

The Black Oystercatcher

Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Newsletter, February 2013

LINKING BIRD HABITAT ASSOCIATIONS TO CONSERVATION

HILLARY WHITE

CASPAR COMMUNITY CENTER

February 18 at 7:00 pm

You may have noticed the bird species and their numbers at your favorite bird watching locale are rarely the same year to year, much less season to season. As landscapes develop and change over time, avian diversity and abundance change in relation to habitat characteristics and availability. Understanding habitat associations provides opportunities to improve bird conservation and management, especially since rare and endangered species often have specific habitat requirements. Hillary White, a wildlife and restoration ecologist, will discuss how habitat-association models contribute to habitat restoration and bird conservation projects in the Western U.S.



American Bittern
photo by
H.M. White

FUN FAMILY EVENT

Spring Family Bird Walk Series with Sue "MaGoo" and Sarah Grimes.

Fourth Saturdays in February, March, April and May at 9:00 a.m.

February 23 Van Damme State Park: meet at beach parking lot

March 23 Big River Haul Road

April 27 Botanical Gardens

May 25 Lake Cleone in Mackerricher State Park

We provide bird books and binoculars. For more information call [937-4322](tel:937-4322) or email zewa@mcn.org

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER**David Jensen**

People ask me, "How often do you go birding?" The question makes me smile. One of the pleasures of bird watching is you can enjoy this avocation any time and any place. I do most of my birding as I go through my regular routine. For instance, this morning I birded from the breakfast table (White-throated Sparrow), from behind the wheel of my vehicle (Varied Thrushes on Highway 20), and from my office desk (Mockingbirds). The parade of birds brings pleasure to an otherwise tedious life.

But every now and then, you need a little excitement, some avian variety. And unless you are blessed with a large budget of free time and ready cash (both of which I find in short supply), it helps if such adventures are fairly close to home. Northern California seems made for birders like us. There are many great locations within a tank of gas that offer spectacular birding experiences.

Each January, I visit the Central Valley with a group of friends. We stay in Colusa and tour the major wildlife refuges to observe wintering waterfowl. Several thousand geese noisily rising together in response to a passing Bald Eagle is a sight and sound that you will remember for years. Or wave after wave of White-faced Ibis flying against a sunset as they return to the safety of the ponds for the night. My first birding trip to the valley was on a College of the Redwoods excursion in 1978, and 35 years later I continue to return.

If you want to visit, check the weather to avoid the occasional bouts of valley fog, then travel east on Highway 20. Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge, perhaps the most popular, is about 20 minutes north of Highway 20 on Interstate 5. This year it costs six dollars to enter. There is a visitor center with educational displays and a circular driving route through the refuge that can be toured in thirty minutes or seven hours, as you choose.

My new favorite valley refuge is on Highway 20 about two miles west of Colusa. Until the Falcated Duck arrived last winter, the Colusa Refuge received little attention. Although it is smaller than the Sacramento unit, it is well designed. You can readily view the ponds from the refuge road. There is a convenient viewing platform near the entrance, and it is free to enter. So if you are traveling on Highway 20 to some other destination, drop in for a minute, see what's on the ponds, check the sparrows near the rest room (I had great views of a cooperative Lincoln's Sparrow on my last visit) stretch your legs, and then be on your way.

Gray Lodge Refuge is harder to reach, offers filtered views of the ponds, and is less inviting than some. My other favorite birding spots include Bodega Bay (great mud flats on a manageable scale), Arcata Marsh (great walking trail with fantastic viewing), San Francisco Bay, especially on the southwest edges (the sound of feeding Stilts, Avocets, and Dowitchers is sweet music), the fields west of Stockton and Lodi (Sandhill Cranes, Tundra Swans and Cackling Geese galore), and the refuges near Merced and Los Banos (more of everything and a taste of old California).

If you travel east in late spring or early summer, take the southern route around Clear Lake. Despite years of abuse, that incredible lake hosts flocks of Yellow-headed Blackbirds (perhaps the worst song any bird has voiced) and Western Grebes (perhaps the finest aquatic dance any bird has performed). To live so close and never enjoy these birds would be a sin. We are fortunate to live so near the places. When you leave the coast, take some extra time to enjoy the rich variety of birds that most folks pass by. As my grandmother would have said, if she'd known: Forget the roses - stop and watch the Rose-breasted Grosbeaks

PAM HUNTLEY ON KZYX FM 88.3, 90.7, AND 91.5

COMMON GOLDENEYE

**Pam's radio spots can be heard on KZYX
Monday at 5:50 pm and Friday at 7:50 am.**



Female Common Goldeneye photo by Ron LeValley ww.LeValleyphoto.com

Even though the Common Goldeneye has no lips it is called *The Whistler*, because of the sound the male's wings make in flight. The Common Goldeneye is a medium-sized diving duck, sixteen to twenty inches. It is described as *stocky* with a large head and small bill. It is aptly named, as both the male and female have light ivory-colored eyes. The male has a round, glossy green head, a dark bill and a round, bright, white cheek-patch. In flight, it shows a lot of white on its sides and wings. The female has a chocolate-brown head and grey-brown body. Her dark bill is tipped with dull yellow.

The Common Goldeneye winters in our area. The males tend to winter farther north than the juveniles and females. The Common Goldeneye dives for crustaceans, mollusks, amphibians and

small fish. They also feed on plants and tubers. Along the coast, they will dive for mud crabs and hermit crabs

In mid-April, they return to the coniferous forests of Canada and Alaska. Courtship displays are said to be spectacular. The pair flies above trees with the whistling male following the female. On the water, the drake circles the female and then bends its head all the way back while kicking up a spray of water. The pair searches for a hole in a hardwood tree close to water to nest. The female lays eight to twelve eggs, one a day.

When the chicks are only a few days old, the mother coaxes the little fluff balls to leap from the nest. She then leads them to the safety of the water where, in another two months, they learn to fly.

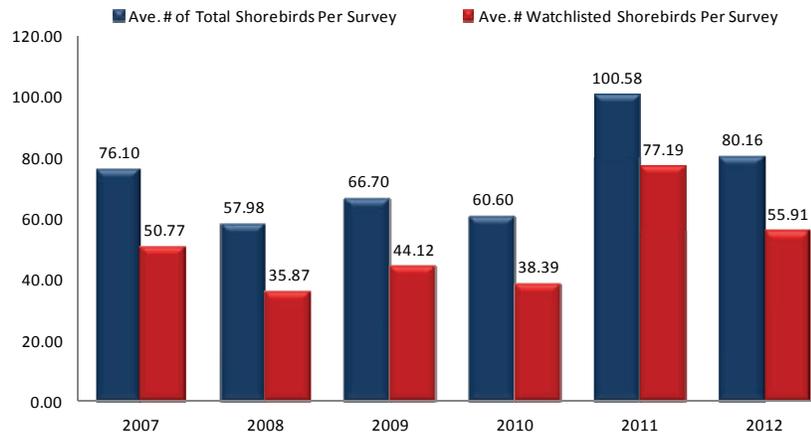


Male Common Goldeneye photo by Ron LeValley ww.LeValleyphoto.com

Save Our Shorebirds Just the Facts, Ma'am One Bird And One Step at a Time

Becky Bowen

Save Our Shorebirds Average Total Shorebird Sightings and Watchlisted Shorebird Sightings 2007-2012
Glass Beach, Virgin Creek, Ten Mile Beach-Combined
MacKerricher State Park - Mendocino County, CA



Shorebirds talk to us every day and here are a few things we've learned:

- Almost 70% of shorebirds we observe on SOS surveys are watchlisted – described as birds in decline by National Audubon and the American Bird Conservancy.
- Watchlisted shorebirds we see here are Western Snowy Plover, Marbled Godwit, Black Turnstone, Surfbird, Sanderling, Western Sandpiper, Red Knot, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Wandering Tattler, Long-billed Curlew and American Golden-Plover. We record sightings of the watchlisted Heermann's Gull and we have data on accidental Hudsonian Godwits, Wilson's Phalaropes, Buff-breasted Sandpipers and others.
- SOS surveyors don't miss much and many write down everything they see. These thoughtful observations paint a picture of changes at the water's edge and in critical beach habitat. We know that Rock Pigeons now own a sea cave at Pudding Creek, or that Common Ravens teach themselves to forage with Black Oystercatchers on mussel beds, or where Burrowing Owls hang out at Ten Mile Beach, or that a Bald Eagle showed up in the middle of Ten Mile River. We've seen how native plants pop out of restored bluffs at Glass Beach (and how sparrows and Western Meadowlarks respond).

Shorebirds are at the top of our list, but we know the picture is big and everything in the air, on the water and under the soil is connected. We'll keep watching, counting, and reporting. All six years of our shorebird data will soon be up on the MCAS website. For a preview, join our listserv and click on files: <http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/AudubonSOS/>

Save Our Shorebirds is a long-term on-going MCAS citizen science program in which volunteers conduct on-foot surveys in MacKerricher State Park on three beaches (Ten Mile, Virgin Creek and Glass Beach). Our partners are California State Parks and FLOCKworks. To participate, contact State Parks Environmental Scientist and MCAS board member Angela Liebenberg at Angela.Liebenberg@parks.ca.gov and please visit us on facebook:

www.facebook.com/SaveOurShorebirds

MANCHESTER CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Karen Havlena

We will hold the next CBC (Elk to Pt Arena Light) on Saturday, January 4, 2014. That should help some of you to kick start your year list for 2014.

As for this recent CBC, we had a grand total of 139 species. Several things combined to delay the final results - apologies all round. Highlights included Sandhill Crane (Bob & Ryan Keiffer), Green Heron (Jeff Petit), Palm Warbler (Diane Hichwa & Rich Trissel), and Pacific Golden-Plover (Chuck Vaughn, Jerry White, mob). We had only one "Count Week" species, an Orange-crowned Warbler found by Cheryl Watson the day after count day.

The weather was clear but cold. Many birds stayed under cover and kept quiet. Only 9,404 individuals were noted by our bundled-up counters. Of course, half of this circle is open ocean.

I am going to ask the hierarchy at National Audubon to allow us to change the official name of CAMN to Manchester, the nickname commonly used. The current name, Mendocino Coast, is now awkward, as the Fort Bragg count is on the Mendocino coast, also. CAMN fits Manchester very well, so no code change is necessary — hope I can get that point across.

My sincere thanks to the participants *and* to David Jensen for organizing the count and for providing dinner for those who could be at the compilation that evening. Thank you.



Sandhill Cranes. Photo by Ron LeValley
www.LeValleyphoto.com

BIRD WALKS AND FIELD TRIPS

Saturday, February 2 - Beginners bird walk at 8:30 at the Coast Botanical Gardens.

Sunday, February 10 - Stornetta Public Lands and Point Arena. Meet at corner of Highway One and Miner Hole Road at 9:00.

Wednesday, February 20 - Bird Walk at 8:30 at the Coast Botanical Gardens.

Saturday, March 9 - Lake Cleone and Laguna Point. Meet at Lake Cleone parking lot at 8:00.

Sunday, April 14 - Van Damme State Park. Meet at Van Damme beach parking lot at 8:00.

Saturday, May 11 - Navarro River and Beach. Meet at south end of Navarro River bridge at 8:00.

RED KNOT

Donald Shephard



Red Knot breeding plumage. Photo by Gregory Breese USFWS

In 1028 A.D., King Canute of England, Denmark, Norway, and parts of Sweden sat on his throne in the tidewaters of the Thames at Westminster and watched the river rise about his ankles to prove he could not stem the tides. In 1758, Linnaeus allocated the species name, *canutus*, to the Red Knot because he likened their habit of foraging along the tide line to Canute's behavior. Knot is a form of Canute. Another etymology suggests an onomatopoeic origin based on the bird's grunting call.

Largest of the sandpipers in North America, the Red Knot is colorful. It makes one of the longest yearly migrations of any bird, some traveling 9,300 miles from its Arctic breeding grounds to southern South America

as far south as Tierra del Fuego. North American breeders also migrate to coastal areas in Europe while Eurasian populations winter in Africa, Papua New Guinea, Australia, and New Zealand. In many areas, this species forms enormous flocks after breeding, but not here.

Becky Bowen, the Save Our Shorebirds (SOS) volunteer coordinator, reports these numbers for Red Knot sightings: 22 in 2007, 0 in 2008, 12 in 2009, 0 in 2010, 18 in 2011, and 2 in 2012. Becky says: "Our summer numbers show we rarely see Red Knots on the Mendocino Coast – and only in summer and early fall. In breeding plumage, they are easy to identify, but otherwise, they present a serious challenge. Andarin Arvola and I spent an hour at Ten Mile Beach one morning a few years ago, trying to figure out the identity of a lone bird foraging on wet sand. We finally decided to apply some Toby wisdom which is, "Figure what the bird is not. So, it's not a peep, it's not a Wandering Tattler and it's not a Sanderling and so forth. Therefore it's probably a Red Knot. One thing about learning shorebirds from Toby, you never forget the lesson. In the last couple of years, Richard Hubacek has seen the most Red Knots on SOS surveys."

An adult Red Knot measures 9–10 inches long with a wingspan of 18–21 inches. Like other members of the *Calidris* genus, the head and eyes are small, the neck short and the thin, dark bill slightly tapering. The relatively large size, white wing bar and grey rump and tail help the otherwise difficult identification. When feeding, the short, dark-green legs give a characteristic 'low-slung' appearance. When foraging singly, they rarely call, but when flying in a flock they make a low monosyllabic *knutt* and when migrating they utter a disyllabic *knuup-knuup*.

Red Knots can double their weight prior to migration. Like many migratory birds they also reduce the size of their digestive organs at that time. The atrophy is not as pronounced as in species like the Bar-tailed Godwit, probably because there are more opportunities to feed during migration for the Red Knot. They ingest food whole and crush it in their muscular stomach, reminding me of my sons in their teenage years. The gizzard increases in thickness when they feed on hard-shelled mollusks, bivalves, gastropods and small crabs on the wintering ground and decreases in size when they feed on softer foods such as, spiders, arthropods and larvae, in the breeding grounds. Unlike many species of birds., it does not regurgitate undigested hard parts of prey.

RED KNOT

continued

While feeding in mudflats during the winter and migration, Red Knots are tactile feeders. When the tide ebbs, they tend to peck at the surface and in soft mud. They may probe and plough forward with the bill inserted to about a centimeter depth.

Males migrate before females and establish territories in moist tundra in June. When males arrive, they display, and aggressive defense of their territory. The display song of the male is a fluty *poor-me* sung while circling high with quivering wing beats and tumbling to the ground with the wings held upward.

Red Knots nest on the ground, both near water and inland. They scrape a hollow for a nest and line it with leaves, lichens and moss. Males construct three to five nest scrapes in their territories prior to the arrival of the females. The female lays three or usually four eggs over the course of six days. Downy cryptic feathers cover the precocial chicks. They join with their parents away from the nest within a day of hatching and forage. The female leaves before the young fledge while the male stays on. After the young have fledged, the male migrates south leaving his young to make their first migration alone. How do they know where to go?

During their first year, juveniles have fine black and white edges to back and wing coverts creating a scalloped appearance. Juveniles are slightly slimmer than adults, with a distinct pink-buff wash on the breast and browner upper parts.

Perhaps as much as 90% of the population of North American Red Knots can be found in Delaware Bay, feeding on the eggs of spawning horseshoe crabs. The birds have become threatened as a result of commercial harvesting of these crabs, which began in the early 1990s. Delaware Bay is a critical stopover point during spring migration; the birds refuel on crab eggs almost exclusively. Delaware enacted a two-year ban on harvesting horseshoe crabs, but a judge struck it down, citing insufficient evidence to justify the disruption to the fishing industry. A male-only harvest has been in place in recent years. If horseshoe crab numbers in the Bay decline there may be fewer eggs to feed on, negatively affecting Red Knot survival. On the positive side, New Jersey state and local agencies have limited horseshoe crab harvesting and restricted beach access.

In Europe, Knots, as they are known there, face many local declines caused by the dredging of intertidal flats for edible cockles in the Dutch Wadden Sea.

To be assured of seeing a "patch", "fling", or "tangle" of Red Knots, take a trip to Delaware Bay, or visit Morecambe Bay on the west coast of England. You may want to see them on The Wash in eastern England too. Perhaps Queensland appeals to you more. If you spend a long day watching Red Knots there, you could enjoy a bottle of "good cheap wine" called Red Knot cabernet sauvignon.

Red Knots feeding on horseshoe crab eggs in Delaware Bay. Photo by Gregory Breese USFWS





POINT REYES BIRDING & NATURE FESTIVAL

Save the dates of April 26-28th for the Bay Area's best birding and nature extravaganza. Enjoy birding at the height of spring migration with some of the best naturalists around.

For more information, visit:

www.pointreyesbirdingfestival.org

Tickets go on sale in late February, and all proceeds benefit the habitat conservation work of the Environmental Action Committee of West Marin.

YARD BIRDS

Pam Huntley

In winter, I spend more time staring out the window, watching the birds of my yard, my fingers wrapped around a cup of tea. Our mornings are the same dark hours as theirs. Their foraging is more determined and more critical.

In October, a Song Sparrow returned to the same patch of Labrador Tea, singing to himself deep within the bushes. He spends the winter shuffling back and forth under my pine trees. In November, Robins visited in large flocks, cleaning out the last of the huckleberries and are now gone. My naked willow is on a regular gleaning route for the Chickadees, Bewick's Wren and Ruby Crowned Kinglets. The Hermit Thrush claims the lawn furniture for itself and dines on the red berries from my Christmas swag. I love watching the brilliant faces of the Townsend's Warblers feeding in the sunshine at the tips of the cyprus branches. The female Wren-tit can still be heard proclaiming her territory. The long-mated raven pair spend more time in the snag, gleaning each other. Hairy and Pileated Woodpeckers regularly inspect the dead trees. Now the Red Crossbills travel in pairs and sing their beautiful courtship songs. Our mornings are so early that I even hear the Screech-Owl. sing when I awake.

**Western
Screech
Owl**



FORT BRAGG CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT Tim Bray

The tally for the second official Fort Bragg Christmas Bird Count (CAFB) included 143 identified species, plus two taxa (*Scaup* sp. and *Dowitcher* sp.), for a total of 145 on Count Day. Count Week birds (Burrowing Owl, Bewick's Wren, Cedar Waxwing, Palm Warbler, and the elusive Bullock's Oriole) brought us up to the coveted 150-species mark this year. We counted a grand total of 18,509 birds, of which 16,430 were identified as to species.

Eight species appeared on the CAFB list for the first time: **Brant, Redhead, Dowitcher, Bonaparte's Gull, Heermann's Gull, Barn Owl, Yellow-Headed Blackbird, and Black-Headed Grosbeak.** The Count Week **Palm Warbler** and **Burrowing Owl** were also new .

Uncommon birds, present here in winter only in small numbers and which could easily be missed on any given day, included:

Northern Shoveler (1)	Rhinoceros Auklet (1)	Yellow-Bellied Sapsucker (1)
<i>Scaup</i> sp. (1)	Cassin's Auklet (1)	Pileated Woodpecker (2)
Common Goldeneye (3)	Band-Tailed Pigeon (4)	Say's Phoebe (1)
Snowy Egret (3)	Barn Owl (1)	Northern Mockingbird (2)
Osprey (2)	Western Screech-Owl (2)	American Pipit (4)
Peregrine Falcon (1)	Great Horned Owl (1)	Orange-Crowned Warbler (2)
Sora (2)	Barred Owl (1)	Nashville Warbler (2)
Rock Sandpiper (1)	Northern Saw-whet Owl (2)	Brown-headed Cowbird (1)
Ancient Murrelet (6)	Red-Breasted Sapsucker (2)	Lesser Goldfinch (2)

The most abundant bird was American Robin; at 1,510 individuals, they accounted for almost one in every ten birds identified (not including the 1,869 unidentified Gulls). Western and California Gulls were essentially tied for second, with 1,168 and 1,140 respectively. Yellow-Rumped Warbler came in fourth at 797.

We had forty-nine field participants this year, plus sixteen feeder-watchers. Notable visitors included **Jerry White**, who came from Kelseyville hoping to get out to sea for some pelagic birds; alas, the boat captain studied the rolling seas and chose discretion. Jerry had fun anyway and at the Count Dinner exclaimed, "We have to get this count to 150."

Once again I thank the Area Leaders: **Ron LeValley, Dorothy Tobkin, Warren Wade, Bob Keiffer, Art Morley, Jim Havlena, Dave Jensen, and Richard Hubacek.** We are fortunate to have such first-class birders who are also able to organize teams and conduct their counts with minimal effort from the compiler. Special thanks also to **Joleen Ossello** for coordinating the feeder-watchers, and for her brilliant performance advertising the event on MCTV. I am deeply grateful to **Angela Liebenberg** and **Judy Steele** for making the count dinner happen without any effort on my part; it is a relief to know their food and drink waits at the end of the day.

Be sure to mark your calendar for **Saturday December 21, 2013**, when we will at last reach that magical 150-species mark. You certainly won't want to miss such an historic event.

MCAS BOARD MEMBERS AND PROGRAM CHAIRS 2011-2012

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At large	Tim Bray	937-4422	tbray@wildblue.net
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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

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