

The Whistling Swan



NEWSLETTER OF THE MENDOCINO COAST AUDUBON SOCIETY

May 2011



ON THE ROCKS: THE CALIFORNIA COASTAL NATIONAL MONUMENT

Speaker
Ron LeValley
Fort Bragg Town Hall
May 16th at 7 PM

Call them islands or call them rocks, most of them are part of the California Coastal National Monument and are home to a

variety of seabirds. Biologist and photographer Ron LeValley will share his knowledge and show photos of the various birds and mammals that make these off shore rocks their resting and nesting spot.

Join Mendocino Coast Audubon Society on Monday May 16, 7 P.M. at Fort Bragg Town Hall on the corner of Main and Laurel to learn more about the importance of these offshore islands for their avian and mammal inhabitants.

ANNUAL MEETING

MCAS will hold its short (very short, we promise) Annual Meeting immediately before Ron LeValley's presentation. Board members were elected in 2010 for two years, this is an opportunity to fill either of two positions in this friendly board. See page 6 for more details.

Inside this issue:

<i>President's Corner</i>	2
<i>Brown Pelican</i>	3
<i>SOS Black-bellied Plovers</i>	4
<i>Banded and Tagged Birds</i>	5
<i>Opportunity Knocks</i>	6
<i>New Black Oystercatcher Survey</i>	8
<i>Bird Walks and Field Trip</i>	9
<i>Pelagic Trip</i>	9
<i>Board members</i>	10
<i>Mission</i>	10
Common Murre with squid, and Tufted Puffin photos by Ron LeValley	
www.LeValleyphoto.com	

PRESIDENT'S CORNER**David Jensen**

Graham Chisolm, David Jensen, Anna Weinstein

Audubon California recently recognized Mendocino Coast Audubon Society president David Jensen for his dedication and effective work as a Regional Stakeholder for the California Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA). David received a Volunteer Achievement Award at Audubon California's annual Morris Doyle luncheon, Thursday April 11, at the Golden Gate Club in San Francisco's Presidio.

Graham Chisolm, Executive Director and Vice President of Audubon California explained, "The Morris Doyle awards celebrate

extraordinary individuals for their commitment to Audubon's mission. On behalf of Audubon California I want to express my appreciation for all you have done to conserve seabirds and California's marine environment." Chisolm reported that "David was instrumental in generating consensus among fishermen, Native American tribal leaders, and conservationists along the North Coast in order to produce a network of marine reserves and buffer areas around globally significant seabird colonies. Audubon California understands the MLPA offers an exceptional opportunity for seabird conservation, as similar marine reserves around the world have been proven to protect and restore ocean life."

Anna Weinstein, Audubon California's Seabird Conservation Coordinator, also thanked David for helping to forge a joint management agreement with Bureau of Land Management, the Trinidad Rancheria, and Audubon California. This collaborative partnership will combine educational outreach, scientific research and community-based enforcement designed to study and protect important seabird rookeries near Trinidad Harbor. Ms. Weinstein directs a state-wide program whose mission is to protect and restore the seabirds along our coast, and to raise the public's awareness of the importance of these birds, but are nonetheless vital to our marine ecosystems.

The Mendocino Coast Audubon Society is currently working with Audubon California and other state and federal organization to monitor and protect seabirds and shorebirds along the Mendocino Coast.

In addition to the tenth biannual breeding bird census at Point Cabrillo, we are conducting our fifth annual Save Our Shorebirds survey along local beaches, monitoring nesting Cormorants in several coastal rookeries for the third year, and participating in the initial survey of breeding Black Oystercatchers along the California coast. Interested volunteers with all levels of experience are welcome to join us in these worthwhile projects. For more information, contact the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society at [964-6835](tel:964-6835).

PAM HUNTLEY ON KZYX FM 88.3, 90.7, AND 91.5



Brown Pelican photo Ron LeValley

www.LeValleyphoto.com

head first. They don't carry fish in their pouch - they use it as a fish net. They tip the point down to drain the water before swallowing the fish.

Brown Pelicans might be seen on our coast at any time, but are most common in July through November. We usually see either young pelicans, that have a brown heads, or non-breeding adults, whose heads and necks are white with light yellow on the crown and gray pouches. The breeding adults have a bright yellow head, white forehead, and a sport gorgeous rich brown on the back of the neck and a red pouch.

On our coast, Brown Pelicans have historically nested as far north Point Lobos but now are restricted to Southern California, especially the Channel Islands, and south into Mexico. Females do not breed until three years of age and males until even older. In breeding pairs, the males collect the nesting material and the female builds the nest. They will build nests colonially, in low trees, on cliffs, or on the ground in shallow depressions.

They lay three eggs. If one survives to fledge at three months it's a successful year. In 1970 there were only five Brown Pelicans reported to have fledged in the entire state. This failure was due to the build up of DDT and other chlorinated hydrocarbons in the adults, causing the egg shells too soft and break prematurely.

Brown Pelicans were placed on the Endangered Species List . On the Atlantic coast Brown Pelicans were removed from the l in 1985. The Brown Pelican was removed from the list throughout its range in 2009. It presents another example of nature's ability to come back when given half a chance.

A wonderful bird is the pelican / Its bill can hold more than its belly can. Well, actually it's the pouch attached to the bill which can hold three times as much as the stomach. Everyone recognizes the Brown Pelican. It's that four-foot bird on the coast with that giant bill. At eighteen inches the Brown Pelican has one of the longest bill of any bird. It is strictly coastal bird. They travel in a line over the water, each taking a turn flapping and gliding on that seven-foot wings.

Brown Pelicans eat fish almost exclusively. They perform spectacular dives, sometimes from sixty feet up, twisting and plunging into the water

Brown Pelicans on a breeding colony at La Jolla. Photo Don Shephard





**ALL DRESSED UP, READY
TO GO WAY UP NORTH**
From Save Our Shorebirds Notes:
The Black-bellied Plovers
Of Virgin Creek
By Becky Bowen

Ask any of the Save Our Shorebirds volunteers who survey Virgin Creek Beach and they'll tell you chances are good that you'll see Black-bellied Plovers at the beach almost any day between April and January. When the plovers aren't wintering along the West Coasts of North, Central and South America, they are headed north or south on their way to or from Arctic breeding grounds.

The plover's winter plumage (above left) is subtle and easily blends into the color of sand. But just about now, breeding plumage appears and the males, especially, come close to sporting the finest tuxedo nature can produce in the world of shorebirds (right).



These plovers breed north of the Arctic Circle and in pockets along western Alaska. A typical place to raise chicks would be near Resolute, Nunavut Territory, Canada (2,612.6 miles north of Fort Bragg as the plover flies). If you do the math another way, some Black-bellied Plovers would be migrating 7,535.1 miles one-way from— say —Santiago, Chile, to the oh-so-aptly-named Resolute. Beaches like Virgin Creek are a welcome rest and refueling stop for these heroic travelers.

Please join us if you can on our SOS surveys. Every Friday (except 5/6 and 5/20) at 8:30 A.M. in-the-field training is scheduled until July 1 when daily SOS surveys start. You'll learn about these amazing plovers and other shorebirds (many described as birds in decline on the Audubon Watchlist) that we study and protect. Call Becky Bowen for directions for a meeting place at Virgin Creek.

Save Our Shorebirds is a long-term citizen science MCAS program in partnership with State Parks. Volunteers conduct shorebird surveys on three MacKerricher State Park beaches. To help with surveys, please contact State Parks Environmental Scientist Angela Liebenberg at ALIEBENBERG@parks.ca.gov

This project is supported by Audubon California

BANDED OR TAGGED BIRDS

Diane Hichwa



Caspian Tern with leg bands.

Photo Steven Smith

Banded or tagged birds present a valuable aid to research and an intriguing puzzle to solve. Whenever possible, follow-up on these sometimes colorful tags and bands as they provide information about the age, health and migratory habits of the wildlife around us. For example, since 2008 researchers have banded over a thousand California Gulls in South San Francisco Bay to learn their movements after their main breeding colony in the former Cargill salt flats was restored to tidal action in December, 2010. In the past few years, new sightings of these gulls have occurred in Santa Cruz and in Davis.

A Banded Snowy Plover: On August 22, 2009 a friend walking the sand at Sea Ranch sent a photograph with his comment " I shot this picture this morning." With a GPS on his camera he could report its exact longitude and latitude. Knowing that Snowy Plovers are monitored by Mendocino Coast Audubon we sent the inquiry to Ron LeValley, who commented, "Well, it's GL:YP (known formally as Green Lime Yellow Pink). It's not one of our birds and it hasn't been seen on the north coast by any of our cooperators. I've copied Frances Bidstrup, who keeps track of our color-band codes." Later that same day, we learned that "GL:YP" fledged in 2009 from Marina State Beach in Monterey County. An interesting path this bird is taking.

A "White Winged" Turkey Vulture: On January 28, a woman from Healdsburg called me to say that she had seen a Turkey Vulture at Lake Sonoma on January 9 and wondered about the "thing" on its wing. She indicated that it could fly just fine. Concerned, she asked, "Was it a growth? A plastic tag? Or something else?"

I queried Bob Kieffer of Peregrine Audubon. The photo showed a white tag on the wing. With some fancy processing we read a number: #67. Bob told us that UC-Hopland Research Center tagged #67 about three years ago.

A Davis researcher, Terra Kelly, added, "This is a female vulture that we captured on August 28, 2008 as a hatch-year bird. We are investigating lead exposure in scavenging Californian birds. We sampled this vulture during deer hunting season and found it one of few with a low blood lead concentration."

A few Reporting Ideas: Many are familiar with the silver US Fish and Wildlife Service bands that, if seen, can be reported to: USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center Bird Banding Laboratory:

www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bbl/homepage/call800.htm.

For the California Gulls mentioned above, please send reports to: Caitlin Robinson-Nilsen, Waterbird Program Director, cnilsen@sfbbo.org.

Willet with leg bands.

Photo Don DesJardin



OPPORTUNITIES KNOCK Donald Shephard



Rhinoceros Auklet photo Ron LeValley

[www. LeValleyphoto.com](http://www.LeValleyphoto.com)

Do they nest here? Ask Ron at our meeting on May 16.

your life and yet habitually ignore your natural surroundings beyond smiling at a sunny day. In either case please consider joining Mendocino Coast Audubon Society in one or more of its citizen science projects.

We call our big, ongoing project "Save Our Shorebirds." Angela Liebenberg manages the program and Becky Bowen administers the volunteers. Do not hesitate for lack of experience with shorebirds. Becky welcomes new volunteers and eases them into the survey. Becky will conduct in-the-field training every Friday (except 5/6 and 5/20) at Virgin Creek Beach starting at 8:30 A.M. Training will continue every Friday at Virgin Creek Beach until July 1 when daily surveys start. You'll learn to recognize Snowy Plovers, Wandering Tattlers, Long-billed Curlews, Pacific Golden Plovers and many more species that we study and protect.

Angela Liebenberg invites Audubon members and volunteers to attend a presentation by Ron LeValley, photographer and biologist. Ron will talk about the excitement of observing shorebirds (including Snowy Plovers) – migrants and nesters – and the issues surrounding them. The presentation will take place at the Russian Gulch Recreation Hall, on Thursday May 19 from 10:00 am to 12:00 noon. The session, sponsored by SOS with funds from California Audubon, is free.

In his *Republic VII*, Plato suggested that all mankind are like men born and bred in a cave, who are convinced that shadows on the wall projected by spiritual realities outside their cave are those realities themselves. Only the inspired philosopher can hope to enlighten them. I often feel like one of Plato's troglodytes while I watch Pelagic Cormorants at Point Cabrillo light. Each time I gain a small insight, either from my own observations or from Ron LeValley's ocean of knowledge, I inch closer to the light outside my cave.

Perhaps you are retired, released from your cubicle in a smog-bound city and ready to breathe the clean air along our shores. We have many opportunities for you to learn more about the world around you. This is also true if you have lived here all

Pacific Golden Plover photo by

Ron LeValley

[www. LeValleyphoto.com](http://www.LeValleyphoto.com)



continued

Here on the north county coast, Joleen Ossello leads our new survey of the iconic Black Oystercatcher. California Audubon realized that they knew little about this species and even that knowledge is out of date. Joleen is a joy to work with, an SOS veteran, and spearhead of our conservation program. See page 8 for more details. In the south county, Diane Hichwa heads up the project. See page 5 for details.

Charlene MacAllister organizes our programs, including May's "On the Rocks" - about the California Coastal National Monument - by Ron LeValley. Come and hear what he has to say about Rhinoceros Auklets among other offshore rock dwellers.

Ron LeValley conducted training for cormorant monitors a couple of weeks ago but it is not too late to join new recruits like Susan Tubbesing, who has adopted a colony in a cove at the south corner of Point Cabrillo Light Station. Welcome Susan: I look forward to our collaboration.

Chairman David Jensen appointed a committee to revise our bylaws. We will briefly discuss this and other board matters before our program on May 16th. Board members serve two-year terms so no voting is necessary. We announce with sadness but gratitude for her service that Ginny Wade will retire from the board next spring. She would like to groom someone to serve as membership chair next year.

Perhaps life offers you little spare time or, for one reason or another, you cannot volunteer then support us with your membership. Our term begins in June. Thanks to all who contributed to our successful fundraiser and thanks to those who used the opportunity to renew your membership. If you have not yet renewed, please join us. Our treasurer Judy Steele will surely welcome your subscription and donations.

The indefatigable Sarah Grimes organizes our extensive program which brings bird watching into our schools. I am sure an offer of help would not go wanting. If you have web skills, call Tony Eppstein to volunteer. As editor of this newsletter, I encourage you to forward it to interested family and friends, especially anyone who plans to move to our rocky shores. Sharing this file will spread the word, a golden public relations opportunity.

If you break the habit of passive bird watching, you may come to agree with Cicero (*De natura deorum*) *It is not a disgrace that the natural philosopher, that observer and tracker of Nature, should seek evidence of the truth..* Come out of your cave, join this happy band of curious folks walking in our beautiful surroundings, breathing precious clean air and reap the rewards. Listen - opportunity knocks. Contact any board member - David, Tony, Becky, Ginny, Charlene, Angela, Judy, Joleen, Sarah or Donald - to join our quest. You'll find contact information listed on page 10, or call the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society at **964-6835**.

Long-billed Curlew photo

Ron LeValley

www.LeValleyphoto.com



LEARNING ABOUT BLACK OYSTERCATCHERS Joleen Ossello

The Black Oystercatcher is one of the most distinctive birds in North America. In a state largely defined by its beauty of its shorelines, the coast-hugging Black Oystercatcher is a California treasure. Unfortunately, it is one that is increasingly at risk. In June, Audubon California will host its first survey of Black Oystercatchers to obtain data for our conservation efforts directed to this fascinating species.

Well-loved but little known the Black Oystercatcher can live 40 years or longer. It ranges from the Aleutian Islands in Alaska to Baja California. With a global population of 10,000-12,000 individuals, it is considered rare. This species is completely dependent on marine shorelines, favoring sheltered areas of high tidal variation that support limpets and mussels, their preferred food. (Despite its name, it does not eat oysters.) Their numbers are highest from Alaska to British Columbia, where their habitat is relatively plentiful and lower levels of disturbance are lower than in the southern portion of the range.



Black Oystercatcher photo
Donald Shephard

2011 Black Oystercatcher Survey: The 2011 Black Oystercatcher survey is scheduled for June 2-5 and June 9-12. The survey is designed as a first step to answer some fundamental questions about species and its distribution in California: How many are here during the breeding season? What are the key habitat sites? Do these sites need additional protections?

Conservation status: The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service selected Black Oystercatcher as a Focal Species for Conservation Action due to small population size, restricted range, threats to preferred habitat, lack of baseline data to assess conservation status, and a number of ongoing and anthropogenic and natural factors. In 2007, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and other agencies developed a range-wide conservation action plan and working group, which is the unified resource and blueprint for tracking and conserving the species.

Little is known of the status and trends of Black Oystercatcher in California. The estimated statewide population of 1,000 to 1,200 individuals may be inaccurate, as the last statewide survey was conducted more than 20 years ago. This population is thought to be entirely resident (non-migratory), in contrast with birds in Washington and Oregon.

How to get involved in the survey: We heartily invite you to get involved in the 2011 survey. Opportunities include half or whole day surveys, and compiling survey results.

Please contact: Joleen Ossello, Mendocino County Volunteer Coordinator,
J_ossello@earthlink.net or phone 707-391-7019

In the south county contact Diane Hichwa dhichwa@earthlink.net.

BIRD WALKS AND FIELD TRIPS

May 7 Beginners' Bird Walk: 9:00 A.M., Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens.

May 14 8:00 AM Field Trip: Navarro River and Beach. Meet at south end of Navarro River Bridge.

May 18 Bird Walk: 8:30 A.M. Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens

May 28, 10:00 A.M. Meet Sarah Grimes & Sue "Magoo" Coulter for a family spring Bird walk at Lake Cleone

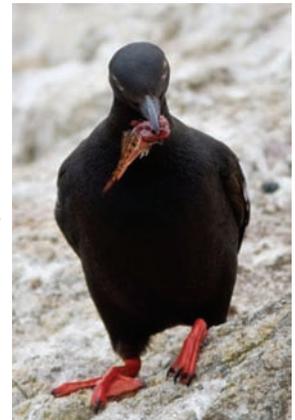
PELAGIC TRIP

Karen Havlena



Rhinoceros Auklet, left, and Pigeon Guillemot right. Photos Ron LeValley

[www. LeValleyphoto.com](http://www.LeValleyphoto.com)



Date: May 15, 2011

The Mendocino Coast Audubon Society is sponsoring a day-long boat trip out of Fort Bragg's Noyo Harbor for seabirds, dolphins and perhaps a whale or two. This enjoyable trip, for beginners as well as experienced birders, will take place on Sunday May 15, 2011. The trip leaders will be Ron LeValley, and Rob Fowler. A second 2011 trip will be held on September 18, 2011.

Meeting time at Dock: 7:00 A.M .

Return to Port: 3:30 P.M.

Boat Location: TELSTAR - North Harbor Drive, Noyo harbor, Ft Bragg.

Cost: \$100 (Mendocino & Lake County residents only) \$110 (all others)

Payment: Check or credit card

Make checks payable to MCAS. Mail to: K Havlena, PO Box 40, Ft Bragg, CA 95437

Credit card: Send email to: kahavlena@yahoo.com with your telephone number and a good time to call in reply.

Bring your own food and beverages. Take seasickness precautions. Sightings should include many Shearwaters and hopefully many Albatrosses. There is also a chance to see any one of three species of Storm Petrels. We can expect to see Common Murres, Pigeon Guillemots, as well as Cassin's & Rhinoceros Auklets.

Prior trips have given good views of dolphins and whales, but the special draw of any pelagic birding trip is the possibility of the unexpected appearance of an out-of-range visitor.

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
Treasurer	Judy Steele	937-2216	judys@mcn.org
SOS Program	Angela Liebenberg	962-9267	aliebenberg@parks.ca.gov
Membership	Ginny Wade	964-6362	wwade@mcn.org
Programs	Charlene McAllister	937-4463	charmac@mcn.org
Conservation	Joleen Ossello	391-7019	j_ossello@earthlink.net
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
P.O. BOX 2297
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