

The Whistling Swan



NEWSLETTER OF THE MENDOCINO COAST AUDUBON SOCIETY

February 2010

COUNTING CORMORANTS: CITIZEN SCIENCE HELPS UNDERSTAND OCEAN CHANGES

RON LEVALLEY

7 pm February 15th

Fort Bragg Town Hall

Ron LeValley, well known local biologist and photographer will talk about the monitoring project being conducted by volunteers on the Sonoma and Mendocino coasts and how this information can be used to record changes in ocean conditions and assist scientists in better understanding how global climate change is affecting our coastal waters.



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Cormorant photos Ron LeValley LeValleyphoto.com	
Top row Pelagic, Double-crested, Brandt's Cormorants.	
Bottom row Pelagic, Brandt's Cormorants.	

PRESIDENT'S CORNER**David Jensen**

First of all, thank you to all who came to the birthday celebration in Point Arena for the Coastal National Monument. A special note of thanks must go out to Grace Steurer. Grace not only helped with the bird walk that attracted over 30 people, but she steadfastly represented your chapter in regular meetings with BLM and the other collaborative partners. Thank you, Grace, from all of us.

Also, a quick note of thanks to all who joined in the annual Christmas Bird Count.

Although the day was dreary and gray, I heard no complaints and saw only smiling (but tired) faces at the compilation dinner that night. Thanks to all of you. Well done.

I know many of you feed birds in your yard and some of you have started feeding this year. Personally, I feed Niger thistle for goldfinches and a personal blend of seed for sparrows, and other ground feeding birds. Although some folks love to debate the merits of various diets and the ethics of feeding wild birds, I would like to focus on sanitation.

If you have a bird feeder, you eventually will do more harm than good unless you keep it clean. This is especially true in late winter when the rain and cold foster the growth of mold and lower the birds' resistance to disease. Here are a few basic principles to follow.

Clean regularly. How often is enough? The answer depends on several factors. Hummingbird feeders, which quickly become fermentation vats, should be cleaned about every 4 days (which is one reason why I don't have one). The schedule for sock, tube and platform feeders will depend on variable factors such as weather, the number of birds, and the amount of uneaten seed. Don't overfeed, keep the seed dry, and don't let it accumulate. Not anywhere. Inspect in and around your feeders and act accordingly.

Have some tools. A bucket for water, a towel to dry, a bottle brush for tube feeders, a spatula or putty knife for platform feeders, a broom and dust pan for sock feeders, rubber gloves and eye protection for you. The right tools make the job much easier.

Clean and disinfect. I have used Dawn detergent to clean my emptied feeders since I watched it used to clean oiled birds. To disinfect, I use one part household bleach to 9 parts water. You may soak the feeders in white distilled vinegar if you prefer. Be sure to thoroughly dry feeders before refilling.

Clean around feeders. Uneaten seed and other waste will sicken ground-feeding birds such as juncos. My thistle feeders that hang above vegetation can attract unwanted mice. Sanitation begins at the feeder and continues to the rest of the environment.

I feed birds because I love to watch them and genuinely care about their well being. That is also why I regularly clean my feeders and baths. It takes extra money and time, but the return on my investment is fantastic.

PELICAN RESCUE

Tanya Smart

Recently, folks have been finding pelicans wandering about town near gas stations, parking lots and campuses. Some suffer from injuries, some suffer from weakness and cold. Wanting to help these birds is a very good thing. Knowing what to do is even better.

No local rescue facility exists for pelicans so helping usually means a drive over the hill, but not always. If you feel the need to help an injured or disoriented pelican, the people at both Sonoma Wildlife Rescue and International Bird Rescue and Research Center (IBRRC) are trained to walk you through whatever situation may present itself. If you can find a large closeable cardboard box (big enough to hold the bird) and a couple of towels, you will probably have all you need.

The numbers to call:

INTERNATIONAL BIRD RESCUE AND RESEARCH CENTER (IBRRC) (707) 207-0380

SONOMA WILDLIFE CENTER (707) 526-9453 (WILD)

At times, one will refer you to the other. Sonoma Wildlife Center will meet you in Ukiah (or Cloverdale) when they can.



Injured Brown Pelican,
photo Donald Shephard

OWL WALK AND BIRDS OF MACKERRICHER STATE PARK

On Saturday, **February 13**, the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society will host a field trip to view the birds of MacKerricher State Park. Due to its many habitats, MacKerricher State Park hosts more species of birds than any other park along our coast. Participants are invited to meet at **9 A.M.** at the Lake Cleone parking lot. This field trip should end around noon.

On **February 13** we will also offer an evening field trip to look for owls along our coast. This inaugural owling trip will be limited to 16 persons and carpooling will be mandatory. To register, please call **964-8163** or send an email to djensen@mcn.org.

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

BIRD WALKS

The Mendocino Coast Audubon Society will host two walks at the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens during the month of February. Our monthly beginners' bird walk will be held on the first Saturday of the month, **February 6, at 9:00 A.M.** Our early birders' walk will be held on the third Wednesday of the month, **February 17, at 8:00 A.M.** Admission is free for Botanical Garden members.

AN SOS TALE: THE CURIOUS CASE OF THE PECTORAL SANDPIPER

Becky Bowen



Save Our Shorebirds surveyors Barbara Auerbach and Kathy Carl found two Pectoral Sandpipers at Virgin Creek Beach September 24, 2009. The birds were too busy eating to notice humans near them.

I never met a Pectoral Sandpiper I didn't like.

They are scarce here, but not rare, and they mystify us. Since males leave the Arctic tundra breeding grounds before chicks hatch and females leave shortly after males, how do juveniles know the way to the wintering destinations in Argentina, Chile, Australia and New Zealand? That's 9,000 miles one way as the Sandpiper flies.

The Pectoral Sandpipers we see on SOS surveys (usually in late summer) appear to be young and hungry. We see them feeding in beach sand away from their grassy wet habitat, and they are off the migration flight path that typically takes them south through the Midwest and East .

We never see the courtship flight (3 to 6 feet off the Arctic ground surface) when males inflate air sacs in the throat and breast to produce a throaty low hoot and an enhanced appearance. What female could resist? By the time we see them, Pectoral Sandpipers are well on their migratory

way. Ten Mile and Virgin Creek Beaches are only places to rest and refuel.

Fuel here means a lot of spiders, aquatic invertebrates, and tiny crustaceans, even though insects and larvae are the food of choice in the marshes and grasslands where they usually forage.

You will know one when you see one: Pectoral Sandpipers are large (up to 9 inches long), legs are yellowish, a well-defined line separates the brown breast streaks from the white belly, there's a white stripe over the eyes and the dark bill curves down very slightly.

The first time we saw a Pectoral Sandpiper on Ten Mile Beach, he ran toward us and came so close we thought he would step on our toes. We think he was too young and curious to be afraid of humans. We immediately assumed the shorebird-watching stance: be still, don't wave arms, don't talk – and, for goodness sake, enjoy the moment.

Save Our Shorebirds is an on-going Mendocino Coast Audubon Society citizen science project in partnership with California State Parks, College of the Redwoods and FLOCKworks. To help, contact Becky Bowen at casparbeck@comcast.net or (707) 962-1602.



POINT REYES BIRDING AND NATURE FESTIVAL

Will Wilson, Corte Madera



The first Point Reyes Birding and Nature Festival (April 23-26, 2010) is now open for registration. Some of California's preeminent birders will be leading trips, including Rich Stallcup, Steve Howell, Keith Hansen, Jules Evens, David Wimpfheimer, and Lisa Hug. There will be walks, boat trips, classes, demonstrations, and a pelagic trip to Cordell Bank.

To register online, go to:
www.pointreyesbirdingfestival.org

and sign-up for the walks, events, lectures, and classes that you find most exciting. Some of these trips will be fully subscribed very quickly and registering early is advised. Enrollment will be limited.

The Festival is sponsored by the Environmental Action Committee of West Marin, in cooperation with

PRBO Conservation Science, Marin Audubon Society, Madrone Audubon Society, American Birding Association, Point Reyes National Seashore, and many other groups.

If you have any questions about the Festival, send an email to prbnfestival@gmail.com or call the Festival Headquarters at 415-663-9312.

You can help make the Festival successful by forwarding this message to your birding and other friends with an interest in nature and the outdoors -- and you can help publicize the Festival by putting a link to it on your website or Facebook page. If there are websites you think the Festival should contact to establish a link, please send an email to prbnfestival@gmail.com

Hope to see you at the Festival.

SAVANNAH SPARROW**Donald Shephard**

Savannah Sparrow Photo Ron LeValley
www.LeValleyphoto.com

From meadows to marshland, and from temperate coastlines to tundra, the Savannah Sparrow forages throughout much of North America, preferring open habitats ranging from grassy coastal dunes, to farmland, to sub-alpine meadows. They inhabit relatively small patches of grassland, and will even use disturbed and weedy areas in the open. You may spot them in grassy areas around towns and at the edges of irrigated fields, especially alfalfa.

You will find them in grassland locally at MacKerricher State Park, Point Cabrillo, Mendocino Headlands and Point Arena Lighthouse among many other areas. This songbird varies widely across its range, with sixteen or more recognized subspecies.

The name does not derive from its grassland habitat, but from Savannah, Georgia, where collectors

first described this bird. You will most likely see this small, grayish-brown passerine running into grassy cover. Savannah Sparrows are able runners; once discovered, they drop into the grass and dart away. If one perches to sing, you will notice streaking on its back, breast and flanks; a yellowish eyebrow stripe (supercilium); brown cheeks and white throat. The flight feathers are blackish-brown. Pink legs and feet help identify this bird. The lower part of the bill shows horn color and the upper part dark grey.

In its open country habitat, Vesper (rare) and Song Sparrows most resemble the Savannah Sparrow but the latter is paler and more slender. You will distinguish it by its yellowish supercilium, white central crown stripe and short forked tail. When flushed, the Savannah Sparrow tends to fly fairly high to its next perch whereas Song Sparrows fly low and pump their tails, Vesper Sparrows often show considerable white in the tail.

The male sings to defend his territory and attract a mate. Polygyny is common in some populations, but many are monogamous. If both members of a pair survive, they are likely to re-pair in the following year. The female builds the nest on the ground, usually in a depression and well hidden in thick grass or under matted-down plants. Overhanging vegetation may act as a tunnel, giving a side entrance to the open cup nest made of coarse grass and lined with finer grass. The female incubates the 4 to 5 eggs for 10 to 13 days. Both parents help brood and feed the

SAVANNAH SPARROW

continued

young, which leave the nest at 10 to 12 days of age. The fledglings can run short distances, but can't fly well for another week or so. The parents continue to feed and tend the young until they are about three weeks old. Second broods occur in the south, but not the north, of the range.

The parents subsist most of the time on seeds, but eat insects in the breeding season and feed them to the young. Coastal populations also eat some small crustaceans and mollusks.

The Savannah Sparrow breeds in Alaska, Canada, northern, two-thirds of the United States. The Pacific breeders are resident, but other populations are migratory, wintering from the southern United States across Central America and the Caribbean to northern South America. We receive an influx of non-breeding birds in winter. It is a very rare vagrant to western Europe.

Small winter flocks forage on the ground. Savannah Sparrows walk when foraging, and often run or hop. They are less shy than many other open-country sparrows, singing from weeds and fence-wires in full view, and also singing from the ground. The male performs a flight display during the breeding season, flying slowly over the tips of the grass with his tail raised and his feet dangling down. The commonly heard, distinctive song consists of a trill preceded by a series of short notes.

Birds return each spring to the area where they were hatched, and this philopatry results in great regional variation within the population. It is possible that the many recognized subspecies will be grouped into three species in the future.

The adaptable Savannah Sparrow is abundant and widespread and has probably benefited from early 20th Century human activity. However, urban sprawl and reversion of small farms to forests in the northeastern United States may account for population declines seen in that area. In the western United States, increased intensity of agriculture and continued forest clearing have probably contributed to the increases that continue to be seen. Breeding Bird Survey results show a small, not statistically significant increase in numbers of Savannah Sparrows.



Savannah Sparrow nest
Photo
Linda Pivicek.

Recent DNA work indicates the Ipswich Sparrow is a subspecies of Savannah Sparrow whereas the southwestern subspecies should be recognized as distinct species, the Large-billed Sparrow. Should you need a formal introduction as you sit in the hopeful sunshine eating your sandwich lunch, ornithologists call the Savannah Sparrow, Passerculus sandwichensis. Whatever its name and genealogy, the Savannah Sparrow's cheery song will brighten your day.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Karen Havlena

MENDOCINO COAST CBC #110 -- 2 January, 2010

Total Species: 137 Total Observers: 44 Weather: Fog with some sun C W= Count Week

- 1 Grt White-fronted Goose
- 1 Snow Goose
- 6 Brant - CW
- 1 Cackling Goose
- 92 Canada Goose
- 43 Tundra Swan
- 1 Eurasian Wigeon - CW
- 72 American Wigeon
- 124 Mallard
- 1 Cinnamon Teal



- 4 Western Grebe
- 153 Brown Pelican
- 40 Brandt's Cormorant
- 3 Dbl-crested Cormorant
- 67 Pelagic Cormorant
- 13 Great Blue Heron
- 138 Great Egret
- 1 Cattle Egret
- 117 Turkey Vulture
- 1 Osprey
- 10 White-tailed Kite
- 11 Northern Harrier
- 4 Sharp-shinned Hawk
- 3 Cooper's Hawk
- 19 Red-shouldered Hawk
- 73 Red-tailed Hawk
- 11 Ferruginous Hawk



- 6 Virginia Rail
- 9 American Coot
- 6 Black-bellied Plover
- 3 Pacific Golden-Plover
- 5 Snowy Plover
- 28 Killdeer
- 12 Black Oystercatcher
- 110 Black Turnstone
- 34 Surfbird
- 152 Sanderling
- 79 Least Sandpiper
- 5 Dunlin
- 4 Wilson's Snipe
- 1 Heermann's Gull
- 25 Mew Gull
- 273 California Gull
- 3 Herring Gull
- 2 Thayer's Gull
- 244 Western Gull
- 16 Glaucous-winged Gull
- 5 Common Murre
- 4 Marbled Murrelet
- 5 Ancient Murrelet
- 1 Cassin's Auklet
- 1 Rhinoceros Auklet



- 4 Northern Pintail
- 3 Am Green-winged Teal
- 1 Redhead
- 23 Ring-necked Duck
- 6 Greater Scaup
- 3 Lesser Scaup
- 6 Surf Scoter
- 87 Bufflehead
- 11 Common Merganser
- 76 Wild Turkey
- 287 California Quail
- 3 Red-throated Loon
- 5 Pacific Loon
- 17 Pied-billed Grebe
- 1 Horned Grebe

- 1 Rough-legged Hawk
- 53 American Kestrel
- 1 Merlin
- 3 Peregrine Falcon

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT**Karen Havlena**

Photos Ron LeValley, Levalleyphoto.com Cinnamon Teal, Ferruginous Hawk, Rhinoceros Auklet, Barn Swallow, Common Yellowthroat, and Western Meadowlark

6 Rock Pigeon	104 Chstnt-bk'd Chickadee	32 Fox Sparrow
8 Band-tailed Pigeon	112 Bushtit	145 Song Sparrow
169 Eurasian Collared-Dove	1 Red-breasted Nuthatch	3 Lincoln's Sparrow
27 Mourning Dove	58 Pygmy Nuthatch	1 Wht-throated Sparrow
10 Barn Owl	17 Brown Creeper	581 Wht-crowned Sparrow
4 Western Screech Owl	2 Bewick's Wren	148 Gldn-crowned Sparrow
12 Great Horned Owl	22 Winter Wren	163 Dark-eyed Junco
1 Northern Pygmy Owl	14 Marsh Wren	2 (Slate-colored Junco)
1 Burrowing Owl	76 Gldn-crowned Kinglet	955 Red-winged Blackbird
1 Northern Saw-whet Owl	88 Ruby-crowned Kinglet	8 Tricolored Blackbird
23 Anna's Hummingbird	21 Western Bluebird	99 Western Meadowlark
10 Belted Kingfisher	36 Hermit Thrush	
5 Acorn Woodpecker	1107 American Robin	
4 Red-breasted Sapsucker	93 Varied Thrush	
4 Downy Woodpecker	52 Wrenit	
10 Hairy Woodpecker	1 Northern Mockingbird	
57 Northern Flicker	4222 European Starling	
2 Pileated Woodpecker	43 American Pipit	
78 Black Phoebe	12 Cedar Waxwing	
3 Say's Phoebe	4 Orange-crn'd Warbler	
5 Hutton's Vireo	123 Yellow-rmp'd Warbler	
6 Gray Jay	9 Townsend's Warbler	
77 Steller's Jay	1 Com Yellowthroat	
47 Western Scrub-Jay		
204 Common Raven		
1 Barn Swallow - CW		



1080 Brewer's Blackbird
8 Brown-hd'd Cowbird
24 Purple Finch
98 House Finch
79 Pine Siskin
6 American Goldfinch
48 House Sparrow

137 Species - Count Day

3 Species - Count Week



9 Spotted Towhee
4 California Towhee
57 Savannah Sparrow

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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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