



Pacific Flyway

Newsletter of the Morro Coast Audubon Society

Volume 42 Issue 6, Dec 2007-Jan 2008

Count Down (and Up) to 2008

It seems appropriate that the final Morro Coast Audubon Society (MCAS) activities for 2007 include the Morro Bay Christmas Bird Count and the Carrizo Plain Christmas Bird Count.

Then, in 2008, our first activity is the Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival where MCAS members and other birders will count up their sightings on Big Day field trips and many other outings. MCAS is now counting on your support for our annual fund drive. Thanks to all of you who have contributed thus far; the current count at press time is \$4050. Any amount you choose to contribute is greatly appreciated and helps MCAS continue community education and enrichment programs, as well as participate in important research and conservation efforts.

In the coming year, MCAS will attract new leaders, new volunteers, and additional funds to finance our programs, projects, and organization. If you have not yet taken the opportunity to make a donation, please consider making your tax-deductible contribution today.

Wishing you a joyous and bird-filled holiday season!
Counting on you,

Jan Surbey
MCAS President

Gifts for Fund Drive Donors

Your support is vitally important to MCAS and donations of any amount to the Annual Fund Drive are appreciated. However, we invite you to make a donation of \$50 or more and enjoy a gift of attendance at one or more of these very special events.

\$50 - PLOVER PALS

Invitation to continental breakfast on the beach while searching for plovers and shorebirds.

\$100 - LOON LOVERS

Invitation to birdwatching and sunset with hors d'oeuvres at Audubon Overlook.

\$250 - BRANT FLYERS

Invitation to Morro Estuary birdwatching cruise aboard pontoon boat (refreshments included).

\$500 - PEREGRINE FAMILY

Invitation to birding and catered brunch at Sweet Springs Nature Preserve.

\$1000 - CONDOR CLUB

Individualized birding tour with an MCAS "expert" birder, plus an invitation to events of previous categories.

MCAS Thanks the Following Fund Drive Donors

Suzy Black	Herb & Debra Holt	Marie McAulay	Joyce Seligson
Sheila Blake	Judy Iden	Betty McElhill	Linda Sewell
Barbara Burke	Donald Jernigan	Urban McLellan	Holly Sletteland
Jean Burnham	Rich & Priscila Johnson	Howard & Marlo Miller	Shaunna Sullivan
Mike Cook	Andrea Jones	Gerry Montgomery	Jan Surbey
Elinore Cottrell	Gene & Mimi Kalland	Barbara Nordin	Harry & Shirley Tow
George and Pat Daniel	Mary Knorr	Lee & Debbie Oliver	Bert & Elaine Townsend
Pat Diener	Trevor Keith	Donna O'Shaughnessy	Ann Travers
Rosemary Donnell	Ken & Gaby Levine	Richard Parker	Rosalie Valvo
Sue & Lee Drocco	Cheryl Lesinski	Dominic Perello	Ruth W Vasconcellos
Embarcadero Inn	Cheryl Lish	Henry Pontarelli	Elizabeth P Warner
Joanna Frawley	Ann & Gaylen Little	Karen Randall	Norma Wightman
John & Joy Gault	Stephanie Little	Ron Ruppert	Wild Birds Unlimited
Nancy Hillenburg	Robert R Lyon	Alan Schmierer	more to come...

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www.morrocoastaudubon.org

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Following Our CREED: RESEARCH

CONSERVATION RESEARCH EDUCATION EXPANSION DIVERSITY

MCAS continues to work on all five areas of our CREED, but the focus for December and January is on RESEARCH. By participating in the Morro Bay and Carrizo Plain Christmas Bird Counts, MCAS is joining over 1000 other bird counts from around the world. The important

data gathered is used to ascertain annual distribution and fluctuations in numbers of North American birds.

Additionally, these months mark the start of data collection for the 4th season of the winter loon survey, a collaborative effort between MCAS and the Biodiversity Research Institute of Gorham, Maine. Ground-breaking data is being collected to study the health of Common Loons overwintering in Morro Bay Estuary.

Call for New Board and Committee Members

Join the MCAS community! The current MCAS board is seeking members interested in joining the board or serving on committees. All positions are volunteer, but offer plenty of fun and opportunities to meet new people, develop new skills, and help MCAS move forward in a positive direction.

Interested persons should contact any current board member and are invited to attend our next board meeting on Monday, December 3rd, 6:45-8:30pm at the MCAS Office and Outreach Center in Morro Bay.

Pen Pals Write On

A huge thanks goes out to MCAS volunteers Nancy Hillenberg, Marlo Miller, Patricia Golden, Sarah Bryant, Anne Mitchell, Dottie Kroenung, Mike Cook, Dawn Williams, and Rosalie Valvo for their help addressing, folding, stuffing and stamping MCAS annual fund drive letters.

An additional thanks to graphic artists Anne Mitchell and Anthony Hopper for designing our stationery and the anniversary invitations. These efforts were essential to the success of our fund drive.

MCAS FIELD TRIP

Raptors at the Carrizo

Saturday, December 1st, 7am

Meet leaders Paul Andreano and Nick Todd, raptor biologists with the Predatory Bird Research Group, at 7am at the Park-and-Ride parking lot east of the Santa Margarita exit off Highway 101. Birders at all skill levels will enjoy this trip.

Bring lunch and plenty of water, and make sure you have a full tank of gas. If you have a scope or walkie-talkie radio please bring it along (the latter is great for car-to-car communication about directions and birds seen en-route). Minimal walking involved. We will return by about mid-afternoon. Email Paul if you have questions at himountainpaul@gmail.com.

MB Winter Bird Festival

January 18th-21st

Morro Bay Community Center

All-day and half-day tours will take participants to a wide variety of habitats, including deep water pelagic, oak woodland and riparian, wetland and estuary, and the unique grassland habitat of the Carrizo Plain. Workshops cover a vast array of topics from beginner birding classes to gull identification.

Open to the public is a vendor area with nature-related artwork, books, field equipment and attire, and local merchant wares. To obtain more information and register for the event visit www.morrobaybirdfestival.org.

This wonderful event is put on by a volunteer board in collaboration with Morro Coast Audubon Society, California State Parks, Central Coast Natural History Association, the City of Morro Bay and the Morro Bay Chamber of Commerce.

Don't want to miss an event?

To receive email announcements of all MCAS events AND short-notice field trips not included in the *Flyway*, simply sign up for "MCAS Alert!" by emailing Mike Stiles at mstiles@calpoly.edu.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

Morro Bay CBC and Potluck

Saturday, December 15th

For more information contact Bert and Elaine Townsend at 543-1373 or betownsend@sbcglobal.net. Please be aware that official registration was due by November 27th.

CBC Turkey Dinner & Potluck

Saturday, December 15th, 6-9pm

SLO Botanical Garden

Open and free to everyone, participation in the CBC not required. Beverages and turkey provided. Bring your own reusable place setting and a dish to share. Do some holiday shopping through a silent art auction or purchase new MCAS logo merchandise.

The SLO Botanical Garden is located in El Chorro Regional Park (across from Cuesta College off Highway 1 between Morro Bay and SLO.)

Carrizo Plain CBC

Saturday, December 29th, 8am

Meet at the Community Center/Fire Station on Soda Lake Road. Note there is a \$5 fee for each participant. Bring own food and water and come with a full tank of gas. Be prepared for cold temperatures, but some counts have been very pleasant.

In the morning, the group is usually broken into 7-8 parties that come back together at 1pm for lunch and to check the number of species observed. Those who are dedicated and knowledgeable of certain areas may be assigned section leaders. Several parties bird the afternoon depending on what we need to find or confirm. Depending on weather conditions, some participants might camp out or stay at Painted Rock Ranch the night before. No official arrangements have been made at this time. Contact Al Schmierer if you are interested in camping. A group usually scouts the area the day before and gets up early on the count date to look for owls and watch the sunrise over the Temblor Range.

If interested contact Al Schmierer at aaschmierer@yahoo.com or by phone at 772-2026. Or contact Roger Zachary at rzachary@charter.net or 466-6222.

Morro Bay Christmas Bird Count History

The Morro Bay Christmas Bird Count has been conducted for over 50 years. The species total is regularly in the top ten for the nation and in the top five for California. This is a reflection of the volunteers that help each year and the diverse habitats in the count circle, which includes the jewel of the count, Morro Bay.

The first Morro Bay Christmas Bird Count was conducted on December 30, 1948 by Howard L. and Bessie Cogswell. The Cogswells spent 8.8 hours recording 102 species during the first count. They must have enjoyed the experience, because they returned in 1949 to do it again. R.F. Johnston was the lone participant on the 1950 count and was followed by well known ornithologists Robert L. Pyle and Arnold Small in 1951 and 1952. No counts were run between 1953 and 1958.

The count resumed in 1959 when Alma Stultz compiled the count and four observers recorded 109 species. Cal Poly professor Aryan Roest compiled the count from 1962-1965. Twenty-eight participants on the December 29, 1965 count spent 67 hours in the field and recorded 149 species indicating that interest in the count had grown locally.

The December 25, 1966 was the first one affiliated with the newly formed Morro Coast Audubon Society. That year 58 observers spent 67 hours in the field recording 168 species. Eleanor Pugh was the compiler for the 1966 (and 1967) count and group leaders that year were Aryan Roest, Dick McKillop, Mr. and Mrs.

Charles Taubert, Mr. and Mrs, Len Penhale. In 1968 Aryan and Sharon Roest compiled the count with Aryan continuing in that role through the 1973 count. From 1974 to 1976, Cal Poly professor Eric Johnson took the reins. During his tenure the count broke 180 species in 1974 when 118 participants recorded 182 species in 324.5 hours afield. Michael Weinstien, then a Cal Poly graduate student, compiled the count from 1977 to 1979.

John McDonald became compiler in 1980. That year the count reached 191 species with the help of 104 participants. John continued as compiler through the 1987 count. During his tenure the number of participants peaked at 135 observers and attained two milestones, 200 species in 1983 and the count's all time of 211 species in 1987!

Greg Smith and I compiled the 1988 through 1991 counts, I compiled the 1992 count, and Jim Royer and I compiled the 1993 count. I have continued to compile the count since 1994. From the late 1980's through 2007, a host of expert birders have assisted as Sector Leaders including Jim Royer, Karen Havlena, Marlin Harms, Mike Stiles, Bill Bouton, Alan Schmier, and Maggie Smith.

During the early 2000's, the count took to the web and participants can now sign-up and view sector maps online. Count results can be viewed via the National Audubon Society website.

Tom Edell, Cayucos

Measuring the Value of the Natural Environment

Summer in Morro Bay brings white pelicans, Art in the Park, blooming poppies...and lots of tourists! Do they come to watch the birds, kayak, fish, shop, eat, hike or all of the above? How far do they travel? What do they think of the natural environment surrounding Morro Bay? Does the weather influence their decision to visit? Does the fishing community provide a unique character that attracts tourists?

These are the types of questions that will be answered by the Coastal User Survey carried out this summer. The survey is a component of the Economic Indicators Initiative of SLOSEA (San Luis Obispo Science and Ecosystem Alliance). It will also serve as the basis for a group project being conducted by four students at the Donald Bren School of Environmental Science and Management (University of California, Santa Barbara).

I was in charge of enumerating surveys in popular locations around Morro Bay. I spent the summer, along with Emily MacFarlane from Cal Poly, talking to coastal users along the Embarcadero, in local state parks, in Los Osos, at Morro Rock and at the Morro Bay T-Piers. We interviewed more than 700 tourists and residents over a 10 week period.

During this time, MCAS graciously allowed us use of office space to organize our data and act as a central location for our survey efforts. Without this assistance, we would have never been able to complete so many surveys. I look forward to presenting our survey results to upon the completion of our project.

*Lexie Brown
Bren School of Environmental Science & Management
University of California, Santa Barbara*

Students Add Insight to Audubon California's Assembly

In October over 250 people gathered for Audubon California's State Assembly at the Asilomar Conference Center in Pacific Grove. In addition to several MCAS board members, eight Atascadero High School students also joined the assembly.

These very special students were accompanied by their Advanced Placement (AP) Environmental Science teacher Roger Zachary. Many of you may be familiar with Roger as one of the top birders in our county, who often takes time to lead field trips; but Roger also serves our community via his teaching career.

The students received scholarships from Audubon California Board to pay for their hotel and attendance at the conference. The conference's focus was on global warming solutions and empowering conference attendees to take positive actions. These young adults provided energy, enthusiasm, and insights from

a generation destined to experience the results of decisions and actions taken today. To join the these and other empowered conference participants, go to www.audubonaction.org.



Eight Atascadero High School students received scholarships to attend the recent Audubon California's State Assembly. The students were accompanied by Roger Zackery, their AP Environmental Science teacher.

40th Anniversary Celebration a Big Hit!

Over 100 happy people attended the MCAS 40th Anniversary Celebration held Friday, November 9th at the MCAS Office and Outreach Center in Morro Bay.

Highlights included a cake decorated with the new MCAS logo which was carefully cut by MCAS charter members Wayne and Norma Bickford, and Michele Roest (daughter of the first MCAS President, Aryan Roest).

The local band, MOONPIE, provided crowd-pleasing music throughout the evening, adding to the fun-filled gala event.



Audubon Activism In Action In California

We applaud Governor Schwarzenegger for signing AB 821, a bill banning lead ammunition in condor habitat. Condors often feed on animal carcasses left by hunters, sometimes ingesting the toxic lead. The ban on lead ammunition in condor feeding territory helps in the condor recovery efforts while not harming recreational hunting.

And Nationally

More than five years in the making, the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA), which contains billions in funding to restore ecosystems, became law after Congress overrode President Bush's veto by a staggering margin. A longtime Audubon priority, the bill provides unprecedented ecosystem restoration funding authority in areas like the Everglades, the Great Lakes, coastal Louisiana, and the Mississippi River.

For more information on this important act and other Audubon concerns, go to the Audubon web site and click on the *Take Action* link in the upper right hand corner.

When enough individuals like yourself *Take Action*, we can influence legislation.

Priscilla Akin, MCAS Secretary

Eureka! Birds of San Luis Obispo County

The arrival of Red-breasted Nuthatches, Golden-crowned Kinglets, and Pine Siskins raised the question "Would this be a good year for montane species?" It's still too early to tell, but we should have a good idea by the time the CBC takes place on December 15th.

WATERFOWL: Waterfowl descended on the county in October. A juvenile Greater White-fronted Goose showed up at OCP where it hung out with the domestic geese 5-31 Oct (MLS). Two Snow Geese were reported, one a juvenile seen flying north over Morro Bay on 14 Oct (TME) and the other was in a lettuce field near OFL on 29 Oct (MLS,DGS). A total of 13 Cackling Goose were along the coast with ten at Laguna Lake 17-18 Oct (JAC) and one there 24 Oct (TME), one at San Simeon Creek on 18 Oct (MLS), and two calling birds flying over the Oso Flaco Valley on 21 Oct (MLS, AFS). The later three birds and at least two of the ten had white neck rings suggesting they were of the Aleutian race. The only Wood Duck reports were of a female at PSBOC on 2 Oct (DGS) and three at the AWTP 27-31 Oct (RHZ). A young male Eurasian Wigeon with a reddish head and flanks was seen from the Elfin Forest. Redhead are very rare in the county, therefore a young male at WRR 13-21 Oct (RHZ) and four at Santa Margarita Lake on 29 Oct (MLS,DGS) are notable. Other ducks of interest included a male Greater Scaup at OCP 6-31 (MLS), a young male White-winged Scoter off Northpoint Park in Morro Bay on 13 Oct (RHZ), and a male and two female Hooded Mergansers at WRR on 28 Oct (TME).

GREBES THRU ALCIDS: A sick first-year Red-necked Grebe, a rare winter visitor, was picked up at Grover Beach on 24 Oct (FB). A seabird survey on 30 Oct turned up a dark and a light morph Northern Fulmar and a Short-tailed Shearwater (TME,BKS,MLS). A Buller's Shearwater - rarely seen from shore - was seen from Point Buchon on 20 Oct as were 100+ Black-vented Shearwaters (TME,BKS,MLS). Swainson's Hawk is scarce in fall; an adult and an immature were along Pozo Road on 11 Oct (MLS) and a light colored immature was over the southern CPNM (AFS,MDS). A juvenile Common Moorhen was at OFL on 20 Oct (DGS). At Morro Bay, unusual waders included a Black-necked Stilt on 2 Oct (CAM) and a single Red Knot on 14 Oct (JSR). A Baird's Sandpiper photographed at the Santa Maria River Mouth on 23 Oct was very late (MPB) and a Pectoral Sandpiper seen from the Elfin Forest on 14 Oct (BAB) and two more at WRR on 18 Oct (MLS) were fewer than expected. Interesting alcids reported were a late immature Pigeon Guillemots off Northpoint Park on 13 and 27 Oct (RHZ, TME) and off Cayucos on 30 Oct (BKS) and eleven Marbled Murrelets off Arroyo del Osos and one off San Simeon Creek on 13 Oct (TME).

WOODPECKERS THRU SOLITAIRE: After being absent last winter, Lewis's Woodpeckers have returned with one along Hwy 58 at postmile 29.3 on 11 Oct (TME) and up to two adults and a juvenile along Pozo Road 1.8 miles east of the Hwy 58 (MLS). A juvenile Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was at PSBOC on 22 Oct (MLS). A Tropical Kingbird showed up along the rocky shoreline at Northpoint

Natural Area in Morro Bay on 29 Oct (MLS,DGS). Always unexpected on the coast, a calling flock of 8-10 Common Ravens flew overhead at MDOSP on 1 Oct (SCS). A Cliff Swallow seen from the Elfin Forest in Los Oso on 14 Oct was late (BKS). Ten Mountain Plovers in the southern CPNM on 26 Oct were the first reported this fall (MLS,AFS,TME) and a Townsend's Solitaire there 25-26 Oct on was the first record for the Monument (KS).

WARBLERS: Always a highlight of the fall, 22 warbler species were recorded in October with most at the well known vagrant traps PSBOC and SCC. Highlights from PSBOC were a Tennessee Warbler on 2 Oct (MLS) and hatching-year female type Chestnut-sided Warbler 10-20 Oct (JF) and Blackburnian Warbler on 13 Oct (MT), a hatching-year male Prothonotary Warbler on 18-21 Oct (DGS) and a late MacGillivray's Warbler on 23 Oct (CAM). Highlights from SCC were a hatching-year female type Magnolia Warbler on 10 Oct (JF), a Blackpoll Warbler on 6-14 Oct (TME,RHZ), and a first-year female American Redstart on 6 Oct (TME). A Virginia's Warbler along AGCK on 7 Oct (BKS), Black-and-white Warbler in the Pecho Road willows at Los Osos on 28 Oct (JSR), and a Northern Waterthrush at San Simeon Cove 12-14 Oct were all along the coast. The only unusual inland warbler was a first-winter Black-throated Green Warbler at the Saucito Ranch, CPNM, on 9 Oct that provided the county's first inland record for this species (AFS)

TOWHEES THRU MANNIKIN: Rarely encountered in the county, a Green-tailed Towhee showed up at a feeder in Los Osos 9-13 Oct (MDS). The date span for Black-throated Sparrow in this county is undefined due to the low numbers present, but an adult and juvenile at Quail Springs on 7 Oct were later than expected (AFS). The first Swamp Sparrow of the season was found at PSBOC on 24 Oct (MLS) and the first White-throated Sparrow was at a feeder near Hollister Peak (AFS). A female/immature slate-colored Dark-eyed Junco was in the southern CPNM 26-27 Oct (TME, AFS, MLS). Lawrence's Goldfinches showed up on coast in October with one near the mouth of AGCK on 1 Oct (CAM) and some seen at the Elfin Forest on 13 Oct (JSR). Small numbers of Nutmeg Mannikins are present along the coast where one was in Arroyo Grande on 17 Oct (AP); however, one adult and four immature birds in the southern CPNM was unexpected (KS).

Tom Edell

OBSERVERS: Thanks to the many birders that report their sightings. The following people are cited above: Fred Bar, Bill A. Bouton, Joyce A. Cory, Tom M. Edell, Jonathan Feenstra, Marlin D. Harms, Curtis A. Marantz, Alan Percival, Jim S. Royer, Alan F. Schmierer, Brad K. Schram, Steve C. Schubert, Kathy Sharum, Gregory P. Smith, Maggie L. Smith, Mike D. Stiles, Doug G. Stinson, Mike Tyner, and Roger H. Zachary.

ABBREVIATIONS: AGCK, Arroyo Grande Creek; CPNM, Carrizo Plain National Monument; MBSP, MDOSP, Montana de Oro State Park; OCP, Oceano County Park; OFL, Oso Flaco Lake; PSBOC, Pismo State Beach Oceano Campground; SCC, Spooners Cove Campground at MDOSP; and WRR, Whale Rock Reservoir.

A Warm Welcome to These New MCAS Members

Arroyo Grande

Leonard Manzella
Clark Staub

Atascadero

Norman & Connie
Pillsbury Bradley
Daphne Denny

Cambria

Mr & Mrs Clearwater

Los Osos

Barb Renshaw

Morro Bay

Saralyn Pettit

Nipomo

Linda Lopez

Nipomo

Argene Tisdale
Kay Vollmer

Pismo Beach

Lee B Dominguez
Antone Pires

San Luis Obispo

Larry Galpert
Leonard & Grace
Palmbach
Charles J. Templin

San Simeon

Lorna Lee

Templeton

Janine Kirkpatrick
Gregg Littell

Tom Vaughan In Memoriam

Morro Coast Audubon Society lost another old friend when Tom Vaughan died on October 14th, just ten days after his eighty-fourth birthday.

Tom served on the board in several capacities: as Treasurer 1981-83, Membership Chair 1983-84, and Historian 1984-85. Meanwhile his wife, Nancy, was also on the board, ascending to be President 1983-85. Nancy was instrumental in the acquisition of Sweet Springs and, as the first Lands Committee Chair, established the Sweet Springs Endowment Fund. After her death in 2002, Tom established a memorial fund in her name, the Nancy Vaughan Scholarship Fund, for students in ecological or environmental studies at Cuesta College.

The family requests that donations be made in Tom's memory to Morro Coast Audubon Society, P O Box 1507, Morro Bay, CA 93443.

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 _____

_____ 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).

If yes, please provide your email address: _____

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

CALENDAR AT A GLANCE

Find additional information on these events inside...

MCAS FIELD TRIP: Raptors at the Carrizo

Saturday, December 1st, 7am

Morro Bay CBC

Saturday, December 15th, dawn to dusk

Morro Bay CBC Turkey Dinner & Potluck

Saturday, December 15th, 6-9pm, SLO Botanical Garden

Carrizo Plain CBC

Saturday, December 29th, 8am

Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival

January 18th-21st, Morro Bay Community Center



Black-necked Stilt by Mike Baird

What will your legacy be?

You can create a legacy that will last beyond your lifetime with a planned gift to MCAS. To receive information about planned giving, call 772-1991 or email mcas@morrocoastaudubon.org.



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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