



The Black Oystercatcher

Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Newsletter, January 2013

MIDWAY ATOLL, HOME OF A MILLION ALBATROSSES RON LEVALLEY

CASPAR COMMUNITY CENTER

New Location

January 21 at 7:00 pm

New Location

In February of 2012, Ron visited Midway Atoll, part of the (easy for you to say) Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. Much had changed since his last visit in 2001. The Fish and Wildlife Service had greatly improved conditions for the native wildlife. Ron will share his stories of the positive changes that have been made to the refuge along with his photos of "Wisdom", the oldest wild bird known in the world, and photos of the increasing Short-tailed Albatrosses. He will augment the many bird pictures with images of the also increasing Green Sea Turtles, the endangered Hawaiian Monk Seal and some of the beautiful underwater inhabitants of the National Monument.



Hawaiian Monk Seal

Short-tailed Albatross



Green Sea Turtle

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Photos by Ron LeValley
www.LeValleyphoto.com

PRESIDENT'S CORNER**David Jensen**

As all the wishes for a Happy New Year begin to recede, I would like to revel a bit longer in the successes that we achieved in 2012. No year is ever without its failures and tragic moments, but in 2012 many of our earlier efforts produced results that exceeded our expectations, and we were able to start new projects that hold promise for the coming years.

On the national level, successes included the protection of over 11 million acres of sensitive nesting and breeding land within the Alaskan National Petroleum Reserve. After years of research and observation, Audubon was able to map out the specific regions of the petroleum reserve that were most critical to the long-term survival of birds, caribou, and other species. In response, the federal government is restricting oil development to other areas of the reserve.

Given the current realities of global politics and social demands, Audubon and others have switched to a type of intelligently designed conservation that holds more promise for the future. Determine the needs of the vulnerable species, carefully map the resources, then site development or resource extraction in those areas that will have the least impact. Oil in Alaska, natural gas in Colorado, wind and solar power in many areas.

On the state level, 2012 brought two memorable conservation successes. In December the final set of Marine Protected Areas went into effect along our north coast. This is another example of placing conservation efforts in those areas that will provide the greatest environmental protection at the lowest practical socio-economic cost. In particular, seven key seabird colonies were protected with minimal impact to the sport and commercial fishing industries.

The Fish and Wildlife Agency made a second landmark decision in late 2012 when they provided additional protection to forage fish. Forage fish are the smaller species that provide food for many other organisms, including certain whales and most seabirds. Without sufficient forage fish, those other species cannot survive. The Agency ruled that the needs of birds and marine mammals must be considered, and that a significant share of the forage fish population must be left for their use. Like the establishment of Marine Protected Areas, this decision should help to ensure the continued health of the marine ecosystem for generations to come.

Locally, 2012 brought the further development of our Black Oystercatcher research project. We were gather data on the reproductive success of individual pairs, thus increasing our understanding of local conditions. We shall continue this project into 2013 and with a new grant we shall be able to develop public outreach and education activities to complement the research.

Finally, with all due respect to the two very successful coastal Christmas Bird Counts at the end of December, the last sweet moment of the year was the belated arrival of "Al", the Laysan Albatross, to Arena Cove. As the final days of November and early days of December ticked by with no reports, many of us worried this might be the first time since the winter of 1993 that the bird would fail to return. Just as our hopes waned, he finally appeared. Al is back at the cove, and all is well with the coast. So yes, let's all hope for a happy new year, one that continues to build our successes and one that we can be proud of twelve months from now.

PAM HUNTLEY ON KZYX FM 88.3, 90.7, AND 91.5

BARN SWALLOW

The association between Barn Swallows and people allows many of us to enjoy watching their nestlings grow right outside our doors. They are easily recognized by their deep-blue backs, long pointed wings, and deeply forked tails. Females are paler with a whitish chest. Males have more orange on their chest and a longer forked tail. Barn Swallows are the only swallows showing spots of white on their tails.

April brings the return of their chattering calls during their graceful courtship flights. The male chases the female through the air. When they land they rub heads and necks, interlock their bills, and preen each other. As the name suggests, Barn Swallows almost always nest on human structures that have an overhang to provide protection from the weather and predators. They have been known to nest on slow-moving trains and boats. They build a cup-shaped nest of mud and lay four to five small white eggs with brown spots. They produce two to three broods a summer. The young have been known to stay around the nest and help out.

The Barn Swallow is a great help with pest control, catching bugs while flying low over the fields. They even drink and bathe while in flight over water. They have one of the longest migrations, seven thousand miles, with some spending summers in Alaska and winters in Argentina.



Barn Swallow photo by Ron LeValley
www.LeValleyphoto.com

YARDBIRDS

There are many frustrations for birders. The objects of your attention flit away just as you reach for your binoculars. They stop singing when their name is on the tip of your tongue. They sit quietly teasing you with the light behind them. But no frustration matches that of pests to the gardener. That's why I watched with glee when this Great Blue Heron snapped out his S-shaped neck and snatched up a pocket gopher. Thank you Great Blue. Come again, please.

Donald Shephard



Save Our Shorebirds

The Senator Meets The Western Snowy Plovers Of MacKerricher State Park– Becky Bowen



We are passionate about the plight of watchlisted shorebirds, so we write letters to people who write laws that protect wildlife. Letters always close with an invitation to come to the Mendocino Coast to see firsthand what we are talking about. Second District State Senator Noreen Evans took us up on the invitation on a cold, blustery December day and joined an SOS survey to ask questions and learn more. She was quick to point out that it's all about habitat on the fact-finding survey where she and her staff talked with biologists, Park Rangers and a new constituent who was on the beach and decided to tag along. State Parks Environmental Scientist Angela Liebenberg (above left) led the survey on Ten Mile Beach. Sen. Evans spotted four Western Snowy Plovers and pointed them out to staffer Ed Sheffield (below). It was the first time her staff members ever saw a Western Snowy Plover.



Save Our Shorebirds is a long-term citizen science Mendocino Coast Audubon program. To volunteer for shorebird surveys on three MacKerricher State Park beaches, contact State Parks Environmental Scientist Angela Liebenberg at Angela.Liebenberg@parks.ca.gov and please visit us at www.facebook.com/SaveOurShorebirds

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT FEEDER WATCH Joleen Ossello

Wild Turkey	21	Red-breasted Nuthatch	8
California Quail	24	Pygmy Nuthatch	14
Turkey Vulture	22	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	1
Northern Harrier	2	Western Bluebird	3
Sharp-shinned Hawk	2	Hermit Thrush	1
Cooper's Hawk	2	American Robin	23
Red-shouldered Hawk	1	Wrentit	3
Red-tailed Hawk	1	European Starling	6
Buteo sp.	1	Yellow-rumped Warbler	22
American Kestrel	2	Townsend's Warbler	1
Rock Pigeon	5	Spotted Towhee	11
Eurasian Collared-Dove	27	Fox Sparrow	26
Mourning Dove	20	Song Sparrow	21
Anna's Hummingbird	18	White-throated Sparrow	33
Acorn Woodpecker	15	Golden-crowned Sparrow	32
Downy Woodpecker	3	White-crowned Sparrow	55
Northern Flicker	7	Dark-eyed Junco	197
Black Phoebe	1	Brewer's Blackbird	33
Steller's Jay	26	Brown-headed Cowbird	1
Western Scrub Jay	14	House Finch	17
Common Raven	16	Pine Siskin	91
Chestnut-backed Chickadee	42	House Sparrow	14

Sixteen feeder-watch participants, trine of whom were new, spent 32.5 hours observing birds in their yards.



Townsend's Warbler



Left, Fox Sparrow

Right, White-throated Sparrow



Photos by Ron LeValley
www.LeValleyphoto.com

ROCK SANDPIPER**Donald Shephard****Rock sandpiper photo by Max Hescheff**

While Rock Sandpipers are regular visitors to our coast, they trickle down from Alaska in ones and twos, surrounded by Surfbirds, Black Turnstones and other rock and surf tolerant species. Ron LeValley spotted one Rock Sandpiper for our Fort Bragg Christmas Bird Count this year. Save Our Shorebirds volunteers have never recorded one instance of seeing this species. I called on Dorothy Tobkin to guide us to this rare bird. She told me, to find it you must study the rocks at Laguna Point in MacKerricher State Park at high tide between October and

February; then you must train your binoculars on the thirty or forty Black Turnstones or Surfbirds to winkle out the one or two Rock Sandpipers among them. This species challenges the finest bird watchers.

To make your identification job more difficult Rock Sandpipers show a great deal of variation in size and color pattern among their isolated populations. The largest and brightest birds breed in the central portion of the range, while the smallest and darkest live in the southern and western part (Allen's Rule). The winter range of Rock Sandpipers extends farther north than any other sandpiper.

Where the surf washes nutrients over rocky shores and gravel banks, this species thrives in frigid temperatures, in areas with short winter and long summer days. The sandpiper's species name, "ptilocnemis," means "feather boot" and describes its protective feathers covering the leg down to the heel, one of its adaptations to cold.

Stroll along the Laguna Point boardwalk and watch the rocks for a shorebird with a fairly long, slightly drooped bill, gray upperparts with "scaled" back, and wings with a broad white stripe. Look for short drab-greenish legs. Breeding birds have an obvious black belly-patch, and richer rufous coloring on the upperparts and neck.

Unlike their traveling companions, Rock Sandpipers do not chip or pry attached prey from its substrate. They move slowly along and pick up moving prey from the crevices and seaweed among the rocks. Unusual among shorebirds, this species commonly eats vegetable matter, including seeds, berries, moss, and algae. They also eat invertebrates, such as mollusks, crustaceans, and marine worms.

ROCK SANDPIPER

continued

Breeding pairs remain monogamous, with bonds lasting several years. Males establish territories and attract mates with displays, which include undulating flights and extended hovering. Males confront each other with lifted wings, parallel runs or flights, and crouching postures. Pairs court around dummy nests, where females inspect, enter, and rearrange the structure. As husband to an interior designer, I have great sympathy for the males. Nests consist of a scrape, with a base of leaves, lichens, sedges, or mosses, and lined with finer plant materials. These they locate on the ground around ponds in open, dry tundra, often on a raised area of lichen or moss.

The female lays four greenish eggs marked with brown, which hatch in approximately three weeks. Both parents incubate the eggs, although males may provide most of the incubation, which lasts for about twenty days. Hatched chicks are covered with down and are active. Within hours of emerging, chicks can walk, feed, and hide. They leave the nest soon after hatching and feed themselves. Males usually tend broods, although sometimes both parents or only the female will do so. After a few days, they keep themselves warm at night. Juveniles fledge in about twenty-three days. Females depart before young fledge, and males stay for guidance and defense which includes hiding, running like a mouse, squealing, bleating, and faking injury.

Adults molt on the breeding grounds before migrating southward late in fall. Some populations that breed on islands off Alaska are resident. The populations that do migrate, winter along the Pacific coast south to northern California.

Rock Sandpipers are a species unique to the north Pacific, with breeding populations found in near-shore habitats ringing the Bering Sea. Likely numbering fewer than 100,000 individuals and with four subspecies, this robin-sized shorebird displays physiological feats inspiring wonder as the farthest-north wintering shorebird in the Pacific region. As fall approaches and most of its congeners migrate far south to warmer climes, Rock Sandpipers move relatively short distances. In fact, the subspecies breeding in the Aleutian archipelago inhabits the same wind-swept stretches of coastline all year long.

You do not have to brave the cold of the Pribilof Islands in the Bering Sea to glimpse a Rock Sandpiper. With a lot of patience and some luck, you can withstand the blustery winds of Point Laguna and become one of an elite few local birders who have seen the cold-tolerant Rock Sandpiper.

Rock Sandpiper chick. Photo by Jim Johnson



FORT BRAGG CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT Tim Bray**Yellow-bellied Sapsucker.****Photo by John Harrison**

The second Fort Bragg CBC was a great success, in spite of difficult conditions. Powerful thunderstorms kept many of us awake Friday night, but stopped just in time for owling before dawn, and only a few of us got caught out in the sudden and violent hailstorm around 2:15 in the afternoon. At dusk, the Rec Hall at Russian Gulch began filling with tired but cheerful birders, gorging on salad and pizza brought in by Angela Liebenberg and Judy Steele, and exchanging stories of the day's events. We had several birders join us from Peregrine Audubon over the hills, and one came all the way up from the Santa Clara Valley.

Our preliminary total from the 49 remarkably hardy field participants includes over 15,000 individual birds comprising 145 taxa. Highlights include: Yellow-Bellied Sapsucker and Nashville Warbler at Rose Memorial, Yellow-Headed Blackbird at Caspar, Black-Headed Grosbeak at a feeder, Heermann's Gull in Noyo Harbor, and the continuing Redheads at Caspar Pond. Other notable birds included a Rock Sandpiper and a Sooty Shearwater, both found at Laguna Point; five Ancient Murrelets and one Rhinoceros Auklet off Mendocino Headlands; a Say's Phoebe off Bald Hill Road; two Orange-Crowned Warblers, one at a feeder; and a Brown-Headed Cowbird at MacKerricher.

That's a remarkable species count for a stormy midwinter day, especially as the birds were generally not very active. It is a testament to the skill and persistence of all those who participated. I was gratified to learn that so many of the birds David and I had identified as "target" species, during the storm-darkened December 17 MCAS meeting, were found on Count Day by people specifically looking for them.

Many, many thanks to everyone who participated. I particularly want to thank Angela and Judy for the Count Dinner hall and food; that is a key component of the Count Day and I am grateful to them for taking charge of the whole matter. The success of the Count itself really comes down to the remarkable skill and dedication of our Area Leaders: Ron LeValley, Dorothy Tobkin, Warren & Ginny Wade, Bob Keiffer, Art Morley, Jim Havlena, David Jensen, and Richard Hubacek. I cannot thank them enough.

At the Count Dinner we discussed scheduling for next year's CAFB, and tentatively agreed that the pre-Christmas date is better for most people. Mark your calendars for Saturday December 21, 2013, when we will hope for better weather and try to get 150 species.

Yellow-headed Blackbird**Photo by Alan Vernon**

JANUARY EVENTS

David Jensen

The Mendocino Coast Audubon Society holds two bird walks each month at the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens. Our monthly beginner's bird walk takes place on the first Saturday of the month, and our midweek walk on the third Wednesday. Each month we arrange at least one field trip, which is held on the second weekend of the month. Special field trips are occasionally scheduled throughout the year. The location of each field trip varies according to the seasonal movement of the birds. Birders with all levels of experience are invited to attend these events. Binoculars will be available for those who need them.

Saturday, January 12. Field trip to view birds of the Ten Mile River: 9:00 am; meet at south end of Ten Mile River bridge.

Wednesday, January 16. Bird Walk: 8:30 am; at Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens. Admission is free to Gardens members.

FIELD TRIP CALENDAR

David Jensen

Saturday, January 12 - Ten Mile River. Meet at south end of Ten Mile River bridge at 9:00.

Sunday, February 10 - Stornetta Public Lands and Point Arena. Meet at corner of Highway One and Miner Hole Road at 9:00.

Saturday, March 9 - Lake Cleone and Laguna Point. Meet at Lake Cleone parking lot at 8:00.

Sunday, April 14 - Van Damme State Park. Meet at Van Damme beach parking lot at 8:00.

Saturday, May 11 - Navarro River and Beach. Meet at south end of Navarro River bridge at 8:00.



Red-Headed Duck by Kevin Bercaw

Ferruginous Hawk by Ron LeValley



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MCAS BOARD MEMBERS AND PROGRAM CHAIRS 2011-2012

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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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