



The Black Oystercatcher

Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Newsletter, February 2014



Mon., Feb. 17, 2014
7 p.m.
Caspar Community Center
Ronnie James
Saving Wildlife
On the Mendocino Coast



See Page 2 for information about these rescues.

Ronnie James has practiced wildlife rehabilitation for 30 years. In 1987, she moved to Mendocino and established Woodlands Wildlife. She holds state and federal licenses which allow her to possess wildlife and practice environmental education. "Clients" include river otters, fawns, eagles, chickadees and others. She is the author of *Touching Wings*, *Touching Wild* about her wildlife rehabilitation experience in Mendocino. The book, available at www.touchingwings.org, will be for sale at the meeting. Ronnie has offered to donate a portion of proceeds from sales at the meeting to MCAS. All other proceeds fund Woodlands Wildlife rescue and rehabilitation work.

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MCAS

Family Birdwalks

Four friendly, fabulous family birdwalks start in March. Join leaders Sue "Magoo" and Sarah Grimes on adventures for adults and kids of all ages. See newsletter calendar or our MCAS website www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org for details. Dates are:

March 29
April 26
May 24
June 21

Masthead photo by Ron LeValley

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Joleen Ossello



Self Portrait

I recently attended a gathering of coastal civic organizations that confirmed my belief in the success of collaborative partnerships in our community.

The Fort Bragg-Mendocino Gateway meeting centered on organizational efforts to inform and educate residents and visitors about the California Coastal National Monument (CCNM).

Acting Regional CCNM Manager Bob Wick, of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM), said he was impressed with our community's successful efforts and future visions.

The "Rock Walks" map, created by members of the local community, currently is being updated, and will be reprinted and made available on the internet and at various locations along the coast.

It is my priority that MCAS remain a collaborative partner with the community to support the California Coastal National Monument – and that includes our continuing support for the designation of the south coast Stornetta Public Lands as the first mainland extension of the coastal monument. I want to ensure that "Sharing the Shores" is a clear message to humans when it comes to interacting with local wildlife – as the Black Oystercatcher says, "*Mi Casa es Su Costa.*" Collaborative partnerships in our community are more important than ever as we embrace tourism as an important part of our future, especially since the national press has described our coast as a 2014 world-wide travel destination:

http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/01/10/travel/2014-places-to-go.html?_r=0



Ronnie James Photographs

A note from Ronnie James, our speaker at the Feb. 17 program:

The three owllets shown on Page 1 were photographed at about 10 days (top) and then at 6 weeks, when neither the tails nor "horn feathers" were completely out. The owllets' tree had been destroyed during an illegal "agricultural" development. Can anyone tell us the function of these feathers, which are also called "ear tufts?"

The fluffy hawk (bottom) is a Cooper's Hawk, about 3 weeks old. A local forester carried the chick six miles to safety after its tree was destroyed in a logging operation.

All reached adulthood and were reintroduced successfully into the wild.

MCAS PROFILES: GRACE STEURER & POLLY DAKIN Charlene McAllister

Editor's Note: Diane Rubin, an AmeriCorps volunteer at Mendocino Coast Clinics, participated in the MCAS Manchester Christmas Bird Count, where she met Grace Steurer, who has been an Audubon member for many years. Diane interviewed Grace at the countdown dinner and asked her to share her birding achievements.

"There are still birds to get" says the unstoppable Grace Steurer.

In 1985, when the last of her eight children left home, Grace took a birding class from Ed Harper in Sacramento. Harper is a well-known naturalist and photographer in the Central California Valley, who lectured at American River College.



Grace Steurer (left) and Polly Dakin at our January MCAS chapter meeting.
Photo by Ron LeValley

The class led Grace to decide she was going to see all the nesting birds in the United States. This enterprise expanded to travel around the world, and brought her Life List to 4,000. Her list for Canada, Alaska and the lower 48 states is 800. She found her 800th bird, the Asian Brown Flycatcher, on the Pribilof Islands in the Bering Sea. When asked to name her favorite bird, she answered without hesitation: Steller's Sea Eagle. To see this bird, she was flown over two glaciers (one advancing and one retreating) in order to reach a gravel stream bed. Another memorable bird was the Himalayan Snow Cock, which she saw from a helicopter flying between canyon walls in the Ruby Mountains of Nevada.

Five of her eight children are also "birders." Son Tim has 825 on his list; two children have more than 750; and all have more than 650 within the American Birding Association area. She has birded six continents and says, "Not only do you see birds; you see the geological beauty, the people, the culture, the foods and the climate. I always keep my bag packed". We asked what she plans next. "To keep adding new birds," she said and this she hopes to do in 2014 or 2015 with a trip to the Pantanal, one of the world's largest tropical wetlands located mostly in the Brazilian state of *Mato Grosso do Sul*. In the meantime she still needs to find the Pink-Footed Goose, the Northern Lapwing and a Barnacle Goose for her North American list.

While talking with Grace, we asked about Polly Dakin, the longest enrolled member of MCAS, having joined in 1971. Grace said she would be doing the Sea Ranch Bird count with Polly (via golf cart) and would be delighted to interview her. Here is what we learned: Polly said she has always been interested in wildlife, and was introduced into "really watching" by her husband, Doug. They bought the "Audubon Bird Book" in 1957 for their first Christmas and started marking it up. While she has never been a "lister" she does keep records of her sightings in the US and in other countries. Polly and Doug bought property in Mendocino County in 1975 and started planting native shrubs and trees using the *Sunset Western Garden Book* suggestions and California Native Plant Society guides. Their yard is a welcoming spot for birds and a haven and joy for Polly and her family. When asked to name her favorite bird she said Brown Pelican, though many of her backyard birds catch her attention. She said her most memorable birding experience was the first sighting of a Road Runner long after everyone in her family had seen one. Since her retirement, she has time to travel to national parks and exotic places around the world. For Polly, that is a "dream come true."

DONALD SHEPHARD**Red Phalarope**

**Red
Phalarope
Photo Courtesy
of
Mike Baird**

During the Manchester Christmas Bird Count a few years ago, I stood with David Jensen and other birders on the bluff vista point north of Irish Beach. A Peregrine Falcon perched atop a high rock. It stooped to the ocean, diving on a Red Phalarope. The shorebird swam below the surface to escape. Time and again the falcon stooped, but each time the phalarope submerged until the predator returned to his perch. Not all phalaropes are as lucky. On a recent pelagic trip, Ron LeValley photographed a Peregrine Falcon twenty miles off Noyo Harbor with a Red Phalarope in its mouth. Apart from falcons, this species has few enemies and is surprisingly approachable.

The Red Phalarope lives a mysterious life far out to sea for most of the year, seeking rich feeding grounds. This seems an unlikely lifestyle for a wader weighing less than two ounces. The short, strong legs and large rounded toe lobes show its adaptation to swimming, while its buoyancy is obvious when sitting on water. They easily feed in rough inshore waters when persistent onshore winds drive them to the coast.

In flight, the white wingbar is prominent against dark wings and gray back. In non-breeding season, Red Phalaropes appear mostly gray and white, with a striking dark mark through the eye; hence its British name, the Grey Phalarope. To separate this species from the Red-necked Phalarope consider the bill. It is stouter from the side and remarkably broad from above. If it has any yellow at the base of the bill then identity is confirmed. Young birds in autumn show some dark feathers among the gray of the back and often a little yellow on the bill base. You will note a fairly thick bill and stocky appearance.

continued

As with the other phalaropes, the typical avian sex roles are reversed. Females are larger and more brightly colored than males. The females pursue males, compete for nesting territory, and will aggressively defend their nests and chosen mates. Once the female lays four olive-brown eggs, she migrates south, leaving the male to incubate the eggs and care for the chicks. The young mainly feed themselves and can fly within eighteen days of birth.

Large numbers of Red Phalaropes migrate off both coasts in August, September, and October. Though normally seen well offshore, severe storms drive them to land. They migrate later in fall than Red-necked Phalaropes. Their oceanic winter range is poorly known but includes from the southern United States to the Southern Hemisphere. A few winter off the North American coast, but most apparently reside well south of the Equator in winter.

These active birds generally feed by picking food from the water's surface, but will also strain plankton through their bills. When swimming, they occasionally spin in tight circles to create upwellings of food. When driven ashore by storms, they forage by walking slowly along the water's edge, or by swimming and tipping forward to reach under the surface or fluttering up to catch insects in the air. At sea, they land on mats of floating seaweed. They are often found with whales, and will pick parasites from their backs.

Wilson's and Red-necked Phalaropes gather by the thousands on Mono Lake, but usually not Red Phalaropes. With water twice as salty as sea water, the lake is not a home for fishes, but it does support an abundance of brine shrimp and brine flies. By devouring these small animals, phalaropes double their body weight. This added fat helps sustain them during their 6,000-mile migration to tropical seas in winter. Red Phalaropes migrate in smaller flocks, but sometimes mix with Red-necked Phalaropes.

Clearly this is not a year for vernal pools. Should we get lucky and have abundant rain from belated winter storms, search for this little pelagic shorebird in pools along the bluffs.

This article is the last in a series on local shorebirds seen by Mendocino Coast Audubon Society volunteers in the Save Our Shorebirds program. Please join them. No matter your level of expertise, ample training is available.



Peregrine Falcon with Red Phalarope
Photo Courtesy of Ron LeValley
LeValleyphoto.com

SAVE OUR SHOREBIRDS**Becky Bowen**

The SOS Data – Sanderlings

**Roll Out the Numbers,
See What They Tell Us**

The SOS numbers, just like the shorebirds, keep coming, and we learn more every year.



Consider Sanderlings: When we began this project eight years ago, some of us assumed all of these 3-ounce watchlisted shorebirds migrated extremely long distances from breeding grounds in the tundra of the High Arctic Canadian Islands. We thought Sanderlings simply passed through here twice a year on their way back and forth to balmy wintering grounds on the Tiera del Fuego coast.

Now, SOS 2013 data are complete (all of them soon to be posted on our MCAS website) and our surveys indicate Sanderlings can be found along the Mendocino Coast every month of the year. They don't breed on our beaches, but we are gathering documentation that some Sanderlings choose to spend winters here.

SOS volunteers have counted 37,388 Sanderlings on Glass Beach, Virgin Creek and Ten Mile Beach since July, 2007. We keep a separate record of the highest number of Sanderlings counted on a single survey and here are the data:

SOS Sanderling High Counts 2007-2013

	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
2007	-	-	-	-	-	-	245	120	155	300	50	80
2008	150	50	1	3	15	0	168	145	77	52	75	70
2009	60	25	75	50	75	3	87	141	104	22	105	150
2010	110	300	160	50	12	0	100	66	133	110	150	32
2011	54	38	46	30	50	0	94	175	150	270	250	225
2012	216	246	131	75	150	9	75	206	80	99	91	125
2013	55	175	113	250	123	12	200	150	92	75	214	125

We look forward to publishing more SOS numbers in future newsletters. Our volunteers have conducted 1,897 surveys and counted 320,914 birds in the last seven years. We have a lot of stories to tell.

Save Our Shorebirds is an on-going long-term citizen science MCAS program in partnership with California State Parks and FLOCKworks. Volunteers conduct shorebird censuses under supervision of a State Parks biologist on three Mackerricher State Parks beaches. To help with surveys, contact MCAS SOS Director Angela Liebenberg at

liebenbergs@mcn.org and please visit us at www.facebook.com/SaveOurShorebirds

CALENDAR, BIRD WALKS, FIELD TRIPS

February 2014

Saturday 1 Beginner Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 9AM*

Saturday 8 Field Trip - Owling, Meet at 5:30 PM on Caspar Little Lake Road (Road 409) where the pavement ends (3.3 miles up from the intersection at Highway 1), field trip leader Mike Stephens (for more information, contact Tim Bray tbray@wildblue.net or 937-4422). Parking limited, please carpool and arrive early. Dress warmly and bring a light. We will do some walking in the dark.



Monday 17 Meeting [Caspar Community Center](#) 7PM Speaker: Ronnie James, Bird Rescues

Wednesday 19 Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 8:30AM*

March 2014

Saturday 1 Beginner Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 9AM* **Cancelled**

Sat-Sun 1-2 Bird Walk at Point Cabrillo for the [Whale Festival](#) 9AM, meet at Lighthouse parking lot at entrance on Point Cabrillo Drive, bird walk leader Sarah Grimes

Saturday 8 Field Trip - Mackerricher State Park (Lake Cleone and Laguna Point) 9 a.m., meet at Lake Cleone parking lot, field trip leader Dave Jensen

Sat-Sun 15-16 Bird Walk at Point Cabrillo for the [Whale Festival](#) 9AM, meet at Lighthouse parking lot at entrance on Point Cabrillo Drive, bird walk leader Dave Jensen

Monday 17 Environmental Partnership Potluck 6 PM, Russian Gulch State Park Recreation Hall (MCAS, [MLT](#), [CNPS](#) and [MAPA](#)), bring a dish for 8 and your own plates, silverware. Host organization MAPA. Program at 7 PM

Wednesday 19 Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 8:30AM*

Thursday, 20 MCAS Board Meeting 7PM, contact J. Ossello for location

Saturday, 29 Family Bird Walk, Big River Haul Road 9 AM, meet on north side of Big River at the yellow gate entrance to haul road, bird walk leaders Sue "Magoo" and Sarah Grimes

April 2014

Fridays 4, 11, 18, 25 Save Our Shorebirds in-field training Virgin Creek Beach 9AM, contact Becky Bowen, casparbeck@comcast.net or 707 962-1602 for meeting place

Saturday 5 Beginner Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 9AM*

Saturday 12 Field Trip - Van Damme State Park 9 AM, meet at Van Damme Beach parking lot on Highway 1, field trip leader TBA

Wednesday 16 Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 8AM*

Thurs-Wed 17-23 Godwit Days, Arcata

Monday 21 Meeting [Gualala Art Center](#) 7PM Program TBA

Saturday 26 Family Bird Walk, Point Cabrillo 9 AM, meet at Lighthouse upper parking lot, birdwalk leaders Sue "Magoo" and Sarah Grimes

**These walks are free, but there is an entry charge for participants who are not members of the Gardens.*

For updates and useful links, visit the MCAS website: www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org and please visit us on facebook: www.facebook.com/mendocinocoastaudubon

MCAS BOARD MEMBERS AND PROGRAM CHAIRS 2013-2014

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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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