



Volume 42 Issue 4 Morro Coast Audubon Society

September 2007

Our 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"

WAKE UP CALL TO ACTION

Birding hit the national news this summer when Audubon biologists announced the findings of 40 years of data: Since 1967 the average population of the common birds in steepest decline have fallen 70 percent. (See www.audubon.org/bird/stateofthebirds/CBID for detailed information as well as the related article on page 4 in this *Flyway* issue.)

Like the proverbial "canary in a coal mine", these birds are giving us a warning that "all is NOT well in our environment" and we need to address the threats to birds, other forms of life, and to the quality of our own lives.

At the national level, author Greg Butcher suggests preserving farmlands, grasslands, and wetlands; halting global warming; supporting sustainable forests; stopping invasive species; patrolling beaches; monitoring feeders; joining local bird counts; and getting involved with the local Audubon chapter and helping out at a local IBA (Important Bird Area).

MCAS is ready and available to help you "get active" in any or all of these suggested activities. San Luis Obispo County boasts varied habitat, such as Carrizo Plain, Morro Estuary, and MCAS-owned properties in Los Osos that are important for the recovery of declining species as well as protecting and providing habitat for additional plant and animal species. MCAS hosts Christmas Bird Counts in Morro Bay and Carrizo Plain and conducts bird counts throughout the year. Opportunities abound to help with habitat preservation and local bird counts.

Additionally, part of the recently completed MCAS Strategic Plan (*see page 3*) calls for MCAS to "set an example of ways to preserve and protect natural resources". To that end, MCAS is publishing the *Flyway* on 100% post-consumer recycled paper printed with soy ink, encouraging electronic subscriptions and communications, hosting "no waste" events, and will soon offer "sweatshop free" organic merchandise sporting the new MCAS logo. MCAS suggests that members examine their own lifestyles and make changes for the betterment of the environment. Ignoring this wake-up alarm is not an option for those committed to the preservation of life on this planet.

And remember, there is hope as the other birding item to hit the national news this summer was the delisting of the Bald Eagle as an endangered species. Call, Email, and GET ACTIVE! MCAS needs YOU!

(to sign up to receive informational alerts on local, state, and national conservation issues, go to

www.audubonaction.org/audubon/join.html) Jan Surbey MCAS President

MCAS Announces Office Hours

Morro Coast Audubon Society announces regular hours at its office at 601 Embarcadero, Morro Bay. (Upstairs in the Marina Square Building, next to the National Estuary Program Visitor Center). You may visit to see the office, get information, join or renew your membership, or purchase sale items during the following hours:

OFFICERS

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ejagger@charter.net

RARE BIRD ALERTS

see Eureka column April 2007, page 7.

To report a sick or injured wild animal including birds:

Pacific Wildlife Care 543-WILD

Reporting Marine Mammal Problems:

To report a dead sea otter south of Cambria 772-1135

To report a dead sea otter north of Cambria 927-3893

To report a live stranded marine mammal (805) 771-8300

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E-mail subscription to Flyway

Rosalie Valvo

We ask you to consider changing your Pacific Flyway subscriptions to e-mailed PDF files.

We're now sending out over ninety electronic Flyways each month! This enables us to do our part in conserving paper, a forest product.

If you haven't switched over yet, you can simply by e-mailing me at rvalvo@sbcglobal.net. You will need Adobe Reader on your computer, but if you don't yet have it you can download it free at www.adobe.com. You should also be aware that if you are connected on a dialup telephone it will take several minutes to download.



MCAS Office Hours

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Tuesdays 12:30pm-4:00pm

MCAS ALERT!

Get the latest Morro Coast Audubon news by joining our email announcement service. Members will receive timely notices of general meetings and programs, field trips, and other MCAS happenings.

To join, go to the [website at http://morrocoastaudubon.org](http://morrocoastaudubon.org) and click on the MCAS Alert! link. There you can sign up with an online form. You can also join by sending an email to Mike Stiles at mstiles@calpoly.edu and ask to join MCAS Alert

Our Website

www.morrocoastaudubon.org



Past issues of the *Flyway* are available at the website

e-mail:

mcas@morrocoastaudubon.org

POTLUCK and COMMUNITY PROGRAM

The Wealth of Birds and Wildlife Offered in Costa Rica

Presented by Jose Calvo

Monday, September 17th

Potluck 6pm – Program 7pm

South Bay Community Center in Los Osos
2180 Palisades Avenue, off Los Osos Valley Road



Costa Rica's diversity of birds and wildlife is no accident. Mountains sandwiched between the Pacific and Caribbean coasts cover more than half of the land area. These diverse habitats are home to more than 800 species of birds, 200 reptiles and 160 amphibians, and a wide variety of mammals.

Jose's presentation will include photos of rain and cloud forests, mountains and seashore habitats and some of the more remarkable birds and wildlife such as monkeys, sloths, and iguanas that call Costa Rica home.

Jose is one of the best naturalist guides in his native country of Costa Rica. Certified by the National Institute of Learning, Jose has been guiding tour groups in Central America for the past 17 years. He is a well-rounded naturalist with major interests in ornithology, rainforest ecology, climatology and geology. Photography and photo editing are his major hobbies along with adding to his personal bird list of 700+ species.

Bring your own place setting and a dish to share for the potluck! Refreshments will be provided by MCAS.



Questions: Cheryl Lensinski
clesinski@mbnep.org 772-3834

MCAS Strategic Plan 2007-2012

The MCAS board is proud to announce the completion of the strategic plan designed to guide the organization over the next five years. The plan encompasses five specific goal areas summarized by the acronym **CREED** (Conservation, Research, Education, Expansion, and Diversity) and includes ten addenda describing various MCAS programs and / or honored members.

MCAS is now seeking interested members to work on various committees needed to implement the plan and enable MCAS to accomplish its goals. Check out the plan on the MCAS website www.morrocoastaudubon.org. To help with the plan implementation, leave a message on the MCAS phone (772-1991) or contact any board member.

SEPT 2007 FIELD TRIPS

BASIC BIRDING FOR BEGINNERS: Over the next few months we will be having several field trips specifically designed for beginning birders. If you are interested, join the "MCAS Alert!" now!!!
TELL MIKE AT <mstiles@calpoly.edu> TO SIGN YOU UP FOR THE E-MAIL "MCAS ALERT!" SYSTEM

SEPT 15th (SATURDAY): "BASICS OF BIRD ID": This is a little different than our usual field trip tradition. Bill Bouton will give a workshop-type presentation at **Washington Mutual Bank, 1045 Los Osos Valley Road in Los Osos, from 9:30 to about 11:00AM.** This will be essentially the same talk that he has given for years for the Winter Bird Festival ... and sells out every year! He will talk about bird guides and binoculars, but most important will show you lots and lots of great slides of bird field marks to help you sort out how to identify a bird with a field guide. Bill blends great information, outstanding photos and humor into a package that novice birders will really enjoy!!! **Wheelchair accessible.** Not specifically designed for youths, but motivated **kids** will learn a lot. Space is limited, so **PLEASE RSVP** to Bill at bbouton@charter.net.

SEPT 2007 ANNUAL MCAS PELAGIC TRIP :

When: Sunday, **September 30, 2007** from 7:00 AM to 3:00 PM. At the time there are still a few spaces available.
For more information and an Application Form: contact Maggie Smith at milleniummaggs@charter.net or call her at 805-710-4356.



ALAN SCHMIERER, CHAIRMAN, FIELD TRIPS COMMITTEE

California's Vulnerable Common Birds:

Andrea Jones

This summer, National Audubon scientists announced the results of an analysis of 40 years of citizen science Breeding Bird Survey and Christmas Bird Count data. The results were alarming and revealed that some of the most common species are suffering the steepest national declines. Some species have nosedived by up to 80 percent in the past four decades.

Population declines for some of the most recognized birds in California echo the disturbing findings, revealing how local, national and global threats are combining to take a toll on birds, habitat, and the environment across the country. In a similar analysis of data over 40 years by Audubon California, Northern Pintail, Horned Lark, and Loggerhead Shrike topped the list with declines between 96 and 75%, mirroring national trends in the same species. For a full list of declines in breeding and non-breeding species in California, go the website: http://ca.audubon.org/birds_in_decline.html.

In San Luis Obispo County, some of the birds we consider common in open country habitats, or at least rely on spotting while we travel the back roads of the county, are also surprisingly on either the national or state declining birds list. For example, Lark Sparrow, a bird of open habitats ranging from grasslands to oak woodlands, has declined by 68% since 1967. Causes of decline are attributed to inappropriate fire, invasive annual plant species, and pest control activities. Loggerhead Shrike has declined by 76% in the non-breeding season, and breeding Western Meadowlarks by 50%. These birds all rely on farmland habitats with robust insect populations and cover of grasses or shrubs. Places like the Carrizo Plain National Monument are havens for these species as are many of the ranches still covering vast areas of San Luis Obispo County. Future land protection and wildlife friendly farming practices are important tools to either halt or reverse the declines in some of these seemingly common species.

There are also species that are also considerably common in the county that we do not know much about in terms of abundance, declines, etc. **PRBO Conservation Science and Audubon California are currently partnering to conduct surveys of the Long-billed Curlew in central California in the species' nonbreeding season to aid in its conservation.** These surveys aim to gather vital information on this curlew's population size and habitat preferences and to identify threats to its existence in this region.

The count will be taking place throughout the Central Valley, Carrizo Plain, and Imperial Valley. Morro Coast Audubon is helping to sponsor the Carrizo portion which will take place on the weekend of Sept. 15-16th.

If you are available and interested in helping on this survey, contact Andrea Jones at ajones@audubon.org or 805-772-1995. For more information, go to: http://ebird.org/content/ca/news/Citizen_Science.html



to our new members

Arroyo Grande

David Copley
Janey Dale

Atascadero

John Bullaro PhD
Gregg Cobarr
Martha Pedersen
Lennette Reece

Suzy & Doug Reynolds
Stephen Stahlman

Bob Tedone

Avila Beach

Mary Rossi

Cambria

Marshall McFarland

Stony Wilson

Cayucos

Bud Strauss

Clovis

Linda McAllister

Goleta

Lexie Brown

Los Osos

John Bryant

Deborah R Levi

Paul O'Connor

Sharon Robertson

Morro Bay

Kathy Faulkner

Peter & Sharron Favre

Nipomo

Alana M Hansen

Paso Robles

William Crawford

Doris Ross

Pismo Beach

Ruth Scheffer

Redondo Beach

Anastasi Development Co

San Luis Obispo

Marianne Bollinger

Scott Cooke

Ana H Ferrer

Alison D Goldberg

Quin Hauss

Margery G Johnson

Trevor Keith

Judith L Obermeier

Edwina Olt

Louis L Silva

Lois Thompson

San Miguel

Bruce Townsend

WHAT WE DID ON OUR SUMMER VACATION

While many MCAS members traveled near and far this summer, several MCAS events provided enjoyment and entertainment to those who were here in San Luis Obispo County. Higher Movement Drum Dance Troop performed at the MCAS BBQ at El Chorro Regional Park on June 18th. The group brought smiles to each and every one of the 85+ faces in the audience, as well as radiating an explosive energy.



June, July, and August brought the highly successful “TRIPOD” photography series to the MCAS Office and Outreach Center where receptions were held each month featuring member’s photographs with themes of wildlife, birds, and landscapes and botanicals. Classical guitar player Jeff Bright added his musical talents to each reception. Exhibits changed monthly and the proceeds from the sales of photographs (some as much as 100%) benefited MCAS.

MCAS thanks Higher Movement Dance and Drum Troop (lower picture), MCAS photographers (right hand picture, left to right): Alan Schmierer, Greg Smith, Garry Johnson, Janice Masilun, Walter Moore, Marlin Harms, (not pictured): Mike Baird, Kevin Cole, Bryan Cole, Bill Bouton, Cleve Nash, and Dick Boyd along with guitar player Jeff Bright for adding zest and fun to the summer months.

Jan Surbey



In memory of Brian Walton

Here are two tributes submitted by Steve Schubert, one written by himself and the other written by Dr. Eric Johnson, retired Ornithology Professor, Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, both are in memory of Brian Walton, Director of the Santa Cruz Predatory Bird Research Group.



Brian had a strong attachment and love for the Hi Mountain and Huff's Hole area. Brian found and reported nesting peregrine falcons at the Huff's Hole cliffs in the early 1970's, at a time when the species was very endangered and extremely rare throughout its range in the West. For several years a nest watch was set up by the Forest Service to protect and monitor this peregrine falcon nest site, and I was hired as one of the full-time nest guards at Huff's Hole in 1978, my first introduction to the Hi Mountain-Huff's Hole area. At the time, in the late 70's, Hi Mountain Lookout was still an active Forest Service fire lookout. For several years in the late 1970's volunteers from Morro Coast Audubon Society conducted a yearly Huff's Hole peregrine falcon nest watch, staffing and occupying Hi Mountain Lookout in advance of when the Forest Service lookout would come on duty during the fire season.

Over a period of several years Brian Walton and his SCPBRG staff conducted innovative management techniques at the Huff's Hole and Hi Valley peregrine falcon and prairie falcon nesting cliff sites, by removing and captive-hatching thin, fragile peregrine eggs (and encouraging double clutching at the wild nest), cross-fostering young peregrines into nests with prairie falcons, and setting up a hack box release site for young peregrines. Throughout the state these endangered species management efforts led to a recovering peregrine falcon population, once near extinction.

Brian spoke at the annual Hi Mountain Lookout Project open house event in October, 2005. We were very pleased that he was able to attend and see all the work accomplished at the lookout since he had last visited there many years ago. He spoke about the special connections with people and places that can develop and will be maintained over a lifetime, and lives that are changed and career paths established at a place as special as Hi Mountain.

Indirectly, the very concept and implementation of the Hi Mountain Lookout Project -now functioning as biological field research station and interpretive center- would never have come about without Brian's influence and the history of events that took place near there decades ago.

On July 17th several SCPBRG staff made a memorial climb to the top of Morro Rock. Brian Latta rappelled down to the southside peregrine nest site and collected eggshell fragments for laboratory analysis. This memorial event was attended by many of Brian Walton's family and friends, in tribute to a remarkable man and his lasting legacy

Steve Schubert

Volunteer Coordinator, Hi Mountain Lookout Project www.condorlookout.org

From Eric Johnson:

Brian was a graduate of Cal Poly in the early 70's. He was a student in my Ornithology class, and did his senior project with me on Cooper's Hawks in SLO County. He subsequently obtained a Master's degree from San Jose State, where Dick Mewaldt made him work on Song Sparrows in the hope that Brian would learn to look on 'dicky birds' as more than just raptor food! At Santa Cruz, Brian and his group were directly responsible for the recovery of the Peregrine Falcon on the Pacific coast, from California to Washington, and in the Cascades and the Sierra. Many of you worked for him as nest monitors, at Morro Rock, Diablo Canyon, the Big Sur coast, and especially Huff's Hole. Brian's program of captive breeding, fostering, nest manipulation (double-clutching), and hacking Peregrines was his life's work, and if you see a Peregrine you probably owe Brian a 'Thank You'. More recently he and his people have been actively involved in the recovery of the U.S. population of Aplomado Falcons. Brian had a special place in his heart for the Peregrines of Morro Rock, and swore that as long as he had anything to do with it the Rock would always fledge Peregrines. As far as I can recall he was true to his word.

Brian encountered health problems when in his early 30's (Type II Diabetes) but tried never to let that interfere with his work. He finally underwent a combined kidney and pancreas transplant, which was successful for years.

Brian was devoted to birds of prey, and a Conservationist who indeed truly made a difference. He will be sorely missed.

Eric Johnson,
Stuart, VA

Eureka!

THE BIRDS OF SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY – June/July 2007

- Snow Goose – 1-18 Jun, an immature that may be a hybrid Snow X Ross's was at Laguna Lake (MLS,TME,GPS)
Ross's Goose – 5 Jun-21 Jul, a summering bird has been seen at the Sea Pines Golf Course and on Morro Bay (MLS)
Cackling Goose – 16 Jun-21 Jul, a fairly dark one at Morro Bay was with eight Canada Geese (TME)
Mute Swan – 8-15 Jul, three adults continue on Whale Rock Reservoir, with only two there 26-31 Jul (TME)
Blue-winged Teal – 30 Jun, casual in summer, a male was at the Atascadero Wastewater Treatment Plant (TME)
Northern Shoveler – 30 Jun, an eclipse male was at the Atascadero Wastewater Treatment Plant (TME)
Canvasback – 16 Jun – 17 Jul, a male at Oso Flaco Lake was the first to summer locally (DML)
Black Scoter – 3 Jun, a very late male was seen from the San Simeon Pier (MLS)
Horned Grebe – 19-27 Jun, an alternate plumaged bird at Oso Flaco Lake provided the first summer record (MLS)
Eared Grebe – 6 Jun, rare in summer, an alternate plumaged bird was at Oso Flaco Lake (MLS) and 24 Jun, two alternate plumaged birds were off the Estero Bluffs (TME)
Northern Fulmar – 24 Jul, worn individuals were seen off Morro Rock and near Point Buchon (DVP)
Ashy Storm-Petrel – 24 Jul, one was seen 1/2 to 1 mile offshore south of Diablo Canyon (DVP)
Snowy Egret – 17 Jun, five large chicks were "branching" in a eucalyptus in front of the Morro Bay Power Plant (TME)
Red Knot – 23 Jun, an apparent second-year bird in partial alternate plumage was at Morro Bay (TME)
Franklin's Gull – 12-20 Jun, one in partial alternate plumage was at the mouth of Arroyo Grande Creek (MLS)
Royal Tern – unexpected in Jun, basic plumaged birds were seen north of Point Piedras Blancas on 14 Jun and off the Estero Bluffs on 24 Jun (TME)
Forster's Tern – 13 Jun, casual in Jun, two alternate plumaged birds were at Arroyo Grande Creek Mouth (BKS)
Black Skimmer – 31 Jul, one was at the mouth of the Santa Maria River (MPB)
Marbled Murrelet – previously unrecorded in SLO County in June: 2-16 Jun, up to eight were offshore between San Simeon Cove and the first vista point to the south (TME); 11 Jun, two were off Moonstone Drive (GPS); 13 Jun, one in basic plumage was off Shell Beach Road with an alternate plumaged bird there on 9 Jul (MLS); 24 Jun, two alternate and one basic plumaged bird were off the Estero Bluffs (TME); and 28 Jul, four were seen from the closed Piedras Blancas Motel (RHZ)
Ancient Murrelet – casual in summer: 2-3 Jun, two were off San Simeon Point (MLS,AFS,MDS) and 16 Jun, two were seen from the lone cypress tree vista point just north of Arroyo Laguna (DP)
Horned Puffin – The first major incursion along the Central Coast that started in late Jun with numbers diminishing in Jul led to the first influx of this into SLO County since 1975. It is difficult to say how many birds were involved, but reports suggest that as many as 14 birds may have been present in SLO County. 2-16 Jun, an immature offshore south of San Simeon Cove (TME) was likely one of the two seen later from San Simeon Point (MLS,AFS,MDS). On 3 Jun, at least two adults and two immatures were seen from San Simeon Point (MLS,BKS); 3 Jun-17 Jul, up to four immatures were off the lone cypress tree vista point located north of Arroyo Laguna (MLS); 6 Jun, one was photographed onshore along Morro Strand State Beach (AFS); 10-14 Jun, up to three immatures and an adult were along Moonstone Drive and Leffingwell Landing (M&TB,MLS,GPS); 14-17 Jun, one was offshore of Arroyo del Osos (TME); and 19 Jun two were seen from the elephant seal rookery (NG) where one remained through 21 Jul (DML,DV, SJ).
Common Ground Dove – 19 Jun & 8 Jul, two were heard calling along Dana Foothill Road in Nipomo (MLS)
Short-eared Owl – 30 Jul, one seen near Hazard Peak in Montana de Oro State Park provided the county's first summer record for the coast (JLR)
Saw-whet Owl – 17 Jul, a juvenile was about 2.5 miles back up the Coon Creek trail in Montana de Oro State Park (JLR)
Vaux's Swift – 26 Jul, at least two and possibly five were over the Atascadero Wastewater Treatment Ponds (AFS)
Winter Wren – 4 Jul, twelve plus birds singing at 10 locations along Coon Creek Trail in Montana de Oro State Park suggests breeding there again this year (AFS)
Yellow-headed Blackbird – 12 Jun, rare in June, four females at Oceano County Pond were later than expected (MLS)
Scott's Oriole – 25-27 Jun, a rare breeder in southeast SLO County, four were recorded near Caliente Peak (AFS)
Lawrence's Goldfinch – 16 Jun, a "small flock" was along the coast at San Simeon Cove (MLS)

OBSERVERS: Thanks to the many birders that report their sightings. The following people are cited above: Martha and Tony Bauer, Mark P. Brown, Tom M. Edell, Noah Gaines, Steve Jobst, Dave M. Lawrence, Cheryl Lish, David Pavlik, John L. Roser, Alan F. Schmierer, Brad K. Schram, Greg P. Smith, Maggie L. Smith, Mike D. Stiles, Doug G. Stinson, David Vander Plyum, Deb Villa, and Roger H. Zachary. 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*

The 11th Annual Central Valley Birding Symposium

will be held Nov. 15-18 in Stockton, Ca, but at a new location. We're in the brand spanking-new Sheraton Stockton and have sole use of their Convention Center.

Evening programs include Joe Morlan- "Digiscoping for Fun and Science: Confessions of a Reluctant Photographer", and Laura Erickson's "Owls- the Inside Story". We have many workshops such as, "Birding By Ear- Visually" by Arch McCallum, an e-Bird primer with Brian Sullivan, and one of Jon Dunn's famous birding ID tutorials. Clay Taylor is giving a digiscoping workshop and leading a post-Symposium field trip on Monday the 19th. Jon Dunn is leading a gull field trip on Monday as well.

For more info, check the website at www.cvbs.org , or contact Frances Oliver at hummer52@sbcglobal.net or (209) 369-2010. Cheri Pillsbury Central Valley Birding Symposium

Morro Coast Audubon Society Membership Application

Yes, I would like to join the Morro Coast Audubon Society and the National Audubon Society, and receive the Flyway and Audubon Magazine. Enclosed is a check payable to the NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY in the amount of:

\$15 Students/Seniors \$20 Introductory \$35 Basic(renewal) Other \$ _____

NAME _____ NEW MEMBER RENEWAL

ADDRESS _____ CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

PHONE _____ E-MAIL(optional) _____

Mail check and coupon to: MORRO COAST AUDUBON SOCIETY, P.O. Box 1507, Morro Bay CA 93443-1507. To check the status of your subscription or request membership changes call 1-800-274-4201

Check box if you are interested in volunteering Check box if you wish to receive special MCAS announcements and alerts by e-mail

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