



Pacific Flyway

Newsletter of the Morro Coast Audubon Society

Volume 43 Issue 5, October 2008

Accomplish, Support, Celebrate

MCAS 2008 Fund Drive

As members of the Morro Coast Audubon Society, **together we have accomplished great things thus far in 2008.** Most notable is the acquisition of the long sought-after East Sweet Springs Property. Along with the existing Sweet Springs preserve, this property will serve as a sanctuary for people and wildlife alike.

In addition to the outstanding protection of East Sweet Springs, Morro Coast Audubon Society has continued to offer educational events to the community and support protection of important habitats. 2008 achievements include more than a dozen free community programs; twenty-two free birding field trips; sponsorship of the MB Winter Bird Festival; educational materials and in-class presentations for local classrooms; support for research programs; input to local agencies and MCAS members on important conservation concerns; and your monthly newsletters to keep you up to date on projects, events, and issues.

As a member of Morro Coast Audubon Society, you are a supporter of these programs and important conservation work. Now is the time to **show your**

support by making a donation to our ongoing MCAS projects.

During our fund drive this year, you have a rare opportunity to **celebrate the East Sweet Springs acquisition with an additional donation.** While the property is paid for, there is much work to be done to improve wildlife habitat and build walking trails.

Options for Sweet Springs donations include becoming a founding member of the Sweet Springs Circle of Friends (adding to an endowment to care for Sweet Springs in perpetuity; names of founders will be placed on a plaque at Sweet Springs); sponsoring a native plant that will provide food and shelter for wildlife; or volunteering your time and skills to help maintain this property.

A tax-deductible donation in any amount from you, our members, will help ensure that we can continue to accomplish great work on your behalf.

~Jan Surbey
MCAS President

Thank You to the MCAS Fund Drive Supporters to Date

A big thank you to your fellow MCAS members who have already donated \$1,725 as of press time. Please join them so we can keep Morro Coast Audubon programs moving forward.

J Abderhalden	Andrea Jones
Len Beardsley	Tom Maloney
Doug & Lee Buckmaster	Marjorie Neiswanger
Bill Denneen	Joan O'Keefe
Garry & Mary Eister	Holly Sletteland
John & Joy Gault	Janet Swanson
Alta Hall	June Wright



Celebrate our East Sweet Springs acquisition by making an additional donation during our annual fund drive.

MCAS Contacts

President

Jan Surbey - 772-7273, jansurbey@earthlink.net

President Elect

Vacant

Treasurer

Holly Sletteland - 239-3928, hslettel@calpoly.edu

Secretary

Priscilla Akin - 534-0280, pakin@charter.net

Programs Chair

Rouvaishyana - 534-9867

Christy Holmes - christy026@care2.com

Publicity Chair

Dick Boyd - 772-3993, dickboyd@charter.net

Field Trip Co-chairs

Alan Schmierer - 772-2026, aaschmierer@yahoo.com

Jen Moonjian - jmoonjia@gmail.com

Hospitality Chair

Margie Cush - 801-1426, cushes@sbcglobal.net

Membership Chair

Rosalie Valvo - 772-1429, rvalvo@sbcglobal.net

Education Co-chairs

Dawn Williams - 545-8412, slodawn1@att.net

Stephanie Little - 610-6229, stephjoy13@hotmail.com

Lands Chair

Holly Sletteland - 239-3928, hslettel@calpoly.edu

Communications Co-chairs

Newsletter: Cheryl Lesinski - aarski@sbcglobal.net

Website: Mike Stiles - 528-1515, mstiles@calpoly.edu

Conservation Co-Chairs

Andrea Jones - 772-1995, ajones@audubon.org

Greg Smith, slobird@aol.com

Directors at Large

Carlo Christian - 801-2991, carlocc@sbcglobal.net

Fund Development Chair

Sarah Bryant - 528-8215

MCAS Lands Coordinator

Holly Sletteland - 239-3928, hslettel@calpoly.edu

Morro Coast Audubon Society Office and Outreach Center

601 Embarcadero, Morro Bay, upstairs in Marina Square

(805)772-1991 mcas@morrocoastaudubon.org

Hours: Tuesday, 1-3pm & Thursday, 10am-Noon

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 1507, Morro Bay CA 93443

Printed on recycled paper

SAVE THE DATE

MCAS Christmas Bird Count

Saturday, December 20, 2008

The 2008 Christmas Bird Count and annual pot luck dinner will be conducted by MCAS on December 20, 2008. Please circle and save the date.

Many sighters/counters are needed to achieve a good count and maintain our high nationally- accredited standing. The count is part of a continent-wide effort, with the published results used to assess the distribution and population of wintering birds.

The November Flyway will include enrollment forms and instructions. Non-members are welcome to participate, but all counters must be enrolled.



2007 Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival attendees enjoy one of the country's pre-eminent birding spots. Photo by Mike Baird.

Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival

Friday thru Monday, January 16-19, 2009

Local and national birding experts will lead a variety of field trips and workshops. Field trip group sizes are limited to maximize spotting and identification opportunities. Workshops are aimed at sharpening your birding skills, and evening programs feature outstanding speakers.

For more information about the Festival, check their website at www.morrobaybirdfestival.org, or call 805-772-4677. You can request that your name be added to the mailing list for our 2009 brochure, or register online. Both the brochure and online registration will be available in October 2008. The registration deadline is January 5, 2009 but early signups are encouraged as the most popular events fill up quickly.

Morro Bay Winter Loon Study Kicks Off 4th Field Season

Volunteers Needed, No Experience Necessary

Morro Coast Audubon Society and BioDiversity Research Institute will be resuming their joint loon banding efforts at Morro Bay in late November and are seeking volunteers to assist.

Since 2004, over 100 loons of three species have been banded, bio-sampled, and released at Morro Bay, with two birds recently tagged for satellite tracking. Band-returns from live birds are beginning to be received from locales such as coastal Washington and Vancouver Island. Mercury levels of our birds continue to run well below the continental average for common loons.



The loon banding season will run from November through early May, two or three evenings per month (usually every other Saturday, but potentially some Friday or other evenings, depending on volunteer availability). We meet at the municipal boat launch at the east end of Embarcadero in Morro Bay at

sunset, and usually return to the dock no later than 10:30pm. This year, we will be employing some updated protocols, enabling us to process birds right in the boat after capture; this will allow more time for catching additional loons. If weather deteriorates, we usually have access to Pacific Wildlife Care's facility for processing birds.

Volunteers will have the opportunity to assist and rotate through all aspects of the processing of each captured loon, and we'll provide on-the-job training, so bird-handling experience is not critical. Tasks include driving the boat (drivers are a MAJOR need at this time), extracting and restraining the loons during measurements, obtaining samples, recording data, photographing plumage, and spotlighting ahead of the vessel. We need a minimum of 3 persons per night to operate (one to light, one to drive the boat, and one to scope for and net birds - then all hands on deck to work up captured loons). However, up to 5 volunteers can be on board at a time - additional help with handling birds and scoping is always welcome.

If you are interested in volunteering, for more details, and to be added to the email / call list to stay up-to-date on our monthly schedule through the season, please contact **Darwin Long** (see below).

Morro Coast Audubon does accept donations earmarked for the Loon Project. We deeply appreciate your financial support, and hope to work with you in the field as well this season!

~ Darwin Long
darwin.long@briloon.org
805-750-1294

Annual Nancy Vaughan Sweet Springs Scholarships Awarded

On Friday, August 8th, at Cuesta Community College, two Audubon Nancy Vaughan Memorial Sweet Springs Scholarships were awarded. The lucky recipients were Richard Emeterio and Gregory S. Moore. Both are Cuesta students interested in forestry and water resources respectively. Each student received \$500. Dawn Williams represented the MCAS at the event.

These annual scholarships are targeted for Cuesta students. The original scholarship was started by Tom Vaughan in memory of his late wife, Nancy.



Photo, l-r: Gregory S. Moore, Dawn Williams, Richard Emeterio

LOCAL EVENTS, PROGRAMS AND FIELD TRIPS

FIELD TRIPS

Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes National Wildlife Refuge

Saturday, October 18th, 8am

As part of National Wildlife Refuge week, join us for a unique opportunity to hike a portion of the Guadalupe-Nipomo dunes that is normally closed to the public. The refuge is 2500 acres near Oso Flaco Lake. It is home to many rare plants and animals and contains some of the most remote and least disturbed habitat in the dunes complex.

We will hike over the dunes to a small oasis of willows and a seasonal wetland to look for birds. This week of October can be very productive for vagrant warblers, vireos, and other birds. We will be out until at least 11:00am, and possibly a little later.

The hike is about 3 miles round-trip and is moderately strenuous over loose sand and steep dune hillsides. Bring water, hat, sunscreen, and be prepared in layers for autumn conditions. There is a small amount of (avoidable) poison oak, and there may be ticks, so long pants are recommended.

Space is limited. Please respond to **Mike Stiles** at mstiles@calpoly.edu to register for the hike. A detailed map and directions will be sent upon registration.

COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

The Abundant, Diverse, and Informative Seabird Populations of Vandenberg Air Force Base

Monday, October 20th, 7pm
El Chorro Park, SLOBG Education Facility
(across from Cuesta College)

Join us for a presentation by Dan Robinette, biologist with the Point Reyes Bird Observatory (PRBO). Dan's presentation will focus on the seabird species that breed at Vandenberg Air Force Base, including a history of each species. Discussion will encompass the histories' impact on the study of local ocean conditions, as well as recent trends observed in the Vandenberg seabird populations and what these trends can potentially tell us about oceanographic conditions in the Santa Maria Basin.

Dan manages PRBO's seabird program at Vandenberg Air Force Base. He received his B.S. in marine biology and his M.S. in biology from Cal State Long Beach. His master's thesis investigated the partitioning of food resources by four sympatric terns breeding in southern California.

All MCAS Community Programs are free and open to the public. Refreshments are provided.

Take Your Own Field Trip to the Carrizo Plain IBA

In addition to the IBAs (Important Bird Areas) mentioned in last month's newsletter, another IBA San Luis Obispo County hosts is the Carrizo Plain. This IBA encompasses 180,000 acres along the San Andreas Fault between the Central Valley and the coast, and includes two large valleys (Carrizo Plain and Elkhorn Plain), a massive seasonal alkali lake (Soda Lake), and low, rolling hills of grass and arid scrub.

Jointly managed by the BLM and a host of other public agencies and non-profits, it represents one of the most significant swaths of protected lands in the state. Taken together with Bitter Creek National

Wildlife Refuge just to the southeast, the Wildlands Conservancy's recently-designated Wind Wolves Preserve, and the Sespe Wilderness Area, this is one of the few areas in the state that is large and protected enough where, as it is often said, condors can soar down from the hills to feed on the carcasses of Pronghorn and Tule Elk. This IBA contains the largest remaining example of the San Joaquin Valley ecosystem that within the valley itself were eliminated over a century ago. Sensitive bird species to be spotted here are: Northern Harrier, Ferruginous Hawk, Golden Eagle, Prairie Falcons, Mountain Plovers, Long-billed Curlew, Burrowing Owl, Short-eared Owl, Loggerhead Shrike, and more.

LOCAL EVENTS, PROGRAMS AND FIELD TRIPS

EVENTS

7th Annual Hi Mountain California Condor Campout and Open House Event

Saturday, October 11, 2008 (all day event)
Hi Mountain Condor Lookout, San Luis Obispo County, Los Padres National Forest

Come and discover one of the largest and most endangered flying birds of North America. Approximately 70 California Condors re-introduced into California can be tracked from Hi Mountain, flying between Big Sur in Central California and the Sespe Condor Sanctuary in Southern California. This is a great chance for you to learn more about condors and the effort to return these magnificent birds back to the wild.

Hi Mountain Lookout has been restored as a biological field research station and interpretive visitor center. The visitor center has condor and other local wildlife display items. The day will include condor radio tracking demonstrations, native plant identification field trip, bird watching, geology overview, and in the evening guest speaker presentations and astronomy telescopic observations of the evening sky. Overnight camping is optional.

We will have wildlife posters and other fun stuff to give away. You may purchase tickets for raffle prizes. There will be condor t-shirts and other merchandise for sale with the proceeds going to our fundraising efforts. For driving direction, schedule of events, or other information go to www.condorlookout.org. To register for the event please call Steve Schubert at (805) 528-6138 or e-mail s_schub@webtv.net.

Great Autumn Chimineas Ranch Event

Friday thru Sunday, November 7-9, 2008

Please join Morro Coast Audubon and California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) for a creek restoration weekend at Chimineas Ranch. Chimineas Ranch, located adjacent to Carrizo Plain, is a spectacular 30,000 acre ranch owned by DFG and managed by a variety of conservation partners. MCAS is sponsoring a weekend event to help restore some of the creek habitats on the ranch for songbirds.



Chimineas Ranch

Lodging will be provided at the beautiful and historic Chimineas Ranch house. Friday night we will gather for an informal dinner; Saturday will be a work day, Saturday night a barbecue; and Sunday will be an optional tour and birding of the ranch. Please come prepared to help install fences on the ranch, support an important conservation project and have fun! **For more information and to sign up, please contact Andrea Jones ajones@audubon.org or Jen Moonjian jmoonjia@gmail.com, or call 805-772-1991.**

Help save resources by switching to an electronic subscription to the *Pacific Flyway* newsletter.

Simply email Rosalie at rvalvo@sbcglobal.net and request the change. You will receive the newsletter via email as an attachment in Adobe Acrobat. Size is generally less than 2MB.

East Sweet Springs Preview Party A Success

Thank you to everyone who joined us at Sweet Springs Nature Preserve on Sunday, September 21st to celebrate the acquisition of the 8-acre addition of East Sweet Springs.

Attendees enjoyed guided tours of the new property, birding opportunities, refreshments, and mingling.

The charming East Sweet Springs property includes 400 feet of Morro Bay's southern shoreline including

critically important coastal wetlands, marsh, mudflats, and upland coastal scrub.

MCAS President Jan Surbey says "We are thrilled to expand the Nature Preserve to include this important shoreline property. We look forward to expanding our restoration efforts and trails on this new property and opening the site up for public enjoyment and education." Watch for additional details in the November Flyway.



Bruce Gibson, County Supervisor District 2, and Tim Duff, Coastal Conservancy



Karen Frankel, Trust for Public Lands, joins Jan Surbey, MCAS President, in announcing the acquisition

Together Green Volunteer Days

Saturday, October 11, 2008
8:30am - 12:30pm
Sweet Springs Nature Preserve

Our kick-off for Together Green Volunteer Days in September was a great success! A big thanks to all of you who participated and made it happen. We need to keep the momentum going throughout the fall and winter, so I hope you'll join us again.

For those of you who have never participated in a volunteer day, this is a great time to start. It's as beneficial to you as it is to us! Volunteering is a wonderful way to meet new people and develop friendships with others who share your desire to make the world a better place.

It gives you a chance to do something different, learn new things and expand your horizons. It's a way to feel good about making a real difference in your community. And nothing brings a stronger connection to the environment than getting out in nature and getting your hands dirty. There's just no better way to be green!

At our October Together Green Volunteer Day, we have a little more watering and mulching to do, and the important task of measuring off and placing flags for plants to go in the ground in November.

We'll provide the coordination, training, and tools to do the jobs that need to be done, along with refreshments to keep you going. We just need you to show up along with gloves, long pants and sturdy shoes. For more info, call Holly at 805-239-3928 or find directions to the preserve at www.morrocoastaudubon.org/spdirection.htm.

Sweet Springs Wish List

If you have any of the following items cluttering up your garage that you no longer need, we could really use them:

- Garden tools in usable condition including pruners, loppers, hoes, rakes, shovels, etc.
- Irrigation supplies

- garden hose, spray nozzle, ½ inch drip line, 1-2gal emitters, connectors, etc.

- Trash bags - New or slightly used 32 gallon
- Water Seal
- Gloves - all sizes

Contact Holly at 239-3928 or hslettel@calpoly.edu for pick-up arrangements.

Eureka! The Birds of San Luis Obispo County-August 2008

ABBREVIATIONS: AGCM = Arroyo Grande Creek Mouth; PSBOC = Pismo State Beach Oceano Campground; and WRR = Whale Rock Reservoir.

WATERFOWL: Out of season waterfowl around the county included the Greater White-fronted Goose continuing at Oceano County Park all month (MLS) and a Brant on Morro Bay that was last reported on 23 Aug (JSR). Up to seven Wood Ducks at WRR during the month (mob) and 20 in Atascadero on 13 Aug (RHZ) were at expected locations. Returning waterfowl began to straggle into WRR in August with five Northern Pintail on 28 Aug (MLS) and three Green-winged Teal on 23 Aug (TME). In the odd duck category, both a molting male Redhead that showed up on the PSBOC lagoon 29-31 Aug (MLS) and a Lesser Scaup at WRR 2-31 Aug are unexpected prior to mid-September. There were no August reports of the male Harlequin Duck summering at Morro Bay, but the male at Estero Bluffs State Park continued through at least 8 Aug (MLS). A small number of Common Mergansers are regular in summer along the north coast where two immature birds were at Arroyo de La Cruz on 1 Aug (MLS) and one was at the mouth of Pico Creek on 20 Aug (RHZ). Female Red-breasted Mergansers continued off San Simeon on 14 Aug (MLS,RHZ) and on Morro Bay through 30 Aug (LT).

SHEARWATER THRU MOORHEN: Sooty Shearwaters become a spectacle along the immediate coast in August and September as witnessed off Cayucos where estimates of 10,000-15,000 birds were present 4-31 Aug (TME). Though common along the coast, Brown Pelicans are rarely seen inland; one seen standing on Corbett Canyon Road near its intersection with Hwy 227 on 5 Aug (MLS) may have followed gulls to the Cold Canyon Landfill (MLS). An immature Ibis, presumed to be a White-faced, was at the mouth of AGCM on 22 Aug (JMC). Osprey sightings at Morro Bay on 15 Aug (RHZ) and 23 Aug (JSR) and at WRR on 28 Aug (MLS) could pertain to the same bird. Bald Eagles continue to successfully breed in the county at Lake Nacimiento and recently at Lopez Lake; the continuing presence of two at WRR all month (MOB) will hopefully lead to breeding there in the near future. An immature Sora at Oso Flaco Lake on 17 Aug was the first post breeding arrival and an adult Common Moorhen at WRR 1-11 Aug (TME) was likely a dispersing breeder.

SHOREBIRDS: The first juvenile Lesser Yellowlegs of the season found at WRR on 7 Aug (TME) was

followed by two at the Turri Road tidal ponds of 17 Aug (RHZ) with one there on 22 Aug (TME). A first for WRR was the discovery of three fledgling Spotted Sandpipers on 10 Aug (TME). There are no previous county breeding records from the west side of the Santa Lucia Range. Rare fall migrants, two adult Solitary Sandpipers were at the mouth of San Simeon Creek on 14 Aug (MLS,RHZ). Baird's Sandpiper sightings were of an adult at Morro Strand State Beach on 1 Aug (JSR,MLS,MDH) and two juveniles at the Santa Maria River Mouth on 30 Aug (TME) and adult Pectoral Sandpipers were encountered on 8 Aug at the Turri Road tidal ponds (MLS) and at Harmony Headlands State Park (JS); very few adults of either species are found in fall. The find of the period was a juvenile Buff-breasted Sandpiper discovered at the Santa Maria River Mouth in Santa Barbara County on 29 Aug that provided the fifth county record when it flew across the county line on 31 Aug (MLS). A Wilson's Snipe found at the AGCM on 31 Aug (RHZ) was slightly early.

GULLS THRU NIGHTHAWK: A juvenile Bonaparte's Gull photographed at Harmon Headlands State Park on 8 Aug (JS) provided an early arrival date and was likely the same bird seen nearby at WRR on 9 Aug (JSR). A few Common Terns are encountered along the shore each year in late summer; an immature bird was at the AGCM on 13 Aug (MLS,EKB). Post breeding Marbled Murrelets reports were an adult and juvenile seen from the San Simeon Pier on 14 Aug (RHZ,MLS) and ten north of Point Piedras Blancas on 20 Aug (RHZ). Two resident Common Ground Doves were heard along Dana Foothill in Nipomo on 7 Aug (MLS). An unidentified Nighthawk catching insects along a residential street in Arroyo Grande on 31 Aug (MS) was likely a Lesser Nighthawk.

NUTHATCH THRU GRACKLE: A movement of White-breasted Nuthatches away from breeding locations was noted along the coast in late Aug when individuals were spotted at PSBOC 20-26 Aug (MLS), Black Hill in Morro Bay State Park on 25 Aug (AFS), and at the top of Deer Canyon in Arroyo Grande on 25 Aug (BKS). A Ruby-crowned Kinglet seen and heard at the PSBOC on 26 Aug was only a day later than our earliest arrival record. Though not close to existing early dates, the arrival date for several warblers were: Black-throated Gray Warbler, Carrizo Plain National, 25 Aug, Monument (KS); Hermit Warbler, PSBOC, 20 Aug (MLS), and Townsend's Warbler, PSBOC, 26 Aug (MLS). One-hundred and fifty

Morro Coast Audubon Society Membership Application

FIRST NAME _____ LAST NAME _____

ADDRESS _____ CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

PHONE _____ EMAIL _____

What type of membership would you like?

Morro Coast Audubon Society and National Audubon Society combined membership

(includes the Pacific Flyway newsletter and Audubon Magazine).

___ \$15 Students/Seniors

___ \$20 New/Intro

___ \$35 Renew Basic

*Make check payable to National Audubon Society.

Morro Coast Audubon Society membership only

(includes the Pacific Flyway newsletter)

___ \$20 New or renewal

**Make check payable to MCAS.

C18
7XCH

MCAS Membership Details

Please mark all that apply:

___ I'd like to receive occasional "MCAS Alert!" email notifications of news and events.

___ I'd like to receive the *Pacific Flyway* newsletter via email (this saves trees and reduces MCAS printing and mailing costs).

___ I would like to be contacted about volunteer opportunities.

___ I would like to receive information about the MCAS planned giving program.

**For both membership types, mail form & check to:
MCAS, P O Box 1507, Morro Bay , CA 93443**

To check the status of your National Audubon Society membership or request changes call 1-800-274-4201.



MORRO COAST
AUDUBON
SOCIETY

MISSION:

To promote the appreciation, conservation and restoration of ecosystems, focusing on the biological diversity of birds, other wildlife, and their habitats, particularly in San Luis Obispo County.

Morro Coast Audubon Society

P.O. Box 1507, Morro Bay CA 93443

805-772-1991

mcas@morrocoastaudubon.org

www.morrocoastaudubon.org

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. postage
PAID
San Luis Obispo CA
Permit No. 26