



# Pacific Flyway

Newsletter of the Morro Coast Audubon Society

Volume 44 Issue 8, February 2010

## Generosity for the Present and the Future

“Real generosity toward the future lies in giving all to the present” ~ Albert Camus

In early December, the 2009 MCAS fund drive letters began appearing in the mailboxes of MCAS members. In spite of tight budgets due to the depressed economy and the holidays, MCAS members and friends have once again shown strong support to MCAS through generous donations! These donations are a symbol of generosity towards the future; by supporting MCAS lands and programs, donors are preserving and enhancing our environment for generations to come. As of New Years Day, our Annual Fund Drive total stands at \$12,092. Much of this total (\$5,500) is due to the generosity of two people - members of the Sweet Springs Circle of Friends Endowment! \$500 is the minimum donation to become a member of the Sweet Springs Circle of Friends. Another \$1,250 was given by three donors to support the Hi Mountain Condor Lookout Project. The balance of the funds, approximately \$5,300, is comprised of donations to our lands, Sweet Springs Nature Preserve and East Sweet Springs, as well as to our general fund.

The general fund helps to pay for many ongoing projects, including monthly community programs, school outreach, the Pacific Flyway production and distribution, and office space rent. The general fund is also tapped for awards and programs in need, such as Hi Mountain Lookout, Morro Bay Winter Loon Survey, Western Snowy Plover Recovery and more. A giant THANK YOU to all who have donated!

If you haven't sent in your fund drive donation, it's not too late! Please consider making a donation to any one of our worthy projects, lands, or general fund. All donations are tax deductible and greatly needed to keep the wonderful work moving forward. Even if you can only donate \$5, it will still help us! Also, if you prefer to donate online, visit our website at [www.morrocoastaudubon.org](http://www.morrocoastaudubon.org) and donate instantly with a credit card.

Christy Holmes, MCAS President

## Thank You to Our Annual Fund Drive Supporters

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## Morro Coast Audubon Society Office and Outreach Center

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Website: [www.morrocoastaudubon.org](http://www.morrocoastaudubon.org)

Printed on recycled paper

## BULLETIN



## Thank You to Our Hi Mountain Lookout Project Donors

### FINANCIAL DONATIONS:

Phyllis Hischer, *San Luis Obispo*

Paul and Judith Burkhardt, *Creston*

Melissa Kelly, *Santa Ynez*

Anonymous -reimbursement for solar inverter  
installation

### SUPPLIES MATERIALS & LABOR:

Dave Berry and Dennis Byrnes- Toyota Land Cruiser  
Association

Chris Arndt, *San Luis Obispo*

John Ewan- Pacific Energy Company,  
*San Luis Obispo*

Donations can be made by writing a check to:  
‘MCAS Hi Mountain Project’ and mailing to:

Morro Coast Audubon Society

Po Box 1507

Morro Bay, CA 93443-1507

Contributions are tax deductible under IRS Code  
501(c)(3).

## SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

# Solar: New Year's Resolution!

We are Audubon members because we love and respect the natural world. But respect is sometimes not enough and needs to be partnered with ACTION! What better way to start the new year than to not only read about "green" ideas but to actually take action and do your part! The possibilities are unlimited. One really major impact that you can have on your own sense of environmental well-being and to the environment is to go solar. It is easy, very effective and can be affordable.

The costs, the tax and other incentives, and the savings involved in going solar are variable and can be rather confusing. The easiest way to understand all of the costs and other factors is to contact a local solar contractor and have them do a free site inspection and engineer a potential system for your property. Then you will know specific facts, costs and potential incentives as they apply to your situation.

The biggest fact that will emerge is that the up-front cost is high! Please do not stop there in your thinking and planning. There are ways to make it work. There are Federal and PG&E incentives and tax credits available. (SLO County is also working on plans for incentives, but in my personal opinion, it may not offer any major incentives over those that exist now through other sources.) In addition, many solar contracting companies offer plans with low up-front costs and with time payments no greater than your electric bill was before. And remember that the solar on your rooftop not only adds to the actual physical value of your home, but provides power for free thereafter it is paid off!

Going solar is more than talk; it is ACTION, and action that makes you feel good ... gives you a sense of environmental pride! Take step one now. Make that call to a solar provider and see what potential there is for solar at your place! (One should not complain about the Carrizo solar projects if you have not taken the time and minimal effort to see if solar will work for your house!)

- Alan Schmierer, MCAS Member (aaschmierer@yahoo.com)

## A Warm Welcome to Our New Members!

### *Atascadero*

Nancy Green  
James O'Connor  
Jabeth Sterni

### *Buellton*

Peter Dullea

### *Cambria*

Charles Hench  
Pamela Mettier  
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Kelli Schonher  
Linda L Thompson

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Virginia Palmer

### *Templeton*

Jennifer Hamman  
Sonja Savery Orton

## LOCAL EVENTS, FIELD TRIPS & PROGRAMS



*Laughing Gull, courtesy of Alan Schmierer*

### Focus on Gulls Field Trip

Wednesday, February 10th  
10am to 12pm at Laguna Lake, San Luis Obispo

OK, so now you know that they are not called “seagulls” and are starting to wonder what else there is to find out about this fascinating species. Join us at Laguna Lake, a great place to study the more common gulls in our county up close. Here we will practice identifying gull species, talk a little about aging, molt and just when and where to expect these birds in our county.

Binoculars are necessary, scopes suggested but not required, and bring your Sibley or National Geographic field guides if you have one.

Directions: Located in San Luis Obispo midway along the north side of Madonna Road. Madonna Road exits Rte 101 in San Luis Obispo or can be reached at a major intersection on Los Osos Valley Road about a mile west of Rte 101. There is access for all mobility levels there. Link to map at: <http://www.morrocoastaudubon.org/mbsloguide.htm#lalapa>

Rain will cancel the field trip.

- Kaaren Perry, leader (surfbird1@att.net)

### Sweet Springs Restoration Party

Saturday, February 13th  
9am to 12pm

“When we heal the earth, we heal ourselves” -David Orr

Meet at the main entrance off Ramona. Tools, tips and munchies will be provided. The focus will be on removing invasive weeds this month.

### Volunteers Needed to Staff Upcoming Events

MCAS is expanding our public outreach efforts and need your help. We are looking for volunteers to help staff our booth at upcoming events including the Los Osos Oktoberfest, Pozo Greenfest and Cal Poly’s Sustainability Fair. If you enjoy attending any of these events why not get involved?

Volunteers will receive free admission into the event and will be asked to volunteer at the booth for a shift of 2 - 8 hours, depending on the time commitment you are willing to make. Our goal in attending these events is to distribute information about local birds and other wildlife to our community, increase MCAS membership, collect email addresses for MCAS Alert!, sell MCAS merchandise and artwork, accept donations, and gain additional volunteers. Our booth is set up for adults and for kids. The “make-a-plover-chick” artwork activity has been very popular with the kids and is a lot of fun to get involved with.

If you are interested in joining our Community Outreach Committee to inform our community about MCAS, please contact Aurianna Woodson at [auriannaw@gmail.com](mailto:auriannaw@gmail.com).

### We Need Help With Beginner / Kids Field Trips!

Some of you may not be “super-birders” but do have a little time and know birds well enough to help out! We are looking for folks who can help with field trips for beginners and kids. We are also looking for some of you who might spend a few hours or less a month at Sweet Springs or at the Fourth Street overlook. We really need you!! Please contact Alan Schmierer at [aaschmierer@yahoo.com](mailto:aaschmierer@yahoo.com) or 772-2026.

# Community Program: Land Conservation in the Face of Global Climate Change

*with Brian B. Stark*

Monday, February 15th

7pm at El Chorro Park, SLO Botanical Garden Oak Glen Pavilion (across from Cuesta College)

Global climate change is a reality that is going to affect all of us, including our plants and animals. We have but a short window of time to do what we can, both to reduce the impacts of a changing climate and to anticipate and manage the resulting landscape changes. Climate change is a big topic for land trusts because land conservation has an important part to play in climate change planning.

Come learn how the Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo County is addressing climate change issues through project prioritization, preserve management, and on-the-ground restoration. Executive Director Brian Stark will discuss what is being done to reduce the impacts of a changing climate and to anticipate and manage the resulting landscape changes. Be sure to catch this informative meeting!

Brian started at the Land Conservancy as a volunteer in 1994 and never left. Working on such early projects as the Rural Settlement Pattern Strategy Reports and the San Luis Obispo Greenbelt Plan he specialized in conservation planning and resource mapping. In 1997 he was assigned the project that has defined his career at the Land Conservancy, creation of the San Luis Obispo Creek Watershed Enhancement Project. Since that time he focused primarily on managing restoration projects on local creeks and doing conservation easements and acquisitions on behalf of steelhead trout. Since 1997 he has overseen the installation of over 30 physical restoration projects including erosion control, water quality improvement, revegetation and improving migration access for steelhead trout.

In 2001 Brian was assigned the Deputy Director position at the Land Conservancy. While still managing projects he helped a growing staff implement a great variety of tasks that are critical to non-profits and particularly, land trusts. This paved the way for Brian's eventual selection for the Executive Director position. When asked about his long tenure at the Conservancy and in San Luis Obispo County he said, "I love people and land and we have great examples of both here on the central coast. It has been an honor to serve the public trust as a staffer at the Land Conservancy."



*Brian Stark, photo courtesy of Brian Stark*



*Dave Keeling, photo courtesy of Dave Keeling*

## March Program Slideshow: "Birds of SLO, 2009, Mainly"

The March 15, 2010 MCAS meeting will present a slideshow entitled "Birds of SLO, 2009, Mainly." Over a dozen of our finest local bird photographers have contributed more than 900 images of 240 bird species. The quality of images is outstanding and will produce a show that is not to be missed!

The coordinator, Dave Keeling, has taught chemistry at Cal Poly for over 30 years. The last year and a half he has reduced his teaching to half-time, allowing him to step up his nature photography activity.

# 2009 Morro Bay Christmas Bird Count Results

The 56th Morro Bay Christmas Bird Count was held on December 19, 2009. Seventy-seven participants divided into 49 parties to cover the count circle this year. Together the parties spent 67.75 hours driving 352 miles, 127.25 hours walking 209.25 miles, 8 hours boating and kayaking 6.5 miles, 3.0 hours biking 7.5 miles, and 6.5 hours and 12 miles owling (foot & car). The count total of 52,892 birds was 3,365 greater than the average of the past 29 years and the total of 200 species equaled the count average since 1980. In addition, five species were seen during count week, but not on count day. No species were new to the count this year, so the count's cumulative species total (1948-2009) continues at 312 species. Thanks to all the volunteers who contributed to this year's success. A special thanks to Bert and Elaine Townsend for excellently coordinating the count, and to the sector leaders Maggie Smith, Eric Weir, and Bill Bouton for organizing the participants.

The most notable species this year (recorded on fewer than 10 counts since 1980) were Lesser Yellowlegs on Morro Bay (5th count), two Marbled Murrelets (4th) and an Ancient Murrelet (6th) seen offshore from Montaña de Oro State Park, a White-winged Dove in Los Osos (4th), a first-year female Yellow-bellied Sapsucker in San Luis Obispo (8th), two Pygmy Nuthatches in Morro Bay State Park (7th), a Sage Thrasher near Point Buchon (2nd), a Nelson's Sparrow at Morro Bay State Park (5th), an adult male Summer Tanager at Cal Poly (4th), and Great-tailed Grackle at Laguna Lake and the Irish Hills Plaza (4th).



*The Cuesta Ridge, Christmas Bird Count morning  
- photo courtesy of Alan Schmierer*

Other rarities of note were Eurasian Wigeon (4 birds), Mountain Bluebird (2), Townsend's Solitaire (1), Black-and-White Warbler (1), Swamp Sparrow (1), and White-throated Sparrow (3). Notable high counts were made for Greater White-fronted Goose (68), Ross's Goose (38), and Cackling Goose (177). Four subspecies of Fox Sparrow were recorded including a "red" form in Los Osos. Species seen during count week, but not on count day, were two unidentified jaegers, Pigeon Guillemot, Short-eared Owl, Costa's Hummingbird, and Bullock's Oriole.

Complete count details will be available on the Audubon Website, <http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/> after Feb 15, 2010.

-Tom Edell, Count Compiler

# 2009 Carrizo Plain Christmas Bird Count Results



*Photo courtesy of Roger Zachary*

Thirty participants counted birds and found 66 species. This total included count week birds also. Some birds of interest included:

Rough-legged Hawk, Ferruginous Hawks, Golden Eagles, Prairie and one Peregrine Falcon, Mountain Plovers, Burrowing, Long-eared, and Short-eared Owls, Mountain Bluebirds, Sage Thrasher, Plainopeplas, Sage and Vesper Sparrows (to mention a few). Thank you to all who volunteered!

-Roger Zachary, Count Compiler

# Eureka! The Birds of San Luis Obispo County, Nov.-Dec. 2009

The following are some of the most interesting reports gleaned primarily from the Slocobirding listserv and eBird. Abbreviations used below are: CPNM = Carrizo Plain National Monument; MBSP = Morro Bay State Park; and PSBOC = Pismo State Beach Oceano Campground.

**WATERFOWL THRU SHEARWATERS:** An immature **TUNDRA SWAN** at Santa Margarita Lake on 14 Nov (DGS) provided the only report for the period. Though expected annually, **EURASIAN WIGEON** remains a rarity in the SLO County where four males were reported on Morro Bay 20 Nov-20 Dec (WF). The lone report of a **REDHEAD** involved an adult male photographed at Oso Flaco Lake 22-26 Nov (MLS). The male **HARLEQUIN DUCK** present since 10 Oct between Old Creek and Toro Creek continued through at least 18 Dec (CAM). A male **BLACK SCOTER** was offshore near Little Pico Creek 22-24 Nov (JSR). Casual away from the coast, a **RED-THROATED LOON** was at Atascadero Lake 9-13 Dec (RHZ). A first winter **RED-NECKED GREBE** frequented the Morro Bay harbor mouth 10 Nov-10 Dec (MLS) and is probably still in that area.

**IBIS THRU SHOREBIRDS:** One of the more interesting reports was of an immature intermediate or dark morph **SWAINSON'S HAWK** - presumably a late migrant - found along Hwy 58 near Branch Mountain Road (TW,LA); there are no previous Nov records for the county. Three **ROUGH-LEGGED HAWKS** photographed on the CPNM 1 Nov-31 Dec involved both an adult male and female and an immature bird (MLS,AFS,RHZ). Unexpected along the coast, a **SANDHILL CRANE** flying over the Foothill Blvd marsh toward the coast on 13 Dec (DGS) provided the county's first coastal record in eleven years. In addition to the expected **MOUNTAIN PLOVERS** on the CPNM, there was an intriguing report of this species along Bitterwater Road where a flock of about 80 birds was 6-8 miles south of Hwy 46 (DR). A single **LESSER YELLOWLEGS** was seen mostly during high tide periods in flooded mudflats off the MBSP Campground 7 Nov-19 Dec (KLP).

**ALCIDS THRU WOODPECKERS:** An after hatching year **PIGEON GUILLEMOT** wintering in the Morro Bay Harbor mouth area 9 Nov-22 Dec (MLS) led to much discussion about its age; the bold white wing panel indicated it was not a hatching year bird. **MARbled MURRELETS** continued near San Simeon where eight were seen from the pier on 3 Nov (AFS). An elusive **WHITE-WINGED DOVE** associating with Eurasian Collared Doves around the 1700 block of 5th Street in Los Osos 8-16 Dec (JC) is probably wintering in that vicinity. A female **COSTA'S HUMMINGBIRD** present along 13th Street in Los Osos for a while was last recorded on 16 Dec (MDS). The **YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER** found in a pepper tree at Santa Rosa Park in SLO during the Christmas bird count (19 Dec) was seen again on 22 Dec (CL). **RED-NAPED SAPSUCKERS** were found in two locations with a male in the White Oak picnic area at Santa Margarita Lake 14 Nov (DGS) and a hatching year male on a utility pole along Hwy 58 at the Carrizo Plain School on 15 Nov (TW,LA). A male "Yellow-shafted" **NORTHERN FLICKER** was seen at the bay end of Nancy Street in Cuesta-by-the-Sea 8-14 Dec (JSR).

**SWALLOWS THRU SPARROWS:** A single **BARN SWALLOW** was seen over the Atascadero Wastewater Ponds on 1 Dec (MLS). Up to four **PYGMY NUTHATCHES** continued on Black Hill in MBSP 6-19 Dec (MLS). Sporadically found along the coast, a single **MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD** was along a ridge at Deer Canyon in Arroyo Grande on 16 Nov (BKS) and up to nine were along Turri Road in the vicinity of the summit 3-19 Dec (KLP). A wintering **NASHVILLE WARBLER** was found in a willow patch along Los Olivos in Los Osos on 4 Dec (MLS) while a **PALM WARBLER** discovered at Estero Bluffs State Park on 17 Nov (AFS) was presumed to be a late migrant. Rare in western SLO County, an adult Black-throated Sparrow was at a feeder in San Luis Obispo (EL). Two large-billed **SAVANNAH SPARROWS** were banded adjacent to the MBSP Marina 5-16 Dec (RO) and after a three year absence, two **NELSON'S SPARROWS** were found in the same location 7 Nov-19 Dec (DGS). Red **FOX SPARROWS** (*P. i. zaboria*) returned to two locations, one for its fourth year in Los Osos 25 Nov-19 Dec (MDS) and another at a feeder in Arroyo Grande for its second year 10 Nov-31 Dec (BKS).

**LONGSPURS THRU ORIOLES:** A first winter **LAPLAND LONGSPUR** found feeding along the shoreline at Estero Bluffs State Park on 19 Nov (MES) was the only longspur reported this fall. A brilliant red male **SUMMER TANAGER** found by the Cal Poly library 5-20 Dec (KLP) is presumed to be the same bird seen later at the nearby Mustang Village in SLO. One of the rarest finds for the period was an immature male **SCARLET TANAGER** photographed at PSBOC on 4 Nov (RHZ). Following up on above average numbers this spring and fall, three **ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAKS** were reported, a male at PSBOC on 6 Nov (DK), and adult male at Camp Keep in Montana de Oro State Park 16-18 Nov (SCS), and a female at a feeder in Los Osos 23-26 Dec (MDS). Even rarer in winter, a male **BLACK-HEADED GROSBEAK** was frequenting a feeder in Deer Canyon, Arroyo Grande 6-31 Dec (BKS). Another exciting find was a first year male/adult female **PAINTED BUNTING** photographed in a yard in SLO on 14 Nov (KH). A female **BULLOCK'S ORIOLE** was found near Madonna and Oceanaire Drive in San Luis Obispo on 21 Dec (MPB); there were reportedly two more orioles with this bird.

**OBSERVERS:** Thanks to the many birders that report their sightings. The following people are cited above: Liga Auzins, Mark P. Brown, Joyce Cory, Wes Fritz, Ken Hillers, Dave Keeling, Ernie Lawrence, Cheryl Lish, Curtis A. Marantz, Regena Orr, Kaaren L. Perry, Dave Richardson, Jim S. Royer, Alan F. Schmierer, Brad K. Schram, Steve C. Schubert, Maggie L. Smith, Mark E. Stacy, Mike D. Stiles, Doug G. Stinson, Tom Wurster, 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

## Morro Coast Audubon Society Membership Application

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ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_ CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

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

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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.

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Please mark all that apply:

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

I would like to be contacted about volunteer opportunities.

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

For questions, contact the Membership Chair. (Contact information on page 2.)

For both membership types, mail form & check to: MCAS, PO 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

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