

The Whistling Swan



NEWSLETTER OF THE MENDOCINO COAST AUDUBON SOCIETY

January 2010

BATS – WINGED FLYERS OF THE NIGHT

Patricia Winters “Bat Ma’am”

TOWN HALL, Main Street, Fort Bragg

January 18, 7:00 p.m.



California Myotis Bat

Explore the myths and realities of bats. Learn the truth about bats from Bat Ma’am Patricia Winters. The program will include an audiovisual presentation and feature live tame bats of several species for viewing and discussion. Myths, superstitions and misconceptions about these highly beneficial mammals will be discussed. Myth will be replaced with factual information about the ecological importance of bats.

Discover why bats don’t get headaches from hanging upside down, and why you don’t have to worry about bats getting in your hair. Did you know: one bat can eat 600 insects or more an hour; only about 1 in 1,000 bats will contract rabies, about the same as other wildlife? Bats are the only significant hunter of night flying insect pests. Learn why bat populations are declining and what you can do to help.

Patricia Winters, bat conservationist and rehabilitator, has been giving talks on bats for many years and educated thousands on the ecological importance of bats.

Together with her traveling bats (rehabilitated bats that can’t be released back into the wild), Patricia will change your mind forever regarding these marvelous creatures of the evening skies.



Pallid Bat

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER**David Jensen**

I hope that many of you will join me in Point Arena on Sunday, January 10, to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the California Coastal National Monument. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and your Mendocino Coast Audubon Society, together with the Point Arena Merchants Association, the Point Arena Lighthouse Keepers, and other local organizations, will host a series of free indoor and outdoor events in and around Point Arena.

The California Coastal National Monument consists of more than 20,000 rocks, small islands, exposed reefs and pinnacles from mean high tide out 12 nautical miles. It stretches along the entire California coast from Oregon to the Mexican border and contains many important seabird nesting and feeding areas.

According to Monument Manager Rick Hanks, "This will be the first in a full year of California celebrations to mark the tenth birthday of the California Coastal National Monument and the tenth anniversary of the larger National Landscape Conservation System of which the monument is a part."

The Mendocino Coast Audubon Society will kick off the festivities by leading a brief guided bird walk. Participants should meet at the parking lot outside the Point Arena Lighthouse gate at 9:00 a.m. Binoculars and spotting scopes will be available.

At 10:00 a.m. the party will shift to the historic Arena Theater on Highway One in downtown Point Arena for the "Rocky Shore Picture Show." Events will include a screening of Huell Howser's film about the Monument, a slide show by renowned photographer Craig Tooley of The Sea Ranch, and special recognition of Monument partners. Coffee and snacks will be provided.

After a lunch break (bring or buy your own) four different guided walks will be offered: One in downtown Point Arena and three at the BLM Stornetta Public Lands along Lighthouse Road. At 3:00 p.m., there will be an opening reception at the Point Arena Lighthouse, featuring the collection of photographs by Bob Wick that highlight the wonders of the Monument. Beverages and appetizers will be served.

The Point Arena Lighthouse will waive its admission charge from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. for those with free admission tickets available from participating Point Arena merchants or downloaded from www.pointarena.net or www.blm.gov/ca/ccnm (click on the Point Arena special event link).

Your local Audubon chapter was an original Collaborative Partner of the Point Arena Gateway and proudly maintains an active role in the management of the Monument, so this will be a special event for us. I plan to be there all day, and I hope to see you. And if the wind is not blowing too strong out of the south, we should also be able to see Al the Laysan Albatross from the Point Arena pier - especially in the afternoon.

PAM HUNTLEY ON KXYZ FM 88.3, 90.7, AND 91.5**RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH**

Red-breasted Nuthatch photo Ron LeValley
[Www.LeValleyphoto.com](http://www.LeValleyphoto.com)

Nuthatches are distinguished by their nasal call and they are the only ones that move down the trunks of the trees instead of up.

Here on the coast, the Pygmy Nuthatch is most common, while inland the White-breasted prevails. The Red-breasted Nuthatch is somewhat irregular in coniferous woods. This 4-½ inch bird is rusty colored underneath, has a blue-gray back with a black cap, white eyebrow and a black line that runs through the eye. The female looks the same but the cap is more bluish-black.

Nuthatches feed by going head first down trunks of trees and probing under bark with their small slightly upturned beaks. They are adapted to do this with their short legs and

long strong toes with claws. They feed on insects and their larva. In winter they are fond of pine and spruce seeds. They will also visit bird feeders for seeds and suet. If a seed is too large, they will wedge it in the cracks of bark and then break off pieces to eat. They will take seeds from a person's hand and have even taken sunflower seeds from the lips of a friendly birder.

Red-breasted Nuthatches nest in holes in decaying trees, which they usually carve themselves. They will sometimes use an old woodpecker's hole. The cavity is lined with grass and fir. The female lays 4-6 white eggs peppered with reddish-brown. The eggs are incubated for 12 days. Red-breasted Nuthatches have the unique behavior of intricately smearing sap all over the entrance of their nest. David Fix calls it their sticky doormat. It is thought that this inhibits other animals and insects from entering, as the insects could bring parasites and disease to nestlings.

[Pam broadcasts on KXYZ once Tuesday evenings on Community News with Christina Anastat](#)

THE QUOTABLE BIRDER Bill Adler Jr. ed.

To a man, ornithologists are tall, slender, bearded so that they can stand motionless for hours, imitating kindly trees, as they watch birds. —Gore Vidal

Live in such a way that you would not be ashamed to sell your parrot to the town gossip. — Will Rogers

SAVE OUR SHOREBIRDS – KISSING 2009 GOOD-BY Becky Bowen

Looking back is not as much fun as looking forward, but 2009 deserves one last look.

It was a good summer for Black Oystercatchers on MacKerricher State Park beaches and a bad year for many marine mammals (we are curious to learn an explanation from biologists).

We look forward to a study of a mountain of SOS data gathered in the summer of 2009, and we will make this information available to everybody – especially students, birders and researchers.

Here are volunteers who served more than 700 hours this summer on surveys, graphics projects for shorebird beach protection signs, the Naturally Inspired Art Show, and educational outreach: Elizabeth Alden, Andarin Arvola, Barbara Auerbach, Ellen Baron, Greg Baron, Win Bowen, Jeanette Boyer, Jim Boyer, Kathy Carl, Maureen Eppstein, Tony Eppstein, Jim Griswold, Michael Haas, Karen Havlena, Jim Havlena, Trudy Jensen,



David Jensen, Penny Lancaster, Anne Little, Louise Mariana, Peggy Martin, Charlene McAllister, Evan Mills, Nathaniel Mills, Art Morley, Autumn Ossello, Joleen Ossello (who served as our director), Ingrid Peterson, Janet Self, Marcy Snyder, Dorothy “Toby” Tobkin, Ginny Wade, Warren Wade and John Wilder.

We are grateful for help from our partners – especially Angela Liebenberg, State Parks Environmental Scientist, our Mendocino State Park District Rangers, FLOCKworks and College of the Redwoods. We thank Johanna Jensen and her colleagues at Mendocino Coast Dog Owners Group (MCDOG) for being part of the solution to wildlife protection on our beaches. Thanks also go to Nancy and Bill Bennett, Cowlick’s Ice Cream, a place to turn in data sheets and satisfy appetites. Biologist and photographer Ron LeValley trained our volunteers and led a shorebird workshop for State Parks personnel – and remains a source of help and guidance.

We leave you with one of many favorite photos of the summer of 2009 – this one of a Great Egret (above) who was so readily visible to hikers at Virgin Creek Beach that he turned into a bit of a hambone. Whenever we look at this shot, we can’t help but yell, “Ma! The Emperor Has No Clothes!”

Save Our Shorebirds is an on-going citizen science research project sponsored by the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society that studies shorebirds on MacKerricher State Park beaches. To help, contact Becky Bowen at 962-1602 or e-mail: casparbeck@comcast.net

BIRD WALKS

The Mendocino Coast Audubon Society will host the following walks this month at the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens. Weather permitting, the midweek bird walk will be held on the third Wednesday of the month, **January 20, at 8:00 A.M.** Our monthly beginners' bird walk will be held on Saturday, **February 6, at 9:00 A.M.**

Birders with all levels of experience are invited to attend these walks. Binoculars will be available for those who need them. Admission is free for Botanical Garden members. For more information on these and other activities, please call 964-8163 or visit our website www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org

FIELD TRIPS

On Saturday, **January 9**, the chapter will host a field trip to view the birds of the Ten Mile River and Beach. Participants should meet at the south end of the Ten Mile River bridge shortly before 9:00 a.m. This field trip should end around noon.

On Saturday, **February 13**, the chapter will host a field trip at MacKerricher State Park to view the birds of Lake Cleone and Laguna Point. Participants for this trip should meet at the Lake Cleone parking lot shortly before 9:00 a.m. Weather permitting, this field trip should end around noon.

Later that evening, the chapter will host its first winter night field trip to "view" owls of the Mendocino coast. More details will be available in the February newsletter.

Birders with all levels of experience are invited to attend these walks. Binoculars will be available for those who need them. For more information on these and other activities, please call 964-8163 visit our website www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org

THE QUOTABLE BIRDER Bill Adler Jr. ed

For most bird-watchers, the coming of the warblers has the same effect as catnip on a cat.

Arline Thomas, in *Audubon's Birds*.

The tuft of hair on the breast of a wild turkey cock cannot be of any use, and it is doubtful whether it can be ornamental in the eyes of the female bird; indeed, had the tuft appeared under domestication, it would have been called a monstrosity.

Charles Darwin, *Origin of Species*

SPARROWS**Donald Shephard**

Fox Sparrow photo Ron LeValley

[Www.LeValleyphoto.com](http://www.LeValleyphoto.com)

On a December visit to England, the long hours of darkness allowed plenty of time to read and reflect. I remember my mother teaching me the difference between Blackbirds and Starlings. "Watch them Donald, Blackbirds hop and Starlings walk." Her own favorite bird, known there as Wren, we call Winter Wren. She referred to all other small brown birds as "Sparrows". Later, I came to distinguish three "sparrows"; Hedge Sparrows, House Sparrows, and Tree Sparrows. Today, Brits name Hedge Sparrows, Dunnocks, since they belong to the Accentors. House and Eurasian Tree Sparrows are in the genus *Passer* or Old World Sparrows.

New World Sparrows belong to a different family of passerines, called Emberizids. They are small songbirds, often brown and streaked, with rounded wings and conical bills for husking seeds in winter. In breeding season they add insects for more protein to fuel their young-raising activities. Their rounded wings allow flitting through shrubs, grasses and, in some species, deserts and mature pine forests. Several species have adapted well to human-altered ecosystems, becoming familiar yard birds.

Mendocino Coast sparrows commonly include Savannah, Song, and White-crowned, Fox and Golden-crowned.

To find out more about rare visiting sparrows, I called Dorothy Tobkin, who has recorded all sparrows on the American Birding Association list. That claim may change soon as several species are likely to be split after careful DNA analysis of subspecies.

Toby tells me the Chipping Sparrow although found inland, is an unusual migrant here on the coast. A few Lincoln's Sparrow are regular in small numbers in fall, winter and spring. The Lark Sparrow, fairly common inland, rarely turns up here. Vesper Sparrows, rare inland, are a very rare coastal vagrant. White-throated Sparrows although uncommon, do come to feeders as they migrate to breed north and east of us. Toby spotted one Clay-colored Sparrow this fall. East of Covelo, you may find the Black-chinned Sparrow, but not on the coast. Once, a Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow appeared. Art Morley discovered Grasshopper Sparrows nesting on a hill north of Ten Mile, but they move from year to year. Karen Havlena has recorded one Harris's Sparrow. This is not a complete county list.

Common or rare, these ground-dwelling songbirds glean most of their food from the surface of the ground or low vegetation. They exist mostly in North America where they breed

SPARROWS

continued

from the Arctic tree line to the Mexican border, but you may spot them in Eurasia and Africa. Emberizids are absent from Australia and Antarctica.

Beginning birders often divide sparrows into those with breast streaks and those without. Confusion results when encountering juvenile birds. Even when adults of the species lack breast streaks, most young display them. In winter flocks, sparrows of several species may occur together.

Both sparrow parents feed insects to their young. Nestlings and fledglings favor caterpillars for their soft bodies. Parents prepare hard bodied insects like grasshoppers by removing difficult parts such as legs. Emberizids predominantly feed on seeds in winter. Small-billed species can crack and remove husks from small seeds while bigger billed birds can handle larger seeds. A feeder filled with large sunflower seeds will attract less sparrows than one filled with millet, a small, thin-coated seed.

In more natural surroundings, some sparrows simultaneously rake the claws of both feet across the ground discarding leaf litter and digging into the upper soil surface. They position their heads directly over the scratch area ready to pick up any exposed food. Experienced birders identify the rhythmic sound of double-scratching sparrows. White-crowned Sparrows, Golden-crowned Sparrows, White-throated Sparrows and Savannah Sparrows all employ this technique.

Smaller sparrow species use another method of foraging. They fly to a seed cluster atop a grass stem and ride it to the ground where their weight holds the stem steady while they devour the kernels.

Sparrows solve the combined problems of survival in winter, finding food and avoiding predators in two ways. They may forage close to refuge cover or feed in flocks relying on the combined vigilance of flock mates. Species with longer wings and more agility forage safely far from cover.

For example, if you stroll along the bluffs at Point Cabrillo, you will likely flush Savannah Sparrows while higher up Song Sparrows disturbed by a hiker will dive into low shrubs at the edge of open areas.

I learned from my mother to watch bird behavior and even though neither she nor I had any idea of the number of sparrow species here on the coast, my early training helps me to distinguish one small brown songbird from another. In later newsletters, we will



Song Sparrow photo Ron LeValley
www.LeValleyphoto.com

BRITISH BIRDS

Donald Shephard



European Robin

My wife and I recently returned from a trip to England where we saw Robins, so famous for their use on Christmas cards. This association dates from the 1860s, when greeting cards became fashionable and postmen wore red tunics and were known as 'robins'. This feisty bird is a small thrush, a member of the family Turdidae. The American Robin is much larger (of course) and no doubt named by settlers because of its similarity to the European bird.

My education, in another century and another continent, led me to believe in a single swallow species. In the American west, we have seven species titled "swallow". The



Swallow

bird called swallow in England is *Hirundo rustica*, known in America as the Barn Swallow. My mother's favorite bird was the wren, *Troglodytes troglodytes*, known here as the Winter Wren.

I use *The Complete Book of British Birds* published by the inimitable Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. The book is co-published by AA, which I hasten to add, is the Automobile Association and not Alcoholics Anonymous. The RSPB book lists three species of swan, all belonging to the Queen for the usual eccentric British reasons. We share nonnative Mute Swans and Whooper Swans with the old country but they have the Bewick's Swan, *Cygnus columbianus*. But wait a minute, our own Tundra Swan is *Cygnus columbianus*. There is a variation in beak color that separates the two into subspecies, a murky depth I decline to enter.

Other names confuse the ornithological traveler. You may have seen three types of Goldfinch, Lesser, Lawrence's, and American Goldfinches. England sports but one, the European Goldfinch, known only at *the Goldfinch*, a strikingly handsome bird. Many attempts to introduce this species to America have failed. All these species of goldfinch are in the genus *Carduelis* which includes our Pine Siskins.

A favorite childhood memory from the days of foil-covered milk bottles delivered daily and before the advent of homogenized milk, is Blue Tits, *Parus caeruleus*, pecking through the foil to get the cream. This acrobat of forests and feeders is related to our Bushtits and Chickadees.

Blue Tit



BIRD SIGHTINGS

Dec 24. **Common Moorhen** at Lake Cleone; **Burrowing Owl** at Virgin Creek. Toby Tobkin and Rich Hubacek

Dec 25. 40 **Tundra Swans** and one **Snow Goose** Hunter's Lagoon, Point Arena/ Manchester. Rich Trissel.

Dec 25. **Gray Jays**, 2.5 miles down Middle Ridge Road, Albion. Tim Bray.

Dec 27. **Western Tanager** feeding with sparrows and towhees in David Jensen's Fort Bragg yard.

Dec 27. **Greater White-fronted Goose**, Near the mouth of Little River, Toby Tobkin.

Dec 27. **Palm Warbler** in the upper campground of Van Damme State Park, Toby Tobkin.

Dec 27. **Ross's Geese** Fern Creek Pond; **Red Phalaropes** at Point Cabrillo; **Thayer's Gull** and **Black-legged Kittiwakes** on Ward Avenue.

Helen Kochenderfer and Bill Doyle (Santa Rosa)

Dec 28. **Cattle Egrets** at Garcia Flats, Rich Hubacek.

Dec 29. **Sora** in the marsh area south of Point Cabrillo Lighthouse, Rich Hubacek.



Common Moorhen photo Ron LeValley

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT Karen Havlena, Compiler

Saturday morning, 2 January 2010, was quite foggy along the south coast between Elk and the Point Arena lighthouse. Participants who were able to venture inland a few miles had some sun during the day. The total species seen this year was 137 on count day, with a few additional birds seen during the count week period. Highlights found on count day included **Cattle Egret**, **Pacific Golden-Plover**, **Rough-legged Hawk**, **Cinnamon Teal**, **Redhead**, and two **Slate-colored Juncos**. Just a day or two after the official count, six **Brant**, a female **Eurasian Wigeon**, and a **Barn Swallow** were discovered by south county birder, Rich Trissel.



Cattle Egret photo by Sue Neko

Tundra Swan numbers have dropped considerably, especially in recent years. During count week, at least 40-45 swans were noted, but that is very low when compared to previous years' totals in the low hundreds. A big thank you to the area leaders: Chris Bing, Dave Jensen, Bob Keiffer, Art Morley, Rich Kuehn, Connie Schimbor & Diane Hichwa. All of the participants' driving to this somewhat out of the way location and their efforts are also appreciated. A huge thank you goes to David Jensen for preliminary organization and for preparing dinner for those who attended the compilation dinner in Point Arena.

MCAS BOARD MEMBERS 2009-2010

President	David Jensen	964-8163	djensen@mcn.org
Vice President	Tony Eppstein	937-1715	tonyepp@mcn.org
Secretary	Tanya Smart	964-4235	wrismart@mcn.org
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Newsletter	Donald Shephard	962-0223	donshephard@comcast.net
Emeritus	Art Morley	964-2541	agmorley@hotmail.com

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

