

The Black Oystercatcher

Photograph by Ron LeValley

Mendocino Coast Audubon Society Newsletter December 2014

**YOU BETTER NOT SHOUT, YOU BETTER NOT POUT
THE HOLIDAYS ARE HERE, SO COME HELP US COUNT!**



Tim Bray and Victoria Rideneur on the Skunk Train tracks during the 2012 Fort Bragg CBC. Photograph by Catherine Keegan

**COUNTDOWN TO THE CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS
MONDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2014
7 P.M.
CASPAR COMMUNITY CENTER**

MCAS Vice-President Dave Jensen and Field Trip Chair Tim Bray will help us get ready for two Audubon Christmas Bird Counts at our chapter meeting December 15. They will present a multi-media review with plenty of tips for field identification by sight or sound. They will show us how to participate in the two counts conducted by the MCAS. Whether you intend to venture out into the field, or stay home and count birds at your feeder, you will find this an enjoyable and informative presentation. Dave coordinates the South Coast (Manchester) count, Tim coordinates the Fort Bragg count. The backyard bird count that is part of the Fort Bragg count is organized by Sarah Grimes. Please see details on page 2.

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Ceramic artist and birder Chris Bing leads a team at the South Coast CBC. Shown here on the 2007 count. More photos, p.2.

THE COUNTS OF CHRISTMAS PAST



Greenwood Beach, Elk, 2014

Tim Bray coordinates the Fort Bragg CBC. To participate, contact him at 937-4422 or tbray@wildblue.net



Geoff Heinecken, Noyo River, 2013



MCAS Education Chair Sarah Grimes coordinates the Fort Bragg CBC Backyard Feeder count. To participate, contact her at 937-4322 or zewa@mcn.org

On Saturday, December 20, 2014, bird watchers and nature enthusiasts, armed with binoculars, bird guides, and checklists, will count all the birds they can identify from Little Valley Road south to Big River. On January 3, 2015, many of them will get up and do it again, on the south coast from Elk to Point Arena (called the "Manchester count." They will be joining tens of thousands of birders across the Americas who will brave uncertain weather (or stay home and watch a feeder) to count every bird of every species they can find in one day, as part of the 114th National Audubon Christmas Bird Count.

The Mendocino Coast Audubon Society invites you to join us, no matter what your level of birding experience. Everyone who takes part in the Christmas Bird Count does it for love of birds and the excitement of friendly competition, with the knowledge that their efforts make a difference for science and bird conservation.

To participate, contact Dave Jensen at 964-8163 djensen@mcn.org for the Manchester count. Contact Tim Bray at 937-4422 tbray@wildblue.net for the Fort Bragg count. For the Fort Bragg CBC backyard feeder count, contact Sarah Grimes at 937-4322 zewa@mcn.org

For more information about Christmas Bird Count, visit Audubon's website at christmasbirdcount.org and click on the "Get Involved" link on the right-hand side of the page.



Dave Jensen coordinates the Manchester CBC. To participate, contact him at 964-8163 or djensen@mcn.org



Joleen Ossello, Manchester, 2014



Fox Sparrow, Elk Beach, 2014



CBC dinner at Point Arena's Druid Hall, 2014
Photos by Tim Bray, Joleen Ossello, Sarah Grimes, B. Bowen

PAM HUNTLEY ON KZYX FM 88.3, 90.7, AND 91.5

RUFOUS HUMMINGBIRD

The Rufous Hummingbird looks so much like its cousin, the Allen's Hummingbird, that many birders refer to both by their genus, *Selasphorus*, which means "flame bearer" in Latin.

Rufous males have orange backs and flanks, green crowns, and white breasts. Their throat-coverings, called gorgets, are iridescent and shine like burnished gold in certain light. Generally, Rufous adult males' backs are orange while the Allen's Hummingbird adult males' backs are green. Females are difficult to distinguish as both species have rufous flanks, green backs, white bellies and red-spotted throats. Both Rufous and Allen's Hummingbirds are about 3½ inches long.



Photograph by Roy W. Lowe, www.gaderinge.com

By late spring, identification of *Selasphorus* hummingbirds is easier because Rufous Hummingbirds leave California. They continue north to nest from Oregon to Southern Alaska. The 2,000 mile migration follows blooming red flowers such as columbines, penstemons, and flowering currants. Males arrive earlier than females, to establish breeding territories. They zealously guard territories from other hummingbirds, other songbirds, and even chipmunks. Male courtship displays include diving rapidly in a long u-shape flight, flashing females with brilliantly-colored throats, and producing distinctive whining sounds during display flights. Mating is accomplished in flight. Shortly after mating, males leave the breeding grounds for higher inland elevations.

Females build low-lying nests, sometimes right on top of a previous year's nests. They construct the nests from plant down, lichen, and spider silk. In each nest, two white half-inch eggs are laid. Within a month of hatching, the females and their young join the males in the mountains, returning southward by following the late blooms of high meadows.

MCAS Friends Request Your Input About Hummingbirds Charlene McAllister

Garry and Gloria Van Tassel report that they have been feeding hummingbirds for the past 5 or 6 years at their home in Little River. They wonder how many other Audubon members are also feeding these delightful creatures. They started with one feeder and are now up to 6, with a lively swarm of visitors to the feeders every day. Going through 2 pounds of sugar a day keeps them looking for sales. They wondered if any others are having similar experiences. Perhaps a sugar buying club could be started. You can drop Garry and Gloria a note at garyvantassel@wildblue.net

BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON **Donald Shephard**

Black-crowned Night-Heron photo Dick Daniels

When my wife was a student at U.C. Davis, she visited abandoned sugar-beet wastewater ponds in Woodland, and later introduced me to the birds there. We particularly enjoyed the Yellow-headed Blackbirds and the whirling dervish activity of Wilson's Phalaropes. A colony of Black-crowned Night-Herons dominated the reed beds. On a trip to Monterey, we peered from our motel window at a tree-filled island in a small lake. It appeared that vandals had teepeed the trees, but how was that possible? On venturing around the lake with our binoculars we eventually recognized our sugar pond friends. We met them again at San Diego Wild Animal Park in Escondido.

My *Checklist of the Birds of Mendocino County* lists Black-crowned Night-Herons as rare year-round. That great source of reports of uncommon avian visitors, *Mendobirds*, shows two records this year. Jeff Petit spotted an immature upstream from the Garcia River bridge on Highway 1 in June and Karen Havlena recorded an adult at Noyo Harbor in January.

In contrast, Arthur Cleveland Bent wrote: "How often, in the gathering dusk, have we heard its loud, choking squawk and, looking up, have seen its stocky form, dimly outlined against the gray sky and propelled by steady wing beats, as it flies high in the air to its evening feeding place in a distant marsh."

They wear a black crown and back with the remainder of the body white or gray, red eyes, and short yellow legs. The pale gray wings flash white underneath. Two or three long, white plumes, erected in greeting and courtship displays, extend from the back of the head. Black-crowned Night-Herons do not fit the typical body form of the heron family, but appear relatively stocky with shorter bills, legs, and necks than their more familiar cousins. Despite their elegant dress, these birds transmit a sinister aura with their hunchback posture and penetrating red eyes. When resting they slouch, but when hunting they extend their necks and look more like other wading birds.

Members of the family Ardeidae, including the Black-crowned Night-Heron, have breast and rump patches in which the down disintegrates to a powder they use for preening, often with their pectinate middle toes. This powder is familiar as the mark left by doves hitting your window.

Donald Shephard

Largely nocturnal, night-herons spend the day roosting in trees, bushes, or dense reed beds, except in the nesting season, when they may forage during the day.

Black-crowned Night-Herons notoriously take chicks and eggs of terns, ibises, and other herons which share their colony. Yet they will brood any chick that is placed in their nests. The herons apparently don't distinguish between their own offspring and nestlings from other parents.

While foraging in wetlands they may sway or bob to compensate for water refraction and to enhance their binocular vision. They "bait" fish by placing insects, flowers, seeds, twigs, bread, or even popcorn on the water's surface to attract fish. They may also hunt by vibrating their bills in the water to lure prey into investigating the disturbance. Because of their position at the top of the food chain, these birds are considered excellent indicators of the health of wetland ecosystems.

The genus name, *Nycticorax*, means "night raven", and refers to the nocturnal habits and harsh crow-like call. Scientists find it easy, if a bit smelly and messy, to study the diet of young Black-crowned Night-Herons because the nestlings often disgorge their stomach contents when approached. Unfortunately for would-be researchers, both males and females vigorously defend feeding and nesting territories, sometimes striking with their bills and grabbing each other's bills or wings.

The male advertises for a mate with displays that involve bowing and raising the long plumes on his head. Both the male and the female sit on the eggs and brood the chicks, greeting each other with calls and raised feathers at incubation exchange time. Young leave the nest at the age of one month and, as they are still unable to fly, move through the vegetation on foot, forming nocturnal flocks in feeding areas. They take to the air at six weeks old, and then disperse widely.

You must travel out of county to encounter a colony of Black-crowned Night-Herons but the drive will be worthwhile for you to see the bustle and hear the cacophony and know you are a witness to a "scattering," a "battery," or (perhaps for the good alliteration) a "hedge" of herons.

Black-crowned Night-Heron with snake
photo by D. Gordon E. Robertson



SAVE OUR SHOREBIRDS – WISH THEY ALL COULD BE CALIFORNIA GULLS*

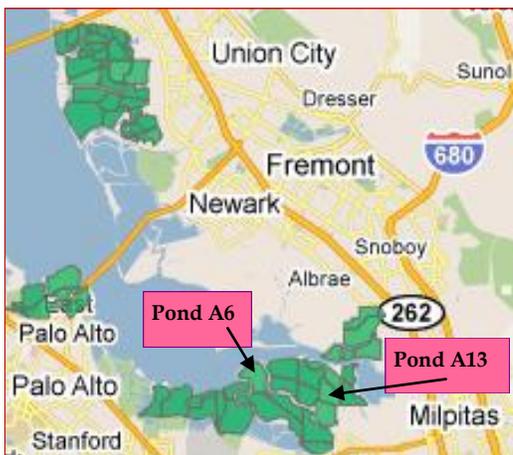


*Story and photos by Becky Bowen. Headline by Teresa Hurray, friend of shorebirds everywhere.



NOVEMBER 1, 2014 TEN MILE BEACH—On any other day, the photograph above would have been just another shot of California Gulls along the water's edge. But a closer look revealed a bird with a readable band. SOS surveyors saw recorded similar band in 2010, and notes indicated a connection to the San Francisco Bay area's South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project, the largest wetlands restoration effort on the West Coast.

A coalition of agencies (including U.S. and CA Fish & Wildlife, and the California Coastal Conservancy) as well as private foundations and stakeholders manage the 50-year \$1.2 billion project located on former Cargill Inc. salt evaporation pond property acquired by public and private funds in 2003 under the leadership of Sen. Dianne Feinstein.



The South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project includes sites (shown in green) where some 15,100 acres of former industrial salt ponds will be restored to tidal marsh habitat. The California Gull found on Ten Mile Beach on the Mendocino Coast was banded in 2008 on Pond A6. Source: Google Map on www.southbayrestoration.org

Natalie Washburn is Waterbird Program Coordinator for the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory. Her research involves gull colonies there. "Our database indicates the bird found on Ten Mile was banded as adult in 2008 on a pond due for restoration in 2010 (pond A6, now a tidal marsh area)," she said. "The bird was then re-sighted by our staff during a Snowy Plover survey in March, 2012, at a pond near Alviso Marina (pond A13)." As chance would have it, SOS volunteers were on a Snowy Plover survey when they found the banded gull here November 1.

SOS is an on-going long term MCAS program in partnership with State Parks. To learn more, contact Director Angela Liebenberg at liebenbergs@mcn.org and view photos of surveyed birds at www.facebook.com/SaveOurShorebirds

CALENDAR, BIRD WALKS, FIELD TRIPS

December 2014

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

Saturday 13 Field Trip [Rose Memorial Park & Pudding Creek](#) 9AM - Meet at cemetery entrance, east end of Spruce Street, Fort Bragg. This is a winter "hotspot" where we have found rarities, such as Bullock's Oriole and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, in previous winters. Leader: Tim Bray

Sunday 14 Ukiah Christmas Bird Count

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

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

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

To participate, contact **Tim Bray** at 937-4422 tbray@wildblue.net

To participate in bird feeder count, contact **Sarah Grimes** 937-4322 zewa@mcn.org

January 2015

Saturday 3 [Manchester Christmas Bird Count](#)

To participate, contact **Dave Jensen** 964-8163 djensen@mcn.org

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

Saturday 10 Field Trip [Ten Mile River](#) 9AM - Meet at parking lot south of Ten Mile Bridge west side of Highway 1. Leader: Dave Jensen

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 Garden members*

For complete calendar, updates, and useful links, visit: www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org

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



CALIFORNIA
COASTAL
COMMISSION



The Noyo Center for Marine Science is partnering with the California Coastal Commission and NOAA to conduct beach surveys to monitor debris from the 2011 Japanese tsunami. We are recruiting volunteers to conduct surveys at Westport, Ten Mile, Jug Handle, Caspar, Navarro and Elk Beaches. Join the Center staff for orientation and training:

Saturday, December 6, 2014 2-3 p.m.

Fort Bragg City Hall, Old Recreation Center Gym

For information, contact Sarah Grimes, Tsunami Debris Coordinator

707 813-7925 sarah@noyocenter.org

MCAS BOARD MEMBERS AND PROGRAM CHAIRS 2013-2014

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Newsletter	Charlene McAllister	937-4463	charmac@mcn.org
Field Trips	Tim Bray	937-4422	tbray@wildblue.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

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