



The Black Oystercatcher

Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Newsletter July, 2014

Masthead Photo by Ron LeValley

MCAS Family Bird Walks Are For Kids of All Ages



By Charlene McAllister

On a not-too-warm coastal June Day, two young girls and their mothers joined others for the MCAS Family Bird Walk to explore Mackerricher State Park's Lake Cleone. A chance to look at birds through binoculars brought instant smiles. Sarah Grimes started by showing them an abandoned Bushtit nest with intricate weaving of mosses and feathers that creates a miniature "sleeping bag." A short walk brought them to a singing Marsh Wren atop a cattail near the bird's nest. A feather was examined. Snags were investigated and discussed. When a bird was sighted and all had seen it, Sue "Magoo" brought out *Birds of Northern California*, by David Fix, which illustrates birds and provides information about them. Sable and Ella proved apt students of nature, being interested in all they saw. Sable told about the Northern Mockingbird that lives near her Windsor home and Ella, when asked what her favorite bird of the day was, said "the tiny ones." That Marsh Wren made an impression.



Photos by B. Bowen

Sable (above) with MCAS Educator Sarah Grimes and Ella (below) at the MCAS Family Bird Walk June 21, 2014. At top right, Marsh Wren seen by participants.

When families venture out-of-doors with their children, there is an opportunity to expand their appreciation and understanding of wildlife. Sarah Grimes and Sue Coulter are the perfect duo to help children and parents learn to enjoy and better understand the natural world. Please join us and encourage your friends and visitors to bring their kids and grandkids on one of the walks.

THE MANY BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP IN MCAS

Annual membership in Mendocino Coast Audubon Society provides:

A subscription to *The Black Oystercatcher*, which contains information and announcements of field trips, programs, local issues, plus articles about birds.

Nine monthly meetings featuring speakers on a variety of natural history subjects

Field trips for beginner, intermediate and advanced levels of birding

Opportunities to volunteer in support of various environmental endeavors, including bird surveys

Being part of a team that works on local conservation issues

MCAS serves our community by:

Providing school-based education programs

Organizing two Christmas Bird Counts

Creating the MCAS web site for education and communication as well as membership development

Working in conjunction with local State Parks to conduct bird surveys

Participating in the annual coastal clean-up

All MCAS dues fund local projects and events.

It's membership renewal time (our membership year is July 1- June 30). If you are one of those who automatically renew via PayPal you can ignore the notice. If you have membership questions, contact Marybeth Arago at mmbarago@mcn.org

Mendocino Coast Audubon Society

P.O. Box 2297 • Fort Bragg • CA 95437

audubon@mcn.org www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org

IT'S MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL TIME

The basic membership dues cover the cost of your subscription to the *Black Oystercatcher*. Please consider joining or renewing at a higher level to support the important environmental education and conservation projects critical to the protection of wildlife and the environment. *Note: Membership in Mendocino Coast Audubon does not make you a member of National Audubon and joining NAS does not include membership in MCAS.*

I am a new member

I am a renewing member

Basic membership \$25.00

Low Income/Student \$15.00

Family \$30.00

\$ _____ Tax Deductible Contribution Amount

Please make your check payable to **Mendocino Coast Audubon Society (MCAS)** and mail to **P.O.Box 2297, Fort Bragg, CA 95437**. If you wish to pay by credit card, you may use the Pay Pal button on the web site www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

OUR MEMBERSHIP YEAR IS JULY 1- JUNE 30. Renewals not received by 9/1 will result in your being dropped from our membership list. Please don't let that happen!



CALLING ALL HIGH-STEPPERS AND GOOD SPORTS

**WE NEED YOUR HELP IN THE FABULOUS
MENDOCINO 4TH OF JULY PARADE**

- *PRECISION SPOTTING SCOPE AUDUBON DRILL TEAM**
- *NO EXPERIENCE OR REHEARSAL NECESSARY**
- *NO SPOTTING SCOPE REQUIRED – WE’LL FIGURE OUT A WAY TO MAKE IT WORK**
- *WE GUARANTEE A GOOD TIME AND YOU WILL BE ONE OF THE HITS OF THE PARADE (SEE LAST YEAR’S PHOTO ABOVE THAT WENT VIRAL)**

**CONTACT TIM BRAY TO PARTICIPATE:
tbray@wildblue.net OR 937-4422**

OYSTERCATCHERS**Donald Shephard**

Black Oystercatcher nest at the Point Cabrillo Light Station State Historic Park. Note the nest of pebbles and the cryptic color of the eggs. How many do you see?

Photograph by Donald Shephard

Black Oystercatchers, the eponymous species for this newsletter, are one of only four species of shorebirds that nest here on the Mendocino Coast. We all hear them calling above the crashing surf as they chase off intruders and defend their territory. Eponymous or not, they are neither black nor do they catch oysters. Mark Catesby coined the name oystercatcher in 1731 for the North American species *Haematopus palliatus*, which had previously been called sea pie. Joleen Ossello leads local volunteers in surveys of this species. Identification is simple: a blackish brown shorebird with a red bill. Waiting half an hour for an incubation exchange which lasts about thirty seconds, in order to count their mottled eggs on pebble nests, is not so simple. Catching sight of dark chicks on mussel beds is tougher. See for yourself in the photo.

Since 1913 there have been ten species in the oystercatcher genus *Haematopus*. Four exist down under: Pied Oystercatcher, Chatham Oystercatcher, Variable Oystercatcher found in New Zealand and Australia (as I mentioned in last month's article on New Zealand birds), and Sooty Oystercatcher. We have two species in the United States: Black Oystercatcher and American Oystercatcher (the latter species on the East Coast as well as Southern California). In Argentina, Chile and the Falkland Islands, you will find two more species: Magellanic Oystercatcher and Blackish Oystercatcher. Southern Africa and its offshore islands support the African Oystercatcher. The most widespread species – alternately called Eurasian Oystercatcher, Common Pied Oystercatcher or just plain Oystercatcher – roams from Europe to China and Korea. Most live along shorelines, but the Eurasian Oystercatcher and the South Island Oystercatcher both breed inland, far inland in some cases. Unfortunately the Canary Island Oystercatcher became extinct during the twentieth century.

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Fortunately we do not have to distinguish between our own Black Oystercatcher, which often shows dark brown feathers on the body, the Blackish Oystercatcher of South America, the Sooty Oystercatcher of Australia and the black specimens of the Variable Oystercatcher. The people who name birds must be eccentric because the scientific name for the Variable Oystercatcher is *H. unicolor*. Yes, a uni-colored, variably colored bird, why not.

Confusion about the species' delineation abounded in the past, with discrete populations of all black oystercatchers afforded specific status, while ornithologists considered all pied oystercatchers the same species. Having witnessed a variety of bird names change back and forth (White-tailed Kite to Black-shouldered Kite to White-tailed Kite for example), I would not be surprised if there occurs a further consolidation.

Oystercatchers are large, conspicuous, and noisy plover-like birds, with massive long orange or red bills, necessary for smashing or prying open mollusks. The bill shape varies between species, according to the diet. Those birds with blade-like bill tips pry open or smash mollusk shells, and those with pointed bill tips tend to probe for annelid worms.

Nearly all species of oystercatcher are monogamous, although there are reports of polygamy in the Eurasian Oystercatcher. They are territorial during the breeding season, with a few species defending territories year round. There is strong mate and site fidelity in the species that have been studied, with one record of a pair defending the same site for 20 years. A single nesting attempt is made per breeding season, which occurs over the summer months. Their nests are simple affairs: scrapes in the ground which may be lined, and which are placed in a spot with good visibility. The eggs of oystercatchers are spotted and cryptic (check the photo to get the feel of how cryptic). Between one and four eggs are laid, with three being typical in the Northern Hemisphere and two in the south. Incubation is shared but not equally; females tend to do more incubation while males engage in more territory defense.

Join Joleen Ossello and her volunteers studying the numbers and status of our Black Oystercatchers. In observing this species you will surely tune in to nature more closely and be inspired to help defend their territories from the ravages of our species with our ever expanding need for housing.

Black Oystercatcher chicks on a mussel bed on the Point Cabrillo Light Station State Historic Park. Another example of cryptic colors. How many chicks do you see?

Photograph by Joleen Ossello.



SAVE OUR SHOREBIRDS**Becky Bowen**

Photos by B. Bowen

**New Fort Bragg Trail Is On Our Horizon**

In 2002, Fort Bragg residents chose a coastal trail as the most important goal in development of the former Georgia-Pacific lumber mill located within city limits. Now, after twelve years of community input, planning, acquisition, environmental impact reporting, revenue-raising, negotiating, and hard work, the dream is coming true.

Marine mammals, shorebirds, and seabirds were viewed on "preview" tour of the future coastal trail June 20 led by Fort Bragg Community Development Director Marie Jones (top) and 50 members of the public, including City Council Member Heidi Kraut and daughter, Sadie.

Marie Jones, the city's Community Development Director, led some 50 members of the public on a "preview" walk through the 25-acre north parkland portion of the trail Friday, June 20. It was an opportunity for community members to look at the future trail site and ask questions before the \$6.5 million construction starts later this year. The

south portion of the construction project will add another 57 acres to the trail that will run from Glass Beach south to the Noyo bluffs. Funding is in place for construction in 2014 and 2015. When it is finished, the public will have access to the blufftop strip of land for the first time in more than 100 years. The rest of the 320-acre mill site property will remain private property.

Hikers will experience spectacular views from the trail that will form a segment of the California Coastal Trail. Offshore rocks easily viewed from the future trail are part of the California Coastal National Monument—home or resting places for marine wildlife. Audubon visitors on June 20 got their first looks at the "back" of the Western Gull Colony, otherwise seen only from a distance, on Glass Beach shorebird surveys. Sitting quietly on the blufftop were the first six gull chicks hatched this season. When construction is complete and the trail is open to the public, we'll add it to SOS survey routes. Then, we will be surveying beaches from Ten Mile River south to Noyo River—and every step we take will be on public land.

Save Our Shorebirds is an on-going long term Mendocino Coast Audubon program in partnership with State Parks. To learn more, contact Angela Liebenberg at liebenbergs@mcn.org and visit us on www.facebook.com/SaveOurShorebirds

GREEN BIRDING MENDOCINO **Richard Hubacek**

Photo by Tom, MTA

Back in the August, 2013, issue of *The Black Oystercatcher* there was a story about me trying to lower my “birding” carbon footprint. As you might recall, I had decided to do an experimental year of birding using the Mendocino Transit Authority (MTA), my bike, shoe leather and driving my truck as little as possible. So how did I do? Being a very serious birder--would I be bird deprived? Being a senior birder (MTA's classification, not mine) would I decide that all that biking and hiking was just too much effort? Would the weirdos on the bus “gross” me out enough to cause me to stop riding the bus? None of that happened and as it turned out I was the “weirdo” on the bus. Take a look at that picture in the August issue. Overall it was a fairly enjoyable year with just a few exceptions. Two of those exceptions were riding my bike on the Haul Road into 20-30mph headwinds, and subfreezing temperatures. The third exception I will get to later.

During my “year” I found 250 bird species. Eight of those were, for me, new Mendocino County birds with two of them being “life” birds. The lifers were the first documented Curlew Sandpiper seen in Mendocino and a Brown Booby. The other six were a Black-throated Sparrow (one of only four ever seen in Mendocino), Tropical Kingbird, a White-winged Dove, a Northern Parula, a Great-tailed Grackle, and a Rough-legged Hawk.

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A cancelled pelagic trip and a poor fall vagrant season prevented me from getting more than 260 birds. Cornell University's E-bird data showed my best year in the past was 263 birds, and I remained competitive (you did know that birding is a competitive sport?) with other top Mendocino birders. So I wasn't bird deprived.

I saved over 2929 carbon producing truck miles. According to the Union of Concerned Scientists' website, I prevented over 3,514 pounds or 1.757 tons of planet-warming carbon dioxide from entering the atmosphere. I actually did two SOS shorebird surveys and one trip to Ukiah without using my truck. That brings up the third exception mentioned above--biking up Little River Airport Road.

My blog at www.greenbirdingmendo.wordpress.com generated 651 (now over 1700) views over the year. Parts were read in 25 (now 48) countries. I had nine people following my blog. I wrote 191 posts. I wrote about serious subjects: drought, wildfires, rising temperatures and sea levels, acidification of our oceans, starving Arctic Tern chicks, how Miami is "doomed" and some not-so-serious subjects: B95, a 20+ year old banded Red Knot spotted in Delaware, a stork being arrested for spying in Egypt, sperm donor bikes in Copenhagen, a "bare-naked" big birding day, and how I almost stole a *National Geographic* magazine. I even featured a song by Loreena McKennitt called "Dante's Prayer." Some of you might be in the "know" as to how it got into my blog. My five part series on the "Psychology of Bus Riding" caught the eye of MTA's management. On two occasions, my blog was linked directly to the American Birding Association's blog.

During my "year" several major reports came out. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released parts of its Fifth Assessment Report saying that climate change is real and it's caused by us. The International Programme on the State of the Ocean released their "State of the Ocean Report 2013," describing the critical state our oceans are in. The reports were released around the time that our government was shut down. They didn't make the news. For the sake of future generations of both humans and birds, we should all be paying more attention to our warming planet.

I would like to thank several people for allowing me to hitch rides over the year. Arranged according to mileage are Chuck Vaughn, of the Peregrine Audubon Society; Dave Jensen, of Mendocino Coast Audubon Society; Alison Cebula, of State Parks; Adam Hutchins, formerly of State Parks and now of California Fish & Wildlife; Ron LeValley; and Sarah Grimes, my Fort Bragg CBC birding partner.

CALENDAR, BIRD WALKS, FIELD TRIPS

July 2014

- Friday 4 July 4 Parade, Village of Mendocino 12 Noon
Saturday 5 Beginner Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 9AM*
Wednesday 16 Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 8AM*

August 2014

- Saturday 2 Beginner Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 9AM*
Wednesday 20 Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 8AM*
Saturday 23 Great Day in Elk 12 Noon-4 PM (Parade at 12 Noon)

September 2014

- Saturday 6 Beginner Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 9AM*
Saturday 13 Field Trip 9AM [Virgin Creek Beach](#)
Monday 15 Meeting [Caspar Community Center](#) 7PM
Speaker: Ed Pandolfino on Birds of the Sierras
Wednesday 17 Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 8AM*
Saturday 20 [California Coastal Cleanup Day](#) 9AM-Noon

**These walks are free, but there is an entry charge for participants who are not members of the Gardens.*

For complete calendar, updates, and useful links, visit: www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org

And please visit us on facebook: www.facebook.com/mendocinocoastaudubon

FIELD TRIP REPORT: BIRDING THE NOYO BY KAYAK Tim Bray



Photo courtesy of Cate Hawthorne, Liquid Fusion Kayaking, Fort Bragg

The wind stayed outside the harbor Saturday, June 14, and the birds came out to play, so we had a great morning on the river. The birds began appearing even before the trip started, as a Western Wood-Pewee and a Downy Woodpecker each collected insects from a nearby tree during the safety orientation. Twelve participants, most with little kayak experience, filled the six tandem kayaks and were expertly guided by Cate Hawthorne and Jeff Laxier of Liquid Fusion Kayaking. They took us down to the harbor and back, pointing out many fascinating

things along the way: holes in the bank occupied by Belted Kingfisher and Northern Rough-winged Swallow nests; Ospreys sitting on nests, loudly calling to their mates in the air; a curious Harbor Seal pup checking us out. The highlight for me was watching a female American Kestrel enter a nest box (probably intended for Wood Duck) and hearing her chicks screaming for food. We also saw Song Sparrows and Chestnut-backed Chickadees feeding young. The air was filled with birdsong, including Swainson's Thrush and Golden-crowned Kinglet among many others. At the end of the trip we were greeted by a singing Black-headed Grosbeak and treated to the charming sight of a Mute Swan.

MCAS BOARD MEMBERS AND PROGRAM CHAIRS 2013-2014

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Field Trips	Tim Bray	937-4422	tbray@wildblue.net

Mendocino Coast Audubon Society e-mail address: 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

FORT BRAGG, CA, 95437

