



NEWSLETTER OF THE MENDOCINO COAST AUDUBON SOCIETY

August 2012

The MCAS Spotting Scope Precision Drill Team

Adam Hutchins, our Program Chair, organized the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Spotting Scope Precision Drill Team for the Fourth of July parade. Members included Tim Bray, David Jensen, Jessica Morton, Susan Tubbesing, Linda Perkins, and Adam Hutchins as bird spotters. The sign (shown on page 10) was carried by Alison Cebula and Bill Heil.

Despite the festive crowds, the marchers managed to spot American Goldfinches, Western Gulls, an Osprey, a Griffin (atop a downtown Mendocino building), and Turkey Vultures (over the cemetery). The most interesting birds were Olive-sided Flycatchers (they all heard “quick-three-beers” in front of both Dick's and Patterson's) and Royal “Tern” (command for 360 degree wave). Less celebratory bird spotters might have heard “quick-two-beers” from the rare editor bird, who took this photo before being driven home for his nap.

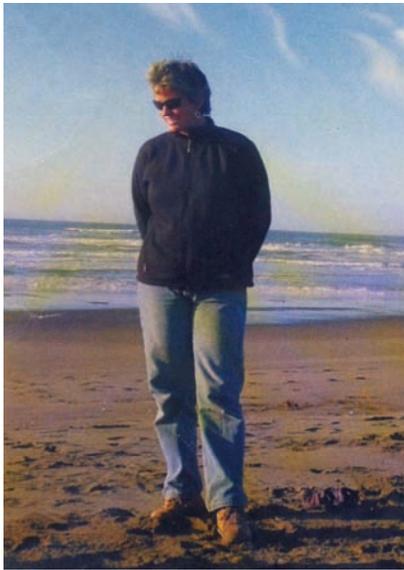


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Photos by
Donald Shephard





Jenny Griffin at the March Environmental Potluck where she received the Matt Coleman Award. Drawn from photos by Barbara Auerbach and Barbara Weiss, of the Mendocino Land Trust Board of Directors.

REMEMBERING JENNY GRIFFIN

Jenny Griffin, who received the Matt Coleman Environmental Service Award March 27, died of cancer July 7 in Mendocino. Jenny was born in 1961, grew up in the Bay Area, and moved to Mendocino County in 1988.

Jenny was a carpenter, commercial fisherman, landscaper, master gardener, and a leader in environmental protection, education and land conservation in Mendocino County. Her master's degree from UC Santa Cruz was in Environmental Education. Most recently she was a project manager for the Conservation Fund. MCAS worked with her in writing letters to support the Fund's acquisition of Salmon Creek land, where some 16,000 acres of redwood and Douglas fir forests now are either preserved or designated for sustainable forestry.

Her employment with the Conservation Fund followed five years as a project manager at the Mendocino Land Trust. Here she was in charge of a \$27 million fundraising effort to acquire and protect 7,334 acres in the Big River estuary. The Mendocino Coast Audubon society continues to conduct breeding bird surveys on this property.

"I cannot think of a single person who accomplished more in the conservation of the north coast's beautiful and threatened lands than Jenny Griffin. The Big River acquisition is the best known. Up and down the coast, her fingerprints are everywhere. She was dedicated, smart and effective. We miss her, and will for the rest of the time we spend doing this work," Mendocino Land Trust President Winston Bowen says.

David Jensen, MCAS President and former MLT President, says, "There are many who have taken a stand for the environment and who have accomplished wonderful things. But none of them have done so with the warmth, grace and charm that Jenny gave to everyone. Jenny Griffin set the standard for leadership. She didn't charge ahead and exhort others to follow, rather, she encouraged and inspired them to move forward according to the desire she had magically instilled in them through the light of her vision and the irresistible lure of her smile."

Dorothy Tobkin knew Jenny for over 20 years. "I remember her contented glow, her inner tranquility and warmth, Toby says. "She had a full life cut grievously short."

"I'm grateful for the time I had with Jenny – from land use planning to borrowing clothes for a special occasion and so much in between. I wish my time with Jenny had lasted longer," says Caspar's Judy Tarbell.

She was always at the right place at the right time and did the right thing for the earth for all the right reasons. We miss her beyond expression. Jenny is survived by Sheila Semans, her partner in life; mother, Mary Lou; brothers Steve (Christine) and Jeff (Tiffany) and their children, Sawyer, Tess, Joshua and Finn. She was preceded in death by her father, Ben.

The family asked that any donation in Jenny's honor be made to the Commonwealth Cancer Help Program (www.commweal.org) P.O. Box 316, Bolinas, CA 94924 or the Education Program of the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society (www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org) P.O. Box 2297, Fort Bragg, CA 95437.

PAM HUNTLEY ON KZYX FM 88.3, 90.7, AND 91.5

WESTERN SCREECH-OWL



Western Screech-owl photo courtesy of Laura Santry

Western Screech-Owls don't screech. Instead they produce a series of evenly pitched notes that accelerate at the end. These calls can be heard in the fall and are frequent during spring courtship. In the evening, their calls drift through both natural and suburban habitats, revealing the owl's otherwise hidden presence. Their bouncing-ball whistle is easily imitated and can be used to draw an owl into flashlight range. (Not recommended as a frequent practice in spring and summer.)

Western Screech-Owls are year-round residents in open or broken woodlands, often in riparian areas. They are also found in parklands, suburbs, towns, farms and ranches.

The Western Screech-Owl is seven to eleven inches tall with a wingspan of two feet. Those in our area are light gray with prominent vertical breast streaks. They have yellow eyes and a dark bill. The two tufts of feathers on the top of their head are called ear-tufts.

Screech-Owls hunt from a perch, eating mainly insects, mice and amphibians. They dive into streams for fish or crayfish. They are also known to hunt small birds and have been known to take another Screech-Owl and have the ability to tackle prey larger than themselves. There is a report of a Screech-Owl flying down a chimney and killing a canary inside its cage.

In spring, the male performs his courtship display from a perch, where he bows, raises its wings, snaps his bill and blinks at the female as she approaches. He will also bring food for her, presented with much hopping and bowing. Once established as a pair, they mutually preens and sings duets.

Western Screech-Owls make their nests in abandoned woodpecker holes, old magpie nests and nest boxes. They add no nesting material. The female incubates two to five white eggs for twenty-six days. The male feeds her and roosts with her during the day. Both feed the young. The downy hatchlings leave the nest after another month.

IT'S BEEN ONE BLOY OF A SUMMER Joleen Ossello



Some of our dedicated Black Oystercatcher Stewards.

In May of this year as you may recall, our chapter hosted a workshop on a U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service *Species of Focal Concern*. That event spearheaded a summer-long endeavor for twenty-one volunteers, who have conducted weekly nest checks of the flamboyant and ever present shorebird, the Black Oystercatcher (BLOY).

What does a focal species mean? This designation is part of a strategy to provide increased accountability from all federal agencies. It involves the creation of working groups, comprised of both governmental and non-governmental agencies, whose purpose is the development conservation action plans. MCAS is contributing to that end through a chapter grant from Audubon California and in-kind support from California State Parks.

It began the summer of 2011, when Anna Weinstein of Audubon California's Sea Bird Program asked me to coordinate a population survey of the Black Oystercatcher for the entire Mendocino County coastline. What began as a daunting task for one individual (150 miles of coastline) proved attainable for a group of thirty-seven volunteer birders. They scanned our rocky intertidal habitats with spotting scopes, binoculars and a sense of intrigue and purpose for two consecutive weekends in June. They scoured assigned areas between Hardy Creek to the North and Elk to the south counting every Black Oystercatcher visible.

The results were astonishing: within our many miles of the ideal sea stack habitat, we counted over 400 birds. Mendocino County contributed nearly one third of the total count of individuals in a statewide effort. Outdated population estimates suggested 1,000 individuals statewide, and have since been recalculated to 5,120 based on results came from twelve of seventeen California coastal counties.

Our 2012 summer-long endeavor, started on May 15th, was focuses on nesting success. Twenty-one volunteers covering more than thirty miles of habitat, monitoring forty-one nests and forty young. There have been four confirmed nest failures and seven suspected failures.

IT'S BEEN ONE BLOY OF A SUMMER continued

Surveyors have reported groups of five to nine birds flying, hatchlings moving to the west facing side of the nesting rock, additional nests suspected offshore, re-nesting after nest failure, ongoing territorial displays, and sites that are accessible by hikers and divers. While no direct nest predation has been observed, eggs must remain safe for three weeks and hatchlings must survive for up to five weeks before they can fly on their own. People, waves, Common Ravens, Peregrine Falcons, and Western Gulls can all contribute to nesting failures.

As the project coordinator, I am ever appreciative of the camaraderie and genuine commitment from everyone on the survey team. The information gathered from this study will contribute to a conservation handbook that a multitude of organizations will use to manage the best stewardship practices for the Black Oystercatcher. Because of this effort, we shall better understand the behavior and needs of this intriguing shorebird with whom we share this coast.



Black Oystercatcher photo
Ron LeValley
www.LeValleyphoto.com



Trudy Jensen watches a
Black Oystercatcher
close to fledging. The
black tip to the red bill
indicates a juvenile bird.



Digiscope chick photo and Trudy Jensen photo Jolleen Ossello

BIRD WALKS

August 2012:

- 5 Beginners Bird Walk: 9:00 a.m., Mendocino Botanical Gardens. (Note: Change of day)
- 15 Bird Walk: 8:00 am, Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens

HUDSONIAN GODWIT**Donald Shephard**

In this series of articles on the birds that frequent our shore, we covered Whimbrels in June and will deal with Willets in October. In between we have the less well-known *Limosa* Sandpipers or godwits: the rarely seen here Hudsonian Godwit and the Marbled Godwit. The other members of the *Limosa* Sandpipers are Black-tailed Godwits and Bar-tailed Godwits, both found on British coasts. All four of the world's godwits once appeared together in New Jersey. These long-distance migratory birds sometimes turn up in unusual places.

On August 26, 2009, Dorothy Tobkin spotted four smaller godwits feeding with a Marbled Godwit and a Whimbrel on a kelp bed at Glass Beach. The smaller size and the white rump contrasting with a black tail suggested they could be Hudsonian Godwits. This was not a likely identification because only 21 had been seen individually in California, no one had previously seen a group of them. Toby consulted her book. Fortunately, she had seen this species in Texas some years before. Experience and her guidebook cemented the identification as Hudsonian Godwits.

The following week, Matthew Matthiessen saw three Hudsonian Godwits at Virgin Creek, north of the previous sighting. Were these different birds or three of the original group circling the neighborhood? Bob Keiffer subsequently analyzed many photographs taken by the flocks of serious birders that descended on the area and concluded the Glass Beach godwits and those at Virgin Creek were one and the same birds.

Tob says she became excited when she made the identification; though it was not a life-list

HUDSONIAN GODWIT

continued

bird for her, it was a new county record. She had previously discovered Bar-tailed Godwits for the first record in this county. That had happened on the same day, August 26, thirteen years earlier.

Normally, Hudsonian Godwits migrate from their breeding grounds in Hudson Bay and Alaska through the center of the United States to the Gulf Coast.

Although it is not likely you will see this rare visitor to our coast, it is not impossible. As Bob Keiffer wrote in *MendoBirds* "When considering the identification of Hudsonian Godwits make sure that you look for key characteristics, such as the black and white tail, black underwing linings, black and white primaries and secondaries seen in flight, distinct supercilium (eyebrow) especially at the fore-eye, small (for godwits) size, and drabber, grayish colors as compared to Marbled Godwits."

Adults have long dark legs and a long pink bill with a slight upward curve and dark tip. The upper parts are mottled brown and the under parts chestnut. In flight, they show black wing linings.

Hudsonian Godwits live at the extremes of North and South America, and hustle between them to breed in summer and feed overwinter. They reveal their life history only to persistent and lucky observers. In preparation for their possibly non-stop 2,800-mile migration each fall, these large sandpipers gorge on aquatic plants, an unusual diet for a shorebird.

Because they spend much of their life in remote areas, little is known of their life history. The species is highly vulnerable, with a population of only 50,000-70,000 birds, the majority of which occur at a handful of sites during the non-breeding season.

Curiously, a group of godwits is known as a "prayer". You may consider you do not have a prayer of a chance to spot Hudsonian Godwits. August 26 might be a good day to test your hypothesis. I am certain Toby Tobkin will have godwits on her mind that day.

Hudsonian Godwit photo
Ron LeValley
www.LeValleyphoto.com



© Ron LeValley

FALL PELAGIC TRIP**Karen Havlena**

Date: Sunday, October 7th, is booked for the Fall MCAS Pelagic Trip. We will again be venturing out to sea on the TELSTAR with Captain Randy Thornton. Our leaders will be Ron LeValley (Mendocino), Tony Kurz (Humboldt) and possibly John Sterling (Yolo).

Cost: \$105 per person, prepaid.

This trip will essentially be all day, meeting at 7-am and returning 3:30-4-pm. This is not a whale-watching cruise. We search for migrating and resident seabirds, and we will look at mammals near the boat. The boat sometimes takes us out over 20-miles.

Everyone should bring lunch, snacks and beverages. Taking a seasickness medication is strongly recommended. It can be exciting or dull, wet and cold or sunny and warm. Rain will not cancel the trip, only very rough sea conditions (as determined by the captain) will stop us.

Please send an email to jkhavlena@yahoo.com for information.

Payment instructions will be given to you then. Thank you.



Short-tailed Albatross photo Ron LeValley
www.LeValleyphoto.com

This species was once a staple of Native American's diet along the Pacific coast. It first reappeared off our shores a year ago. Watch out for this and other albatross species such as the Black-footed Albatross on this trip.

HANDS ACROSS THE SAND AUG 4th AT BIG RIVER BEACH Ginny Stearns

Ocean support group Oceana is calling for a demonstration of support for our oceans on beaches and in parks worldwide for 15 minutes this Saturday August 4th at Noon.

Locally there will be a gathering at Big River Beach in Mendocino to protest offshore drilling and support clean energy.

All are encouraged to come to show support for our magnificent oceans.

For more info, contact Ginny Stearns at

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SOS Profile of an Accidental Coastal Migrant – Wilson’s Phalarope

**Becky
Bowen**



*Wilson's Phalaropes July 25, 2012, in Virgin Creek,
MacKerricher State Park . Photo by Richard Hubacek*

Delicate New World shorebird that congregates by the thousands in large inland saline and alkaline lakes, especially California’s Mono Lake.

Doubles weight (built up in fat reserves) and molts feathers before a non-stop flight to winter in lakes and marshes of the pampas and Patagonia in Uruguay and Argentina, Ecuador, Peru, and Chile.

Named after Alexander Wilson, who died at age 47 in 1813 in Philadelphia. Ornithologist Wilson, for whom a Phalarope, Snipe, Storm-petrel, Plover and Warbler were named, wrote and illustrated the nine-volume *American Ornithology*, the final volume published after his death.

Females are the more colorful gender during breeding season and males typically rear chicks. Food is churned up by the bird’s whirling swim that brings nutrients to the surface.

Listed as extremely rare on the Mendocino Coast in the summer. SOS data indicate we have enjoyed a visit by these inland birds only twice in the last six years: Summer, 2009, reported by surveyors Trudy Jensen and James Griswold and July 24-26, 2012, reported by Dorothy Tobkin. All sightings were in Virgin Creek near the haul road bridge.

Save Our Shorebirds is a long-term, ongoing Mendocino Coast Audubon Society citizen science project in partnership with California State Parks. Volunteers monitor shorebirds on Glass Beach, Virgin Creek Beach and Ten Mile Beach in MacKerricher State Park. To help, please contact State Parks Environmental Scientist Angela Liebenberg ALIEBENBERG@parks.ca.gov and visit us on Facebook.

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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.