NEWSLETTER OF THE MENDOCINO COAST AUDUBON SOCIETY

November 2008

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF HAWK-GAZING AT THE GOLDEN GATE

Speaker: Allen Fish

Monday, November 17, 2008 7:00 p.m.

College of the Redwoods, Room 300

For a quarter century, the citizen-driven Golden Gate Raptor Observatory has kept track of the biggest hawk migration in the western US each fall, over the Marin Headlands.

Traditional scientific tools like binoculars, traps, and radio-transmitters have allowed volunteers to count 1000 hawks a day, to band dozens a day, and to follow a hawk to Mexico.

But other volunteers weren't satisfied with the traditional, and so have created innovations for raptor study at the Golden Gate: among them, a standardized group-counting technique for measuring daily flights, a mechanical bird to lure hawks into traps for banding, and the first calibrations of West Nile Virus infection rates in California's wild raptors.

A dynamic result of the partnership between the National Park Service and the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, the GGRO today makes use of 300 volunteers annually, and draws some 10,000 visitors

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Twenty-five Years of Hawk-Gazing at the Golden Gate

to the Headlands each autumn. Come hear GGRO director Allen Fish chronicle both the Observatory's citizen contributions and its avian splendors. Amidst Goshawks and Golden Eagles, he'll tell tales of reverse-migrations, of a nearly-domesticated Redtail, and of a city with the highest density of nesting Cooper's Hawks ever recorded.

Director of the GGRO since its inception in 1985, Allen Fish was a Redwood City kid who practiced his own altitudinal migrations each summer to the Sierra Nevada. Schooled at UC Davis, he now teaches Raptor Biology there each winter, and consults on avian conservation issues throughout the state. He lives in Berkeley with his wife, an art librarian, and two kids who can't have dessert until they can tell a Sharpshin from a Coop.

MCAS REICEVES NATIONAL GRANT FOR SAVE-OUR-SHOREBIRDS

At the October chapter meeting, President David Jensen announced MCAS received a $15,700 *TogetherGreen* National Innovation Grant to fund another year of Save Our Shorebirds.

MCAS and State Parks created Save Our Shorebirds in 2006 to monitor shorebirds on MacKerricher State Parks beaches. Nathan M. Cooley, a graduate of College of the Redwoods Marine Science Technology, directed the program. We paid particular attention to shorebirds placed on the 2007 watchlist by the Audubon Society and the American Bird Conservancy including Western Snowy Plovers, American Golden-Plovers, Wandering Tattlers, Marbled Godwits, Western Sandpipers, Rock Sandpipers, Semipalmated Sandpipers, Buff-breasted Sandpipers, Black Turnstones, Surfbirds, Red Knots, Sanderlings, and Long-billed Curlews.

Volunteers surveyed birds and recorded disturbances that contribute to species decline. A David and Lucile Packard Foundation grant, which ended in September 2008, funded the study.

State Parks Environmental Scientist Angela M. Liebenberg worked with Dorothy "Toby" Tobkin and Cooley to establish survey guidelines. MCAS will post the final report to Audubon of the survey results on its website and make it available to schools, and libraries. If you would like to view raw data, contact casparbeck@comcast.net

Two years of study taught us an increase in shorebirds requires a decrease in disturbance. We needed to teach people about these birds, many of whom make heroic journeys along the Pacific flyway twice a year. (continued)

MCAS Receives National Grant For Save Our Shorebirds (continued)

Black-bellied Plover (Photo by Ron LeValley (www.LeValleyPhoto.com)

The *TogetherGreen* grant speaks to that concern. It is one of 41 new grants awarded in the United States and all projects can be viewed at www.togethergreen.org

Bird surveys will continue and volunteers will participate in other shorebird protection tactics including invasive non-native plant removal, preparation of a children's book, a new State Parks Interpretive Junior Ranger series, and a shorebird project by College of the Redwoods art students.

The Save Our Shorebirds grant is part of the first $1.4 million awarded by *TogetherGreen,* a national Audubon program funded by Toyota aimed at providing opportunities for people to take action in their communities to improve the health of the environment.

This team effort involved help and support from the Mendocino District State Parks staff, State Parks Rangers, Cowlick's Ice Cream (where volunteer observation sheets were collected and plenty of product consumed), FLOCKworks (a non-profit organization that supports a creative community spirit), teachers, administrators and pupils in three coastal school districts and Professor Greg Grantham at College of the Redwoods.

In awarding this grant, Toyota recognized Save Our Shorebirds and the following volunteers as conservation leaders in our community: Elizabeth Alden, Andarin Arvola, Barbara Auerbach, Ellen and Greg Baron, Becky and Win Bowen, Ande Lynn Brown, Joan Carroll, Pat Dunbar, Jeanette and Jim Boyer, Maureen and Tony Eppstein, Jim Griswold, Michael Haas, Karen and Jim Havlena, Dave Jensen, Trudy Jensen, Marilyn and Jim Katzel, Toni Kuljis, Angela Liebenberg, Louise Mariana, Charlene McAllister, Art Morley, Joleen Ossello, Nancy Paquette, B. Parmeter, Janet Self, Dorothy Tobkin, and Ginny and Warren Wade.

Jump in if you like. The water's fine. We will work with you to identify and survey birds on our beaches. If hiking the beach is not your preference, jump in anyway. We need help with public speaking, writing, audio book recording, teaching, videography, bird survey charts, photography and construction of a gigantic cardboard bird costume that will help teach children of all ages about shorebird protection. Contact Becky Bowen at casparbeck@comcast.net or 962-1602.

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

For the past couple of years, your chapter has been increasingly involved in several activities that are popularly referred to as "citizen science." We conducted breeding bird surveys at Point Cabrillo and Big River; nesting seabird surveys at the mouth of the Gualala River, Snowy Plover surveys at Glass Beach, Virgin Creek, and Ten Mile Beach; fall bird surveys along Big River; and annual Christmas Bird Counts. Every participant learned more about the natural world and enjoyed the experience, but many were unable to join us for various reasons. Therefore, I offer several other opportunities that you may enjoy.

Of course, the premier citizen science event in the world is the annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count. For over a century, volunteers have been recording information on the distribution and relative abundance of birds across the continent. Your Mendocino Coast Audubon chapter has been contributing data from our coastal area for four decades. This newsletter contains more information concerning this year's count, or you can go to www.birdsource.org and click on the CBC link for more information.

The Great Backyard Bird Count, sponsored by Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society, is an annual four-day event that allows you to contribute valuable bird distribution data within the limits of your own physical ability and despite the variability of the weather. You can count during as many days as you like in this period, at as many locations as you choose. You simply report the highest number of each species seen. For more information, go to www.birdsource.org and click on the link.

Another way to participate in citizen science from within the comfort of your own home is to join Project FeederWatch. This winter-long survey of birds that visit feeders in backyards, parks, nature centers, and other sites began in Canada over three decades ago. It is now co-sponsored by Cornell Lab and has now grown to over 15,000 members in every state and province in North America. Go to www.birds.cornell.edu or www.birdsource.org for more information.

This will be my second year participating in Project FeederWatch. The survey runs from November 8 until April 3, but requires as little as one hour every two weeks, although you will probably want to watch and count much longer. There is a $15 annual participation fee to cover the cost of research materials they send you as well as their operating costs. Please contact me at 964-8163 if you would like to participate but are on a fixed income and cannot afford the fees. Scholarships are available.

Please believe me when I say that you do not need to be an expert to participate in any of these projects. In fact, by doing so you will learn something new, no matter how much you know before you start, and you will add a richness and deeper sense of appreciation to your bird watching activities. So please join me.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

The Mendocino Coast Audubon Society invites interested persons with all levels of birding skill to join in our annual Christmas Bird Count on Saturday, January 3, 2009. Small groups will survey assigned areas throughout the day. Those who are able to stay will then meet for dinner at Druid's Hall in Point Arena to report their findings.

The count area, which is centered near Manchester, stretches from Cuffey's Cove near Elk to the northern edge of Point Arena and contains some of the best birding habitat along our coast. The first Christmas Count in this area was held on December 15, 1974. Nine observers reported a total of 60 different species. The number of participants as well as reported species has continued to grow since then. Last year thirty-eight observers reported a total of 147 species.

If you are interested in participating in this year's count, please contact David Jensen at djensen@mcn.org or leave him a phone message at 964-8163. Even if you are not an expert in the identification of gulls or sparrows, you can still be a productive member of this effort and will certainly have an enjoyable day in a beautiful part of our coast.

BIRD WALKS

Merlin

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, November 1, at 9:00 A.M. Our midweek bird walk will be held on the third Wednesday of the month, November 19, at 8:30 A.M. Please note that the start date is one half hour later than usual this month.

In December, the monthly Beginners' Bird Walk will be held on Saturday, December 6, at 9:00 AM, and the midweek bird walk will be held on the Wednesday, December 17, again starting at 8:30 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

NOVEMBER FIELD TRIP TO VIEW HAWKS OF THE SOUTH COAST

On Saturday, November 8, the Audubon Society will host a field trip to view the hawks of the south coast. Participants with all levels of experience are invited to meet at 9 A.M at the south end of the Navarro River bridge on Highway One. From there we will caravan south to Point Arena, stopping to scan the skies and fields along the way. This is an exciting time of year to look for returning raptors. Possible sightings include Peregrine Falcons and Ferruginous Hawks. Binoculars will be available for those who need them. This field trip should end in the early afternoon, so bring water and a lunch.

Dark Phase Red-tailed Hawk

(Photo by Ron LeValley (www.LeValleyPhoto.com)

GIFT CERTIFICATES

Treat yourself , a friend, or a loved one to membership in Mendocino Coast Audubon Society. Support a good cause and enrich a life. To send a friend or other loved one a Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Gift Certificate, simply complete the form, send a check payable to MCAS, or complete the credit card information and mail to:

MCAS

PO Box 2297

Fort Bragg, CA 95437

Amount $_____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State ____Zip Code _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Date _____

Tundra Swan

formerly known as the Whistler Swan

Designations

_____ $15 Subscriber

_____ $25 Family

____ _$ 50 Sponsor

_____ $ 75 Protector

_____ $100 or more Steward

I would prefer to pay by

Master Card____ Visa_____

Card # _____

Expiration Date _____

Signature _____

RECENT SIGHTINGS

Pacific Golden Plover - Virgin Creek
Cackling Goose - Lake Cleone, Pudding Creek, Ten Mile River
Black and White Warbler - Usal Creek
Black-throated Blue Warbler - Chadbourne Gulch
Magnolia Warbler - Ten Mile River
Chestnut-sided Warbler - Ten Mile River
Nashville Warbler - Ten Mile River
Vesper Sparrow - Virgin Creek
California Towhee - north of Ten Mile River
Lapland Longspur- Mendocino Headlands near Sister City plaque
Elephant Seal - Glass Beach
Steller's Sea Lion—Noyo Harbor bouy

Black-and-White Warbler
(Photo by Ron LeValley (www.LeValleyPhoto.com)

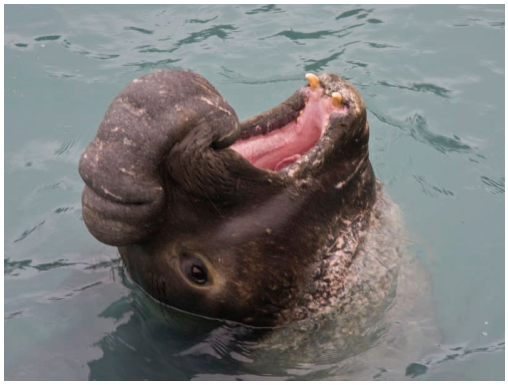
SPRING SHORT COURSES AT COLLEGE OF THE REDWOODS

BIOL 120K - Marine Mammals of the North Coast: March 28-29 - SAT 9AM-Noon, 12:30-4:30PM; SUN 9AM-Noon, 12:30-4PM. 0.5 units

BIOL 120M - Introduction to the Identification of North Coast Birds: April 11-12 - SAT 9AM-Noon, 12:30-4:30PM; SUN 8:30AM-Noon, 12:30-3:30PM. 0.5 units

BIOL 120E - Intertidal Ecology: April 24-26 - FRI 6-8:30PM; SAT 6AM-Noon; SUN 6AM-11:30AM. 0.5 units

Greg Grantham



RADIO SPOTS (FIELD NOTES) on KZYX

Catch Pam Huntley's bird spots on KZYX Monday mornings during Community News between 6 and 7 am and Wednesday mornings during Morning Addition between 7:50-8:00 a.m.

AT MENDOCINO HEADLANDS, BRANDT'S CORMORANT

Donald Shephard

Photo Ron LeValley (www.LeValleyPhoto.com)

The other day my grown sons and I watched a pair of Brandt's Cormorants spread out their soaked wings to dry after a dive. Their incomplete waterproofing helps reduce buoyancy, a valuable attribute for a diving sea bird. I wonder how their parents taught them this trick.

Brandt's Cormorants are large, black, crest-less seabirds with webbed feet, short black legs, a long neck, and a long, hooked bill that they use to catch prey while swimming underwater. Their slim bodies are 33-35 inches long and their wingspan is about four feet giving them strong, direct flight with rapid, powerful wing beats. They gather in flocks and fly to their feeding area in long straggling lines low to the waves. The cormorants depend on the rich food sources resulting from the upwelling of the California current. In the non-breeding season, the effects of this current diminish, and Brandt's cormorant populations redistribute along the coast from South Alaska to Baja California, wintering wherever they find food locally available.

The sexes look similar. Breeding adults show brilliant turquoise eyes and a bright blue gular (throat) pouch bordered with yellow, and their face and back sport slender white plumes. This identifying mark, distinctive among cormorants, fades quickly after the nesting season. Young birds are a duller buff color on the breast.

Brandt's Cormorants inhabit exclusively marine zones including inshore Pacific coastal waters, especially kelp bed areas, as well as large bays, estuaries, or coastal lagoons. They prefer breeding locations on gentle slopes on the windward side of coastal rocks such as the rocks north of Goat Island at the Mendocino Headlands. This species and the Pelagic Cormorant frequently nest on the same cliffs, with Brandt's forming colonies on level ground at the cliff top and Pelagic choosing inaccessible ledges. Their colonies often include Common Murres, which nest on the

AT MENDOCINO HEADLANDS, BRANDT'S CORMORANT (continued)

more level terrain with the Brandt's Cormorants. The feisty cormorants provide the murres with protection from marauding gulls.

Male cormorants choose the nest site and display there, exhibiting the blue throat pouch. They build a substantial nest on the ground, consisting of dry matter such as grass, sticks or rubbish and seaweed collected by diving, all cemented together by droppings.

If you watch land birds in your garden, you will notice nests with hatchlings or even fledglings by May 1 but Brandt's Cormorants only begin building their nests at that time and take about a week to complete it. Other sea birds, such as the Western Gull, are later yet.

The female Brandt's Cormorant lays 3-6 pale blue eggs, which hatch after a month of constant incubation into naked and helpless chicks. Nest robbing by Western Gulls presents such a serious problem that parents rarely leave eggs and chicks unguarded. Thus, both parents care for the young, feeding by regurgitation, brooding chicks when cold, and shading them from heat.

When the chicks reach about ten days old, neighboring youngsters coalesce into crèches. Older chicks then form larger groups at about one month of age. Adults still feed them but the young birds make brief sallies to the ocean where they must learn to dive.

El Nino brings unusually warm waters to the eastern Pacific every few years, reducing available prey and significantly lowering populations of Brandt's Cormorants. When panicked, adults fleeing the cramped colony trample eggs and gulls then take both eggs and young chicks.

Watch Brandt's Cormorants on coastal islands and you will see them stave off their enemies and rear their young. Given the difficulty of communicating in words with my own children, I often wonder how birds pass these skills to their offspring.

Ron LeValley
(www.LeValleyPhoto.com)

PROJECT FEEDERWATCH BENEFITS BIRDS AND PEOPLE

More than 100 studies have shown that getting closer to nature reduces stress and promotes a feeling of well-being in children and adults. So, filling feeders and counting the birds that visit may be just what the doctor ordered! For more than 20 years, that's what participants in the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Project FeederWatch have been doing--benefitting themselves and the birds.

The 2008-09 season of **Project FeederWatch gets underway November 8** and runs through April 3. Participants count the numbers and kinds of birds at their feeders each week and send the information to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Participants submitted more than 115,000 checklists during the 2007-08 FeederWatch season, documenting unusual bird sightings, winter movements, and shifting ranges--a treasure-trove of information that scientists use to monitor the health of the birds and of the environment.

Highlights of the most recent season include the largest southward movement of Red-breasted Nuthatches in the history of the project--part of an expected influx of northern birds that fly farther south when their food supplies run short.

Project FeederWatch welcomes participants of all ages and skill levels. To learn more and to sign up, visit www.feederwatch.org or call the Lab toll-free at (800) 843-2473. In return for the $15 fee ($12 for Lab members) participants receive the *FeederWatcher's Handbook*, an identification poster of the most common feeder birds in their area, a calendar, complete instructions, and the Feeder-Watch annual report, *Winter Bird Highlights*.

Thanksgiving Window Watch Bird Count

Dr. John G. Hewston of Humboldt State University runs an annual Thanksgiving Day Bird Count. Follow this procedure: Select a circular area on the ground (may include water area), 15 feet in diameter, to include feeders, bird baths, shrubs, etc., as you wish. Imagine the circle extending upward as a cylinder. Count the numbers of individual birds of each species which come into this circle (or cylinder) during exactly ONE HOUR. Try to judge as best you can the actual number of individuals which are making visits to the Circle, or which fly through the imaginary cylinder. Try NOT to count the same individual bird over and over again. Please print clearly the number for each species in the In Circle column. If you wish to report any, seen outside the Circle, list them in the "Outside" column.
Pick any ONE-HOUR period during the day --and make the count on Thanksgiving Day!

For more information check: http://www.utahbirds.org/cbc/ThanksgBCForm.htm

Please send your count results (even if you see no birds at all) to:

Dr. John G. Hewston
Natural Resources Building
Humboldt State University
Arcata, CA 95521

MCAS BOARD MEMBERS 2007-2008

President	David Jensen	964-8163	djensen@mcn.org
Vice President	Tony Eppstein	937-1715	tonyepp@mcn.org
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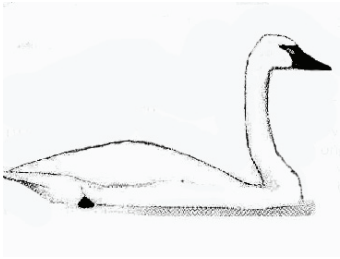
MISSION STATEMENT

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.

MENDOCINO COAST AUDUBON SOCIETY

P.O. BOX 2297

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