



Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Newsletter May 2014

Little-Known Ethiopia: A Birder's Dream

Matthew Matthiessen

Monday, May 19, 2014
7 PM

Caspar Community Center

Tall mountains, lush forests, fertile land and unique birds and animals: could this possibly be Ethiopia? Due to diverse habitats, Ethiopia is one of the most species-rich countries in Africa. Matthew Matthiessen will describe this northeastern African country with its unique bird life as well as its ancient Christian history. Matthew is known for his engaging manner, impressive command of his subject, and stunning photos. In February, 2010, Matthew joined an international team of birders that observed and compiled a longer list of Ethiopian birds than any other group. Their list of 526 species included Prince Ruspoli's Turaco, a magnificent bird of red, greens and blues; an array of beautiful starlings; and many other birds.



Malachite Kingfisher
Photo by Matthew Matthiessen

Ethiopia is the tenth African country Matthew has birded. He believes it is a must for any serious birder wishing to expand a list of African species. A variety of habitats, which range from below sea level to high alpine peaks, accounts for a large number of endemic species (species found nowhere else in the world).

In addition to its birds, Ethiopia has a fascinating history. Christianity was officially adopted as the state religion of Ethiopia in the fourth century and remains widely-practiced today. In fact, the Ethiopian Orthodox church claims the current resting site of the Ark of the Covenant is in northern Ethiopia. Matthew will show us images of the famous rock-hewn churches of the town of Lalibela. Lalibela has been named a World Heritage Site and is one of the most impressive man-made wonders of the world.

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Masthead Photo of
Black Oystercatcher
By Ron LeValley

MCAS MEMBERS IN THE COMMUNITY

Audubon Educator Sarah Grimes Honored by City of Fort Bragg



Celebrating with their favorite Blue Whale bones at Fort Bragg's first annual Marine Science & Art Fair are leaders at the Noyo Center for Science and Education (from left) Kelly McCorkle, intern and College of the Redwoods Marine Science Technology student; MCAS Education Chair Sarah Grimes; Noyo Center Executive Director Sheila Semans and MCAS Educator Sue Coulter. Sarah and Sue are part of the Noyo Center Education Program. Photo by Ron LeValley

MCAS Education Chair Sarah Grimes appeared before the Fort Bragg City Council April 14, in order to be recognized for her work with local charter school elementary students in creating exhibits at the first Marine Science & Art Fair. The fair was sponsored by the Noyo Center for Science and Education and was held Sunday, March 16 at Fort Bragg Town Hall.

The Montessori Del Mar School, located north of Fort Bragg, was the first school in the area to test a new curriculum about marine mammals, developed by the Noyo center and administered by the school staff in cooperation with Sarah, who is part of the science center's education team. The fair was held during Fort Bragg's annual Whale Festival. Exhibits were created after a months-long study of the Blue Whale skeleton that eventually will be housed at the proposed science center.

The Blue Whale bones were retrieved, cleaned and stored by a team of volunteers, scientists, and students after the animal was killed by the propeller blades of a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration research vessel off the Fort Bragg coast in 2009. Blue Whales are described as the world's largest animal. The Montessori Del Mar students studied the skeleton of the mammal that weighed some 70 tons and was 73 feet long.



ECOLOGY HOUR DEBUTS ON LOCAL PUBLIC RADIO

By Tim Bray and Robert Spies

Mendocino County Public Broadcasting is airing a new segment of the *Ecology Hour* at 7 PM on the fourth Tuesday of each month. The new show is about the science of ecology. Hosts are Tim Bray and marine biologist Dr. Robert Spies.

For the inaugural episode, we spoke with Dr. William Sydeman, president of the Farallon Institute, about the marine ecosystem off the Mendocino coast. We learned about the large-scale currents in the Pacific Ocean and in the atmosphere, how they influence the supply of nutrients along the California coastline, and how climate change might affect that system.

Dr. Sydeman told us about the dramatic difference in productivity of the food chain depending on whether it is based on diatoms or dinoflagellates, and how El Nino and/or climate change can affect which one dominates in a given year. We also learned that another large El Nino event is developing and may affect the marine environment off California—and weather onshore—next year.

Dr. Sydeman also described how seabird populations are sensitive, meaning they respond disproportionately, to such changes. MCAS has three ongoing programs that are providing valuable scientific data in this regard: Save Our Shorebirds, Black Oystercatcher surveys, and Pelagic Cormorant breeding surveys. Dr. Sydeman praised the volunteers conducting these surveys and placed their efforts in the context of West Coast and Pacific Ocean monitoring efforts.

It was a discussion filled with scientific details presented in accessible language, sometimes challenging our assumptions about effects of climate change on ecosystems. Dr. Sydeman's final thoughts were that all environmental change produces "winners and losers," in the sense that some species benefit while others are impaired—so whether such change is "good" or "bad" depends on where you are in the ecosystem.

The entire show can be heard here: <http://tinyurl.com/ldjy99q>

The program airs live on KZYX, heard locally at 88.1 FM (Fort Bragg), 90.7 FM (most of the coast and Anderson Valley), and 91.5 FM (Willits and Ukiah), and everywhere else from kzyx.org (live Web-stream). Archives will be maintained at ecologyhour.wordpress.com where you will also be able to comment and discuss the show with the hosts.

Tim Bray serves on the MCAS Board of Directors, leads local bird watching field trips, and compiles data for the annual Fort Bragg Christmas Bird Count. He is a hydrogeologist and has an MS degree in geological engineering from the University of Nevada-Reno. Dr. Robert Spies, a U.S. Geological Survey research biologist, is lead author of the federal study, released in Feb., 2014, about the lingering effects of the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill in Prince William Sound.

SAVE OUR SHOREBIRDS**Becky Bowen****GET READY, GET SET, MIGRATE, CELEBRATE***

SOS volunteers completed a month of in-field training in April and observed early migrants on the way to breeding grounds in the Arctic. Black Turnstones (left) are known to be extremely aggressive protectors of breeding grounds in Western Alaska. Shown here, perhaps rehearsing, at Virgin Creek Beach.

This Marbled Godwit (right) was on Virgin Creek Beach in late April. It was traveling north, probably from the coasts of Baja California or Central America, where its Spanish common name is *Picopando canelo*. The bird winters on coasts but its breeding grounds are mainly on the Great Plains of Alberta, Ontario, Montana and South Dakota. Small populations breed along the southwest coast of James Bay in Canada and on the Alaska Peninsula.



Photos by Becky Bowen

Based on sightings of early migrants, it looks like it will be another good year (like 2013) for Semipalmated Plovers. The plover (with black collar) joined a group of Western Sandpipers in striking breeding plumage on April 23 at Virgin Creek Beach. During these first few days of spring migration, we many small mixed flocks.

Save Our Shorebirds is an ongoing long-term citizen science Mendocino Coast Audubon Society program in partnership with State Parks and FLOCKworks. To learn more and participate in shorebird surveys on Mackerricher State Park beaches, contact Angela Liebenberg liebenbergs@mcn.org and please visit us for updated photos of shorebirds observed on surveys at our facebook page:

www.facebook.com/SaveOurShorebirds

***Saturday, May 10, 2014, is International Migratory Bird Day – Happy Bird Day!**

PAM HUNTLEY ON KZYX FM 88.3, 90.7, AND 91.5

BLACK-NECKED STILT

The Black-Necked Stilt is a slender wading bird with long red legs. It forages along edges of fresh and saltwater marshes, ponds and tidal mudflats. The bird is 14" tall with a long black bill. Its legs are proportionately the longest of any North American bird. Feathers are black on top and white underneath. The eyes are crimson.

Black-Necked Stilts wade in shallow water, foraging on aquatic bugs and crustaceans. Their nickname, "yelper" or "lawyer," is a description of their persistent mating sounds.

During courtship, the male pecks at the surface of water and preens his breast. The female stretches ("elongates"), then the male circles the female and flicks water. Nests, built in small colonies by both parents, are shallow depressions on low mounds near water. They are lined with shell bits, pebbles, twigs and fish bones. When it is hot, parents will take turns shading eggs. They even soak their bellies to cool the eggs and have been known to do that more than a hundred times a day.

Adults distract predators from the nest by performing aerial displays or hitting the water with their breasts to make a sharp sound. They also will lead predators away from the nest by feigning injury or pretending to incubate eggs in a location nowhere near the actual nest.

The young hatch in 25 days. Like many shorebirds, chicks can run and forage immediately but are not able to fly for a month.



Black-necked Stilts

Weslaco, Texas

Black Oystercatcher staff photo

Board Members, Officers To Be Elected at May Chapter Meeting

MCAS Bylaws require staggered election of board members and officers at the May chapter business meeting (held before the regular program). This year's business meeting will be Monday, May 19, prior to the evening program about birding in Ethiopia. Nominated this year for the board are: Sarah Grimes, Tim Bray, Angela Liebenberg (two-year terms) and Diane Rubin (one-year term). Officer nominations are Angela Liebenberg, Treasurer (two-year term) and Diane Rubin, Secretary (one-year term).

Nominations may be made from the floor if nominees are informed prior to the meeting and agree to be nominated. The nominating committee is made up of an on-board chair (Charlene McAllister) and two off-board members (Becky Bowen, Ron LeValley).

SWAINSON'S THRUSH**Donald Shephard**

Swainson's Thrush Photo by Matt Reinbold

This shy bird honors William Swainson (1789-1855), a British ornithologist, malacologist (he studied mollusks), conchologist, entomologist and artist. Clearly, Swainson possessed more energy than many of us, but consider his namesake. Birds of the coastal subspecies migrate down the Pacific coast of North America and winter from Mexico to Costa Rica, whereas the continental birds migrate eastwards within North America (a substantial detour for a bird weighing about an ounce) and then travel southwards via Florida to winter from Panama to Bolivia. The "russet-backed" Pacific population shows more reddish plumage and a slightly different song than the "olive-backed" birds in the rest of the range.

Swainson's Thrushes hide in trees and sing madrigal-sweet songs which spiral upward and sound flute-like. Breeding males use this melody to defend nests and territory and also probably to attract mates. While this song varies somewhat from one individual bird to the next, its whistling, constantly ascending quality is always recognizable once you've heard it. As Gerald Manley Hopkins wrote of the thrush song, "...through the echoing timber does so rinse and wring the ear, it strikes like lightning to hear him sing."

I used to hear a Swainson's Thrush singing in the trees beside the lane down to Point Cabrillo Light Station and another on the south side of Noyo Harbor. Walk down to the bridge in the Botanical Gardens from mid-May to July and you are more likely to see than hear one. Tim Bray, who leads the bird walk there on the third Wednesday of every month, tells me, "Swainson's are the 'soundtrack to summer.' Far more often heard than seen though, they tend to stay inside the alders and have the habit of 'freezing' in position for long intervals. We have sometimes triangulated on a singing bird and figured out which tree it is in, then spent some time trying to see it – without success."

Part of the difficulty of spotting a Swainson's Thrush arises from the ventriloquial quality of its whirling song. This may happen as the singer moves quickly from one perch to another between songs. It may also have to do with the sounds' reverberations in dense foliage. Swainson's Thrushes occasionally sing quiet a song that creates the illusion it emanates from a more distant location.

During fall and spring migration, their soft, bell-like overhead "peeps" at night may be mistaken for the calls of frogs. In addition to the male's haunting song, a peeping flight call, and other

continued

vocalizations, Swainson's Thrushes communicate aggression and other states-of-mind with a variety of silent body poses and displays, such as wing-flitting, leaf-tossing, and foot-quivering.

These largely arboreal foragers pluck berries, glean bugs from leaves, or perch on low twigs or branches to survey the litter below, then dive for insects. On the forest floor, they take long, springy hops from one hunting stop to the next. Swainson's Thrushes have been called "mosquito thrushes" for their fly-catching habit.

The Swainson's Thrush is a common species, but has been gradually declining across its range since 1966, according to the North American Breeding Bird Survey. This species keeps away from areas of human construction and other human activity. Problems on breeding grounds include grazing, development, human activity, and invasions of nonnative plants. During spring and fall migration, significant numbers of Swainson's Thrushes die from collisions with windows, radio and cell-phone towers, and tall buildings.

These birds range from sea level up to about 8,500 feet in elevation. They build a cup nest on a horizontal tree branch. Here, where their habitat may depend on the presence of fog, they tend to stay below about 500 feet. In coastal California, Swainson's Thrushes breed primarily in deciduous streamside woodlands, alder or willow thickets, and occasionally in coastal scrub.

Thomas Fuchs, University of Pittsburg, Johnstown, PA, and colleagues, found that migratory birds compensate for loss of nocturnal sleep with brief episodes of daytime sleep. One study showed that Swainson's Thrushes, some of which fly up to 3,000 miles from Central and South America to their breeding grounds in Alaska and Canada, take daytime "micro-naps" lasting several seconds during the migration season. Another study revealed a remarkable finding: during micro-naps only half the brain sleeps so one eye can remain open. When I read these studies I flashed on my baby-raising days.

Fortunately for local birders, Swainson's Thrushes are busy rearing young here and cannot catnap. Join Tim Bray or David Jensen on one of the bird walks through the Botanical Gardens this summer and you will likely hear the magic in the song of a Swainson's Thrush.



*Swainson's Thrush in Argentina
Photo by Miguel Andina*

Field Trip Notes and Your Invitation To Two Audubon May Field Trips

By Tim Bray

On Saturday, April 12, we gathered at Van Damme State Park parking lot and set up scopes to look for seabirds. Highlights included large numbers of Pacific Loons flying low and fast on their northbound migration, interspersed with the occasional tight flock of Surf Scoters. Two fairly sizeable flocks of Brant also flew by us, while a lone individual stood on a rock at the north side of the cove. The low-angle view made finding birds on the water somewhat challenging, but we nevertheless found Common Loons and a tricky bird that was eventually confirmed as a female Red-Breasted Merganser, along with sizeable groups of Pigeon Guillemots. All three species of Cormorant were found, and three Brown Pelicans cruised by. Shorebirds were limited to Black Oystercatchers and Black Turnstones.

We then headed into the campground, and began searching for the Gray Jays. It was relatively quiet at the start, but soon the Orange-crowned and Wilson's Warblers began singing, and then the Pacific Wrens joined in. Pacific-slope Flycatchers called to us from the trees, and the thin, high reedy songs of Golden-crowned Kinglets occasionally drifted down from the canopy. By the time we got to the upper end of the campground, the birds were in full throat, a lovely soundtrack for our walk. We saw or heard a total of 42 species, unfortunately not including the elusive Gray Jays, despite my feeble attempts to whistle them up.

We have two field trips coming up in May: **Saturday, May 10, Navarro River**, 9 AM. Meet at the parking area just south of the Highway 1 bridge across Navarro River. Join me for a walk down the road to the beach. A variety of songbirds are possible, and highlights are usually Black-headed Grosbeak and Bullock's Oriole in breeding plumage. Last year the superstar was a beautiful male Rose-breasted Grosbeak in full song. Two years ago we were given a hard stare from a Green Heron standing on the bridge railing. Dave Jensen will lead the month's second field trip **Saturday, May 17, to Hendy Woods State Park**, 9 AM. Meet at the bridge on Philo-Greenwood Road, off Highway 128 in Philo. We expect to see a Black-headed Grosbeak, Western Tanager, Purple Martin, Black-throated Gray Warbler, and many others. You just never know what you will find if you look. Join us!

Land Trust Invites Local Birders to Help with Big River Breeding Bird Surveys

By Dave Jensen

The Mendocino Land Trust is asking all birders, novice through experienced, to participate in the Spring Breeding Bird Surveys on Big River. The purpose is to gather data by conducting bird counts at ten stations. Observers will record all birds seen and heard during a 10-minute stop at each station. Teams will be led by experienced birders, so this is an exceptional opportunity for participants to develop or improve their visual and auditory identification skills. The surveys will be held from the beginning of May through the second week of June, totaling nine surveys along Big River and the Laguna Marsh. All interested volunteers are welcome.

Please contact Nicolet Houtz at nhoutz@mendocinolandtrust.org or 962-0470 to participate.

CALENDAR, BIRD WALKS, FIELD TRIPS

May 2014

Saturday 3 Beginner Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 9AM*

Thursday 15 MCAS Board Meeting 7PM Contact J. Ossello for Location

Saturday 10 Field Trip [Navarro River and Beach](#) 9AM Meet at parking area just south of Highway 1 bridge over Navarro River. Leader Tim Bray.

Saturday 17 Field Trip [Hendy Woods State Park](#) 9 AM Meet at bridge on Philo-Greenwood Ridge Road off Highway 128 in Philo. Leader Dave Jensen.

Monday 19 Meeting [Caspar Community Center](#) 7PM

Speaker: Matthew Matthiessen: Little Known Ethiopia: a Birder's Dream

Wednesday 21 Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 8AM*

Saturday 24 Family Bird Walk Series [Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens](#) 9AM*

Meet at front entrance. Explore the gardens with Audubon educators Sue "Magoo" and Sarah Grimes. Family friendly bird walks.

June 2014

Saturday 7 Beginner Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 9AM*

Saturday 14 Field Trip Noyo River by Kayak 9 AM Meet at [Liquid Fusion's](#) parking lot

Wednesday 18 Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 8AM*

Saturday 21 Family Bird Walk Series [Lake Cleone, MacKerricher State Park](#) 9AM

Meet at Lake Cleone parking lot. Explore the lake trail with Audubon educators Sue "Magoo" and Sarah Grimes. Family friendly.

July 2014

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

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

August 2014

Saturday 2 Beginner Bird Walk
[Botanical Gardens](#) 9AM*

Wednesday 20 Bird Walk
[Botanical Gardens](#) 8AM*

**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:

www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org

And please visit us on facebook:

[facebook.com/mendocinocoastaudubon](https://www.facebook.com/mendocinocoastaudubon)

C O A S S T

The Coastal Observation and Seabird Survey Team seeks volunteers to help monitor marine birds near Fort Bragg.

Training session
Fort Bragg Public Library,
Community Room
Saturday, May 3, 2014
11AM-5 PM

COASST volunteers collect data monthly on beach-cast carcasses of marine birds to establish a baseline pattern of bird mortality on North Pacific beaches. Data help address marine conservation issues. To reserve space:

info@coast.org 206 221-6893
COASST – University of Washington
School of Aquatic & Fishery Sciences
Box 355020
Seattle, WA 98195-5020 coast@uw.edu
www.coasst.org

MCAS BOARD MEMBERS AND PROGRAM CHAIRS 2013-2014

President	Joleen Ossello	391-7019	j_ossello@earthlink.net
Vice President	David Jensen	964-8163	djensen@mcn.org
Secretary	Open		
Treasurer	Angela Liebenberg	962-9267	liebenbergs@mcn.org
SOS Program	Angela Liebenberg	962-9267	liebenbergs@mcn.org
Webmaster	Catherine Keegan	937-4422	keegan@wildblue.net
Membership	Marybeth Arago	962-0724	mmbarago@mcn.org
Programs	Charlene McAllister	937-4463	charmac@mcn.org
Conservation	Linda Perkins	937-0903	lperkins@mcn.org
Education	Sarah Grimes	937-4322	zewa@mcn.org
Newsletter	Charlene McAllister	937-4463	charmac@mcn.org
Field Trips	Tim Bray	937-4422	tbray@wildblue.net

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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