

# The Whistling Swan



NEWSLETTER OF THE MENDOCINO COAST AUDUBON SOCIETY

September 2011



## RAPTORS ON THE MOVE

Speaker

ADAM HUTCHINS

FORT BRAGG TOWN HALL

7:00 P.M.

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 19th

Adam Hutchins came to the Mendocino coast from the arid lands of the Great Basin and the Colorado Plateau. He developed an interest in birding while attending The Evergreen State College in Washington and pursued a career in ornithological studies and monitoring after graduation. His fieldwork has included projects with hummingbirds, forest passerines, and birds of prey. He has watched, counted, trapped, banded, tracked, sampled, rescued and photographed raptors for over a decade. He has even climbed into their nests. His favorite hat was stolen from his head by a Red-tailed Hawk and he has been christened by a Condor. He met his wife, fellow raptor-ophile Alison Cebula, atop a mountain during a hawk watch. He is a big fan of bats and fish, too. Currently, Adam is taking advantage of his time living near the Ten Mile River to work on his shorebird, gull and pelagic identification skills. Adam recently joined the Mendocino Audubon Society Board and will be Program Chair.

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### Photo:

**After Hatch-year Male Sharp-shinned Hawk, Adam Hutchins. October 2007-Nevada.**

**PRESIDENT'S CORNER****David Jensen**

Welcome back, everyone, and welcome to what promises to be another exciting year of programs, bird walks, field trips, conservation efforts, and educational opportunities. In my first column of the season I want to review some of what we have done over the past summer, as well as some of the changes for the coming year.

Chapter volunteers worked with Ron LeValley again this summer to monitor the nesting success of local cormorant species. Each year brings new surprises. This year's surprise came

when Richard Hubacek discovered a Double-crested Cormorant rookery along the shores of Big River.

Many of you participated in the first statewide Black Oystercatcher survey. Although the official results have not yet been released, your chapter had one of (if not the) highest participation rates in the state. MCAS Conservation Chair and local survey organizer Joleen Ossello deserves much of the credit for this successful effort. Although our cormorant and oystercatcher surveys have ended, our other successful long-term monitoring program, Save Our Shorebirds, will continue conducting surveys through September.

It is my pleasure to announce some exciting changes for the chapter's Board of Directors. Adam Hutchins has volunteered to replace Charlene McAllister as the Program Chair. Adam is a professional biologist who came to the Mendocino coast from the arid lands of the Great Basin and the Colorado Plateau. You may meet Adam at the September program when he presents "Raptors on the Move." During the coming months, Charlene will work with Ginny Wade to take over as Membership Chair. This will allow Ginny to take on the important task of recording the history of this chapter.

In other developments, Tim Bray, who leads the monthly midweek bird walks at the Botanical Gardens, has agreed to serve as the Compiler for our Fort Bragg Christmas Bird Count. I would like to thank Richard Hubacek, who worked hard to organize the initial count. His leadership was responsible for the success of last year's count and his efforts have laid the foundation for this important and enjoyable event that will continue for many years.

Finally, I am overjoyed to announce that Ron LeValley has agreed to present a gull identification workshop this winter. Mark your calendars right now and reserve the date of Sunday, January 8. Cancel that trip to Hawaii, you can go in February. This is your chance to learn the ancient secrets of the larophiles. Impress your friends with your ability to identify third-year hybrids. Or simply learn to enjoy a frustrating group of birds.

Well, once again I've gone way beyond my allotted space. I look forward to seeing you at a meeting or on a bird walk. Until then, good birding and thanks for your support.

## PAM HUNTLEY ON KZYX FM 88.3, 90.7, AND 91.5

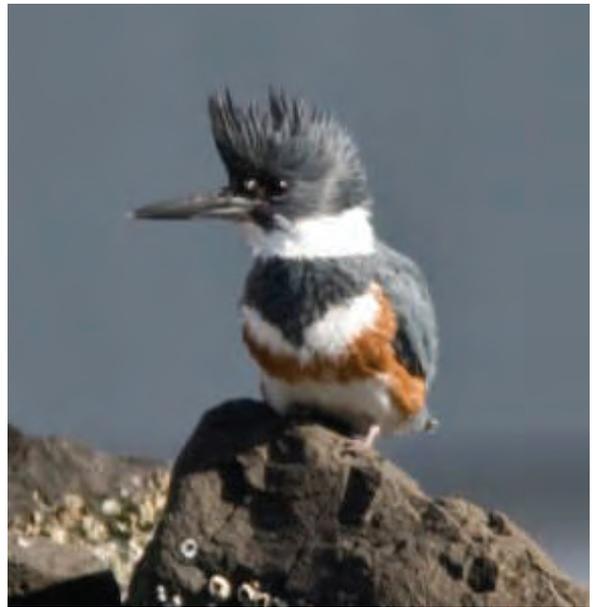
### BELTED KINGFISHER

Belted Kingfishers are easy to spot along waterways, perched on conspicuous branches or wires, ready to dive headfirst for their meal. Their call is a loud, dry rattle. They have a large head and bill with a small body and tiny feet. They are slate-blue on their backs and heads with a shaggy crest. Both male and female have blue breast bands but the female is a rare case among North American birds by being the more colorful, with a rusty belly band and flank.

The Belted Kingfisher lives alone except during nesting season when both male and female take on the amazing task of burrowing horizontally into a bank for their nest. They take turns carving it out with their bills and kicking the dirt behind them with their feet. The average tunnel length is three to seven feet and has been recorded at over fifteen feet. Excavation can take up to three weeks.

After the young fledge, or leave the nest, parents teach them to fish by dropping dead prey into the water for retrieval. Ten days later, they catch live food and are then forced away from their parents' territory.

Kingfishers hunt from a perch or by hovering above water. The fish is caught with the bill; the kingfisher then returns to a perch where it beats the fish on a limb, then tosses it into the air and swallows it headfirst. They also eat tadpoles, crayfish, mussels, young birds,



Adult female Belted Kingfisher  
photo Ron LeValley  
[www.LeValleyphoto.com](http://www.LeValleyphoto.com)



One characteristic of the Belted Kingfisher is tiny syndactyl feet, the outer two toes of which are joined almost to the end.

Photo by Stephen Johnson, graduate student, University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

## THREE JUNIOR RANGERS TO ADMIRE

By Joleen Ossello

**Junior  
Rangers, Sean,  
Allison, and  
Conor Daly**



**Photo  
Joleen Ossello**

I am pleased to introduce three avid naturalists whose enthusiasm compelled them to attend the MacKerricher State Park *Save our Shorebirds* Junior Ranger Program of 2011. Meet Sean, Allison, and Conor Daly from Loomis, CA, each posing with a favorite shorebird.

The group arrived for the program with great zeal, looking as if they considered it a “seriously” exciting event. To become a junior ranger was as important an undertaking as tide pooling for a variety of crab species.

As I introduced our agenda, their nature stories spilled out. Conor explained in extravagant detail how a gull on the shore successfully scavenged a crab, while Sean was astounded by an Osprey’s fish catch earlier in their stay. Allison did everything her brothers did with the same enthusiasm. She found the Snowy Plover story of “The Pink Lady” fit her perfectly.

After we covered the Junior Ranger responsibilities and some shorebird basics, it was off to our own bird survey by the sea shore. Before we could hit the sand, there were shouts of “Western” and “California” as the group identified passing gulls. Sean took precise notes on which species we saw and how many. In order to save time, he efficiently chose to use their four letter ornithological abbreviations.

I was astounded by this family’s enthusiasm and knowledge. I recall asking Conor why he thought the shorebirds were important. He instantly replied, “They drop seeds!” My talk covers guano providing nutrients in the ocean for plankton; perhaps you can imagine my appreciation as I heard yet another reason from this junior ranger.

I searched the campground the next day to take their photo, and when I found them, they filled me in on details for an tide pool expedition. Believe it or not, they were still wearing their Junior Ranger badges.

## 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, September 3, at 9:00 A.M. Our midweek bird walk will be held on the third Wednesday of the month, September 21, 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](http://mendocinocoastaudubon.org).

## FIELD TRIP TO VIRGIN CREEK

The first field trip of the 2011-2012 season will be held on Saturday, September 10. We will meet at 9 A.M. in the CalTrans turnout just north of the Pudding Creek bridge on Highway One at the north end of Fort Bragg. After surveying the birds in the Pudding Creek Lagoon, the group will proceed to Virgin Creek Beach. This is an exciting time of year to look for shorebirds, and the knowledgeable leaders will help identify the various "peeps." Birders with all levels of experience are welcome. Binoculars will be available for those who need them. This field trip should end by noon.

## MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Looking ahead to October, our monthly beginners' bird walk will be held at the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens on October 3, at 9:00 A.M. On Sunday, October 9, we will hold a field trip to view the birds of Glass Beach in Fort Bragg. Please note the change from our usual Saturday date.

## COASTAL CLEANUP DAY



The Mendocino Coast Audubon Society will join hundreds of other volunteer organizations in the annual Coastal Cleanup Day on Saturday, September 17. Volunteers should meet at the south end of the Ten Mile River bridge on Highway One at 9:00 a.m. We will walk to the mouth of the river and then proceed south along the beach, collecting all sorts of interesting flotsam and jetsam, along with the regular trashy variety of litter.

This is a great opportunity to help clean our environment while taking an enjoyable walk with hearty companions along one of the most beautiful beaches in our fair county. Call Art Morley at [964-2541](tel:964-2541) for more information.

## LAPWINGS AND PLOVERS Donald Shephard



Male Masked Lapwing from Australia, photo Aviceda.

In his excellent book, *The Sibley Guide to Bird Life and Behavior*, David Allen Sibley groups plovers and lapwings together in the family Charadriidae. I met the largest member of this family while visiting my brother in Darwin, Australia. The male Masked Lapwing has a distinctive lemon-yellow wattle and yellow face. We watched these attractive birds and compared them to the English lapwings easily identified by their dark green plumage and grand upsweeping crest.

Lapwings rarely visit North America but we are blessed with a wide variety of their kin, the plovers. They fall into two genera, *Pluvialis* and *Charadrius*. *Pluvialis* plovers include Black-bellied Plover, American Golden-Plover, and Pacific Golden-

Plover. Most of these birds acquire a lustrous tawny coat in breeding plumage. Even more striking is their dark, dramatic mien as they turn black from their face and breast down through the belly.

*Charadrius* plovers include Semipalmated Plover, our beloved Snowy Plover, and Killdeer. These birds are known as the ringed plovers because most of them sport by breast bands. While most ringed plovers, such as Wilson's and Semipalmated in North America, bear a single band, be it full or faint, partial or complete, some display two, like the Killdeer, or even three. I will write about this large and varied group in coming months.

You can distinguish plovers from other types of shorebirds by their short, thick bills, though large eyes and short necks also differentiate many of them from their kin. Plovers are often seen with their close relatives – sandpipers – which also forage on small aquatic prey. The most numerous plover genus, *Charadriids*, are cryptically colored, short-billed birds of open shorelines, such as the beaches the volunteers of Save Our Shorebirds monitor:

Lapwing  
RSPB Photo  
By Andy Hay



## LAPWINGS AND PLOVERS

continued

Virgin Creek Beach, Glass Beach, and Ten Mile Beach. They forage in a way similar to another group of visual hunters – thrushes – with robin-like pecking actions. You will see them standing alert and upright, watching for prey, then running to another spot.

You might also see them employ a trick known as “foot-trembling” in which they stand on one leg with the other foot held loosely, slightly forward, and vibrating against the ground. Perhaps the vibrations scare concealed prey from their hiding places, or perhaps vibrations attract unsuspecting small aquatic creatures. At other times, you may discover that they stand and wait before sighting close-by prey at which they abruptly peck.

While we happy birders walk our scenic beaches, taxonomists busily split and lump species. They split golden plovers into two species, American and Pacific. Both species migrate along our coast. Historically, biologists classified the Kentish Plover, found in Europe, and its look-a-like, the Snowy Plover, from the US, as being different varieties from the same species due to their similar looks; recently, however, scientists from the Universities of Bath and Sheffield in England, analyzed DNA from two different American populations of Snowy Plover, four Eurasian populations of Kentish Plover, and one African population of a closely related species, the White-fronted Plover. They found that the European birds were more similar to their African cousins than to their relatives in America, indicating that the bird population split and colonized America, where they became Snowy Plovers, before splitting again to produce Kentish and White-fronted plovers. These new findings could prove important in the conservation of the Snowy Plovers, which are listed as threatened.

In the next three issues of *The Whistling Swan* I will write about our three *Pluvalis* plovers - Black-bellied, and American and Pacific Golden-Plovers. Following that, we will take a closer look at the *Charadrius* plovers - Semipalmated, Snowy and Killdeer. Only the latter two species breed along our shores; the others all migrate up and down our coast. That is why the careful work of our Save Our Shorebirds volunteers has become such an important program for MCAS and the scientific researchers who visit eBird and use their data. Becky Bowen trains our volunteers. If you would like to join us, please call her at **962-1602** or email her at [casparbeck@comcast.net](mailto:casparbeck@comcast.net)



Killdeer (left) and Snowy Plover photos Ron LeValley [www.LeValleyphoto.com](http://www.LeValleyphoto.com)

## SEPTEMBER PELAGIC TRIP

Karen Havlena



Pomarine Jaeger



Parasitic Jaeger

Photos Ron LeValley

[www.LeValleyphoto.com](http://www.LeValleyphoto.com)

Please join us on the Sunday, September 18th pelagic trip sponsored by Mendocino Coast Audubon Society. Spaces are limited on the TELSTAR, which is a smaller boat than we have used in the past. The meeting place will be on North Harbor Drive, Noyo Harbor, Fort Bragg. Paid reservations are needed.

DATE: Sunday, September 18th, 2011.

COST: \$105

TIME: Now 8 hours. Meet at 7:00-am; we will return at 3:30-pm.

PLACE: Parking lot of TELSTAR, large sign on North Harbor Drive shortly after rounding the curve at the bottom of the hill.

Pay either by check or credit card.

Mail your check, payable to MCAS for \$105 to: K. Havlena, PO Box 40, Fort Bragg, CA 95437

CREDIT CARD: Send an email to [kahavlena@yahoo.com](mailto:kahavlena@yahoo.com) with your phone number and a good time to call.

Please commit as soon as possible; we don't deposit checks, etc, until trip time. Remember spaces are limited. Sorry, but nobody under 11 years old or anyone unable to stand for long periods may participate. Confirmations will be sent out shortly before the trip date. Thanks.

## SAVE OUR SHOREBIRDS

Becky Bowen's excellent articles about our Save Our Shorebirds program will return next month. She sent the editor this photo from a recent survey.

Oh the things you see on a Save Our Shorebird survey-- spotted by SOS volunteer Martha Racine in August. Ospreys frequently hunt fish in the shallow surf at the beach.



## MATT COLEMAN

Matt Coleman,  
Jeanne Coleman  
and  
Susan Coulter



The Mendocino Coast Audubon family joins the rest of our community in mourning the tragic death of our dear friend and brother Matt Coleman. Many of us spent hours in the field with Matt during stewardship activities along Big River. We removed invasive weeds, counted birds in the spring and fall, and documented the presence of Coho salmon in the stream. Matt's gentle ways and sense of humor kept us energized whether it was hot, cold, drizzling or windy. He lifted our spirits when the mosquitoes outnumbered the birds. He was and is irreplaceable.

Matt was closely linked to this organization. He was a very good birder, gifted with exceptional hearing. His sister, Jeanne, served on the board as the Education Chair. She continues to help take our educational program into local schools. His beloved partner Sue is a very special member of our education team. She is a gifted educator, and together she and Matt shared a special ability to touch the lives of children and unlock in them the love and appreciation of the natural world.

We have been reminded that each of us is here for only a brief time, and some of us are taken far too soon. Let's also remember that how we spend our life is more important than how long it lasts. Our legacy is measured in impact rather than tenure. Matt Coleman's life of love and service to others was a life well spent. He showed us that it is not enough to enjoy nature – you need to put that love into motion and protect those things you hold dear. Through his dedication he earned the love and respect of those who met him. He leaves behind a legacy of stewardship and respect that will continue to inspire others. Let's all do what we can to honor his memory by following his example.

David Jensen, MCAS President

## MCAS BOARD MEMBERS AND PROGRAM CHAIRS 2011-2012

President	David Jensen	964-8163	djensen@mcn.org
Vice President	Tony Eppstein	937-1715	tonyepp@mcn.org
Secretary	Becky Bowen	962-1602	casparbeck@comcast.net
Treasurer	Judy Steele	937-2216	judys@mcn.org
SOS Program	Angela Liebenberg	962-9267	aliebenberg@parks.ca.gov
Membership	Charlene McAllister	937-4463	charmac@mcn.org
Programs	Adam Hutchins	962-9055	raptorous@mac.com
Conservation	Joleen Ossello	391-7019	j_ossello@earthlink.net
Historian	Ginny Wade	964-6362	wwade@mcn.org
Newsletter	Donald Shephard	962-0223	donshephard@comcast.net

### Off-board chair:

Education	Sarah Grimes	937-4322	zewa@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

FORT BRAGG, CA, 95437

