# The Black Oystercatcher

Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Newsletter- November 2023


## BIG DAY RECAP

by Dave Jensen

*Red-tailed Hawk photo by Tim Bray.*

On October 14, thousands of birders around the world set out to record every bird they found. Cornell University's eBird reported that 376,109 people in 191 countries went birding with eBird and/or Merlin; 36,332 eBirders submitted 83,735 checklists; 7,525 species were reported; and participants submitted 48,749 photos and 1,247 sound recordings to the Macaulay Library.

Members of your chapter were part of this record-breaking effort. Nine participants visited their favorite birding locations from Newport Ranch to Point Arena and reported 111 species to Tim Bray's Mendocino Coast October Big Day 2023 trip list on eBird (ebird.org/tripreport/165073). Roger Adamson's team edged out "the competition" with a total of 77 species, while Dave Jensen's team received the Exxon/Mobil Customer Appreciation Award for logging 138 miles.

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*Black-footed Albatross photo Tim Bray. See more on page 4.*

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Notable sightings on that day included fifteen Canada (Gray) Jays near the Navarro River, five Western Cattle Egrets (four at Pudding Creek and another on the Garcia River flats), one Swamp Sparrow at Caspar Pond, a late Pigeon Guillemot, an early Black Scoter, and a Varied Thrush. As is the case in any such event, a few species were reported AWOL that day, most notably American Robins (still feeding in the hills east of the coast) and Ferruginous Hawks (which should be present on our November 11 field trip to the south coast).

Other birders in Mendocino County also joined in the Big Day event, resulting in an eBird total of 133 species reported by 28 observers. For more information on this world-wide tally, go to ebird.org/news/october-big-day-2023-results.

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# RECENT SIGHTINGS

by Roger Adamson

*Swamp Sparrow, 17 Oct 2023, Caspar Pond photo Roger Adamson.*

We reported a good variety of birds this month. The hybrid American/Black Oystercatcher returned to Virgin Creek beach on 9/30 (LWR). A Black-necked Stilt was seen at Ukiah WWTP on 10/1 (CV). White-breasted Nuthatch, unusual on the coast, was reported on 10/2 on the Old Smith Ranch Trail at Ten Mile River (SU). Two more Orchard Orioles brought our total for the fall to about ten individuals, one on Albion Ridge on 10/3 (TB & CK) and one on 10/8 in Riverside Park, Ukiah (CV). This has been an unusually good year for Bobolink; one made its way to Westport on 10/5 (GH). Two Black-and-White Warblers were reported on successive days (10/8 and 10/9) at the Navarro River and on Miner Hole Road by one observer (TE); we will never know if it was the same bird! On 10/11 along Mendocino Pass Road Clark's Nutcracker, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, and a late Hammond's Flycatcher were all reported (TE). There are good birds up there, but they are hard to reach. Tropical Kingbird, an almost yearly visitor, was found at Cabrillo Point (10/9, NG) and at Manchester SP (10/16, KK & MP).

A Swamp Sparrow was briefly seen at the Caspar Pond 10/14 (LWR) and then two or three more were found on 10/28 (also, LWR). Western Cattle Egret were reported from both Garcia River flats (TB, CK, DJ) and Pudding Creek (DJ) on 10/14; at Pudding Creek there were four. An Evening Grosbeak was a great yardbird just north of Fort Bragg on 10/17 (LWR). An American Bittern appeared at the Willits WWTP 10/21 (MdSA). A Rock Sandpiper, another almost annual sighting, was reported on 10/26 just north of Laguna Point (RA).

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Two birds deserve individual mention. A Franklin's Gull was reported by two separate observers the morning of 10/15 at Laguna Point (GH) and Virgin Creek (LWR). This species is an inland breeder, preferring fresh-water marshes in the northern Great Plains from Nebraska into Canada. The common migration route is south to the Gulf Coast and through Mexico and Central America to the primary wintering area of coastal Peru and Argentina. They are not considered rare on either U.S. coast during migration but can be called infrequent. I believe this was the first one seen in Mendocino since 2015.

*Franklin's Gull, 6 Oct 2023, near Laguna Point, photo Roger Adamson.*

On 10/14 a Common Ground Dove was reported at Usal (CB). The next day a Common Ground Dove was photographed at Spring Ranch (JL). The first observer checked the photos of the second observer and, due to the presence of some disarrayed feathers (molt or illness?), the first observer confirmed that the photographs probably were of the same bird initially seen 38 miles further north. What are the chances that the same, very rare, small, unobtrusive bird would be seen on successive days at two widely separated locations! These are birds of Mexico, Texas, and points south of us. This was the second county record.

Thanks to the following for reports: Lisa Walker-Roseman (LWR), Chuck Vaughn (CV), Shannon Underhill (SU), Tim Bray (TB), Catherine Keegan (CK), Gjon Hazard (GH), Todd Easterla (TE), Nancy Gronert (NG), Karen Kenney (KK), Marjorie Powell (MP), Dave Jensen (DJ), Marisela de Santa Ana (MdSA), Roger Adamson (RA), Bob Schallman (BS), Judy Meredith (JM), Claire Bernd (CB), and Jen Leonard (JL).

*Rock Sandpiper with Surfbird, 26 Oct 2023, near Laguna Point, photo Roger Adamson.*

*Hybrid AMOY/BLOY at Virgin Creek Beach, North side, photo by Lisa D. Walker-Roseman*

## TRIP REPORT: FEATHERS AND FLUKES by Tim Bray

*Black-footed Albatross photo by Tim Bray.*

Our collaboration with the Noyo Center for Marine Science worked out really well. Calm seas and little wind made for excellent conditions, and the marine life showed up just as we had expected. Right off the bat, Sarah Grimes of the Noyo Center pointed out a small group of Steller's Sea Lions adorning the red-and-white buoy outside Noyo Bay. These northern pinnipeds are much larger, and much less abundant here, than the California Sea Lions we saw in the harbor and on the red buoy.

Heading out to sea, we soon spotted our first Sooty Shearwaters, which were to be the most abundant birds of the day. A little farther offshore we began seeing a few Pink-footed Shearwaters as well. These two species were abundant throughout the day, often providing great views as they glided along just above the water. As a bonus, we also spotted a few handsome Buller's Shearwaters, though they remained frustratingly distant.

Pairs of Humpback Whales appeared in several places, and we were treated to wonderful views when a pair surfaced very near to the boat. This has been a terrific summer to see them here.

Pacific White-sided Dolphins were seen as we approached the undersea Noyo Canyon, dispersed in small groups rather than forming a large pod. There appeared to be smaller ones, probably this year's calves, with the adults. True to their reputation, they were playful and social, with several coming to the boat and riding the wave off the bow.

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Reaching the upper Noyo Canyon, where the sea floor drops to more than 2,000 feet, we stopped to put out a "slick" of fish oil. This is done to lure in the "tubenoses" – seabirds that use specialized olfactory systems to find food in the open ocean. Soon we had several Black-footed Albatrosses circling the boat and landing nearby, giving everyone terrific views of these marvelous birds. Although rarely seen from shore, they are common just a few miles out, and are not shy about approaching boats. A lone Northern Fulmar also came by, drawn by the scent, but didn't find anything to eat and so moved on.

*Pink-footed Shearwater, 21 Oct 2023, photo Roger Adamson*

Much less common and much more difficult to find and identify were two Pomarine Jaegers that flew past us without even pausing to investigate. These are predatory seabirds, "kleptoparasites" that get much of their food by harassing and robbing Gulls and Terns of their catches.

Probably the best marine mammal of the day came just as we were turning to head back in, when four Northern Right-whale Dolphins approached the bow and gave us fantastic views. These dolphins are quite distinctive because they lack a dorsal fin. Much less abundant and less commonly seen than the Pacific White-sided, they are a real treat to watch.

*Buller's Shearwater photo by Tim Bray.*

After all that, we returned to port satisfied and happy, adding one more marine mammal when Sarah spotted a young Elephant Seal loafing on the Noyo Beach.

It was a marvelous afternoon and we hope to do trips like that more often. The Noyo Center is currently planning a shorter trip on the Telstar in November, so if you are interested, get on their mailing list: www.noyocenter.org

## TAXONOMY TIME by Roger Adamson

The recent annual update of the Clements Checklist of Birds of the World, commonly known as Clements Checklist, has again changed the taxonomy of bird species. Changes include 3 new species, 124 additional species due to splits, and 16 species lost due to lumps for a net increase of 111 species. This affects only a very few of our local records. The changes will be most apparent to those using tools provided through the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, including Merlin, eBird, Birds of the World, and the Macaulay Library.

Cattle Egret is split, and our bird is now the **Western Cattle Egret**; Eastern Cattle Egret is found in India and east to Japan and New Guinea so should not be found here.

The Pacific-slope Flycatcher has been lumped with the Cordilleran Flycatcher and is now once again called the **Western Flycatcher**.

And, if one of us is fortunate enough to see a Northern Goshawk, we will now record it as an **American Goshawk**, distinct from the Eurasian Goshawk.

See: https://ebird.org/news/2023-taxonomy-update

# NOVEMBER PRESENTATION

*Chris West Presents:*

## THE NORTHERN CALIFORNIA CONDOR RESTORATION PROGRAM: CULTURAL AND ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

## Monday, November 20 at 7:00 PM
## Caspar Community Center

You are invited to the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society's meeting on Monday, November 20th, 7:00 P.M. at the Caspar Community Center.

We are fortunate to have Chris West giving a presentation that night, titled, "The Northern California Condor Restoration Program: Cultural and Ecological Restoration in the Pacific Northwest."

Chris began working with California condors as an intern with the Ventana Wildlife Society in 1999, leading to his Masters research at Humboldt State University investigating condor vigilance behavior while feeding. He began working for the Yurok Tribe in 2008, working to set up the first reintroduction site in the Pacific Northwest and is now the Manager of the Northern California Condor Restoration Program.

Chris's presentation will include a background on condor biology, history of declines, the recovery program, Yurok Tribe's involvement, and the formation of the Northern California Condor Restoration Program. He will introduce the birds and what they have been up to and discuss release strategies and current issues in condor restoration.

Photo credit: Patrick Myers, Yurok Tribe

# UPCOMING EVENTS

*Red-tailed Hawk*
*Photo by Megan Smithyman*

## SOUTH COAST RAPTOR SAFARI SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 11

The hawks and falcons have started to arrive, and on Saturday, November 11, we will again meet at the south end of the Navarro River bridge to form up and search them out. Meet us at 9 a.m. (8:45 is better so we can leave on time), bring a lunch, water, maybe some snacks, and be prepared to carpool. Some may leave early, but many of us will continue all the way to Point Arena to scan the mouth of the Garcia River, then return home around sunset. If this wasn't such a great trip we wouldn't do it every year, so come join us for a great time.

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## CBC WARM-UP - DECEMBER 9TH

This is our most flexible field trip of the year. What we know: meet at 9:00 somewhere in the greater Fort Bragg/Mendocino area. The rest of the details depend on the weather and where we have the best opportunity to search out birds of interest. So, watch this space in next month's newsletter for more information.

*Lincoln's Sparrow,*
*photo by Ron LeValley*

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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

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# 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.

## NOVEMBER 2023

**Saturday 4 - *Beginner's Bird Walk* 9:00 AM - Noon**
Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens, 18220 Highway 1, Fort Bragg, CA 95437

**Saturday 11 - *South Coast Raptor Safari* 9:00 AM**
Meet at the south end of the Navarro River bridge to carpool. See page 8 for more.

**Wednesday 15 - *Early Bird Walk* 8:30 AM - Noon**
Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens, 18220 Highway 1, Fort Bragg, CA 95437

**Monday 20 - *Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Meeting* 7:00 PM**
Caspar Community Center. 15051 Caspar Rd, Caspar, CA 95420

## DECEMBER 2023

**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* 6:00 PM**

**Saturday 9 - *CBC Warm-up* 9:00 AM.** See page 8 for more information.

**Wednesday 20 - *Early Bird Walk*** ** **8:30 AM - Noon**
Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens, 18220 Highway 1, Fort Bragg, CA 95437

**Saturday 30 - *Christmas Bird Count,*** Fort Bragg circle (contact Tim Bray for details)

**Friday, January 5, 2024 - *Christmas Bird Count, Manchester circle***
(contact David Jensen for details)

**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