



Pacific Flyway

Newsletter of the Morro Coast Audubon Society

Volume 43 Issue 6, November 2008

Three Cheers & a Big Thank You to All Fund Drive Donors

Hip Hip Hoorah! Over 200 people attended the festive yet relaxed East Sweet Springs Celebration on September 21st. Among the honored guests were: Trust for Public Land representative Karen Frankel, State Coastal Conservancy representative Tim Duff, County Supervisor Bruce Gibson, and the previous owner of the acquired property, Kathryn Donovan. Guests enjoyed the delightfully sunny day complete with champagne toasts, cake, and tours of the new property.

And another Hip Hip Hoorah! As this newsletter goes to press (and with our annual fund drive announced only a few weeks ago), we have already surpassed the total donated for last year's fund drive. **Our total now stands at \$10,397** with donations designated for every available project and program: the MCAS general fund, educational

needs, the Hi Mountain Condor Lookout Project, the Snowy Plover Habitat Restoration and Conservation Program, the Winter Loon Survey, and Sweet Springs Management and Restoration, which received a sizable portion of the designated funds.

And the final Hip Hip Hoorah! There is still time to donate to any and all of the MCAS projects and programs and the Sweet Springs Fund. All contributions are tax-deductible and will be greatly appreciated not only by MCAS, but by birds and wildlife as well.

Last but certainly not least, a giant THANK YOU to all donors and to all who attended the Sweet Springs Celebration!

~Jan Surbey, MCAS President

Thank You to Our Annual Fund Drive Supporters*

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**see also Circle of Friends
Founding Members on page 3*

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Hours: Tuesday, 1-3pm & Thursday, 10am-Noon

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 1507, Morro Bay CA 93443

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Following the MCAS CREED: Research

While MCAS simultaneously works on all five areas of our CREED, November's focus is on RESEARCH. This month, our free community program will feature Dr. Francis Villablanca speaking about the research being conducted at the Hi Mountain Condor Lookout.

Also in November, the MCAS Winter Loon Survey begins its fourth season of the tracking and collecting of data on the loons that winter in the Morro Estuary. Volunteer opportunities are available for both of these projects. For more information, please visit the MCAS website or call the MCAS office.

Conservation
Research
Education
Expansion
Diversity

New Members

If you're looking for our new members column, you won't find it again this month. The National Audubon Society database is "migrating" to a new system, and we haven't had access to any updates for a couple of months now. Next month look for an extra-long list.

And if you're wondering why you received a postcard telling you that your membership with MCAS had expired but you're still receiving the Flyway, it's because I don't know who has renewed and who hasn't (unless you renewed through us). Please bear with us.

Rosalie Valvo, Membership Chair



Osprey with fish, photo by Mike Baird

Join the Sweet Springs Circle of Friends

MCAS's recently acquired East Sweet Springs property enlarges the existing Sweet Springs Nature Preserve from 24 acres to 32 acres.

With this accomplishment comes important responsibilities, including restoring wildlife habitat and building trails to make the property accessible to the public.

To ensure that funds will be available to care for this ecologically important area now and in the future, MCAS is offering opportunities to become a founding member of the Sweet Springs Circle of Friends, adding to an endowment to care for Sweet Springs in perpetuity.

Thus far, if all of the current founders joined hands to make a circle, we could perhaps encircle

a giant redwood tree. Our goal is to have enough founders to join hands and encircle Sweet Springs; more hands are needed!

Circle of Friends Founding Members

Molly Brown (in memory of Carrie Sprague)
Jim and Karen Clarke (in memory of Shirley Rubin)
Joanne B. Smalley (in memory of Stanford V. Smalley)
Nancy Williams-Koors (in memory of Donald Koors)
Michael Baxter & Cynthia Ryan Francis
Jan Surbey & Mike Cook
Holly Sletteland
Rosalie Valvo
Judy Iden

Founding donations begin at \$500 and are certainly available at higher levels. As a founding member of the Circle of Friends, your name (or the name of the person of your choice) will be placed on a plaque at Sweet Springs Preserve. Donors of \$5,000 or more will have a dedication plaque placed on a bench within Sweet Springs.

As always, monetary donations of ANY AMOUNT are greatly needed and appreciated. Let's enlarge the Circle of Friends and enhance the beloved Sweet Springs property for wildlife and people alike.

2008 Western Snowy Plover Nesting in San Luis Obispo Coast District of California State Parks

San Luis Obispo Coast District's Western Snowy Plover breeding season for 2008 statistics show that not as many plovers were in the area, resulting in fewer nests, a total of 147. Fewer nests did not affect the hatch success rate, however, which at 49% was one of our most successful years on record. Nest failures this year can be largely attributed to predations, high winds, and high tides/swells; still, the predation rate was the lowest it has been in the past seven years.



Snowy Plover, photo by Alan Schmierer

Data Summary for the 2008 Nesting Season:

147 nests District wide
49% successfully hatched
96 nests at Montana de Oro Sandspit
33 nests at Morro Strand State Beach
16 nests at Villa Crk Beach, Estero Bluffs State Park
2 nests at San Simeon State Park

Protection Measures Implemented:

- Symbolic fencing of nesting habitat
- Single nest enclosures at Morro Strand
- Enforcement of State Park policies
- Monitoring 5 days per week
- Interpretive & enforcement signage

Public Outreach and Education:

- Interpretive and regulatory brochures
- Workshops for local agencies
- Lectures and interpretive walks for local groups and the public
- Interpretive booth at Morro Strand on July 4th

Information provided by Regena Orr, Environmental Scientist for San Luis Obispo Coast District.

LOCAL EVENTS, PROGRAMS AND FIELD TRIPS

Annual MCAS Christmas Bird Count and Potluck Dinner

Saturday, December 20th, dawn to dusk

Registration due November 29th (see insert for details)

The Annual Christmas Bird Count will be on Saturday, December 20, 2008, rain or shine! It will be followed as usual with a potluck dinner at 6pm, which will be held again at the San Luis Obispo Botanical Garden Education Building, located at El Chorro Regional Park, off Hwy 1 across from Cuesta College. Take the park entrance road and drive past the Garden entrance to the new building on the right (across from a group picnic area).

Our Bird Count area is a circle 15 miles in diameter, centered at Turri Road and Los Osos Valley Road. Only species and numbers of birds seen within this area may be counted. Our past success in the national ranking has been the result of having many people in the field sighting birds.

Please look over the map of the count area, select your favorite spot or select "no preference," and send in your registration along with the \$5.00 REGISTRATION FEE. Although Audubon membership is not required, registration is required by National

Audubon for each participant. Rules will not permit us to accept a count from an unregistered observer. The results of over 1000 counts in North America, Latin America, the Caribbean and the Pacific Islands are compiled by the National Audubon Society and used to ascertain the annual distribution and fluctuation in numbers of North American birds. The \$5.00 fee goes toward the compilation and publication costs of the data in the American Birds Magazine, and each registrant will receive a copy of this interesting and beautifully illustrated report.

Your registration is requested no later than November 29th so that the sector leaders can properly organize for thorough coverage. Early registration makes smooth coordination possible, and allows registrants to pre-bird the area and become familiar with it. Your Sector Leader will contact you in early December to give you your assignment.

Count Coordinators: Bert and Elaine Townsend
(805) 543-1373 or betownsend@sbcglobal.net

Carrizo Plain Christmas Bird Count

Saturday, January 3, 8am

The Carrizo Plain Christmas Bird Count will be on Saturday, January 3, 2009. We will be meeting at the Community Center/Fire Station on Soda Lake Road at 8am. There is a \$5 fee for each participant.

Optional activities include scouting of the area the day before and getting up early on the count date to look for owls and watch the sunrise over the Temblor Range. At 8am, participants can expect to break into 7-8 parties and then re-group at 1pm for lunch and to check the number of species observed. Section Leaders dedicated to and knowledgeable of certain areas may be assigned. Parties may choose to bird the afternoon depending on need.

Bring your own food and water, and come with a full tank of gas. Weather conditions fluctuate. Please come prepared for both warm and cold

temperatures. Depending on the weather conditions, some participants might want to camp out or stay at Painted Rock Ranch the night before.

Official camping/lodging arrangements have not been made at this time. **Please contact Roger Zachary (see below) if you are interested and would like future updates.**

We look forward to a productive count as well as a great day of birding.

Roger Zachary
Carrizo Plain CBC Compiler
(805) 466-6222 or rzachary@charter.net

LOCAL EVENTS, PROGRAMS AND FIELD TRIPS

COMMUNITY PROGRAM

The California Condor Tracking Program

with Dr. Francis Villablanca

Monday, November 17th, 7pm
El Chorro Park, SLOBG Education Facility
(across from Cuesta College)

Morro Coast Audubon Society has provided funding to assist California Polytechnic State University in hiring summer interns to take part in the California Condor telemetry program at the Hi Mountain Condor Lookout. The three interns from summer 2008 gave a brief summary of their work at the September MCAS Community Program. Dr. Francis Villablanca, the interns' advisor at Cal Poly, will take a more in-depth look at tracking efforts, successes and setbacks in the condor recovery program, and related matters. You will come away with a greater understanding of Central California studies and activities oriented toward protecting this species, still among the most endangered of all North American wildlife.

Francis Villablanca, PhD, is a professor of Biology at Cal Poly, where he teaches courses in Ornithology and Mammalogy, among others. He has been a presenter at the Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival, Dune Quest, and other natural history venues in the area.

Get Ready for the Audubon California Assembly: The Future of Conservation

March 15, 16 and 17, 2009
Asilomar Conference Grounds
in Pacific Grove, California

The Assembly description and registration form are now online! If you register by December 11, 2008 you will save \$50. For more information go to <http://ca.audubon.org/assembly.php>

FIELD TRIP

Las Cruzitas Ranch, Santa Barbara County

Saturday, November 15, 8am-2pm
Leader: Peter Dullea

Meet in Buellton at the Albertson's Parking Lot in Buellton, CA (Hwy 246 east exit from 101) at 8am and caravan to Las Cruzitas, a private 1500-acre cattle ranch including oak grassland and sage-covered canyons. We will be met by Cruz Phillips, the ranch owner, who will lead the trip.

Expect to see Yellow-billed Magpies, Vesper and Lark Sparrows, Band-tailed Pigeons, Red-breasted Sapsuckers, Golden Eagles, and possibly Burrowing Owls, Prairie Falcons, Phainopeplas, Red-naped Sapsuckers and Lewis' Woodpeckers. At least 30 species are seen from the ranch house bird feeders alone, so folks who cannot walk far can sit in the yard and have a great time birding.

We will finish at about 2pm. Please RSVP to Peter (see below) indicating where you live for carpool arrangements. Bring lunch.

Peter Dullea
(805) 350-1304 or pdullea@hotmail.com



Red-Breasted Sapsucker, photo by Alan Schmierer

October Pelagic Trip: A Swell Time

Morro Coast Audubon's annual boat trip was held Sunday, October 5. The forecast of large swells and high winds did not keep a boatload of birders from venturing out, and the weather was not as bad as predicted. The wind never materialized and, though the swell was large, it was not a problem. Due to the forecast of high winds we decided not to go well offshore, but to head west and then northwest around the 100 fathom line. We eventually turned around off Arroyo de La Cruz. The air temperature was surprisingly warm by mid-day.

Mammals encountered along our route included Humpbacked Whale (15+), Common Dolphin, California Sea Lion, and Sea Otter. At least one Sunfish (*Mola mola*) was seen.

Pelagic species seen: Pacific Loon 2, Common Loon 1, Pink-footed Shearwater 700, Flesh-footed Shearwater 1, Buller's Shearwater 50, Sooty Shearwater 400, Black-vented Shearwater 25, Brown Pelican 100, Double-crested Cormorant 2, Brandt's Cormorant 175, Pelagic Cormorant 1, Osprey 1 (Morro Bay Harbor), Peregrine Falcon 1 (Morro Bay

Harbor), Red-necked Phalarope 8, South Polar Skua 1 (2 sightings), Pomarine Jaeger 5, Parasitic Jaeger 2, Heerman's Gull 50, California Gull 25, Western Gull 100, Sabine's Gull 1 imm., Elegant tern 5, Common Murre 200, Cassin's Auklet 2, Rhinoceros Auklet 12.

Tom Edell
Cayucos, CA



Brown Pelican, photo by Mike Baird

Together Green Volunteer Days

Sowing a Greener Tomorrow
Saturday, November 8, 2008
8:30am - 12:30pm
Sweet Springs Nature Preserve

This is the day we've all been waiting for! Fall is the ideal time for planting on the Central Coast and we're scheduled to do just that on Saturday, November 8th, from 8:30 to 12:30 at the Sweet Springs Nature Preserve in Los Osos.

John Chestnut and his class at the Los Osos Middle School have agreed to donate hundreds of native plants (that they grew themselves) to the Sweet Springs Nature Preserve. Plants they will be donating include California Aster, Woolly Blue Stars, California Fuchsia, Silver Dune Lupine, Sticky Monkey Flower and many more. John Nowak and Lionel Johnston have also generously agreed to donate a number of Coast Live Oak seedlings for planting. We need your help to get the plants into the ground and to make sure they get off to a good start with a deep watering and a blanket of mulch.

As always, we'll have munchies and drinks to keep you energized, and we still have plenty of free tee shirts and caps to raffle off. If you haven't seen the new eastern addition to the Sweet Springs, this is your chance. We'll take a short walk over there when the day is done. So just grab your gloves and come join us! If you need more info, call Holly at (805) 239-3928 or find directions to the preserve at www.morrocoastaudubon.org/spdirection.htm.

We have a couple of very successful volunteer days behind us, and once again, I want to thank all of you who have participated to date. I also want to thank our national sponsors, National Audubon and Toyota, for underwriting all of these events, including providing funding for refreshments, tee shirts, tools and coordination. And I am deeply indebted to our local sponsors, Miner's-Los Osos and Farm Supply-SLO, for making our funding stretch further by providing very generous discounts on our tools and supplies. Let's keep the momentum going and have the best turnout ever for this opportunity to sow a greener tomorrow!

Eureka! The Birds of San Luis Obispo County-September

ABBREVIATIONS: EBSP = Estero Bluffs State Park; MBSP = Morro Bay State Park; PSBOC = Pismo State Beach Oceano Campground; SMRM = Santa Maria River Mouth; and MDOSP = Montana de Oro State Park. Unless otherwise noted, birds reported as “photographed” can be found at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/tedell>.

WATERFOWL THRU PELICAN: Several waterfowl species continued through the month including the adult Greater White-fronted Goose at Oceano County Park (mob), adult Mute Swan at Whale Rock Reservoir (mob), male Redhead at PSBOC (MLS), and after a 45 day absence the male Harlequin Duck was seen again at EBSP (NW). Fall arrivals were three female plumaged and a male Blue-winged Teal at Sweet Springs Nature Preserve on 25 Sep (JC) and a female plumaged Hooded Merganser found at Whale Rock Reservoir on 12 Sep (CAM), which is 35 days ahead of this species earliest known arrival date in SLO County. Western and Clark’s Grebes nested at Santa Margarita Lake again this year where recently hatched young and incubating adults were still present on 15 Sep (JS). An interesting Brown Pelican sighting involved one seen over Spooners Cove Campground, MDOSP on 13 Sep that gained altitude as it circled to the east over Islay Creek and finally out of sight well east of the campground and the ridgeline (TME).

SHOREBIRDS THRU FLYCATCHERS: Two rare shorebirds photographed during the month were a juvenile American Golden Plover in southern SLO County at the SMRM on 11 Sep (CAM) and a Solitary Sandpiper photographed at the Arroyo Grande Creek mouth 14-15 SMRM on 14 Sep (CAM). A juvenile Semipalmated Sandpiper, possibly the second this fall, was photographed at SMRM on 11 Sep (CAM). A few Marbled Murrelets were sighted off the San Simeon Creek mouth with five on 12 Sep (CAM) and two more on 23 Sep (MLS). Few migrant nighthawks are found in fall, therefore one unidentified to species over the Elfin Forest in Los Osos on 14 Sep (DT) is noteworthy. Interesting flycatcher reports were of a Willow Flycatcher at Spooners Cove Campground, MDOSP on 20 Sep (MLS) and a Tropical Kingbird from 23-29 Sep seen perching on snags on the PSBOC “peninsula” and later at the Oceano Airport (DGS).

WARBLERS: This group of birds always provides fall highlights. This year 10 eastern species were reported in Sep and when added to the western species seen, account for a total of 20 warbler species. As is expected, all of the eastern “vagrant” warblers were along the immediate coast. The amphitheater area at MBSP campground hosted a hatching-year (born this calendar year) Chestnut-sided Warbler 20-28 Sep 2008 (JSR) and a hatching-year Blackburnian Warbler 13-14 Sep (CAM). Perhaps the best find of the month was a hatching-year Bay-breasted Warbler discovered along Santa Rosa Creek in Cambria on 20 Sep (OJ) that accounts for only the ninth county record. Five or six Blackpoll Warblers found along the coast between 10-28 Sep (mob) is

about average for Sep and Oct. Well below average, only one Black-and-white Warbler was reported with a probable adult female along Santa Rosa Creek on 12 Sep (CAM). One of the more abundant eastern warblers to appear in the county is American Redstart and six reports between 10 Sep and 24 Sep (mob) is not unusual. The four Prothonotary Warblers found in Sep is well above the average of about one per fall. A female was photographed at the mouth of Islay Creek, MDOSP 20-30+ Sep (JC), a male was seen in Monterey pines along the San Simeon State Park loop trail that begins at the Washburn Day Area on 20 Sep (DGS), a probable female was photographed at Arroyo de La Cruz on 23 Sep (AFS- <http://www.flickr.com/photos/sloalan/2882418149/>), and a male was photographed at PSBOC 28-30+ Sep (MLS). Northern Waterthrushes were found bobbing along Santa Rosa Creek in Cambria 12-14 Sep (BKS,DML) and the edge of the lagoon at PSBOC 19-28 Sep (MLS). A hatching-year female Hooded Warbler was in the native garden area at PSBOC on 23 Sep (BKS) and a hatching-year Canada Warbler was at Arroyo de La Cruz (TME).

SPARROWS THRU: Migrant juvenile Chipping Sparrows were photographed at the top of Deer Canyon in NE Arroyo Grande on 18 Sep (BKS- <http://www.flickr.com/photos/chaparralbrad/2868395925/>) and at the mouth of Islay Creek, MDOSP on 26 Sep (DLK). A Grasshopper Sparrow at EBSP on 13 Sep (MLS) stayed beyond the typical departure time in August and was presumed to be a lingering breeder. A White-crowned Sparrow that showed up at a feeder in Chorro Valley on 4 Sep (AnS) is presumed to be the county’s earliest arrival for the pugetensis race; the very similar appearing nuttalli race is not known to stray from the immediate coast. A feeder at MBSP hosted a male Rose-breasted Grosbeak on 16 Sep (MLS). Surprisingly, a Bobolink photographed at the mouth of Islay Creek, MDOSP on 26 Sep (DLK) provided the first county record since 2001. A report of four Lawrence’s Goldfinches along West Cuesta Ridge was the only one from western SLO County (AFS).

~Tom Edell
805-995-1691 or tedell@aol.com

OBSERVERS: Thanks to the many birders that report their sightings. The following people are cited above: Joyce Cory, Tom M. Edell, Oscar Johnson, David L. Keeling, Dave M. Lawrence, Curtis A. Marantz, Jim S. Royer, Alan F. Schmierer, Anna Schmierer(AnS), Brad K. Schram, Kathy Sharum, Gregory P. Smith, Maggie L. Smith, Mike D. Stiles, Doug G. Stinson, Jan Surbey, Linda Tanner, Dean Thompson, Norma Wightman, 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 (see above).

Morro Coast Audubon Society Membership Application

FIRST NAME _____ LAST NAME _____

ADDRESS _____ CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

PHONE _____ EMAIL _____

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

___ \$20 New/Intro

___ \$35 Renew Basic

*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.

C18
7XCH

MCAS Membership Details

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

P.O. Box 1507, Morro Bay CA 93443

805-772-1991

mcas@morrocoastaudubon.org

www.morrocoastaudubon.org

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2008 MCAS CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT SIGN UP FORM

The 2008 Morro Coast Audubon Christmas Bird Count will be on Saturday, December 20. Sector maps and descriptions are available on line at www.morrocoastaudubon.org. You may sign up online or by filling out and mailing in this form. When you register, please indicate how you wish to receive the information about your sector.

There are 54 sectors within the count circle, with 4 of these sectors requiring a canoe or kayak. Some sectors are relatively small, allowing you (the counter) to do more than one if desired. While it is desired to assign participants to requested sectors, it is not always possible. Please be flexible; sectors will be assigned as availability allows. The earlier you submit the better your chances of getting the sector you desire. The registration deadline is November 29, 2008.

Please send your completed form and a check (payable to MCAS) totaling \$5.00 for each participant. Check to be made payable to MCAS and mail with form to:
Elaine and Bert Townsend, 531 Lawrence Dr., San Luis Obispo, CA 93401

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

PHONE _____ E-MAIL _____

First choice sector # _____

Second choice sector # _____

Third choice sector # _____

Wherever needed _____

Birding skill? Experienced [] Intermediate [] Beginner []

(Beginners will be assigned with a more experienced birder.)

Would you be willing to census additional sectors? YES NO

Would you be willing to census your bird feeder? YES NO

Would you prefer to go out with a more experienced birder? YES NO

Experienced birders are encouraged to take along a beginner. Are you willing? YES NO

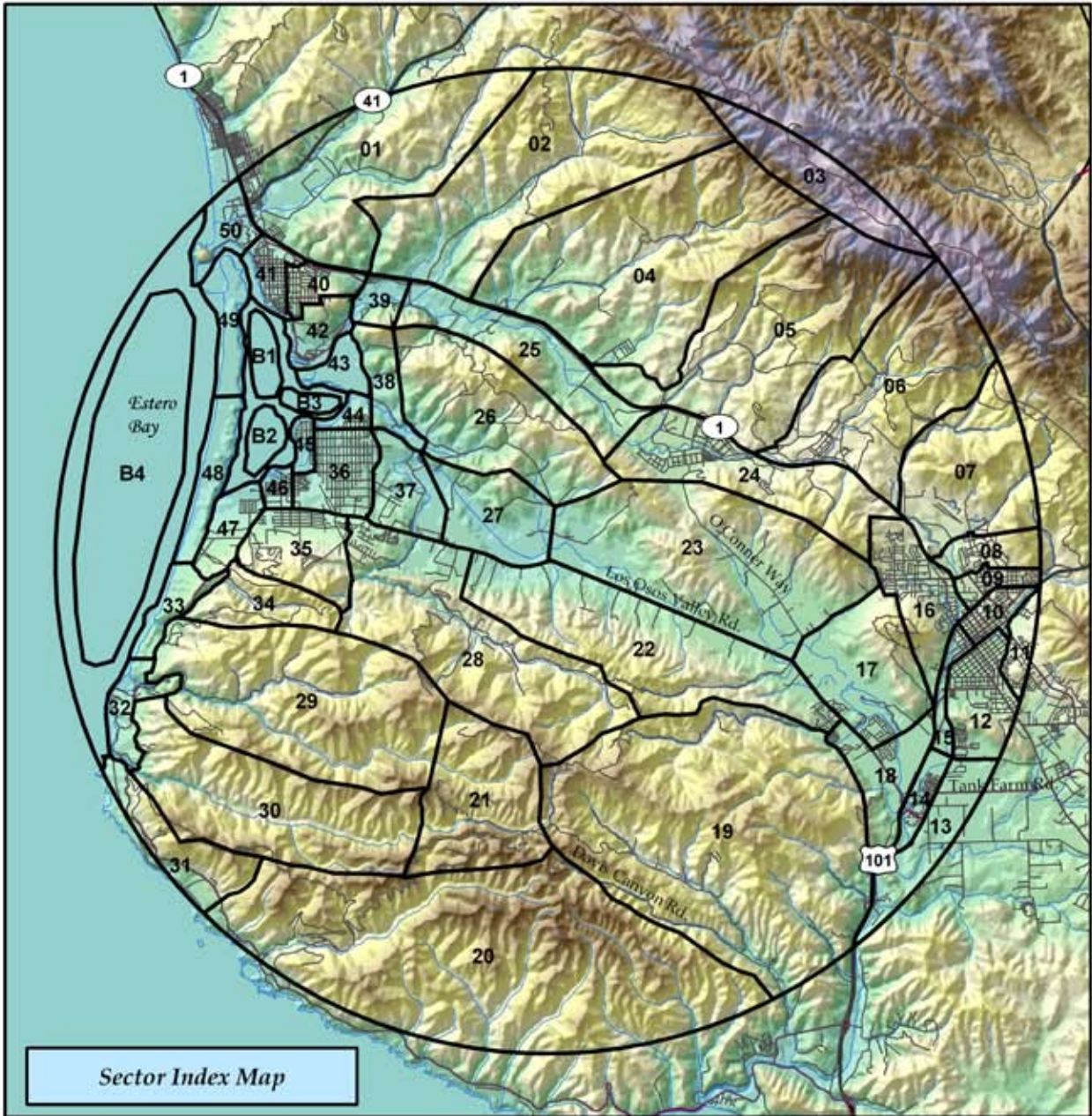
____ I would like to receive the maps and forms by mail.

____ I will retrieve them from the web site.

____ I have done the same sector many times and do not need a map or sector description.


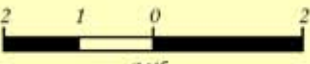
Other questions or comments:

MORRO COAST AUDUBON SOCIETY
CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT



Sector Index Map

 Sector Boundary
 Prepared by Jason Kirschenstein
 Rincon Consultants, Inc.
www.rinconconsultants.com



 Miles