



The Black Oystercatcher

Mendocino Coast Audubon Newsletter March-April 2016

Photo by Ron LeValley



Dorothy King Young Chapter

CALIFORNIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

You Are Cordially Invited
To Join Us For The
Annual "Environmental Potluck"
And Presentation Of The
Matt Coleman Environmental
Service Award

To Sheila Semans, Executive Director
Noyo Center for Marine Science

Saturday, March 19, 2016
Russian Gulch State Park
Recreation Hall

Dinner at 6 p.m.

Followed by Presentation by Marie Jones,
Fort Bragg Community Development Director
And Introduction of Congressman Jared Huffman,
California 2nd District

This Year's Potluck Hosted by Mendocino Land Trust
Please bring your own plate, silverware, beverage,
and a potluck dish for 8

Contact: Ann Cole, Executive Director

www.mendocinolandtrust.org (707) 962-0470

**KATHY BIGGS PRESENTS
DRAGONFLIES OF CALIFORNIA**

**MONDAY, APRIL 18, 2016
7 P.M.
CASPAR COMMUNITY CENTER**

Kathy Biggs built a pond in 1998. Dragonflies soon arrived and quickly became her passion. She is the author of *Common Dragonflies of California*, *Common Dragonflies of the Southwest* and *Dragonflies of North America: A Color and Learn Book*. The Xerces Society considers her one of California's leading *Odonata* experts. She enjoys teaching about dragonflies and building wild-life ponds and recently has written e-books on those subjects. Kathy will speak about the migration, life cycles, and reproduction of the earth's first flyers.



Bluet sp.



Flame Skimmer

All Photographs by Ron LeValley



Variegated Meadowhawk



Northern Bluet



Paddle-tailed Darner



Blue-eyed Darner

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Dave Jensen



The old saying is that March comes in like a lion and goes out like a lamb. I do not find that to be the case here on the Mendocino coast, but what I can say is that March comes in as winter and goes out as spring. The passage of time is a peculiar thing. Some months just blend into one another with a subtlety that escapes notice. June evolves into July into August with barely a ripple. Except for the dwindling hours of televised football, what marks the change from January to February?

But March, March is one of those dramatic corners in our endless route around sun – especially for birders. In our backyards right now, things are pretty peaceful. Not much singing, not much aggression, lots of juncos and sparrows getting along together. The first-year Spotted Towhees are still pretty drab, as are the White- and Golden-crowned Sparrows. Take a look and see what I mean. Then check back at the end of the month. They'll be looking real sharp – ready for the big spring dance on their breeding grounds.

Where I've really come to appreciate the phenomenon known as March is along our headlands. For more than ten years now I have led birding walks at Point Cabrillo as part of the Whale Festival. Two trips on the first weekend of March and two more on the third weekend, weather permitting. In a typical year, that's two walks at the end of winter and two more at the beginning of spring. The shift between the two is heralded by the return of some of my favorite summer species. The first Pigeon Guillemots arrive in Frolic Cove. The Ospreys return to the Caspar Cemetery. Pelagic Cormorants reoccupy their traditional nest sites adjacent to the lighthouse. Rock Pigeons begin building nests inside the sea caves. Savannah Sparrows announce their presence from atop clumps of Coyote Brush.

Farther up the terraces and into the trees, the first swallows of summer appear like magic. The Red-shouldered Hawks begin to call. The Northern Flickers join in with their unique cackling, a sound at first welcome as a visit from a long absent friend, but eventually as annoying as a relative who won't leave. The Hutton's Vireos sing out their one-note serenade, not unlike a broken record – but it's so exciting. Spring has arrived with the promise of many more wonderful things to come.

That said, there are still many pleasures of the winter birding season to appreciate in the month of March. Red-breasted Mergansers are plentiful near the shore, especially at the far end of the newly opened south trail on the Fort Bragg Mill Site. Red-necked Grebes can be seen in the bay at Mackerricher Park. Bufflehead Ducks still shine like stars on local streams and ponds. Be sure to enjoy these and the other winter residents before they suddenly disappear.

In any case, please don't take my word for it. Come on one of the many walks your chapter is sponsoring this month. The Botanical Gardens is beautiful right now; come join us on one of our walks there. You'll have four opportunities to join us at Point Cabrillo. There will be another walk at Mackerricher on the morning of March 12, and we'll be back on the Mill Site trail for a Sunday stroll on the March 27. Please, get out and enjoy this special time of year before it slips away.

BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKE Donald Shephard

Linnaeus first described this species in his *Systema naturae* in 1758 as *Larus tridactylus*. Our beloved editor recently sent me a note. "We did manage to find a Black-legged Kittiwake on our Ten Mile survey last Saturday. I'd never seen one and I think the rough seas tossed it up on the beach for a rest. Kittiwakes (what a wonderful word) have very sweet faces." Not commonly seen from land, Kittiwakes generally spend the entire winter on the open ocean only occasionally sheltering ashore from storms. Old-timers derived the name from its call, a shrill 'kittee-wa-aaake, kitte-wa-aaake'.



Black-legged Kittiwake
Photograph by Yathin S. Krishnappa

Writing in 1840, Audubon gives us a clear view of the Black-legged Kittiwake in its environment of the times. "Bearing up against the heaviest gale, it passes from one trough of the sea to another as if anxious to rest for an instant under the lee of the billows; yet as these are seen to rear their curling crests, the gull is already several feet above them and preparing to plunge into the next hollow. While in our harbor, and during fine weather, they seem to play with their companions of other species. Now with a spiral curve they descend toward the water, support themselves by beats of their wings, decline their heads, and pick up a young herring, or away they fly, chased perhaps by several others anxious to rob them of their prize. Noon has arrived. High above the masthead of our largest man-of-war the kittiwakes float gracefully in wide circles until all, as if fatigued, sail downward again with common accord toward the transparent deep, and, alighting close to each other seem to ride safely at anchor. There they now occupy themselves cleaning and arranging their beautiful plumage."

North American ornithologists refer to this species as the Black-legged Kittiwake to differentiate it from the Red-legged Kittiwake, but in Europe, where it is the only member of the genus, it is simply called Kittiwake. Curiously, the subspecies of the East Coast is unique among the Laridae in having only a very small or even no hind toe, giving the bird its scientific name, *tridactyla*, meaning "three-toed" (instead of four on each foot). This nomenclature remains with our West Coast birds even though they have four toes.

It has a white head, neck and belly; gray back, gray wings tipped solid black, black legs, and a yellow bill. In winter, this species acquires a dark gray smudge behind the eye and a gray hind-neck collar. This coastal breeding bird is most often found around the north Pacific and

Donald Shephard

north Atlantic oceans. It breeds in large colonies on cliffs of North America and Europe and creates great noise on the breeding ground. Cliff nesting for gulls occurs only in the *Rissa* genus. The kittiwake is capable of utilizing the sheerest cliffs. The female lays one to two buff-spotted eggs in the nest which is lined with moss or seaweed. The downy young of kittiwakes are white, since they have no need of camouflage from predators, and do not wander from the nest like *Larus* gulls, for obvious safety reasons.

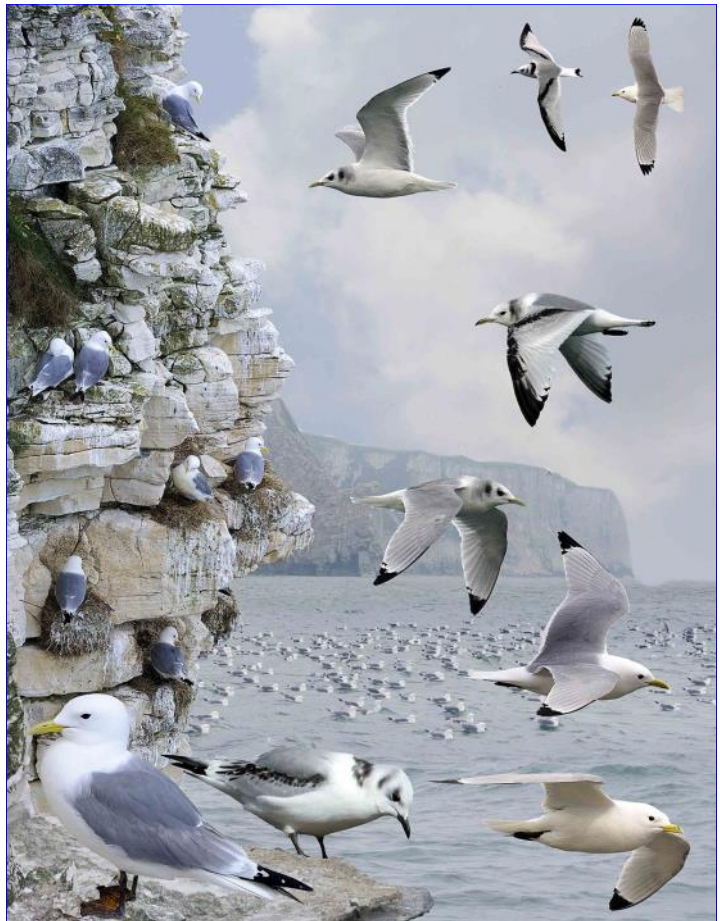
At fledging, the juveniles differ from the adults in having a black 'M' band across the length of the wings and whiter secondary and primary feathers behind the black 'M', a black hind-neck collar and a black terminal band on the tail. Curiously, European guides refer to the 'M' band as a 'W'. I suppose it is all in your point of view.

It seems unlikely that a kittiwake will be misidentified, even when it goes to bathe or find nesting material at a nearby lake. From time to time kittiwakes are seen inland, usually adults in early spring, or immature birds in autumn or winter after gales. The bounding, banking flight, if there is a good wind, the mid-gray back fading towards the wingtips, and protruding head and neck (looking brilliant white in summer) make an adult identifiable a mile away—even if you cannot see the black legs and “dipped in ink” wingtips that would confirm it.

These birds forage on the ocean surface while in flight or swimming, mostly in daylight but also at night, when foraging over deep ocean waters. They feed mostly on fish but also eat crustaceans, marine worms, mollusks, squid, insects, and sometimes plant material. Real birds of the sea, kittiwakes – unlike many other gulls – do not scrounge at refuse dumps or feed on beaches.

Reported to be the most abundant gull species, the Black-legged Kittiwake also has a widespread distribution and is not currently considered at risk of extinction. However, significant population declines have been recorded in some parts of its range, such as in the United Kingdom.

Our editor was lucky to see a Black-legged Kittiwake on a Save Our Shorebirds survey at Ten Mile Beach, and now she has heard 'kittee-wa-aaake, kitte-wa-aaake', she will not soon forget it.



**Kittiwake composite from the Crossley ID
Guide to Birds of Britain and Ireland**

CORMORANT COUNTING**Ron LeValley**

It's getting to be that time of year!

We have expanded our monitoring of Pelagic Cormorants up and down the coast, with collaborators from southern Oregon down to Point Arguello. The larger data sets are helping us predict the future of the Pelagic Cormorant population and identify local issues. Our work to date has shown clearly that the more colonies we can monitor, the better our understanding of this species' population trends and problems will be.

In 2015 we monitored 20 sites for reproductive success here in Mendocino and in northern Sonoma County. Our data gathering was very good, but we could use more monitors. Our area of coverage in Mendocino runs from Wages Creek in the north to Navarro Bluff in the south. There are colonies scattered all along this part of the coast, including the Noyo Trails in Fort Bragg, Noyo Harbor mouth, Point Cabrillo, Mendocino Headlands and Navarro Bluff. There are some other sites that we might want to add into our project depending on whether there are birds present this year or not.

I will schedule an evening get-together for those of you who can help us this year. I will start this gathering with the presentation I gave to the Pacific Seabird Group's annual meeting in February that summarized our seven years of data and our larger project and its goals.

Please let me know if you are interested in helping us this season. And feel free to pass this on to others that you think might be interested in coming to the meeting or helping this summer.

Ron LeValley, 707/937-1742 ron@levalleyphoto.com



Pelagic Cormorant

Photograph by Ron LeValley



GREAT GRAY OWL BRINGS OUT BIRDERS IN HUMBOLDT COUNTY

Birders from across the state flocked to Humboldt County in late January to see a Great Gray Owl, the first one to visit the area in 34 years. The bird was spotted by a park ranger near Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park near Orrick. The owl is described as the world's largest (in length). It breeds in Southern Oregon and near Yosemite National Park.

Photograph by Ron LeValley

SAVE OUR SHOREBIRDS

Becky Bowen

PERCY, THE PERAMBULATIN' PLOVER OF TEN MILE, ANNOUNCES KICKOFF OF 2016 WESTERN SNOWY PLOVER BREEDING SEASON



Percy the Perambulating Plover announces the start of 2016 nesting season on local beaches and asks for help to protect plover nests like this one, photographed in 2009 by Angela Liebenberg at Manchester State Park, Mendocino County, CA.

Meet Percy, the Perambulating Western Snowy Plover of Ten Mile Beach, who has just three words of wisdom for human beachgoers this spring: “Watch Your Step.” That’s because nesting season for this two-ounce shorebird starts March 1.

Western Snowy Plovers (and their Killdeer cousins) scrape out simple nests in sand. “Put yourself in my feathers,” Percy said in a press release announcing nesting season on local beaches from March through September. “Our nests can be anywhere on the open beach – right there on top of dry sand, and if you don’t look where you step, it could wipe out my family.”

“I know about this nesting business because I’m a thoroughly modern Dadbird. Western Snowy Plover dads help incubate the eggs. Matter of fact, it’s the dads who raise the chicks after the eggs hatch.”

“So please come down to the beach this summer. It’s my home and you’re invited in. Just give us shorebirds a chance to survive and thrive (*Editor’s note: Save Our Shorebirds data indicate more than 60 percent of shorebirds observed on local beaches are listed as birds in decline by National Audubon*). It’s easy to help us: Walk on the wet part of the beach and avoid the dry sand where we hope to be sitting on nests. Pack out your trash so it won’t attract the ravens and gulls that steal eggs and snatch our chicks. Keep throwing toys and drones away from plover habitat. We look up there and think they are flying predators. Scares us off our nests. Respect signs about dogs. Dogs—even dogs on leash—ramp up the stress level of birds so high that they get up and get off the nest and, well, there goes the family.”

“Have a great summer and look for us plovers when you come to the beach. We’re the fine-looking shorebirds (a little smaller than tennis balls) strutting and foraging with Sanderlings and others along the water’s edge. We hang out on Mendocino County’s north coast at Virgin Creek and Ten Mile Beach.”

Save Our Shorebirds is an ongoing year-round Mendocino Coast Audubon citizen science program in partnership with California State Parks. Volunteers gather data about shorebirds during on-foot surveys along the entire 15.7 km. coast of Mackerricher State Park. To help, contact Angela Liebenberg liebenbergs@mcn.org In-field training will be held in April and May—see page 9. And please visit us on facebook: www.facebook.com/SaveOurShorebirds

BLACK OYSTERCATCHER MONITORING **Joleen Ossello**

The Black Oystercatcher Monitoring Project was organized by Audubon California five years ago. A previous study in the late 1980's indicated an estimated population of only 1500 individuals along the California coast.

In 2011, more than thirty volunteers from the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society surveyed the county's coastline.

The volunteers helped determine that statewide, today's Black Oystercatcher population is approximately 5,000. It turns out that Mendocino County is home to the highest number of Black Oystercatchers on the California coast.



Black Oystercatcher, Mackerricher State Park Photograph by B. Bowen

This year marks the fifth season of monitoring reproductive success. Last year, more young hatched and successfully fledged than in previous years, most likely due to mild weather conditions. Information we collect ensures that scientists and lawmakers have a baseline understanding of productivity in our area, as oystercatchers indicate the health of our intertidal shoreline.

Volunteers at all levels of experience are welcome and needed. Binoculars are essential and a spotting scope is helpful. An introductory workshop is scheduled for April 30, after which volunteer teams will survey once a week from May through September. All of our survey sites are located on public lands. Meet other nature aficionados and learn a new birding skill. Contact Joleen Ossello at j_ossello@earthlink.net or (707) 391-7019.

MARCH AND APRIL FIELD TRIPS **Tim Bray**

Saturday, March 12 - Lake Cleone and vicinity. Leader: David Jensen. 9 AM - noon. Meet at the Lake Cleone parking lot. We will walk all the way around the lake, if access is possible. Waterfowl, marsh birds, songbirds, and woodland birds are concentrated in this edge-habitat where wetlands and woods merge, and rarities often are found here.

Saturday, April 9 - Hendy Woods State Park, near Philo. Leader: David Jensen. 9 Am - noon. Meet at the bridge on Philo-Greenwood Road. We will bird from the bridge and nearby areas, then go into the park and walk a loop trail. Swallows and Purple Martins, Black-headed Grosbeaks, and Black-throated Gray Warblers are regularly seen; sometimes Western Tanager, Hermit Warbler, and Green Heron. Cassin's Vireo and Barred Owl also can be heard here.

CALENDAR, BIRD WALKS, FIELD TRIPS

March 2016

Saturday 5 Whale Festival Bird Walk Pt Cabrillo Light Station 9AM-Noon. Leader: Dave Jensen

Sunday 6 Whale Festival Bird Walk Pt Cabrillo Light Station 9AM-Noon. Leader: Dave Jensen

Saturday 12 Field Trip [Mackerricher State Park \(Lake Cleone\)](#) 9AM-Noon. Meet at Lake Cleone parking lot. See page 8. Leader: Dave Jensen

Wednesday 16 Bird Walk [Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens](#) 18220 Highway 1, Fort Bragg. 8:30AM-Noon* Leader: Tim Bray

Saturday 19 Whale Festival Bird Walk Pt Cabrillo Light Station 9AM-Noon. Leader: Dave Jensen

Saturday, March 19th - Environmental Partnership Potluck - 6PM
[Russian Gulch State Park Recreation Hall](#) (see page 1)

Sunday 20 Whale Festival Bird Walk Pt Cabrillo Light Station 9AM-Noon. Leader: David Jensen

Saturday 26 Family Bird Walk Big River Haul Road 9AM-11AM. Meet at yellow gate at east end of large parking lot on north bank of river. Leaders: Sue "Magoo" Coulter and Sarah Grimes

Sunday 27 Coastal Trail Bird Walk - [Coastal Trail](#) 10AM-Noon. Meet near rest room 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

April 2016

Saturday 2 Beginner Bird Walk [Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens](#) 18220 Highway 1, Fort Bragg. 9AM-Noon* Leader: Dave Jensen

Thursday 7 MCAS Board of Directors Meeting 7 p.m. Contact: Dave Jensen djensen@mcn.org

Fridays 8, 15, 22, 29 Save Our Shorebirds In-field Training. Contact B. Bowen for time, place 962-1602

Saturday 9 Field Trip [Hendy Woods State Park](#) 9AM-Noon. Meet at south end of bridge at park entrance. See page 8. Leader: Dave Jensen

15-17 Olympic Bird Fest Sequim, Washington. Guided birding trips, boat tours, live auction & raffle, gala banquet, and more. Featured speaker: Artist Tony Angell, "Revealing the Secret Lives of Owls." Festival pre-trip: Three-day, two-night birding/sightseeing cruise of San Juan Islands, April 12-14, 2016. Register separately at www.pugetsoundexpress.com/audubon Neah Bay post-trip April 17-19, 2016: Two days exploring northwest coastal Washington.

13-19 Godwit Days Arcata, see inset at right

Monday 18 Meeting [Caspar Community Center](#) 7PM
15051 Caspar Rd, Caspar.

Speaker: **Kathy Biggs** Dragonflies of California

Wednesday 20 Bird Walk [Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens](#)
18220 Highway 1, Fort Bragg.

8AM-Noon* **Note Time Change** Leader: Tim Bray

Saturday 30 Black Oystercatcher Introductory Workshop Contact Joleen Ossello
j_ossello@earthlink.net or (707) 391-7019 for time and place

Saturday 30 Family Bird Walk Spring Ranch Trail 9AM-11AM. Meet at parking pullout on west side of Highway 1 (opposite Gordon Lane). Leaders: Sue "Magoo" Coulter and Sarah Grimes



**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

President	David Jensen	964-8163	djensen@mcn.org
VP, Field Trips	Tim Bray	937-4422	tbray@mcn.org
Secretary	Diane Rubin	(413) 658-7105	dianerubin12@gmail.com
Treasurer	Jim Havlena	964-1280	havlenas@fix.net
SOS, Conservation	Angela Liebenberg	962-9267	liebenbergs@mcn.org
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Education	Sarah Grimes	937-0903	zewa@mcn.org
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Off-board Chairs:			
Programs, Membership	Charlene McAllister	937-4463	charmac@mcn.org
Newsletter	Becky Bowen	962-1602	casparbeck@comcast.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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