

The Whistling Swan



NEWSLETTER OF THE MENDOCINO COAST AUDUBON SOCIETY

March 2009

ENVIRONMENTAL PARTNERSHIP MEETING

Monday, March 23, 2009

Potluck at 6:00 PM

Meeting starts at 7:15 PM

St. Anthony's Hall, Lansing Street, Mendocino

Dr. Dave Imper, an Ecologist in the Arcata Field Office of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, and Rare Plant Chair of the California Native Plant Society will speak on "Livestock Grazing in Wildlife Habitat". This year's event is hosted by the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society, and co-sponsored by Mendocino Area Parks Association, Mendocino Land Trust, and the Dorothy King Young Chapter of the California Native Plant Society.

The Mendocino Coast Audubon Society, this year's sponsoring organization, will present an award to persons who have contributed to our coastal community and environment through education, conservation and preservation.



Western Meadowlark



Satyr Tragopan photo by Dean Schuler

BIRDING in the LAND of the THUNDER DRAGON-BHUTAN

Monday, April 13, 2009

Gualala Art Center

Speakers: Richard Kuehn
& Dean Schuler

More details in the April Whistling Swan

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER



I thank everyone who took the time to speak out in support of the efforts by Mount Diablo and California Audubon Societies to stop the slaughter of Acorn Woodpeckers in the Contra Costa County community of Rossmoor. Although the resolution of this matter is still in doubt, the Mount Diablo Audubon chapter recently reported that the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USF&WS) has issued a temporary halt to the shooting in order to conduct a survey of the area to determine the

number of woodpeckers actually present.

In their application for the predation permit, the Rossmoor condominium associations claimed that there were 500 birds in the area. However, Dr. Eric Walters, who is well known for his Acorn Woodpecker research at Hastings Natural History Reserve in Monterey County, asserts that the number is more than 30 times the highest density of Acorn Woodpeckers ever recorded! Audubon California believes that an accurate census will convince USF&WS to withdraw the permit, but nothing is yet assured. For a review of Dr. Walters' interesting report as well as the unfortunate history of how this development was allowed to be located in this area with such predictable results, go to Mount Diablo website at www.diabloaudubon.com/newsletter.php and read their February 2009 newsletter.

It's not too late to call and voice your opinion. Let Rossmoor know you think they should work with local Audubon representatives on a non-lethal solution: (925) 988-7712. Call the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and tell them you want Rossmoor's permit (MB164975-1) revoked: (916) 414-6464. Ask U.S. Congresswoman Ellen Tauscher (Democrat, 10th District) to pressure the Service on the permit: (925) 932-8899. The quickest and easiest way to speak out is to sign an electronic petition to stop this cruel and pointless act (www.audubonaction.org/campaign/woodpeckers_revoke_permit).

Also, for more information on global warming and its effects on birds and those who love them (see the story on page 4 of this newsletter), please visit California Audubon's website www.ca.audubon.org. It is important to understand that although the situation is bad and becoming worse every day, you can still become part of the solution. Click on the links to read the full report, including the many steps that can and must be taken to minimize the damage. Watch the video of an interview with the chief researcher of Audubon's report, or read the article about the "Carbon Breakfast Club." This group of Yolo County ranchers, researchers, regulators, and environmentalists is trying to determine the economic, scientific and practical viability of using rangeland in Yolo County and elsewhere to sequester carbon and help mitigate global warming. While you are there, sign up to receive Action Alerts so that you can easily speak out on concerns such as the recent spate of sewage spills in San Francisco Bay. Then take a deep breath and enjoy the beauty around you, knowing that you have done at least one small thing to protect it.

PAM HUNTLEY ON KXYZ FM 88.3, 90.7, AND 91.5



American Goldfinch

photo courtesy of Jim Wedge
and Cornell Lab of Ornithology

Pam broadcasts on KXYZ once Tuesday evenings on Community News at 5:00 pm with Christina Anatat. The segment is rebroadcast on Friday mornings at about 7:55 am. Here is a sample of a recent airing.

The American Goldfinch

In spring American Goldfinch definitely deserve their nickname, wild canary. The male is bright lemon-yellow with a black cap, wings and tail. Females are olive-yellow with dusky wings. They both have white wing-bars, a notched tail, and a thick, orange beak. For most of the year, males and females are hard to tell apart. Living in mixed flocks, they bound through the air with their roller coaster flight singing in chorus over orchards, fields, and roadsides.

American Goldfinches feed on the seeds of conifers and alder trees, thistles, golden rod, and dandelions. In the garden, they eat the flowering heads of zinnias, cosmos, and lettuce.

American Goldfinches commonly change mates between seasons. In most of the country they are known as late nesters, but in California they do things differently, and start nesting in May and June. Nests are made out of woven plant fibers, and held together with spider and caterpillar webbing. The nest is so thick it can hold water and mother must shield it with her wings during a rainstorm or the chicks could drown. The female spends an incredible 95% of her time on the eggs and is fed by the male with much fancy flight and song.

American Goldfinches sometimes get hooked on burrs while feeding on burdock and can't escape. They also get caught in the web of orb-weaving spiders.

For the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society, I'm Pam Huntley wishing you happy birding.

BIRDS TELL AN IMPORTANT CLIMATE CHANGE STORY



Purple Finch photo courtesy of Ashok Khosa

What are Purple Finches, Boreal Chickadees and Black Ducks trying to tell us about climate change? They are all telling us that climate change is here, now. They are telling us we must act now to address this urgent problem. They are showing us a pattern of ecological disruption that tells an alarming story.

Audubon's latest report, *Birds and Climate Change: Ecological Disruption in Motion*, looks at the last 40 years of Christmas Bird Count data and

concludes that 58% of the species studied have moved significantly northward as winter temperatures increase, with the Purple Finch shifting the furthest – 433 miles.

We all know that birds are strong, early indicators on the health of our environment. This evidence of ecological disruption is yet another warning that global warming is an urgent problem, one that demands bold action now.

Take action on global warming by signing our petition to let your Members of Congress know that we need to pay attention to what the birds are telling us. We can solve the global warming problem if we act now and act together.

As part of Audubon's national campaign to promote this report and urge our leaders to take immediate action to address the threat of global warming, we've launched a companion web site, www.BirdsandClimate.org.

In addition to the action petition, www.BirdsandClimate.org features a fun quiz, so you can test your knowledge, and a place to report your own observations (we'll post some of the best stories). Also, don't miss our upcoming webcast featuring the Audubon's lead bird scientist, Greg Butcher, author of the report.

Finally, help us spread the word on this important message. Send the quiz or the petition to your friends, your family, your coworkers. Help us grow so that we can build our online army and do even more to persuade Congress that action is needed on global warming now.

Take action on global warming by signing our petition. Let your Members of Congress know that now is the time for action. The birds are sending us an important message, one we dare not ignore.

Do you know someone else who cares about protecting our future for our children and the natural world we depend on? Help us to spread the word.

COLLEGE AWARDS CELEBRATE STUDENTS AND SHOREBIRDS

College of the Redwoods art students will be honored for creating shorebird images at a ceremony next month where MCAS will award three scholarships totaling \$1,750.

A \$1,000 scholarship will be awarded to the student who designs a new Save Our Shorebirds graphic logo. Save Our Shorebirds is an on-going Audubon and State Parks citizen science project that monitors shorebird activity on MacKerricher State Park beaches. The scholarship was funded by MCAS and a matching grant from TogetherGreen.

The college recently received donations to fund additional awards of \$500 and \$250 for the SOS art scholarship competition.

The awards ceremony will be at noon, Thursday, April 23 at the campus.



Deadline for entries is April 10 and competition is open only to students enrolled at CR for the last two semesters. All entries will hang in college hallways from mid-April through May 1.

Judging will be by an art professor, a science professor and Audubon member Ron LeValley.

The College and Audubon will sponsor a First Friday Artist Reception at the school on May 1.

“The Shorebird Scholarship and related exhibition of shorebird art has generated a flurry (no pun intended) of interest in a topic that is in the consciousness of many of our students all the time: the aesthetic and environmental appreciation of our scenic north coast and all its wonderful creatures,” Prof. Bob Rhoades said.

Scholarship competition introduced many art students to new subjects and new media. SOS volunteers prepared a lesson plan about shorebirds and students were invited to create innovative graphic images of shorebirds. No photographs or computer-generated art is included.

SOS entered the third year of research in 2009. This shorebird conservation program currently is supported by TogetherGreen, an Audubon program with funding by Toyota.

We welcome volunteers with all levels of birding experience. Contact B. Bowen at casparbeck@comcast.net or 962-1602.

AT THE MENDOCINO HEADLANDS: THE RED-NECKED PHALAROPE

Donald Shephard

Red-necked Phalarope
photo courtesy of
Ashok Khosa



If the current rainy season proves productive, vernal pools will form on the landward side of Heeser Drive in the Mendocino Headlands State Park. Turn your attention away from the ever-fascinating ocean and you may see a Red-necked Phalarope spinning in the water. I watched my first phalarope, a Wilson's, at the Sugar Ponds near Woodland. Observe through binoculars as this buoyant, little bird, held high in the water by a thick patch of underbelly feathers, spins like a demented toy, and nausea quickly results. This whirligig action, propelled by lobed toes, creates a vortex of water that brings small insects and crustaceans to the surface. Phalaropes pluck the goodies and open their beak. They use the water surface tension to 'wick' their prey from the tip of their bills into their mouths. During the breeding season and when on fresh water, they eat mostly insects. At saline lakes, they consume brine shrimp in large numbers. At sea, they eat zooplankton and other small creatures that rise to the surface at convergence zones and upwellings.

All three, Wilson's, Red, and Red-necked Phalaropes, gyrate in this manner. The Red-necked (formerly the Northern) Phalarope, at sparrow size (7 inches), rates the smallest pelagic bird. The breeding female shows predominantly dark grey above, with a chestnut neck and upper breast, black face and white throat. The breeding male presents a duller version of the female. Young birds look grey and brown above, with buff underparts and a black patch through the eye. In winter, the plumage appears essentially grey above and white below, but the black eye-patch identifies them. Their finer bills and bodies distinguish them from their congener, the Red Phalarope.

Red-necked Phalaropes, like Red Phalaropes, but unlike other shorebirds, prefer to swim rather than wade, a habit that enables them to spend the winter on the high seas, although on occasion they wade in pools and feed on mudflats with many other shorebirds. Red-necked Phalaropes spend up to ten months at a time at sea. You may see overland migrants on reservoirs, lakes, and coastal marshes. This phalarope breeds in the Arctic regions of North America and Eurasia. In winter they spend all their time at sea in three areas: off the Arabian Peninsula; around Indonesia and the Philippines; and off the Pacific coast of Peru. [\(continued next page\)](#)

At the Mendocino Headlands. The Red-necked Phalarope (continued)

Females arrive on the breeding grounds before males. Like other phalaropes, they practice polyandry with reversed sex roles; breeding females display brighter plumage than males and slightly larger body size. The species is largely non-territorial, but females fight ferociously over males, which provide all parental care. Females establish territories and display to attract mates. Both sexes start scrapes on mounds or tussocks near the water, and the female picks one. The male adds a lining of grass, sedge, lichen, and leaves in a shallow depression concealed in sedge, ferns, grass, or shrubs. After laying four eggs, the female leaves the male to incubate the eggs and provide all parental care. The male incubates the eggs, cares for the young and therefore displays muted colors. Scientists found a correlation between the aggression of the female, her brighter colors, and her lack of post-natal duties and endocrine levels.

Although they provide no parental duties, females can mate with multiple males each year, and produce up to four sets of eggs. Jaegers, gulls, and foxes are documented sources of mortality for eggs and adults on the nesting grounds; jaegers, dolphins, storms, and El Nino are documented sources of mortality at sea.

In western North America, tens of thousands use hyper-saline lakes as fueling stations on their way south to the Humboldt Current off Peru and Ecuador. In eastern North America, massive flocks totaling millions formerly staged in fall in the western Bay of Fundy; in recent years, these have disappeared. This troubling development remains a puzzle, like much of the pelagic biology of this species. Japanese observers have recorded similar declines in numbers of their populations of migratory phalaropes.

In Alaska, one may see hundreds or thousands of phalaropes in swirling clouds that rise and fall above the sea surface, or forming large lines of swimming birds, in a feeding frenzy. Though small in stature, phalarope concentrations on the ocean rival any seabird aggregation for intensity and beauty. Here, at the coast, the Red-necked Phalarope entertains us not with massive numbers but with beauty and its frenetic feeding habit. We easily understand the collective nouns for these birds, a "swirl", "twirl", "whirl", and "whirligig" of phalaropes.



Red-necked Phalarope chick in the hands of an Alaska Park Ranger.

AFTERTHOUGHT

Remember my article, titled "A closer Look at the Varied Thrush", in the March, 2008 Whistling Swan? I wrote that we should see more Varied Thrushes this year. In fact we have, mostly in small bands of ten and twelve birds and often at the edge of flocks of American Robins.

VOLUNTEER OPORTUNITY

Save Our Shorebirds (SOS) volunteers look forward to resuming bird censuses on Ten Mile, Virgin Creek and Glass Beach this summer. We hope you can join us in this exciting project. To volunteer, contact Becky Bowen at casparbeck@comcast.net or 962-1602. If beach hiking is not your cup of tea, other SOS volunteer opportunities include work on a shorebird storybook for children of all ages, participation in a State Parks Junior Ranger program, European beach grass removal at Virgin Creek, help in shorebird identification training and taking the SOS message on a public speaking circuit.



Save Our Shorebirds, 2007, 2008 Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Volunteers

BOARD MEMBERS NEEDED

Perhaps you cannot spend as much time in the field as the volunteers above. Perhaps, like me, you are new to the coast and cannot yet tell a Snowy Plover from a Sanderling. Perhaps you have organizational skills developed from membership in other volunteer organizations or your career. Perhaps you are passionate about conservation. Are you newly retired and looking to develop your interest in this beautiful area and its natural denizens? Whatever your talents and level of birding skills, we need new board members. Charlene McAllister wants to pass on her task of Program Chair to an enthusiastic person. Ginny Wade wants to show someone else how she develops membership. We meet once a month. Ours is a lively, talented group full of joy in the world around us. Join us by calling any of the present board members listed on page 12.



A celebration of birds, wildlife, and springtime on beautiful Clear lake. Come and see the Western Grebe's joyous, almost comical courting display.

April 25-26, 2009

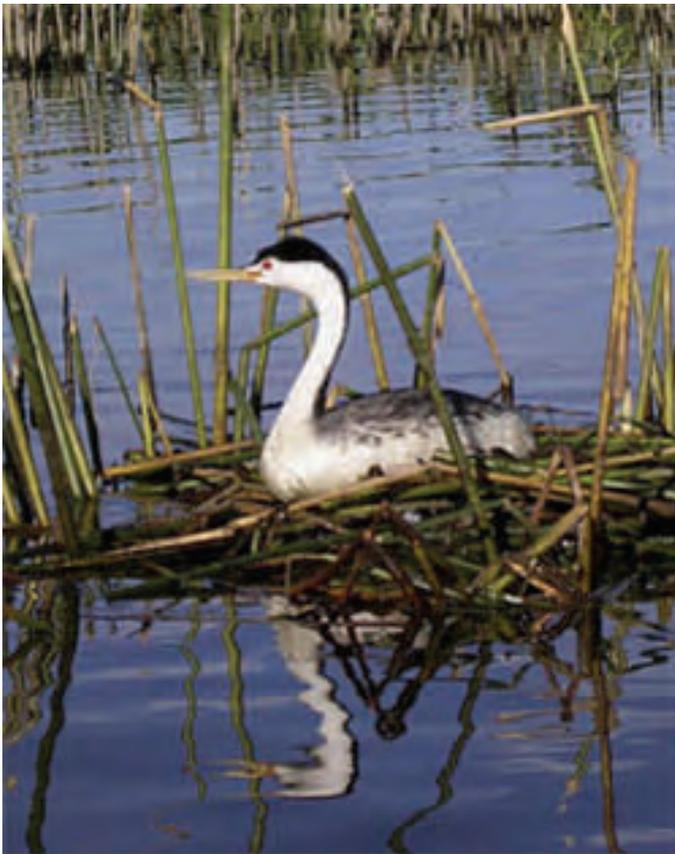
Clear Lake State Park, Kelseyville, CA.

Presented by the Redbud Audubon Society and Clear Lake State Park Interpretive Association. Phone (800) 525-3743

<http://www.heronfestival.org/>

Visit their website to view the Western Grebe courting display.

[Clark's Grebe on nest](#), courtesy Redbud Audubon. Note the white surrounding the eye and the bright yellow bill to distinguish it from the Western Grebe with dark around the eye and a dusky yellow bill.



PLOVERS

Maureen Eppstein

A dozen plovers invisible until
as if by standing still
a shape shift

upslope from tumble
and tongue of wave
bleached bull kelp
tangles on dry sand

as if
suspended between being
and not being
to witness

motion
of small speckled birds
intent on
shelter and food

First published in *Save Our Shorebirds: The First Two Years*, MCAS and California State Parks, 2009.



Black-bellied Plover in its winter plumage photo by Ron LeValley
www.LeValleyPhoto.com



Dear Festival Goers,

Registration has begun for Godwit Days Spring Migration Bird Festival 2009 in Arcata, California. Visit our website at www.godwitdays.com to view the event schedule and to register on-line. The keynote speaker will be Pete Dunne, Director of the Cape May Bird Observatory in New Jersey. New field trips are available as well as many of the popular ones we have offered year after year. We hope to see you Next April 16 - 22.



Marbled Godwit,

photo by Ron LeValley
www.LeValleyPhoto.com

Happy Birding,

The Godwit Days Board of Directors

BIRD SIGHTINGS

Bird Sightings for February taken from Mendobirds. You can register for Mendobirds at:
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Mendobirds/>

Bullock's Oriole, 15 Feb. A male took a quick bath in my small pond: David Jensen.

Purple Finches at my feeder, one of the males had such severe pox on both feet that he appeared to be wearing lamb's wool slippers: Dave Jensen, near Pudding Creek in Fort Bragg.

Allen's Hummingbird, male, in Mendocino on Sunday, February 15: Jerry White

Black-legged Kittiwakes, 16 Feb. At Juan Creek beyond the breakers ... Ward Avenue Black Scoter, Laguna Point.

Long-tailed Duck, Lake Cleone/Laguna Point Many mixed gulls at the beach, including Thayers Gull, one Brown Pelican adult, Whimbrels, Surfbirds, Black Turnstones were on the rocks north of the Laguna Point platform (no Rock Sandpipers).

Mew Gulls, Say's Phoebe, Black Oystercatchers, Black Turnstones, Surfbirds, and three Rock Sandpipers at Virgin Creek beach.

Rhinoceros Auklet, Feb 22, from the Trek II: Bob Keiffer.

Mockingbird on Ocean Drive.

BIRD WALKS AND FIELD TRIPS

March 7 and 8 at Point Cabrillo Light Station. The Mendocino Coast Audubon Society will host two bird walks as part of the Whale Festival activities at Point Cabrillo Light Station. Meet at 9:00 a.m. in the parking lot .

March 14 at Van Damme Beach parking lot. Field trip starts at 9:00 a.m. This is one of the few local places to see a Gray Jay.

March 18 at the Botanical Gardens. Our early birders walk will be held on the third Wednesday of the month, March 18, at 8:00 a.m. at the Botanical Gardens, Admission is free for Botanical Garden members. 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 and visit our website www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org

March 21 and 22 at point Cabrillo Light Station. . The Mendocino Coast Audubon Society will host two bird walks as part of the Whale Festival activities at Point Cabrillo Light Station. Meet at 9:00 a.m. in the parking lot .

MCAS SPRING PELAGIC TRIP - SUNDAY, MAY 17 , 2009

Plan to join the MCAS pelagic boat trip on Sunday, May 17, 2009, led by Ron LeValley and Kerry Ross. They have excellent knowledge of both seabirds and sea mammals, and they will enthusiastically call out what species we will see and help beginners learn field marks.

We meet at 7:30 a.m. and the charter boat Trek II will depart from Noyo harbor, Fort Bragg, at 8:00 a.m. for this seven hour cruise above either Navarro or Noyo Canyons or Tolo Bank. Sea canyons and banks create upwellings of nutrient-rich water that ocean birds detect. We should see albatrosses, shearwaters, jaegers, auklets and murre, and sea mammals such as whales, dolphins, seals and sea lions.

Cost : \$95 per person. Pay by check or credit card.

Payment by CHECK: Make check to MCAS for \$95 per person. Please include full names and contact information of your party: email addresses, phone numbers, and a mailing address.

Mail your envelope addressed as follows: K. Havlena - Pelagic Trip

PO Box 40

Fort Bragg, CA 95437-0040

Payment by CREDIT CARD: Please contact me by email with your telephone number and a good time for me to call you and take your credit card information.

NOTE: Please submit credit card approvals at least two days before the trip (May 15).

Confirmations will be sent to you with helpful suggestions regarding directions, food to bring (there is no galley on board), attire, and preventive measures for seasickness. Thanks.

Karen Havlena jkhavlena@yahoo.com



MCAS BOARD MEMBERS 2007-2008

President	David Jensen	964-8163	djensen@mcn.org
Vice President	Tony Eppstein	937-1715	tonyepp@mcn.org
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Education	Jeanne Coleman	937-1838	jeanne@mcn.org
Conservation	Warren Wade	964-6362	wwade@mcn.org
Newsletter	Donald Shephard	962-0223	donshephard@comcast.net

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

