



Pacific Flyway

Newsletter of the Morro Coast Audubon Society

Volume 42 Issue 7, February 2008

Your 2008 New Year's Resolutions Made Easy by MCAS

Does your New Year's resolution include a commitment to give back to your community? Good news: MCAS is currently looking for a few members to join our Board, beginning in May. The following positions are open:

President-Elect works closely with the current Board President and plans to take on the presidency in a future year.

Programs Co-chair will work with another Board member and is responsible for planning monthly community programs (no programs take place in December, January, July or August). The Programs Chair draws ideas on potential speakers from the entire board, so no previous experience is necessary.

Hopeful Good-Bye to Friend

Those of you who know me, know that I have been involved in a love affair for the past 17 years: with my CAR! The 1991 red Geo Metro convertible named Abbey (after my hero, Edward) accompanied me on a daily basis. Unfortunately, the time recently arrived when the repairs outweighed the car's value, again. This time, I reluctantly agreed to donate Abbey to charity. And guess what? "Cars 4 Causes" not only picks up your car (gently) and gives you a tax-deduction, but allows you to choose a charity or non-profit organization with which they share any profits they realize. Yes, Abbey will live on not only in my memories, but as part of Morro Coast Audubon Society! Please consider "Cars 4 Causes" (www.cars4causes.net) and MCAS should you be faced with a similar decision in the future. And, no, I have not yet found a suitable replacement (for the car or Edward!). Still in mourning,

- Jan Surbey



CAR! The 1991 red Geo Metro convertible named Abbey (after my hero, Edward) accompanied me on a daily basis. Unfortunately, the time recently arrived when the repairs outweighed

S/he makes sure speakers and all other program logistics are taken care of.

Hospitality Chair makes MCAS event participants feel welcome, have an enjoyable time, and leave the event wanting to come back again. One of the most important tasks is organizing drinks and snacks for the monthly Community Programs.

Treasurer is custodian of the chapter's funds and responsible for keeping accounts and dispersing funds in accordance with the Board's direction.

If you are interested in joining the board or volunteering on one of our committees, please contact MCAS President, Jan Surbey, at 772-7273.

Great Turn Out for Carrizo Plain Christmas Bird Count

Twenty four participants joined the 2007 Christmas Bird Count out at the Carrizo Plain count circle. It turned out to be a nice day of birding. We came up with a total of 57 species. The conditions were pretty dry and low numbers were expected. Some of the highlights included: 1 Townsend's Solitaire (off of Highway 58- Kern County), 18 Mountain Plovers, 1 Adult Bald Eagle, 61 Long-billed Curlews, and the normal raptor species. The next Carrizo Plain CBC will be held January 3, 2009.

- Roger Zackary



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 Printed on recycled paper

Donors and Dollars Added to Annual Fund Drive

Thanks to all members whose collective contributions currently stand at \$6,695. Members of the Plover Pals (\$50), Loon Lovers (\$100), Brant Flyers (\$250), Peregrine Family (\$500), and the Condor Club (\$1000) should expect invitations to the promised events in the spring. Additional fund drive contributions of any amount are ALWAYS welcome! Another opportunity to help MCAS now exists with our planned giving program. Information is available by request from our Office and Outreach Center, at (805) 772-1991. **Thank you to these members who donated** after our last newsletter went to print:

Priscilla Akin	Kristin Miller
Brenda & Richard	Marilyn Moore
Allmann	Marjorie & Gordon
W D Buckmaster	Neiswanger
Libby & Guy Fitzwater	Russ & Caroline E
Pete Hague & Sarah	Rayburn
Bryant	Rouvaishyana
Marion Irving de Cruz	Joel Shennum
Steven Jobst	Anthony & Kathleen
Marsha Karl	Toscano
Peg Labrenz	Dirk & Bonnie Walters
Mary J Leimer	Albert D Warren Jr
Margaret McNamee	Eric Wier

2007 Morro Bay Christmas Bird Count Total: 202 Species

The 54th Morro Bay Audubon Christmas Bird Count was held on Dec. 15th, 2007 with approximately 35 parties covering the count circle. Together the parties spent 73 hours driving 370 miles, 189 hours walking 116 miles, 8 hours boating and kayaking 17 miles, 3 hours at feeders, and 8 hours and 14 miles owling (foot & car). The count total of 51,638 individuals was 3,598 greater than the average of the past 27 years and the total of 202 species was 2.5 greater than the average since 1980. Franklin's Gull and Grace's Warbler were new to the count this year and the count's cumulative (1948-2006) species total now stands at 312 species.

Go to www.morrocoastaudubon.org for species specific details. Thanks to 72 volunteers who contributed to this year's success. A special thanks to Bert and Elaine Townsend for excellent coordination and to the Sector Leaders, Maggie Smith, Mike Stiles, and Bill Bouton, for organizing the participants.

- Tom Edell



LOCAL EVENTS, PROGRAMS AND FIELD TRIPS

COMMUNITY PROGRAM

The Island Scrub-Jay

Monday, February 11th, 7pm
SLO Botanical Garden in El Chorro Park
with Luke Caldwell

**Please note the special date and new venue!*

The Island Scrub-Jay is a little studied species whose population may be in decline. This has led The Nature Conservancy, National Park Service, and the Fish & Wildlife Service to invest in more detailed investigations into the population dynamics of this bird.



Luke Caldwell's work on Santa Cruz Island is an attempt to determine what is occurring within the population and how recent improvements to the flora and fauna on the island may be affecting this species. Luke's research builds upon over 25 years of work by Dr. Charles Collins, a professor emeritus at CSU Longbeach.

Join friends and community members at this free program. As always, all ages are welcome and snacks and refreshments will be provided.

2007 Christmas Bird Count photo submissions. Birding at Camp SLO from Steve Schubert and outrigger bay birding by Orchid Outrigger.



MCAS FIELD TRIPS

Los Banos

Saturday and Sunday, February 9th-10th
with Roger Zackary

The group will meet in the parking lot at the Los Banos Wildlife Area at 9am on Saturday (on Henry Miller Ave/off of N. Mercy Springs Rd). Plan for a 2 hour and 45 minute drive from Atascadero.

We will bird the Wildlife Area and then drive over to Merced National Wildlife Refuge to bird that afternoon. We usually return to our motel in the late afternoon and share appetizers/drinks in someone's room. There is no formal dinner. On Sunday we rise early and drive over to San Luis Wildlife Refuge. We bird until after lunch, then go our own way home.

Bring extra food and water. Two-way radios are helpful. We usually get about 100 species of birds over the weekend, and the waterfowl displays at some of the areas are spectacular. We stay at Best Western in Los Banos (209) 827-8891; or there's camping nearby and other motels. This trip is limited because of the number of cars caravanning and driving through the refuges. I would like to limit the vehicles to a total five, but I'm flexible. Some folks can carpool from San Luis area. Rain cancels. For information call Roger at (805) 466-6222 or email rzachary@charter.net.

Dinner and Owling

Saturday, February 9th, 4:30-10:30pm
with Jim Royer

The group will meet at 4:30pm for daytime owling, take a dinner break at a Chinese restaurant, and then continue with more owling after dark. The trip will cover the San Luis Obispo area and finish at about 10:30pm. Wind and/or rain may cancel. Number of attendees is limited. Dress warmly in quiet clothes and be prepared for much walking and possible mud. A quiet small group is a must. Reservations: call Jim at 528-8933.

Field Trip Chair Note:

Apologies for the unavoidable overlapping dates on these trips! They are both great annual field trips, but very different in nature.

- Alan Schmierer

History of the California Condor and Audubon

The following is the first in a three part series. The full article appears on the California Audubon website at www.audubon-ca.org/California_Condor.html. We thank Steve Schubert for this submission.

Audubon and the California Condor

The magnificent California Condor, among the rarest and most imperiled birds in the world, was famously rescued from the brink of extinction in the late 1900s. Around 200 birds currently survive, roughly half in captivity and half in the wild.

Once found throughout the Southwestern U.S. into Mexico (as well as pockets in New York and Florida), by the early 1900s they were largely confined to the rugged mountains and foothills of Central and Southern California, where they remained until 1987. In that year, the last free-flying wild bird was captured and integrated into an existing captive breeding program. At the time of his capture, this male was one of only 27 living California Condors, whose numbers had dipped to as low as 21 in 1981-82.

From 1987 to 1992, no California Condors flew free in the California skies. In 1992 captive-bred condors were released into the wild at Hopper Mountain National Wildlife Refuge north of Ventura, with additional captive-reared birds added to the flock each year thereafter.

Audubon's relationship with the California Condor has been complex and at times controversial, but has been effective at both the field research level and when focused on pushing for legislation to list the species as Endangered; advocating for land acquisitions around the horseshoe-shaped southern edge of California's Central Valley; and supporting public outreach and education through its magazine and other publications.

The Early Years

Audubon's official involvement with the condor dates back to 1939, when National Audubon Society helped support the doctoral research of Carl Koford, then a student at the University of California, Berkeley. This research was published in 1953 as one of three landmark "National Audubon Research Reports" which provided much of the information on the species' life history. (The other two being Robert Porter Allen's "Whooping Crane" and James Tanner's monograph of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker.)

During the 1930s and 40s, Audubon pressured federal agencies to set aside large parcels of habitat for the condor, even then known to be extremely rare. Two U.S. Forest Service Sanctuaries were established during that time: The Sespe Condor Sanctuary in Ventura County and the Sisquoc Condor Sanctuary in Santa Barbara County. (Two USFWS refuges for condors have been established subsequently; the Hopper Mountain NWR adjacent to the Sespe Condor Sanctuary, and the Bittercreek NWR in Kern County, near Maricopa).

In 1952, before much was known about captive-rearing of wildlife, the San Diego Zoo was granted permission to establish a captive breeding flock in an attempt to augment the fewer than 100 birds believed left in the wild. These early efforts were a failure, and their permits were revoked after the National Audubon Society (including Carl Koford himself) and other groups protested based on the risk of trying to rescue so rare a bird with so little knowledge of proper captive breeding techniques. Other concerns included the threat of breaking up possible existing pairs and injuring birds during capture and handling.

Seeking to affect the behavior and attitudes of ranchers and rural residents within the range of the condor, Audubon hired "Condor Naturalist" John Borneman in 1964, who served as a sort of Condor Ambassador in the southern California backcountry. John gave talks at Audubon chapters throughout California, and served as an Audubon official on many state and federal agency condor advisory boards. He also lobbied heavily for condor protection and for additional research funds.

Audubon members and chapters continued to push hard for federal action to reverse the condor's decline during the 1960s, and in 1971, the California Condor was included in the first round of animals protected under the U.S. Endangered Species Act. This early victory helped set the stage for Audubon's future work with endangered species elsewhere in the U.S.

SAVE RESOURCES

by switching to an electronic subscription of the *Pacific Flyway*. Email rvalvo@sbcglobal.net and ask to go "green."



Big Green Big Year - "BIGBY"

Like most other birders, I started out by identifying the birds in my backyard and other places I visited for non-birding reasons. As I became more experienced, I expanded my range of birding. I visited places primarily to find birds. I started to list all of the birds I ever sighted (life list) and the birds I saw in my yard (yard list). Later I began additional lists such as a year list, county list, county year list, state list, big day list, big sit list, and individual lists for favorite birding locations. Other birders seriously pursue a North American list or even a world list. I have met more imaginative birders who keep a dream list (no kidding), or a T.V. list (all birds seen and heard on T.V., like the California Quail on M.A.S.H.)

Some of these lists involve large amounts of driving and even flying. I confess that I have done big days which involved driving across the state to maximize the number of bird species that can be tallied in a 24-hour period or driven for hours to see a new state bird, or life bird, or county bird. I have felt a little uneasy about burning a bunch of gas to see as many birds as possible. In response to this I have done bicycle big days and started the Elfin Forest Big Sit.

Richard Gregson and friends in Baie d'Urfe, Quebec have started the concept of a big green big year - "bigby" - counting all of the birds you see in 2008 without driving, flying, or otherwise consuming fossil fuels. There are 3 categories: 1) on foot, 2) self-propelled (includes bicycles, canoes, etc.), and 3) using public transport (bus or rail). You must start from home or your place of work or (for category # 3) from the spot that public transport takes you. It is a friendly sort of competition without any prizes or awards. Word has spread on the Internet and approximately 140 birders have registered for the event at www.sparrowworks.ca/bigby.html. The guidelines for the Bigby can be found here along with a forum where counters are entering accounts of their continuing quests. Birders in at least 29 U.S. states, 6 Canadian provinces, and 3 other countries have registered. At least 28 birders in California are taking part, including several in this county.

Having started on foot in my neighborhood and by bike between Morro Rock and Los Osos on January 1, I realized that reducing gas consumption and pollution is only a small part of a big green big year. For me, I am getting out birding more often, and more in the area where I live and work instead of concentrating my birding on the county "hotspots". It am also getting a fair amount of exercise - I found

myself walking and biking 10-25 miles each of the first three days of the new year.

It does take some adjusting however. Carrying a scope and tripod is a little harder on a bike. Obviously, getting around takes longer and my range is greatly reduced. Fortunately, I don't live in Kansas. I feel lucky to live in an area with a variety of habitats in a small area. I am really looking forward to a year of birding by foot and bicycle.

- Jim Royer, Los Osos

A Welcome to New Members

Arroyo Grande

Tara D Storke
Helen J Walley

Atascadero

Kathleen Dillon
Maria Kindel
Gloria Nelson
M Peterson Chipman
Jeri Ransen
Shirley Smith
Michael Thompson

Beth Tolerton

Cambria

Jane Eddy
John Hedberg

Cayucos

Scott & Jane Robinson
Mel Wysock

Creston

Jeanne Anderson
Nancy McIntosh
Garden Farms
Judie Bartlett
Valerie Jeanne Dixon
Johanna Rubba
Happy Vly
Frank L Johnson

Los Osos

Roger Carmody
E J Cartwright
Wendi Craig
Jason Dart
W A Greene
Heather Heaps
Toby Thompson
Alice Welchert
Eileen Zolkoski

Morro Bay

Melinda Elster

Morro Bay

Richard & JoAnn Hansen
Donna Strauss

Nipomo

John W Perkins

Oceano

Patricia D Tyler

Paso Robles

Suzy Reynolds

Pismo Beach

Louise Dechert
Juanita Maichele
Larry Spiegel
Lucia Wolff

San Luis Obispo

Lisa Ankenbrandt
Yvonne Baker
Evelyn Cunningham
Jane Faber

Sandra Freeman

Betty Griffin

Christy Gullo

Theodora Jones

Joan F Knouse

Anthony Krause

Duane Kukuk

Clifford N Seaver

Kathleen Tanner

Marsha Thoriakson

Lawrence J Wolf

Kristin Wurster

San Miguel

Susanne Anshen

Santa Margarita

Missy Teal

Templeton

Julie Badalamenti

Laura Brooks

Suzanne Dutra

Marcia Walker

Chapter Volunteers of the Year Named for 2007

MCAS recently recognized two outstanding members as "Chapter Volunteers of the Year." The MCAS Board deliberated over many potential candidates and chose two gentlemen: Roger Zachary and Henry Pontarelli. Henry and Roger were honored at the CBC compilation dinner and presented with a thank you gift.

In addition to donating untold hours of volunteer work for MCAS, both men are avid environmentalists. Roger became an MCAS member last year when the North Cuesta Audubon chapter merged with MCAS. Since 1983, Roger served as Board President with occasional rounds as Education, Field Trip, and Conservation chairs. 1983 was also the year Roger became the complier for the Carrizo Plain CBC, a responsibility he retains today. Roger routinely leads field trips, including several for the Winter Bird Festival.

Now in his 32nd year of teaching Roger, has influenced countless students, including our own Stephanie Little (Education co-chair) and Emily Jagger (Chapter Administrator).

As a participant in numerous bird surveys and counts, coastal and creek clean-up leader, and winner of the Water Conservation Outstanding Award several years, Roger exemplifies outstanding qualities of an MCAS member. We have much to learn from this life-long teacher.



Henry, originally from the Mid-West, moved to the Central Coast in 1999. He promptly began native plant restoration on his property in Los Osos and soon joined MCAS. After serving a year as President-Elect, Henry became President for two years. During this

time, Henry was instrumental in starting and promoting the MCAS Winter Loon Survey, a cooperative effort with the Biodiversity Research Institute (BRI) of Gorham,



Past Outstanding Volunteer Service Award Recipients

- 1998 Fran and Dorothy Kilfoil, Bud and Alice Meyer Hyrum and Nora Strong
- 1999 Don Parham, Bill and Emma Moore
- 2000 Phil Persons, Nancy Vaughan, Aryan Roest
- 2001 Tom Edell, Jim and Karen Havlena
- 2002 John McDonald, John Perkins, Rosalie Valvo Gale Kordowski, Steve Schubert - Activist Award
- 2003 Barbara Burke, Joanna Frawley Marla Morrissey - Activist Award
- 2004 Eilleen Bowen, Gloria Rasmussen Nathan and Francis Sweet
- 2005 Jim Royer, Mike Stiles, Bert and Elaine Townsend

Maine. Now in its 4th season, Henry has logged countless hours observing, capturing, weighing, measuring, and banding loons on the Morro Bay Estuary in an attempt to learn more about the life cycle and environmental stresses that common loons are exposed to during winter. Henry and BRI field biologist Darwin Long continue to give numerous power point presentations and lead loon field trips every year at the Winter Bird Festival. Henry remains on the MCAS Board as Strategic Development Chair and holds seats on the SLO County Marine Interest Group Advisory Council and the SLOSEA (San Luis Obispo Science and Ecosystem Alliance).

Congratulations to Roger and Henry! MCAS proudly adds their names to our list of volunteer award recipients.

Burrowing Owl Mania

The proceedings of the California Burrowing Owl Symposium, a two-day event held in Sacramento in November 2003, is now available. The proceedings contain twenty papers about burrowing owl regional status, research, management, policy, and reference information edited by J.H. Barclay, K.W. Hunting, J.L. Lincer, J. Linthicum, and T.A. Roberts (vii + 197 pages, ISBN: 978-0-9800011-0-5). Visit www.albionenvironmental.com to view the table of contents and to order the \$25 publication; or call (831) 469-9128.

Eureka! Birds of San Luis Obispo County

November through January is a great time to find an unexpected wintering bird in the county. Documenting species shown as rare or casual in Morro Coast Audubon's "Birds of San Luis Obispo County, California" with a photograph, sketch, or written description is of great value to the scientific community and future researchers exploring county records.

WATERFOWL: Most of our rarer wintering geese were settled in by November and December. The Greater White-fronted Goose at OCP was present through the period (MLS*). Two Snow Geese were at Morro Bay High School on 8 Dec (BTM) and one at Shamel Park in Cambria was well described (EB#). An adult male Harlequin Duck seen from Northpoint Natural Area in Morro bay on 12 Nov (TME) may be the same bird later seen north of Cayucos at the Estero Bluffs 17 Nov-31 Dec (TME). Also at Northpoint were an adult male Black Scoter on 7 Nov (MLS) and two females on 12 Nov (TME). Three Long-tailed Ducks found near the mouth of Morro Bay on 18 Nov (BAB,*) were reported.

GREBES THRU ALCIDS: Pacific Wildlife Care rehabbed and released a Red-necked Grebe at Morro Bay that may have been the same bird seen off Northpoint Natural Area on 12 Nov (TME). A well described sub-adult Brown Booby was seen from the elephant seal viewing area south of Point Piedras Blancas on 2 Dec (MSM#). Small numbers of Mountain Plovers were reported on the Carrizo Plain, but the one worth mentioning was found on the beach at the Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes National Wildlife Refuge on 23 Nov (DG). Very rare in winter, a Lesser Yellowlegs was along the shoreline adjacent of Butte Drive in Los Osos 9-31 Dec (SCS). Interesting gull reports included a first-winter Franklin's Gull found near the MBSP Marina on 23 Nov (EAC*) that remained to at least 27 Dec, and at Atascadero Lake the county's first inland Western Gull 13-27 Nov (MDH*) and second inland record for Black-legged Kittiwake 26-27 Nov (CAM*). A total of 16 Marbled Murrelets were reported between 2 Nov and 15 Dec with a high count of 13 along the north coast on 3 Nov (TME, MLS)

SWIFTS THRU SWALLOW: The 30-40 Chaetura swifts seen on the north side of Black Hill, MBSP could not be positively identified (JSR) but were most likely Vaux's Swifts. The find of the period was an immature Broad-billed Hummingbird found at a feeder in Atascadero on 23 Nov that was later in a yard ¼ mile away thru 3 Dec (KJZ*#). Lewis's Woodpeckers were in three locations with three at Barney Schwartz Park in Paso Robles 14-16 Nov (LT*), one along Calf Canyon on 8 Dec (LT*), and one seen west of the Santa Lucia Range at Varian Ranch in rural Arroyo Grande in late Dec (DML). A male Red-naped Sapsucker returned to Cal Poly where it was again in the pepper trees in front of the library 10 Nov-

15 Dec (MLS) and another was on the north side of Black Hill, MBSP, 14-19 Dec (TME,*). Three "yellow-shafted" Northern Flickers were found; a male in the Pecho Road Willows 6 Nov-4 Dec (JSR), a female in rural Arroyo Grande (CL), and a male at Deer Canyon in Arroyo Grande on 31 Dec (BKS*). An Eastern Phoebe seen from Pecho Road Willows and on the Sea Pines Golf Course in Los Osos 9-15 Dec (JSR) is likely wintering there. Now somewhat regular in winter, three Barn Swallows were on Camp San Luis Obispo at Chorro Reservoir (DR).

WARBLERS THRU ORIOLES: Perhaps the find of the period was a Grace's Warbler found on the north side of Black Hill, MBSP, 14-31 Dec (CAM#,*), that provided the third county record and appears to be wintering just off La Loma Ave. A Palm Warbler was south of Pt. Piedras Blancas at the elephant seal observation area on 9-11 Nov (RE). There is a good chance that a male Black and White Warbler seen at OFL on 11 Dec (NBS) is wintering there. A walk through the mature habitat in the community of Halycon on 26 Nov produced a Summer Tanager (CAM). An adult Green-tailed Towhee, a rare visitor to the county, was at Santa Margarita Lake (JS). Vesper Sparrow is rare along the coast where one was recorded near Point Buchon on 3 Nov (RHZ). A banded rostratus subspecies Savannah Sparrow netted on the MBSP Marina spit on 27 Nov was originally banded there in Dec 2004 (GPS). Two Yellow-headed Blackbirds were reported with one described as a female/immature at Cal Poly on 25 Nov (MLS) and the other as a first winter bird at the Cuesta Ponds (DR). Birders following up on the female Orchard Oriole found at the intersection of Henrietta Ave and Pecho Road in Los Osos on the 15 Dec Christmas Count (CAM) have not positively identified a female oriole seen in the same location thru 24 Dec (mob); a photo would help document this bird. A Bullock's Oriole was seen along Estero Ave in Morro Bay on 14-15 Dec (CAM).

ABBREVIATIONS: MBSP, Morro Bay State Park; OCP, Oceano County Park; OFL, Oso Flaco Lake, PSBOC, Pismo State Beach Oceano Campground. A * indicates a bird was photographed and a # indicates a description was provided. **OBSERVERS:** Thanks to the many birders that report their sightings. The following people are cited above: Bill A. Bouton, Eric Brunschwiler, Eugene A. Cardiff, Jamie M. Chavez, Joyce Cory, Tom M. Edell, Richard Erickson, Doug George, Marlin D. Harms, Dave M. Lawrence, Cheryl Lish, Curtis A. Marantz, Bob T. Maytum, Dave Richardson, Jim S. Royer, Mike San Miguel, Alan F. Schmierer, Brad K. Schram, Steve C. Schubert, Gregory P. Smith, Maggie L. Smith, Nancy B. States, Mike D. Stiles, Doug G. Stinson, Jan Surbey, Linda Tanner, and Roger H. Zachary. For info about birds 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

LOCAL EVENTS, PROGRAMS AND FIELD TRIPS

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