



Photograph by Ron LeValley

The Black Oystercatcher

Mendocino Coast Audubon Newsletter December 2016



White-winged Scoter

Photograph by Robert Keiffer, 2015

Dave Jensen and Tim Bray Present
Winter Birds Of The Mendocino Coast
7 p.m.
Monday, December 12, 2016
Caspar Community Center

A great variety of birds winter on the Mendocino coast, making our Christmas Bird Counts a treasure hunt. As many as 152 species have been found on a single day. Finding and identifying the birds can be a challenge: their winter plumage is often cryptic, the songbirds are generally not singing, and many only are active for part of the day. Dave Jensen and Tim Bray will lead an audiovisual review of coastal habitats and the birds to be found within them, with an emphasis on the Fort Bragg and Manchester CBC circles. Learn to identify those mysterious sounds in the darkness, how to quickly distinguish which "little brown job" is hopping through the bushes, and what to look for when a raptor flies past you. They will also share some tips for quickly estimating numbers of birds. Whether you join in the counts or not, this will be an enjoyable and informative presentation. *Continued on next page*

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS ON THE MENDOCINO COAST Tim Bray

It's the most wonderful time of the Year – Christmas Bird Count season. For many of us, this is the highlight of winter birding. No other event concentrates so much of our effort, or brings so many of us together at once. The feeling of camaraderie starts when you first meet your teammates in the dawn chill, and lasts through the Count Dinner when we share our sightings. The sense of doing something worthwhile only intensifies when you realize that you are joining tens of thousands of people doing the same thing, all across the Western Hemisphere.



Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens Photograph by Catherine Keegan

There are many ways to participate: Join a field team. Call for owls in the predawn darkness. Hike a trail, kayak a river, drive a road, scope from a bluff, or take a boat out on the ocean. If you live within the circle, you can bird your own patch, or simply count the birds that come to your feeder. What's your favorite kind of birding? You can do that for the CBC. You don't have to be an expert or even a good birder – just use your eyes and ears to find birds and let the team help you identify them. And every team needs a scorekeeper to tally the birds as they are counted. Your reward comes at the end of the day, when we all gather for the Count Dinner to share hot food, cold drinks, and the incomparable good cheer of tired, happy birders.

The Fort Bragg Count will be held on Monday, December 26. The circle can be seen at http://mendocinocoastaudubon.org/mcas_xmas_fb.html There are eight Area Leaders: Ron LeValley, Carolyn Kinet, Warren Wade, Bob Keiffer, Art Morley, Alison Cebula, Dave Jensen, and Richard Hubacek. Feeder-watch is coordinated by Sarah Grimes. To participate, contact Tim Bray: tbray@mcn.org or 734-0791. The Count Dinner for the participants will be held at the Caspar Community Center, which will be open from 4:00 pm with homebrewed beer and cider on tap (or bring your own beverage); lasagna comes out of the oven at 5:00 pm. Please RSVP to Tim Bray if you're planning on attending, so we know how much food we need to provide.



Lincoln Sparrow Photo by Tim Bray

The Manchester Count will be held on Monday, January 2, 2017. This circle includes areas from Elk to Point Arena. To join, contact Dave Jensen: djensen@mcn.org or 964-8163. The Count Dinner will be at Druids Hall, Point Arena, open from at 4:30 p.m. with a catered dinner at 5:30 pm. Bring your own beverage.

You can find much more information about the coastal Counts (Including slide shows of winter birds) at our website: mendocinocoastaudubon.org

PRESIDENT'S CORNER**Dave Jensen**

"May you live in interesting times." Whether the saying is from ancient China or twentieth century England, a curse or simple irony, it is (shamefully to mix my metaphors) a shoe that fits our current situation and one that we will now wear for several years. If you will bear with me for the length of this brief column, I would like to share some thoughts and advice on how we might confront some of the challenges that face us now and in the near future. Perhaps you will find what I have to say too simplistic, a revision of recently failed efforts. If so, I will gladly refund your money and wish you success with an alternate approach, but this is how I intend to proceed.

Identify those things you hold most dear and fight to save them. For me, it's the birds. I will let others tackle education, immigration, mass transit and international trade. I can't do it all, but I can do birds. Does this sound too restrictive, too myopic? Far from it. People thrive where birds survive. If we truly fight to save the birds, we will need to address education, population, transit, trade, energy, climate and the judiciary. In all parts of the nation and throughout the hemisphere. We will do so with a clear focus and a specific goal in mind.

The challenges ahead of us are daunting, but don't run for cover. Join together with others who share our ideals. I fear that recent events have made many of us quite cynical. But even if the candidate or cause you supported was defeated, please recognize that there is strength in numbers. National Audubon President David Yarnold repeatedly observes that the Audubon Society is the nation's most effective conservation organization due to the strength of our chapter network. We are active in communities across the nation. When I speak out for the protection of birds, it's not just my opinion, my weak voice. I have the power of the Audubon network behind me, and together we have a chance to make a difference.

If you think I am being too optimistic, let me remind you of the victories such activism has produced. The Audubon Society was created in 1896 to save egrets from destruction: mission accomplished. More recently we worked together to stop the spread of tons of toxic lead pellets throughout California. Remember DDT? Condors have returned to the Western skies. We have created a network of wildlife refuges. Los Angeles Department of Water and Power may have drained Owens Lake in the first half of the twentieth century, but Audubon succeeded in having enough water restored to curtail the resultant dust storms – and the birds are returning. Perhaps more importantly, Mono Lake was saved from a similar fate.

If we are going to protect the birds in these interesting times, we will all need to work together. I invite you to join me in this quest. Locally, you can speak out for birds on our shorelines and in our parks. You can create bird friendly habitat in your yard. You can support our education program in local schools so we can reach the next generation of birders.

We also need your support for our state and national efforts. Log on to www.audubon.org (national) and <http://ca.audubon.org/> (state). You will learn how you can help protect the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, ensure that alternate energy operations are located in areas where they will have the least environmental impact, protect the Endangered Species Act, prevent the State of Florida from closing the Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge in the Everglades, see that Central Valley refuges receive their legal share of water, and other important matters.

There will be defeats as well as victories, as is always the case in life. But we must continue to stay engaged, to strive to protect those things we hold dear. Remember that it's not just about the birds. People thrive where birds survive. Save the things you love.

SAVE OUR SHOREBIRDS**FOLLOW THAT RED PHALAROPE****B. Bowen**

Red Phalarope June 27, 2016 – Barrow, Alaska



Photographs by Becky Bowen

Red Phalarope October 22, 2016 – Ten Mile River

Red Phalaropes frequently appear in my dreams – colorful, quick, and captivating birds. When an opportunity came up to join an Alaska bird tour in late June, it was time to follow the birds – and the dream.

The shorebirds we monitor here on Mackerricher State Park beaches (with the exception of Spotted Sandpipers, Black Oystercatchers, Western Snowy Plovers and Killdeer) breed in the Arctic. Shorebirds breed there because summer weather is good, predators are scarce, days are long, and food is abundant. That means everything happens in June and early July: breeding, nesting, hatching, chick-raising and migration.

The journey to Red Phalarope breeding grounds took us as far as we could go and still be in the country – 350 miles north of the Arctic Circle to Barrow, Alaska. There on the tundra, on June 27, our guides showed us the first Red Phalarope. It was in aerial pursuit of a Pomarine Jaeger. Both birds had nests on the ground and they were not alone. Around us were nesting Lapland Longspurs, Long-billed Dowitchers, Pectoral Sandpipers, Spectacled Eiders, and Steller's Eiders. It was a dream come true quietly to watch these special birds in this ecologically fragile and special place.

Breeding female Red Phalaropes are larger and more colorful than males. It is the males that incubate for 18-20 days. Very shortly after chicks hatch, Red Phalaropes leave the Arctic to winter in marine waters, mostly in the Southern Hemisphere. Some can be seen on our local pelagic trips, and occasionally one or two will come on-shore. In the first ten years of SOS surveys, we had only 40 sightings of Red Phalaropes – almost all of them in August and September. In October and November of this year, we recorded sightings at Virgin Creek, Ten Mile River and Ten Mile Beach – all sightings were of single birds.

The change in plumage from Arctic red glory to winter white is radical. It may look like a different species, but the bird's energy and flamboyance remain the same. In shallow water, phalaropes swim rapidly (and sometimes crazily) in circles to bring food toward the surface. So the term for a group of phalaropes is indisputably appropriate: "whirligig."

Save Our Shorebirds, an ongoing year-round Mendocino Coast Audubon citizen science project, began in 2007. Volunteers hike 15.7 kilometers of the coast of Mackerricher State Park and take bird censuses. Data are made available to schools, agencies and the public at no charge. To help us on surveys, contact Angela Liebenberg at liebenbergs@mcn.org and please visit us at www.facebook.com/SaveOurShorebirds

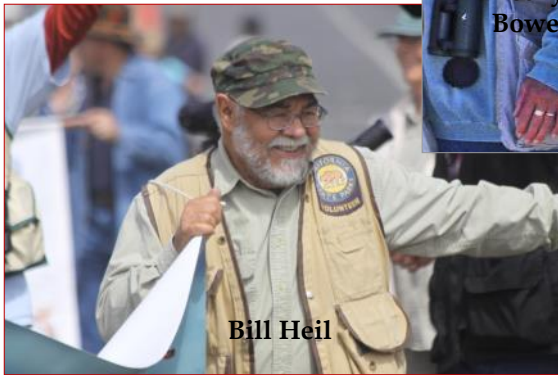
**Hats Off and Heartfelt Thanks
To Our 2016
Mendocino Coast Audubon
Save Our Shorebirds
Surveyors**



Anne
Harvey



Becky
Bowen



Bill Heil



Jeanette Boyer



Win
Bowen



Linda
Perkins



Alison Cebula,
State Parks

**Our 2016 Annual Report
Is Dedicated the Memory
Of SOS Surveyor Jim Boyer
We Really Miss Him
And Remember Him With a Smile**



Angela Liebenberg Peggy Martin



Henri Bensussen

*Henri's photograph by Tony Eppstein,
Mendocino Coast Writers Conference.*

PURPLE MARTIN**Donald Shephard**

David Allen Sibley calls Purple Martins common in eastern U.S. and uncommon and local in the west. Their distribution divides our country almost exactly in half. The western edges of Northern California, Oregon and Washington and parts of the Arizona and New Mexico account for all of its sparse distribution in our half of the country. Habits change with habitats. John James Audubon commented on this species in 1831, "Almost every country tavern has a martin box on the upper part of its sign-board; and I have observed that the handsomer the box, the better does the inn generally prove to be."

In flight, European Starlings can be confused with Purple Martins, but the narrower wings, forked tails, and typical swallow flight of the martins distinguish the two. Purple Martins, unlike European Starlings, call out almost constantly while in the air. The only other swallow here with a dark chest and light belly like the female Purple Martin is the Cliff Swallow, but the Cliff Swallow is much smaller and has a square tail and more rounded wings. Both male and female Purple Martins fly with quick flaps and glides, outlining big circles in the sky as they hunt insects and rarely land on the ground, though you might catch them alighting to collect nesting material or pick up digestion-aiding grit on their way back to a tree snag or bridge nest.

In the East, conversion to human-made martin houses from ancestral nest sites was completed about 1900. Prior to that time martins nested in abandoned woodpecker holes in dead snags. Only a few records of natural nest sites east of the Rocky Mountains have been reported since. Yet in the mountain forests, deserts, and coastal areas of western North America they still nest almost exclusively in woodpecker holes in tree snags, or saguaro cactus.

Locally, we find both natural nesting sites and manmade ones, especially bridge holes. You will find nests in snags or snag-topped trees in openings, especially in trees extending above the surrounding canopy, or growing on a slope, so that the birds have lots of open space for access and foraging.

Let us motor in our imaginations from Juan Creek north of Westport to Gualala. Purple Martins nest in man-made cavities in Juan Creek Bridge. Dan Airola and Sarah Grimes monitored nests on Ten Mile Bridge after Caltrans began rebuilding it. Travel south and rest beneath Noyo Harbor Bridge and, in the right season, peer upwards and you will see this, largest of our swallows, flying high above or diving at great speed with its wings tucked. This year, Purple Martins returned to breed in Big River Bridge after an extended absence. Drive down to Elk and



Purple Martin male
Photograph by J. J. Cadiz

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you will find more of Dan's and Sarah's work at the Greenwood Bridge. This time they were more involved with the design, mitigation, and monitoring program. Miss those nests and discover the colony at Gualala Bridge. As you return home, consider the origin of the binomial for this species.

Linnaeus first described it in 1758. Later taxonomists changed the genus to *Progne* from the usual swallow genus *Hirundo*, and kept the species name *subis*. The new genus name refers to Procne, of Greek myth, who killed her son to avenge her husband's rape of her sister Philomela. They served the husband a meal of boiled son. Not amused, he gave chase with an axe and they prayed to the gods for delivery. The gods turned Procne into a swallow, Philomela into a nightingale and the husband into a hoopoe. Perhaps because of its aggression to birds of prey when nesting, the specific *subis* refers to a bird that breaks eagle eggs. Those gods were as fickle as the people who name birds. Enough about myths, let us return to reality as we know it.

In the East, Purple Martins suffered from the introduction into North America of my fellow Brits, European Starlings and House Sparrows, which compete with them for nest sites. Dan Airola and Sarah Grimes monitored local colonies from 2007 to 2011. He concluded, based on the relative stability of colonies at sites occupied in the '80s, that the North Coast population was the healthiest in the state. The long-term counts at the Gualala Bridge during breeding bird surveys also did not show any negative trends. The rapid colonization of the rebuilt bridges on Highway 1 indicates a healthy population there. Two colonies in the agricultural areas around Sacramento and Lava Beds in Modoc County have declined drastically since the advent of neonicotinoid pesticides, those prime suspects in bee die off. The colonies at Gualala Bridge and Lake Shasta, where pesticide application is sparse, do not show declines. Not all news is bad. Dan and others established the first colony to use nest boxes in California at Shelter Cove in Humboldt County.

One of the reasons martins have continued to do well on the coast is that the forested cover doesn't support starling populations as high as elsewhere in the state where grassland, agriculture, and development is more prevalent

Wintering in the Amazon Basin and Ecuador, Purple Martins migrate to North America in spring to breed. In April, older birds migrate first to established nest sites in Northern U.S. Some birds start the trip south in July and others stay until October. Purple Martins migrate over land through Mexico and Central America. I am composing this piece early because my wife and I are also migrating south for a month in South America. Perhaps we shall see Purple Martins there.



Purple Martin female
Photograph by Shanthanu Bhardwa

PLAN NOW FOR JANUARY 14-15 SACRAMENTO VALLEY FIELD TRIP **Tim Bray**

Our first field trip of the year is January 14-15, 2017, to Sacramento Valley wildlife refuges and nearby areas. Leaders will be Dave Jensen and Tim Bray.

The field trip will be divided into four segments, and you can choose to join any or all of them, depending on your schedule.

The first segment, for those who come over on Friday night, will be a Saturday morning trip to the western foothills. Oak savannah with rocky outcrops provide opportunities for a number of birds we rarely see here on the coast. We will meet at dawn in Williams, carpooling to the field for about 3 hours of birding.



White-faced Ibis, Sacramento National Wildlife Preserve
Photograph by Ron LeValley

The second segment will begin at midday at the Colusa National Wildlife Refuge. We will spend some time at the observation platform getting familiar with the geese and ducks, and then carpool for the Auto Tour route. If there is time after that, we will search nearby fields for swans, cranes, curlews and ibises. At the end of the day we may return to the Colusa platform to experience "liftoff," and watch Black-crowned Night-herons and Great-horned Owls fly out from their daytime roosts.

Sunday will begin with a walking tour at the Sacramento NWR, followed by the auto tour. This refuge is larger than the Colusa NWR, has a wider variety of birds, and the auto tour includes three places where we can stop and get out of the cars. We plan to spend the whole morning there.

Sunday afternoon we can tailor to find whichever birds we want more of: Sandhill Cranes, Tundra Swans, Long-billed Curlews, Horned Larks, etc.

You will be responsible for your own lodgings. There are a number of motels in Williams, where Highway 20 meets I-5, about 10 miles from the Colusa NWR. We can arrange sandwich lunches; you will be responsible for your own dinner.

Please sign up in advance for this trip, and let us know which modules you plan to attend. The trip may be cancelled if rain or tule fog are predicted, so we may need to contact everyone at the last minute. E-mail is best: tbray@mcn.org or (707) 734-0791.

CALENDAR, BIRD WALKS, FIELD TRIPS

December 2016

Saturday 3 Beginner Bird Walk [Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens](#) 18220 Highway 1, Fort Bragg. 9AM-Noon* Bring water, wear comfortable walking shoes, binoculars available, heavy rain cancels. Leader: Dave Jensen

Saturday 10 Field Trip Christmas Bird Count Tune-up at [Rose Memorial Cemetery](#) 9AM-Noon. Meet at the east end of Spruce Street, Fort Bragg. Leader: Tim Bray

Monday 12 Meeting [Caspar Community Center](#) 15051 Caspar Rd, Caspar. 7PM
The annual Christmas Bird Count slideshow with Dave Jensen and Tim Bray

Note Date Change from the 21st

Saturday 17 [Ukiah Christmas Bird Count](#)

Wednesday 21 Bird Walk [Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens](#) 18220 Highway 1, Fort Bragg. 8:30AM-Noon* Leader: Tim Bray

Monday 26 [Fort Bragg Christmas Bird Count](#) There will be a dinner for the participants at the Caspar Community Center. The hall will open around 4PM, and dinner (lasagna and salad) will be at 5PM. Bring your own beverage. If you plan to attend dinner, please RSVP to Tim Bray at tbray@mcn.org or 734-0791 to help plan how much food to prepare.

January 2017

Monday 2 [Manchester Christmas Bird Count](#) See story Page 2 for dinner details.

Saturday 7 Beginner Bird Walk [Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens](#) 18220 Highway 1, Fort Bragg. 9AM-Noon* Leader: Dave Jensen

Saturday 14-Sunday 15 Field Trip Sacramento Valley refuges and fields. Make arrangements now with Tim Bray at tbray@mcn.org or 734-9791 and see story Page 8 of this newsletter for details. Leaders: Tim Bray, Dave Jensen

13-16



Monday 16 Meeting [Caspar Community Center](#) 15051 Caspar Rd, Caspar. 7PM
Speaker: Gary Alt. Subject: Bears.

Wednesday 18 Bird Walk [Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens](#) 18220 Highway 1, Fort Bragg, CA. 8:30AM-Noon* Leader: Tim Bray

Sunday 29 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

25-29 [Snow Goose Festival Of the Pacific Flyway](#) Chico

**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 2015-2016

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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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