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Following Our CREED: EDUCATION

CONSERVATION RESEARCH EDUCATION EXPANSION DIVERSITY

This month's focus is on EDUCATION. Stephanie Little (one of our Education Co-chairs) is an Environmental Scientist with CA State Parks, as well as the volunteer coordinator for MCAS's Habitat Conservation and Western Snowy Plover Recovery Program.

As part of the start of Western Snowy Plover nesting season, Stephanie has again begun visiting various SLO County Schools to inform students about the importance of habitat conservation and protection of the Western Snowy Plover. Additionally, Stephanie has given several presentations to interested student groups (including her alma mater in Elmhurst, Illinois) regarding her career in the environmental field. Feel free to contact Stephanie if you would like her to give one of her presentations to an interested group. She can be reached stephanie@westernsnowyplover.org.

Volunteers Needed for Western Snowy Plover Recovery Program



Interested in combining birding with habitat conservation? Want to help an endangered species while enjoying the beach? March 1 through September 30 is Western Snowy Plover breeding season, and this threatened shorebird needs your help. Join the Habitat Conservation & Plover Recovery Program sponsored by MCAS. Volunteers play a crucial role in helping to protect the remaining plover population and their habitat.

Volunteer Training Lunches:

April 26th, May 22nd, June 28th & August 23rd, at noon
Meet other volunteers while learning how you can help.

Plovers on the Beach Programs:

June 14th & July 19th, 9am – noon

Learn about this season's nesting plovers while enjoying juice and homemade bread.

For locations & more information, contact:
Stephanie Little at 805.610.6229 or email
stephanie@westernsnowyplover.org

LOCAL EVENTS, PROGRAMS AND FIELD TRIPS

COMMUNITY PROGRAM & ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING Los Osos Valley Conservation Outlook Forum

Monday, April 21st

6:45pm - membership meeting and vote

7pm - program begins

SLO Botanical Garden Education
Building at El Chorro Regional Park

Join Morro Coast Audubon Society and the Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo in this interactive discussion about the future of land conservation in the Los Osos Valley region. Land Conservancy Executive Director, Brian Stark and Conservation Director, Bob Hill will lead the discussion.

Attendees are encouraged to provide insight and feedback to the directors regarding conservation goals, priorities and strategies for the quickly changing landscape in the area.

Membership Meeting Agenda:

The agenda will include a brief review of the year's accomplishments followed by a member vote to accept / reject the new slate of nominees for Board positions, as well as a vote to revise the MCAS by-laws (the only change this year is moving the budget approval from June to April to accommodate our fiscal year, which begins May 1st). This may be the shortest and most fun-filled meeting you are invited to attend, so plan to come a little early for the Community Program this month.



Photo by Judith Hildinger

MCAS FIELD TRIPS

3rd Annual Birdapalooza at Chimineas Ranch

Saturday & Sunday, April 19th-20th

Bob Stafford of the CA Dept of Fish and Game has invited us for third annual informal survey of the birds at the Chimineas Ranch (CR). CR is the latest addition to the Carrizo Plain National Monument and represents a great diversity of under-birded habitats.

We will meet at the CR ranchhouse at 7am on Saturday, divide into teams and survey sectors of the ranch. Less experienced birders can pair up with more experienced birders.

There are beds (limited) and plenty of indoor and outdoor camping space available. Cooking facilities are available, and we will coordinate potlucks on Friday and Saturday nights. The survey will continue briefly on Sunday morning if needed, for those wishing to stay. To sign up contact Jen Moonjian at: jmoonjia@gmail.com *after April 1st*.

Hummingbirds and More

Tentative date: April 11th or 12th

Our annual hummingbird outing.
To get details, sign up for "MCAS Alert!" by emailing Mike Stiles at mstiles@calpoly.edu.

Mark Your Calendars for the MCAS & CNPS Lake Picnic!

Sunday, May 18th, 8am-4pm
Santa Margarita Lake

Morning activities will include bird and plant identification walks, canoe and kayak tours, destination hikes, beginning birding walks and more.

At noon, we will gather for a picnic-potluck FEAST! After lunch, plan to relax and join a watercoloring wildflowers workshop, socialize in the shade, or enjoy self-directed activities of your choice. Families and kids of all ages are welcome. A specific time schedule for events and directions to the lake will appear on the MCAS website and in the May edition of the *Pacific Flyway*.



AUDUBON ACTIVIST

Right Now

Forty-eight California State parks are scheduled for closure as a result of proposed budget cuts in resource departments including the Department of Parks and Recreation. At the state level, Audubon California is working with the California State Parks Foundation to oppose the closing of these parks. Several of these parks are listed as Important Bird Areas.

Locally, our Morro Coast Audubon Chapter is endorsing fighting the governor's proposal and urging that state parks be kept open. Individually, if you would like to join in this endeavor go to the web site, www.savestateparks.org/joinus/. Here you will find information on steps you can take to help and upcoming events including Park Advocacy Day, April 7th, in Sacramento.

And On-Going

Many programs aimed at saving birds (and the habitat they need to survive) are in jeopardy. With a

divided U.S. Congress and new leaders emerging in states across the country, every vote on these priority issues of restoring and protecting habitat, securing funding for conservation programs and preserving key natural resource protections will be close. And one of our lawmakers may cast the deciding vote.

Our conservation efforts will only be successful with your participation in communicating with elected officials and policy makers on these issues.

You Can Make a Difference

No experience is necessary. All you need to do is join the Audubon Action Network. As a Network member you will receive information on proposals pending in Congress, in your state legislature and in your community. You'll be informed when a species-saving issue is headed for a vote or is being ignored. You will get information on how to contact your lawmakers and where they stand on the issues. This program is free. For more information call 1-800-659-2622. Or to join, visit www.capitolconnect.com/audubon/myregistration.asp.

A Warm Welcome to These New MCAS Members

Arroyo Grande

Wilfred E Cawelti
John Coffman
Donna Rae Dickey
Roberta Markan
Carolyn Moffatt
Joan Richerson

Atascadero

Ellen & Bill Fry
Suzy & Doug Reynolds
Jan Tartalia

Cambria

Lucille Bosco
C R Heyne
Bernice C Lipsky
Ron & Erica Massengill

Cayucos

Connie L Papousek
Larry Tindall

Creston

Mary Norton
Grover Beach
Terry Fry
Jack Hunter

Lancaster

John Birsner

Los Osos

Jerry Garron

Morro Bay

Jennifer Burke
J Vogt

Paso Robles

Emily Beebee
Lee B Graham

San Luis Obispo

Judith Kaliski
Laurie Mattison
Jennifer Moonjian
Tricia Reynolds
William R Sheely
Jerry D Smith

Santa Maria

Bennie Stanton
Kimberly Thompson

Templeton

Marj & Johana Moon
Garrison

Exciting MCAS Board News

MCAS extends a huge THANKS to the many supporters who attended the Board of Supervisors (BOS) meeting on March 11th. The BOS voted unanimously to deny the appeal of the Subdivision Review Board's approval of the Donovan / The Trust for Public Land's request for a conditional certificate of compliance on the 8-acre "East Sweet Springs" property brought forth by Jeff Edwards and Julie Tacker. After Bruce Gibson recused himself from the decision-making process (due to an earlier letter of support he authored) he spoke as a private citizen urging the Board to deny the appeal. THANK YOU BRUCE! Edwards and Tacker may now choose to take their request before the Coastal Commission. Stay tuned for the latest proceedings via "MCAS Alert!"

On a different note, three of our dedicated Board members are "moving on"; we send a hearty THANKS and good wishes to Ted Pope, Barbara Burke, and Cheryl Lish, all of whom have contributed countless hours of time, ideas, and expertise to the Board. **We are pleased to announce four new nominees to the Board:** Sarah Bryant is our Hospitality nominee, Christy Holmes our Programs Co-chair nominee, Jen Moonjian our Field Trips Co-chair, and Margie Cush our Member-at-Large nominee. We look forward to working with these awesome and talented community volunteers!

History of the California Condor and Audubon

The following is the last installment in a three-part series the began in February.

A New Era of Condor Conservation

Despite a major expansion in captive breeding and rearing, as well as continuing refinement of release and monitoring techniques and international cooperation (with Mexico), Audubon's involvement with condor conservation actually declined during the late 1980s and 90s, after the last birds were brought in. Some Audubon members who fought passionately for the condors' survival - and for captive breeding - began to direct their support to other conservation groups. Others may have lost interest in its plight, figuring the battle over when the last wild bird was captured in 1987, and viewing the remaining birds to be somehow "artificial". Still others may have assumed that the agencies and zoos had the situation under control, and that it was just a matter of time before condors were fully recovered. Indeed, most of the advocacy on behalf of the condor is done by the various non-Audubon conservation groups and facilities who are directly involved in its preservation.

Interest in condor conservation has remained high at the chapter level. Morro Coast Audubon Society jointly launched (with the USFWS and the U.S. Forest Service) the Hi Mountain Condor Lookout (www.condorlookout.org) in a renovated fire lookout tower. This site, which acts as a combination staffed visitor's center and research station, opened in 2002 in the hills east of Pismo Beach, between two major release sites at Big Sur and Santa Barbara County. Audubon, assisted by Kern Audubon Society (based in Bakersfield), fought a successful court battle (with Kern County) to halt a proposed "new city" at the northwestern base of the Tehachapi Mountains in the southern San Joaquin Valley. This would not only have affected condors, but many other threatened and endangered species as well. This site, now Wind Wolves Preserve, is being managed and restored by the Wildlands Conservancy.

Audubon magazine recently brought the public's attention to the plight of the condor with a widely-read article in the December 2002 issue. "Project Gutpile", by Jane Braxton Little, described the continuing challenges to condor recovery, including the pervasive effects of lead bullet fragments left behind in deer and other animal carcasses by careless hunters and ranch-hands.

Sadly, soon after the article appeared, one of the last condors born in the wild, AC-8, was shot and killed on Tejon Ranch, which again brought to light the ongoing need for public awareness of condors. With the goal of the Recovery Program to establish three populations of 150 individuals (with 15 breeding pairs each), the environment into which they are released must be made safe.

During the next few years, Audubon will work with experts around California and the U.S. toward a strategy for this new era of condor recovery, where more and more birds are being released widely throughout the Southwest, and their foraging areas increasingly constricted by human settlement and activity. Public education and awareness is needed more than ever before, and Audubon will once again step up to the challenge.

Green Birding Follows February BIGBY Article...

In my pursuit of a Big Green Year list (no fossil fuels used) I wanted to see how many birds I could get on foot, so I walked from my home in Los Osos to Morro Rock today.

Along the way the highlights were: GREATER SCAUP along South Bay Blvd, one female WHITE-WINGED SCOTER off the state park marina, male and female COMMON GOLDENEYE, and four of the LONG-TAILED DUCKS off Coleman Park. I took the RTA bus back to Los Osos--I figured it would negate my carbon savings to have someone drive over and pick me up--and since I had 94 birds I walked back out into the Elfin Forest. As soon as I reached the viewing platform I almost simultaneously added OSPREY, Sharp-shinned Hawk and Northern Harrier. A few GADWALL in the channels, a Canada Goose, a few Dowitcher sps, and a WHITE-THROATED SPARROW, and Oak Titmouse in my backyard gave me 102.

With painful misses like Orange-crowned Warbler (!), Hermit Thrush (both backyard residents most days), Blue-winged Teal, and forgetting to look for swifts around Morro Rock, my total could have been higher.

- Mike Stiles, Los Osos

Eureka! Birds of San Luis Obispo County - February 2008

Arriving breeders will be the big story in March. To find out when our breeders first show up, refer to the booklet "The Birds of San Luis Obispo County, California" produced by Morro Coast Audubon. The bar graphs indicate when species are present and how common or rare they are throughout the year. Report early arrivals on the slocobirding listserv or to me directly.

WATERFOWL: Greater White-fronted Goose reports included the one wintering at Oceano County Park that was last reported 1 Feb (MLS) but is still likely present, and 13 in the fields north of Laguna Lake 4-5 Feb (JSR,MLS). A fair number of Cackling Geese have been present since November. Up to eight were with Canada Geese seen from Hwy 1 in the Hearst Ranch pasture north of the Hearst Castle entrance road 2-28 Feb (RHZ,EKB,TME) and five more were with Canada Geese in the wetlands off Foothill Blvd on 4 Feb in San Luis Obispo (JSR). The adult Tundra Swan wintering on the evaporation pond behind the San Simeon State Park Campground was present through the month (EKB,TME). Three male Eurasian Wigeon were seen on Morro Bay from the Elfin Forest in Los Osos on 2 Feb (GT) and another was seen in the flooded fields from Foothill Blvd near San Luis Obispo 2-28 Feb (JSR). A male Eurasian Green-winged Teal was tentatively identified on Morro Bay in January and probably was the positively identified one photographed at the Cuesta-by-the-Sea inlet in Los Osos 12-17 Feb (JSR, <http://flickr.com/photos/tedell/>). The adult male Harlequin Duck wintering along Estero Bluffs State Park was present through the month (TME, <http://flickr.com/photos/tedell/>). After a high of seven in January, the number of Long-tailed Ducks reported on Morro Bay diminished with six on 2 Feb (JSR) and only one on 18 (TME) and 28 Feb (MLS). The only reports of Hooded Merganser came from San Luis Obispo Creek near Avila where a female was just upstream from the Bob Jones Trail Bridge on 18 Feb (DML) and a male was down stream of the bridge on 20 Feb (DV).

HAWKS THRU OWLS: One, possibly two, Rough-legged Hawks have been present on the Carrizo Plain this winter where one was observed on 23 Feb (EKB). On 29 Feb a flock of 155 Mountain Plovers was present near the metal building on Panaroma Road in the CPNM (TME,MLS). The wintering Lesser Yellowlegs was present on Morro Bay through the month at Cuesta-by-the-Sea inlet in Los Osos (mob) and the Glaucous Gull wintering at the elephant seal rookery along Hwy 1 south of Point Piedras Blancas was present through at least 9 Feb (mob). Other reports of this species likely involved hybrids. Marbled Murrelets were observed in several locations with two seen from the North Point Natural Area in Morro Bay on 2 Feb (TME), two at Santa Rosa Creek mouth and near San Simeon Cove on 10 Feb, two from Cliff Drive at Margo Dodd Park in Shell Beach on 11 Feb (MLS), and two south of the elephant seal rookery on 16 Feb (TME,MLS). A calling Spotted Owl and a Northern Pygmy Owl were at Balm of Gilead Campground in the Garcia Wilderness on 16 Feb (MDS,NT).

WOODPECKERS THRU WARBLERS: A few Lewis's Woodpeckers continue to be reported this winter. One was seen along Hwy 46 East near Golden Hills Road and behind Paso Robles Ford on 27 Feb (LT) and another was along Pozo Road about 1.8 miles from the junction of Hwy 58 on 28 Feb (MLS). The three reports of Cassin's Kingbirds involved one on Black Hill in MBSP on 17 Feb (TME), one in Los Osos on 19 Feb (GPS), and two vocalizing at Sierra Vista Hospital in San Luis Obispo on 24 Feb (DV). Rare in the CPNM, a likely pair was seen there from Van Metre Ranch Road on 28 Feb (MLS,TME). Interesting warblers reported in the county were a bright Nashville Warbler

photographed in the native garden at Pismo State Beach Oceano Campground on 6 Feb (MLS, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/slomaggie/>), an adult male Hermit Warbler in Los Osos on 9 Feb (GPS), the continuing Grace's Warbler on the north side of Black Hill in MBSP on 15 Feb (HWB), and an adult male Black-and-white Warbler along Santa Rosa Creek next to the Cambria Wastewater Treatment Plant 10-16 Feb (TME).

SPARROWS THRU ORIOLES: Of the several White-throated Sparrows wintering in the county, two near the campground kiosk at MBSP on 2 Feb (JSR), one in a yard on 13th Street in Los Osos on 2 Feb (MDS), a tan-striped individual visiting a feeder on Canet Road through at least 16 Feb (MLS), and a bright white-striped bird in the parking lot at Cerro Alto Campground off Hwy 41 on 28 Feb (MLS) were reported. The female Orchard Oriole wintering at Henrietta and Pecho in Los Osos was reported 2-16 Feb (JSR,MLS,HWB). A Hooded Oriole that showed up in a yard in eastern Los Osos on 27 Feb (GPS) likely wintered somewhere in the area, or was the earliest spring arrival by ten days for the county.

ABBREVIATIONS: CPNM, Carrizo Plain National Monument; and MBSP, Morro Bay State Park.

OBSERVERS: Thanks to the many birders that report their sightings. The following people are cited above: Harold W. Bond, Eric K. Brunschwiler, Tom M. Edell, Dave M. Lawrence, Jim S. Royer, Alan F. Schmierer, Brad K. Schram, Gregory P. Smith, Maggie L. Smith, Mike D. Stiles, Linda Tanner, Guy Tingos, Nick Todd, Deb Villa, Roger H. Zachary, and mob = many observers. For information about birds mentioned in this report, consult the Morro Coast Audubon publication "The Birds of San Luis Obispo County, California" or contact Tom Edell at (805) 995-1691 or tedell@aol.com....

Tom Edell



Photo by Mike Baird

Loon Research on Morro Bay: 2004-08 Research Summary

Background

In 2004, MCAS joined the Biodiversity Research Institute (BRI) in collecting data on the health of common loons on the Morro Bay estuary. BRI is conducting a comprehensive ecotoxicology study in North America and has gathered over 50,000 data points since 1995.

Capture and Re-Sighting Methods

Forty-two separate evening spotlight-and-dipnet capture sessions were conducted from boat in Morro Bay between 2004 and 2008. Capture sessions took place during the months of November through May.

Field reobservations identifying individuals via leg band color combinations were regularly conducted from shore or by boat (by volunteers and State Park employees). Data was logged electronically to identify habitat occupation patterns and fidelity toward wintering and maturation areas throughout the year. Any mortalities salvaged were identified by band number and either sent to CA Department of Fish and Game laboratory in Santa Cruz or to BRI after necropsy and study skin generated if still not predated or decomposed.

Number and Age/Species Breakdown

Between March 2004 and August 2008, 61 common loons, 3 pacific loons and one red-throated loon were banded at Morro Bay. Of these, 10 were juvenile common loons banded between February and March of this season ('08). All mortality band recoveries from Morro Bay were juvenile loons.

Toxicology

We have recently received a large block of methylmercury data from our COLO blood samples. Of 32 birds sampled at Morro Bay, the mean blood-borne concentration is 0.80ppm with one outlier juvenile with 2.25ppm. A concentration of 0.80ppm is just above the mean-concentrations found in loons in Alaska. The Alaska sample group had the lowest measured mean-concentration across North America. Methylmercury blood concentrations are generally highest in the northeastern portion of the continent, with mean-concentrations exceeding 2.00ppm.

Territory Fidelity and Usage Patterns

It was previously unknown if adult common loons return to their wintering areas year after year as they do their summer breeding lakes. Through our color

leg-banding study, we have been able to demonstrate that adult common loons do in fact return each winter to the same bay, and in fact, prefer to occupy certain portions of the bay during daily activity or night-rafting. So far, 7 banded adults have been observed to return from 2 to 5 consecutive wintering seasons at Morro Bay. We have also determined that most juveniles remain in and around Morro Bay through their first 2 years of maturation, and do not migrate until 3 years of age. The exact length of stay is still unknown, and we only have 4 documented juvenile individuals that have remained at Morro Bay the past 2 years of age. The low number may be due to the elevated mortality rate of juveniles.

Subadult Molt Cycle and Adult Molt Variation

Through color-banding and monitoring individual birds over time, we also have been able to determine that subadults actually acquire their first nuptial plumage at 20 months of age, and undergo TWO catastrophic wing molts six months apart: once at 12 months of age around June or July upon entering their first basic, and another the following January or February upon entering their first nuptial. This was previously unknown until our banding study began acquiring data on molt cycle.

Future Plans

Over the next several years, we intend to continue our portion of this ongoing continent-wide study and to consistently increase our sample base for wintering and maturing loons at Morro Bay. Additionally, an opportunity has been extended to our group from the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of Montana to examine migratory and habitat usage patterns through the use of PPT satellite radiotelemetry, and logistical and funding preparations are currently underway to make this possible this spring before adult migration. We have a more refined and less invasive sampling technique and laboratory processing available than when we first began, and a growing base of skilled and dedicated volunteers, thus allowing more time spent afield and less time in working birds up, and we hope that our efforts will serve as a model for future studies of loons at other locales, and to provide data and conclusions to help manage common loons' wintering habitats, and to better understand the most stressful portion of a loon's annual cycle.

Darwin Long, Bio-Diversity Institute

Morro Coast Audubon Society Membership Application

Yes, I would like to join the Morro Coast Audubon Society and the National Audubon Society, and receive the *Pacific Flyway* newsletter and *Audubon Magazine*.

_____ \$15 Students/Seniors _____ \$20 Introductory _____ \$35 Basic (renewal)

NAME _____ NEW MEMBER _____ RENEWAL _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

PHONE _____ E-MAIL _____

_____ I would like to receive "MCAS Alert!" e-mail notifications for events.

_____ I would like to receive the *Pacific Flyway* newsletter via email (to save resources).

_____ I would like to be contacted about volunteer opportunities.

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

Mail check payable to NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY and this form to:
MORRO COAST AUDUBON SOCIETY, P.O. Box 1507, Morro Bay CA 93443-1507.

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7XCH

To check the status of your membership or request changes call National Audubon at 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

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