mud turtles covered in the tiny round leaves of elodea pond weed, and a Green Heron. We

again met this solitary and somewhat secretive bird along wooded streams and around edges of wooded ponds, where it crouches in shadows waiting for fish.

Locally, you may be lucky enough to spot one at the Botanical Gardens, Point Cabrillo Light Station or any of our riparian habitats. Most conspicuous during dusk and dawn, these birds are nocturnal rather than diurnal, preferring to retreat to sheltered areas in daytime, except when feeding or provisioning young. Shore-living individuals adapt to the rhythm of the tides.

Unlike other herons, they nest and roost singly in trees. Crow sized, Green Herons appear dark overall without contrasting markings. Note their stocky shape, short broad wings, and short legs. Sibley describes their wing beats as deep and snappy. Their habit of often briefly unfolding their neck during flight will aid your identification. The name, like a lot of other bird names, puzzles me because the dark

Green Heron photo by Dan Pancamo

Donald Shephard, continued

rufous neck shows bolder than the green body – so why not the Red-necked Heron?

For the most part they hunt quietly, slipping in and out of view in dense vegetation, but when alarmed they emit a sudden, loud *skeow*. The male mating call will shock the unwary birder. The Audubon Society describes it as *g'waw*. To get a better sense, go to the vocals section of <http://birds.audubon.org/birds/green-heron> and be amazed that a seven ounce bird produces such a resonating sound. Recall these uncommon birds live solitary lives in dense foliage and need to communicate over long distances, making visual display less effective.

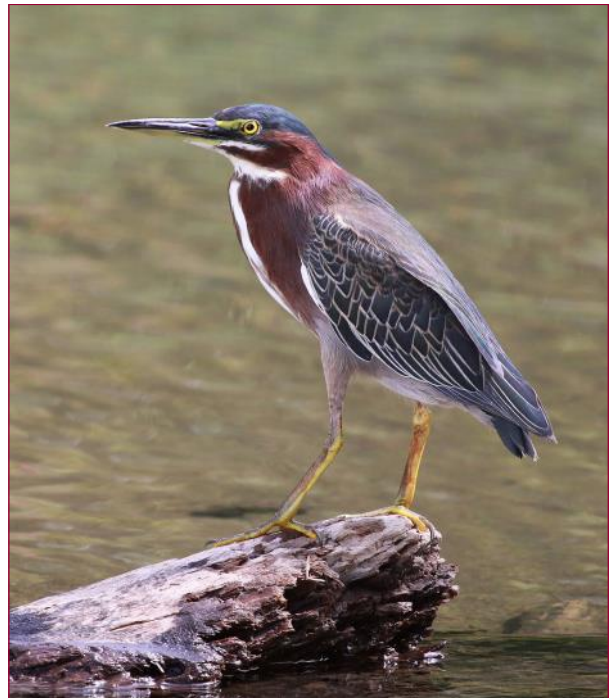
They typically stand still on shore, in shallow water, or on branches and await prey. Like the Black-crowned Night Heron, they sometimes drop food, insects, twigs, feathers or even earthworms on the water's surface to lure fish, making them one of the few tool-using species. I wonder if man learned from heron or the reverse. Unlike man, they are able to hover briefly to catch prey. Occasionally, they dive for deep-water creatures and need to swim back to shore – probably with help from the webs between their middle and outer toes.

You are unlikely to see a Green Heron in winter, but come spring visit a wetland such as Lake Cleone or Inglenook Fen and carefully scan the banks looking for a small, hunch-backed bird with a long, straight bill staring intently at the water. Next time you walk along a river bank, listen for their harsh *skeow* call. If you watch beside a stream in the Botanical Gardens for their distinctive flight, you may spy the slow beats of their rounded wings, which make them look like tailless crows.

Fortunately for California birdwatchers and Green Herons, our population of these birds shows an increase, but elsewhere in North America their population declined by 51 percent from 1966 to 2010, according to the North American Breeding Bird Survey. In the past, people hunted Green Herons for food and controlled their numbers near fish hatcheries, where the herons were perceived as a threat to the fish. Today, their biggest danger is probably habitat loss through the draining or development of wetlands, although no one knows the extent of this impact because these herons are solitary and widely dispersed.

As I write this article, massed American Robins and a good number of Varied Thrushes ignore the pouring rain to snatch unlucky earthworms around my house. We need the rain, but I look forward to taking a riparian stroll and catching sight of a solitary bird perched on a branch above an unfortunate fish. Perhaps by then the sun will highlight the green and rufous feathers. Spotting an uncommon bird among the great diversity of living things brings me joy.

Green Heron photo by Basar



SAVE OUR SHOREBIRDS**Becky Bowen****Of Birds and Words and Tongues
That Get Tied Into Knots**

Marbled "Goblet" after a few too many?

Becky Bowen Photo

SOS brings new birders into the field on shorebird surveys every year – some are visitors, some are people birding for the first time, some are “volunteers” performing court-mandated community service, and some are just out there because they’re curious.

It’s no surprise to us that a new experience comes with a new vocabulary and let’s face it: with so much to learn it’s easy to understand how a person in the thrill of discovery can come out with some wonderfully bizarre bird names, some of which may be better than the original names.

Here are our favorite quotations, with translations:

- “Guess what we saw on the Enchanted Trail? A Pleated Woodpecker!” (Pileated Woodpecker)
- “There’s a Lesser Egret over there in Virgin Creek.” (Snowy Egret?)
- “Who would have thought there would be a herd of Yellow-rumped Sparrows on a beach?” (Yellow-rumped Warblers)
- “Man, get a load of the Marbled Goblets.” (Marbled Godwits)
- “Not to mention the Rudy Turnstones that just walked by.” (Ruddy Turnstones)
- “The Buffalo Heads generally only come around in late fall or early winter.” (Buffleheads)
- “Did you just hear a Swanson’s Thrash?” (Swainson’s Thrush)
- “Look! Dunhills!” (Dunlins)
- “There’s a bunch of Wobblers down there at the water’s edge.” (Whimbrels, or maybe warblers)
- “Then there’s these Scote Surfers right off shore.” (Surf Scoters)
- “Oh, wow! A Double-breasted Catamaran!” (Double-crested Cormorant)

Our all-time favorite note comes from SOS surveyor Trudy Jensen: “I recently had the pleasure of birding with Terry Colburn. At lunch, we exchanged stories of misunderstood bird names. I told him of Dorothy Tobkin’s student who loved the ‘all-excited flycatcher’ (and there’s always the ‘violent green swallow’). But Terry one-upped me with the report he’d actually heard on the radio of the power outage caused by a ‘pair of green falcons.’ We agreed that, since neither of us had ever seen this species, the carcasses would be truly worth preserving for scientific research.”

Save Our Shorebirds is an on-going long term MCAS citizen science project in partnership with State Parks and FLOCKworks. Volunteers survey the Mackerricher State Park shoreline from Ten Mile River south through Glass Beach. To learn more, contact Angela Liebenberg at liebenbergs@mcn.org and please visit us at www.facebook.com/SaveOurShorebirds

CALENDAR, BIRD WALKS, FIELD TRIPS**January 2015**

Saturday 3 [Manchester Christmas Bird Count](#) Please contact Dave Jensen 964-8163 djensen@mcn.org

Saturday 3 Beginner Bird Walk **Cancelled due to CBC**

Saturday 10 Field Trip Ten Mile River 9AM - Meet at parking lot south of Ten Mile Bridge. Heavy wind, rain cancels. Leader: Dave Jensen

Monday 19 Meeting [Caspar Community Center](#) 7PM Speakers: Giusti/Keiffer, on Turkey Vultures

Wednesday 21 Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 8:30AM* Leader: Tim Bray

Wednesday 21-25 [Snow Goose Festival of the Pacific Flyway](#) Chico

Thursday 29 MCAS Board of Directors Meeting - Contact J. Ossello for time and place

February 2015

Saturday 7 Beginner Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 9AM* Leader: Dave Jensen

Thursday 12 - 15 [Winter Wings Festival](#) Klamath Falls, OR

Friday 13 - 15 [San Francisco Bay Flyway Festival](#) Vallejo

Friday 13 - 16 [18th Annual Great Backyard Bird Count](#)

Saturday 14 Field Trip Owling Road 409 - 5:30PM Meet on Road 409 at the end of the pavement, 3.3 miles east from Highway 1. Parking is limited. Dress warmly, bring a light. Please contact Tim Bray tbray@wildblue.net and let him know you are coming so he can alert you if we have to cancel. Rain cancels. Leader: Mike Stephens

Monday 16 Meeting [Caspar Community Center](#) 7PM Speaker: John Gallo, Conservation Biology

Wednesday 18 Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 8:30AM* Leader: Tim Bray

March 2015

Saturday 7 Beginner Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) **Cancelled due to Whale Festival**

Saturday 7-8 Whale Festival Point Cabrillo Light Station Birdwalks 9AM Saturday and Sunday. Meet at upper parking lot off Point Cabrillo Drive. Rain cancels. Leader: Dave Jensen

Saturday 14 Field Trip [MacKerricher State Park](#) 9AM Meet at Lake Cleone parking lot. Heavy wind, rain cancels. Leader TBA

Monday 16 Environmental Partnership Potluck - Time and place TBA. This year's sponsor: CNPS

Wednesday 18 Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 8:30AM* Leader: Tim Bray

Saturday 21-22 Whale Festival Point Cabrillo Light Station Birdwalks 9AM Saturday and Sunday. Meet at upper parking lot off Point Cabrillo Drive. Rain cancels. Leader: Dave Jensen

Thursday 26 MCAS Board of Directors Meeting - Contact J. Ossello for time and place

April 2015

Saturday 4 Beginner Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 9AM* Leader: Dave Jensen

Saturday 11 Field Trip Hendy Woods 9AM - Meeting place TBA. Leader: Dave Jensen

Wednesday 15-24 [Godwit Days](#) Arcata

Wednesday 15 Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 8:30AM* Leader: Tim Bray

Monday 20 Meeting at Gualala - Details TBA

May 2015

Saturday 2 Beginner Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 9AM* Leader: Dave Jensen

Saturday 9 Field Trip Navarro River and Beach 9AM - Meeting place and leader TBA

Monday 18 Meeting and Board Election [Caspar Community Center](#) 7PM

Speaker: Floyd Hayes - Adventures in Paraguay, Argentina, and Brazil

Wednesday 20 Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 8:30AM* Leader: Tim Bray

Thursday 28 MCAS Board of Directors Meeting - Time, place TBA

**These walks are free, but there is an entry charge for participants who are not Garden members*

For complete calendar, updates, and useful links, visit: www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org

And please visit us on facebook: www.facebook.com/mendocinocoastaudubon

MCAS BOARD MEMBERS AND PROGRAM CHAIRS 2013-2014

| | | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|
| President | Joleen Ossello | 391-7019 | j_ossello@earthlink.net |
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| Secretary | Diane Rubin | (413) 658-7105 | dianerubin12@gmail.com |
| Treasurer | Angela Liebenberg | 962-9267 | liebenbergs@mcn.org |
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| Field Trips | Tim Bray | 937-4422 | tbray@wildblue.net |

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

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