

The Whistling Swan



NEWSLETTER OF THE MENDOCINO COAST AUDUBON SOCIETY

October 2011



**MARINE MAMMALS OF THE PACIFIC COAST
AND IN YOUR BACKYARD
SARAH ALLEN
FORT BRAGG TOWN HALL
7:00 P.M.
MONDAY, OCTOBER 17th**

By Sarah Allen, Co-Author of Marine Mammals of the Pacific Ocean: British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, California and Baja (also by Joseph Mortenson and Sophie Webb)

Sarah Allen has been studying marine birds and mammals for more than 30 years, mostly in California but also in Antarctica. Currently, she is promoting the establishment and study of marine protected areas, recently participating on the Science Advisory Group for the North Central Coast Marine Life Protection Act. She received her B.S., M.S. and Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley in Wildland Resource Science. Sarah works for a federal environmental agency and is a research associate with the Point Reyes Bird Observatory.

Inside this issue:

<i>Fort Bragg Christmas Bird Count Tim Bray</i>	2
<i>Common Merganser Pam Huntley</i>	3
<i>Save Our Shorebirds Becky Bowen</i>	4
<i>Pelagic Trip Karen Havlena</i>	5
<i>Calendar</i>	8
<i>Bird Rescue Sarah Grimes</i>	8
<i>Three British Birds Donald Shephard</i>	9
<i>Board Members</i>	10
<i>Mission</i>	10
Common Dolphin photo Scot Anderson	

FORT BRAGG CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT Tim Bray

The Fort Bragg Christmas Bird Count Circle



It's Official: The Fort Bragg Christmas Bird Count circle has been accepted by Audubon Science. They have not yet assigned us a code, but we have been given the green light to plan on conducting the Count. At last year's trial-run count dinner, we set a date of Monday January 2, 2012. The South Coast count will occur on Friday, December 30, 2011.

The circle outline is nearly identical to last year's: a radius of 7.5 miles, centered on Latitude N 39.4005, Longitude E -123.7782. This circle has been divided into eight areas, each of which has an experienced leader:

Area 1: Ron LeValley

Area 5 - Art Morley

Area 2: Dorothy Tobkin

Area 6 - Jim Havlena

Area 3 - Warren and Ginny Wade

Area 7 - David Jensen

Area 4 - Robert Kieffer

Area 8 - Richard Hubacek

Tim Bray will serve as this year's Compiler, succeeding Richard Hubacek, who did most of the work of setting up the circle and defining the area boundaries last year. If you are interested in participating in this year's Count, feel free to contact any of the Area Leaders, or contact Tim by e-mail: tbray@wildblue.net, or by phone: 937-4422. In particular, he is looking for someone to serve as Feeder Coordinator.

PAM HUNTLEY ON KZYX FM 88.3, 90.7, AND 91.5

COMMON MERGANSER

The Common Merganser is an elegant looking bird. The “common” refers to its being the most abundant of the mergansers. They have slender red bills, which are serrated to grasp slippery fish; hence the name “saw-bill”. Other names for the Common Merganser are Sheldrake and in Europe, Goosanders.

They sit low in the water and dive as deep as thirty feet to fish. At twenty-two to twenty-seven inches the Common Merganser is also the largest of the mergansers. Unlike Red-breasted Mergansers that prefer the shallow salt water of our coast, the Common Merganser prefers the fresh water of our forested rivers and deep ponds and lakes.

The females and non-breeding males have a reddish-brown head and crest, a distinctive white throat and a grey body. The breeding males have a gorgeous, glossy green head, blood-red bill, black back and white breast. They fly flat, like an arrow, low to the water, showing white wing bars.

Common Mergansers are seen in large flocks for most of the year. They break into breeding pairs in early spring. Their favorite nesting spot is a hole in a tree. The male leaves once the nine to twelve green-colored eggs are laid. The female incubates the eggs for thirty-five days. The young jump from the nest when they are a couple of days old but they cannot fly for the first two months. Mothers protect their young but do not feed them. They eat aquatic insects for the first two weeks and then switch to small fish.

Adult Common Mergansers catch small trout, carp, perch and suckers. While some think that mergansers have a negative effect on salmonids, others think that by eating the small fish they are helping the larger fish by making more food available.

Common Merganser
Photo Ron LeValley
www.LeValleyphoto.com



FROM SAVE OUR SHOREBIRDS

Muchas Gracias, Toda Raba, Wah Wah Wah, Merci, Dankon, Mahalo, Takk, Xie Xie,
Ka Pai, Siyabonga, Maraba, Wado, Dannaba, Salamat, Mis tatK, Enkosi, Spasibo*



**Marbled Godwit,
Virgin Creek Beach
Photo by
Richard Hubacek**

There are many ways to say thank you to SOS volunteers who surveyed our shorebirds at MacKerricher State Park during the past year. Mostly we say it from the bottom of our hearts to those who helped with this on-going, long-term citizen science project: Andarin Arvola, Barbara Auerbach, Henrietta Bensussen, Jim Boque, Win Bowen, Jeanette and Jim Boyer, Alison Cebula and Adam Hutchins, Jack Daily, Sarah Grimes, Karen and Jim Havlena, Linda Perkins and Bill Heil, Richard Hubacek, Naomi Jasper, Trudy Jensen and Jim Griswold, Angela Liebenberg, Frank Menhams, Charlene McAllister, Art Morley, Gail Nsentip, Autumn Ossello, Martha Racine, Lydia Rand, Trish Steele, Emily Strachan, Dorothy Tobkin, David Wolf, Molly Worden and Chuck Worden.

We thank Joleen Ossello, our 2011 SOS Director; Ron LeValley, trainer and teacher; State Parks Interpreter Fred Andrews and Mendocino Area Parks Association's Lead Interpreter Teresa Hurray, who helped with the Junior Ranger shorebird program; and Ginny Wade, who transformed children's art into magical shorebird protection posters for our beaches.

Mendocino Coast Audubon Society's Save Our Shorebirds is a volunteer effort that just finished the fifth year of citizen science research about migrating and resident shorebirds at MacKerricher State Park. State Parks is one of our partners and an integral part of the program that includes educating children (and others) about watchlisted shorebirds and their critical habitat. To participate, please contact Angela Liebenberg at ALIEBENBERG@parks.ca.gov

This project is supported by Audubon California

***In Spanish, Hebrew, Papuan, French, Esperanto, Hawaiian, Icelandic, Mandarin, Maori, Zulu, Buri (Nigeria), Cherokee, Punjabi, Tagalog, Yuki, Xhosa, Russian. In Mendocino Coast Audubonspeak: THANK YOU**

Becky Bowen

PELAGIC TRIP

Karen Havlena

September 18, 2011 8:15 AM - 3:00 PM, Protocol: Traveling,
20.0 miles.

Maximum 18.3 miles offshore

Offshore portion of Mendocino Coast Audubon pelagic.

Leaders: Rob Fowler, Ron LeValley and John Sterling.

16 species of birds

- Black-footed Albatross 15
- Northern Fulmar 10
- Pink-footed Shearwater 105
- Buller's Shearwater 10
- Sooty Shearwater 120
- Ashy Storm-Petrel 6
- Sabine's Gull 1
- Western Gull 20
- California Gull 45
- South Polar Skua 2
- Pomarine Jaeger 3
- Parasitic Jaeger 3
- Long-tailed Jaeger 12
- Common Murre 2
- Cassin's Auklet 8
- Rhinoceros Auklet 6

Northern Fulmar

Photo Ron LeValley

LeValleyphoto.com



Route courtesy of Ron LeValley



4 species of mammals

Humpback Whale 2

Dall's Porpoise 15

Pacific White-sided Dolphin 12

Northern Right Whale Dolphin 4

Humpback Whale photo Ron LeValley

LeValleyphoto.com

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER **Donald Shephard**

Black-bellied Plover in breeding plumage.

Photo courtesy of US Fish and Wildlife Service, Tom Bowman

While others prepared their barbecues and eagerly awaited fireworks on July 4, 2004 Becky Bowen of downtown Caspar followed her passion to Ten Mile Beach. She spotted a Black-bellied Plover near the mouth of Inglenook Creek still wearing his full breeding plumage.

Becky says, "I'd never seen anything like that except in pictures and it very nearly stopped my heart. I remember getting out the cell phone and calling Alison Cebula at State Parks to report the sighting and babbling like an idiot."

I prefer to think of Becky as a sentinel for shorebirds. Like the Black-bellied Plover, she stands guard and calls out a warning while other species feed unconcernedly. Long-winged in flight, it shows a clear white wingbar and square white rump. From below, a diagnostic black mark on the armpit contrasts with the white underwing. In breeding plumage, this species sparkles white and gray above, with a white line along the side and jet black underparts. Non-breeding birds are pale below and greyish and pale spotted above. The large dark eye is prominent. The stance appears hunched and neckless, hence the old Cape Cod name, Beetlehead.

They move relatively slowly on the ground and fly away silently when disturbed. They exhibit the typical plover habit of stop, look, and peck, but occasionally pick in shallow water like

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER

continued

sandpipers. If you observe their tracks in wet sand, you will see they are the only plover in our region with a small hind toe like the lapwings. Later evolving plovers have lost them.

Becky is not alone in admiring this handsome shorebird. Its large breeding range includes West Russia east to Baffin Island, while its winter range covers the coastal areas of north Europe, Africa, Australia, Asia, North and South America, but not Antarctica. In England, where it does not breed, it is known as the Grey Plover, perhaps in the interest of truth in advertising, for its off-season plumage appears gray.

This plover is one of our strongest fliers, one reason for its wide range. Dorothy Tobkin tells me Black-bellied Plovers are common in migration and she sees them at Virgin Creek all winter. Most birds have lost the striking black chest by the time they arrive here, although a dazzling male visited recently. Volunteer members of the Save Our Shorebirds program count 30-40 all winter. Since we lack the huge mudflats found in Humboldt County, where large numbers congregate, our sightings are all the more precious.

Black-bellied Plovers are the largest of US plovers and, like Whimbrels, take prey of sufficient size to interest gulls, which pester them. Arthur Cleveland Bent in his book *Life Histories of North American Shorebirds* quotes three stalwarts in 1918 who "took" a California bird which had in its stomach "fourteen small snails, one small bivalve mollusc, and parts of two or more small crabs." Bent also writes that they "resort to meadows and upland pastures where grass is short and do some good by devouring grasshoppers, cutworms, earthworms and beetles."

Take a beach walk and you may see Black-bellied Plovers. Their behaviour becomes aggressive and asocial as they feed alone, but roost in flocks. Watch for a male to spread its tail in full show-off mode, it's amazing according to that passionate birder, Becky Bowen, "It looks like an angel's fan."

Black-bellied Plover non-breeding plumage

Photo by Gabriel Buissart



THREE BRITISH BIRDS Donald Shephard

A greenbelt encircled postwar London and provided my youthful legs flat alluvial fields in which to run along the banks of the river Roding, a tributary of the Thames. My home county, Essex, has three or four points above three-hundred feet in elevation. I lived on the edge of Epping Forest, a green finger of preserved land which thrusts from its eponymous town well into London.

When I was six, as A. A. Milne would note, I jumped from an old look-out beech tree about six feet and sprained an ankle on its roots. At eleven, when I became interested in cross country running, I loved to trot around the playing fields wearing my father's old army boots. To strengthen my ankles, I had resoled and shod this cumbersome footwear with many metal studs.

Along the river Roding in a hole in a tall willow tree, I always found a Green Woodpecker nest. Imagine my joy at spotting a green bird with a red crest. As the Roding meandered through the football (soccer) fields and around the cricket pitches, it left an oxbow lake which we called the River Stink although it did not flow. During my bicycle rides to high school, I sometimes stopped by the stinky stagnant water to watch a Kingfisher dart from its perch to snatch a stickleback or minnow and return to its burrow to feed its young.

For nine years after World War II the government rationed food including milk. A dairyman drove his horse-drawn cart from house to house delivering imperial pints of pasteurized milk. No homogenization occurred in those days. Colored metal foil denoted Friesian, Jersey, or Guernsey milk. In winter, Blue Tits, those acrobats of the hedgerows and trees, pecked through the foil and drank the cream that accumulated in the bottle's neck.

Next month Becky Bowen will graciously edit this newsletter while I visit my sister and a friend I've known for sixty-two years since we were eight. We will slog through the gluey orange London clay of hills which are topped with glacial moraines and I hope to see once more those colorful birds of my youth, the Green Woodpecker, Kingfisher, and Blue Tit.

Photos Royal Society for the Preservation of Birds



CALENDAR

October 2011:

- 9 Field Trip: 9:00 am, Glass Beach. Meet at the west end of Elm Street, Fort Bragg.
- 17 Chapter Meeting: 7:00 pm.
- 19 Bird Walk: 8:30 am, Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens

November 2011:

- 5 Beginners' Bird Walk: 9:00 am, Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens
- 12 Field Trip: 9:00 am, Hawks of the South Coast. Meet at the south end of Navarro River Bridge to caravan south.
- 16 Bird Walk: 8:30 am, Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens
- 21 Chapter Meeting: 7:00 pm.

December 2011:

- 3 Beginners' Bird Walk: 9:00 am, Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens
- 11 Sunday Field Trip: 9:00 am, Point Arena and Manchester. Meet at Hwy 1 and Miner Hole Road, Mile Post 17.54
- 21 Bird Walk: 8:30 am, Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens
- 30 Manchester Christmas Bird Count.



**Red Knot photo Greg Breese.
US Fish and Wildlife Service,**

BIRD RESCUE

Sarah Grimes

Two agencies that I find very helpful especially if the reporting party is willing to transport the bird are:

Bird Rescue Center in Santa Rosa phone
(707) 523 BIRD (2473)

<http://www.birdrescuecenter.org/>

International Bird Rescue Research Center
(707) 207-0380

<http://www.ibrrc.org/>

**Injured Brown Pelican
Photo Don Shephard**



MCAS BOARD MEMBERS AND PROGRAM CHAIRS 2011-2012

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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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