Forty years ago when Point Reyes Bird Observatory established the Farallon Island Research Station, Ron, then a young biologist, volunteered as a bird bander for a number of years. In August of 1968 Ron spent a month on the islands, a month instrumental in focusing his career. During the late 1970’s, Ron worked as a full time Farallon Biologist for PRBO. This past summer, twenty-nine years after his last visit, he returned to the beginning of his career and participated in today’s research activities.

Ron will share some of his experiences – both old and new – on the islands, providing an interesting perspective on the changes – both on the island and in its ecosystems. He will illustrate his talk with his outstanding photographs. (continued).
THE FARALLONES: 40 YEARS LATER

Ron LeValley’s bio

Ron LeValley has been photographing nature for over 40 years. He is a founding member of the Mendocino Coast Photographer Guild and Gallery, at 301 North Main Street in Fort Bragg, where his work can be seen. As a professional photographer, Ron has compiled an impressive collection (over 70,000 images) of wildlife photographs that he uses for presentations and publications. Ron’s photography started back in the 1960’s and has evolved with the technology of the time.

Ron is also the founder and Senior Biologist of Mad River Biologists, a biological consulting firm in Eureka, California. Best known for the identification and distribution of birds along the Pacific Coast, he also has an extensive understanding of natural history subjects. He serves as Treasurer of the Pacific Seabird Group and is an Associate Editor of Western Birds, the journal of the Western Field Ornithologists. One of Ron's outstanding attributes is sharing his knowledge and enthusiasm with others.

Ron began his career in Sacramento where he grew up and graduated from American River College and Sacramento State College before going on to Humboldt State University for his Master’s Degree. He spent almost 20 years conducting an ecotourism business that took him on over 100 excursions to Baja California, to the Galapagos nineteen times, and to other places such as the Amazon, the far north of the eastern Canadian Arctic, Southeast Alaska, Australia and Africa.

Arriving on the Farallon Islands, Pigeon Guillemot and Tufted Puffin photos by Ron Valley (www.LeValleyPhoto.com)

Come and see and hear more Monday, September 15, 2008 7:00 p.m. College of the Redwoods, Room 300
Welcome back, everyone! I occasionally wonder why we suspend our field trips and programs during the summer. Perhaps it is simply so that we can experience the excitement of beginning again each September. In any case, I am very glad for the opportunity to write to you again and to welcome you to another year of fun, education, and service.

Once again we have an ambitious slate of activities scheduled for the coming year. There will be many opportunities to get out and experience the natural environment. We have an interesting slate of programs that will entertain and educate. We will continue our programs, both in the schools and in the field, for interested persons of all ages. We will also provide opportunities to conserve and restore the precious resources that have drawn us here. Perhaps most importantly, we will continue our efforts to protect the birds, especially those in our area, many of which are struggling to adapt to this rapidly changing world—just as we are.

The month of September exemplifies the type of opportunities your local Audubon chapter offers. If you want to get out and enjoy the natural environment, you are welcome to come on a bird walk at MacKerricher State Park or the Mendocino Botanical Gardens. You may also accompany us on a local field trip to view the shorebirds in our area, many of which have recently returned from Alaska, some of which will simply be stopping to rest and feed on their long journeys south. The truly adventurous or curious should come on our pelagic trip to see seabirds and marine mammals that live along our coast. Every day, they struggle to survive on the open ocean, our mysterious neighbors on this coastline, always just out of our sight.

For those who enjoy informative programs with excellent speakers and slide shows, Ron LeValley will present a fascinating program about the Farallon Islands, that mysterious birding spot that many of us have seen in the distance but will never visit, a version of birders’ Shangri-la.

For those who wish to help restore the environment, we will remove trash from Ten Mile Beach as part of the California Coastal Cleanup Day. For those who wish to participate in citizen science, we will join with the Mendocino Land Trust to offer a fall bird identification course for volunteers who will participate in the continuing survey of birds in the Big River State Park Unit.

Well, once again I’ve gone way beyond my allotted space, but perhaps you can sense my excitement about the coming year. I look forward to seeing you at a meeting or on a bird walk. Until then, good birding!
SAVE OUR SHOREBIRDS VOLUNTEERS APPRECIATE KILLDEER’S “ROCKY” MOMENT

Every once in a great while, you have a “Rocky” moment where you just want to stand up and cheer—and kiss your true love. MCAS Save Our Shorebirds volunteers shared a “Rocky” moment at Virgin Creek Beach in July. A late Killdeer nest appeared at the worst time at the worst place in the middle of the beach. The nest held two eggs, wildly protective adults and no chance in this world to make it. It lay yards away from the Haul Road, surrounded by footprints of humans, birds, horses and bicycles. As we watched it every day, we began to think of the adults as the AAO birds (“Against All Odds”).

When Audubon volunteers checked the site after a month, eggs were gone and so were the adults. Bird surveyors assumed the nest destroyed. Then along came Ron LeValley with his July photography class field trip and up popped a shot of a Killdeer chick on Ron’s natural history photography website (Outside My Window) at www.levalleyphoto.com. Ron found two chicks on Virgin Creek Beach right after the nest disappeared. We later learned Virgin Creek neighbors watched and protected the nest for more than a month—and joined with volunteers in officially changing the parent Killdeer moniker from “Against All Odds” to “I Thought I Could, I Thought I Could.”

Save Our Shorebirds flourishes as a two-year research project directed by College of the Redwoods graduate Nathan Cooley. Volunteers conduct bird censuses on Virgin Creek, Glass and Ten Mile Beach, where they record disturbances to shorebirds and work toward educating beach-goers about migrating birds. The program nears the end of a two-year commitment funded by a David and Lucile Packard Foundation grant awarded by Audubon California but volunteers hope to continue research.

Article and egg photo by Becky Bowen. Killdeer chick photo by Ron LeValley (www.LeValleyPhoto.com)
DAVID JENSEN, BIRD WALK GUIDE

David Jensen enjoys bird walks so much he guides them even when nobody else shows up. His primary goal is to educate people about the marvels of bird watching especially in this area. He hopes these new bird watchers join the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society. David loves to get beginners started on a career watching birds just as someone helped him when he could not tell a Mockingbird from a Shrike. In fact, he prefers neophytes because their palpable excitement contrasts with experienced birders who hear the “chip” of a Song Sparrow, check it off their list and move on without stopping to look at it. Birding in this area enables residents and visitors to enrich their lives with a free activity. This, David hopes, will help grow the organization he chairs. Once new birders find the species that enthralls them, they get hooked and often join MCAS.

MacKerricher State Park presents birders a wide variety of habitats in a small geographical space, making it David’s favorite place to train new comers to the joys of birding. The Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens rate a close second. In MacKerricher Park, you find fresh water marsh, coniferous forest, riparian, sandy beach, and rocky shore habitats, everything except the mudflats of Ten Mile Beach. All of these ecological niches adjoin each other in easy walking distance. MacKerricher attracts many migrant birds and offers interest to beginner and experienced birders alike.

Obviously, David belongs in the latter group, but when he came here from Enumclaw, Washington in 1971 he knew little about birds beyond the call of Killdeers in the meadows of his father’s dairy farm. His general interest in nature led him to SCUBA work on the Mendocino Outfall Line. Watching Surf Scoters and Oystercatchers during this time hooked David on bird watching. The Surf Scoters intrigued him with their bizarre faces. The Oystercatchers captured him with their bright red beaks and eyes and their pinkish legs. He looks back fondly on his commercial fishing days, when he and his partner, alone in their fogbound boat, listened to male Common Murres calling their chicks. These calls oriented him.

Perhaps his early days milking cows on an isolated farm in Enumclaw rooted David in his environment giving him his bearings and enabling him to guide others. He especially looks (continued)
On Heeser Drive in Mendocino Headlands State Park you will see Western Gulls slide along the wind as it rises up the bluff, wheel around and angle back in the opposite direction. They roost and nest on two rocks north of Goat Rock. How do they turn from windward to leeward without a single flap of their wings? Careful observation of the Western Gulls on those bird-burdened islands will show you that until late April, when land birds are already raising young, they roost overnight and disperse to their feeding area early in the morning. A week later, they enter the nesting mode and stake out territories by perching all day on the rock. Your observer’s notebook reveals courtship behavior such as neck stretching by the end of April. Once the breeding season starts, white-headed adults banish the browner juveniles. In fact, breeding Western Gulls chase away any outsider, even much larger Brown Pelicans.

By the middle of May you will observe the arrival of the first nesting material, and a week later you will see an adult standing in the nest defending it against all comers. Gulls are so common you might think that many species of them nest here but that is not the case, only the Western Gull breeds on the Northern California Coast. Not so much a sea gull as a coast gull, it rarely ranges more than a few miles inland or 25 miles out to sea. The exclusively marine range of the Western Gull, from Washington and British Columbia to Baja California gives some concern because it is limited compared to other gulls.
The Whistling Swan - September 2008

AT MENDOCINO HEADLANDS, THE WESTERN GULL continued

Characteristics of this species include the dark gray back with black wingtips, the bright pink legs, the large yellow bill with a red spot near the end of the lower bill that chicks peck to stimulate feeding, and a variable but mostly amber colored eye. The wings show black primaries with white tips and a single white mirror on the outermost primary. The wingspan measures about four and a half feet and the body about 21 inches. In addition, the Western Gull keeps its white head through the winter, the only species of gull to do so. The flat forehead and large bill give the Western a “mean” appearance.

It nests from Washington to Baja on offshore islands and rocks such as those off Heeser Drive. For the lifetime of the male, long-term pairs aggressively defend territories whose borders may shift slightly from year to year. Those same Western Gulls you observe today may have been nesting there for up to twelve years typically, or even up to 20 years in some cases although there has been a general shift in the past two years from the larger, outer island, to the smaller, inner one.

The Western Gull builds its nest in colonies. It consists of a scrape in the ground filled with vegetation, feathers, rope, plastic, or other items. They lay three light buff or, greenish, eggs with dark blotching and incubate them for a month. The chicks may leave the nest cup at one day old, covered in cryptically covered down. Chicks remain inside the territory until fledged, for, if they stray into another gulls domain, the neighbor may kill them. Chick mortality is high with an average of one chick surviving to fledging.

Ron LeValley (www.LeValleyPhoto.com)

An opportunistic feeder, the Western Gull resembles a teenage boy at an open refrigerator. They scavenge refuse, steal food from seals or other gulls, even from Brown Pelicans, and steal milk from seals lying on their backs sleeping on the beach. The photo above, although it is probably an intergrade or hybrid between a Western Gull and a Glaucous-winged Gull, illustrates the wide angle at the corners of the bill which allows it to swallow large prey whole, in this case a Sea Star. (continued)
Western Gulls feed in pelagic and inter-tidal environments. At sea, they take fish and invertebrates like krill, squid and jellyfish exclusively on the surface since they cannot dive. On land, they feed on seal and sea lion carcasses, cockles, limpets and snails in the inter-tidal zone. They also take food from people at beaches and marinas. Some Western Gulls prey on the young of other birds and even adults of smaller species and some rob competitors of their prey. Numbers fell precipitously in the nineteenth century when egg collectors supplied the growing city of San Francisco. Contamination from pesticides and habitat loss decimated this species in the mid 20th century. Today the Farallon Islands, 35 miles west of Bodega, support the biggest Western Gull colony. Experts refer to the Western Gull as a four-year gull, meaning it takes that long to reach maturity.

They separate juveniles into first, second and third years by the color of their feathers, which progresses from brown to white and grey, the black legs quickly become pink, and the bill color changes from black to pink.

Spend a little time on Heeser Drive observing their behavior and you will see the young peck at the red spot on the adult bill. Later you will catch brown juvenile and white-headed adult alike, glide effortlessly in the rising air current along a bluff and wonder how they do it.

**BIRD WALKS**

The Mendocino Coast Audubon Society will host its monthly midweek bird walk on the third Wednesday of the month, September 17, at 8:00 a.m. at the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens. 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.

The monthly Beginners’ Bird Walk that had been scheduled for the first Saturday of September has been cancelled. The Mendocino Coast Audubon Society is very grateful for the Botanical Gardens’ continuing hospitality and support, and we hope that this year’s Winesong! Event is a smashing success.

For more information on these and other activities, please call 964-8163, or visit our website [www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org](http://www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org)
FUTURE BIRD FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

12th ANNUAL
CENTRAL VALLEY
Birding Symposium
November 20th to 23rd, 2008
Stockton Grand Hotel
2323 Grand Canal Blvd
Stockton, California
Ph: 209-957-9090 (hotel reservations)
hosted by the
CENTRAL VALLEY BIRD CLUB
www.cvbs.org

Lodi Sandhill Crane Festival
TBA (November)
www.cranefestival.com

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.
CONSERVATION NOTES: VAUX’S SWIFT

Hopefully there is a well known Vaux's Swift Communal migratory roosting chimney right down the street from your residence.

Conservation Chair Wade,

Vaux's Happening is a Washington State Audubon Project to identify communal migration roosts and get population estimates for the species.

It looks like we are going to be able to get Oregon in on a piece of the southbound migration this year. The plan is to have observers at all of the major roost sites on the same day/days. For this year we are just shooting for September 13. I will probably also suggest the 20th. One of our historic sites is right on the Canadian Border and we will have Washington coved down to the Columbia. The main Oregon sites have been identified and we are scrambling after observers.

If we could get some of the high count California sites in on it, Audubon could have a border to border snapshot of this sensitive species yearly population.

I'm taking somewhat of a shot gun approach to this. Hopefully there is a well known Vaux's Swift Communal migratory roosting chimney right down the street from your residence. Even if you have to drive a bit, this could be a fun and valuable event for some of your members.

So, do you know of any roost sites in your area, and Is this something you would be interested in putting some time and effort into?

We have website. vauxshappening.org

Larry Schwitters, Project Coordinator
Vaux's Happening
Issaquah, WA

If you wish to help in this effort, call Conservation Chair Warren Wade at 964-6362.
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.

BIRD SIGHTINGS

August 7  **Harlequin Ducks (4)** North of Virgin Creek beach also, this morning 1 **Snowy Plovers (7)** Ten Mile beach, **Baird's Sandpipers (5)** Ingle-nook Creek to Ward Avenue

August 19  **Marbled Godwits (5)** near Ward Ave

August 20-21  **Green Heron** Virgin Creek, and **Surfbirds, Black Turnstones, Black-bellied & Semi-palm Plovers, Ruddy Sturnstones** on the beaches.

August 25  **Wandering Tattler, Green Heron, Dowitchers**, and **Snowy Plovers** at Virgin Creek

MIGRATING BIRDS:

August 29  Here is the latest in the migration department from Becky Bowen:

**Red-necked Phalaropes** arrived in town Saturday morning. We saw more than 40 at Glass Beach. Saturday afternoon and yesterday, I counted 57 bobbing around in the surf. We also have seen more than 40 **Black Turnstones** hanging around Glass Beach. They sit on an off-shore rock and fly in to shore when there is not too much disturbance at the water-edge. **Dowitchers** are back in town--at Virgin Creek. **Cliff Swallows** left the old Ten Mile Bridge about two weeks ago--right on schedule. BOLO for Dunlins. Also a beautiful juvenile **Baird's Sandpiper** spotted at Virgin Creek on . **Snowy Plovers** are at Virgin Creek (5) and Ten Mile Beach (6).
FIELD TRIP TO VIRGIN CREEK

The first field trip of the 2008-2009 season will be held on Saturday, September 13. Participants with all levels of experience are invited to 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.” Binoculars will be available for those who need them. This field trip should end by noon.

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..

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

The Mendocino Coast Audubon Society and the Big River Stewards program of the Mendocino Land Trust will hold bird survey training on Sunday, September 21, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens.

Veteran birder and educator David Jensen of the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society will lead this free workshop which will focus on identifying birds by sight and sound. The workshop aims to prepare volunteers for the annual Fall Big River Bird Surveys during which they survey for bird species present at 30 point-count stations throughout the new park. Many Audubon members have participated in previous spring and fall surveys.

Training participants will have the opportunity to practice their new skills by signing up for the Big River Fall Bird Surveys. This ambitious project, begun in 2003 and co-sponsored by California State Parks, Mendocino Coast Audubon Society, and the Mendocino Land Trust, seeks to monitor the bird species present on the new park over time. "A Report on 2005 Big River Breeding Season and Fall Bird Surveys Conducted by the Big River Stewards" is available on the Mendocino Land Trust's website, www.mendocinolandtrust.org/

To attend the workshop or participate in the bird surveys, please RSVP to Big River Stewards volunteer coordinator Matt Coleman at 962-0470.
PELARGIC TRIP

Please join us on Sunday, September 14 for the
MCAS FALL PELAGIC TRIP

From Noyo Harbor
Aboard the Trek II
Cost $95 per person

Please make your check payable to MCAS

Mail your check ASAP to:
K. Havlena – Pelagic
P.O. Box 40
Fort Bragg, CA 95437-0040

It was like motoring on a lake during our May 18th pelagic trip aboard the Trek II. Our able leaders, Ron LeValley, Kerry Ross, and George Chaniot, called out the 23 species as they appeared from the foggy surroundings.

Bird list for the spring pelagic trip: 4 Sabine’s Gull, 5 Common Tern, 142 Common Murre, 7 Pigeon Guillemot, 8 Cassin’s Auklet, 25 Rhinoceros Auklet.

Also: 1 Mola Mola Sunfish, 1 Harbor Seal, 1 California Sea Lion.

You will see a different mix and number of species of birds and mammals. Come join the fun.
“Silence of the Song Birds” by Bridget Stutchbury recounts the many human activities and practices which have wiped out huge numbers of song birds, over many years, both in North America and on the Central and South American wintering grounds of many species. The author offers some recommendations, which may help somewhat to lessen the destruction.

First, purchase only shade-grown coffee, both for home and at restaurants and coffee shops (Starbucks does not serve shade-grown coffee, though they do sell it to take home. They can brew organic coffee on request, which usually is, in fact, shade-grown.)

Second, purchase organically grown fruits and vegetables whenever possible. The domestically grown vegetables with the highest pesticide use when grown non-organically are Brussels sprouts, celery, cranberry, cabbage, and potato, so especially stay away from non-organic varieties of these. Among imported fruits it is especially important to buy organic bananas and pineapples.

The author makes many other recommendations, such as keeping cats indoors, buying recycled paper products, and taking a number of actions that may help reduce global warming. She writes clearly, knowledgeably, succinctly, and feeling fully about an issue which we might prefer to believe to be insignificant or transitory. Apparently it is neither.