



# The Black Oystercatcher

Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Newsletter- April 2024

## RARE SIGHTINGS

By Roger Adamson



Laughing Gull, 31 March 2024, found by Catherine Keegan and Tim Bray on Virgin Creek beach, photo Roger Adamson.

We had very few rare birds reported during March. No doubt, this was partly a result of rainy weather keeping us all indoors. With improving weather and the changing season we will soon see lots of migrants. The Baltimore Oriole continued near Albion out on Middle Ridge and was reported on 3/1 (CK & TB). Also continuing from early in the year was a Western Tanager seen in Ukiah on 3/1 (GG). An early returning Nashville Warbler was found in Riverside Park, Ukiah, on 3/4 (CV). A female Long-tailed Duck resting in Virgin Creek for several days was first reported 3/14 (LWR). A Black-throated Gray Warbler was heard 3/23 at a home just north of Fort Bragg (LWR). For a last-minute surprise, on 3/30, Catherine and Tim sighted a Laughing Gull on Virgin Creek Beach (CK & TB). A sixth county record, this species breeds primarily along the Atlantic coast from Texas to Maine. Its wintering territory is widespread from Virginia in the north to coastal Peru and some in Baja California. A regular vagrant in southern

Continued on page 2

## Inside This Issue

<b>Rare Sightings</b> By Roger Adamson	1-2
<b>Trip Report: Pelagic</b> By Tim Bray	2-3
<b>Short-tailed Albatross</b> By Tim Bray	4
<b>Trip Report: Owling</b> By Tim Bray	5
<b>April Presentation</b> By Justin Garwood	5
<b>Board Announcements</b> New board members	6
<b>Celebrations of Life</b>	7
<b>Upcoming Events</b>	8
<b>MCAS Calendar</b>	9
<b>MCAS Board of Directors</b>	10



By-the-wind Sailors (*Velella velella*), a small jellyfish. More on page 2. Photo by Roger Adamson.

*Continued from page 1*

California, Laughing Gulls are much less frequently found north of San Francisco. Excellent find.

By far the most unexpected and truly rare bird, a Short-tailed Albatross, was reported by observers working on the fishing vessel Princess out of Noyo Harbor. The bird was seen over Noyo Canyon about 12 miles northwest of Fort Bragg on 3/21. Tim Bray organized a hopeful trip to look for the bird on the 26th. While the search for the Short-tailed Albatross was unsuccessful, we had an excellent day of birding having found one Laysan Albatross and about 20 Black-footed Albatrosses, the two more common north Pacific albatross species. Short-tailed Albatross breed on only a few islands off Japan and forage across the north Pacific. Thought to have once numbered in the millions, feather collecting decimated the population and the situation was exacerbated by a volcanic eruption on one of the major nesting islands in 1902. By 1987 fewer than 200 adults were observed. Conservation measures have succeeded in raising the population toward 10,000 individuals. However, the species remains listed as "vulnerable."

Thanks to the following for their reports: Catherine Keegan (CK), Tim Bray (TB), George Gibbs (GG), Chuck Vaughn (CV), Lisa Walker-Roseman (LWR).



*Laysan Albatross, 26 March 2024, about twelve miles NW of Fort Bragg, Roger Adamson.*

## TRIP REPORT- FEATHERS & FLUKES, 8 MARCH 2024

**By Tim Bray**



*Grey whale fluke, photo by Roger Adamson.*

We got lucky with the weather on this one, catching a brief period of calm winds and calm seas between storm systems, and the marine life put on a great show. An out-of-season Heermann's Gull flew in before the *Kraken* had even left the dock. Heading out of Noyo Bay we soon found several Gray Whales moving north, and got some good looks as they came up for air and even did a little pectoral-fin waving at us. After that we headed farther out to look for birds, and for a time it seemed like maybe that was a mistake - the ocean was flat and blue and apparently empty, except for immense numbers of By-the-wind Sailors (*Velella velella*), a small jellyfish.

At the upper Noyo Canyon, about eight miles offshore, things picked up. We spotted Gulls standing on a driftwood log, some of which were Black-legged Kittiwakes. These are a true "Sea Gull" in

*Continued on page 3*

*Continued from page 2*

that they spend their entire lives at sea, even nesting on sea-cliffs. They let us get up close for good looks and many photographs. Nearby, an immature Glaucous-winged Gull was eating the Velella, an unusual sight.

After proceeding a couple more miles down the canyon we stopped and put out a fish-oil slick, which almost immediately drew multiple Black-footed Albatrosses. Several of them circled the boat at close range before settling on the water to pick up our floating chum. At one point we counted nine Albatrosses in view at one time. That action in turn drew a number of Gulls, including a beautiful first-cycle Iceland (Thayer's) Gull that posed for photos right off the stern. A distant Northern Fulmar did not come in to investigate the slick, as they usually do. Two birders spotted a very distant black-and-white Shearwater that may have been a rarity, but did not come close enough to identify.

While all that was holding our attention, our Captain spotted something breaking the surface a little farther out. That turned out to be a small pod of Pacific White-sided Dolphins. They were initially foraging but a few came over to play with the boat, riding the wave thrown off the bow, giving us a real thrill. That used up the last of our time and we ran back to the dock, where the Heermann's Gull was still hanging around.



*Iceland Gull, photo by Roger Adamson.*



*Black-footed Albatross, photo by Roger Adamson.*

It was a very successful trip on a balmy day with better conditions than we had any reason to expect! Many thanks to Bob Keiffer, Roger Adamson, and Todd Easterla for helping people find and identify the birds; Sarah Grimes and Sarah Sundberg from the Noyo Center for helping us understand the mammals and other marine life; and Captain Richard Thornton for arranging the nice weather.

We will continue looking for opportunities to do these kinds of trips to help people see and appreciate the wonders of our offshore marine ecosystem. To be notified of upcoming trips, email [audubon@mcn.org](mailto:audubon@mcn.org) and ask to be added to the pelagics list.

List of birds found, with many photographs, here: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/208073>

**SHORT-TAILED ALBATROSS CHASE****By Tim Bray**

On Thursday March 21, the *F/V Princess* texted me a photo of a big Albatross with a huge pink bill that was sitting off the stern of their boat while they were fishing for Sablefish over the upper Noyo Canyon. One glance confirmed it was a Short-tailed Albatross, one of the rarest birds in the North Pacific. Before the 19th century, there were millions of them, but the plumage trade in the late 19th century led to their extirpation from the few islands off Japan where they nested. Like most seabirds, they are unafraid of humans, having evolved in an environment where we posed no threat to them, and this made them easy prey for the hunters. By the 1930s the islands were emptied and a scientific expedition in 1949 found no evidence of nesting, so they were declared extinct.

Albatrosses spend their first several years out at sea, not returning to land until they mature five to ten years after fledging. This saved the species, as there were a few dozen juveniles out at sea when the adults were wiped out, and those juveniles eventually returned and began reproducing. Protected from hunting, their population has recovered to a few thousand individuals. Most of those forage from Japan north to the Bering Sea and east to the Gulf of Alaska. Some range south along the continental shelf to Canada, and a few get as far south as California. The California Bird Records Committee lists 67 sightings off California from 1949 to 2023.

Excited by the prospect of seeing one of these magnificent birds, I organized a “chase boat” and got a dozen people on board the *Kraken* the following Tuesday. We had a fabulous morning on the water, with Black-footed Albatrosses coming and going almost all the time, and every time a new one arrived we got hopeful. None however sported the enormous pink bill that we were hoping for. Our consolation prize was a Laysan Albatross, initially a bit coy but eventually providing nice looks to everyone on the boat. Entertainment was provided by the many Black-footed Albatrosses (we counted 19 at one time) squabbling with each other and the many Gulls that were drawn to our chum.



## FIELD TRIP REPORT - OWLING WITH MIKE STEPHENS

We had near-perfect weather conditions for our Owling field trip to Philo-Greenwood Road, a welcome relief after having this trip rained-out the last couple of years. Fourteen of us crowded into three cars for a great night of owling.

Our first of the evening was a pair of Great-horned Owls carrying on a lively duet. In addition to the Great-horned Owls we heard Western Screech-owls, a very chatty Northern Saw-whet Owl, and the best bird of the night - a Northern Spotted Owl.

The Northern Spotted Owls used to be easy to locate, because they would readily respond to calls, allowing surveyors to find their nests and monitor their breeding success. The Barred Owl has forced the Northern Spotted Owl to alter its behavior, and the Northern Spotted Owls often do not respond to the standard survey protocols, making it harder to protect nest sites and monitor their populations. Fortunately for us, this one did respond, although with a call few of us would have recognized as a Spotted Owl, or even as an Owl at all. Mike told us that call is known among the surveyors as the "crow-bark."

At each stop on the trip up the ridge, Mike gave us more information about the different species of owls that live there, how they behave, the different ways they respond to calling, their conservation status, and the threats they face, and much more. It was a wonderful way to learn about these endlessly fascinating birds, out in the woods under the stars on a quiet night, listening to them calling back at us from the darkness.



*Justin Garwood Presents*

**FISH AND FROGS: REVERSING WIDESPREAD LEGACY IMPACTS OF INTRODUCED SPORTFISH  
ON DECLINING AMPHIBIANS IN GLACIAL LAKE BASINS OF THE KLAMATH MOUNTAINS**

**Monday, April 15 from 7:00 - 8:00 PM**

**Caspar Community Center**

Justin is an Environmental Scientist with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's Northern Region Fisheries where he has worked on landscape-level population monitoring for coastal salmonids and Klamath Range amphibians over the past 20 years to inform species recovery. He grew up in Trinity County and holds a B.S. in Fisheries and an M.S. in Wildlife at CalPoly Humboldt. Justin is co-editor of the book: *The Klamath Mountains: A Natural History*.

## BOARD ANNOUNCEMENTS

### WELCOME NEW BOARD MEMBERS

We are proud to announce that three members of your chapter have volunteered to serve as board members. An election will be held at our annual membership meeting in May. The following is a very brief introduction to each candidate.

#### **Matthew “Matt” Franks**

Matt grew up on the Mendocino Coast and has been back since 2020, after 20 years living in other parts of the country including Ohio, Maine, and Georgia. He now lives south of Fort Bragg with his husband and works in higher education. Matt has dabbled in birding since he was a kid, and has taken a more serious interest since moving back to California. You will often see him on Audubon field trips, and as a board member he hopes to help get more diverse local folks into birds and birding. He also plays in the local band Queer Country and loves going backpacking.

#### **Mary Glanville**

Mary came to the Mendocino Coast in 2007 after spending many years in the San Francisco Bay Area. She now lives in Cleone, near MacKerricher Park. She has a Bachelor of Science in Marine Biology and a Doctor of Pharmacy degree from UCSF. She was inspired to pursue birding after watching Tim Bray’s presentation on pelagic birds and the marine food web. Since then she has attended as many birding activities as her schedule allows, both locally and in points far beyond.”It’s my pleasure to support MCAS as a board member because this is both a great organization and a wonderful group of people.”

#### **Megan Smithyman**

Megan grew up on the east coast and attended Audubon summer camps in high school, participating in field research projects studying Common Loons and Grey Jays. After moving to the Mendocino Coast in 2011, she fell in love with the wildlife of MacKerricher State Park, living near the Inglenook Fen. She has volunteered for the Big River Bird Survey through the Mendocino Land Trust and was asked to serve as the editor of the Black Oystercatcher newsletter in 2017. Recently she was gifted a nice camera and has since been enjoying bird photography. It is her pleasure to contribute to an organization that has fostered a life long love of birds and the natural world.



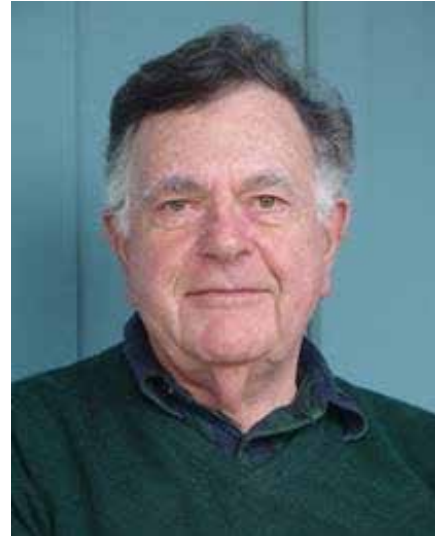
*Bald Eagle on the South Caspar headlands getting harassed, March 23, 2024. Photo by Megan Smithyman.*

## CELEBRATIONS OF LIFE

*Maureen Eppstein and Family Invite You to Join Us in  
Celebrating the Life of*

**Anthony D. (Tony) Eppstein  
(1937 – 2023)**

**Saturday April 6 at 2:00 PM  
at the Mendocino Community Center  
998 School St. Mendocino, CA 95460**



Tony was a long-time member and ardent supporter of this chapter who freely gave his time, talent and other resources whenever asked. When Tony moved to the coast after retirement, he brought with him technical skills that were sorely needed by this organization. Tony created the chapter's first website, an electronic database for our membership records and developed our first email list. Tony served as the Vice-President of your chapter from 2007-2012, and for several years he and his wife Maureen hosted our board meetings at their home. Tony Eppstein was the consummate gentleman, and he lived a life that deserves to be celebrated.

### A Party in Memory of Art Morley

**Saturday, April 13 at 6:00 PM  
at the Caspar Community Center  
15051 Caspar Rd. Caspar, CA 95420**

Inviting Birders, Naturalists, Environmentalists,  
Historians, Weed Warriors, Musicians, etc



Friends and admirers of the late Art Morley are invited to gather to celebrate his life and contributions to our community on Saturday, April 13th at 6 pm at the Caspar Community Center. This will be a potluck affair with music and shared stories. A photo display is planned, so, if you can, bring photos and mementos to add to the pleasure of remembering this true local hero.

Volunteers who can help with organizing, setting up, and cleaning up, are welcome. Contact Jary Stavely ([jstavely@mcn.org](mailto:jstavely@mcn.org)) or Jackie Wollenberg ([jwoll@mcn.org](mailto:jwoll@mcn.org)) with questions, ideas, or plans to attend.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### APRIL FIELD TRIP TO HENDY WOODS STATE PARK

**Saturday, April 20 8:00 AM - Noon**

Due to the busy calendar of events this April, our monthly field trip will occur on April 20, the third Saturday of the month. Meet at the bridge on Philo Greenwood Road. We will bird from the bridge, then go into the park. Five or six species of Swallows can be seen here, including Purple Martins nesting in tall snags. Black-headed Grosbeaks, and Black-throated Gray Warblers are regularly seen. Western Tanager, Hermit Warbler, and Green Heron have also been seen, sometimes from the bridge. Cassin's Vireo and Barred Owl can also be heard here. This field trip will likely end around noon, unless the birding continues to be good, so bring a lunch, something to drink, and be prepared for an enjoyable visit to one of the area's special locations. Please note that Hendy Woods State Park charges an entrance fee.

Leader: Dave Jensen

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### MENDOCINO ENVIRONMENTAL PARTNERS POTLUCK DINNER

**Sunday, April 14 from Noon - 2:30 p.m.**

**Noyo Center Marine Field Station | 32430 N. Harbor Drive, Fort Bragg**

You are invited to the Annual Potluck Dinner of the Mendocino Environmental Partners, hosted by the Noyo Center for Marine Science at their Marine Field Station in the Noyo Harbor. The potluck begins at noon, followed by annual updates from each organization at 1:00 p.m. and the presentation of the Matthew Coleman Environmental Service Award.

#### What To Bring

Please bring your own plate, utensils, preferred beverage, and a potluck dish to serve eight.

**Parking is limited** in Noyo Harbor, so carpooling is strongly suggested.

**Questions? Contact Michael Hicks at [michael@noyocenter.org](mailto:michael@noyocenter.org)**

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](http://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.

### APRIL 2024

**Tuesday 2 - Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Board Meeting 6:00 PM via Zoom**

**Saturday 6 - Beginner's Bird Walk 9:00 AM - Noon**

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

**Sunday 14 - Environmental Potluck Noon - 2:30 PM**

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

**Monday 15 - Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Chapter Meeting 7:00 PM - 8:00 PM**

Join us for Justin Garwood's presentation on 'Reversing widespread impacts of sportfish on declining amphibians in glacial lake basins of the Klamath Mountains.'  
At the Caspar Community Center.

**Wednesday 17 - Early Bird Walk 8:00 AM - Noon**

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

**Sunday 20 - April Field Trip to Hendy Woods State Park 8:00 AM - Noon**

Meet at the bridge on Philo Greenwood Road. See page 8 for more info.

### MAY 2024

**Saturday 4 - Beginner's Bird Walk 9:00 AM - Noon**

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

**Wednesday 15 - Early Bird Walk 8:00 AM - Noon**

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

**Monday 20 - Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Chapter Meeting 7:00 PM - 8:00 PM**

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

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

