

The Black Oystercatcher

Photograph by Ron LeValley

Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Newsletter
September-October, 2015



**RON LEVALLEY PRESENTS
OUR CHANGING OCEAN
7 P.M.
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 21
CASPAR COMMUNITY CENTER**

Biologist and popular speaker Ron LeValley will look at our changing ocean and how warming trends, an increase in carbon dioxide, and floating plastic trash impact marine life. Ron will share his observations of local waters and talk about what we can expect from the predicted 2015-2016 El Nino conditions, the Pacific Decadal Oscillation, and other long term trends in oceanography.

Ron earned a B.A. degree in biology from Sacramento State College in 1969 and an M.A in Biology from Humboldt State University in 1980. His affiliations include American Ornithologists Union (Life Member), The Pacific Seabird Group, National Audubon Society, Point Reyes Bird Observatory (Life Member), and Western Field Ornithologists.



Photographs courtesy of Ron LeValley

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Barbara Bridges, a member of Redbud Audubon, is a resident of Lakeport, CA. She photographed this Black Skimmer at 4:30 p.m. during a visit to Mackerricher State Park August 6. A Black Skimmer found by Dorothy Tobkin on June 27, 2014, at Virgin Creek Beach, was the first reported in Mendocino County.



*Red-headed Barbet (top), King Penguin (bottom)
Photographs courtesy of Bob Lewis*

BOB LEWIS

PRESENTS

A BIRD'S RAINBOW

7 P.M.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2015

CASPAR COMMUNITY CENTER

Many birds are brightly colored, while others use patterned feathers for camouflage. How do these colors originate? What's the difference between colors from pigments and physical colors? From Yellow Warblers to Anna's Hummingbirds, from Snow Geese to Brewer's Blackbirds, each species makes unique use of the feather colors it possesses. What do the colors indicate to other birds? And do birds see the same colors we do? Bob Lewis will unravel some of the mysteries of color in birds with a little chemistry, a bit of physics, and a lot of brightly colored slides.

Bob Lewis trained as a chemist and worked for Chevron for 33 years. He's taught birding classes in the Bay Area for more than 20 years, and is chair of Golden Gate Audubon's Adult Education Committee. Currently he's co-teaching a Master Birding class at the California Academy of Sciences with Jack Dumbacher and Eddie Bartley. He loves to travel and photograph birds, and has just returned from a trip to Southeast Asia, chasing the brightly colored birds of that area.

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Dave Jensen



Photograph provided

Welcome back, everyone. I am so happy for the opportunity to address you again as the president of your local chapter. I want to thank Joleen for the wonderful job she has done for the past two years. She has certainly raised the bar for all who follow. I am also very excited to begin working with the great members who make up our board of directors.

It looks like we will be able to offer a rewarding set of programs for the coming year. Great field trips, regular walks at the Botanical Gardens, and monthly walks along the new mill site trail(s). I feel conflicted saying it, but hopefully the phrase “heavy rain cancels” will actually mean something this winter.

You will notice that we are publishing our newsletter every other month this year. That schedule will mean a lot less work for many volunteers and fewer last minute attempts by me to beat the submission deadline, but it also means fewer chances to communicate with you through this medium. So I will ask for your indulgence if this column tends to spread beyond the bottom of the page.

For this edition, I would like to try something a bit different – a reprint of an essay I presented to you several years ago. Since then it has been reprinted in newsletters from Marin to Apalachee, Florida.

The value and success of the Audubon Society is based on its three core values: education, conservation, and enjoyment. This is true at all levels – from the national organization to the flyway and down to the local chapter. This essay tries to demonstrate the importance of each.

In closing, I hope to see you soon on a bird walk, field trip, or at a program. Until then, thank you for your continuing support.

A BIRDER'S LAMENT BY DAVE JENSEN

I have a couple of confessions to make.

True Confession Number 1: I never really cared for the National Audubon Society. I'm sorry, but it is true. You see, I have always had a love for birds, even as a boy. When I began to get serious about studying birds about 40 years ago, I joined the National Audubon Society to learn all I could. I faithfully read each copy of their magazine but soon realized they wanted to talk about habitat and conservation, not feather patterns and field notes. I didn't care about grasslands in the Dakotas or swamps in the Carolinas, so I threw their renewal notices in the trash and instead joined what might be called a birding club. I enjoyed birds and wanted to be the best birder I could be.

True Confession Number 2: I didn't miss being part of Audubon for over 30 years. I was happy watching the birds in my back yard. I studied bird songs. I visited the birding hotspots. I joined lots of Christmas Bird Counts. I slowly developed a modest set of skills and a humble life list. Birding was a personal pleasure for me, devoid of politics and conflict. Meanwhile, grasslands were converted to housing tracts, marshes turned to shopping malls, and the birds became scarcer and scarcer. Still, I enjoyed birds and simply wanted to be the best birder I could be.

Continued on Page 4

A BIRDER’S LAMENT *Dave Jensen's President's Message – continued from Page 3*

True Confession Number 3: I may have learned how to identify many birds with only the slightest glimpse of feather, beat of wing or phrase of song, but I have not been a very good birder. Good birders truly care about the future of the species they enjoy, and act to ensure that all birds are protected. Good birders speak out and support efforts to preserve habitats that are necessary for avian survival. Good birders not only enjoy the beauty of wild birds, but repay them with time, talent and treasure. A selfish birder will never be the best birder he or she can be.

So please join with me and all the best birders around. Help save what we have left so that there is something to leave for future generations. You don't need to write a big check. You don't need to quit your day job. You don't even need to put a bumper sticker on your car. Simply show your support and concern in any way possible. If you have internet access, check the Audubon California website at www.ca.audubon.org

Write or call your elected officials – city, county, state, national, any and all of them. Let them know that you care about birds and that you vote. Write letters to the local newspaper. Conservation doesn't just happen in the Arctic Refuge, it happens at home as well - at the mouth of the Garcia River and on the beaches of Ten Mile.

Each of us has different talents and interests, but we are all bound by a common interest in birds. Your Mendocino Coast Audubon Society is more than a birding club. We are also a conservation organization that speaks out for and takes action in the interest of birds. I ask you to learn from the youthful mistakes of the person I was forty-some years ago. Support us in our efforts to preserve and protect the wild things we love. If you do, you will become the best birder you can be.

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): _____

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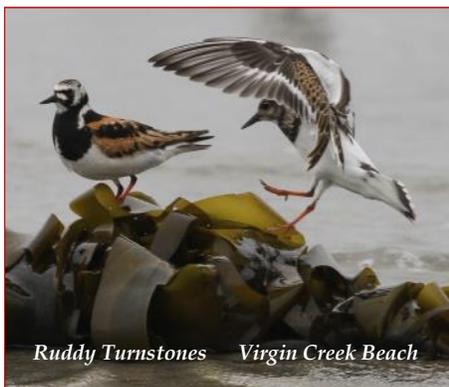
SAVE OUR SHOREBIRDS**Becky Bowen****BIRDS COUNT, AND SO DO WE**

Anne Harvey got a visit from Dorothy Tobkin when she started her summer work as Save Our Shorebirds educator.



Wandering Tattler

Glass Beach



Ruddy Turnstones

Virgin Creek Beach

Photographs by Becky Bowen

Save Our Shorebirds is a long-term, ongoing Mendocino Coast Audubon citizen-science shorebird conservation program in partnership with California State Parks. It is funded by individual donations and grants. Here is a recap and update of our activities through August, 2015:

- Volunteers take bird censuses year-round on 15.7 km. of contiguous coastline (five survey routes) from Ten Mile River to the south end of Glass Beach – the entire coastline of Mackerricher State Park.
- As of mid-August, 2015, SOS volunteers have recorded 465,018 bird sightings during 9 years of surveys.
- Total volunteer time since the program started in June, 2007: 8,330.50 hours as of August 1, 2015.
- SOS data are available at no charge and appear on the MCAS website (click on the conservation tab): www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org
- Anne Harvey, of Fort Bragg, joined the SOS team in the summer of 2015 to conduct outreach and public education about shorebird protection. Anne worked with SOS Chair Angela M. Liebenberg to introduce beachgoers to our local shorebirds. Her work was supported by State Parks funding.
- Highlights of the year are a record high count of 73 Snowy Plovers on the January 4, 2015, SOS Ten Mile Beach survey, 6 summer sightings of a Red Knot in breeding plumage, and good numbers this fall of Black Turnstones, Whimbrels, Black Oystercatchers and Wandering Tattlers.
- In connection with our summer outreach program, we are posting a "Bird of the Day" SOS facebook page. Please visit us to see what we've been counting: www.facebook.com/SaveOurShorebirds

BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD Donald Shephard



Brown-headed Cowbird female (left) and male (right)
Photograph by Jan Malik

In April, my wife and I visited Italy. At a hilltop villa overlooking the beautiful Tuscan countryside that looks almost landscaped, we munched basil and tomato bruschetta and sipped Chianti Classico. As I strolled the terrace, I heard a European Cuckoo deep in the valley below. It must be at least fifty years since I last heard that bird, but the call is unmistakably onomatopoeic. I confirmed the identity with a Hungarian born fellow traveler when the cuckoo called from nearby oaks. Sounds cast me back to my youth as

powerfully as scents such as lilacs. In the late forties and early fifties in England, the *Times* ran letters, usually written by retired military officers, announcing they heard the first cuckoo of spring. Refuting claims followed in quick succession – another brick on the pile of British egocentricity.

Members of the cuckoo family, Cuculidae, rarely grace our coast. Sparsely and uncommonly, the Yellow-billed Cuckoo may winter in California, but its close relative Greater Roadrunner is more familiar. These species do not display the most striking of the European Cuckoo's characteristics – brood parasitism. For that, we must turn to the Brown-headed Cowbird in the family Icteridae, a large group including blackbirds and orioles.

The general shape of Brown-headed Cowbirds appears typical for an Icterid, but the finch-like head and beak are smaller than in most members of the family. Watch a flock of mixed Brewer's Blackbirds and cowbirds and you will note the iridescent black body and brown head of adult males and slightly smaller, dull gray-brown females with pale throats and finely streaked underparts. You will observe them foraging on the ground, often following grazing animals, such as horses and cows, to catch insects the grazers stir up. They eat seeds as well as insects. Originally a bison-following bird of the Great Plains, but unable to nest while moving with the wandering herds, they developed their parasitic nesting behavior to accommodate this nomadic lifestyle. The Brown-headed Cowbird spread westward in the 1800s as settlers cleared forests. Their numbers expanded with the clearing of forested areas and the introduction of grazing animals by settlers across North America. Common across most of the continent, populations slightly declined from 1966-2010, according to the North American Breeding Bird Survey. Brown-headed Cowbirds are now commonly seen at suburban birdfeeders.

Brown-headed Cowbirds lay their eggs in the nests of other small perching birds, particularly

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Donald Shephard

Continued from page 6

those that build cup-shaped nests. Ornithologists have documented Brown-headed Cowbird eggs in nests of 220 host species, including hummingbirds and raptors. Host parents feed young cowbirds at the expense of their own young. Brown-headed Cowbird females can lay 36 eggs in a season. Unlike the European Cuckoo, our bird is not divided into host-specific lineages. However they have developed species-typical singing, social, and breeding behaviors. Some target species, such as the House Finch, feed their young a vegetarian diet unsuitable for young Brown-headed Cowbirds, meaning almost none survive to fledge. If you find a nest, look for a slightly larger nestling that begs vigorously with a bright red "gape" (the brightly colored areas in the corners of a nestling's open mouth). Most songbird chicks have a yellow or pale gape.

Cowbird eggs hatch faster than other species eggs, giving cowbird nestlings a head start in getting food from the parents. Young cowbirds also develop at a faster pace than their nest mates, and they sometimes toss out eggs and young nestlings or smother them in the bottom of the nest. Host parents manifest three rejection strategies: nest desertion, burying of the egg under nest material (e.g. Yellow Warbler), and physical ejection of the egg from the nest (e.g., Brown Thrasher). Brown-headed Cowbird nestlings are also sometimes expelled from the nest.

Song Sparrow nestlings in parasitized nests alter their vocalizations in frequency and amplitude so that they resemble the cowbird nestling, and these young tend to be fed equally often as those in unparasitized nests. According to a study by the Florida Museum of Natural History published in 1983, Brown-headed Cowbirds periodically check their eggs and young. Removal of the parasitic egg may trigger a retaliatory reaction termed "Mafia behavior". Cowbirds returned to ransack host nests half the time and removed host eggs. Cowbirds also destroyed nests in a type of "farming behavior" to force the hosts to build new ones then laid their eggs there.

Brown-headed Cowbirds, like Victorian children, are more often seen than heard while European Cuckoos are heard more often than seen although the male keeps its bill closed while calling. A stranger difference is the cuckoo's taste for hairy caterpillars. A protective stomach lining, which they shed and renew, allows them this delicacy. With the mention of food, my mind wanders back to Tuscany, bruschetta, chestnut and portabella mushroom soup, squid ink pasta with salmon followed by pineapple carpaccio in lemon juice. Pour another glass of Montepulciano Nobile and I am back atop a Tuscan hill listening to a cuckoo for the first time in fifty years.

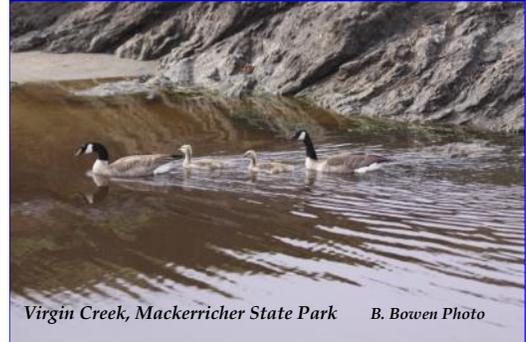


Common Yellowthroat adult with Brown-headed Cowbird chick
Photograph by Darin Ziegler

PAM HUNTLEY ON KZYX FM 88.3, 90.7, AND 91.5

CANADA GOOSE

The Canada Goose is a large goose with a long black neck and distinguishing white “chin strap” from ear to ear. It has a light brownish body, black tail and white crescent rump patch visible in flight.



There are six subspecies of Canada Goose with heights that vary from two to four feet. Most Canada Geese are winter visitors to our area, but one group likes it so much they now are year-round residents.

Canada Geese are found along lakeshores, riverbanks, marshes, and waterfronts, and locally on coastal headlands. They also are regularly seen on harvested grain fields and agricultural land. They glean and graze on seeds, roots, and sprouting grass. In water, they feed on submerged vegetation and tubers. Along the coast they eat mollusks and small crustaceans.

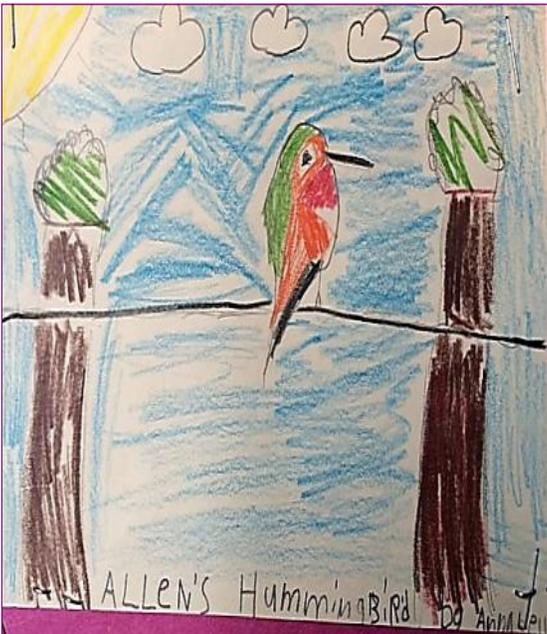
Males and females look alike, but can be distinguished by their voices. The male (gander) has a slow, low-pitched voice with a two-syllable call. The female's call is a one-syllable call that is quicker than the male's and has a higher pitch. Male and female often greet each other so rapidly that it sounds like the call of only one bird.

Pairs mate for life, but if one dies, the other will find a new partner, usually within a year. Nests normally are built by the female on the ground. Construction materials include grass and other vegetation and include a feather lining. Four to seven white eggs are incubated for about a month. The family stays together for nearly a year. While the goslings are still flightless, the adults molt and also are flightless for a month, growing new flight feathers just in time to teach the young how to fly.

In the next issue of the *Black Oystercatcher*, we'll look at the Canada Goose subspecies. Some are listed as threatened species while others are considered invasive pests.

AUDUBON EDUCATION

Sarah Grimes



**2015
WAS
BIRDCLELLENT!**



MCAS Education Chair Sarah Grimes and colleagues Pam Huntley and Sue Coulter are winding up an active year. Here are their accomplishments:

In the Schools: Classroom visits by MCAS educations increased awareness and promoted conservation of local wildlife habitats and birds. A total of 346 students were reached in Point Arena, Manchester, Anderson Valley, Mendocino Village, Fort Bragg (including Three Rivers), Comptche, Albion, Caspar and Branscomb.

On Educational Projects: Educators collaborated with Pacific Community Charter School in Point Arena to develop a "Birdcellent" brochure, an interactive checklist of birds found on the Point Arena-Stornetta Public Lands of the California Coastal National Monument. Forty-one students participated.

During October: Twelve 4-H students participated in an educational challenge to see the most birds possible during the month of October.

On the Walks: Educators led 31 participants on free local bird walks on the Spring Ranch, Big River haul road and around Lake Cleone in Mackerricher State Park.



Every year, Sarah Grimes challenges her students to count as many species as they can identify during October. How about the rest of us? Let's have our own Big October, too! Keep track of the species you see during October and come to the November meeting to share your list.

Catherine Keegan

FIELD TRIPS

Tim Bray

Saturday, September 12 Field Trip [Virgin Creek Beach](#) 9AM-11:30 AM. Meet at the "Enchanted Trail" parking area on the west side of Highway 1, just north of the Montessori Del Mar school. Leaders: Alison Cebula, Adam Hutchins

This is a short walk, less than a mile round-trip, traversing through several different habitats: shore pines, coastal scrub, coastal meadow, lagoon, sandy beach, rocky shore, and nearshore marine. The diversity of habitats offers chances for an extensive list of sightings. Virgin Creek Beach is usually the best spot on the Mendocino Coast for migrant shorebirds: ten species are regularly found here, and as many as fifteen are possible. Fall migrant songbirds, such as warblers or tanagers, also can be spotted along the "Enchanted Trail" portion of the walk.

Saturday, October 10 Field Trip Caspar hotspots 9AM. Meet at the entrance to the Caspar Cemetery, on Point Cabrillo Drive (Road 409) just west of Highway 1. Leader: Tim Bray

We will walk down to the cemetery and look for Red Crossbills, wintering warblers, and others – then work our way down the trail to the beach and creek mouth, looking for late migrating shorebirds and early-returning waterfowl. After that we will move across the bridge and view the Caspar Pond waterfowl, finishing up before noon. Wear hiking boots; check the weather forecast. Heavy rain cancels.



SOS volunteer Richard Hubacek heard a strange call on his July 30 Virgin Creek survey. He looked for the source and discovered a Peruvian Aplomado Falcon out for a walk on the haul road with falconers "Mike and Paula."

Photo by Richard Hubacek, Greenbirding Mendocino

GROUPS PROVIDE CONTACTS TO REPORT BANDED OIL SPILL PELICAN VICTIMS

After the Refugio oil spill in May, 2015, several Brown Pelicans were cleaned and released with green bands, similar to the International Bird Rescue Center's blue-banded Brown Pelicans. Oiled Wildlife Care Network (OWCN) accepts Green-banded sightings and the International Bird Rescue Center (IBRC) accepts sightings for both Blue-banded and green-banded Brown Pelican reports.

Green-banded Brown Pelicans can be reported by going to www.owcn.org <http://www.owcn.org/> and selecting the "green banded pelicans" tab, or by clicking directly on this link

<http://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/owcn/green-banded-pelicans.cfm>

Sightings of these birds will help us learn how well these birds survive.

Green and Blue-banded Brown Pelicans can be reported to the IBRC at:

<http://bird-rescue.org/contact/found-a-bird/reporting-a-banded-bird.aspx>

CALENDAR, BIRD WALKS, FIELD TRIPS

September, 2015

- **Saturday 5 Beginner Bird Walk** [Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens](#) 18220 CA-1, Fort Bragg, CA 95437 9AM-Noon* Bring water, wear comfortable walking shoes. Binoculars available, heavy rain cancels. Leader: David Jensen
- **Saturday 12 Field Trip** [Virgin Creek Beach](#) 9:00 AM to 11:30 AM Meet at the "Enchanted Trail" parking area on west side of Highway 1, just north of the Montessori Del Mar school. Leaders: Alison Cebula, Adam Hutchins
- **Wednesday 16 Bird Walk** [Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens](#) 18220 CA-1, Fort Bragg, CA 95437 8AM-Noon* Leader: Tim Bray
- **Saturday 19 Half Day Pelagic Trip** Limited to 25 people, so reserve your spot early. Contact Ron LeValley at 707-937-1742 or email ron@levalleyphoto.com and details will be sent to you. \$60.00 per person.
- **Saturday 19 Coastal Clean Up Day** www.coastal.ca.gov/publiced/ccd/ccd.html
- **Monday 21 Meeting** [Caspar Community Center](#) 15051 Caspar Rd, Caspar, CA 95420 7PM Ron LeValley will speak on Our Changing Oceans
- **Sunday 27 Fourth Sunday Bird Tour** - [The new trail on the former GP property](#) 10 AM Meet near rest room, east end of parking lot, foot of Elm Street, Fort Bragg. Bring water, wear comfortable shoes. Binoculars available, heavy rain cancels. Leader: Dave Jensen

October, 2015

- **Saturday 3 Beginner Bird Walk** [Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens](#) 18220 CA-1, Fort Bragg, CA 95437 9AM-Noon* Bring water, wear comfortable walking shoes. Binoculars available, heavy rain cancels. Leader: David Jensen
- **Saturday 10 Field Trip** Caspar Hotspots 9AM Meet at the entrance to the Caspar Cemetery, on Point Cabrillo Drive (Road 409) just west of Highway 1. Leader: Tim Bray
- **Monday 19 Meeting** [Caspar Community Center](#) 15051 Caspar Rd, Caspar, CA 95420 7PM Robert Lewis will speak on Color in Birds
- **Wednesday 21 Bird Walk** [Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens](#) 18220 CA-1, Fort Bragg, CA 95437 8AM-Noon* Leader: Tim Bray
- **Thursday 22 MCAS Board of Directors Meeting**-contact D. Jensen for time and place
- **Sunday 27 Fourth Sunday Bird Tour** - [The new trail on the former GP property](#) 10 AM Meet near rest room, east end of parking lot, foot of Elm Street, Fort Bragg. Bring water, wear comfortable shoes. Binoculars available, heavy rain cancels. Leader: Dave Jensen

Please hold these dates for our Christmas Bird Counts:

- **Sunday, December 27, 2015 Fort Bragg Christmas Bird Count**
- **Saturday, January 2, 2016 Manchester Christmas Bird Count**

**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

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

MCAS BOARD MEMBERS AND PROGRAM CHAIRS 2015-2016

President	David Jensen	964-8163	djensen@mcn.org
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Newsletter	Becky Bowen	962-1602	casparbeck@comcast.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

