

Photo by Ron LeValley

The Black Oystercatcher

Mendocino Coast Audubon Newsletter February 2017

GORDON BEEBE PRESENTS EXPLORING THE COLOMBIAN SOUTHWEST ANDES AND INTERMOUNTAIN VALLEYS

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2017

7 P.M

CASPAR COMMUNITY CENTER

Photographer and author Gordon Beebe joins us in February to speak about the Colombian Andes.



He will present video and audio recordings made in the high tropical regions of the South American country. Birds of interest are Torrent Duck, Cock-of-the-Rock, Black-billed Mountain Toucan, five species of Antpittas, Jet Antbird. and Buffy Helmetcrees (a hummingbird of the *paramo*, a tropical habitat above the timberline).

Beebe is the former president of Sonoma County's Madrone Audubon Society. In 1981, he earned a bachelor's degree in environmental studies with a minor in art at the University of California, Santa Cruz. He lives in Santa Rosa and leads birdsong classes in Sonoma County. His website is <http://home.earthlink.net/~phot8grd/>

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NOTES: MCAS FIELD TRIP TO SACRAMENTO VALLEY REFUGES

Here are the first notes by Tim Bray and Catherine Keegan on their drive to the MCAS January field trip to the Sacramento Valley. Find more of Tim's field notes on Page 8.

January 12, 2017 On Highway 253 ,we found a "big dark raptor " sitting in an oak tree. A convenient pullout allowed us to scope what proved to be a juvenile Bald Eagle. I chanced to look around just as a second Bald Eagle flew down the ravine and landed in an oak; this one looked like a second-year bird. Catherine then looked up and found an adult soaring over the valley. As if three Bald Eagles wasn't enough, a juvenile Golden Eagle appeared, soaring high up. Pretty good 15 minutes.

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Dave Jensen

As I have mentioned in previous columns, to be a member of this chapter is to be a part of the larger Audubon family. So, this month I ask you to join with me to celebrate the 100th anniversary of our sister organization - the Golden Gate Audubon Society. A history of Golden Gate Audubon is presented in the special 20-page winter edition of *The Gull*, the chapter newsletter available at www.goldengateaudubon.org. One of the authors writes that "The story of Golden Gate Audubon's first 100 years is a story of individual bird lovers who joined together to share their passion, educate others, and advocate for Northern California wildlife." As I read that story, I was struck by the impact that this relatively small group of dedicated bird lovers has had on a major metropolitan area and the entire state. As a result of their efforts, miles of shoreline habitat have been reclaimed and preserved, parks have been established, and the quality of life throughout the Bay Area has been improved, for birders and non-birders alike.

Like a younger brother who looks up to his elder sibling, I was also inspired by the similarities shared by our two chapters, despite the obvious difference in our size. Like this chapter, Golden Gate has always committed itself to educating the next generation of bird lovers and environmental stewards. Like this chapter, they are taking a hands-on education program into the classrooms throughout their area.

Like this chapter, they are actively engaged in citizen science. Elsie Roemer, who led several successful efforts to save shoreline habitat from destruction, stated, "If you really love something, gather data." That is the power of the data that enabled Golden Gate to preserve the breeding colony of endangered Least Terns on the former Alameda Naval Air Station. Like this chapter, they have worked with and supported the efforts of other environmental groups. This spirit of cooperation and support has expanded their influence far beyond the borders of their chapter.

Like this chapter, Golden Gate's first response to environmental threats is to gather public support through education and outreach. But when that is not enough, they have gone to court to protect birds and the habitat that supports them. As early as 1918, the chapter began its battle to prevent the draining of Klamath lakes, a fight for water that continues to this day. In the 1980s they provided financial and political support for the legal battle to save Mono Lake, and they sued the Port of Oakland to prevent the destruction of wetlands. More recently, they joined with other chapters in the successful effort to modernize the wind farms at Altamont Pass and curtail the slaughter of as many as 4,700 eagles, hawks and other birds each year. These events clearly demonstrated that although the Audubon family prefers to work with others to resolve conflicts, we are willing to "put on the gloves" when necessary.

Although Golden Gate has an annual budget more than 100 times greater than ours, like this chapter, its real strength comes from the dedication of its members, many of whom volunteer as park docents, field trip leaders, educators, and citizen scientists. Like this chapter, Golden Gate is living proof that the strength of Audubon flows from the dedication of its members.

As the post-war boom of the 50s was rapidly causing the permanent loss of crucial bird habitat, Golden Gate President T. Eric Reynolds delivered these words at the 40th anniversary of that chapter: "The future, while not exactly rose-colored, is far from hopeless. To a great extent, the dedication, zeal, energy, and unselfishness of those now living will determine the heritage we leave to our descendants. ... The future is up to us. We must defend those things we hold to be important." His words are no less true sixty years later. Let us all continue to honor our heritage as members of Audubon. Happy Birthday, Golden Gate.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS ON THE MENDOCINO COAST



Photograph by Catherine Keegan

Editor's Note – Birding enthusiasts at all levels of experience participated in two Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Christmas Bird Counts during the holidays and here is a preliminary recap of highlights. We include some favorite CBC photos including a sunrise picture taken by Catherine Keegan from the Fort Bragg Coastal Trail.

Fort Bragg – December 26, 2016

Despite the bad date and weather, we had a remarkable total of 77 participants. The birds were hard to find, though. We counted 11 thousand individuals, a new low for this Count and the third straight year of declining numbers. Species count was 139, including one questionable record of American Crow awaiting documentation. This is within our previous range but definitely toward the low end. It certainly wasn't for lack of trying, and we did record two new species for this count: Bald Eagle, represented by two juveniles found off Bald Hill Road, and a Palm Warbler from a yard/feeder watch. Other unexpected finds included: Redhead, Yellow-shafted Flicker, and Eurasian Wigeon.

An additional five species were reported during count week, including a Tennessee Warbler. Notable misses included: Band-tailed Pigeon, Barn Owl, and Cedar Waxwing.

Count dinner was as lively as usual, especially when the hot lasagna came out. Big thanks to the day's heroes, Angela and Matt Liebenberg, who set up the hall, prepared the dinner, and then cleaned up the mess.

My thanks as well to all the Area Leaders for coordinating the teams and getting me the tally sheets, and especially to Sarah for coordinating the feeder/yard watch AND running a drop-in beginner team in Mendocino Village. The complete tally will be available on the MCAS website. See you all next year. **Tim Bray**



Photograph by Catherine Keegan



Photograph Courtesy of Liquid Fusion



*Tennessee Warbler
Photograph by Dominic Sherony*

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS ON THE MENDOCINO COAST



Gunderson Rock, Greenwood State Beach 1/2/2017

Elk, CA

South Mendocino Coast—January 2, 2017

Thirty-three birders participated in the south coast count in weather conditions that included fog, rain, sleet, hail, snow and sunshine.

Perhaps the biggest story is the absence of Tundra Swans. I think that's a first.

The official total is 130 species. Highlights include American Bittern, Bald Eagle, Blue-winged Teal, Western Snowy Plover (a total of 26 in two groups), American Dipper (a pair at the Elk Creek bridge), Violet-green Swallow, Barn Swallow and Tree Swallow (with a possible high count of at least 50 Tree Swallows). Count week birds were Common Goldeneye and Brown Pelican.

Tim Bray reported he went all day without a single Yellow-rumped Warbler or Chestnut-backed Chickadee. He said the best bird of the day for him was a Western Screech Owl trilling at 6 a.m. in spite of the snowfall. **Karen Havlena**



Becky Bowen

Great Blue Heron, Elk

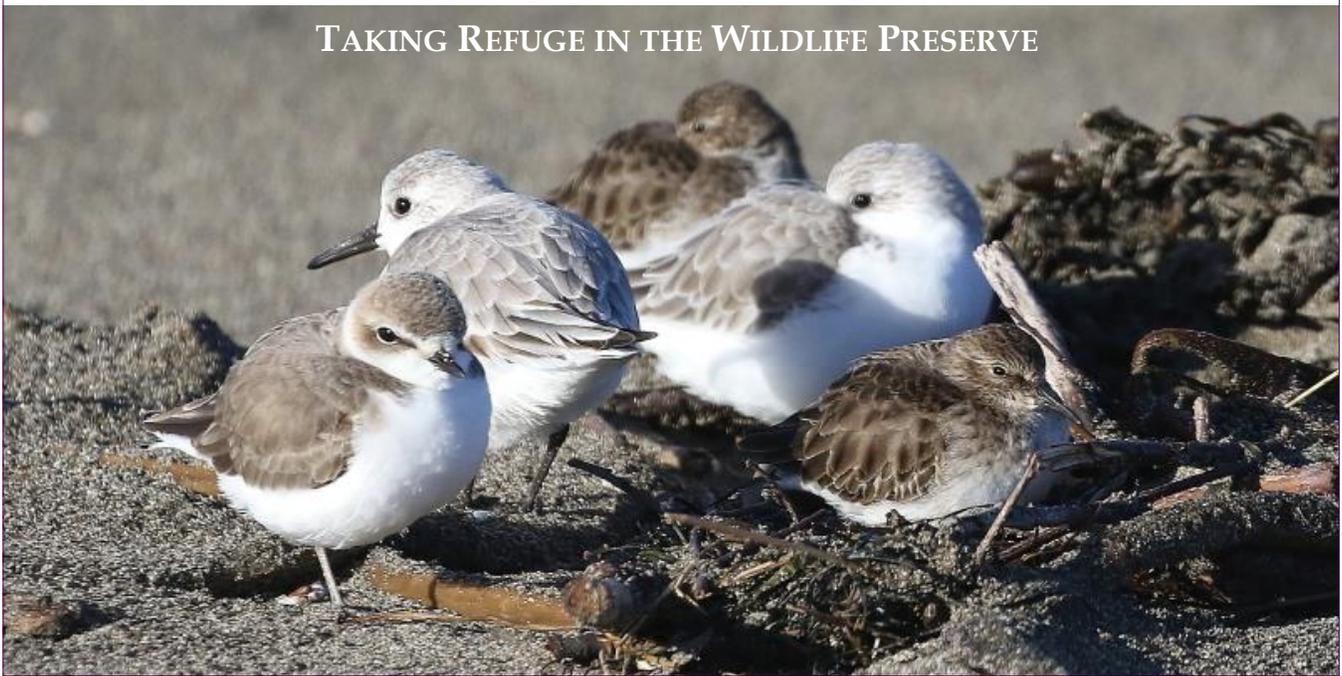


Tim Bray Photo

From left, Christine Babbit, Nancy Cuffman, Chris Bing birding in coastal snow.



Tim Bray, Elk Beach.

SAVE OUR SHOREBIRDS**Becky Bowen****TAKING REFUGE IN THE WILDLIFE PRESERVE**

Western Snowy Plover (left), two Sanderlings (middle), two Least Sandpipers (front and rear) Photograph by B. Bowen

Winter life on the beach for shorebirds is no bed of roses.

When storms blow through Inglewood Fen-Ten Mile Dunes Preserve, where do shorebirds take shelter?

There's no way to fly in pelting rain and the whammy is doubled by recent king tides that recently have wiped out long stretches of open sand where some shorebirds forage, nest and rest. There's nowhere to go, but down and east.

When storms come, small shorebirds, like the two-ounce Western Snowy Plovers, hunker down in human and horse tracks. The lower they go, the warmer it gets. Often it's nearly impossible to see them because their heads barely clear the top of footprints. The birds seek anything as a windbreak, including beach debris, driftwood, and a shorebird huddle like the one photographed above on Christmas Eve on Ten Mile Beach in the Mackerricher State Park preserve. Another way to retain body heat is the one-legged stance. When high tide waters flood habitat, shorebirds on the preserve now are able to go where they couldn't go before 2014, when massive amounts of European beach grass were removed by hand by crews managed by State Parks. The non-native invasive growth trapped shorebirds between the surf and a solid wall of vegetation above soil surface and underground rhizomes. Now that the obstructions are removed on long stretches of the beach, SOS surveyors see shorebirds retreat to fore dunes and further east when the open beach areas are consumed by storms.

Save Our Shorebirds in an on-going Mendocino Coast Audubon conservation program in partnership with California State Parks. To participate, contact SOS Chair Angela Liebenberg at liebenbergs@mcn.org To see more photos of shorebirds we monitor, please visit www.facebook.com/SaveOurShorebirds

BURROWING OWL

Donald Shephard

When we lived in the San Joaquin Valley, we discovered Burrowing Owls living in old ground squirrel holes around Stockton Airport. Another colony attracted our attention in a patch of wasteland on the west side of town near the water treatment plant.

Since we retired to the coast, we rarely even see one bird at a time as they migrate through in winter. A couple of years ago, a mature Burrowing Owl occupied a ground squirrel tunnel south of Point Cabrillo Lighthouse. It stood on the mound of dirt cleared by the industrious rodent and sleepily surveyed the area. Other individuals have visited Bald Hill and the Haul Road in MacKerricher State Park. Birder C. Swarth sighted one in May 1977 on Humboldt County's Little River Estuary.

As I mentioned last month, my wife and I traveled to Argentina and Chile in December. Both those countries host Burrowing Owls in their open countryside. In North America they occur west of the Mississippi with one outlying subspecies in Florida. Another subspecies lives in Canada's prairie provinces. There is a gap in distribution between Central and South America with no Burrowing Owls in the Amazon.

This distribution reflects the impact of man in both positive and negative ways. Florida populations have spread as wetlands are drained and turned into good hunting territory by grazing and mowing. As immigrants tilled the land they destroyed animal burrows and the owl's preferred habitat of open areas with low ground cover. Their numbers have declined sharply with human alteration of their habitat and the decline of prairie dogs and ground squirrels. Burrowing Owls are still numerous, but populations declined by about 33% between 1966 and 2015, according to the North American Breeding Bird Survey. Most recent official estimates place them at less than 10,000 breeding pairs. Declines have been particularly sharp in Florida, the Dakotas, and coastal California.

Efforts to protect Burrowing Owl populations can turn into complex ecological juggling acts. On a naval base near San Diego, land managers had to balance the needs of declining Burrowing Owls with the needs of a colony of endangered Least Terns, whose chicks the owls sometimes preyed upon.



Burrowing Owl photo Charles J. Sharp

Continued on Page 7

Burrowing Owl continued from Page 6

Burrowing Owls adapt as winter approaches by leaving the northern portion of their range to seek warmer conditions; en route many individuals wander, appearing on coastal jetties, islands, even off-shore oil platforms and ships at sea. This tendency to cross water is unusual in other birds of prey but is shared by several owl species.

You might have trouble spotting the bobbing head of a Burrowing Owl protruding from winter grass but once seen their long legs, brown feathers mottled with sandy-pale spots on the backs and wings, spotted breast with bold white throat and eyebrows create an easy identification. Their yellow eyes are unmistakable and their nocturnal eye shine glows red. Curiously, Burrowing Owls like other owls, have both upper and lower eyelids that close when at rest.

Unlike other owls, Burrowing Owls are active during the day, especially in the spring when they gather food for their broods of three to twelve chicks. They also feed on nocturnal insects. Females catch more insects during the day; males take most of the vertebrates, generally at night. Other food includes earthworms, frogs, toads, snakes, lizards, turtles, salamanders, bats, ground squirrels, small weasels, young rabbits, songbirds, and baby ducks.

In 1957 on vacation in the Killarney area of Ireland with three school friends, a spritely landlady commented that we were “not very house proud.” She would have changed her mind if she compared us to Burrowing Owls. During the nesting season, Burrowing Owls collect a wide variety of materials to line their nest, some of which are left around the entrance to the burrow. The most common material is mammal dung, usually from cattle. The dung helps to control the microclimate inside the burrow and to attract insects, which the owls may eat. They may also collect bottle caps, metal foil, cigarette butts, paper scraps, and other bits of trash at the entrance, possibly signifying that the burrow is occupied. Perhaps we were not quite so slovenly in 1957.

I do remember the fug of smoke and sweaty socks in that boarding room. Like those long ago teenagers, Burrowing Owls have a higher tolerance for carbon dioxide than other birds—an adaptation found in many burrowing animals, which spend long periods underground, where the gas can accumulate. These birds are hoarders on a grand scale. A Saskatchewan pair stored 200 rodents in their burrow to help raise their young. When it came to caching food, the odd chocolate bar under our pillows paled in comparison.



Burrowing Owl fledglings
photo by Tom Grey

SACRAMENTO VALLEY FIELD TRIP NOTES **Tim Bray**

Day 1 January 14, 2017

Tundra Swans, Sandhill Cranes, Rock Wrens, Lewis's Woodpeckers, Say's Phoebes, Lark Sparrows, Greater Roadrunners, Golden Eagle, and that was just the morning.

Colusa National Wildlife Refuge auto tour closed because of flooding, so we drove around Sutter Buttes (Ferruginous Hawk, more

cranes) to Gray Lodge State Wildlife Area (Common Gallinule, Eurasian Wigeon, White-faced Ibis, Wood Duck, Blue-winged Teal, and the most amazing perfect liftoff with thousands of Snow and Ross's Geese right in front of us). Great-horned Owl and Black-crowned Night-heron after sunset. Perfect weather all day. Nine very happy birders. Trying for Loggerhead Shrike, Bald Eagle, and Vermillion Flycatcher tomorrow. Valley is full of water (key roads closed). Sutter Bypass brim-full, a sight to behold. Swans almost everywhere. Amazing day.



Photograph by Mary-Ellen Campbell

Day 2 January 15, 2017

Hooded Mergansers, Bald Eagles (at least 6), Peregrine Falcon, Loggerhead Shrike, Ross's Goose, Cackling Goose (a single individual among thousands of white geese), Blue Geese (dark-morph Snow Goose), Tule Goose (subspecies of Greater White-fronted), Cinnamon Teal, Virginia Rail, Black-necked Stilts, a Herring Gull killing a duck, and another spectacular liftoff. 68 species just at Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge. In the afternoon we split up. Dave Jensen led a party out into the back roads to find Long-billed Curlews, more Sandhill Cranes, Tundra Swans (hundreds). The other party tried for Vermilion Flycatcher without success, though we did find more Lark Sparrows.

FEBRUARY 11 FIELD TRIP TO SOUTH COAST **Adam Hutchins**

Join us for a birding trip along Mendocino County's South Coast as we look for wintering Western Snowy Plovers along the beaches, scan for waders and waterfowl at Lake Davis, search for Tundra Swans in Hunter's Lagoon, and try for a falcon trifecta as we bird in Manchester State Park and possibly the headlands of the Point Arena-Stornetta Unit of the California Coastal Monument. Meet at the west end of Kinney Road in Manchester State Park (the beach access parking lot) at 9AM Saturday, February 11. Please bring a scope if you have one, but it's not required. Dress for cool weather and wind.

CALENDAR, BIRD WALKS, FIELD TRIPS

PLEASE NOTE THE JANUARY 29 COASTAL TRAIL BIRDWALK IS CANCELLED.

February 2017

Saturday 4 Beginner Bird Walk [Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens](#) 18220 Highway 1, Fort Bragg, CA. 9AM-Noon.* Leader: Dave Jensen

Monday 6 Board Meeting contact Dave Jensen for time, location

Saturday 11 Field Trip South Coast 9AM Meet at west end of Kinney Road in Manchester State Park (the beach access parking lot). See announcement, Page 9. Leader: Adam Hutchins

Wednesday 15 Bird Walk [Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens](#) 18220 Highway 1, Fort Bragg, CA. 8:30AM-Noon.* Leader: Tim Bray

17-19 San Francisco Bay Flyway Festival Mare Island/Vallejo

Monday 20 Meeting [Caspar Community Center](#) 15051 Caspar Rd, Caspar, CA. 7PM
Speaker: **Gordon Beebe** on the birds of Southwest Colombia (see story Page 1).

Sunday 26 Coastal Trail Bird Walk - [Coastal Trail](#) 10AM-Noon, meet near restroom at east end of parking lot at foot of Elm Street, Fort Bragg. Bring water, wear comfortable walking shoes, binoculars available, heavy rain cancels. Leader: Dave Jensen

March 2017

Saturday 4 Beginner Bird Walk [Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens](#) 18220 Highway 1, Fort Bragg, CA. 9AM-Noon.* Leader: Dave Jensen

4, 5, 18, 19 Whale Festival Birdwalks, Point Cabrillo Preserve 9AM, meet at Point Cabrillo Light Station upper parking lot. Leader: Sarah Grimes (Mar. 4) Dave Jensen (Mar 5, 18, 19)

Owling Field Trip-Reservations required. Contact Tim Bray tbray2mcn.org (707) 734-0791 for date, time, meeting place and leader

Wednesday 15 Bird Walk [Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens](#) 18220 Highway 1, Fort Bragg, CA. 8:30AM-Noon.* Leader: Tim Bray

Wednesday 15 Meeting Gualala. Please check next month's newsletter and MCAS website for meeting time and location.

Speaker: Paul Bannick, award-winning author of *Owl: A Year in the Lives of North American Owls*



Monday 20 Environmental Partnership Potluck, Presentation of Matthew Coleman

Environmental Service Award [Caspar Community Center](#) 15051 Caspar Rd, Caspar, CA. 6 PM Dinner, 7PM Award Presentation

Sunday 26 Coastal Trail Bird Walk - [Coastal Trail](#) 10AM-Noon, meet near restroom at east end of parking lot at foot of Elm Street, Fort Bragg. Bring water, wear comfortable walking shoes, binoculars available, heavy rain cancels. Leader: Dave Jensen

***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 2016-2017

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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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