



Pacific Flyway

Newsletter of the Morro Coast Audubon Society

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MCAS Receives Grant to Build First Bluebird Trail in SLO County



MCAS recently received a \$200 grant from the California Bluebird Recovery Program to assemble and install 15 bluebird nest boxes in El Chorro Regional Park. This collaborative effort between San Luis Obispo County Parks and MCAS owes its success to MCAS members Holly Sletteland, Alan Schmierer, Cheryl Lish, Stephanie Little, and Teddy Llovet as well as SLO County Supervising Ranger Bob Yetter. Alan assembled the 15 nest boxes, which were installed by Cheryl Lish mainly along Dairy Creek Road, which is an unimproved road used for walking by visitors to the park. Holly used a GPS to record the location of each box, which will be monitored for bird activity by grant participants. Congratulations and welcome (hopefully) to an increased population of Western Bluebirds in SLO County.

Cheryl Lish installs a bluebird nest box at El Chorro Regional Park. Photo courtesy of Teddy Llovet

MCAS Welcomes Our New President, Stephanie Little

Many of you probably know Stephanie Little or have at least seen her at one of the many events she has been a part of over her last 4 years as an MCAS board member. The former education co-chair championed MCAS's mission through countless public outreach activities. She has led dozens of bird walks in Morro Bay, Oceano Dunes and Santa Margarita; was a leader at the Winter Bird Festival; and has been a guest lecturer at several elementary school classrooms and college ornithology classes. "One of the best ways to inform the public about habitat conservation and protection for endangered species is by educating our younger community," said Little. Stephanie's loyalty to the environment and desire to teach others about MCAS has been inspiring and made her a logical choice to be the newest MCAS President.

Stephanie graduated from Principia College with a degree in environmental studies and is currently employed by State Parks. Her job ranges from monitoring the Western Snowy Plover and California Least Tern to educating the public about the importance of habitat conservation. In Stephanie's spare time, she enjoys gardening, walking her dog Bear, playing soccer, and hiking with friends on the weekend. "I look forward to working with the community over the coming year and hope to make a positive difference for MCAS. Please don't hesitate to contact me with questions or feedback about our MCAS programs and initiatives," said Little. Stephanie can be contacted by email at stephjoy13@hotmail.com or by phone at 805-610-6229.



Stephanie Little at a recent Sweet Springs cleanups. Photo courtesy of Andrea Jones

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BULLETIN

Wood Scraps Wanted

The MCAS bird-house project depends on donations of scrap lumber. We need 1"x 10", 1"x 8" and 1"x 6 boards or scraps that are at least a foot long and are un-painted and un-preserved. Please email Alan at aaschmierer@yahoo.com if you have wood available to donate.

Bird Fun Fact

THIRSTY HUMMINGBIRDS: Hummingbirds need to consume about 75-80% of their body weight of fluids per day to support their high metabolism and high heat loss. That would be the equivalent of a human drinking about 20 gallons of fluids per day!



Magnificent Hummingbird, photo courtesy of Alan Schmierer

Interested in Purchasing Official Audubon Gear?

Check out our Nature Shop at:

http://morrocoastaudubon.org/nature_shop.php



WANTED

ALIVE



Yellow-billed Magpie

photo courtesy of Alan Schmierer

Join Audubon California's 2nd annual Yellow-billed Magpie survey,

June 4-7, 2010

Sightings of the Yellow-billed Magpie are wanted to inform conservation efforts around this splendid species. The bird has a black head and chest, white shoulders and belly, iridescent blue wings, and long tapered black tail. Its bill is bright yellow. Males are slightly larger than females. The Yellow-billed Magpie is known to frequent California's Central Valley and Central Coast. If you see the Yellow-billed Magpie, do not attempt to apprehend or interfere with it in any way. Simply report the whereabouts to Audubon California. Visit www.ca.audubon.org to learn more.

Enter your results at www.ebird.org/california

LOCAL EVENTS, FIELD TRIPS, AND PROGRAMS

De Anza Trail and Salinas River Bird Walk

Saturday, June 5th at 7:30am

Join Roger Zachary at 7:30 AM at the Horse Arena on the North Ferro Carril Road for a walk along the de Anza Trail section of the Atascadero Mutual Water Company's property. The walk is very easy, on a trail that borders the Salinas River, and the distance is no longer than 2 miles round trip. We will be birding in mixed oak woodland and riparian woodland along the Salinas River. We should be able to identify approximately 30 species or more. Suitable for younger birders. Check out the website www.amwc.us. Reservations are required as space is limited; please please RSVP via email to conservation1@amwc.us or call Jamie Lien 461-7217 ext. 17.



Western snowy plover, photo courtesy of Mike Baird

June Year-End Barbecue

Monday, June 21st, 5:00pm - 8:00pm at El Chorro Regional Park, Dairy Creek Group Area

Plan to attend this MCAS barbecue featuring birding, good food, and live music. We've got the beat...you bring the meat (or veggies). It will be a fun event for the whole family!

5:00pm - Birding and Optics Fest & Field Trip

Test various brands of spotting scopes and binoculars and enjoy a short birding walk.

6:00pm - Everyone Loves BBQ Potluck

Bring something to grill, a side dish to share, and your own reusable place-setting. Throw in your picnic tablecloth, if possible. Assorted drinks provided by MCAS hospitality.

6:30pm - 7:30pm - Live music by Honeyguide

Oceano Dunes Guided Park Tour

Thursday, June 24th and Tuesday, July 13th, 8:00am - 10:00am

Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area is a geologically unique region of sand dunes and serves as a haven for wildlife, rare vegetation, and humans past and present. During the months of March through September, California Least Terns and Western Snowy Plovers nest within the park. To learn more about Oceano's comprehensive Least Tern and Snowy Plover management program, join Stephanie Little, Environmental Scientist, for a two-hour guided tour of the park. This will give folks the opportunity to see firsthand what Oceano Dunes is doing to manage and protect breeding Snowy Plovers and California Least Terns. The tour will begin at the Oceano Campground Nature Center. Highlights will include: bird watching at the Arroyo Grande creek mouth, a tour and discussion of some of the park's restoration efforts and the opportunity to view the 300-acre seasonal Snowy Plover and Least Tern habitat closure. It is very likely that plover and tern nests and chicks will be showcased on this outing. Space is limited and on a first come, first served basis. Please contact Stephanie Little at sjlittle@parks.ca.gov or 805-610-6229 to reserve your place. We will be taking state park vehicles and a waiver form will need to be filled out prior to the tour.

Other Trips will be announced via the MCAS Alert. To be notified of these extra events email Mike Stiles at: mstiles@calpoly.edu.

A Nice Day at Santa Margarita Lake



Jan Surbey and Jack Beigle canoeing on the lake. Photo courtesy of Teddy Llovet

Thank you to all field trip leaders and attendants who participated in the 5th annual Morro Coast Audubon Society and California Native Plant Society picnic on Sunday, May 2nd. This all-day event included numerous field trips with wonderfully knowledgeable leaders, beautiful scenery, good food, and great company. We hope to see you again at next year's event.

Welcome to Our New MCAS Members!

Arroyo Grande

Sharon Andress
Avonne Brown
Robert J Burgess
Jon Hartz
Ron Jeffries
Harold McFarrald
Joan L McKenna
Kelly Wingate Cherry

Atascadero

Clif Bradley
Lisa Crook
Charlene Powell
Nancy Steele

Avila Beach

Lawrence Mattison

Cambria

Jim Clarke
Joan Schleicher

Cayucos

Bette Bardeen
Steve Taquino Kerr
Nancy Wilcox

Grover Beach

Barbara Neuman
Maria Talavera

Livingston, TX

Chet Williams

Los Osos

J Parks
Sandra Taylor

Morro Bay

Philip Carey
Joan Carter
Norman Gausman

Nipomo

Christine Orth
Robert & Shirley Sharps
Elaine Von Achen

Paso Robles

D Cunningham
Darlene Gary
Deborah Ghanley
Jan Michael
Linda M Searl

Pismo Beach

Jill Arellano
Jeannie Nix

San Luis Obispo

Allene B Anderson
Ben C Edmondson
Ralph Kettelkamp
Charlene Korsgaard
Diane Levison
Pat Pautsch

San Miguel

Burton Stokes

San Simeon

Evelyn Popich

Featured Bird of the Month: Tricolored Blackbirds

Monitoring and Protecting Tricolored Blackbird Colonies in San Luis Obispo County

The Tricolored Blackbird is North America's most colonial landbird with breeding colonies often teeming with more than 50,000 birds, sometimes all crammed into a 10-acre field or wetland to raise their young. While similar to the more widespread Red-winged Blackbird, it can be distinguished by its crimson red shoulder patch with a bright white bar, in contrast to the orange-red patch and yellow bar of the Red-winged Blackbird.

Struggling to Make a Comeback

In the 19th Century Tricolored Blackbird flocks were described as so numerous "as to darken the sky." Since then, the population has declined from in the millions to less than 500,000 today. Over just the last 70 years, the Tricolored Blackbird population has decreased by more than 80%.

The reasons for this decline are many, but the loss of marsh and nearby foraging habitats along the coast and in the Central Valley is the main issue. In more recent years, the species has become dependent on agricultural lands, with most of the largest colonies nesting in grain fields. This is a real problem, because usually the young have not yet left the nest around the time farmers harvest their crop, and harvesting destroys Tricolored Blackbird nests and young. In some cases as many as 20,000 nests have been lost in a single field.

Why Tricolored Blackbirds are Important in California

Tricolored Blackbirds are nearly endemic to California, with over 95% of the world's population occurring only here, including scattered small colonies in San Luis Obispo County. Thus, in California we have a unique responsibility to protect this species so that future generations can witness the spectacle of the largest breeding colonies among North American landbirds.

How to Help

The first step in making a difference for Tricolored Blackbirds is to identify and keep track of the location, status, and changes of Tricolored Blackbirds in our county. This information is critical for understanding how things are changing and making sure that colonies that can be enhanced or protected are identified. Download an observation form, and map of known colonies in SLO county, at: <http://morrocoastaudubon.org/tcbb.php>

Annual visits to each of these colony sites and new ones that are found is a great way to work with Audubon California and its partners to protect this species. Audubon California is also looking for opportunities to work with Morro Coast Audubon on opportunities to enhance or expand these and other colonies.

If you have any questions or ideas please feel free to contact Rodd Kelsey at rkelsey@audubon.org.



Tricolored Blackbird, photo courtesy of Alan Schmierer

Eureka! The Birds of San Luis Obispo County -April 2010

Here are some of the most interesting reports gleaned from the Slocobirding listserv and the Cornell Lab's eBird project. A total of 210 species were reported in SLO County during April bringing the county's year total to 276 species. Abbreviations: CPNM = Carrizo Plain National Monument; PPB = Point Piedras Blancas.

Early spring arrivals included Western Wood-Pewee along Pozo Road 9 Apr (MLS); Ash-throated Flycatcher at Lopez Lake 5 Apr (MLS); Cassin's Vireo at Santa Margarita Lake 13 Apr (AFS); Swainson's Thrush at Cerro Alto 3 Apr - earliest county arrival date (JSR); Nashville Warbler at Cuesta Park, SLO 7 Apr (TME); Yellow Warbler at Oso Flaco Lake 2 Apr (MLS); Hermit Warbler at Cerro Alto 15 Apr (AFS); Yellow-breasted Chat along Arroyo Grande Creek 17 Apr (MLS); Western Tanager near Creston 9 Apr (TME); Blue Grosbeak along Pennington Creek Road 17 Apr (MLS); and Lazuli Bunting in Los Osos and along Toro Creek Road 17 Apr (JSR,MLS).

WATERFOWL THRU LOONS: Three **ACKLING GEESE** were reported with a continuing bird at Atascadero Lake 9 Apr (TME), one with Canada Geese at Morro Bay on 17 Apr (JSR), and another seen flying past PPB on 18 Apr (RAR). A lingering male **EURASIAN WIGEON** remained on Morro Bay as of 17 Apr (TME). The male **HARLEQUIN DUCK** at Estero Bluffs State Park was last reported on 11 Apr (TME) and may still be present. Five migrant male **BLACK SCOTERS** were seen flying past PPB 10-24 Apr (RAR). Up to eight females and one male **HOODED MERGANSER** remained on a vernal pond near Creston through 12 Apr (JB). Always unexpected on freshwater, a female **RED-BREASTED MERGANSER** was on Whale Rock Reservoir on 11 Apr (TME). One of the highlights for the month was a **YELLOW-BILLED LOON** observed flying past PPB on 21 Apr (RAR). This bird showed an all pale bill (base to tip), more rectangular shaped head, and a very pale tannish neck and back.

ALBATROSS THRU GULLS: Three **BLACK-FOOTED ALBATROSS** were seen from PPB 4-11 Apr (RAR) where it is seen annually in spring. Another highlight this month was an immature **BROWN BOOBY** that "ripped across the tip of the point [PPB]" during 35-40 knot winds on 11 Apr (RAR). Just to the north, 15 **WHITE-FACED IBIS** were in a marsh off Hwy 1 on 30 Apr (RAR). Seen most springs from the summit of Deer Canyon in Arroyo Grande, a dark morph immature **SWAINSON'S HAWK** flew past there on 14 Apr (BKS). Very rare in spring, two **SOLITARY SANDPIPERS** were recorded with one near Creston 9 Apr (TME) and another near Cuesta College on 18 Apr (JSR). The first **FRANKLIN'S GULL** of the spring, an adult, was found at the San Simeon Pier and later flew past PPB on 17 Apr (RAR). Other gulls of note seen from PPB were a 2nd year **GLAUCOUS GULL** on 5 Apr with an adult and sub adult following on 7 Apr, and an adult **SABINE'S GULL** on 21 Apr (RAR).

WOODPECKER THRU WREN: **LEWIS'S WOODPECKERS** continue along Golden Hills Road in Paso Robles where two were seen 2-10 Apr (mob). Though clearly not rare in the county, **ACORN WOODPECKER** is very rare on the CPNM where one was found on the Washburn Ranch on 24 Apr (AFS). Empidonax flycatchers were on the move in April. **HAMMOND'S FLYCATCHERS** were found away from the coast along River Road Trail at Santa Margarita Lake on 13 Apr (AFS), at Cerro Alto on 15 Apr (MLS), and along the "Porno Wash" in the CPNM on 23 Apr (AFS). Two **GRAY FLYCATCHERS** were also reported with one at the CPNM visitor center on 22 Apr (AFS) and another along Pennington Creek Road on 28 Apr (MLS). A late **SAY'S PHOEBE** was at Spooner's Cove in Montana de Oro State Park on 19 Apr (DGS); please report any breeding evidence for this species west of the Santa Lucia Range. Also in the park, a **WINTER WREN** was singing along the Coon Creek Trail just past the trail Rattlesnake Flats Trail junction on 30 Apr (PG).

SPARROW THRU ORIOLE: Up to ten **BREWER'S SPARROWS** were along the cut-off road from Padrone Springs Road and along "Porno Wash" at CPNM 22-24 Apr (AFS). Several were also heard at a new location along Hwy 58 near San Diego Creek on 29 Apr (JSR). A small number of **BLACK-THROATED SPARROWS** are found in east county each year where males along "Porno Wash" on 23 Apr and at the Washburn Ranch on 24 Apr were in the CPNM (AFS), and another was singing along hwy 58 near San Diego Creek on 29 Apr (JSR). A White-throated Sparrow remained at a feeder in Chorro Valley through 30 Apr (AFS). **YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRDS** are present in small numbers in spring. This year a male was on the Carrizo Plain near the elementary school on 8 Apr (PG), a female was at Cal Poly on 13 Apr (MLS), a male was along Pennington Creek Road on 15 Apr (MLS), and two females were at the MU Ranch, CPNM (KS). A **SCOTT'S ORIOLE** heard near "Porno Wash" on the CPNM on 23 Apr (AFS) was seen the following day (MLS).

OBSERVERS: Thanks to the many birders that report their sightings including those cited above: Jan Bugge, Tom M. Edell, Peter Gaede, Richard A. Rowlett, Jim S. Royer, Alan F. Schmierer, Brad K. Schram, Kathy Sharum, Maggie L. Smith, and Douglas G. Stinson 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

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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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