



The Black Oystercatcher

Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Newsletter- September 2023

RECENT SIGHTINGS

by Roger Adamson



Murphy's Petrel, May 7 pelagic trip. Photo by Roger Adamson.

We had an excellent pelagic trip out of Noyo shortly after the May newsletter was completed. The best sightings were Hawaiian Petrel, Murphy's Petrel, and Laysan Albatross (May 7, numerous observers). Four Hawaiian Petrels were seen. These are found very infrequently on our trips out of Fort Bragg. We tallied seven Laysan Albatrosses, also an unusually high number. The major surprise was seeing Murphy's Petrels during several hours of the trip, with a total of over thirty observations. Moreover, with excellent weather and the birds coming in close to the boat, everyone on board had excellent views of these special birds. These were "life-birds" for several participants. Additionally, we saw nearly sixty Black-footed Albatross, always fun to see.

A Brewer's Sparrow, first seen May 2, was an unexpected treat at Noyo Headlands Park (SU). Brewer's is most closely related to Clay-colored Sparrow which it strongly resembles in non-breeding plumage. However, Brewer's Sparrow is noted as non-descript, indistinct, or sometimes just plain.

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Brewer's Sparrow, Noyo Headlands Park. Photo by Roger Adamson.

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It is gray-brown with gray-brown streaks. Brewer's is a small sparrow with a white eye-ring and a relatively long tail in comparison to other sparrows commonly seen here. The species breeds in sage brush shrub-land in the inter-mountain west and winter from southern California across Arizona to New Mexico and down Baja and into central Mexico. This may be only the third county record.

An extreme rarity, a Nazca Booby was reported, and photographed, riding a fishing boat a few miles out on 8 Jun (MD). It was seen again a few days later, also hitching a ride on a fishing vessel. This first county record somewhat frustrated keen birders because no one except the fisherfolk got to see it. This species breeds primarily on the Galapagos Islands and is rarely seen far from its breeding grounds.

During our August third-Wednesday outing to the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens we were treated to numerous Sphinx moths, also called Hummingbird Moths. The first impression of these is certainly that they are a small hummingbird. They feed and fly just like hummers. The species we found was the White-lined Sphinx, (*Hyles lineata*).



White-lined Sphinx moth, Botanical Gardens. Photo by Roger Adamson.

August always brings shorebird migration. While checking the beaches near the Garcia River mouth, a birder found a Bar-tailed Godwit on 21 Aug (MB). Populations of the Bar-tailed Godwit breed from Scandinavia east across Siberia and into north and western Alaska and they winter from Africa east to China and south to Australia and New Zealand. The bird Matt found was reportedly only the fourth county record and was thought to be from the Siberian population. The Alaska population is noted as able to accomplish the longest non-stop migration of any species, from Alaska to New Zealand, over 10,000 km and nine days.

Thanks to the following for reports:

Shannon Underhill (SU), Mike Daniels (MD), and Matt Brady (MB).

HALF-DAY PELAGIC TRIP REPORT, SUNDAY AUGUST 27

by Tim Bray

We had a great afternoon trip on the Kraken out to the upper Noyo Canyon area, about 10 miles offshore, in very nice weather. Almost immediately after leaving the harbor we spotted some whale spouts. We took a short detour and were treated to some good views of Humpback Whales - the first of many. Resuming our journey toward the deeper water, we spotted several pairs of Common Murres, half-grown chicks accompanied by their fathers. Common Murres "fledge" before they can fly, by jumping or falling off the cliffs where they hatched, bouncing off rocks, and landing in the water. Once there, they can swim and are accompanied by the male parent, who will feed them for the next three weeks or so until the chick can dive and forage for itself. The females leave when the chick hits the water, and take no further part in rearing the young.



Black-footed Albatrosses. Photo by Tim Bray.

Continuing our journey offshore, we soon began to encounter a few Sooty Shearwaters. As we pushed farther out we encountered large "rafts" of them sitting on the water - hundreds in long lines stretching north and south as far as we could see. On our approach they would attempt to fly, but many of them were apparently full of food, struggling to get airborne. We spotted our first Buller's Shearwaters, beautiful birds with a striking gray-and-black pattern on their backs, mixed in among the Sootys. Black-footed Albatrosses began to appear as well as Pink-footed Shearwaters, and we also began seeing both Cassin's and Rhinoceros Auklets on the water, and small flocks of Red-necked Phalaropes. As we approached the deepwater canyon, the numbers of birds (and whales) increased dramatically. We stopped and put out some chum, which immediately drew in the Albatrosses and a couple of Northern Fulmars as well as a noisy flock of squabbling juvenile California and Western Gulls. It was great fun watching the Albatrosses chase food tossed out by the deckhands.

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After that, we continued another couple of miles into deeper water. Seabird numbers continued to increase. We saw swarms of them, hundreds of birds at a time, circling and hitting the water, apparently diving on schools of baitfish. We stopped again to put out chum and this time drew an even larger crowd, including seventeen Black-footed Albatrosses who came right up to the boat to get rockfish carcasses thrown to them by the deckhands. Many Gulls joined in and all that activity drew in a Long-tailed Jaeger that circled the boat, and a Pomarine Jaeger a few minutes later. There were so many birds it was hard to even know where to look. Mike Curry spotted a bird sitting on the water, and Roger Adamson got a photo of our only Sabine's Gull of the day - a bird I was looking for but missed seeing in all the frenzy.



*Hawaiian Petrel, May 7 pelagic trip.
Photo by Roger Adamson.*

Eventually, we felt we had seen all we were going to see there, so we moved on, seeing breaching and tail-slapping Humpbacks and more large swarms of seabirds. Whale spouts were in view almost continuously, and at times one could look in any direction and see them. Two people got very brief glimpses of a probable Tufted Puffin, and we circled around trying to re-find it, but no luck. Albatrosses continued to accompany us, repeatedly circling around the boat. The trip back to the harbor was punctuated by more Humpback Whales and seabirds, and an early-arriving Herring Gull.

eBird checklist, with photos, here: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S148317448>

Big thanks to Captain Richard Thornton of Anchor Charter Boats and his excellent crew, Jonah Leland and Kevin Brennfleck. They were wonderful to work with, as always, and helped make this a really fun trip. Thanks also to Bob Keiffer for helping spot and identify these confusing and difficult birds; I learn from him every time we go out together.

I hope to do another of these half-day trips in October if there is enough interest, and possibly some shorter whale-and-bird-watching trips as well. If you are not already on my e-mail notification list, contact me (trbay@mcn.org) and ask to be added.



A Search for Missing Whistling Swans

If you have copies of The Whistling Swan newsletter from 2007 or earlier, we would dearly love to scan them so they can be posted to our website. Please contact Dave Jensen at 707-326-8815 or djensen@mcn.org if you can help us preserve your chapter's history. Thank you.

BOARD BUSINESS

by Tim Bray

Since 2020, we have not held the annual meeting of the membership to vote on Officers and Directors of the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society, because we did not meet in-person. This year we lacked a Nominations chair to present a slate of candidates for Directors and Officers. To preserve the functioning of the Board, I reappointed those Directors willing to continue in their roles during that period. We now have several serving Directors who have “termed out” without successors. They have agreed to continue serving until May 2024.

Two of our long-serving Directors have reached the end of their terms and retired from the Board: Programs Chair Terra Fuller, and Programs Co-chair Hayley Ross. They served us very well through some extraordinary times. They figured out how to make Zoom work for us and kept our Chapter programs going with quality presentations despite the pandemic disruptions. It was an amazing effort and a great success, and I cannot thank them enough for all the work they put into it. Fortunately for all of us, they have both agreed to continue serving as off-Board members of the Programs Committee.

Even more fortunately, two people have volunteered to join the Board. Mary Glanville has agreed to take up the position of Programs Chair, and I have provisionally appointed her to the Board, pending approval by the membership at the May 2024 meeting. Our Newsletter Editor and Website manager, Megan Smithyman, has also agreed to join the Board, and I have therefore also provisionally appointed her Newsletter/Website Chair. I hope you are as pleased as I am to welcome them to their new roles.

The Mendocino Coast Audubon Society is still in need of a Director who can chair the Nominations committee and present a slate of candidates to the membership next May. This should be someone with a lot of contacts in our community, who can help identify and recruit new Board members and get us back into compliance with our By-laws. It’s a critical role and one that greatly affects our Chapter, as the Board sets policy, directs our activities, and manages our budget. This position requires no birding skills, just an interest in bird conservation and good communications.

For now, we continue to operate, albeit irregularly, with a great group of people dedicated to advancing bird conservation and helping people in our community learn about and appreciate our wild birds. Thanks to all of them for sticking with it through the last three years, and thanks to all of you for your support as well.



Great Blue Heron. Photo by M. Smithyman.

SEPTEMBER EVENTS

Ryan Klausch Presents:

USING FIRE AND FIRE SURROGATES TO RESTORE HABITAT HETEROGENEITY ON THE SONOMA COAST

Monday, September 18 at 7:00 PM
Caspar Community Center



The Sonoma-Mendocino Coast District of California State Parks has 62 miles of coastline, remnant old-growth forest, pygmy forests, Sargent cypress woodlands, intact coastal prairies, coastal pine forests, coastal dune systems, oak woodlands, and rhododendron groves. Over the approximately 45,000 acres, the District has been impacted by a legacy of fire exclusion, timber harvest, development, passively managed grazing, World War II era farming, illicit cannabis cultivation, military training, and non-native species. Fire suppression has been generally successful in preventing large, catastrophic wildfires in our park units. Unfortunately, most habitats and species in California are adapted to fire in some capacity. Fire exclusion reduces habitat and spatial heterogeneity and in turn reduces resilience to future disturbance events. Ryan will introduce California State Park's Wildfire and Forest Resilience Program and discuss strategies for reintroducing fire into some of the most beloved parks in the state of California.

Ryan Klausch is an Environmental Scientist and the Wildfire and Forest Resilience Program lead for the Sonoma-Mendocino Coast District of California State Parks. Ryan graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Wildlife Ecology from the University of Wisconsin, where he developed his foundation in natural resource management. His first prescribed burn took place with the U.S. Navy in longleaf pine forests for the benefit of gopher tortoise habitat. As a resource advisor on large, catastrophic wildfires, he witnessed the impacts of high intensity fire and collateral damage of our efforts to suppress fires and protect life and property. Ryan's primary goal is to reintroduce fire to fire-adapted ecosystems while maximizing the benefits of natural disturbance and minimizing impacts to species-at-risk and nearby communities.

SEPTEMBER EVENTS



CALIFORNIA COASTAL CLEANUP DAY

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 23
9:00 AM - 12:00 PM

On Saturday, September 23, friends of the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society will again participate in the annual Coastal Cleanup Day. Each year your chapter is responsible for cleanup efforts along the Ten Mile Beach. This year Angela and Matt Liebenberg will serve as our team leaders, following in the footsteps of Art Morley, who tirelessly served in that role since our first beach cleanup many years ago.

Volunteers should meet at the south end of Ten Mile Bridge at 9 AM. Trash and recycle bags are provided, as are latex gloves. It is recommended that you bring your own work gloves and items that make outdoor work more comfortable, such as water, a hat, and sunscreen. This event is traditionally finished by noon.

VIRGIN CREEK FIELD TRIP

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 9
9:00 AM - 12:00 PM

The inaugural field trip of the 2023-24 season will occur on Saturday, September 9, when we visit Virgin Creek Beach north of Fort Bragg. Virgin Creek is one of the best shorebird locations along our coast. Many species can be seen here during fall migration, including the Western Snowy Plover (listed as threatened on the endangered species list).

We have had some terrific trips to Virgin Creek in previous years. Given the increasing level of weekend visitation to this and other beaches along our coast, we will meet at 9 a.m. at the unpaved parking area on the east side of Highway 1 north of Geo Aggregates (the old Baxman plant). We will walk the trail across the meadow to the Haul Road bridge, then go down to the beach at the creek mouth.

We will proceed north along the beach and then walk "The Enchanted Trail" to search for migratory songbirds and other woodland species. Birders at any experience level will enjoy this trip. Join us and learn more about the feathered tourists who visit our beaches. Participants are advised to wear sturdy shoes and bring water. Loaner binoculars will be available for those who need them.



Brown Pelicans. Photo by M. Smithyman.

UPCOMING EVENTS

MENDOCINO COAST BIG DAY SATURDAY, OCTOBER 14

October 14 is going to be a Big Day- it's time to pick your teammates! That's right. We are all invited to join Cornell Laboratory's October Big Day. You can participate alone from the comfort of your home or at your favorite birding locations, but we encourage you to enjoy a day in the field with one or more of your best birding buds. Since the count period ends at midnight, we will have an informal gathering on the following afternoon to share our results and congratulate the team with the highest (believable) species count.

Look for more details in the October newsletter, but it's not too early to select your teammates and start planning your route.

For more information on this event, visit ebird.org/news/october-big-day-2023



*White-crowned Sparrow.
Photo by M. Smithyman*

FIELD TRIP - SOUTH COAST RAPTORS SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 11

Meet at the south end of the Navarro River bridge by 9 a.m. for our traditional fall safari down the coast. Bring a lunch and be prepared to carpool.



White-crowned Sparrow. Photo by M. Smithyman

CALL FOR ENTRIES by Megan Smithyman

Calling all photographers! We would love to showcase your latest and greatest shots on the newly updated Mendocino Audubon website, set to launch very soon. If you have high quality photos that you would like to contribute to help populate the site, we would greatly appreciate it.

Please send all submissions to:

Mendobirding@gmail.com

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.

SEPTEMBER 2023

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

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

Saturday 9 - *Virgin Creek Field Trip* 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM

See page 7 for more information.

Monday 18 - *Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Meeting* 7:00 PM

Caspar Community Center. 15051 Caspar Rd, Caspar, CA 95420

Presentation on fire and habitat restoration by Ryan Klausch. See page 6 for more.

Wednesday 20 - *Early Bird Walk* 8:00 AM - Noon

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

Saturday 23 - *California Coastal Cleanup Day* 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Meet at the south end of Ten Mile Bridge at 9 AM. See page 7 for more.

OCTOBER 2023

Tuesday 3 - *Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Board Meeting* 6:00 PM

Saturday 7 - *Beginner's Bird Walk* 9:00 AM - Noon

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

Saturday 14 - *October Big Day*

Monday 16 - *Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Meeting* 7:00 PM

Caspar Community Center. 15051 Caspar Rd, Caspar, CA 95420

Wednesday 18 - *Early Bird Walk* 8:00 AM - Noon

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

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
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Treasurer	Jim Havlena	havlenas@fix.net	
Education	Pam Huntley	pjhuntley@hotmail.com	
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Zoom Czar	Nicolet Houtz	nicolethoutz@gmail.com	
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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

