



# The Black Oystercatcher

Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Newsletter- April 2020

## WHAT A MONTH!

By Tim Bray



As you are doubtless aware, Mendocino County has issued a Shelter-in-place Order, with the force of law, that essentially bans nonessential travel and outdoor activities. There is a great deal of uncertainty about what exactly that means. New information comes from County staff every day, and other agencies are rapidly shifting their stances as well. At the time of writing, there are very few outdoor recreational areas that are open for public use. We all have to adjust our plans and find new ways to indulge our passion for birding - just as migration season is beginning.

There are, of course, innumerable online distractions for birders. The Audubon Society has put together a fun set of photos, videos, and essays to cheer you up and broaden your knowledge at: [www.audubon.org/joy-of-birds](http://www.audubon.org/joy-of-birds)

Activity on the [MCAS Facebook page](#) has picked up and we are sharing a wide range of content there as well, including news, suggestions, and conservation action calls. Follow us there, join in the conversations and let us know what you'd like to see.

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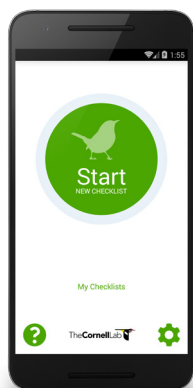
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American Robins  
practicing social distancing  
photo by Ron Valley

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This might be an ideal time to try something new, like eBirding. It's a fun way to sharpen your observational skills, as you need to both identify and count the birds you see, much as we do on Christmas Bird Counts. You can make an eBird entry whenever you happen to watch birds, even if it's just through your kitchen window for 10 minutes while having your morning cuppa. Once it becomes a habit, eBirding can become a very useful way for you to keep track of the birds as they come and go through the year, and the collective data gathered by all of us becomes immensely useful to scientists. Go to <https://ebird.org> home to learn more and get started counting the birds around you. Your everyday birds are always of interest.

Finally, remember to look outside as much as possible. It's too easy to get wrapped up in worry and obsession about the virus, and forget that the rest of the world around us will go on adapting. Watch whatever birds you can see, marvel at the intensity of their lives, and recognize that we are only a part of their world.

## FIELD TRIP REPORT: OWLING WITH MIKE STEPHENS

**Tim Bray**

March 7, 2020

Near-perfect weather set us up for a great night of owling with Mike. Our first bird was a very determined Northern Pygmy-owl who responded to Mike's calls and perched in a tree in full view of everyone. We spent some time trying to coax Great-horned Owls out, but only heard a couple of very distant birds. Western Screech-owls on the other hand were very cooperative and we heard at least three pairs of them trilling to each other. A highlight for many of us was a female Northern Spotted Owl calling from the bottom of the canyon, perhaps a mile or more distant, but clearly heard by all. Two Northern Saw-whet Owls added to the diversity. We did not hear any Barred Owls, somewhat surprisingly, and I'm not sure whether to be disappointed or pleased by that. Still, five species and twelve individual owls is a respectable tally, and the sixteen participants went home happy for the experience.



*Northern Pygmy Owl photo by Alan Schmierer  
Public domain image from Flickr*

## SAVE OUR SHOREBIRDS

Becky Bowen



*Long-billed Curlew, September 2, 2017, Inglenook Fen-Ten Mile Dunes Preserve*

*B. Bowen photograph*

## WHAT THE CURLEWS ARE TELLING US

April 24, 2020, has been designated World Curlew Day by an international group of shorebird conservationists who want us all to hear what the curlews are telling us: they are in real trouble.

Two of the world's nine curlew species are listed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature as critically endangered and possibly extinct: the Short-billed Curlew and the Eskimo Curlew. The Bristle-thighed Curlew is listed as vulnerable, and the Far Eastern Curlew is listed as endangered and decreasing.

The curlew we see on the Mendocino Coast is the Long-billed Curlew, the largest North American shorebird. County bird authorities list it as rare in all seasons. During 14 years of Save Our Shorebirds, surveyors have recorded 220 sightings. When we see them, they are likely to be tucked into flocks of Marbled Godwits and/or Whimbrels foraging at the water's edge.

If they could speak English, the Long-billed Curlew's message would be clear: "Save Our Habitat." According to the Cornell University's All About Birds website, some 90 per cent of the bird's wintering habitat in California grasslands is gone. And unlike many shorebird species that migrate to breeding grounds in the Arctic, Long-billed Curlews fly inland to breed. That takes them into habitat that is threatened by drought and wildfires, urban development, and ingestion of herbicides and pesticides.



## SHELTER-IN-PLACE PATCH CHALLENGE

by Adam Hutchins

You may be astonished to discover, as I was, that driving to favorite locales for an hour or so of bird watching does not fall under essential activities. As local parks and public spaces close to visitors, our immediate surrounding areas, or home patches, are getting more bird watching interest. For folks looking to add some personal sport to regularly watched home patches, here's a little scoring challenge for you. Scoring your personal Shelter-in-Place Home Patch can be done as often as you like, per session, day, week, or whole shelter-in-place period. You may find the more you observe, the higher you score.

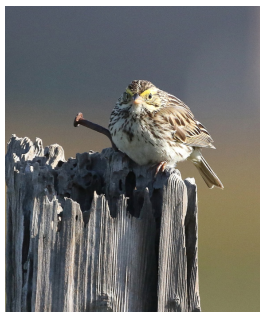
I hope that this Home Patch Bird Game gives you a birdie distraction as we all do our part to combat coronavirus spread. Flatten the curve! Happy Birding.

Categories for Scoring	Point Value and What to Count	Total
Shelter-in-Place Species List (of course)	1 pt each species	
High # at a feeder at a time	1 pt each bird	
High # within 6 feet of feeder at a time	1 pt each bird	
"Local yokels" – year-round residents	2 pt each species	
Migrants passing through	5 pt each species	
Migrants staying for the summer	3 pt each species	
Territories Defended -	3 pt each territory	
Seen/never heard	1 pt each species	
Heard/never seen	2 pt each species	
Seen and heard	3 pt each species	
Nests	10 pt each species	
Fledges	20 pt each species + 5 pt/fledge	
Interlopers - Birds chased off by patch residents	3 pt each observation	
Birds that eat birds	5 pt each species	
Birds that eat fish	7 pt each species	
Birds that eat mammals	5 pt each species	
Birds that cache food for later	5 pt each species	
Birds that scratch/dig for food	4 pt each species	
Total Behavior Section Points		

Score points for any amount of the listed colors in an observed specie's plumage		
Red	1 pt each species	
Orange	1 pt each species	
Blue	1 pt each species	
Brown	1 pt each species	
Yellow	1 pt each species	
Purple/Violet	1 pt each species	
Fuchsia/Pink	1 pt each species	
Black and White	1 pt each species	
Gray	1 pt each species	
Green	1 pt each species	
Total Plumage Color Section		
		<b>Grand total</b>
Total Behavior Section _____ + Total Plumage Color Section _____ = _____		

## LIMERICK CORNER

by Becky Bowen



### THE SAVANNAH SPARROW SETS HIS OWN PANTS ON FIRE

There once was a sparrow named Fred  
Who screwed up everything he said.  
Like the time he tried,  
But obviously lied,  
That he had hit the nail right on the head.

### THE CHAMPION'S RIDE TO FAME AND GLORY

The Sandpiper Kid was the star of the show,  
A cowboy's cowboy at the bird rodeo.  
He let out a yelp,  
And rode the bull kelp,  
And hung on for dear life until he had to let go.



## MCAS BOARD APPROVES SLATE FOR 2020 ELECTIONS

The Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Board of Directors nominated two candidates for election to the board at the February 12 board meeting. Election by membership will be at the brief annual business meeting before the program Monday, May 18, 2020, at 7 p.m. at the Caspar Community Center. Board members are elected on staggered two-year terms per chapter by-laws. Members of the 2020 nominating committee were Jeanette Boyer, Angela Liebenberg, Charlene McAllister and chair B. Bowen. Nominations may be made from the floor at the May meeting, provided those nominees receive advance notification by the nominators.

Nominated candidates are:

Pam Huntley – Education Chair

Becky Bowen – Conservation, SOS Chair

## BOARD NOMINATES PAM HUNTLEY TO CHAIR EDUCATION COMMITTEE



Pam Huntley, a popular coastal bird educator, has been nominated to fill the MCAS board's Education Chair position when Sarah Grimes steps down in May after more than a decade of service.

Pam is a fourth generation Californian, who also grew up in Maryland and Massachusetts. She came to the coast in 1984. Her senior project from University of California, Santa Cruz was a breeding bird survey in the Pygmy Forest. She is a volunteer caretaker for The Nature Conservancy's Pygmy Forest Preserve and has

worked in local schools for more than 30 years, including classroom visits for the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society.

She is Director of Education for the Point Cabrillo Light Keepers Association and also runs a summer program called Nature Day Camp. MCAS sponsors her production of educational radio 'bird spots' on KZYX, Mendocino County's Public and Community Radio.

She spends her time between the coast and Branscomb where her husband, Peter Steel, is manager of the University of California's Angelo Coast Range Reserve.

Our programs are brought to you with the support of Harbor Lite Lodge, offering discount lodging for Mendocino Coast Audubon Society guest presenters.

[www.HarborLiteLodge.com](http://www.HarborLiteLodge.com)

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## CALENDAR

### APRIL 2020

Due to the Shelter-in-place Orders enacted in response to the COVID-19 virus, all public events, meetings, and group gatherings are suspended.

**Wednesday 8 - Audubon Society Board Meeting 6:00 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.**

Will be conducted remotely on Zoom. Contact Tim Bray for more information.

For complete and current calendar, updates, and useful links, visit:

[www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org](http://www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org)

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



photo by Save Our Shorebirds

### BLACK OYSTERCATCHER CITIZEN SCIENCE PROJECT 2020

Black Oystercatcher Training date: TBD

This year State Parks will provide training for the upcoming Black Oystercatcher reproduction surveys. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, State Parks Volunteer Coordinator Amelia Schall will be organizing the volunteers via email. For new volunteers, Senior Environmental Scientist Terra Fuller can provide protocol training on an individual basis that meets social distancing requirements. Please join us in helping to collect this valuable information!

For more information, please contact Amelia Schall at (707) 937-2645 [Schall.Amelia@parks.ca.gov](mailto:Schall.Amelia@parks.ca.gov) or Terra Fuller at (707) 937-3689 [Terra.Fuller@parks.ca.gov](mailto:Terra.Fuller@parks.ca.gov)



## MCAS BOARD MEMBERS AND PROGRAM CHAIRS 2018-2019

President	Tim Bray	tbray@mcn.org	(707) 734-0791
Vice President, Field Trips	David Jensen	djensen@mcn.org	(707) 964-8163
Secretary	Nicolet Houtz	nicolethoutz@gmail.com	
Treasurer	Jim Havlena	havlenas@fix.net	
SOS, Conservation	Becky Bowen	casparbeck@comcast.net	(707) 962-1602
Education	Sarah Grimes	zewa@mcn.org	
Membership	Adam Hutchins	raptorous@me.com	(707) 734-3470
Programs	Terra Fuller	fullerterra@hotmail.com	(707) 964-4675
Programs	Hayley Ross	hayleyhross@gmail.com	

### Off-Board Chairs:

Scholarship Chair	Judy Steele	judys@mcn.org
Webmaster	Catherine Keegan	keegan@mcn.org
Newsletter Editor	Megan Smithyman	mesmithy@gmail.com

Mendocino Coast Audubon Society e-mail address: [audubon@mcn.org](mailto: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

P.O. BOX 2297

FORT BRAGG, CA, 95437

