

The Whistling Swan



NEWSLETTER OF THE MENDOCINO COAST AUDUBON SOCIETY

April 2011

BIRDS AND NATURE of the SOUTHERN CONE

Monday, April 11th, 7:00 pm

Speaker Alvaro Jaramillo

Gualala Art Center

The Southern Cone? Is that an Ice Cream place in Georgia? Nope, it is the triangle-shaped southern section of South America. The cone includes Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and the southern bits of Bolivia and Brazil.

South America has many unique

habitats - the Pampas, Patagonia, the Matorral, the Humboldt Current, Iguazu Falls, the Yungas, the Chaco. It is the land of rheas, penguins, horneros, seriemas, as well as Southern Right Whales, marine otters,

viscachas and Vicuñas. It is a part of the world blessed with some enigmatic, unusual, beautiful and unique creatures.

The memorable scenery including snow-capped volcanoes, huge granitic spikes, the big sky country of the Pampas and Patagonia and coastlines that are perhaps rivaled only by California for their beauty. Come enjoy an evening exploring a gorgeous part of the world and its equally fantastic bird and wildlife through the eyes of a birder-biologist who has a passion for this part of the world.



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Sharp-winged Teal,
King Penguin
photos by

Alvaro Jaramillo

PRESIDENT'S CORNER**David Jensen**

Education, conservation, citizen science, and enjoyment – these are the four main objectives of each Audubon chapter. The order of importance is a personal decision, but the commitment is an organizational trademark. I recently realized that I have expended a lot of ink sermonizing about the latter three, but have said too little about the one that may have the greatest long-term effect -- education.

Mendocino Coast Audubon is a small chapter with a small operating budget, but due to the vision and dedication of a few talented women we have developed an educational outreach program that is the envy of many larger organizations. For over ten years our ambassadors have gone into the grade schools from Point Arena to Westport to instill an appreciation of nature in those who will replace us. Recently we have expanded into classes in Anderson Valley and in Branscomb. Last year alone our emissaries touched the lives of over 400 coastal students.

Their study plan involves two visits. On the first day the children learn about John James Audubon, why and how we protect birds, and how birds fly. On the second visit they go outdoors, use binoculars, learn how to observe, and make a list of the birds they see. The teaching is hands-on, and the learning is interactive, not passive.

Your Audubon education team has been able to help local schools deal with current economic hardships in creative ways. Their very presence helps provide an outdoor education experience that the schools might not otherwise afford. MCAS and Point Cabrillo Light Keepers Association together will underwrite the cost of bus transportation so that a group of students from Anderson Valley can spend the day at Point Cabrillo, learning about birds, sea life and the coastal environment. Some of these students will see the ocean for the first time.

Fortunately we have had some important help along the way. The good people at Out Of This World have been generous, donating a number of binoculars for the children to use. The Stanford Inn has graciously allowed us to use their beautiful grounds and facilities to host family bird walks. Ronnie James of Woodlands Wildlife has partnered with MCAS to make it possible for Sarah Grimes to introduce to older students to the wonder of owl pellets: the small egg-shaped balls of fur and bones that the owls regurgitate, thus revealing the nature of their diet.

Like all healthy things, our environmental educational program continues to grow. With adequate support we hope to take advantage of many additional opportunities. We can begin to work with visiting students from other areas, sharing with them our knowledge of local birds and habitats. We can work with Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, 4-H and other youth organizations. We can offer programs to older students in Middle School. We can involve High School students in our citizen science projects. If you study the brochure we recently mailed, you will see that education is our greatest unreimbursed expense. More of your membership and donations go to education than to any other expenditure. We are proud of that fact and vow to work even harder to put your donations to work, developing the next generation of nature's stewards.

PAM HUNTLEY ON KXYZ FM 88.3, 90.7, AND 91.5

WESTERN BLUEBIRD

The Western Bluebird is a rare sight here on the coast, so when I see that brilliant blue, like the early settlers, I associate it with love, joy and the renewal of spring. The blue of their feathers results not from a pigment but is iridescent from the refraction of light off the structure of the feather. It changes in intensity and hue from different angles.

Bluebirds are seen in fields and open woodlands often perched on fences and wires. In winter they join small flocks sometimes mixed with Yellow-rumped Warblers feeding on mistletoe and other berries. By March, they break into pairs. The courting male flutters in front of the female with his wings half-open and tail spread. Then he perches next to the female, preens her feathers and may offer her food.

Bluebirds are the only members of the thrush family that regularly use cavities or bird houses for nesting. They line their nest, a loose network of twigs, with fine grass.

They usually lay four to six light-blue eggs and often start the second brood even while still feeding the first. In spring and summer they eat mainly insects, which they dart to catch in flight or pounce upon on the ground.

Bluebirds are now a species of concern; their decline is associated with the lack of nesting cavities due to the cutting down of dead trees and limbs and competition from European Starlings. So put up a nesting box in your back yard and you might be blessed with the bluebird of happiness.



CITIZEN SCIENCE OPPORTUNITY Joleen Ossello



The California and Baja California Black Oystercatcher population size is *roughly* estimated at 1,000 individuals. This is a species of high conservation concern throughout its range and a keystone indicator species along the north Pacific shoreline. It is also a U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service focal species for priority conservation action.

MCAS is very excited to help Audubon California coordinate the first-ever abundance survey for Black Oystercatchers along the coast of California. For those who would like to participate, the Mendocino Coast survey is scheduled for June 2-5 as the primary window and June 9-12 as an alternate or additional weekend. If you are interested in volunteering your time and expertise, please email j_ossello@earthlink.net or call 962-0142.

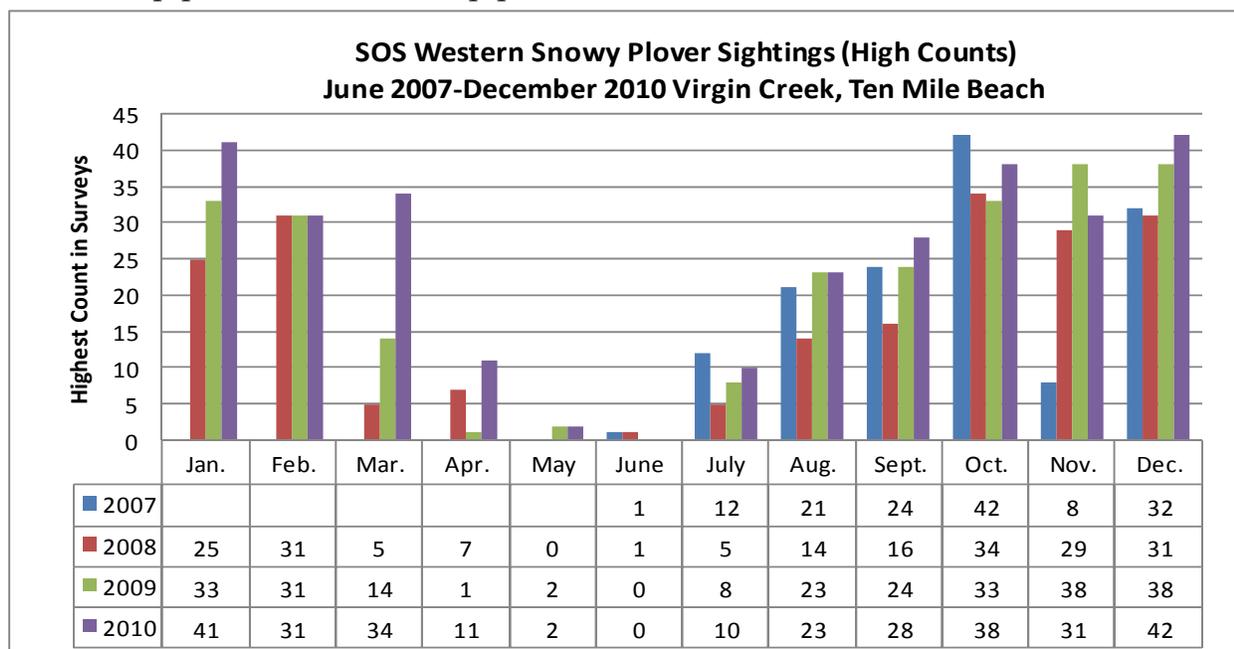


**SAVE
OUR
SHOREBIRDS**
Becky Bowen

Shorebirds of MacKerricher State Park are talking to us every day. There is plenty to tell – and a lot to learn. Now, in year five of Save Our Shorebirds surveys, the numbers begin to tell us something, too.

Below is the first chart of 2011 and while we leave conclusions to scientists, we like to think about these numbers. Clearly, Western Snowy Plovers leave our beaches in the middle of the March-August nesting season. Where do they go? Why are these tiny birds (listed as threatened on the Endangered Species List) coming back here in fall and winter? What do they like about the habitat? What drives them away? Time will tell.

Our volunteers now survey in the field at least once a week all year (with weather luck). We plan to keep this study alive for many years and to contribute observations to scientists who will piece together explanations for continuing global decline of many shorebird species including American Golden-Plovers, Western Snowy Plovers, Wandering Tattlers, Long-billed Curlews, Black Turnstones, Surfbirds, Red Knots, Sanderlings, Semipalmated Sandpipers, Western Sandpipers, and Rock Sandpipers.



Save Our Shorebirds is a long-term citizen science program of MCAS in partnership with State Parks. To help with field surveys, contact State Parks Environmental Scientist Angela Liebenberg at ALIEBENBERG@parks.ca.gov

This project is supported by Audubon California

PELAGIC TRIP

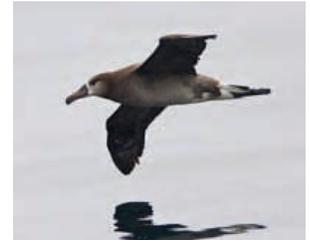
Karen Havlena



Pink-footed
Shearwater

Black-footed
Albatross

All photos on this page courtesy of Ron LeValley
www.LeValleyphoto.com



Please make your plans to join us on the Sun, May 15th pelagic trip sponsored by Mendocino Coast Audubon Society. Spaces are limited on the TELSTAR, which is a smaller boat than we have used in the past. The meeting place will be on North Harbor Drive, Noyo Harbor, Fort Bragg. Prepaid reservations are needed.

DATE: Sunday, May 15th, 2011.

COST: Mendocino & Lake County residents only: \$100

All others: \$110

TIME: Now 8 hours. Meet at 7:00-am; we will return at 3:30-pm.

PLACE: Parking lot of Telstar, large sign on North Harbor Drive shortly after rounding the curve at the bottom of the hill.

Credit card: Send an email to me at kahavlena@yahoo.com with your phone number and a good time to call you.

Prepaid reservations are required either by check or credit card.

Mail your check, payable to MCAS (see "COST" above) to:

K. Havlena, PO Box 40, Fort Bragg, CA 95437

Captain Randy and the Telstar are both fine. He took the boat out to sea prior to the tsunami hitting Noyo harbor, thus avoiding the boat bashing up against the dock -- both dock and boat were spared any damage.

Please commit as soon as possible; we don't deposit checks, etc, until trip time. Remember: spaces are limited. Confirmations will be sent out shortly before the trip date.

Sooty Shearwater

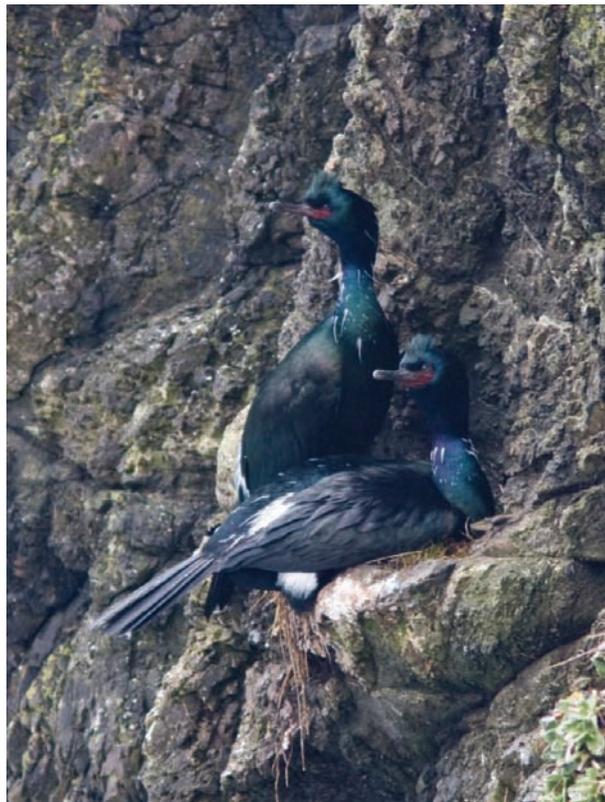


Parasitic Jaeger



Pomarine Jaeger



CORMORANT NEST MONITORING Donald Shephard

Pelagic Cormorant photo Ron LeValley
www.LeValleyphoto.com

During the Whale Festival at Point Cabrillo Light Station, Pam Huntley told me the Pelagic Cormorants are nesting on the bluff just north of the lighthouse. I began monitoring this colony on April 27, 2009 and the nests were already well built. Last year, I started recording nest numbers on May 20th. It is always difficult to know the significance of one's observations and treacherous to anthropomorphize but I think these early birds are staking out prime nest sites. They are in breeding plumage with immaculate white flank patches and brilliant refracted colors from pristine black feathers.

Standing in our windblown tent at the festival, talking to Pam, we joked that whales outnumbered visitors. Rotten weather kept attendance low. Rain and hail also make open nests decidedly soggy. I checked the bluff between showers and counted eight nests of green plant material. Last year some cormorants used flowers to add to the décor. No designer birds appeared this time. A week later, nest number eight, still guarded by a pair of cormorants with wet feet, suffered under a miniature waterfall.

As you know all too well, the weather has not improved. In fact we have had more hail than usual. One nest has washed out. Others have absentee landlords. So far, I have not seen any birds sitting. We, the Pelagic Cormorants and I, have made no progress in the last three weeks. A pair of Western Gulls nest on a pinnacle seaward from the cormorant colony and even they have hunkered down.

This is a small site with twenty nests in 2009 and twelve last year. Those hearty souls who monitor Brandt's Cormorant nests on the rocks at Mendocino Headlands have to count a sample from over sixty nests and we hope to add two new sites this spring. Other volunteers check on the cormorants at Noyo Harbor. Ron LeValley compiled and reported our results. He calculated fledge rates:

Site	Year	Fledglings per pair	Fledglings per successful pair
Point Cabrillo	2009	1.95	2.29
	2010	1.33	1.45
Noyo	2009	1.78	2.46
	2010	1.1	1.38

CORMORANT NEST MONITORING

continued

For comparison, between the years of 1971 to 1983, fledging rates on the Farallon Islands ranged from 0 to 2.43 per nest and 1.11 - 2.83 per successful nest. Significantly, no cormorants fledged on the Farallon Islands in 2009. Why did our colonies thrive while their southern counterparts failed. One possible answer is our birds had the benefit of a strong upwelling bringing nutrients to phytoplankton, which multiplied and fed krill and other small creatures, which multiplied and fed fish. Cormorants with a plentiful food supply lay more eggs, and successfully feed their young to maturity. Hungry birds fail.

Two years do not a database make. Records kept over a couple of decades or more will teach us much more. I will be 90 in twenty years and liable to blow over the bluff but I can already make some anecdotal observations.

One remarkable result of the successful nesting at Point Cabrillo in 2009 was that two nests appeared to lay a second clutch of three eggs apiece after fledging chicks. Second clutches have not been reported in Pelagic Cormorants prior to this occurrence. Neither of these second clutches resulted in chicks.

In 2010, one pair reminded me of parents with a fat, slovenly teenager. I cannot tell the gender of cormorants, so let us presume this was a male. He did not move around the nest much, except to wiggle his beak down a parent's throat to extract semi-digested fish. The posture of this inquiline most resembled Falstaff after a hefty intake of ale. He lay belly-up and wings flopped over the side of the guano-splattered nest. His parents toiled for many weeks to fledge him. One Thursday last year, I checked all the nests and saw his carcass broken into three. Here is the point at which to beware of anthropomorphizing. Much as I love my three grown sons, they could aggravate me as teenagers when they stood, head in refrigerator, devouring me out of house and home. We cannot know what happened to the dead chick. It seems unlikely that a fox, coyote or raccoon climbed down the bluff, killed the fat, juicy fellow but did not carry him back up the rocks. A hawk could have attacked, but why not carry the pieces away? Eventually the carcass disappeared - gull food?

One of the joys of weekly observation of the same birds in the same place is the depth of knowledge gained not just about cormorants but about other birds. Two Western Gull pairs fledged three young apiece on pinnacles beside the bluffs. It took several weeks and the sharp eyes of my wife to find where the Pigeon Guillemots nest in a burrow concealed by that alien invader, iceplant. These scarlet-footed and scarlet-mouthed birds nest here but what happens before and after is a mystery.

There are many such mysteries in nature. What are the Pelagic Cormorants doing building nests this early? Why does an old man take a lawn chair, binoculars, tripod and camera, a spotting scope and a notepad and sit and gaze at rain-soaked nests on a windy bluff? Next time I see Pam Huntley, I shall ask her these questions. Meanwhile, come join me, here's how.

Contact Ron LeValley at [937-1742](tel:937-1742) and tell him what your availability might be this coming season.

AFLOCKALYPSE NOW

Joleen Ossello



Ross's Goose photo

Ron LeValley

www.LeValleyphoto.com

Most likely you have heard of the New Year ringing in with festivities such as streamers, music, fireworks, the Big Apple; but not, blackbirds, turtle-doves, coots and even drum fish. As the world rang in 2011, Mother Nature did so in a different way. In

January news media became riddled with gross displays of bird deaths ranging from dozens to thousands. Arkansas, Alabama, Louisiana, Kentucky, California, Italy and Sweden all reported large numbers of bird fatalities.

Although mass deaths occur naturally, the media published them all in one week. While these species may gain instant notoriety, it is usually not long lived. Officials don't believe any of the incidents are related, and suspect a wide range of causes, from cold weather and fireworks to semi-truck collisions and overeating, though they admit in many instances a clear cause may never be identified.

While mass animal deaths are not rare, many individual birds must face human-induced obstacles. According to the National Audubon Society, habitat destruction is the leading cause of bird population declines. This includes land development, logging, and strip mining. Fatalities due to loss of habitat are immeasurable and unknowable.

The top culprit for fatalities may surprise you. The following table lists U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) estimates for 2002.

<i>Cause</i>	<i>Estimated fatalities per year</i>
Glass Windows (think skyscrapers)	100 – 900 million
House Cats	100 million
Automobiles/ Trucks	60+ million
Electric Transmission Line Collisions	Up to 174 million
Hunting (harvested legally)	100 + million
Agriculture	70 million
Communication Towers	4-40 million
Oil and Gas Extraction	1-2 million
Fishing Industry	10,000-100,000
Wind Turbines	33,000

Initiatives such as Cats Indoors program and Fatal Light Awareness programs through the USFWS encourage land owners and businesses to do their part in order to protect our precious avian community. For more information on Migratory Bird Management, go to <http://birds.fws.gov>. Also, see Audubon's latest achievements with the Migratory Bird Conservation Partnership working to protect wetlands and agricultural lands that support

BIRD WALK AT NAVARRO VINEYARDS



Birding at Navarro pond

Navarro Vineyards graciously hosts another bird walk on Saturday, April 23rd. We hope to see nesting activity by **Tree Swallows**, or **Violet-Green Swallows**, or if really lucky **Purple Martins** in new nest boxes erected last summer, donated by Sarah Grimes and friends. We have already seen **Western Bluebird** activity at the three new houses we put up this year.

Saturday, April 23rd from 10:30 to 1:00

Navarro Vineyards. Thank you and best regards, David Harr

BIRD WALKS AND FIELD TRIP

Sunday, April 10 Field Trip: 9:00 am, Van Damme Beach and State Park Call David Jensen 964-8163 for details.

Monday, April 11 Chapter Meeting: 7:00 pm, Gualala Art Center, Gualala. The annual South Coast meeting. See page 1 for details.

Wednesday, April 20 Bird Walk: 8:30 am, Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens

Saturday, April 30 Family Bird Walk with Sue Coulter and Sarah Grimes 10:00 a.m. at Stanford Inn.

BIRD SIGHTINGS from www.groups.yahoo.com/group/Mendobirds/

March 22 A bright orange male **Rufous Hummingbird**. Tim Bray

March 21 A **Lark Sparrow** and **Tricolored Blackbird** in Ocean Meadows north of Ten Mile river mouth. Karen Havlena

March 20 **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker**, with a **Red-breasted Sapsucker** in the west-most Banksia trees at Rose Memorial Park in N Fort Bragg. Dorothy Tobkin

March 19 A **Lark Sparrow** in Ocean Meadows north of Ten Mile river mouth. Karen Havlena

March 18 A probable **Baltimore Oriole** and 2 **Bullock's Orioles** at Rose Mem'l Park on N Franklin in Fort Bragg. A **Rufous Hummingbird** and a couple of **Allen's Hummingbirds** were in the Banksia trees, as well. Karen Havlena

March 14 AL the **Laysan Albatross** is back on the north side of Arena Cove after the tsunami. Jeanne Jackson

March 10 A basic-plumaged **Long-tailed Duck** and 2 female **White-winged Scoters** were in Laguna Point cove in MacKerricher SP. Dorothy Tobkin

March 3 A coastally rare **California Towhee** at Van Damme State Park around the restrooms at the end of the lower campground circle. Dorothy Tobkin

California Towhee photo
Ron LeValley

www.LeValleyphoto.com



MCAS BOARD MEMBERS AND PROGRAM CHAIRS 2010-2011

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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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