



Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Newsletter, November 2013

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**Monday, November 18
7 P.M.
Caspar Community Center
Pine Communities
Of the Mendocino Coast
Greg Guisti**

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Greg Guisti, Director of Agriculture and Natural Resources of the University of California Cooperative Extension in Lake and Mendocino Counties, will present a program on the coastal pine communities of Mendocino County. He will talk about how the plant communities have shown dramatic and continued decline for the past decade. Both Bishop and beach pine communities have been decimated by insects, disease, fire exclusion and development. With Greg as guide, we shall explore impacts and share ideas on possible remediation for this unique Mendocino plant community.

Greg formerly was the Agricultural Biologist for San Mateo County, has worked with the Marine Ecological Institute and is a lecturer at Stanford University. His BA in Biology and MA in Population Ecology are from San Francisco State University. He is a member of the Wildlife Society, the Society of Conservation Biologists and serves as an ex-officio member of the Redwood Forest Foundation.

**Good News Here
For CA Condors,
Golden Eagles**

Gov. Jerry Brown signed Assembly Bill 711 on October 15, a bill that bans use of lead bullets by hunters, the primary source of unregulated lead in the environment – and a threat to the California Condor, Golden Eagle and other protected species.

Masthead photo Ron LeValley
Bishop Pine Drawing B. Bowen

PRESIDENT'S CORNER**Joleen Ossello***Photo by Joleen Ossello*

Altacal Audubon of Chico recently hosted our yearly convergence of Northern California Chapter Leaders. MCAS Vice President David Jensen and I seized the opportunity to mingle with fellow conservation minds and discuss various chapter endeavors. Council representation included: Audubon California, Redbud Audubon of Lake County, Peregrine Audubon of inland Mendocino, Redwood Audubon of Eureka, Plumas Audubon of the Feather River Region, Wintu Audubon of Shasta County and the new Lassen Audubon of Lassen County.

The council convened for a welcome dinner in Chico on the evening of Friday, October 18. Speaker Mac McCormick, of Altacal, presented an interactive challenge showing the difficult yet rewarding task of banding of passerines. Experienced Auduboners reveled in identifying photos of sparrows, flycatchers, and finch species. Mac left us with an appreciation for unknown future rewards.

We reconvened the following morning thirteen miles east of town at the Big Chico Creek Ecological Reserve (BCCER), a four thousand acre historic ranch snuggled between chaparral-laden ridges dotted with Ponderosa pine. Hidden within the chasm between ridges runs Big Chico Creek. A birding adventure was first on the agenda: Some twenty of us eagerly followed Scott Huber, Education Coordinator at BCCER, under Valley Oaks and past Coffeeberry. I excitedly captured a photo of bear scat on the center trail. Seventeen avian species observed included: American Kestrel, Northern Pygmy-Owl, Western Bluebird, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Dark-eyed Junco, Band-tailed Pigeon, Golden-crowned Sparrow, Bewick's Wren, and Spotted Towhee.

Spirits high, chapter representatives proudly presented the past year's accomplishments and shared ideas for future endeavors. I encourage you to visit their websites for a glimpse into the action. Two representatives from the Bank Swallow Conservation Strategy-Technical Advisory Council shared their goal of revitalizing historic habitat for several thousand pairs of Bank Swallows burrowing each year along the Sacramento River banks.

I am thankful for quality time spent with experienced leaders, avid birders, and truly caring conservationists.



Scott Huber (right), of Big Chico Creek Ecological Reserve, leads Northern California Audubon chapter leaders on morning bird walk to open the council conference.

Photo by Joleen Ossello

PAM HUNTLEY ON KZYX FM 88.3, 90.7, AND 91.5

FOX SPARROW

Fox Sparrows are winter visitors to the Mendocino Coast .

They are in their own genus, and are large sparrow (7 inches in length) with larger feet than other sparrows and longer toes for scratching deeper on the ground.

Fox Sparrows are brown with heavily-streaked breasts of triangular markings that merge to a central spot. The legs are pale.



Fox Sparrow photo by Ron LeValley – taken at the mouth of the Elk River in Humboldt County

There are more than 15 subspecies that migrate through, or winter, in California. Our Pacific subspecies is grayer on the back and head and has a thick bill. Fox Sparrows with mostly rusty backs tend to be from Eastern and Central Canada, while the mostly brown backs are from western Canada or Alaska.

Fox Sparrows winter here from September through April. They are found in brushy thickets, parks, gardens and suburban backyard where they may be seen at feeders. Their songs are sweet and melodic.

The Pacific race has a sharp “chink” call like that of the California Towhee.

They feed by hopping back and forth on the ground to scratch up seed, berries and bugs. In the spring they return to mountain slopes at elevations from 3,000- 9,600 feet. Here their habitat is chaparral, riparia, aspen stands and open pine forest.

Adults build a cup-shaped nest on the ground or in a low shrub or tree. The nest is built of twigs, grass, moss and shredded bark and lined with hair. Fox Sparrows typically build two nests every season with the second located at a lower elevation, perhaps because of melting snow. A female lays 3-4 pale green eggs marked with reddish brown markings. She incubates them for 2 weeks and feeds insects to the chicks.

TEN MILE BEACH AND THE FUTURE FOR PLOVERS – IT TAKES A TEAM

Ten Mile Beach October 19, 2013

Becky Bowen Photo

Save Our Shorebirds began seven years ago with a mission to establish partnerships and get help for shorebirds that were in deeply serious decline – especially Western Snowy Plovers.

Now we need your help. MCAS supports a State Parks project to restore natural habitat for the Western Snowy Plovers at Inglenook Fen-Ten Mile Dunes Natural Preserve. In spite of the project's approval by the County Coastal Planning Administrator and Board of Supervisors, it has been appealed to the California Coastal Commission. That hearing will be in mid-November.

Your letter to the Coastal Commission will help. Letters must be sent before November 8, handwritten or typed, signed (with contact information) or faxed to: Bob Merrill, California Coastal Commission, 1385 8th Street, Suite 130, Arcata, CA 95521 (fax: 707 826-8960). Please write the case number in the upper right corner of your letter in large print: A-1-MEN-13-241. Details are on the MCAS website: www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org or the MCAS facebook page: www.facebook.com/mendocinocoastaudubon Here are important points:

- Restoration will remove remnants of the old haul road which (along with non-native invasive European beach grass) squeeze shorebird habitat between vegetative and asphalt barriers and a rising ocean level. Beach grass will be pulled by hand and road material will be recycled.
- Culverts at Inglenook and Fen Creeks will be removed so stream restoration can begin.
- All haul road removal will be done north of Ward Avenue only (the road is severely deteriorated). The popular walking and biking portion of the road south of Ward Avenue to Pudding Creek will be maintained, with plans for improvement.
- This specific project is fully funded by Proposition 84, approved by voters of California.
- In areas where European beach grass has been pulled at Ten Mile, plovers have roosted and volunteers have seen breeding behavior. The first Snowy Plover nest in nine years on Ten Mile Beach occurred in 2013.
- Ten Mile Beach is the preferred beach in the county for Snowy Plovers and the size of winter flocks continues to grow. Volunteers observed 53 plovers on Ten Mile on October 26 – a significant number and one of the reasons the area is part of a National Audubon Important Bird Area. There are only an estimated 2,100 Snowy Plovers on the U.S. Pacific Coast.
- Popular access points and existing trails to the beach and river will be retained. State Parks will explore a feasible route for bikes on the Coastal Bike Trail from Ten Mile Bridge to Ward.
- The project is supported by MCAS, Audubon California, California Native Plant Society, Redwood Coast Watersheds Alliance, Sierra Club and individuals who volunteer at the 1,285-acre natural preserve in the north part of Mackerricher State Park. It holds the last remaining coastal fen in the state. Your letter will support the project and help the plovers. *Becky Bowen*

MCAS EDUCATION PROGRAM

Sarah Grimes

Editor's Note: MCAS Education Chair Sarah Grimes truly loves her work with children. And children love her. When our photographer was snapping shots of the MCAS Precision Spotting Scope Drill Team performance during the Fourth of July Parade in Mendocino Village, Sarah's fan club was ready for her when the drill team passed by (Sarah is at left in the photo below). The sidelines came alive with shouts of "OH MY, THAT'S MRS. GRIMES."



Being called "Bird Ladies" conjures up a variety of quirky images: The little old lady who feeds and sings to birds in the park, a person who looks like a bird, or perhaps someone who frequently breaks into a raucous chorus of "Jay-cup, Jay-cup Jay-cup" when she talks about Acorn Woodpeckers.

Our young birders have come to know our education team as "The Bird Ladies." They shout it out of school bus windows or in a tumble of words and hugs at the grocery store or on the street. On a recent MCAS Education field trip along the Casper Uplands trail, I watched as each child spotted the Osprey nest. There is just nothing like that light in the eyes of the young when they are successful. A girl name Erwin (with eyes sparkling) informed me after the Caspar birdwalk that Acorn Woodpeckers could store 400 acorns in a granary tree. She heard it during one of Pam Huntley's radio spots on KZYY.

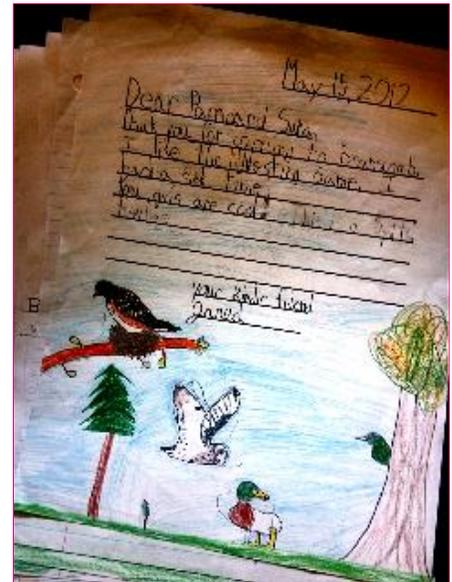


MCAS Family Birdwalks will begin spring, 2014. Photo by Sarah Grimes

If being called a "Bird Lady" comes with the territory, I like this territory. I hope the "Bird Ladies" bring smiles and a sense of pride and strong hope for the future of birding and of these of young stewards of the earth.

Our MCAS educators look forward to reporting results of the 4-H "Big October" competition at our November 18

member meeting and we also hope you join us on Fourth Saturday Spring Family Birdwalks with Sue Coulter and Sarah Grimes in local State Parks (check the MCAS calendar for announcements). Spring is our busiest time as we travel the coast and inland bringing our "no child left inside" program that introduces flight adaptation, conservation, ecology and basic bird identification skills to elementary school children.



DONALD SHEPHARD

WILD TURKEY



Image by Ltshears

The British imported domesticated turkeys from the Levant via Spain. They therefore associated the bird with the country of Turkey and another misnomer entered bird lore.

Benjamin Franklin never recommended the Wild Turkey as our national bird. On January 26, 1784, writing from France to his daughter in Philadelphia two years after the adoption of the Great Seal, Franklin wrote: *For my own part I wish the Bald Eagle had not been chosen the Representative of our Country. He is a Bird of bad moral Character. He does not get his Living honestly. You may have seen him perched on some dead Tree near the River, where, too lazy to fish for himself, he watches the Labour of the Fishing Hawk; and when that diligent Bird has at length taken a Fish, and is bearing it to his Nest for the Support of his Mate and young Ones, the Bald Eagle pursues him and takes it from him.*

Franklin continues with his pros for the Wild Turkey: *For in Truth the Turkey is in Comparison a much more respectable Bird, and withal a true original Native of America... He is besides,*

though a little vain & silly, a Bird of Courage, and would not hesitate to attack a Grenadier of the British Guards who should presume to invade his Farm Yard with a red Coat on.

A local flock of fourteen refrains from attacking me whether I wear red, white or blue, but they entertain me endlessly. Birds have a kind of annual menopause after each mating season when their hormone levels drop and they become sociable and flock together. When their hormone levels rise again, they split into smaller groups and compete, often driving off or fighting with rivals.

The Wild Turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*), a native to North America, weighs in as the heaviest member of the diverse family Galliformes. The domestic turkey we enjoy for Thanksgiving derived from a southern Mexican subspecies of Wild Turkey, not the related Ocellated Turkey.

I watch toms in the mating season walk around and around each other. The dominant male harasses his unfortunate subordinate by turning in front of him. When the weaker bird alters course to avoid the bully, the dominant one follows. This continues for an hour or more. In its second stage, this ritual involves neck-wrestling, as if the preliminaries represent a challenge that the weaker bird repeatedly declines, but is finally forced to accept.

On returning home one night, I came across a group of toms watching two of their fellows' neck-wrestling in the middle of the road. No amount of horn honking moved the match. I resorted to threatened vehicular manslaughter before they reluctantly moved aside.

The third stage of the ritual quickly ensues. The dominant tom grips the weaker one by the tongue and forces him to squat. Then oh what great friendship the two develop. They peck the ground for seeds and insects and display for hens, whether they are present or absent. No wonder Franklin called them vain and silly birds.

WILD TURKEY

continued

We call the feathers that dangle from the breast of most males and some females their beard. Tom heads are fascinating. Gobblers, have a large, featherless, reddish head, red throat, and red wattles on the throat and neck. The head has fleshy growths called caruncles. The difference between an adult male and a juvenile is that the latter has a very short beard and his middle tail feathers grow longer than the outer rectrices.

When males are excited, a fleshy flap, or snood, on the bill expands, and this, the wattles and the bare skin of the head and neck become engorged with blood. Toms have a spur behind each of their lower leg bones.

Wild turkeys are omnivorous, foraging on the ground or climbing shrubs and small trees to feed. They prefer eating hard mast (such as acorns) and seeds, berries, roots and insects. Turkeys also occasionally consume amphibians, small lizards and snakes. They are known to eat a wide variety of grasses

Males are polygamous, mating with as many hens as allow them. Toms display by puffing out their feathers, spreading their tails and dragging their wings, mimicking a body builder emphasizing his pectoral muscles. Head color can change with the turkey's mood, with a solid white head and neck showing when the bird is most excited. They use gobbling, booming and spitting as signs of social dominance, and to attract females.

After mating, females search for nest sites. Nests are shallow dirt depressions surrounded by woody vegetation. Hens lay a clutch of 10-14 eggs, usually one per day. The eggs are incubated for at least 28 days. The poults are precocial and leave the nest in about 12-24 hours.

Once, while entertaining friends in our front room, we observed a juvenile Red-tailed Hawk swooping down to the long grass in a meadow. A turkey hen flew up and dropped down on the much smaller hawk, harassing it. After fending off three or four pounces and looking decidedly awkward spread-eagled on the ground, the young raptor withdrew to the pine tree. The hen clucked as mother hens do. The hawk attacked three times and thrice retreated to the tree to eat his lunch. Upon investigating, we managed to find three golden chicks hiding in the grass. One was a goner. That flock visited our feeder to scavenge dropped seed at least twice a day, but I never saw the chicks again. So Benjamin Franklin's comparison of raptor and turkey holds true for me, but being made of lesser cloth than the great man, I hesitate to draw an analogy.

I shall give thanks for living in this beautiful and prolific place. Wild Turkey was not on the menu in 1621 when the Plymouth colonists and Wampanoag Indians shared their autumn harvest feast; nevertheless I hope you enjoy your Thanksgiving, with or without a slice of the silly and vain bird.



Wild Turkey lower leg bone with fighting spur
Photo by Donald Shephard



Wild Turkey chick
Photo by Donald

MCAS FIELD TRIP LOG**Tim Bray****Glass Beach, Mackerricher State Park-October 12, 2013**

Six birders, led by Dorothy "Toby" Tobkin, tallied 46 species. The best bird was a distant Horned Puffin, flying south over the ocean about a mile out. Toby identified it, through a scope, on the basis of size, shape, and white on its body.

Other highlights included all three Loon species: two Common Loons in breeding plumage, Pacific Loons in breeding and nonbreeding plumage, and nonbreeding Red-throated Loons. Grebes are starting to appear as well: we picked out one Red-necked Grebe, and a solitary Eared Grebe was fun to watch catching minnows in the Pudding Creek lagoon. Toby saw one Pigeon Guillemot flying south (perhaps a straggler). Conversely, a single Cackling Goose, flying with a small flock of Canadas, seemed a bit early.

Two chatty Bewick's Wrens moving through brush near the west end of the trail were a nice surprise; these birds are uncommon here. A Fox Sparrow also surprised me, by singing. Apparently the spring-like weather confused him. It was a beautiful warm fall morning with no wind, good visibility, good birds, and good birders. Can't ask for much more than that. Thanks, Toby.

Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens Birdwalk Sets New Record-October 2013

During our intermediate-level birdwalk at the Gardens, we tallied an extraordinary 68 species, breaking the previous record of 65. Even more remarkably, we saw two species new to the MCBG list. We have records going back to 1995 for this walk, led by Toby Tobkin until 2011, so this was an amazing day.

New species were: one Tropical Kingbird seen hawking from a cypress bush in front of the gray house on the bluff just south of the Gardens; and a Sora foraging in the beach wrack at the mouth of Digger Creek. Both gave great looks through the scope. Other notables included a Northern Pintail flying over the entrance garden, a lone Caspian Tern croaking over the headlands, and a single immature White-Winged Scoter at the head of a large flock of Surf Scoters flying south over the ocean.

The great weather and large numbers of Yellow-rumped Warblers combined to slow us down. Eleven experienced birders came on the walk, and that probably contributed to the large tally. Since there were several species we missed, a total 70 was within reach.

A LOOK FORWARD TO FIELD TRIP NOVEMBER 9, 2013-SOUTH COAST

Raptors of the South Coast, led by David Jensen. Meet at 9AM at the entrance to Navarro State Beach, just south of the Highway 1 bridge over the Navarro River. We will carpool from there, as some of the viewing locations have little space for parking. Bring lunch and plan to be with us all day, as we work south from the starting point to Point Arena, stopping at many points to view wintering raptors in and around the open fields.

CALENDAR, BIRD WALKS, FIELD TRIPS

November

Saturday 2 Beginners' Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 9AM*

Saturday 9 Field Trip 9AM - South Coast Raptors

Meet at the pullout at Hwy 1 and the Navarro River road to carpool

Bring a lunch and water

Monday 18 Meeting [Caspar Community Center](#) 7PM

Speaker: Greg Guisti, Coastal Pine Communities of Mendocino County

Wednesday 20 Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 8:30AM*

Thursday 21 MCAS Board Meeting 7PM, Contact J. Ossello for Location

December

Saturday 7 Beginners' Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 9AM*

Saturday 14 Field Trip 9AM CBC Tune-up - Rose Memorial Park and Pudding Creek

Meet at east end of Spruce Street

Saturday 14 Peregrine Audubon CBC (Ukiah)

Monday 16 Meeting [Caspar Community Center](#) 7PM Focus on Christmas Bird Count

Wednesday 18 Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 8:30AM*

Saturday 21 [Fort Bragg Christmas Bird Count](#)

January 2014

Saturday 4 Beginners' Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 9AM* Cancelled

Saturday 4 [Manchester Christmas Bird Count](#)

Saturday 11 Field Trip - Ten Mile River and Beach 9AM

Thursday, 16 MCAS Board Meeting 7PM, Contact J. Ossello for Location

Monday 20 Meeting [Caspar Community Center](#) 7PM Speaker: Doug Forsell, Seabirds

Wednesday 22 Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 8:30AM*

Thurs-Sun 23-26 [Snow Goose Festival of the Pacific Flyway](#) Chico

February 2014

Saturday 1 Beginners' Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 9AM*

Saturday 8 Field Trip - Owling

Fri-Mon 14-17 [Great Backyard Bird Count](#)

Monday 17 Meeting [Caspar Community Center](#) 7PM Speaker: Ronnie James, Bird Rescues

Wednesday 19 Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 8:30AM*

*These walks are free, however the Gardens charges an entry admission (reduced) for those who are not members of the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens.

For a complete MCAS calendar and useful links, please visit the chapter website at:

www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org

MCAS BOARD MEMBERS AND PROGRAM CHAIRS 2013-2014

President	Joleen Ossello	391-7019	j_ossello@earthlink.net
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Newsletter	Charlene McAllister	937-4463	charm@mcn.org
Field Trips	Tim Bray	937-4422	tbray@wildblue.net

Mendocino Coast Audubon Society e-mail address: audubon@mcn.org

www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org

www.facebook.com/mendocinocoastaudubon

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

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