NEWSLETTER OF THE MENDOCINO COAST AUDUBON SOCIETY

September 2009

HOKKAIDO IN THE WINTER

Ron LeValley

TOWN HALL Main Street, Fort Bragg

September 21 at 7:00 pm

Red-Crowned Crane

Japanese Monkey

Photos www.LeValleyphoto.com

In February of 2009, the Pacific Seabird Group held their annual meeting in Hakodate, Hokkaido, Japan. Hokkaido is the northern island of Japan and is much less developed than the main island of Honshu. A number of exciting birds occur there in the winter, including the iconic Red-crowned Crane, the Steller's and White-tailed Sea Eagles, Whooper Swans and Blakiston's Fishing Owl. Before the conference, a group from the Pacific Seabird Group accompanied some of the premier biologists studying these species on a week-long field trip.

After the conference, another group traveled across to the northern portion of Honshu to see the Japanese Monkeys. Ron will share some of the ecological and environmental stories of these and other species illustrated with his fine photographs.

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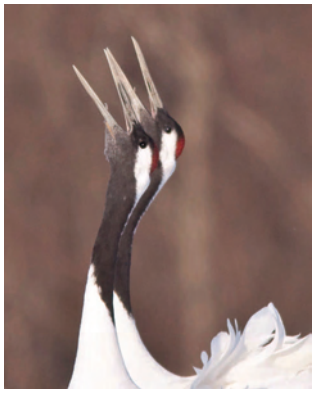
Red-Crowned Crane



PRESIDENT'S CORNER David Jensen

Welcome back, everyone, and welcome to what promises to be another exciting year of programs, bird walks, field trips, conservation efforts and educational opportunities! Although we have not offered a chapter program or newsletter since June, members of your local chapter have been very involved with citizen science projects throughout the summer.

We began the summer with our biannual breeding bird census at Point Cabrillo Light Station State Historical Park. I was pleased to have new volunteers join us this year, and we were rewarded with a new species for the survey, a White-breasted Nuthatch, although the bird was most likely a vagrant, not a resident breeder. This was the ninth in a continuing series of monitoring efforts that began in 1992.

Chapter members also assisted with Mendocino Land Trust's breeding bird survey of the Big River State Park Unit again this year. This was the sixth in a series of annual surveys. Like the Point Cabrillo effort, the highlights of this year's survey included new volunteers and new species.

And speaking of new – Ron LeValley designed and managed a program to monitor the breeding success of seabirds along our coast. Using the protocol and survey devices that Ron developed, chapter members monitored breeding Pelagic Cormorants at Point Cabrillo rookery, Brandt's Cormorants at the Mendocino Headlands rookery, and various seabirds nesting on the rookery at the mouth of Noyo River. This effort, which will be continued next year, produced some useful and rather unexpected results. Despite poor nesting success rates at the Farallon Islands and other rookeries along the coast of central California, local seabird nests were very successful. At Point Cabrillo, Don Shephard documented two cases in which Pelagic Cormorants produced a second clutch of eggs after the first cohort of nestlings fledged, an event that has rarely, if ever been witnessed.

The chapter's very successful Save Our Shorebirds surveys are still underway. Although the surveys will continue through September, this year's highlights already include the documentation of the first Hudsonian Godwits ever sighted in Mendocino County.

Finally, chapter member and education volunteer Ms. Sarah Grimes monitored nesting Purple Martins from Juan Creek north of Westport to Greenwood Creek south of Elk as part of a statewide pilot study.

PRESIDENT'S CORNER continued

Each of these projects not only provides important data that can be used by local, state and national scientists and conservation planners, but they also reward the volunteers with a greater understanding and appreciation of our local birds. I hope that you will be able to join us in these continuing efforts.

Well, once again I've gone way beyond my allotted space, but perhaps you can sense how excited I am about the work our chapter is doing. I look forward to seeing you at a meeting or on a bird walk. Until then, good birding!

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

The Mendocino Coast Audubon Society will join hundreds of other volunteer organizations in the annual Coastal Cleanup Day on Saturday, September 19. Volunteers should meet at the south end of the Ten Mile River bridge on Highway One at 9:00 a.m. We will walk to the mouth of the river and then proceed south along the beach, collecting all sorts of interesting flotsam and jetsam, along with the regular trashy variety of litter.

This is a great opportunity to help clean our environment while taking an enjoyable walk with hearty companions along one of the most beautiful beaches in our fair county. Call Art Morley at 964-2541 for more information.

BIRD WALKS

The Mendocino Coast Audubon Society will host two walks this month at the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens. Our monthly beginners' bird walk will be held on the first Saturday of the month, September 5, at 9:00 A.M. Our midweek bird walk will be held on the third Wednesday of the month, September 16, at 8:00 A.M.

Birders with all levels of experience are invited to attend these walks. Binoculars will be available for those who need them. Admission is free for Botanical Garden members. For more information on these and other activities, please call 964-8163 visit our website mendocinocoastaudubon.org.

Acorn Woodpecker photo John Oback

BIRDS TALK TO US AND SO DO CHILDREN

Becky Bowen

Editor's Note – Save Our Shorebirds, a Mendocino Coast Audubon Society project, completes three years of citizen science research September 15, 2009. Volunteers served more than 2,000 hours in the field gathering data about shorebirds on local beaches. Watchlisted shorebirds are the focus of research and the program expanded in 2009 to include children's shorebird classes. SOS Director Joleen Ossello worked with volunteers and State Parks Interpreter Michael Haas to teach Junior Rangers about shorebirds in MacKerricher State Park. Here are some favorite SOS quotations from participants. Children's remarks are in bold typeface, adult responses are in standard typeface.

Joleen Ossello's daughter, Autumn, helps her mom at State Parks Junior Ranger shorebird presentation

- **"You said the Sanderlings ran like windup toys, but I don't see where you wind them up."**
- **"Hey, look at this cool insect I just found on the beach—whoops, look at that. He jumped right in the pocket of your jacket!"**
- **"My grandpa and I saw a crab get eaten by a scuttle!"**

  "What's a scuttle, Grandpa?"

  " I think she's talking about a sea gull."
- "These Wandering Tattlers are amazing birds that fly amazing distances. If a group of crows is called a murder, what do you think a group of Wandering Tattlers is called?"

  "**A squadron.**" *[Correct answer is a whisper]*
- "What kind of shorebird is found on the rocks and has an orange beak?"

  " I forget. Is it a Black Ostrich?"
- **"I promise to treat all living things with care and respect. Boy, if everybody took this Junior Ranger pledge and just remembered to do it, things would be a lot different around here."**
- **"Grandma calls them Piper Sands. What do you think she means?"**
- **" So when are we going to see that Oh-spray?"**
- **"Why do those ducks look so big?"**

  " Because they're geese."

Nathaniel's natural history birdwalk shoes.

PAM HUNTLEY ON KXYZ FM 88.3, 90.7, AND 91.5

Barn Owl Photo by Dan Lockshaw

BARN OWL

Barn Owls are the ones we are most familiar with because of their close connection with humans. They live in and around towns, above which their eerie hisses, screeches and clicks can be heard late at night. Their ghostly white undersides flash at us from the darkness.

Barn owls have a distinct, white, heart-shaped face and a beautiful tawny back speckled with gray and black. The under wing is brilliant white and their belly is white with small black spots. They have dark eyes, pale beak and long feathered legs. They are 12 ½ -18 inches and the female is slightly larger.

They are year round residents. Barn Owls hunt over open grasslands and farmlands. They roost and nest in cliffs, hollow trees, barns and old buildings. They feed on small mammals, especially rodents; they occasionally eat snakes, lizards, small birds and large insects.

Barn Owls are amazing nocturnal hunters. Tests have proven they can hunt entirely by sound. Their concave facial disc helps to trap sound. Their ears are asymmetrical, one higher than the other so they triangulate to rustling in the grass. They pounce on their prey and swallow it whole, then regurgitate the fur and bones in a pellet, one per victim.

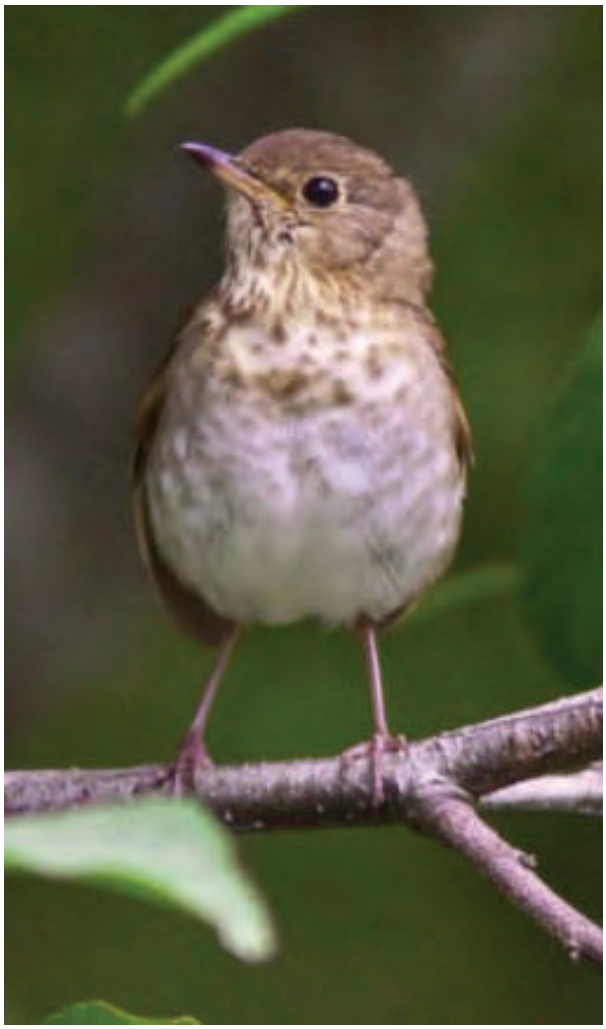
Barn owls mate for life. Courtship involves flight: the male claps its wings together and ritually presents his mate with food. Barn Owls have no actual nest. The Female lays and incubates 3-8 elliptical white eggs. The male feeds the incubating mom for one month and then helps feed and brood the white, fluffy chicks for another 2 months.

Pam broadcasts on KXYZ once Tuesday evenings on Community News with Christina Anastat at 5:00 pm. The segment is rebroadcast on Friday mornings at about 7:55 am.

FIELD TRIP TO VIRGIN CREEK

We'll take our first field trip of the 2009-2010 season on Saturday, September 12. Participants with all levels of experience are invited to meet at 9 a.m. in the CalTrans turnout just north of the Pudding Creek bridge on Highway One at the north end of Fort Bragg. After surveying the birds in the Pudding Creek Lagoon, the group will proceed to Virgin Creek Beach. This is an exciting time of year to look for shorebirds, and the knowledgeable leaders will help identify the various "peeps." Binoculars will be available for those who need them. This field trip should end by noon.

SWAINSON'S THRUSH Donald Shephard



Swainson's Thrush Photo by Ron LeValley, www.LeValleyphoto.com

As I walk to the lighthouse and pause at the top of the rise, I often hear an ethereal flute-like song spiraling upwards, the Swainson's Thrush singing. Another male sings across Noyo Harbor. I may have only seen this bird once because it hides in shady thickets. Named after the English naturalist William Swainson (1789-1855), it is a furtive, ground-dwelling forager of northern forests.

In the west, adults of this medium sized thrush show reddish-brown on the upperparts, white underparts with brown flanks and lighter brown breast with darker spots. You will see pink legs and a distinctive buff-colored eye-ring and face. Notice too, the thin bill and pale base to the lower mandible. The sexes are similar in appearance. A close relative, the Hermit Thrush, sports bolder spots on its breast and a narrow, white eye-ring. The songs are quite distinct.

Scientists divide the Swainson's Thrush into two subspecies, the "Russet-backed Thrush" of the western boreal region and Pacific coast, and the "Olive-backed Thrush" of the eastern boreal region. Our birds fall into the coastal subspecies that occurs west of the Coast, Cascade, and Sierra Nevada mountains from Juneau to Big Sur. The eastern subspecies occurs in eastern North America, and migrates eastwards, (a several thousand mile detour), before heading south via Florida to Panama and Bolivia and as far south as Argentina. Our coastal subspecies migrate down the Pacific coast and winter from Mexico to Costa Rica. Both groups fly at night, feeding and resting during the day. For more on this topic see K.C. Ruegg and T.B. Smith *Evolution of migratory routes*.

Swainson's Thrush occurs in deciduous (willow, alder, and aspen) riparian woodland and shrubby, wet meadows. In most areas, they avoid competition with other thrush species by utilizing different elevations, foraging strategies, or habitat. The birds maintain a very small territory, sometimes surrounding a birder with serenading male Swainson's Thrushes in a single large yard or on a short creek-side path.

They breed along the Pacific coast nearly to Mexico and in the Cascades, northern Sierra Nevada, Rocky Mountains, and northern Appalachians. Seasonally monogamous, like most

SWAINSON'S THRUSH continued

North American songbirds, Swainson's Thrush females show an unusually high degree of between-year fidelity to their nest sites, pairs often re-form in multiple seasons after repeating the pair-bonding process. This may facilitate rapid pairing, important in high-altitude, northern regions where the breeding season is short. Males, which arrive on the breeding grounds first, initially try to drive arriving females off their territories. After several days of female persistence, the male accepts the female and mating occurs.

The female builds a bulky, open-cup nest of twigs, bark strips, moss, grass, leaves, and mud and lines it with fine, soft materials including animal hair and lichen. She typically places it in dense understory cover and usually lays four speckled, blue eggs. She incubates them for 10 to 14 days. Both parents feed the young until they fledge at 10 to 14 days. Nest failure rates in this species are very high, sometimes exceeding 60 percent.

They forage on the forest floor, also in trees, eating mostly insects during spring and summer, and fruits in fall and winter. Beetles, caterpillars, and ants are among the principal insect prey; few temperate songbirds exploit ants to the extent that this and related species do. Typical fruits eaten include elderberries, blackberries, twinberries, and huckleberries. You will usually find them foraging on or near the ground but they spend more time foraging above ground than similar thrushes, sometimes even in the canopy. It uses a variety of techniques, especially pecking and gleaning, typical of thrushes, but also aerial-lunging, hovering, and fly-catching. In the tropics, it follows army-ant swarms like many resident tropical species, which typically displace it when encounters occur.

During the early years (1966-79) of the Breeding Bird Survey, overall trends were strongly positive, especially in Canada. From 1980 to 2002, however, the species declined almost everywhere, again especially in Canada but also strongly in Oregon and Idaho. Populations have disappeared from large areas of California, as a result of destruction of riparian habitat for development and agriculture and, perhaps loss of wintering habitat. Poor productivity seems to be the main limiting factor for this species.

Heard more often than seen, the shy Swainson's Thrush is one of our most beloved songsters. I look forward to hearing them next year, on their return from wintering in Central America. Until then, you may hear their song at: http://www.wildmusic.org/animals/thrush

Swainson's Thrush
Photo courtesy
Allen Chartier

SEPTEMBER PELAGIC TRIP — Karen Havlena

On Sunday, September 20th, meeting at 7:30 am, Mendocino Coast Audubon will have an ocean field trip aboard the Sea Hawk out of Noyo Harbor, Fort Bragg. Birders will be searching for seabirds about 20 miles out in the open ocean. The trip will be 7 hours long, returning to Fort Bragg about 3 p.m. The cost is $95 per person to participate. Please make your paid reservations as SOON as possible. Are you interested in seabird identification? ONLY A FEW SPACES LEFT.

There are 2 ways to pay:

Credit card service is available. Please call or send an email to Karen between the dates of 9/9 & 9/18, because the credit card number must be approved prior to the trip. I will contact you during that time period.

Or, mail your check now:

Payee: MCAS Cost: $95 per person.

We need: Full name(s), email addresses and mailing addresses, plus phone numbers.

Mail your check to:

K. Havlena – Pelagic Trip

PO Box 40, Fort Bragg, CA 95437-0040

Everyone must bring their own lunches, snacks and water or soft drinks.

Confirmations will be emailed or mailed to you with further instructions. Thanks.

Karen Havlena kahavlena@yahoo.com 707-964-1280

Dark-rumped Petrel photo
Matthew Matthiessen

MEMBERSHIP DRIVE — Ginny Wade

Do you support the mission of the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society to help people appreciate and enjoy native birds, and to conserve and restore local ecosystems for the benefit of native birds and other wildlife? Have you renewed your membership? Is there someone you can encourage to join MCAS? We accept, cash, checks or Visa and Mastercard. You will be notified, by email if possible, of your membership status.
Call Ginny Wade at 964-6362 or send your dues to:

Membership,

MENDOCINO COAST AUDUBON SOCIETY

P.O. BOX 2297

FORT BRAGG, CA, 95437

BIRD WALKS AND FIELD TRIPS

September:

5 Bird Walk: 9:00 am, Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens.
12 Field Trip: 9:00 am, Virgin Creek Beach. Meet at Pudding Creek overlook, just north of Pudding Creek bridge.
16 Bird Walk: 8:00 am, Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens
19 Beach Cleanup: 9:00 am, Saturday. Meet at the south end of Ten Mile Bridge.
20 Pelagic Trip: Sunday, Noyo Harbor. Reservations required
21 Chapter Meeting: 7:00 pm

October:

3 Bird Walk: 9:00 am, Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens
10 Field Trip: Sunday, 8:00 am, Glass Beach. Meet at the west end of Elm Street, Fort Bragg.

19 Chapter Meeting: 7:00 pm,
21 Bird Walk: 8:00 am, Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens

BIRD SIGHTINGS

Aug 26 Hudsonian Godwit (County Record) and Marbled Godwit at Glass Beach.

Aug 26 Pacific Golden Plover, Baird's Sandpiper, Ruddy Turnstone, 13 Snowy Plovers and a Short-billed Dowitcher north of Ward Avenue, Cleone.

Aug 24 Two Summer Tanagers at Lake Cleone.

Aug 24 Buff-breasted Sandpiper and a Red Knot at Virgin Creek.

Aug 21 Western Wood Peewee in Fort Bragg.

Aug 11 Franklin Gull at Inglenook Creek.

Aug 7 Baird's Sandpiper at Inglenook Creek.

Aug 4 Baird's Sandpiper, 3 lesser Yellowlegs, 6 Long-billed Dowitchers, 10 Semipalmated Plovers among the Western and Least Sandpipers at Virgin Creek Beach.

Hudsonian Godwit
photo by Becky Bowen

MCAS BOARD MEMBERS 2007-2008

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Emeritus	Art Morley	964-2541	agmorley@hotmail.com

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.

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