



# The Black Oystercatcher

Mendocino Coast Audubon Newsletter March 2017



**Dorothy King Young Chapter**  
CALIFORNIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY



You Are Cordially Invited  
To Join Us  
At the Annual "Environmental Potluck"  
And Presentation  
Of The Matthew Coleman  
Environmental Service Award

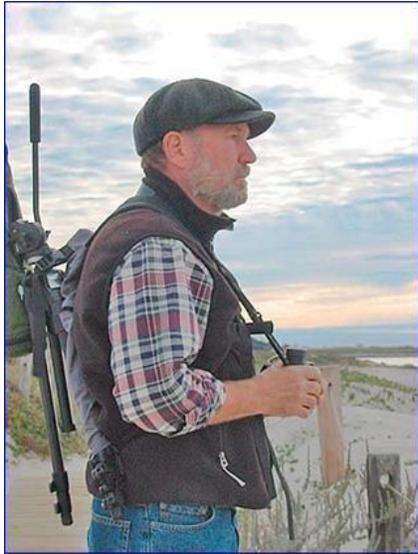
Monday, March 20, 2017  
Caspar Community Center

Dinner at 6 PM  
7 PM Presentation of Award  
To Robert Gaines and Louis Reynolds

This Year's Potluck Hosted by  
Mendocino Coast Audubon Society

Please bring your own plate, silverware, beverage,  
and a potluck dish for 8

Contact: David Jensen, President, MCAS  
djensen@mcn.org 964-8163

**PRESIDENT'S CORNER****Dave Jensen**

For more than 20 years now, Mendocino Coast Audubon has been proud to be part of the annual Environmental Organization Potluck Dinner and Award Celebration. On this special evening we join with members of the Mendocino Land Trust, the Dorothy King Young Chapter of the California Native Plant Society, and the Mendocino Area Parks Association to share our achievements of the past year and to honor a special person or persons for their hard work and dedication to our shared values. And, of course, to visit with one another over a wonderful array of food.

This is always a lively and friendly affair, a chance to see old friends and make new ones. It should come as no surprise that in our coastal community, where volunteer organizations like ours rely heavily on STP (the same ten people), that many of us belong to two or more of the participating organizations.

Organizational boundaries dissolve, ideas and support flow freely, and a spirit of community, of common ground, pervades.

The member organizations take turns hosting this annual event, and this year it is our turn. Your board of directors has decided to forego a formal presentation this year. There will be no speaker, which means that there will be more time for sharing and we can all get to bed on time.

A highlight of each gathering is the presentation of the environmental recognition award. The list of past recipients reads like a "Who's Who" of local environmental leaders. Linda Perkins, Art Morley, Dorothy "Toby" Tobkin, Teresa Sholars, Ron LeValley, Pam Huntley, Becky Bowen, Angela Liebenberg, Warren and Ginny Wade, Mario Abreu, Peter Warner, Lori Hubbart, Joan Curry, the list goes on. Each one a champion for local environmental protection.

In 2012, this award was renamed the "Matt Coleman Environmental Achievement Award" in honor of our dear friend who was dedicated to all that we hold dear. This year's award will recognize the tireless efforts of two humble men - Robert Gaines and Louis Reynolds. As employees of State Parks since 2003 and 2000 respectively, they have spent more than 30,000 hours pulling invasive weeds along our coast. They have helped restore critical habitat for the Western Snowy Plover and for rare and endangered flora. They have worked on European beach grass, ice plant and gorse. They have helped with watershed restoration, helped install signage and symbolic fencing for plovers, and have worked to improve the condition of parklands along our coast. In short, they embody the dedication and commitment to conservation that Matt Coleman displayed and richly deserve to be recognized for their efforts.

So, I hope you will join us at this year's event, which will be held on Monday, March 20, at the Caspar Community Center. The potluck dinner will start at 6:00 and the presentations should begin around 7:00. Bring a dish to share and whatever you prefer to drink at such events. Please remember to bring a plate and utensils, but don't worry if you forget. We'll take care of you.

## MCAS ON THE SOUTH COAST



PAUL BANNICK  
PRESENTS

# OWLS

Wednesday, March 15, 2017

7 PM

Gualala Community Center

For owls, every day brings a new challenge to survive. On Wednesday, March 15, award-winning conservation photographer Paul Bannick will share images and insights that show how owls use the resources available to them in their habitat to survive and thrive. The presentation will be at the Gualala Community Center.

Follow along as each stage in an owl's life is chronicled: courtship, mating, and nesting in spring; fledging and feeding of young in summer; learning independence in fall; and, finally, winter's migration.

In his new book *Owl: A Year in the Lives of North American Owls*, Bannick uses his intimate yet dramatic images to follow North American owls through the course of one year and in their distinct habitats. While the Northern Pygmy-Owl, Great Gray Owl, Burrowing Owl and Snowy Owl are discussed most prominently, all 19 species found in Canada and the United States are covered in the book.

"For anyone who appreciates wild things and wild places, each of Paul Bannick's stunning photographs is worth ten thousand words," says Audubon's Ted Williams.

Paul Bannick is an internationally-recognized photographer who specializes in birds and their habitats. His work has been published by *National Geographic*, *The Smithsonian Magazine*, *The New York Times* and National Audubon Society publications.

## SAVE OUR SHOREBIRDS

Becky Bowen

### ROLL OUT THE NUMBERS—WHAT THE BIRDS AND THE DATA ARE TELLING US

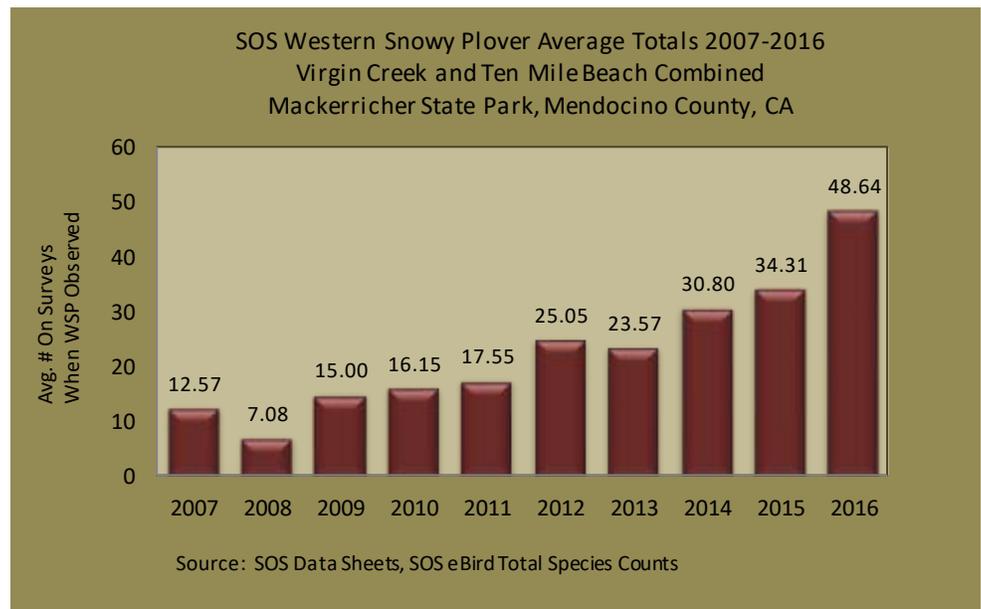
*Editor's Note:: The 2016 SOS Annual Report, published in January, is available on Mendocino Coast Audubon Society's website [www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org](http://www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org) under the conservation tab. The report includes data on shorebird species in Mackericher State Park and is available at no charge to the public, agencies and schools. SOS is an ongoing MCAS citizen science project in partnership with California State Parks. MacKerricher State Park reaches from the south border of Glass Beach to Ten Mile River.*

In 2007, National Audubon and the American Bird Conservancy published a “Watchlist” of birds in serious decline in the Continental U.S. and Alaska, Hawaii, and the Pacific U.S. Territories. Among the watchlisted shorebird species were some names familiar to us: Western Snowy Plover, Long-billed Curlew, Marbled Godwit, Black Turnstone, Surfbird, Red Knot, Sanderling, and Western Sandpiper. On the Watchlist “Red List” were Rock Sandpiper and Buff-breasted Sandpiper, both rare birds on the Mendocino Coast. The Buff-breasted Sandpiper’s global population was estimated at 15,000.

Save Our Shorebirds was established the same year by the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society with help from California Audubon and a grant from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation. The program provided for surveys, education, and outreach. The base year was 2007 and the goal was to see an increase of 5 per cent in two years in the number sightings of watchlisted shorebirds on MacKerricher State Park beaches. California State Parks was our partner and surveyors in the field were supervised by State Parks environmental scientists. We decided to include all shorebirds in surveys; they shared the same critical habitat as watchlisted species.

On June, 18, 2007, surveys began. Surprisingly, two Buff-breasted Sandpipers were observed in August and September on SOS surveys. Now, 11 years later, what do we know and how are the shorebirds doing along the 15.7 km. coastline of MacKerricher State Park? The answer is we now know plenty and the data bring us both good news and not-so-good news.

Numbers depend on the bird and the beach. Western Snowy Plovers, for instance, are found in the park only on Ten Mile and Virgin Creek Beaches. The highest count of the plovers seen on one survey in 2007 was 42 in October. The all-time high count was 116 in December, 2015. At right is a comparison using the average number found on those surveys where Western Snowy Plovers were counted.

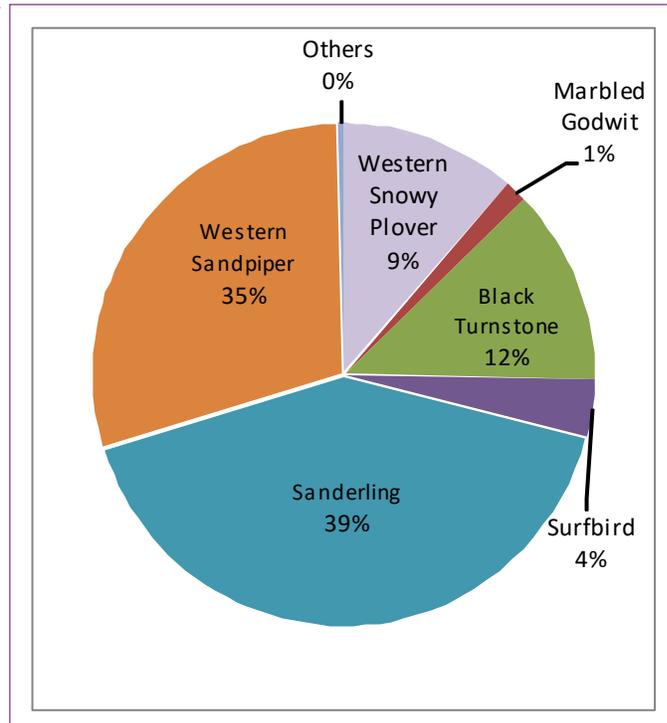


Continued on Page 5

The not-so-good news is that sustainable spring and summer reproduction has not resulted from the thriving Western Snowy Plover numbers observed in winter flocks. All the nests were destroyed; all the chicks were killed. Dog, raven, and human tracks were found at nest sites. Surveyors counted 712 dogs at Ten Mile Beach and 404 off-leash dogs at Virgin Creek Beach between 2007-2016. Since surveys last only 1-3 hours, the disturbance models we built indicate considerably larger numbers of predators at both sites. No dogs are allowed at Ten Mile, which is part of a State Parks preserve. Leashed dogs are allowed on the Virgin Creek Haul Road but the beach itself is off limits to them. From 2007-2016, we also counted 11,220 Common Ravens at Ten Mile Beach and 3,461 Common Ravens at Virgin Creek Beach.

On the good news side, by January, 2017, surveyors had recorded 10,232 sightings of Black Oystercatchers. A steady increase in their average numbers has occurred every year since 2014.

The total number of shorebirds recorded on SOS surveys between 2007-2016 was 232,163, and 155,244 (67 per cent) were watchlisted. At right is a graphic of how the numbers of watchlisted shorebirds broke down.



Becky Bowen  
Buff-breasted Sandpiper, August 20, 2016 Ten Mile Beach

And did the Buff-breasted Sandpipers ever return? Between 2007 and 2016, surveyors recorded a total of 27 sightings of the bird, way off a migration course down the central states (almost never on the Pacific or Atlantic Coast). The latest sighting was in August at Ten Mile.

We keep going to preserve this history. It wouldn't be right to stop now. Coastal shorebirds are important indicators of the ocean's health and many of our watchlisted species are under federal protection. We have a big data set. The size of our spreadsheets is enough to make a grown person cry. But numbers are facts. Facts are information. Information is knowledge. And no matter which way the political winds blow, knowledge is power.

We will hold SOS infield training every Friday in April and May at 9 a.m. at Virgin Creek Beach. You are welcome to join us. To learn more about the program, contact Angela Liebenberg at [liebenbergs@mcn.org](mailto:liebenbergs@mcn.org) and please visit us at [www.facebook.com/SaveOurShorebirds](http://www.facebook.com/SaveOurShorebirds)

## EDUCATION

Sarah Grimes

### MENDOCINO COAST AUDUBON SOCIETY EDUCATORS GEAR UP FOR SPRINGTIME BIRDWATCHING PROGRAMS IN AREA SCHOOLS

Every year, the MCAS education team visits classrooms from Laytonville to Point Arena, from Fort Bragg to Anderson Valley to entice more than 300 young birders to share in the joy of birding. Started in 1992, the program teaches basic bird biology and birding skills. Classes focus on bird identification and conservation. Young students also learn how to use binoculars.



Photograph by Sarah Grimes

Sometimes we learn from our students. One of them told us this story: last fall, one of our "Big October" students contacted us to inform us family members found a banded dead Spotted Owl in their backyard. Since the Spotted Owl is an endangered species, authorities were contacted and arrangements made to transport the owl to Robert Douglas at California Fish & Wildlife in Fort Bragg. Mr. Douglas read the band, identified the bird, and told us it was over 20 years old, one of the oldest study birds in the Comptche area. Thanks to the family for reporting their find to MCAS. Even though it is sad to find a dead bird, this individual told an important story to scientists.

### THE ANSWER LADY: BIRD FEEDER QUESTION Charlene McAllister

A member recently contacted Audubon to say House Finches at her feeder exhibited signs of Avian Pox. She wondered what to do, whether it needed to be reported, and if she should remove the feeders. Avian Pox has been described by bird-feeding enthusiasts for many years. It is caused by a virus. Various sources give these recommendations to prevent disease transmission at bird feeders: keep feeders clean and keep food fresh. Clean feeders once a week with 10% bleach solutions. Sweep ground under and around feeders to remove droppings and unused feed. Those who have squirrels, chipmunks, or nighttime visits from raccoons and skunks are unlikely to have uneaten seed on the ground.

Change water in drinking receptacles or baths every day. Some sources recommend a 5% chlorine solution in bird baths. The type of feeder also has consequences for disease transmission. Tube feeders do not accumulate bird droppings as platform feeders do, and that may help to avoid disease transmission. Some studies, however, show that tube feeders promote direct contact between birds competing for the limited access points. So tube feeders should not be placed close together.

For more information on avian diseases go to <http://feederwatch.org/learn/sick-birds-and-bird-diseases/>

## PAM HUNTLEY ON KZYX FM



California Towhee Photograph by Alan Vernon

### CALIFORNIA TOWHEE

California Towhees are mostly brown birds that are 8-10 inches long with short, conical beaks and long tails. They have brown backs and light underparts. There are rusty brown patches under their tails and chins, as well as streaked lines on their necks.

These towhees are year-round residents of Baja California, California and southern Oregon. Their habitat is often described as along edges of grazing, logging, farming, and suburban areas (they are often seen on patios and under picnic tables). Their metallic, sharp “chink” notes also can be heard in thickets. Chicks are fed only insects, usually beetles and grasshoppers. Male California Towhees are so aggressively territorial they sometimes attack their reflections on window glass or shiny hubcaps. Adults pair for life. If a pair is separated, one will call from the top of a bush until the two reunite with squealing greetings and body bobbing. Nests are built in low forks of shrubs or small trees. Females build bulky cup nests of twigs, grasses, and dried flowers, then line them with hair, bark, and downy seeds. Three to four bluish-white eggs with brown speckles are laid and there can be two or three broods a season.

### MCAS SEEKS BOARD MEMBERS, EDITOR Charlene McAllister

We are on the lookout for good people who want to serve as volunteers or board members. If you, or someone you know, would be a good candidate to join a dedicated group that promotes conservation, education, and protection for birds and other wildlife, drop us a note or give us a call. We’d love to talk to you.

After five years and nearly 50 issues, our newsletter editor will move on to devote more time to the Save Our Shorebirds program. We’d like to hear newsletter ideas and feedback from you. The position requires writing and graphics skills. Please let the nominating committee know if you are interested.

Our membership elects directors and officers at a short business meeting prior to the start of our regular May program. The nominating committee is: Charlene McAllister, chair person (937-4463) [charad@comcast.net](mailto:charad@comcast.net), Jim Havlena (964-1280), and Judy Steele (937-2216).

**Donald Shephard’s column will return next month.**

## FIELD TRIP NOTES

Tim Bray

**Saturday, February 11** – Adam Hutchins led 7 birders on a hike to Manchester Beach, "Lake Davis," and part of the Point Arena-Stornetta Unit of the California Coastal National Monument. The best birds were the 21 Western Snowy Plovers we found right off the bat, crouching against the wind coming off the ocean. Two distant Ferruginous Hawks were also nice, and an Osprey surprised us by flying right over our heads as we walked on the beach. In general birds were sparse, as has been the pattern all winter.

**Saturday, March 11** – **Owling with Mike Stephens.** Reservations required. Please contact Tim Bray [tbray@mcn.org](mailto:tbray@mcn.org) (707) 734-0791 for time and meeting place (it will be an evening field trip). Rain cancels. Leader Mike Stephens has made several presentations to MCAS about owls. In 2000, he moved to Mendocino County where he started a radio-telemetry study of Spotted Owls and their foraging habitat in timber harvesting areas. He has worked for the National Park Service, The U.S. Forest Service, Redwood Sciences Lab in Arcata, CA., and The National Council for Air+Stream Improvement (NCASI). His wildlife consulting business was established in 2005. He has worked with many local clients, including The Conservation Fund, Jackson Demonstration State Forest, Save the Redwoods League, and Redwood Forest Foundation.

## THE OVENBIRD IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD



Ovenbird Dick Daniels photo <http://carolinabirds.org>

Downtown Caspar, California, is a wonderfully friendly and engaging town of some 200 people who get along no matter what the weather and politics throw at us. We like each other and often gather at the rural postal boxes to talk about what's happening around the community center, especially the neighborhood river otters, foxes, and birds. Back in November, a message came from Morgan Zeitler, retired State Parks superintendent-turned-writer. A bird had not survived a window hit at his home and he couldn't identify it. We put him in touch with Robert Keiffer, retired from the University of California Hopland Research and Extension Center.

Keiffer identified it as an Ovenbird and made it part of the center's collection. "What a great record," Keiffer wrote. "Thanks for observing that it was something different."

Different, indeed. This wood warbler is listed in county records as extremely rare. It is an Eastern bird that breeds across middle Canada and migrates to Florida, the Gulf Coast, Mexico, the West Indies and South America. One source indicates as many as half of adults do not survive what is described as a hazardous migration. The bird is named for its nest shape—a covered cup that resembles a Dutch oven.

The bird that made its way to Caspar was half a continent off-course. Keiffer said it was only the fourth or fifth record in the Mendocino County. **Becky Bowen**

## CALENDAR, BIRD WALKS, FIELD TRIPS

### March 2017

**Saturday 4 Beginner Bird Walk** [Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens](#) 18220 Highway 1, Fort Bragg, CA. 9AM-Noon.\* Leader: Dave Jensen

**4, 5, 18, 19 Whale Festival Birdwalks**, Point Cabrillo Preserve 9AM, meet at Point Cabrillo Light Station upper parking lot. Leader: Sarah Grimes (Mar. 4) Dave Jensen (Mar. 5, 18, 19)

**11 Owling Field Trip**-Reservations required. Contact Tim Bray [tbray@mcn.org](mailto:tbray@mcn.org) (707) 734-0791 (See field trip story, Page 8) Rain cancels.

**Wednesday 15 Bird Walk** [Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens](#) 18220 Highway 1, Fort Bragg, CA. 8:30 AM-Noon.\* Leader: Tim Bray

**Wednesday 15 Meeting** Gualala Community Center, 47950 Center Street, Gualala, CA 7PM  
Speaker: Paul Bannick, author of *A Year in the Lives of North American Owls*  
(See story, Page 3)

**Monday 20 Environmental Partnership Potluck, Presentation of Matthew Coleman Environmental Service Award** [Caspar Community Center](#) 15051 Caspar Rd, Caspar, CA. 6 PM Dinner, 7PM Award Presentation (See invitation, Page 1)

**Sunday 26 Coastal Trail Bird Walk - [Coastal Trail](#)** 10AM-Noon, meet near restroom at east end of parking lot at foot of Elm Street, Fort Bragg. Bring water, wear comfortable walking shoes, binoculars available, heavy rain cancels. Leader: Dave Jensen

### April 2017

**Saturday 1 Beginner Bird Walk** [Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens](#) 18220 Highway 1, Fort Bragg, CA 9AM-Noon\* Leader: Dave Jensen

**Monday 3 Board Meeting** contact Dave Jensen for time, location

**Saturday 8 Field Trip** Hendy Woods State Park, near Philo. 9AM-Noon. Meet at bridge on Philo-Greenwood Road. We will bird from the bridge and nearby areas, then go into the park and walk a loop trail. Swallows and Purple Martins, Black-headed Grosbeaks, and Black-throated Gray Warblers are regularly seen; sometimes Western Tanager, Hermit Warbler, and Green Heron. Cassin's Vireo and Barred Owl can also be heard here. Please note Hendy Woods State Park charges an entrance fee.

**Monday 17 Meeting** [Caspar Community Center](#) 15051 Caspar Rd, Caspar, CA 7PM  
Speaker: Ron LeValley [www.levalleyphoto.com](http://www.levalleyphoto.com) Shorebird identification

**Wednesday 19 Bird Walk** [Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens](#) 18220 Highway 1, Fort Bragg, CA 8AM-Noon\* Leader: Tim Bray

**Sunday 23 Coastal Trail Bird Walk - [North Coastal Trail, Fort Bragg](#)** 10AM-Noon, meet near restroom at east end of parking lot at foot of Elm Street, Fort Bragg. Bring water, wear comfortable walking shoes, binoculars available, heavy rain cancels.  
Leader: Dave Jensen

*\*These walks are free, but there is an entry charge for participants who are not Garden members*

For complete calendar, updates, and useful links, visit: [www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org](http://www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org)

And please visit us on facebook: [www.facebook.com/mendocinocoastaudubon](http://www.facebook.com/mendocinocoastaudubon)

## MCAS BOARD MEMBERS AND PROGRAM CHAIRS 2016-2017

President	David Jensen	<a href="mailto:djensen@mcn.org">djensen@mcn.org</a>	964-8163
Vice-President, Field Trips	Tim Bray	<a href="mailto:tbray@mcn.org">tbray@mcn.org</a>	937-4422
Secretary	Iana Porter	<a href="mailto:ianate@mcn.org">ianate@mcn.org</a>	
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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

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