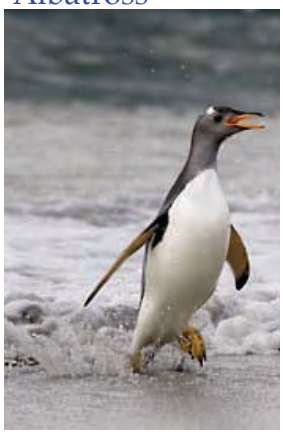
NEWSLETTER OF THE MENDOCINO COAST AUDUBON SOCIETY

November 2009

ALBATROSSES AND PENGUINS
THE WORLD THROUGH THE EYES OF A SEABIRD
Ted Cheeseman
TOWN HALL Main Street, Fort Bragg
November 16, at 7:00 p.m.

Black-browed Albatross



Gentoo Penguin

King Penguin

Join naturalist and popular expedition leader, Ted Cheeseman, for a lecture exploring what it is to be a seabird in the vast unforgiving desert of the open ocean. How is it that albatross can fly 14,000 miles on a single feeding trip to bring home just one meal for a chick? How can penguins thrive and raise chicks in the world's harshest environments, but cannot survive in mild temperate waters?

Ted's abiding love of penguins and albatross stems from a lifetime of guiding travelers to remote seabird breeding colonies. He grew up traveling extensively with Cheesemans' Ecology Safaris, and began studying and photographing wildlife very early. Just as Ted completed a master's degree in tropical conservation biology at Duke University, the icy grip of the Antarctic took hold of Ted's heart and he returned to his home state of California to lead and organize expeditions.

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER David Jensen

In last month's column I spoke briefly about some of the reasons why we look at birds. Now I'd like to say a few words about how you can look at them. Many of us actively participate in outdoor activities such as bird walks, field trips, or even pelagic boat trips. Your chapter regularly sponsors many of these events and they provide a wonderful chance to increase your birding skills, enjoy the company of other like-minded persons, and get a bit of exercise. Several special opportunities are listed in this month's newsletter. In particular, the November 14 field trip to view the hawks of the south coast (very little walking) and the annual Christmas Bird Count (lots of walking) can be very rewarding experiences, both educationally and socially.

But not everyone can get away when these events are scheduled. Some of you work long hours or must care for someone with special needs. Others have young children to tend. Or, as is the case with someone very dear to me, some of you have physical limitations that make even short walks very difficult if not impossible. I'm reminded of my beloved late mother-in-law who, in her final years, was tethered to an oxygen bottle. Although she was confined indoors, she would escape for hours by sitting at the dining room window to watch the hummingbirds and sparrows that came to her feeder. Although she never went on a field trip or joined a Christmas count, she was an active birder. And it brought her great joy.

She would have enjoyed being part of Cornell Lab's Project FeederWatch, which begins on November 14 and runs through early April. Anyone can count the number and type of birds at their feeders and then submit the data electronically or on written forms. What makes this project so valuable is that it not only helps citizens like you and me better understand what is going on in our own backyards, but it also provides important data that can be used to track changes in regional bird populations and their response to changes in global climatic conditions.

I was honestly surprised last winter by how much I enjoyed participating in FeederWatch. I learned that backyard behavior is much more complex than it appeared. I became aware of the ebb and flow in the number of sparrows, towhees and juncos that sought refuge in my backyard. I learned about the temporal patterns of feeding and resting. I learned which are the brave ones that return first after an accipiter or falcon attacks; which are aggressive when feeding; which are susceptible to the stresses of winter; and, which are the first to leave as spring arrives. But best of all, it allowed me to "go birding" on those rainy days when I had to stay indoors.

PRESIDENT'S CORNER continued

To learn more about Project FeederWatch, visit www.feederwatch.org or call the Cornell Lab toll-free at 866-982-2473. There is a $15 enrollment fee to participate, but I have arranged to have ten scholarships available for members of this chapter. So if you or someone you know (perhaps a child or grandchild) would like to participate for free, please contact me at 964-8163.

If you don't have a backyard or aren't ready for a winter-long commitment, you can be a birder by coming to one of our evening programs. Each month, we invite a talented photographer and speaker to share experiences — for free. Many of you remember the old Greyhound ads that promised: "And leave the driving to us." I'll gladly let the speakers stand in line to take their shoes off at the airport. They can wait for delayed flights, calculate the value of a taxi ride in some strange currency, and wait for their body to adjust to new time zones and bacteria. I know that it's not the same as an actual trip to Japan or Kazakhstan or, this month, Antarctica, but you get to learn about the birds, beasts and culture of those areas in an enjoyable and stimulating way, then go home and sleep in your own bed.

I could be wrong, but I believe that Kenn Kaufman once said, "If you like to look at birds, you're a good birder. If you like to look at them a lot, you're a really good birder." Life is seldom as simple as such homilies would have us believe, but there is a lot of truth in Kenn's assertion. Birding allows you to learn, grow and enjoy – no matter how you choose to participate. Thank you for choosing to participate with us.

NOVEMBER FIELD TRIP
HAWKS OF THE SOUTH COAST

On Saturday, November 14, 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. We will look for other birds as well. As always, binoculars will be available for those who need them. This field trip should end in the early afternoon, so bring water and a lunch. Call 964-8163 if you need a ride.

Peregrine Falcon photo Ron LeValley www.LeValleyPhoto.com

THANKSGIVING BIRD COUNT

Ginny Wade

For the 43rd year, Dr. John Hewston, Humbolt State University is organizing a Thanksgiving Bird Count. He needs bird counters for November 26th .

Procedures for Count: 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! 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

Thanksgiving (window watch) Bird Count.

Counter's name and mailing address:
_____
_____
_____, Zip _____

Location of Count _____
_____

Date: _____, Temp. _____

Time: Begin _____, End _____

Weather _____
Habitat type _____
Feeders / baths (Types) _____
_____
Feeders / baths (Number) _____

http://www.utahbirds.org/cbc/ThanksgBCForm.htm
to view the checklist.

Black-headed Grosbeak
photo Donald Shephard

Pine Siskin photo Ron Levalley
www.LeValleyPhoto.com

PAM HUNTLEY ON KXYZ FM 88.3, 90.7, AND 91.5

BUFFLEHEAD

The Bufflehead is a small duck that is easily recognized by the male's huge white patch on the back of his head. They are winter visitors here to enjoy our mild weather compared to the frozen north where they return to nest in spring.

At 13½ inches Buffleheads are thought to be the smallest duck. They have a compact body, small bill and a large head. Males are mostly white with a black back. Their head is iridescent black with a large white wedge that starts from behind the eye. Females are dusky colored with a charcoal gray head and a white patch behind the eye. They were named 'buffalo head' duck because of their large shaggy head.

Buffleheads prefer larger lakes and reservoirs. They feed in the water, diving for insects, snails, crustaceans and submerged plants. Fish are an important part of their winter diet. They are one of the best divers, swimming with their feet and bobbing back to the surface like a cork. One will stand lookout while the others dive to feed.

In the spring Buffleheads return to the ponds of northwest Canada. The female returns to the area where she was born. She nests in old Flicker holes, 5-20 feet off the ground and within 650 feet of water. The female incubates 6-10 eggs for a month. The young stay in the nest for only a couple of days then the mother coaxes them to leap from the tree and then leads them to water. The young won't be able to fly for another two months, which is just about the time the ponds start to freeze over again.

For the Mendocino Coast Audubon I'm Pam Huntley wishing you happy birding.

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

Bufflehead Photo Ron LeValley www.LeValleyPhoto.com

GIVE A GIFT THAT'S FOR THE BIRDS

Far left Pygmy Nuthatch

Left White-crowned Sparrows

Photos: Ron LeValley

www.LeValleyPhoto.com

HOLIDAY SPECIAL

JANUARY-JUNE, 2010 GIFT MEMBERSHIP

TO THE MENDOCINO COAST AUDUBON SOCIETY

$10 per membership

Your friends will receive e-copies of the WHISTLING SWAN,

they will get news about local Audubon field trips and bird counts

and

Your gift will support the Audubon Education Program in our community

Yes, please sign me up to send gift memberships in the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society.

My name is _____ (Recipients will receive notification of your gift).

Send the memberships to:

Name	E-mail Address
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Clip this form and send it with your check made out to MCAS to:

MCAS Gift Membership

P.O. Box 2297

Fort Bragg, CA 95437

For credit card payment: Name_____

Card Number_____

Expiration Date_____

My phone_____

TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED OR CHARGED: _____

To order by phone, call Ginny Wade at 707 964-6362 (or e-mail: wwade@mcn.org)

SAVE OUR SHOREBIRDS– FROM THE GROUND UP

Becky Bowen

If you think like a shorebird, you worship the ground you walk on. Put yourself in a shorebird's feathers: everything except migration or short flights happens on the ground. You rest on the sand, feed there, sometimes breed there, and raise your family there. Until they fledge, it's the only world your chicks know.

Student Conservation Assn. crew works with SOS volunteers, State Parks aides to remove invasive beach grass at Virgin Creek Beach, August, 2009.

State Parks Environmental Scientist Angela Liebenberg says shorebird conservation revolves around habitat: mostly sand. Liebenberg and State Parks biologists work to restore vegetation at Ten Mile Dunes Preserve where non-native, invasive European beach grass (*Ammophila arenaria)* threatens shorebird critical habitat. Non-native beach grass is largely responsible (along with human and predator disturbance) for loss of Western Snowy Plover nests on Ten Mile Beach. The grass creeps into the Plover habitat that at one time extended into the area near the former timber haul road east of the beach, according to PRBO Plover researchers. Another non-native invasive plant, jubata grass (*Cordaderia jubata*) threatens the delicate native vegetation of Ten Mile Dunes Preserve.

SOS Volunteer Art Morley, and colleague Dick Van Alstyne systematically removed more than 3,000 jubata plants from the dunes in 1997 and 1998 and continue to remove seedlings. It is hard, heavy shovel work.

Semi-palmated Plovers on Ten Mile Beach August, 2009

This fall, volunteers and State Parks crews saw Western Snowy Plovers return to a restored area near Ward Avenue in MacKerricher State Park. Karen Havlena reported 33 Plovers there recently on an SOS Ten Mile Beach survey. In August, a group of Student Conservation Association volunteers joined State Parks aides and SOS volunteers to clear out the last large portion of European beach grass at Virgin Creek Beach—yards away from the location of the last local Western Snowy Plover nest in 2005.

If you restore it, they will come. Ten Mile Beach, September, 2009.

What looks good to a Plover may not be your ideal sunbathing beach, but it's heaven on earth to these birds—full of organic beach debris, washed-up kelp, and delectable arthropods.

Save Our Shorebirds is a Mendocino Coast Audubon Society citizen science project in partnership with State Parks, College of the Redwoods and FLOCKworks.. If you'd like to help with shorebird censuses or education projects, contact Casparbeck@comcast.net or call Becky Bowen at 962-1602.

OSPREY REVISITED

Donald Shephard

Osprey with two fish, water spraying from its feathers as it struggles to lift off.

Photo copyright Miguel Lasa

www.miguellasa .com

My wife and I retired here five years ago and I have noticed a kind of ornithological version of SAD, seasonal affective disorder. About mid-September most adult Osprey start their migration south, some going as far as Argentina. Fledglings take their own sweet time a week or two later. They wean me from their whistling calls gradually until a day comes when I hear them no more and a slight pall falls over me.

European ospreys from Scotland to Finland overwinter in north Africa, and Asia north of the Himalayas but not all ospreys abandon their fans so heartlessly. The subspecies that lives in the Bahamas, Cuba, southeast Mexico and Belize does not migrate. The Australian and southwest Pacific subspecies remains year round. But here, we observe the annual unfaithfulness of this beloved bird.

I must wait until March to hear their cry floating high on the wind telling me of their return to the nest by Caspar Cemetery. Then again, I will witness their "sky dance", an elaborate aerial display performed by males during courtship and early incubation. He carries a fish or nest material, utters his screeching call amid short, undulating flights, separated by periods of hovering that look to me as if he briefly climbs aerial stairs.

The male typically consumes one part of the fish before he delivers it to the female. They start at the head and work back to the tail. Most predators are lucky to have 20% of their attempts successful, but researchers report osprey dives-to-fish-captured rates from 24% to 74%. Clear, plant-free water, plentiful fish, and calm weather contribute to osprey successes.

These piscivorous birds are not without their own enemies. Great Horned Owls, Golden Eagles and raccoons have black marks on their reports and those Scottish birds that understandably abandon the wintry Highlands for the warmth of fishing along the Nile must beware of crocodiles as they bask in Tutankhamen's sun.

OSPREY REVISITED continued

Fifty-five years ago, Scotland hosted no ospreys. Recolonization led to a population of 1600 breeding pairs in 2003. Success breeds success and now two areas of England support active nest sites.

Birds provide pointers to environmental changes. One indicator of global warming is the shorter migration of European ospreys. Some now stop in Spain and Portugal thus avoiding the crocodile's teeth.

Recent technological developments have allowed for precise tracking of migratory birds, especially those large enough to carry GPS transmitters thousands of miles. As a result, researchers discovered that fledgling osprey remain in South America for eighteen months. On their return, they head for their natal grounds.

How do ospreys learn all these things? Their migratory instincts must be hard-wired and may be simple – head south. How does an adult osprey teach a fledgling to fish? I find no scientific conclusions on this subject, but there are scattered observations of an anecdotal nature. Parents gradually stop bringing food home but rest on a nearby perch eating and taunting the young. The fledgling stands at the nest, flapping its six-foot wingspan and jumping up and down with typical teenage angst. A gust of wind and it free falls into its first flight.

One Florida observer witnessed an adult dropping a fish over the sea and a youngster diving to retrieve it. A single observation does not support a complete explanation. Perhaps, ospreys learn by watching their parents. Judging by all the calls around the Caspar cemetery nest at fledging time, I think parents teach their young by example even if they do leave them to find their own way to Argentina.

True, when the ospreys depart, other birds migrate along the coast. David Jensen, president of MCAS, tells me his spirits rise with the advent of loons. Soon the magnificent Tundra Swans will coast onto the Stornetta Ranch. The seasons change and with them the birds and yet, part of me waits for March when I first hear that high mewing call that signals the return of the osprey. I shall look up and smile, my thoughts soaring with them again.

Osprey packing its lunch, head first to reduce drag.

13th annual

CENTRAL VALLEY BIRDING SYMPOSIUM

November 19th to 22nd, 2009
Stockton Hilton Hotel
2323 Grand Canal Blvd
Stockton, California

Ph: 209-957-9090 (hotel reservations)

Hosted by the

CENTRAL VALLEY BIRD CLUB

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, November 7, at 9:00 a.m. Our midweek bird walk will be held on the third Wednesday of the month, November 18, 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 or visit our website: mendocinocoastaudubon.org

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 2. Small groups will survey assigned areas throughout the day. Those who are able to stay will then meet for a catered dinner (BYOB) 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 forty-two observers reported a total of 140 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 SIGHTINGS

October 17— Minima Cackling Goose with eight White-fronted Geese on the beach at Howard Creek. Hwy 1 north of Westport a few miles. Jim Havlena

October 18—Pelagic trip. Flesh-footed Shearwater, Cassin's Auklets, and Ancient Murrelets. Blue Whale, Humpback Whale. Debra Shearwater

October 18. Tropical Kingbird on North Windy Hollow. Yellow-headed Blackbird at Barnegat Road off Stonboro Road , Tricolored Blackbirds, Greater White-fronted Geese. Rich Trissel

October 17. Least Flycatcher at Little River Headlands. New County Record. Ron LeValley

Left: Clay-colored Sparrow photo Scott Streit

Right: Least Flycatcher

Photo copyright LgPacker

October 16— I did the weekly SOS survey on Ten Mile beach earlier in the morning, having the most Snowy Plovers I have seen this year totaling 27. All of the SNPLs are about 1/2 mile north of the ramp north of Ward Ave, Cleone. Karen Havlena.

October 15— Clay-colored Sparrow at Lake Cleone in MacKerricher SP. The specific location is on the south side of the outflow pond on the west side of the road going out to Laguna Point. A lot of berry bushes and lush grasses are just below the Haul Rd, where a Black Phoebe inhabits the area.

October 12 - Yellow-headed Blackbird and Tricolored Blackbirds in front yard. Karen Havlena

October 8 - Pacific Golden Plover at Virgin Creek Beach. Ron LeValley

October 5 - Orchard Oriole Laguna Point Karen Havlena

The Quotable Birder by Bill Adler Jr.

I once had a sparrow alight upon my shoulder for a moment, while I was hoeing in a village garden, and I felt that I was more distinguished by that circumstance than I should have been by any epaulet I could have worn.

Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

MCAS BOARD MEMBERS 2007-2008

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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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