



The Black Oystercatcher

Photo by Ron LeValley

Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Newsletter-November 2014



Hyalaeus mesillea (above),
Megachile fidelis (below right).



Photos © 2014 Rollin Coville

SARA LEON GUERRERO
PRESENTS

**CALIFORNIA BEES & FLOWERS:
A SELECTIVE LOVE AFFAIR
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 17
7 P.M.
CASPAR COMMUNITY CENTER**



University of California Berkeley researcher Sara Leon Guerrero will introduce us to native bees of California. There are 1,600 species in California, nearly 40 per cent of the total diversity of bee species in the United States. Native bees are essential to the health of our ecosystems. The talk includes information on bee ecology, bee-plant relationships, and the role of native bees in habitat gardening.

We will learn how to plant gardens that attract bees and boost pollination. Sara Guerrero, a native of the Anderson Valley, has been a research assistant for Dr. Gordon Frankie in the UC Berkeley Urban Bee Lab since 2012. She is a project manager for the lab's Farming for Native Bees Program.

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The Audubon Christmas Bird Count is Coming
Audubon's 115th CBC is coming and we're getting ready for two counts on the Mendocino Coast. It's more than a way to contribute to knowledge about our birds. It's fun, too. Details on Page 7 (see calendar).

THE 2014 MCAS SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT

Joleen Ossello



Scholarship recipient Cyrus Maden with MCAS President Joleen Ossello.

Since 2005, our organization has awarded \$7,500 in environmental science scholarships to College of the Redwood students. Those honored include: Angela Forgery (2005), Marc Mangahas (2006), Amanda Admire and Adam Floyd (2007), Luke Pederson (2008), Angelica Rosa (2010), Catherine Murty (2012), and Brandon Pill (2013).

This year, our scholarship committee recommended choosing one high school senior from Fort Bragg, Mendocino Village, or Point Arena. Senior students applied at their respective schools and wrote an essay about the following: "Identify a critical environmental issue and explain how you hope to make a difference in managing it."

Each applicant also submitted two letters of recommendation. Our scholarship committee (Sarah Grimes, Charlene McAllister and myself) worked with criteria weighted in the following order of importance: academic excellence, financial need, community involvement, school activities, and good citizenship.

Cyrus Maden, Mendocino High School, was chosen. He received the \$1,000 award at the school's June 4, 2014 graduation. In his essay, Cyrus wrote about "becoming a water resource advocate, developing innovative water management strategies, and researching and promoting riparian protection. It is this mix of activism and research I will pursue at college, as a student, intern and volunteer." He participated in salmonid population research through Mendocino High School's Natural Resource Program (SONAR) and University of California's Coho Salmon Monitoring Program in Sonoma County. He also served as president of the school's Students for Environmental Action Club.

Cyrus is now a freshman at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island. I recently interviewed him, and asked him these questions:

How is life different from life in Mendocino? "Life is different in a lot of ways. Mainly, there a lot more people – and interesting, inspiring people at that. There is also a mall, which, as I found out, is a great place to buy clothes in-person."

Have you noticed any wildlife changes and does any particular bird come to mind from your childhood? "The first wildlife change I noticed was the lack of redwoods and corresponding fauna. There are no deer, raven, or quail. There are also no osprey or cormorants. Some constants do exist, however. It's comforting to see a Red-tailed Hawk every now and then, and especially nice to see all of the seagulls. Specifically, growing up on the Coast made me accustomed to the seagulls – each and every local specie. It's definitely reassuring to know that that part of home is still with me."

Are you enrolled in environmental studies yet? "I'm taking a course on estuarine oceanography this semester. Although it's oceanography-focus, it takes a serious interest in the relationship between the physical estuarine processes and the estuary's environment and biology. I'm also in an environmental club called EcoReps, which raises awareness of environmental concerns on campus through tons of public events and displays."

Thank you, members, for your support. Your contribution to this organization is also a contribution to our future environmental leaders.

PAM HUNTLEY ON KZYZ FM 88.3, 90.7, AND 91.5



BREWER'S BLACKBIRD

Everyone has seen Brewer's Blackbirds. They are in parks, fields, and parking lots. They are the birds that peck bugs from your car bumper. In *Birds of Northern California*, David Fix writes, "Our immense network of highways has offered the Brewer's Blackbird a bounty of vehicle-stuck insects. This species exploits the 'road kill resource' niche better than any other songbird."

Brewer's Blackbirds are 8-10 inches long with a slender, straight bill. The male has a glossy greenish back, iridescent purple head, and bright yellow eyes. The female has brown eyes and a medium-brown body with slightly lighter brown underparts.

Brewer's Blackbirds live almost everywhere: wet meadows, grasslands, shores, roadsides, landfills, golf courses, urban and suburban parks and gardens, farmyards, pastures and marshes. They nest from sea level to 900 ft.

They peck, glean, and chase food, which includes a variety of spiders, crustaceans, and snails. They may also eat grass and seeds.

During courtship displays and when they are threatened, Brewer's Blackbirds call and lift their beaks, fluff their feathers, and spread their wings and tails. A pair may remain together for five years, but some males are polygamous. They nest in loose colonies of three to 100 pairs. The nest is constructed of twigs, cow dung (or mud), grass (or fur), and lined with fine material. Females incubate 4-6 greenish eggs with brown and gray spots. In non-breeding season, Brewer's Blackbirds join other birds like Red-winged Blackbirds, Brown-headed Cowbirds, and European Starlings. They may form huge, cacophonous flocks.

General Election Note: Audubon California recommends a yes vote on State Proposition 1. To learn more about this stand, there is information at the organization's blogsite: <http://www.audublog.org/?p=13325>

SNOWY EGRET**Donald Shephard****Snowy Egret in breeding plumage**
photo by Jason Engman

Years ago, my wife and I had a friend with a petite teenage daughter. On one visit, the girl wore elevator yellow boots that reminded me of a Snowy Egret. Arthur Cleveland Bent, in his *Life Histories of American Marsh Birds*, gushes: "This beautiful little heron, one of nature's daintiest and most exquisite creatures, is the most charming of all our marsh birds... The full display of all its glory is seen as it approaches its nest to greet its mate or its young with all the glorious plumes of its head, breast, and back, spread like a filmy fan."

Nineteenth century women prized these breeding season plumes for their hats. Millinery suppliers slaughtered much greater numbers of Snowy Egrets than of their larger relative, because they were more numerous and widely distributed, much less shy and easier to kill, and because the short, delicate plumes commanded a higher price. Hunters shot adults from the nest, plucked out plumes

and left the young to starve and the eggs to addle.

Thus began the race toward extinction for both egrets and hatters. Especially in the 19th century, hat makers employed a process called *carroting*, using mercuric nitrate in the production of felt for hats. They separated the furs of small animals, such as rabbits, hares or beavers, from their skins, and matted them together. They repeatedly shaped the resulting felt into large cones, before shrinking them in boiling water and drying them. In treated felts, a slow reaction released volatile free mercury.

Snowy Egret displaying
photo by Len Blumin

SNOWY EGRET

continued

The hatters (or milliners) who came into contact with vapors from the impregnated felt often worked in confined areas. Their symptoms included red fingers, red toes, red cheeks, sweating, loss of hearing, bleeding from the ears and mouth, loss of appendages such as teeth, hair, and nails, lack of coordination, poor memory, shyness, insomnia, nervousness, tremors, and dizziness.

A French law enacted in 1898 protected milliners, and by the turn of the century, mercury poisoning among British hatters became a rarity. Snowy Egrets and other avian species gained protection from the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918. In the United States, the mercury-based process continued in use until 1941, when the war effort commandeered all available mercury for the manufacture of detonators. Now hats, rather than egrets, are an endangered species and Snowy Egret numbers have rebounded.

Heron shape, yellow feet and black legs make this an easy identification. The area of the upper bill in front of the eyes appears yellow but turns red during the breeding season, when adults gain recurved plumes on their backs. I remember photographing a Snowy Egret at the San Diego Wild Animal Park and thinking it must be having a bad hair day. Juveniles look similar but the base of the bill is paler, and a green or yellow line runs down the back of the legs.

Male Snowy Egrets arrive at the nesting grounds first, to establish a display and nesting territory. The male's displays are both extravagant and unusual.

It circles in the air before descending to a perch, where it points the bill upwards and then pumps the head up and down, all the while giving a "Wah" call. As courtship continues, breeding birds pair up, after which the male bird performs a number of additional, unusual displays.

They nest in colonies, often with other waders, usually on platforms of sticks lined with fine twigs and rushes. Both adults incubate three to four greenish-blue, oval eggs. They stalk fish, crustaceans, insects and small reptiles in shallow water, often running or shuffling their feet, flushing prey into view. Snowy Egrets may also hunt for insects stirred up by domestic animals in open fields. Their yellow feet seem to play a role in stirring up or herding small aquatic animals. They fly strongly with deep wing beats, the yellow feet visibly trailing behind the body. An extremely vocal heron, particularly during aggressive encounters, they emit a characteristic "rah" call. Our Snowy Egrets migrate to Central America.

Enjoy this yellow-booted bird and do not grieve for its beautiful plumes which no longer adorn ladies hats for, to misquote a popular book, "even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."

Snowy Egret on nest.

Photo by David Hall



SAVE OUR SHOREBIRDS-The Coos County Express

Becky Bowen



Western Snowy Plovers resting in human footprints in Mackerricher State Park B. Bowen photo

Save Our Shorebirds volunteers have now spent more than 7,000 hours and 8 years in the field, and we learn more every year. This was the summer of the banded Black Skimmer, hundreds of Elegant Terns, and the highest number of Wandering Tattlers observed in many years. We've seen banded gulls (three in two days on Glass Beach and Ten Mile Beach), Common Terns, an increase in the number of watch-listed Heermann's Gulls, and a large number of Black-bellied Plovers and Dunlins migrating through in the last two weeks.

Perhaps the biggest, happiest surprise is an increase in the number of Western Snowy Plovers (*Charadrius nivosus* ssp. *nivosus*) coming to Ten Mile Beach. SOS surveyors work under the supervision of State Parks biologists. Data are submitted to State Parks and U.S. Fish & Wildlife, which coordinates a federal recovery program for the tiny bird protected under the Endangered Species Act. According to the 2007 USFWS Recovery Plan, there were only an estimated 2,100 of these birds breeding on the Pacific Coast at the time the plan was published in 2007. A significant number winters on Ten Mile Beach, described by the agency as one of only 28 potential Western Snowy Plover nesting areas remaining. We currently are seeing more than 60 Western Snowy Plovers that move up and down the entire length of the 3.8-mile beach.

Scientists who track banded birds tell us Western Snowy Plovers are coming to Ten Mile from both Southern California and from the north, principally from the Oregon coast.

Why is Oregon Snowy Plover recovery so successful? USFWS Biologist Dan Elbert recently posted a report on the agency's Pacific Region website that gives credit to federal and state offices that work together to manage habitat and control unnatural predators. He also gives credit to a committed bird community that discourages disturbance by people and dogs to shorebirds on nesting beaches. Shorebirds perceive dogs as predators and are severely stressed by the sound, sight and scent of dogs – even dogs on leashes. Citizen groups in Oregon are so protective of Western Snowy Plovers that Elbert compares them to the "12th man" on a winning football team's home field. That Oregon "field" had only 68 Western Snowy Plovers on it in 1993, he says. In 2014, more than 270 Western Snowy Plover chicks successfully fledged from Oregon beaches (the previous record was 180 in 2012). Well-known researchers Dave Lauten and Kathy Castelein, at the Oregon Biodiversity Information Center, monitor and band many of the Snowy Plovers that make the trip south to Ten Mile Beach.

It's a long flight to Ten Mile from Coos County and the Mendocino Coast is mighty happy to welcome all out-of-state visitors – especially the feathered ones.

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

CALENDAR, BIRD WALKS, FIELD TRIPS

November 2014

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

Saturday 8 Field Trip South Coast Raptors (Elk to Point Arena) 9AM Leaders: Tim Bray, Dave Jensen

Saturday 8-9 [California Swan Festival](#) Marysville

Monday 17 Meeting [Caspar Community Center](#) 7PM Speaker: Sara Guerrero, on Bees

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

Thursday 20-23 [Central Valley Birding Symposium](#) Stockton

December 2014

Saturday 6 Beginner Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 9AM*

Saturday 13 Field Trip [Rose Memorial Park & Pudding Creek](#) 9AM

Sunday 14 Ukiah Christmas Bird Count

Monday 15 Meeting [Caspar Community Center](#) 7PM Topic: Christmas Bird Count

Wednesday 17 Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 8:30AM*

Saturday 20 [Fort Bragg Christmas Bird Count](#)

January 2015

Saturday 3 [Manchester Christmas Bird Count](#)

Saturday 3 Beginner Bird Walk **Cancelled due to CBC**

Saturday 10 Field Trip Ten Mile River 9AM

Monday 19 Meeting [Caspar Community Center](#) 7PM Speakers Guisti/Keiffer, on Turkey Vultures

Wednesday 21 Bird Walk [Botanical Gardens](#) 8:30AM*

Wednesday 21-25 [Snow Goose Festival of the Pacific Flyway](#) Chico

Thursday 29 MCAS Board of Directors Meeting, Contact J. Ossello for time and place

**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

**Birders Identify
Ocean Bird Rare
To West Coast
On Pelagic Trip
Aboard *Telstar*
Near Fort Bragg**



Photo by Roger Adamson

In the *National Geographic Field Guide to Birds of North America*, Jon L. Dunn wrote Cory's Shearwaters are accidental off the California coast. The bird prefers East Coast waters and breeds in the Mediterranean and on the Azores, Canary and Salvage Islands. Dunn was on board the *Telstar* with Capt. Randy Thornton on September 28, and identified this shearwater about 5 miles west of Virgin Creek Beach north of Fort Bragg. He and Rob Fowler were leaders on the pelagic trip organized by Chuck Vaughn and Robert Keiffer for Ukiah's Peregrine Audubon Society chapter. This photograph was taken by Roger Adamson.

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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

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