



The Black Oystercatcher

Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Newsletter- February 2024

RECENT SIGHTINGS

By Roger Adamson



Crested Caracara by the Garcia River, Roger Adamson.

Relatively few rarities visited Mendocino County this January. Nonetheless, some were excellent. First seen in December, a Baltimore Oriole was reported from Middle Ridge in the Albion Nation (CK, TB). This was the third Baltimore Oriole record (reported on eBird). Surprisingly, another Baltimore Oriole was seen at the Stornetta Dairy on 1/27 (LS), possibly the same bird seen near Albion. Another excellent find was a Magnolia Warbler reported from the pond at Caspar on 1/03 (CL). This was about the tenth county record. A Harris Sparrow was spotted at the Hopland Research and Extension Center on 1/26 (CV). These are hard to find in the county, one showing up every few years.

The real star of the month was a Crested Caracara first reported on 1/19 by Larry Stornetta on his cattle ranch along the Garcia River overlooked by Point Arena. This bird has been seen by

Continued on page 2

Inside This Issue

<i>Recent Sightings</i> <i>By Roger Adamson</i>	1-2
<i>Manchester CBC Recap</i> <i>By Dave Jensen</i>	2
<i>Nest Boxes</i> <i>By Tim Bray</i>	3-4
<i>Scholarships</i> <i>By Becky Bowen</i>	5
<i>In Memoriam</i> <i>By Dave Jensen</i>	6
<i>February Presentation</i> <i>By Tim Bray</i>	7
<i>Upcoming Events</i>	8
<i>MCAS Calendar</i>	9
<i>MCAS Board of Directors</i>	10



Learn more about the marine food web at this month's presentation. See more on page 7. Pink-footed Shearwater photo by Tim Bray

Continued from page 1

numerous birders, some of whom traveled from far corners of the state to record this excellent county bird. Only a second county record, this individual, with light brown feathering and cream-colored neck and chest, was a young bird hatched in 2023. This species occurs mainly at low elevations throughout South and Central America ranging as far north as southern Texas, Arizona, and Florida. They are thought to hunt by sight, not by smell, and to take all sorts of insects, small vertebrates, and carrion. We watched as it performed its characteristic stalking, walking across the field, turning the earth, looking for prey items. It also accompanied Turkey Vultures at a deer carcass until the meat was consumed. Unfortunately, some ranchers believe it to be a danger to newborn livestock and in places the birds are shot or poisoned. However, the species is not threatened over its broad range. This was an excellent bird to find and a real treat to observe.

Thanks to the following for their reports: Catherine Keegan (CK), Tim Bray (TB), Lucas Stephenson (LS), Chris Lamoureux (CL), Chuck Vaughn (CV).



MANCHESTER CBC RECAP

By Dave Jensen

The decision to hold the 50th Manchester Christmas Bird Count on Friday, January 5, the final date of the official count period, proved to be a good one. The weather was dry with only light winds, and while the temperatures were not balmy, neither were they taxing. Thirty-two birders from across the Mendo-Lake-Sonoma region and as far away as Rancho Cordova came to participate.

129 species were observed, slightly below the count average of 131. A total of 8,415 birds were counted, which was a relatively low number given the weather conditions on count day. The following are just a few of the many highlights: 36 Brown Pelicans- a species that usually has left the area by count day; 1 Nashville Warbler- an uncommon bird that has been seen several times in the Fort Bragg area this winter; the most common bird- 1117 Starlings; second most common bird- 506 Brewer's Blackbirds, along with 430 Redwings and 650 blackbird sp., but no Tricoloreds; most common Sparrow- 439 White-crowns; most common Loon- 47 Red-throateds; 24 Tree Swallows and 19 Barn Swallows; and only 3 Peregrines but 4 Bald Eagles. Notable no-shows included Tundra Swan, Cattle Egret, Osprey, Sandhill Crane, Belted Kingfisher and Cedar Waxwing.

The compilation dinner was held in Point Arena at the spacious Trinity Hall next to St. Aloysius Catholic Church, where Lasagna alla Napolitana, Eggplant Parm, and a commemorative carrot cake concluded another memorable day on the Manchester count. Mark your calendars now for the next Manchester count on January 4, 2025.

NEST BOXES**By Tim Bray**

February may be the toughest month for birding here. The weather is unreliable, and the birds are hard to find. Only about half of each year's young birds will survive their first winter, and a lot of that mortality hits in January-February, when food resources are scarcest and the environmental conditions are toughest. Many songbirds band together in mixed-species flocks, called "guilds," to help each other avoid predation and find food. That means most of the habitat appears empty, as all the songbirds in a given area might be concentrated in one spot. Winter birding often means looking through a lot of quiet landscape in search of those elusive guilds.

February is also the calm before the storm of spring migration and breeding season. By early March, we will be seeing the first returning Allen's Hummingbirds and a few Rufous passing through as well. By April, many songbirds will be scouting for nesting places, even if they won't actually start laying eggs for another month. Now is an ideal time to be putting up nest boxes for cavity nesters or cleaning any boxes you already have. You want to have them in place and ready for inspection when those first Western Bluebirds or Violet-green Swallows arrive and begin house-shopping.

Whether you want to build your own or buy premade nest boxes, you need to be aware of the key aspects that make them attractive and increase the chances of successful nesting and fledging. Many of the cute "birdhouses" offered for sale are designed more to appeal to human customers than to produce healthy chicks. For example, the cute little perching peg sticking out below the entrance hole is unnecessary and invites Jays to come steal the chicks. Each species of bird has different needs, so there is no single design that works for everything. This means you need to decide which kinds of birds you want to attract. The following websites offer a lot of useful information to help you understand all the key parameters:

<http://nestboxbuilder.com>

<http://www.sialis.org/nestboxguide.htm>

There are other sites that offer information specific to Bluebirds, Kestrels, or Barn Owls; contact me if you want links to those. Most of these sites offer plans and instructions for building the nest boxes. The effort involved is not great. Even if you don't feel handy enough to DIY, you probably know someone who is and can talk them into helping. A simple bluebird box can be cut and assembled in an afternoon.

Continued on page 4

Continued from page 3

Siting and placement is as important as construction. Probably the single most critical factor determining success or failure is protection from predators. Rats and raccoons will climb almost anything to get at a nest full of eggs. The box must be hung in a way that discourages them. I have had good success mounting my nest boxes on ½" steel electrical conduit poles ten feet long, with the nest box wired or zip-tied to a T-post. In some areas where rats are a big problem, you may want to polish the conduit with some steel wool and rub light oil on it. In any case, do not hang the box on the side of your house or on a wooden post – raccoons and rats can easily climb those.

If you do take the time to build a box, figure out where to put it, and set it up so the predators can't get in, the rewards can be almost immediate. Bluebirds began investigating the first box I put up almost as soon as I walked away and nested in it a month later. We have had them, plus Chickadees and Swallows, every year since. I hope you have the same kind of success.

IMPORTANT REMINDER

As we head into February, be sure to clean your feeders regularly in order to help prevent the spread of avian diseases. Here are some steps to maintain a safe feeder:

- Discard old food and debris from the feeder.
- Scrub the feeder with soapy water and rinse to remove all dirt and particles.
- Disinfect the feeder by soaking it for at least three minutes in a solution of one part bleach with nine parts water for hanging and bird feeders, or one part vinegar with four parts water for hummingbird feeders.
- Rinse the feeder thoroughly with water.
- Let it dry completely before refilling it with birdseed or sugar solution (1/4 cup sugar dissolved in one cup water- no red dye).



The Dollars and Sense of Mendocino Coast Audubon Scholarships

Since 2004, the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society has awarded \$25,320 to science students at our local community college.

When the program was established, the Scholarship Committee mission was clear: even though it was an economical path toward a four-year college, the two-year Associate Degree was not easy and not cheap. Our scholarships have been awarded to students at Mendocino College since 2017 when Mendocino College (headquartered in Ukiah) acquired the Fort Bragg campus of Humboldt County's College of the Redwoods.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the total estimated cost of attendance last year at Mendocino College (for a California resident) was \$23,725 (that estimate included \$1,423 in tuition and fees for a typical class load); \$1,080 for books/supplies; \$16,580 for off-campus room and board; and \$4,642 for other off-campus expenses. There currently is no on-campus housing at the college. The total estimated cost of attendance for an out-of-state resident was \$31,195.

Our MCAS scholarship recipients all have been Mendocino or Lake County residents. Some are married, some have small children, many live with relatives for the first two years of college, and all are in need of financial help. Many of them carry a full class load in addition to holding down at least one job.

Our scholarship committee has learned a few lessons during the past two decades. At some point prior to 2017, we realized that our \$1,000 scholarships were not enough. Our Board of Directors now budgets for two scholarships, and we have reached out to the community and our Audubon members for help. These scholarships can make a big difference.

The chapter also has supported the college field station near Point Arena, where many science students attend in-field hands-on earth study labs.

This support of our recipients and the college field station is something to be proud of. It is more than a way to pay it forward. It's an investment in our future.

Mendocino Coast Audubon Society supports funding for annual science scholarships at Mendocino College. Recipients are selected by science faculty staff based on academic achievement and financial need, and have participated in laboratory research at the college Field Station near Point Arena:

<https://www.mendocino.edu/about/mlccd/our-campus/mendocino-college-coastal-field-station>

Financial support comes from the society's scholarship program and donations from Audubon and community members. We welcome donations which can be made to the MCAS Brandon Pill Memorial Scholarship Fund and/or the MCAS Greg Grantham Memorial Scholarship Fund. Please contact MCAS Scholarship Chair Judy Steele for more information judy@mcn.org. The deadline for funding 2024 scholarships is February 28, 2024.



MCAS scholarship recipient Erin Orth celebrates her 2021 graduation from Mendocino College. She currently is earning a bachelor's degree in environmental science at Sonoma State University.

IN MEMORIAM

By Dave Jensen

Remembering Ollie Kolkman

We are sad to share that Ollie Kolkman passed away on December 20, 2023. Ollie was an important figure in local birding circles and was a dear friend to the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society. He was a great teacher and influence for many birders throughout the county, and was one of the key supporters of the fledgling Manchester (then known as the Mendocino Coast) Christmas Bird Count. I last saw Ollie on the Laguna Point viewing platform, where we enjoyed the morning scanning for seabirds. That brief visit was a wonderful journey through space and time as Ollie shared the knowledge he had gained from birding across the county for the past fifty years. Rest in peace, dear friend.

The following is taken from Ollie's obituary:

"He graduated from San Leandro High in 1952 and went to UC Berkeley where he graduated with a Bachelor of Science from the School of Forestry in 1958. Shortly thereafter, he was drafted into the army and, as a college-educated Conscientious Objector, was assigned as an English teacher for servicemen who hadn't completed high school. An avid birder, Ollie was known as "The Birdman of Mendocino County" and wrote a book entitled "The Birds of Mendocino County". He had the astounding ability to identify nearly any birds in the area and abroad based on sight or sound and could imitate the calls of many. His identification abilities also extended to plants, for which he could give both scientific and common names. Ollie was a very kind and caring individual; he always had a card or flowers to offer support to loved ones as they went through life events, and he was quick to step in and pay for a meal or help with other expenses. People who knew Ollie recognized him for his devoted attention to the environment and his practice of picking up litter alongside the roadways. Ollie will be missed by many as his life touched many hearts." The complete obituary can be found online at www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/ukiahdailyjournal/name/oliver-kolkman-obituary?id=54036667



FEBRUARY PRESENTATION

Tim Bray Presents:

“SEABIRDS AND THE MARINE FOOD WEB”

Monday, February 12 at 7:00 PM - Caspar Community Center



Wind-driven upwelling along the California coast drives an extraordinarily productive marine ecosystem, attracting many kinds of birds. Offshore marine conditions are far less productive and support a less diverse group of birds, many of which are seldom seen from shore. These two different ecologies are juxtaposed off the Mendocino coast, giving us the opportunity to see a wide variety of seabirds employing different feeding strategies.

This presentation begins with a review of the mechanics and biology of the nearshore and offshore ecosystems, before looking at some of the birds that rely on different parts of the marine food webs and the remarkable adaptations they display.

Tim Bray is a retired Hydrogeologist and currently President of the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society. He co-hosts a monthly radio program (The Ecology Hour) with Dr. Robert Spies, a marine biologist. An avid birder, he goes to sea as often as possible and organizes occasional pelagic field trips.

UPCOMING EVENTS



Gull eating a mussel at MacKerricher SP. Photo by Becky Bowen.

February Field Trip - MacKerricher State Park Saturday, February 10. Meet at 9:00AM

This year our February field trip will return to its traditional location- MacKerricher State Park. This park hosts the greatest variety of habitats along our coast: freshwater lake, open ocean, rocky headlands, sandy beaches, forests and coastal prairies. The late morning high tide should offer good views of shorebirds on the rocks off Laguna point. Meet at the ranger station by 9:00 a.m. Loaner binoculars are available, heavy rain cancels.

ENVIRONMENTAL PARTNERSHIP POTLUCK - SAVE THE DATE SUNDAY, MARCH 31

For more than twenty-five years, a small group of local organizations - your Mendocino Coast Audubon Society, the Mendocino Land Trust, Mendocino Area Parks Association, and the Dorothy King Young chapter of the California Native Plant Society - have gathered each spring to dine together, share their successes and challenges, and to honor a person or persons in recognition of their efforts to support and defend our local environment. This year's gathering will be hosted by the newest member - the Noyo Center for Marine Science. Please join us on at noon on Sunday, March 31, at the Marine Field Station in Noyo Harbor (the old Carine's restaurant). Look for more details in our March newsletter.



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

www.TheWharfFortBragg.com

The Wharf
RESTAURANT, LOUNGE & LODGING

CALENDAR

The Beginner's Birdwalk and the Early Birdwalk at the Gardens are continuing on the regular schedule. As always, check our website for the most up-to-date information, and keep up with the postings on our Facebook page.

FEBRUARY 2024

Saturday 3 - *Beginner's Bird Walk* 9:00 AM - Noon

Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens, 18220 Highway 1, Fort Bragg, CA 95437

Saturday 10 - *February Field Trip - MacKerricher State Park* 9:00 AM - Noon

Meet at the Ranger Station at 24100 MacKerricher Park Rd, Fort Bragg, CA 95437

Monday 12 - *Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Chapter Meeting* 7:00 PM - 8:00 PM

Join us for Tim Bray's presentation on Seabirds and the Marine Food Web

Tuesday 13 - *Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Board Meeting* 6:00 PM via Zoom

Wednesday 21 - *Early Bird Walk* 8:30 AM - Noon

Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens, 18220 Highway 1, Fort Bragg, CA 95437

MARCH 2024

Saturday 2 - *Beginner's Bird Walk* 9:00 AM - Noon

Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens, 18220 Highway 1, Fort Bragg, CA 95437

Tuesday 5 - *Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Board Meeting* 6:30 PM via Zoom

Wednesday 20 - *Early Bird Walk* 8:30 AM - Noon

Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens, 18220 Highway 1, Fort Bragg, CA 95437

Sunday 31 - *Environmental Potluck*

Hosted by Noyo Center for Marine Science at the Marine Field Station in Noyo Harbor

If you would like to help the Board maintain and expand the activities of our Chapter, please contact any of the Board members. You don't have to be a Board member to make a significant contribution to our Chapter.

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

www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org

www.facebook.com/mendocinocoastaudubon

MCAS BOARD MEMBERS AND PROGRAM CHAIRS 2023-2024

President	Tim Bray	tbray@mcn.org	(707) 734-0791
Vice President	David Jensen	djensen@mcn.org	(707) 964-8163
Secretary	Roger Adamson	radamson@mcn.org	
Treasurer	Jim Havlena	havlenas@fix.net	
Education	Pam Huntley	pjhuntley@hotmail.com	
Membership	Adam Hutchins	raptorous@me.com	(707) 734-3470
Zoom Czar	Nicolet Houtz	nicolethoutz@gmail.com	
Programs	Mary Glanville	rxdoc@cal.berkeley.edu	
Newsletter/Website	Megan Smithyman	mendobirding@gmail.com	
Off-Board Chairs:			
Scholarship Chair	Judy Steele	judys@mcn.org	
Social Media	Catherine Keegan	keegan@mcn.org	
Programs	Terra Fuller	terrafuller74@gmail.com	(707) 964-4675
Programs	Hayley Ross	hayleyhross@gmail.com	

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

P.O. BOX 2297

FORT BRAGG, CA, 95437

