



Pacific Flyway

Newsletter of the Morro Coast Audubon Society

Volume 41 Issue 1, May 2009

The Future of Conservation: Audubon Assembly Report

This past March, four MCAS Board members were among more than 250 participants at the Audubon California Assembly. Although the event included a variety of workshops, field trips, and discussions, the highlight was a workshop titled “The Next Generation.” Youth from six Audubon chapters spoke eloquently (despite the fact that English was not the first language of many of these youth) regarding what they are learning about nature and how it is affecting their lives. The standing ovation these youths elicited brought tears to our eyes and hope for the future of conservation.

Following are other noteworthy highlights from the annual event.

Energy and Wildlife

California’s aggressive renewable energy portfolio leads the nation, but also brings conflict as wind, solar, and geothermal developers and utilities rush to utilize the federal and state legislative stimuli and apply for permits to develop wind and solar projects in the Mojave and Colorado deserts (as well as three solar projects slated for development here in SLO

County near the Carrizo Plain National Monument). Many of these projects will impact Important Bird Areas and affect other wildlife species as well. Audubon California will be monitoring and participating in the efforts to approve and develop these projects, with the following goals:

1. To protect places and ecosystems while encouraging development of appropriate renewable energy facilities;
2. To advocate for nature in the face of massive social challenges; and
3. To confront “friends” (legislators and others who may have supported environmental causes in the past, but now may be advocating massive renewable energy projects without regard to wildlife and other detrimental impacts).

For more information on the SLO solar farms projects, contact MCAS conservation co-chair, Andrea Jones.

Jan Surbey, Past President
jansurbey@earthlink.net

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“Youth from six Audubon chapters spoke regarding what they are learning about nature and how it is affecting their lives.”



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Welcome New MCAS Members

Arroyo Grande

Sue Allen

Francis C Reith

Betty Stubblefield

Cheryl Lynn Sullivan

Morro Bay

Myra Mize

Leona Thomas

Cyndie Wilson

Nipomo

Beverly Grossman

Sara G Standish

Paso Robles

Cliff Tucker

J Van Laeys

Mary Wells

Atascadero

Sue Owen

Janice Scarbrough

Susie Shirley

Avila Beach

William J Wagner

Los Osos

Sharon L Brown

Barbara Dunn

Julie O'Daniel

San Luis Obispo

Jane M Arends

Patricia Metzler

**Congratulations and
Welcome to the MCAS
2009-2010 Board,
listed at left.**



Brandt's Cormorants sighted March 24, 2009, at Piedras Blancas. Photo by Alan Schmierer.

Mojave Desert Field Trip

Saturday & Sunday, May 9-10

Leader: Tom Edell

Join us for two days of birding in eastern Kern County. The plan is to bird Butterbreedt Springs, California City and the Silver Saddle Resort at Galileo Park. We will catch the height of migration, and there is always potential for something unexpected in the desert during the spring. The group will meet in Mojave early Saturday morning; therefore, it is suggested that participants arrive in Mojave on Friday night. For information on this area, consult pages 74-79 of the ABA/Lane A Birder's Guide To Southern California, by Brad Schram. This trip will be limited to 12 participants. Please contact Tom at 995-1691 or tedell@aol.com to reserve a space or obtain additional information.

Salinas River Field Trip

Saturday, May 30, 7:30am

Leader: Roger Zachary

Join Roger Zachary 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 will be very easy with a distance no longer than 2 miles round trip. We will be birding in mixed oak woodland and riparian woodland habitat, and we expect to identify approximately 30 species or more. This trip is suitable for younger birders. Check out the website www.amwc.us. Space is limited. Please RSVP by calling Jamie Lien at 461-7217 ext. 17.

Field Trip at the Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Area

Sunday, June 14 and Sunday, June 28, 7-9am

Leader: Stephanie Little

Join Stephanie Little, State Park Environmental Scientist, for an early morning tour of the Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area. The tour will begin at the Oceano Campground Nature Center.

The Dunes are a geologically-unique region of sand dunes that serves as a haven for wildlife, rare vegetation, and humans past and present. Field trip 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

Community Program

Alaska: The Last Frontier

with Clayton Fogle

Monday, May 18, 7pm

El Chorro Park, SLOBG Oak Glen Pavilion

Join Clayton Fogle, a wildlife photographer whose work has been featured in such publications as National Geographic Resource Guide and ZooLife Magazine.

Clayton's presentation will transport us from Denali National Park to the Chilkat River, bringing viewers eye-to-eye with caribou, bald eagles, moose, and some of the most spectacular scenery on earth. Clayton was - and still is - overwhelmed by the beauty and danger of Alaska and believes his photographs poignantly tells the story of America's last wilderness.



All MCAS Community Programs are free and open to the public. Refreshments are provided.

Please bring your own mug!

Plover and Least Tern habitat closure. It is very likely that plover and tern nests and chicks will be showcased on this outing. Participants will also have the opportunity to see what Oceano Dunes is doing to manage and protect breeding snowy plovers and California least terns that nest within the park from March through September.

Space is limited. Please contact Stephanie at sjlittle@parks.ca.gov or 805-610-6229 to reserve your place. Participants will be riding in State Park vehicles and a waiver form will need to be filled out.

Great Backyard Bird Count Highlights Dynamic Changes in Where the Birds Are Across the Country

The 12th annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) featured two invasions: voracious Pine Siskins and a new crop of citizen-science participants! Bird watchers shattered last year's record by submitting more than 93,600 checklists during the four-day event, held February 16-19. Participants also identified 619 species and sent in thousands of stunning bird images for the GBBC photo contest. The Great Backyard Bird Count is led by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society.

One of the big stories coming from the GBBC this year was the massive invasion of Pine Siskins and White-Winged Crossbills over much of the eastern United States. These feisty little birds moved southward because of seed crop failures in their usual wintering grounds in Canada and the boreal forests. GBBC participants reported 279,469 Pine Siskins on 18,528 checklists, compared to the previous high of 38,977 birds on 4,069 checklists in 2005.

The GBBC continues to show declines in some common birds, especially grassland and shrubland species. Loggerhead Shrike numbers are down, and although numbers of Northern Bobwhites and Eastern Meadowlarks were both up slightly from last year, they are still being reported in fewer numbers during the GBBC than they were in 2004. These GBBC

trends are only preliminary views of what may be going on with these populations, and they must continue to be monitored.

Species reported for the first time during the GBBC included two oceanic species - Pink-footed Shearwater and Xantus's Murrelet, both in California.

Other first-timers included Baird's Sandpiper, Black-billed Cuckoo, and Blackpoll Warbler. Two rare Mexican species appeared on GBBC checklists from Arizona for the first time: the first Sinaloa Wren ever found north of the border, and a Blue Mockingbird.

For a more detailed summary visit birdcount.org. The next Great Backyard Bird Count is February 15-18, 2010! **The Great Backyard Bird Count is sponsored by Wild Birds Unlimited.**

Top 10 most-frequently reported GBBC birds:

- 1) Northern Cardinal
- 2) Mourning Dove
- 3) Dark-eyed Junco
- 4) American Goldfinch
- 5) Downy Woodpecker
- 6) Blue Jay
- 7) House Finch
- 8) Tufted Titmouse
- 9) American Crow
- 10) Black-capped Chickadee

Audubon California Assembly Reports...Continued from Page 1

State Parks Conservation Work

As Morro Coast Audubon education chair and environmental scientist at Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area, I was fortunate enough to attend the Audubon Assembly conference as part of my work enrichment. One of the Assembly highlights for me was meeting Ruth Coleman, Director of California State Parks, before she gave the keynote address on the opening night of the conference. Ms. Coleman gave a very inspiring talk that left me with a greater appreciation for our State Parks, as well as the work that I do as a park employee. Among her many messages that night, she spoke about the importance of finding collaborative projects between Audubon chapters and their local State Parks. She highlighted the eight years' work that Morro Bay State Parks has done with MCAS and their Snowy Plover docent and outreach program. She

also encouraged Audubon chapters to help their local parks develop bird checklists. This is already something that MCAS members are helping with on a local level. Ms. Coleman also praised the Oceano Dunes for their well managed Western Snowy Plover and California least tern protection program and the balance we have between recreation and habitat conservation. It was a great moment for me to hear such praise about the good job my colleagues and I are doing to help in Plover and Tern recovery.

If you would like more information about how you can help volunteer for MCAS and/or our local state parks, please contact me.

Stephanie Little, MCAS Education Chair
(805) 610-6229, sjlittle@parks.ca.gov

Eureka! The Birds of San Luis Obispo County - March 2009

ABBREVIATIONS: CPNM = Carrizo Plain National Monument; OFL = Oso Flaco Lake; PSBOC = Pismo State Beach Oceano Campground; and WRR = Whale Rock Reservoir.

WATERFOWL: Numbers decrease in March with most wintering waterfowl gone by mid-April. The BLUE-WINGED TEAL population in Baywood Cove was down to 25 on 31 Mar (TME). CANVASBACKS were reported at two locations with 21 at Whale Rock Reservoir on 7 Mar (TME) and a lone male at Harmony Headlands State Park on 13 Mar (DK). A male HARLEQUIN DUCK that flew in and landed off the mouth of Old Creek in Cayucos on 17 Mar (MLS) was likely a migrant as none were known to winter locally this year. Six female and three male WHITE-WINGED SCOTERS seen off the North Point Natural Area in north Morro Bay wintered in that area, but one seen from the San Simeon Pier 11-24 Mar (AFS) was previously unreported. A female/immature plumaged LONG-TAILED DUCK seen on Morro Bay 5 Mar (MLS) was presumed to be one of the birds recorded on the Morro Bay Christmas Bird count and the Winter Bird Festival. Two female HOODED MERGANSERS remained on San Simeon Creek all month (mob) and up to six were seen from the Bob Jones Path Bridge at Avila 6-26 Mar (mob). A female COMMON MERGANSER seen in flight from Hwy 58 and Bitterwater Road on 8 Mar (DGS) seemed out of place on the Carrizo Plain.

RAPTOR THRU DOVE: The latest FERRUGINOUS HAWK report involved individuals on the Carrizo and Elkhorn plains on 16 Mar (BAB). Typically unreported after February, 182 MOUNTAIN PLOVERS were observed along Panorama Road during a raptor survey on 10 Mar (KS). The LESSER YELLOWLEGS that wintered on Morro Bay was again in the Turri Road tidal ponds 20-31 Mar (DB,mob). Small numbers of WHIMBREL are found inland during spring migration, but 150 recorded on 26 Mar (DC) was significantly larger than any previous report. The second winter GLAUCOUS GULL found last month at the elephant seal rookery was last reported on 1 Mar (RHZ); however, a second year bird with a first year bird seen from Point Piedras Blancas on 25 Mar (RAR) and a second year bird seen from the Point on 31 Mar (RAR) may have involved the same bird. Though COMMON GROUND DOVE is somewhat regularly looked for in the citrus groves along Dana Foothill Road in Nipomo, one seen there on 30 Mar provided the first report this year (MLS).

HUMMINGBIRD THRU SHRIKE: Apparently the BROAD-BILLED HUMMINGBIRD that wintered in Arroyo Grande did not leave last month and was present off and on through 24 Mar (CL). A male BLACK-CHINNED HUMMINGBIRD that visited a feeder in Atascadero on 29 Mar (RHZ) was one day earlier than the County's previous arrival date. Three CALLIOPE HUMMINGBIRDS also preceded that species previous early date with males at Arroyo Grande on 22 Mar (BKS), Atascadero 28 Mar (RHZ) and Point Piedras Blancas 30 Mar (RAR). Two LEWIS'S WOODPECKERS were along Golden Hill Road in Paso Robles 7-31 Mar (TME) where they will likely

breed. A female yellow-shafted NORTHERN FLICKER in Los Osos 9-15 Mar may have wintered nearby (JSR). A Western Kingbird along Bitterwater Road on 7 Mar was one day off the county's early arrival date (MLS). A pair of Loggerhead Shrike with two fledglings on the Carrizo Plain 25 Mar, were well ahead of the county's previous early nesting date (DC).

SWALLOW THRU WARBLER: The earliest Purple Martin recorded at the Atascadero nesting site along Hwy 41 was on 21 Mar (MLS). Three were also found along Hwy 58 a little east of Santa Margarita on 28 Mar (MLS). Other early dates for swallows were NORTHERN ROUGH-WINGED on 1 Mar (MDH), CLIFF on 7 Mar (MLS), and BARN on 6 Mar (TME). Largely absent this winter, a VARIED THRUSH along Atascadero Creek on 21 Mar was the latest reported (MLS). The spring migration of SAGE THRASHERS through the County interior was noted by seven birds recorded on the Carrizo Plain between 16-30 Mar (BAB,MLS,AFS). A late March survey of known LE CONTE'S THRASHER locations at the Carrizo Plain National Monument turned up eight birds and two nestlings on 30-31 Mar (AFS).

SPARROW THRU GOLDFINCH: A 25 Mar survey on a private property on the Carrizo Plain turned up a LARK BUNTING and the first GRASSHOPPER SPARROW of the spring. This bunting may have wintered locally or been a spring migrant. Also heard and seen during the survey, but on 10 Mar, was a LAPLAND LONGSPUR (DC). The only WHITE-THROATED SPARROW report was of a continuing adult "white strip" form in Arroyo Grande on 18 Mar (MB). Several BLACK-HEADED GROSBEAKS arrived prior to the county's previous early date with the first found in See Canyon on 19 Mar (SB). An unusually large flock of 1,200 TRICOLORED BLACKBIRDS was observed along Bitterwater Road just north of Hwy 58 on 16 Mar (MLS). All reports of this imperiled species breeding locations are sought. A HOODED ORIOLE at Los Osos on 11 Mar (GPS) and a bright male BULLOCK'S ORIOLE at the Pismo State Beach Oceano Campground on 12 Mar (MLS) both provided this year's early arrival dates. An exceptional count of 75 LAWRENCE'S GOLDFINCHES was recorded at Quail Springs in the Carrizo Plain National Monument (AFS)

OBSERVERS: Thanks to the many birders that report their sightings. The following people are cited above: Dick Barth, Bill A. Bouton, Sara Bilsten, Mick Bondello, Dave Compton, Tom M. Edell, Marlin D. Harms, Dave Keeling, Cheryl Lish, Richard A. Rowlett, Jim S. Royer, Alan F. Schmierer, Brad K. Schram, Kathy Sharum, Maggie L. Smith, Doug G. Stinson, 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 me, (805) 995-1691 or tedell@aol.com.

- Tom Edell

Morro Coast Audubon Society Membership Application

FIRST NAME _____ LAST NAME _____

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PHONE _____ EMAIL _____

What type of membership would you like?

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(includes the Pacific Flyway newsletter)

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**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'd like to receive the *Pacific Flyway* newsletter via email (this saves trees and reduces MCAS printing and mailing costs).

___ I would like to be contacted about volunteer opportunities.

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

**For both membership types, mail form & check to:
MCAS, P O 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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