



Pacific Flyway

Newsletter of the Morro Coast Audubon Society

Volume 45 Issue 9, March 2011

New MCAS Merchandise Revealed at Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival *And the History of Our Logo*

Brisk sales rewarded the efforts to increase the varieties of merchandise displaying the MCAS logo. MCAS now offers gray and navy blue “hoodies,” white, lavender, gray, brown, and light blue long sleeve tees, beanies and caps in a variety of colors. Although the weather during the Winter Bird Festival was mild, MCAS “sold out” of the popular “tassel beanies.”

All of the MCAS merchandise displays the MCAS logo, which was designed a few years back by Damon Chin, a Cal Poly graphics arts student. Damon incorporated human figures, along with a Peregrine Falcon and the outline of Morro Rock. MCAS was formed and incorporated in 1967 by individuals attempting to save the nesting peregrines at Morro Rock. Damon says his goal was “to develop a logo identity that was three-fold: emphasizing the MCAS commitment to protecting natural habitats, distinguishing the regional location of the chapter, and eliciting human compassion and involvement in these efforts.”



MCAS believes that the logo depicts and celebrates all of the components of the MCAS mission and proudly displays the logo on merchandise, correspondence, signs, and throughout the MCAS website. Check out our merchandise at any of the MCAS programs or the MCAS office. We will be adding the merchandise to our website soon at www.morrocoastaudubon.org. Wear that merchandise with pride! The nesting Peregrine Falcons at Morro Rock continue to thrive, and MCAS continues to protect birds, wildlife and their habitats.

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BULLETIN

Thank You MCAS Donors!

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Bird Fun Fact

AERIE? AERY? EYRIE? EYRY? Cannot remember how to spell the name for the nest of a falcon or other bird of prey? All are actually correct though the first is the most common spelling, at least locally.



Prairie Falcon, photo courtesy of Alan Schmierer

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

State Employees - A New Way to Give *Sign up for automatic payroll deductions*

Did you know that Cal Poly and other state employees now have the option of donating to Morro Coast Audubon Society through United Way's automatic payroll deduction? Many people prefer making their charitable donations this way because it's so easy and convenient. Most organizations have an annual sign-up campaign, but you can also talk to your payroll department any time. Once you've signed up, it happens automatically with every paycheck.

State employees can participate as payroll deduction donors for as little as \$2 per month. Retirees can participate for as little as \$5 per month. Although this may appear to be a nominal figure, it adds up over time. It helps to fund the many programs that we offer to the public free of charge, such as field trips, community presentations, access to our nature preserves and offering expert opinion on impacts of local development on birds and other wildlife. It also provides us with a consistent cash flow throughout the year, making it much easier to know what we're working with and to provide our services. Of course, some people find that donating in smaller increments enables them to give more than they otherwise might with a one-time annual gift. Your donations are 100% tax-deductible, just as they are when you write a check.

One hundred percent of your donation to MCAS will be spent on conservation and restoration of wildlife habitat, especially birds, right here at home in San Luis Obispo county. Don't you want to be a part of that?

Welcome to Our New MCAS Members!

Arroyo Grande

Sally L Baldwin

Gerri Kautz

Ruth Meyer

Carol Rockwell

Eileen J Small

Ragnar Thorensen

Calvin Vincent

Atascadero

Susan Goff

Donna Halliday

Scott & Camille Huerta

A Walde

Cayucos

Sharon Fletcher

Lynn Schoennauer

Grover Beach

Judy Beach

Los Osos

Lexie Bell

Thomas Esser

Claudette M Kolk

Alissa Levine

Christina Sheffield

Morro Bay

Pat McCullough

Jan Moore

Nipomo

Lydia Kostyzak

Mike Lewis

Louis G Prunauer II

Paso Robles

Barbara Dukes

Karyl Lammers

Pismo Beach

Karen Kolba

San Luis Obispo

Mike Cole

Harriet J Freeman

Charles R Lawsenson

Ann McDevitt

Joan Palma

Joel Scott

Pamella Wood

San Miguel

Mary Hudson

San Simeon

Nick Chase

Santa Margarita

Jennifer Kelley

Templeton

Noreen McElligott

Ralph Trueblood

Big Green Big Year

Jim Royer Summarizes his 2010 BIGBY Adventures

I was representing clients in Superior Court when my cell phone vibrated in the pocket of my slacks. I dashed off to the vacant jury room where I saw it was Maggie Smith calling. I wondered what bird had been found, where I would have to ride my bike to see it, and how I would get out of work soon enough to see the bird if it was a good one. Such thoughts crossed my mind whenever I got a bird call in 2010. In fact, the hardest part of my green big year was not the 3634 miles I cycled, the 348 miles I hiked, the kayaking, or the running with my binoculars. The hardest part was juggling my work and family commitments with my quest for bird species.

I originally became interested in green birding in 2007 when I saw an item on BIRDCHAT (internet bird Listserv) about doing a BIGBY. This stands for "Big Green Big Year" and was coined by Richard Gregson from Quebec. He promoted green birding on the internet, and encouraged BIGBYs all over the globe. This was a response to the many "big years" done by birders who traveled all over the world to see how many birds they could see in a year. To some birders, driving and flying after big year bird species seemed inconsistent with the pro-environmental ideals espoused by most birders. I first tried a BIGBY in 2008 and found 262 species in San Luis Obispo County. In that same year, Andy Kleinhesselink and Josiah Clark of San Francisco found 295 species in Northern California. This appeared to be the record for North America and was a new goal to shoot for.

It took me a year to think it over and get up the gumption to make a serious attempt to break 300 species. I spent the last few months of 2007 planning my year and setting up a blog to chronicle my efforts. I had never biked for more than a two-day trip, and I had never had my own website or blog, so I was challenging my 58-year-old mind and body. It turned out that setting up a Google blog was not hard, but I suspected that a planned nine-day bicycle trip out to eastern Kern County would not be so easy.



Golden Plover, photo courtesy of Alan Schmierer

I started my 2010 green big year on January 1st, when I pedaled from my house in Los Osos to Cayucos and back, tallying 122 species. Over the course of the year, my green birding trips varied greatly in time and distance. On two occasions, I rode my bike over 100 miles in one day. Both days involved significant hill climbs and netted me new birds for my green year. My longest pedal was a ten-day, 600-mile trip from Los Osos inland to the Mojave Desert where I rode the top of the Greenhorn Mountains (south end of the Sierras) and along the South Fork of the Kern River. This trip added my only out-of-county green birds, including Northern Goshawk, Brown-crested Flycatcher, a pair of Pileated Woodpeckers, and other birds of the desert and Sierras. This trip contributed 16 species to my green year total. In contrast, my shortest trips were my walks to the edge of the bay and the patch of trees at the end of my street, Pecho Willows. This daily ritual not only provided many local rare birds, but gave me a real feel for the changing seasons as bird species came and went, the weather changed, and the tides varied.

I really enjoyed the actual green birding but not my big green year concern over possibly missing a rare bird that had been found by another birder. Chasing a

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Beginner's Birding Event with Sierra Club (All Ages)

Saturday, March 12, 2011 from 8:30 to 11:00 at Sweet Springs Preserve in Los Osos

Guided Walk (8:30-10:30am): We are excited to be holding a beginner's birding event with our local Santa Lucia Sierra Club Chapter. A guided walk through Sweet Springs will begin at 8:30 am at the main entrance on Ramona Street where we'll look for birds and other wildlife that use the preserve. You'll get a chance to see first-hand the major efforts Audubon and our stellar group of volunteers have put into improving the preserve for both wildlife and the public. Binoculars are highly recommended for the guided walk, along with sturdy shoes and layered clothing. All ages and experience levels are welcome.

Sweet Springs Overlook (9:00-11:00am): If you're not interested in the walk or have limited time, please come out to the boardwalk platform where we'll have scopes, binoculars, bird guides, and a few helpful birders to point out some interesting birds and wildlife in a more casual setting. This is an excellent opportunity for young birders to look through the scopes and get a chance to try out binoculars.

To view a map, go to <http://morrocoastaudubon.org/sweet.htm>. Rain will cancel the event. If you have questions, please contact the event leader Jennifer Moonjian at jmoonjia@gmail.com.



Snowy Egret at Sweet Springs, photo courtesy of Mike Baird

MCAS Community Program - Tejon Ranch Conservancy

Presented by Tom Maloney

Monday, March 21st at 7:00pm

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

Tom Maloney, Executive Director of the Tejon Ranch Conservancy, will speak about the historic Tejon Ranch Conservation and Land Use Agreement of 2008 and the formation of the Tejon Ranch Conservancy. Tom's talk will describe the provisions of the agreement, but will primarily focus on the global ecological significance of Tejon Ranch and all that the Conservancy is doing to plan for the stewardship of the 240,000 acres of conserved lands on the Ranch.

Tejon Ranch is the largest contiguous private property in California and sits at the confluence of four major ecological regions. Each of these eco-regions is represented on the Ranch, and the configuration of the Ranch creates conservation linkages of continental significance. This significance led to the signing of a visionary agreement in June of 2008. The agreement founded the Conservancy that started immediately to fulfill its mission to preserve, enhance and restore the native biodiversity and ecosystem values of the Tejon Ranch and Tehachapi Range for the benefit of California's future generations.

Also, this month's "5 Good Minutes" will be presented by Teddy Llovett.

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS, CONT.

BIG GREEN BIG YEAR, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

bird on my bike was not only harder physically, but it took up to 3 times longer than driving. Green birding made it more difficult to fit chasing into my schedule and decreased my chances of seeing a recently found bird. For example, I missed the county's third Red necked Stint on the Morro Bay Estuary mudflats by 5 minutes. I never did find the Eastern Phoebe in the riparian habitat along Los Osos Creek, despite 5 tries on my bike; numerous people had seen it before and after my visits! I missed the fall Northern Parula seen in Oceano, in spite of two attempts, including one where it was initially found by a birder standing right next to me. I searched long and hard, but the bird was part of a flock that totally dispersed in a downpour.

Nevertheless, I did successfully chase numerous birds, like the 24-mile (one way) pedal to see California's second Ivory Gull, a beautiful and aptly named gull from the Arctic circle that was completely unexpected in sunny Pismo Beach. I cycled another 45 miles (one way) to see a first winter Glaucous Gull at the Elephant Seal haul out near Piedras Blancas.

While chasing was harder, finding birds did not seem to be hampered by my green forms of transportation. It helped that my neighborhood, including Pecho Willows, had 20 warbler species, Tundra Swan, Semipalmated Sandpiper, American Golden Plover, White-winged Dove, Black Swift, Clay-colored Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, Indigo Bunting, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Orchard Oriole, and other unusual species in 2010. My favorite green birding find was the county's first Bar-tailed Godwit, which I flushed while on a run along the shore of the Morro Bay Sand Spit. Other birds I discovered on my green birding in 2010 included Stilt Sandpiper, Red-naped Sapsucker, Tropical Kingbird, Magnolia Warbler, Bay-breasted Warbler, Blackburnian Warbler and Swamp Sparrow.

I did have some low points in my green year. During my first ride out to the Carrizo Plain on February 15th, I practically collapsed along the road from exhaustion, having ridden too fast into a headwind with a bike that was packed too heavy, on a route that was unnecessarily long and difficult, and without the proper conditioning. I barely limped into the California Valley Motel before dark at the end of this 70+ mile ride. Another bad experience occurred on March 26th while searching for Greater Roadrunner on San Luis

Mountain with my mountain bike. My front tire caught up on something and I did my impression of a briefly airborne roadrunner as I flew over my handlebars on the descent of the mountain. Unfortunately, my landing was more like a sack of potatoes, and I broke several ribs.

Overall, the green big year was a very enjoyable experience and I have no regrets. I liked the challenge of finding as many species as I could in one year without using any gas. I developed a larger appreciation of the landscape and the birds of Central California because I experienced this area in a very different way than driving from spot to spot. Memorable rides included pedaling along Kelso Valley Road into the Mojave Desert from Lake Isabella, hearing and seeing a large variety of resident and migrant birds (like Gray Flycatcher, Scott's Oriole and Mountain Quail). Cycling on Soda Lake Road on the Carrizo Plain with the fields of early yellow, blue and white wildflowers in the late winter along with flocks of bright blue Mountain Bluebirds, and the yellow meadowlarks glowing in the morning sun, was unforgettable. The ride along the road on both sides of Alta Sierra summit in the warm and bright high elevation sun of the Greenhorn Mountains, with dark blue skies, large patches of snow on the ground between towering firs and pines, the beautiful songs of Green tailed Towhees and Townsend's Solitaires, and the loud cries of the Pileated Woodpecker, was incredible.

While I may not ever do a serious green big year again, I will continue to do as much green birding as I can. I encourage others to do it as well; it is good for the environment and an enjoyably different birding experience. I have written up my green year and will continue to write posts on my green birding blog with links to other green birding sites and events at greenbirding.blospot.com. This blog includes a list of the birds I saw, maps of locations and photos of many of the birds I saw. Yes, I did break 300 species! On December 31st I detected my last species of the year, #318, which was an American Bittern at Laguna Lake. I rode my bike to end of the lakeside road, put on rubber boots, slogged out on a mud trail, and played a recording of its calls, to which it responded.

-Jim Royer, guest contributor

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

Reports gleaned from the Slocobirding listserv and the Cornell Lab's eBird project provided most of the information for this month's column. A total of 223 species was reported to eBird from SLO County in January which is 68% of all the species reported in 2010. The first migrant to arrive in January was Allen's Hummingbird and the first swallows will arrive in Feb. Abbreviations: MDOSP = Montana de Oro State Park; and PSBOC = Pismo State Beach Oceano Campground.

WATERFOWL: Wintering geese were found in several locations, though mainly along the coast. A total of 74 **GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GEESE** was higher than normal and included 10 seen at the Carrizo Plain on 15 Jan (BWS). Lesser numbers of our white geese (10 **SNOW GEESE** and 7 **ROSS'S GEESE**) included two Snow Geese near Creston on 12 Jan (JB) and four more Snow Geese on the Carrizo Plain on 15 Jan (BWS). The 12 **CACKLING GEESE** reported were mainly the Aleutian subspecies, but one at Hearst Ranch on 12 Jan (JM) was smaller and likely the minima subspecies. At least three male **EURASIAN WIGEON** continued through the month on Morro Bay (CAM). An intergrade Eurasian x American **GREEN-WINGED TEAL** seen on Morro Bay below the Elfin Forest on 14 Jan (CAM,TME) displayed a bold horizontal white stripe along the wing and a very faint white vertical stipe from the shoulder. Recently regular in winter, three male **HARLEQUIN DUCKS** were along the coast with one south of Arroyo de La Cruz on 4 Jan (GPS) and two off the Northpoint Natural Area on 8 Jan (TME). A small number of **BLACK SCOTERS** were reported; a male continued off Little Pico Creek through at least 9 Jan (mob) and a male and female were seen off the Northpoint Natural Area on 13 Jan (GPS) and 29 Jan (RHZ) respectively.

SHEARWATER THRU SHOREBIRD: One of the highlights of the Winter Bird Festival boat trip out of Avila on 15 Jan was a **SHORT-TAILED SHEARWATER** (TM). Because of its absence in SLO waters this winter, two **BLACK-VENTED SHEARWATERS** seen from Morro Rock on 9 Jan (JSR,RS) were unexpected. Though small numbers are now widespread in winter, two third year **BALD EAGLES** at Morro Bay on 14 Jan (TME) was hopefully a sign of things to come. **ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK** is our rarest wintering raptor and most regular on the Carrizo Plain where at least to were present 1-30 Jan (BAB). A **COMMON MOORHEN** was at Santa Margarita Lake 14-31 Jan (JS) and one continued at San Simeon State Park through 25 Jan (MLS). Several Carrizo Plain specialties were reported during the month including 35 **SANDHILL CRANES** on 1 Jan (RHZ,RZ) and a high count of over 200 **MOUNTAIN PLOVER** during the annual survey in Jan (KS). The rarest shorebird reported was the continuing **PECTORAL SANDPIPER** wintering at Morro Bay Estuary 5-16 Jan (KLP).

GULL THRU KINGLET: A huge flock of 3,000+ gulls at the mouth of Santa Rosa Creek in Cambria contained a second-year **GLAUCOUS GULL** and an adult **THAYER'S GULL** on 21 Jan (KLP). This has been an above average winter for **ANCIENT MURRELET** and this month six were seen from MDOSP on 6 Jan (MLS,KLP) and nine were seen from the San Simeon Cove Pier on 17 Jan (CH). A **SHORT-EARED OWL** roost on the Carrizo Plain contained an exceptional 25 birds on 14 Jan (SF). A **COSTA'S HUMMINGBIRD** near Cuesta College on 23 Jan (LT) likely wintered nearby. Always interesting to look at, a hybrid male **NORTHERN FLICKER** at El Chorro Regional Park on 16 Jan (NW) showed both red malar stripes and a red nape crescent.

THRASHER THRU WARBLER: **SAGE THRASHERS** were widely reported on the Carrizo Plain National Monument in January with six reported from 20-29 Jan (mob), mostly in the vicinity of Panaroma Road. Also widely reported, about 13 **LE CONTE'S THRASHERS** were recorded in similar locations including several around Panorama Road 12-20 Jan (RHZ), two along Van Metre Road on 20 Jan (MLS), and seven along Elkhorn Road on 25 Jan (BKS). A male **BLACK-THROATED GRAY WARBLER** continued in Morro Bay and was last reported on 6 Jan (KLP). Rare along the coast in winter, single **WILSON'S WARBLERS** were at Oso Flaco Lake on 14 Jan and at PSBOC on 17 Jan (CAM).

SPARROW THRU SISKIN: Typically seen in small numbers on the Carrizo Plain in winter, an exceptional count of 70 **VESPER SPARROWS** was tallied along the southern end of Soda Lake Road on 30 Jan (LS). Only one of the two large-billed **SAVANNAH SPARROWS** wintering adjacent to the Morro Bay State Park Marina was seen on 18 Jan (MLS). A **SWAMP SPARROW** was at Pecho Willows on 7 Jan (JSR) and a **WHITE-THROATED SPARROW** was there on 18 Jan (JSR). The female **SUMMER TANAGER** wintering at PSBOC was reported again 17 & 21 Jan (CAM,MLS). The first **YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD** reported this winter was a male at a feeder in Arroyo Grande on 30 Jan (JS) and the first oriole this winter was a **BULLOCK'S ORIOLE** at PSBOC on 17 Jan (CAM).

OBSERVERS: Thanks to the many birders who report their sightings including those cited above: Bill A. Bouton, Jan Bugge, Tom M. Edell, Sam Fitton, Cher Hollingworth, Curtis A. Marantz, Jonathon Mays, Todd McGrath, Kaaren L. Perry, Jim S. Royer, Brad K. Schram, Ross Schaefer, Joe Seals, Kathy Sharum, Gregory P. Smith, Maggie L. Smith, Liz Southworth, Bob W. Stafford, Mike D. Stiles, Douglas G. Stinson, Linda Tanner, Norma Wightman, and Roger and Ruth Zachary. For seasonal status 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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What type of membership would you like?

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Audubon Society combined membership

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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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