



The Whistling Swan

NEWSLETTER OF THE MENDOCINO COAST AUDUBON SOCIETY

December 2008

YOUR SUPPORT

Your volunteer time and financial aid support these MCAS programs:

Save Our Shorebirds: Becky Bowen manages this grant-funded program that establishes a shorebird protection plan for Ten Mile, Virgin Creek and Glass beaches in cooperation with State Parks. Volunteers walk these beaches and meticulously record their observations of birds and destructive elements. The data are available via our listserve and website. The dedicated work of Becky Bowen to secure the **TogetherGreen** grant from Toyota and to ensure the successful completion of our commitment deserves your support.

Schools and Scholarships: Jeanne Coleman heads our in-class program for area schools. Twenty-five classroom presentations reached 457 children. We sponsor a Nature Day Camp scholarship at the Outdoor School, and two scholarships for College of the Redwoods students, and present a Children's Bird Story Hour at the Fort Bragg Library and Frankie's in Mendocino.

Programs: Charlene McAllister diligently puts together monthly programs on a variety of bird and environmental topics.

Christmas Bird Count: David Jensen leads local volunteers in this 100 year old countrywide program to assess the health of bird populations.

Bird Walks: David Jensen, Toby Tobkin, and Art Morley lead twice monthly bird walks in the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens.

Field Trips: Field trips are organized eight times a year.

TV and Radio spots: Pam Huntley produces weekly radio spots on KXYZ and MCAS teamed up with Mendocino Coast Television to create "A Bird's Eye View" .

Conservation: Warren Wade spearheaded the board's efforts in the successful fight to protect the nesting birds on Gualala Point Island.

Early in 2009, you will receive a fund raising letter. Please consider these achievements and contribute to them.

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER



I see the signs of Christmas are all around as I prepare this column: colored lights are appearing in downtown windows, Juncos outnumber the Goldfinches at my feeder, and Al the Albatross is back! That means my first supermarket carol can't be far away.

As I meet with people from many different stations and persuasions, I sense from all of them that this will be a season of careful giving, a year when modest gifts and sincere gestures will be respected and

appreciated. That will certainly be the case in my household. This year, my family will forego the usual catalogue selections in favor of something more personal.

Instead of the smoked turkey breast and slabs of bacon, one sister is sending me a membership in her local SPCA. Instead of a gourmet cheesecake, another sister is sending me a gift subscription to a cooking magazine. Instead of the usual box of wine, crackers and cheese, another sister is sending a small donation to her local food bank in my name.

None of us needed those pricey gifts last year. We simply sent them out of habit. And none of those gifts lasted very long. A couple of good meals later, they were only memories and dirty plates.

So what am I sending these special people in my life this year? Each one is getting a gift membership to the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society. During the coming year they will enjoy each newsletter that arrives with interesting stories about the place where I live, complete with wonderful photos of birds they have never seen. But more importantly, their gift will help to support our outreach and educational programs throughout the coming year. That will be just as important to the one in Tacoma who is helping to raise her grandchildren, and to the one in Los Angeles who teaches young children, and to the one living in Switzerland who worries about the future of the environment and our country.

So I hope you will consider joining me. Consider sending a gift membership to those ones dear to you who share your love of nature, your concern for our remaining wildlife, and your commitment to helping the next generation discover the natural wonders that surround them.

The Mendocino Coast Audubon Society sincerely thanks you for your support during 2008 and we wish all the best for you, your family, and our world in the coming year.

To join Mendocino Coast Audubon and receive the monthly newsletter, send \$15.00 to MCAS P.O. Box 2297, Fort Bragg, CA.

www.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 3. 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

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, December 6, at 9:00 A.M. Our midweek bird walk will be held on the third Wednesday of the month, December 17, at 8:30 A.M. Please note that the start time is one half hour later than usual this month.

In January, the monthly Beginners' Bird Walk will be superseded by the Christmas Bird Count. However, the midweek bird walk will be held on the Wednesday, January 21, again starting at 8:30 A.M.

We will host a field trip to view the birds of Ten Mile River on Saturday, January 10. Participants will meet at the south end of Ten Mile River bridge at 9:00 A.M. Additional details will be provided in our next newsletter.

Birders with all levels of experience are invited to attend these walks. Admission is free for Botanical Garden members. For more information on these and other activities, please call 964-8163 visit our website www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org.

DECEMBER FIELD TRIP TO VIEW BIRDS at POINT ARENA and MANCHESTER

On Saturday, December 13, the Audubon Society will host a field trip to view the winter birds of the Manchester and Point Arena areas. Possible sightings include Peregrine Falcons, Ferruginous Hawks, Tundra Swans, and "Al" the Laysan Albatross, who has returned to spend another winter at Point Arena Cove. Participants with all levels of experience are invited to meet at 9 A.M at the corner of the Highway One and Miner Hole Road just south of the Garcia River. Carpooling is encouraged, and binoculars will be available for those who need them. This field trip should end in the early afternoon, so please bring water and a lunch.

CHILDRENS' BOOK REVIEW by Jeanne Coleman

A Note for Teachers and Parents:

We have teamed up with Mendocino Coast Television to create "A Bird's Eye View" ...a look at Audubon's ongoing school presentations. Watch for them on Channel 64.

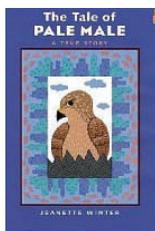


Louisa Morris, mom
and Molly Mielke

Photos By Art Mielke

So many beautiful and wonderful children's books are published every year. (More than 5,000 a year in the United states alone.) It is difficult, if not downright impossible to keep current. This selection of six stories about our feathered friends will help you choose. We solicited these comments from Louisa Morris and her eight year old daughter, Molly, who spent several hours side by side on the couch and huddled under the covers to share their thoughts.

The Tale of Pale Male by Jeanette Winter



Harcourt, Inc. 2007

Louisa: This is the true story of nesting red tail hawks in Manhattan. The story is told simply and clearly and has a happy ending - very well done! My daughter liked it very much.

Molly: I liked this story the very best!

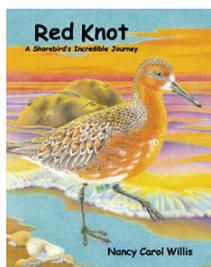
How to Paint the Portrait of a Bird by Jacques Prevert



Roaring Book Press, New York 2007

Louisa: Beautiful illustrations and a nice message, especially for artistically inclined children and parents make this a recommended book.

Molly: I liked the pictures and the fact that the bird flies away in the end.

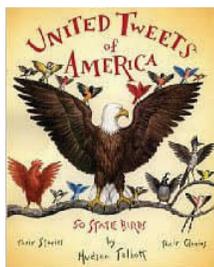


Red Knot: A Shorebird's Incredible Journey by Nancy Carol Willis
Birdsong Books, Delaware 2006

Louisa: This story of the amazing Red Knot inspired me. I had no idea it traveled 20,000 miles a year from Tierra del Fuego to the Canadian Arctic. The author gives great, real information on their journey; what they eat, the threats they face, and the route they travel – great, educational book. This is my favorite.

Molly: I like the colorful pictures in this book and the story of this far-traveling little bird. It had courage.

United Tweets of America by Hudson Talbot

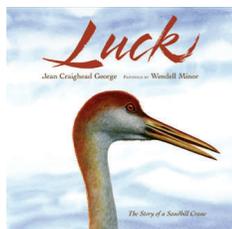


G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York 2008

Louisa: Great content – lots of interesting information on birds and the states, in general. Humorous, educational, and fun for both kids and parents. I learned lots, including that the cardinal and the meadowlark are very popular state birds. Highly recommended, especially if family members are spread out around the country.

Molly: It made me laugh. What the birds said was funny. I like the pictures.

Luck: The Story of a Sandhill Crane by Jean Craighead George



Laura Geringer Books, New York 2006

Louisa: A great story of the Sandhill Crane migration and life cycle – human impacts are expertly woven in as well. Solidly written with nice illustrations. Pull out the family atlas while reading it. This was not Molly's favorite book due to a few moments of "peril" that the cranes faced. As a parent, I feel these are part of the truth of what the birds deal with as a result of human influence on their habitat and food sources. The young girl

in the story is a good role model. Maybe best for slightly older children.

Molly: This book made me a little sad.

The True Story of Stellina by Matteo Pericoli



Alfred A. Knopf, New York 2006

Louisa: A great story about a city bird that is rescued by a gentle woman. Based on a true story; this is a heart-warming, sweet tale.

Molly: I like the pictures and the writing. The best part was when Stellina says, "Cheep!"

AT THE MENDOCINO HEADLANDS, THE TUFTED PUFFIN

Donald Shephard



When I first saw the birds that rest or nest on the islands north of Goat Rock in Mendocino Headlands State Park, they looked like a massive game of chess with many extra pieces. From a distance, the Common Murres and cormorants look entirely black and the gulls appear white. So my wife and I called it Chess Rock, but it has no name.

You may spot a less common bird there, the Tufted Puffin, a Northern Pacific sea bird that nests along coastlines from northern California to Alaska, and across the ocean from Japan to the shores of northeastern Asia. These medium-sized, stocky seabirds with rounded heads appear solid brown-black overall, except for distinctive facial coloration and orange feet. Yellow, and sometimes green, accents the base of the large orange, laterally compressed beak. In breeding plumage, both male and female Tufted Puffins sport a white mask across the face, ending in a tuft of blonde feathers sweeping back from above the ear. To distinguish this species from other puffins, look for its dark belly.

Tufted Puffins weigh nearly twice as much as pigeons, about a pound and a half. Once airborne, they fly well, but these heavy-set birds appear clumsy walking and need a slope and a running start for lift-off. They dive and swim underwater for a half minute or so, using their wings to paddle and their feet to steer their way through schools of small fish, which they catch in their bills. Sometimes a parent puffin will carry a dozen or more fish by using its tongue to hold fish against the spiny palate in its mouth while opening its beak to catch more fish. In flight, they look like flying cigars, moving rapidly and close to the waves.

Where they go in the winter is still not well known. We think they winter far out at sea, but few people have ever seen numbers of puffins in the winter. Occasionally there will be a landfall of both Horned and Tufted Puffins in the winter, presumably because ocean conditions get them to wandering to look for food. (continued)

AT THE MENDOCINO HEADLANDS, THE TUFTED PUFFIN (cont)

They breed in colonies on islands with steep, grassy slopes or on cliff tops. Tufted Puffins probably form long-term pair bonds. They nest in burrows at the edges of cliffs, on grassy slopes, or in natural crevices in rocks. The pair spends a great deal of time preparing the nest site. The 2-7 feet burrow ends with a nest chamber lined with grass or feathers, or sometimes nothing at all. Scratching out the nest burrow with the sharp claws on their webbed feet consumes so much time that the birds most likely do not breed in the season in which they dig the burrow, but wait until the following year.

Tufted puffins court by flying straight upwards, called sky pointing, by strutting, and by rubbing their bills together. When the pair finally breeds, usually in April, the female lays one off-white egg, sometimes with faint blue and brown markings, usually between late April and early June. Both parents incubate for 6-1/2 to 7-1/2 weeks and care for the young for another 6-7 weeks, after which time the fledgling leaves its burrow at night and moves to sea. Most young birds, not yet capable of flight, walk, or flutter to sea, without parental aid.

Young puffins remain at sea for almost two years. They become sexually mature at the age of three, but most do not mate until their fourth year. Their waterproof feathers and their ability to drink salt water and catch fish make staying long periods on the sea possible. They disperse widely while at sea but return to the colony where they were born, and usually to the same mate, every year for breeding.

When breeding ends in the early summer, puffins lose their plumes, the bright colors of the bill turn to a dull reddish-brown as the outer layer sloughs off, and the belly becomes flecked in pale brown while their legs and feet remain red or orange-red throughout the year.

A group of puffins has many collective nouns, including a "burrow", "circus", "colony", "improbability", and "puffinry" of puffins. For my part, I'll settle for the name Improbability Island, for the home of this tufted cartoonish character.



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

LAYSAN ALBATROSS RETURNS TO POINT ARENA COVE

Robert J. Keiffer sent this email:

25 November 2008 - Several observers reported the arrival of "AL" the assumed same Laysan Albatross that has been returning to the Point Arena Cove for the last 16 consecutive winter periods (or more). The bird returned at approximately 10:00 AM on November 22nd (thanks Tom Reid for the sharp lookout). Ironically, I just returned from Kauai where the re-arrival of Laysan Albatross for the nesting season occurred during the week of November 10 - 15th November... about the same time that the Humpback Whales return to Kauai waters. I don't even try to guess if there is any correlation.

For those of you for whom this information is new, the bird uses the Point Arena Cove as a resting area during normal seas. During very rough, intense storms the bird tends to disappear. I always tell folks that they have about a 50% chance of seeing the bird from the Point Arena dock on any one day during the winter periodbut one might have to keep checking every couple hours as you never know when the bird might arrive or depart. If you are travelling from out of the area specifically for this bird ...you might plan on being in the area for at least a couple days to increase your chances. And ...if the bird is sleeping with his head tucked under the wing it can be missed if it is not near any other birds or objects for size reference (I have seen people mistake is for a Western Gull). Ask the surfersthey usually know and look after the bird's welfare.



Photo by Donald Shephard

PAM HUNTLEY ON KXYZ FM 88.3, 90.7 and 91.5

Pam broadcasts on KXYZ once Tuesday evenings on Community News at 5:00 pm with Christina Anastat. The segment is rebroadcast on Friday mornings at about 7:55 am. Here is a sample of a recent airing.

GREAT BLUE HERON

I'm Pam Huntley for the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society. The Great Blue Heron is aptly named. It is the largest heron at 4 feet tall and a wingspan of 7 feet. They are usually seen standing alone motionless in the water waiting for the prey to come within striking distance.

Great Blue Herons are powder blue, adults have a black plume on the head that drapes to the back of the neck, white around the face and neck and the long dagger-like yellow bill. In the breeding season adults have beautiful, long, wispy plumes around the head and neck.

Great Blue Herons, or "G.B.H.'s" as they are called, can give a low croaking call while in flight. They have a deep, lazy-looking wing stroke and fly with their head and neck folded back over their shoulders, legs and feet extended behind them.

They feed on fish and amphibians also on mice and shrews. My favorite experience was seeing a G.B.H. on a soccer field where it suddenly stabbed twice and swallowed a whole gopher that wiggled down its throat. They feed at night and day but are most active at dawn and dusk.

The nest colonies are called rookeries. Herons make a nest that can be over four feet wide out of woven sticks and twigs. It can be lined with leaves and pine needles. She lays three to five eggs which are incubated by both adults. Eggs are gently rotated every couple of hours with their parents bill. Young are fed a diet of fish and fledge after a couple of months.

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

BIRD QUOTES

The reason birds can fly and we can't is simply that they have perfect faith, for faith is necessary to have wings..

James M. Barrie, *The Little White Bird*

AT THE WATER'S EDGE: THE WONDROUS WACKY WORLD OF MAGICAL SHOREBIRD FRIENDS THROUGH OUR CHILDREN'S EYES



The world of shorebirds is an exotic universe if you are 4 or 5 or 10 years old.

Who wouldn't love to hang around a beach with a Marbled Godwit – or a Red Knot – or a Ruddy Turnstone? Not to mention a Snowy Plover named Pink Lady. Pink Lady is a real bird – named after a Western Snowy Plover who visited the Mendocino Coast for two magical years.



Members of the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society took Pink Lady's story to local school children last year and asked them to participate in an art project that "pretty much knocked our socks off," according to one member.

"We sponsored an art project in the local schools, providing teachers with art supplies, a bird identification book and a lesson plan about Pink Lady – because of the color of her leg bands," Ginny Wade says.



"The story and pictures of other shorebirds captured the children's imagination. We laminated their spectacular posters and use to help visitors to the beach understand how to protect the shorebirds while enjoying their day at the beach," Ginny says.

Ginny (our membership chair) has forty-four years of early childhood education experience. She and husband, Warren, our current conservation chair and former chapter president, organized the children's shorebird protection poster contest and exhibited all submissions in the historic Oddfellow's Hall in Mendocino Village. We received in excess of 300 entries, every class won a prize and more than 850 visitors saw the show.



Illustrations by the children of Mendocino County

Mendocino Coast Audubon Society, the Mendocino district office of California State Parks and FLOCK-works, a local non-profit organization that celebrates the community's creative spirit and energy, [\(continued\)](#)



AT THE WATER'S EDGE: THE WONDROUS WACKY WORLD OF MAGICAL SHOREBIRD FRIENDS THROUGH OUR CHILDREN'S EYES (continued)

sponsored the exhibition. The **TogetherGreen** grant funded by Toyota, recently awarded to MCAS includes plans to write a book, about shorebirds for children of all ages, . The children of Mendocino County will illustrate it. For another look at some of the children's art, please drop by the Artist Cooperative of Mendocino Inc., 45270 Main Street (second floor) in Mendocino Village. The gallery will celebrate bird counts during the month of December. An opening sunset reception will be at 3:30 p.m. December 13 – "Second Saturday."

Actively involving children is the key to building an appreciation and understanding of our natural world and a key to leading them to become stewards of our planet. Ginny Wade.

UPCOMING PROGRAMS Charlene McAllister

Unless otherwise noted, all meetings are at College of the Redwoods in Fort Bragg

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|-------------------|--|
| January 19, 2009 | Birding Ecuador by Roger Foote |
| February 16, 2009 | Veracruz River of Raptors by Norma Ferriz |
| March 16, 2009 | Grazing Issues by Dave Imper
("Partnership Potluck" at Russian Gulch) |
| April 13, 2009 | Birding Bhutan by Rich Kuehn (Gualala Art Center) |
| May 11, 2009 | Field Guide to the Sierra Nevada by John Muir Laws |

Masked Trogon, photo courtesy of David & Amanda Mason and Pat & Judy Hayes, with permission.



MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

Do you support the mission of the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society to help people appreciate and enjoy native birds, and to conserve and restore local ecosystems for the benefit of native birds and other wildlife? Have you renewed your membership? Is there someone you can encourage to join MCAS? We accept, cash, checks or Visa and Mastercard.

You will be notified, by email if possible, of your membership status.

Call Ginny Wade at 964-6362 or send your dues to:

Membership, MENDOCINO COAST AUDUBON SOCIETY

P.O. BOX 2297

FORT BRAGG, CA, 95437

Thank you.

MCAS BOARD MEMBERS 2007-2008

President	David Jensen	964-8163	djensen@mcn.org
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Membership	Ginny Wade	964-6362	wwade@mcn.org
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Conservation	Warren Wade	964-6362	wwade@mcn.org
Newsletter	Donald Shephard	962-0223	donshephard@comcast.net

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

FORT BRAGG, CA, 95437

