

# The Whistling Swan



NEWSLETTER OF THE MENDOCINO COAST AUDUBON SOCIETY

March 2011

## ENVIRONMENTAL AWARDS POTLUCK hosted by



**Dorothy King Young Chapter**  
CALIFORNIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

at  
**St. Anthony's Hall**  
**top of Lansing Street in**  
**Mendocino**  
**on Monday, March 21**  
**6 p.m.**

including

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**Mariposa Lily photo**  
**Ron LeValley**  
**LeValleyphoto.com**

**PRESIDENT'S CORNER****David Jensen**

March is always a special month here on the coast. The camellias and early rhododendrons are in bloom. Pods of grey whales pass northward along the coast, past pairs of Canada geese on the sea stacks. Backyard sparrows forgo their drab winter twitters and switch to provocative mating songs. Ospreys, baseball, and daylight saving time return, although not necessarily in that order.

But March is also special because it brings the annual Environmental Awards Potluck, a sort of family reunion of coastal environmental organizations. This year's gathering will be hosted by the Dorothy King Young Chapter of the California Native Plant Society. Members from the Mendocino Area Parks Association, the Mendocino Land Trust, and your Mendocino Coast Audubon chapter are invited, along with members of other like-minded groups.

This cordial potluck dinner and awards ceremony always has a warm, familial tone because so many of us actively support more than one of the sponsoring organizations. The main purposes of this evening are to make new friends, renew old acquaintances, and to acknowledge the selfless effort of the many volunteers who support environmental causes in our community. Last year we honored some of the people who provide the grants and other funding that are critical to the success of our efforts. This year's award will be given to a highly respected individual who has worked for years with several organizations to promote environmental stewardship and nature education.

This dinner is an inspirational event. It is easy to become worn down by all the challenges that lie before us. Climate change, habitat losses, disappearing species, all painted on the canvas of a shrinking economy. But as I prepare my list of what this chapter has accomplished in the past twelve months, I am amazed at all that we are doing. And then as I listen to what the other organizations have done, I realize that we are a part of a larger group of caring coastal residents who are making this a better place to live. As we share our successes and plans for the future, you may not hear the angels sing, but you can surely see the light shining through cracks in the clouds.

So I hope that you can join us at Saint Anthony's Hall in Mendocino (next to the Catholic Church at the top of Lansing Drive) on Monday night, March 21. The dinner starts at 6:00 and the program starts around 7:00. Bring something to share, a fork, a plate, and your smile.

## PAM HUNTLEY ON KZYX FM 88.3, 90.7, AND 91.5

### BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON

An odd but not uncommon sound in the night is the flat, barking “quork” of the Black-crowned Night-Herons as they fly to their nighttime hunting grounds along ponds, salt-water marshes and slow-moving streams. The Black-crowned Night-Heron is very stout or chunky, standing about two-feet tall. It has a large head, short neck and relatively short, yellow legs.

The immature herons are grey-brown with heavy streaking, creamy-white spots on their wings and a yellowish bill. Adults are striking with their jet-black cap, bill and back. They have large red eyes. Their cheeks and underside are white; wings and tail are gray. Breeding adults have two beautiful long, white, skinny plumes of feathers trailing from the back of their heads. Their feet can turn a brilliant red during courtship.

During the day, they typically roost communally in dense stands of trees or brush, sleeping with their bill tucked in their breast feathers. When night falls, they spread into almost every kind of aquatic habitat to hunt , amphibians, reptiles, fish, invertebrates, small mammals and birds. In some areas they are known to be significant predators of ducklings and rails. Black-crowned Night-Herons are expert at still-fishing. They wait motionless for their prey then

**Black-crowned Night-Heron**  
photo Erika Zavalla



strike them with their heavy, sharply-pointed bill. By feeding at night they don't compete with other herons and egrets. When Black-crowned Night-Herons feed by day they are often attacked by other herons and egrets.

Black-crowned Night-Herons nest colonially in almost every kind of habitat: from pine groves to cattail marshes, willows, orchards and city parks. In courtship, the male bows to the female. He stretches his neck and erects his breast feathers and the plumes on his back. The female responds similarly. The pair will rub bills and smooth each other's feathers. The male collects the nesting material for the female, who builds the nest of loose sticks with fine inner lining. Both parents incubate the three to five bluish-green eggs for two weeks and together care for the young for six to seven weeks.

### PELAGIC TRIP

Please mark your calendar for the MCAS spring pelagic trip on Sun, 15 May, 2011. Leaders will include Ron LeValley and Rob Fowler. The trip will last seven hours. Meet at 7:30-am at the TELSTAR dock on N Harbor Drive in Noyo Harbor, Fort Bragg, MEN County. Cost: \$100 - Mendocino & Lake Counties only or \$110 - all others.

Credit card service will be available. Thanks - hope to see many familiar faces joining us.

Karen Havlena, MCAS Pelagic Trip Coordinator.



## CALIFORNIA AUDUBON AWARDS PARTNERSHIP GRANT TO MENDOCINO COAST AUDUBON'S SOS PROGRAM

Becky Bowen

California Audubon last month awarded a \$7,605 grant to Mendocino Coast Audubon Society's Save Our Shorebirds program. The grant will sustain the long-term citizen science project for one year.

Save Our Shorebirds, founded in 2007, is an MCAS - State Parks partnership that seeks to increase the number of watch listed shorebirds that either nest here or rest here during spring and fall migrations. Volunteers monitor shorebirds on three MacKerricher State Park beaches, one of which (Ten Mile Beach) is undergoing extensive work by State Parks to restore critical wildlife habitat. SOS volunteers also survey shorebirds on Virgin Creek Beach and Glass Beach .



Angela Liebenberg

In 2007, Audubon California established the Audubon Endowment for State Parks from the sale of the McVicar property in Lake County to State Parks. The endowment generates income to support conservation, restoration, stewardship and public education projects on California State Park lands that benefit California's native birds. The state Audubon organization looked for programs supported by on-going partnerships between chapter volunteers and State Parks. Preference was given to programs carried out to conserve watch listed birds in Important Bird Areas of the state. MacKerricher State Park is part of the Mendocino Coast Important Bird Area designated by the American Bird Conservancy and Audubon.

Save Our Shorebirds satisfied requirements that also included public outreach and education about watch listed birds.

Grant funds will provide shorebird training for Rangers and other State Parks personnel and fund data input to State Parks and Cornell University's national bird database.



Joleen Ossello

State Parks Environmental Scientist Angela Liebenberg supervises the SOS program and Joleen Ossello will serve as director starting in July. Ossello, a graduate of College of the Redwoods Marine Science Technology Program, said, "I look forward to serving my community for the greater good of all by providing education, awareness, and appreciation to as many people as possible while studying, monitoring and protecting our precious local shorebird population. Thank you to California Audubon for this most excellent opportunity to continue the stewardship of our coastal beach habitat."

To help with surveys, contact Angela Liebenberg at:

[ALIEBERG@parks.ca.gov](mailto:ALIEBERG@parks.ca.gov)

*This Project is supported by Audubon California*

## BIRD WALKS, WHALE FESTIVAL, AND FIELD TRIPS

### Bird Walks

The Mendocino Coast Audubon Society will host two walks at the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens during the month of March. Tim Bray will lead the monthly beginners' bird walk on Saturday March 5 at 9:00 a.m. He will also lead the midweek bird walk on Wednesday, March 16, at 8:30 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 visit our website [mendocinocoastaudubon.org](http://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: March 5, 6, 19 and 20. On March 5 and 6, noted nature educators Pam Huntley and Sarah Grimes will lead a special walk for families. On March 19 and 20, Dave Jensen will lead a longer three-hour tour of the property.

Join us on one of the bird walks that leave the upper parking lot at 9:00 each morning. If you can't get there that early, come visit us at the Assistant Lightkeeper's house as we share our message of education, appreciation, and conservation. There's no better place to enjoy the spectacle of our spring whale migration. We'll see you at the lighthouse.

### March Field Trip to View the Birds of Lake Cleone and Laguna Point



**Black-legged Kittiwake**

On Saturday, March 12, the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society will host a field trip to view the birds of MacKerricher State Park. Participants will meet at 9:00 a.m. in the Lake Cleone parking lot. If that lot is closed due to flooding, we shall meet at the parking lot adjacent to the registration kiosk.

With its variety of habitats, MacKerricher State Park supports more species of birds than any other park along our coast. Weather permitting, this should be an excellent opportunity to see many of them. 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, not showers or drizzle, cancels.

**SANDERLING****Donald Shephard****Sanderling**

Imagine you weigh between two and three-and-a-half ounces and you must travel two to six thousand miles from your Arctic breeding grounds to your overwintering spot and back again each year. Further, to make life more difficult, you mainly travel along a narrow strip of coastline. What would you pack? To give you all the energy you needed, you'd pack fat. That's what Sanderlings do. They feast on high fat, high-energy Arctic insects before they head south. They stop along the way to feed on sand crabs, small mollusks and crustaceans, amphipods, isopods, and marine worms. You can see them now on beaches as Save Our Shorebirds volunteers do.

Sanderlings are most commonly seen in flocks running up a beach ahead of an incoming wave, then turning around and racing after the receding wave, to pick up stranded invertebrates or to probe in wet sand.

A shorebird, the Sanderling breeds around the Arctic, and migrates long distances, wintering from southern Canada south to South America, South Europe, Africa, and Australia. It is highly gregarious in winter, sometimes forming large flocks on coastal mudflats or sandy beaches.

The Sanderling, most widespread of all shorebirds, will turn up at nearly every beach in the world at some point in the year. During the breeding season they reside on the tundra, usually near a freshwater lake or pond. In the winter they can be found primarily on ocean beaches.

The Sanderling, a small sandpiper measuring 7 to 8 inches in length, shows light color with a conspicuous white wing stripe, straight black bill and black legs. During breeding season, it sports a rufous-colored head and neck with a wash of the same color extending onto its back. During the non-breeding season both male and female Sanderlings appear pale gray with a white chest and belly.

Juveniles look similarly to nonbreeding adults, but with a mottled black and white on their backs and with buffy patches on breast sides, streaked with fine black markings. In your spotting juveniles or adults in your scope you may notice it lacks a hind toe.

The mating system of Sanderlings appears to vary among areas, and possibly also among years. It is predominantly monogamous, but occasionally the female lays eggs for several different males in quick succession.

Nonbreeding individuals of Arctic-breeding shorebirds sometimes remain on the wintering grounds through the summer. Why make that long trip if you're not going to breed anyway? Many Sanderlings remain in South America without breeding, but only small numbers remain here along the North American coast. They choose nesting sites on dry stony patches near wet areas. The female lays three or four dull greenish eggs with small irregular brown spots around the large end. Downy young leave the nest a day after hatching. They soon pack on fat and head south.



Sanderling photo Ron LeValley  
LeValleyphoto.com

## POINT REYES BIRDING & NATURE FESTIVAL April 29 - May 2



Register today at [www.pointreyesbirdingfestival.org](http://www.pointreyesbirdingfestival.org).

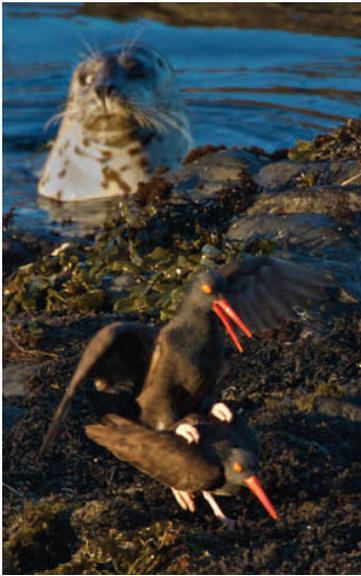
The Point Reyes region is endowed with unique geography and pristine coastline, beaches, dunes, mudflats, bays, estuaries, freshwater wetlands, forests, grasslands, coastal bluffs and chaparral, which together support one of the highest levels of bird diversity in the country. As home base for some of the nation's top birders and naturalists, it offers the ideal setting for a spring festival for bird and nature enthusiasts at all levels of experience.

Last year, Festival participants took part in over 50 fabulous bird walks guided by such top birders as Jules Evens, Lisa Hug, David Wimpfheimer and Keith Hansen, as well as an outstanding pelagic trip to Cordell Bank. All enjoyed the tremendous camaraderie experienced by the 500 people who attended. Festival outings tallied a cumulative total of 200 species of birds, not to mention dozens of mammals, butterflies, marine mammals, and other wildlife, in Western Marin and Sonoma Counties.

This year the Festival is offering more than 70 outings and presentations, with events for beginners and kids. Alvaro Jaramillo will give the keynote address. There will be a screening of award-winning documentary, *Ghost Bird*, about the search for and "rediscovery" of the legendary Ivory-billed woodpecker. The Festival benefits the habitat conservation work of the Environmental Action Committee of West Marin (EAC). You can read about some of EAC's conservation work at [www.eacmarin.org](http://www.eacmarin.org).

## OPPORTUNITIES TO HELP WITH RESEARCH ON THE COAST

By Diane Hichwa



**Mating Black Oystercatchers**

**Photo Craig Tooley**

We invite you to help monitor birds and nesting along the Mendonoma Coast. We survey Black Oystercatchers and a variety of nesting seabirds: Brandt's Cormorant, Pelagic Cormorant, Pigeon Guillemots and Western Gulls. You can brush up on information and skills by attending a March workshop – see below. Contact Diane Hichwa for the Sea Ranch area or Ron LeValley or David Jensen for the Mendocino-Fort Bragg area.

We check three islands off Sea Ranch each week from April through August. In early April we see adult and juvenile Western Gulls mingled together. Then a transition occurs as “thoughts turn to nesting”. The next week adults banish immature gulls. We have overview photos of the islands for the past four years and see that the same spots are taken each year for nest sites, but we do not know if it is same individuals? Do they select those sites because they afford the best protection of chicks, or for spotting predators? We

observe and record disturbances both natural and man-made. River otters, sea lions, Great Blue Herons, divers and aircraft may all disturb nesting. Then the watch and wait begins as cryptically-colored eggs are laid in the nests. When the chicks hatch, we count well-camouflaged, gray-spotted fuzzballs whenever an adult stands up or one comes in to regurgitate food for nestlings.

Following Western Gulls, we see Brandt's Cormorants settle into a checkerboard grid of nests, each spaced so “my neck reaches toward you and yours toward me”. Pigeon Guillemots rest in the sun or disappear inside the rock crevice where they nest.

Black Oystercatchers are more obvious, with their head bobbing and loud piping duets, black bodies with red bills and pink legs that disappear against rocky nest sites. In June they sit on nests. Audubon California is coordinating a survey from June 3 through 6 for Black Oystercatchers, to gather baseline information about the breeding population; some earlier reconnaissance will be helpful. Let us know how you can help.

### **Coastal Bird Identification and Natural History March 12, 10 AM, Sea Ranch**

Jim Weigand, ecologist at the United States Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management, will conduct a workshop at The Sea Ranch for those interested in helping with monitoring activities on the North Coast. For details, contact Diane Hichwa at [dhichwa@earthlink.net](mailto:dhichwa@earthlink.net).



**Western Gulls and chick**  
**Photo Craig Tooley**

## BIRD SIGHTINGS

Feb 23 Ten [Green-winged Teal](#) on the north shore, west of Ten Mile River bridge. Erica Fielder

Feb 23 Sub-adult [Glaucous Gull](#) at the Laguna Point parking lot. Also a juvenile male [White winged Scoter](#). Rick Harris

Feb 22 A [Black-legged Kittiwake](#) at the Laguna Point parking lot. Dorothy Tobkin

Feb 22 Another [Black-legged Kittiwake](#) at Virgin Creek Beech. Richard Hubacek

Feb 22 A single [White-winged Scoter](#) south-side of the Noyo Harbor. M Coleman

Feb 21 First [Allen's Hummingbird](#) of the year arrived and began driving away other hummingbirds. Tim Bray

Feb 20 [Glaucous Gull](#) west of Ten Mile River bridge. Karen Havlena

Feb 18 [Glaucous Gull](#), probably second year, at Laguna Point parking lot. Dorothy Tobkin

Feb 12 Peregrine Audubon field trip to the south Mendocino coast found a few of the continuing rarities : 3 [Lewis Woodpecker](#) near power poles 119 and 120 on the Ukiah-Boonville Road, 3 [Pacific Golden-plovers](#) on the lawns near the Point Arena lighthouse, 2 [Sandhill Cranes](#) seen from the bluff at the mouth of the Garcia River, at least 32 [Tundra Swans](#) at Brushy Creek seen from Bristol Lane. The [Laysan Albatross](#) did not appear during our two visits to Arena Cove, but it was reported Feb 11. George Chaniot

Feb 10 Thirty-one [Snowy Plovers](#) between Ward Avenue and Fen Creek. Most (27) were near the "Snowy Plover Protection Area". 3 were near Fen Creek. They out-numbered the Sanderlings 2 to 1. There were at least two banded Snowies, the new "Pink Lady" and a "Red Lady". At Fen Creek a [Tree Swallow](#) flying North. Richard Hubacek

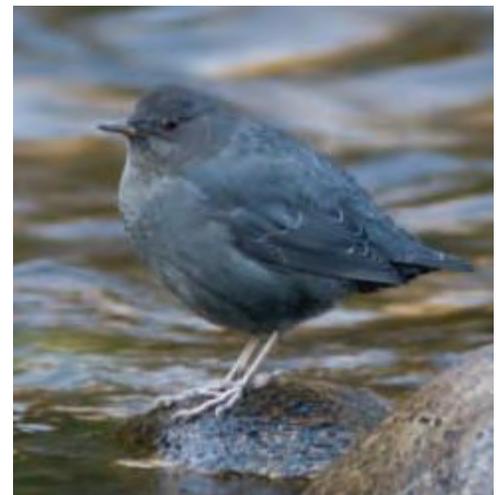
Feb 4 Fort Bragg cemetery 3 [Bullock's Orioles](#). Also a [Yellow-bellied Sapsucker](#). Jerry White

Feb 4 [American Dipper](#) at Van Damme State Park entrance. Richard Hubacek

[Green-winged Teal pair in breeding plumage](#)



[American Dipper](#)  
Photo Ron LeValley  
LeValleyphoto.com



## MCAS BOARD MEMBERS AND PROGRAM CHAIRS 2010-2011

President	David Jensen	964-8163	djensen@mcn.org
Vice President	Tony Eppstein	937-1715	tonyepp@mcn.org
Secretary	Becky Bowen	962-1602	casparbeck@comcast.net
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Newsletter	Donald Shephard	962-0223	donshephard@comcast.net

### Off-board chair:

Education	Sarah Grimes	937-4322	zewa@mcn.org
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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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