

The Sanderling

Monterey Audubon Society
Annual Report
Fall 2024

Great Horned Owl
Danny Lee, @dlldlr



MONTEREY
AUDUBON
SOCIETY



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Brown Pelican, Parham Pourahmad

MISSION

The mission of the Monterey Audubon Society is to celebrate, explore, and conserve the birds and ecology of the greater Monterey Bay region.

Monterey Audubon Society engages in:

- a) Conservation, advocacy, and restoration projects
- b) Special and charitable events, including scholarships
- c) Presentations, field trips, classes, and publications

MESSAGES

President’s Message

Greetings Friends, Birders, and Lovers of Wild Places

This year’s Annual Report comes at a time of unprecedented growth for Monterey Audubon. Following the successful tenure of Monterey Audubon’s former Environmental Advocate and current conservation chair Amanda Preece, we now happily welcome Shannon Conner to the role of executive director. Our Board and volunteers are more engaged than ever, and new donors and members continue to join our efforts to celebrate and protect the birds and biodiversity of the greater Monterey Region.

This surge of engagement and energy comes at an opportune time. A recent headline in the Washington Post read that “there has been a catastrophic 73% decline in the average size of monitored wildlife populations in just 50 years (1970-2020), according to World Wildlife Fund’s (WWF) Living Planet Report 2024.” The scale of declines in wild animals and biodiversity is now much worse than we feared. Rather than despairing, in the face of this tragedy, I encourage all to lift their binoculars and to love and cherish what remains. And, more importantly, vote, donate, and educate with an eye and a heart toward protecting and restoring the birdlife and biodiversity of our homes. The old adage to think globally but act locally should take on new meaning for us all during these challenging times. Monterey’s birdlife is special, as witnessed by the impressive number of globally significant “Important Bird Areas” we are privileged to live near and enjoy. If we do not bear witness to and advocate for our birds and wild places, no one else will.

With gratitude for your support,
Blake Matheson
Board President

Executive Director’s Message

Hello new and old friends!

As I step into my new role as Executive Director of the Monterey Audubon Society, I am excited, inspired, and a little bit intimidated by the incredible community and legacy that this organization has built over the years. I’ve long admired the passionate work of our members and volunteers, whose dedication has made a tangible difference in the conservation of birds and wildlife in the Monterey Bay region.

With your support, I see tremendous opportunities to grow our impact through advocacy, education, and community engagement. Whether it’s Beginner Birding (which is where I find myself most often!), monitoring Black Oystercatchers, or ongoing conservation initiatives, our focus remains on fostering a deep connection between people and nature. Together, we can continue to advocate for the protection of birds and their habitats while expanding our reach to new audiences.

I am grateful for your support and look forward to working with you as we soar into the future!

Cheers,
Shannon Conner, MA/MSNPA
Executive Director

Blake Matheson



Shannon Conner



Black Oystercatcher, Ronnie McClean

Seawatch & MC Gives!
by Shannon Conner,
Executive Director



NINE YEARS OF SEAWATCHING AT POINT PINOS

Since 1855, the Point Pinos Lighthouse, located in Pacific Grove, has served as a beacon for vessels traveling along the coast. However, long before human influence, this location was also a beacon for our feathered friends migrating along the West Coast.

The unique geographic location of Point Pinos along the Monterey Bay brings the south-bound migratory seabirds closer to shore, making Point Pinos one of the few places to see this fall migration from land on the West Coast. Pair this geography with the

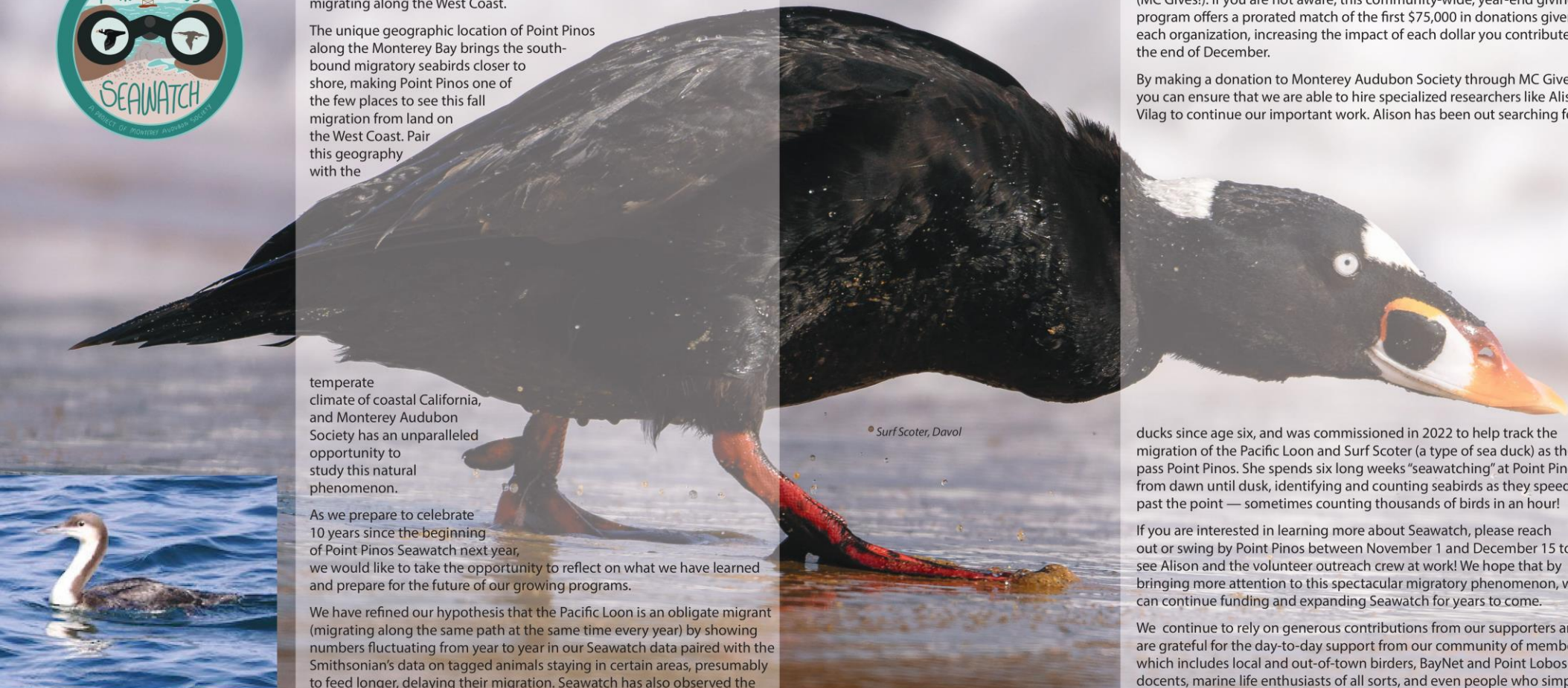
temperate climate of coastal California, and Monterey Audubon Society has an unparalleled opportunity to study this natural phenomenon.

As we prepare to celebrate 10 years since the beginning of Point Pinos Seawatch next year, we would like to take the opportunity to reflect on what we have learned and prepare for the future of our growing programs.

We have refined our hypothesis that the Pacific Loon is an obligate migrant (migrating along the same path at the same time every year) by showing numbers fluctuating from year to year in our Seawatch data paired with the Smithsonian's data on tagged animals staying in certain areas, presumably to feed longer, delaying their migration. Seawatch has also observed the numbers of migrating Surf Scoters decline year after year. Stronger and longer weather events will continue to blow ever more changes our way as



Common Loon, Parham Pourahmad



Surf Scoter, Davol



Pacific Loon, Bill Hubick

MONTEREY COUNTY GIVES!
Joining Together for Big Ideas

<http://www.MontereyCountyGives.com/Audubon>

offshore wind developments progress and climate change increases the importance of our annual count.

This year, Seawatch is the focus of our Monterey County Gives Campaign (MC Gives!). If you are not aware, this community-wide, year-end giving program offers a prorated match of the first \$75,000 in donations given to each organization, increasing the impact of each dollar you contribute by the end of December.

By making a donation to Monterey Audubon Society through MC Gives!, you can ensure that we are able to hire specialized researchers like Alison Vilag to continue our important work. Alison has been out searching for

ducks since age six, and was commissioned in 2022 to help track the migration of the Pacific Loon and Surf Scoter (a type of sea duck) as they pass Point Pinos. She spends six long weeks "seawatching" at Point Pinos from dawn until dusk, identifying and counting seabirds as they speed past the point — sometimes counting thousands of birds in an hour!

If you are interested in learning more about Seawatch, please reach out or swing by Point Pinos between November 1 and December 15 to see Alison and the volunteer outreach crew at work! We hope that by bringing more attention to this spectacular migratory phenomenon, we can continue funding and expanding Seawatch for years to come.

We continue to rely on generous contributions from our supporters and are grateful for the day-to-day support from our community of members, which includes local and out-of-town birders, BayNet and Point Lobos docents, marine life enthusiasts of all sorts, and even people who simply live nearby and want to help. You make this project special in many respects. Thank you.

TOP 5 RESOURCES FOR BIRDERS



Red-shouldered Hawk, Blake Matheson



Acorn Woodpecker, Brian Sullivan

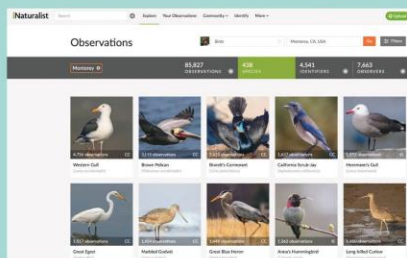
Five Digital Resources for Birding in 2025!

by Kyan Russell

Heermann's Gull Monitoring
and Seawatch

Watching birds can be as easy as appreciating their beauty and behavior. But accurately identifying birds can be difficult—painfully so. Fortunately, we live in a time where birding resources are bountiful and accessible. Each time I go birding, I will use most (if not all) of these resources to inform my expectations, rule out unlikely birds, and make the final call on an identification.

1



Researching what species to expect is very helpful when birding a new region. The **iNaturalist** website and app contain powerful filtering functions. I especially enjoy the ability to present a list of species for a given area that are sorted by the number of observations, giving you a bird's-eye-view of what species are actually being observed. For example, you can drill down to what alcid are being observed in Monterey Bay for the months of September and October, giving you an idea of what to expect on fall pelagic trips.

2

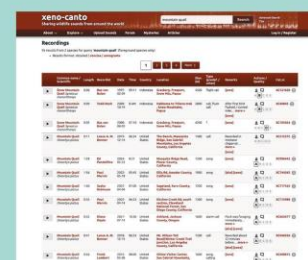
Alternatively, when traveling you may want to quickly see what species are being reported nearby. Were you granted an hour to spare for birding while on a family trip? The Explore tab on the **eBird** app is helpful for incidental birding in new areas, allowing you to filter for birds you may need for your life, year, county, or other lists you may keep. It can also help you find recently active birding hotspots in your area. Of course, the checklist reporting feature is invaluable when you want expert opinions on difficult identifications.



3
4
5

In the field, the **Sibley Birds 2nd Edition** app can be critical in distinguishing subtle field marks. Don't remember the differences between immature fall warblers? Compare selected species side-by-side with Sibley's beautiful and detailed plates. Of course, the portability of the app is a huge selling point—and no internet required!

The diversity of bird calls can be overwhelming when walking through a particularly birdy habitat. The overlapping calls of so many species and individuals is difficult to parse—in this situation I find the Merlin app to be very useful. By letting it record ambient sound, **Merlin** can often pick up birds that otherwise go unnoticed in the din. Merlin is also an excellent way to provide instant feedback for the beginning birder, but remember, identifications should be treated as suggestions double-checked against Merlin's built-in audio library.



While Merlin has an excellent library of bird calls available, some unusual or uncommon calls may be missing. Was that a Red-shouldered Hawk you heard, or a Steller's Jay doing its best imitation? iNaturalist and eBird both support uploading audio, but if you're looking to identify a call yourself, you may want to use the website **xeno-canto.org**. This astounding project aims to catalog the sounds of all species, and contains thousands of audio records available for your perusal. If Merlin suggests an identification but doesn't contain that particular call in its library, often xeno-canto will have it. It's also useful in filtering calls by range for species that vary by population.



Red-shouldered Hawk, Blake Matheson

Bird identification is hard—but not impossible! Having begun my birding journey in Monterey, I'm especially grateful to the wonderful birding community we have here. It seems as though every time I'm afield, I run into someone with whom I can share the joy of constructively working through a tricky identification. Thank you, and happy birding!

The Sanderling

Historic Newsletters Archived with Stanford

by Amanda Preece

Little Sanderling Editor and Conservation Committee Chair

Thanks to the diligence of past Chapter Historians, a former board member title for Monterey Audubon Society (MAS), I had a box of original copies of *The Sanderling*, the chapter's quarterly newsletter that began in 1944, in my apartment. Since MAS doesn't have an office, what to do with this collection became an important topic of discussion. After exploring options, I thought to email Stanford University's Hopkins Marine Station (HMS) Library and ask if there was a scanner I could borrow to digitize these documents. I received a prompt and enthusiastic reply from research librarian Dr. Amanda Whitmore, who kindly met with me to discuss options and explain that housing important historical documents about the natural history of the Monterey region is simply the function of the HMS library, and that not only would they accept the collection, they would also digitize it - at no cost to MAS! Simply amazing. Hours of work by librarian Dr. Melissa Tabbarah with metadata entry by MAS volunteer Madison Luken has given us high-resolution digital scans of these historic documents plus the ability to search for topics of interest within the collection.

As we reviewed past issues of *The Sanderling* for metadata, it was illuminating to discover the twining of topics and interests by past board members and other foundational institutions. For instance, MAS regularly reprinted excerpts from the Friends of the Sea Otter newsletter to share their conservation work and policy efforts. Legendary librarians, Alan Baldrige at HMS and Sheila Baldrige from Moss Landing Marine Labs, were also heavily involved with the administration of our local chapter.

While many birders live very much in the moment (this fall migration, this year, etc.), there is so much to learn and discover by looking back and reviewing how bird species were distributed in Monterey County, how birders traveled around and participated in the field study of birds, and in which conservation efforts the chapter has engaged. The concept of 'environmental history' is an idea that only fomented for me through this project, but the field itself is not new at all. Utilizing data from old whaling accounts or fishing records has allowed researchers to piece together a clearer picture of what the natural world looked like, and in many cases, the true scale of what we have lost. Learning which birds were common in certain locations in our county and realizing that they are now rare in that same spot, gives us insight into the rapid alteration of the landscape, and how much it can change, to the benefit or detriment of bird diversity, in a short span of time.

The Sanderling: Bulletin of the Monterey Audubon Society collection can be browsed online through:

<https://searchworks.stanford.edu/view/ww113sm4698>

Enormous thanks are due to:

HMS Library Staff Dr. Amanda Whitmore and Dr. Melissa Tabbarah

MAS volunteer Madison Luken

Past MAS Chapter Historians including Brian Weed, Don Roberson, and Connie Gottlund

Red-shouldered Hawk, Brian Sullivan

Hopkins Marine Station Scanning Project

Fun old bird names used in *The Sanderling*:

Marsh Hawk - Northern Harrier
California Woodpecker - Acorn Woodpecker
Linnet - House Finch
Common Redwing - Red-winged Blackbird
Baird's Cormorant - Pelagic Cormorant
Hudsonian Curlew - Whimbrel
Green-backed Goldfinch - Lesser Goldfinch



Pelagic Cormorant, Brian Sullivan

Scholarship and Essay Contest



Isabella Davi



American Kestrel, Blake Matheson

Monterey Audubon Society (MAS) celebrates and conserves birds and wildlife along the central coast in many ways. We actively encourage youth to become stewards of nature and help foster a community of young birders, who share similar ages and interest levels. Our Young Birders Club and other youth-focused outreach opportunities have engaged

135 youth over the last year and a half with funding provided by the 2023 Monterey County Gives Campaign.

We also support youth looking to further their education in the environmental/biological sciences. Scholarships are awarded to finalists in our annual essay contest - First (\$2,000), Second (\$1,500), and Third (\$1,000) places. Each submitted essay focuses on their reasons for choosing a career in the natural sciences. The Scholarship Committee also verifies their academic achievement in science and extracurricular activities. MAS has awarded \$44,500 in scholarships to graduating seniors in Monterey County over the last 14 years. We find it very encouraging to see so many students interested in environmental science.

Jan Scott

MAS Scholarship Chair

For more information about our Scholarship Essay Contest or to donate to our scholarship fund please contact info@MontereyAudubon.org

Excerpt from Winning Scholarship Essay

by Isabella Davi

This year Isabella is studying at Cornell University with a major in Biological Sciences. She joined the marching band, plans to join the birding club and is hoping to get involved in undergraduate research at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

"In middle school, I got my own binoculars for my birthday and I began exploring around local birding areas. I would crouch on a trail and stare at a dark-eyed junco in a bush, or walk squinting at the sun to identify the soaring raptor overhead. I began to record my observations in a journal and keep track of the species I saw in my Life List. Soon enough, my bookshelves became piled with field guides and textbooks...

I would crouch on a trail and stare at a dark-eyed junco in a bush, or walk squinting at the sun to identify the soaring raptor overhead.

In my sophomore year of high school, I began to explore the area of falconry and its educational and conservational value...

Now, since passing the exam... I am working with a juvenile American Kestrel who I named Erwin. I have been training Erwin to hunt the invasive species, European Starling...

As a wildlife biologist working to understand bird migration, behavior, and biology, I believe I would be able to contribute to the conservation of birds around the world..."

Share the Shore

Local Shorebirds Share a Common Struggle
by Amanda Preece
Little Sanderling Editor and Conservation Committee Chair

During the fall, we are flush with shorebirds! A short birding trip along Jetty Road in Moss Landing can get you at least twenty different shorebird species, but most of these birds are migratory, and they'll be leaving us in the spring, flying north or inland to different habitats to breed. But there are a couple of shorebirds that stay put who must then contend with the increased human use of the coastline in the summer months. I'm of course talking about our two favorite shorebirds – the Snowy Plover (SNPL) and Black Oystercatcher (BLOY).

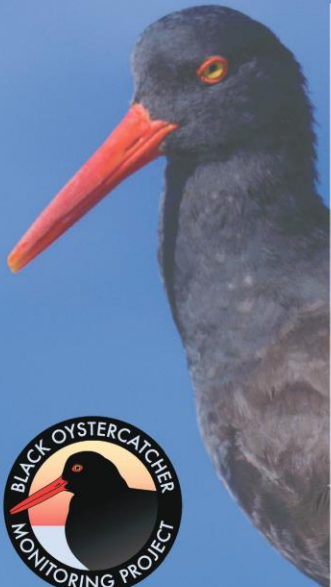
These two species have often been the focus of our outreach and conservation efforts. Both species suffer from the same challenges: they are ground nesters, they are sensitive to human disturbance (eek dogs! drones!), they reproduce somewhat slowly, and their populations have declined from historic numbers. Compared to last year, the 2024 nesting season showed lower numbers of fledglings for both of the SNPL and BLOY populations that we monitor. The plovers continue to have much higher numbers of individual fledglings than the oystercatchers (Table 1). Both species clearly need a little extra TLC out there during the spring and summer months, given their sensitivity and the increased use of the coast by humans during that same period.

The Snowy Plover Guardian Program is a partnership with California State Parks in which volunteers spend time either patrolling on foot or hosting outreach tables at beaches where Snowy Plovers nest. Guardians primarily conduct public outreach and education, and their training focuses more on communication and State Parks rules. The messaging often revolves around dogs and where they are and aren't allowed. But we also emphasize responsible park visitation and the need to follow all the posted rules, which are in place to protect the sensitive natural features of the coastal dune ecosystem. This includes our beloved plovers! This project is focused on public education, since, as a federally listed species, the Snowy Plover requires numerous permits to monitor them. Lucky for us, California State Parks and Point Blue Conservation Science have the biological monitoring of Snowy Plovers well covered!

Our Black Oystercatcher Monitoring Project started as an Audubon California statewide Black Oystercatcher census in 2011, and then thanks to general interest, it simply kept going! Each nesting oystercatcher pair on the rocky coastline between Pescadero in the north and Point Lobos in the south has volunteers who closely monitor the nesting process, keeping track of when nest building commences, when eggs are laid, hatch, and when chicks fledge. This project also has two paid seasonal biologists who help ensure that the data is accurate, write the monthly and end of season nesting reports, and monitor nests located in hard to access locations. This project has been in partnership with the Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History, and we've also had college interns from



Snowy Plover Guardian and photographer Yvonne Wright is a champion for the plovers. This plover, banded pink-violet/orange-green, hatched in 2018.



Black Oystercatcher Monitor Susan Lambert captured this Pebble Beach bird feeding its chick in 2023.



the Undergraduate Research Opportunity Center (UROC) at California State University, Monterey Bay work as paid interns.

The challenges plovers face are similar to the challenges the oystercatchers face. The only difference is that plovers are on sandy beaches and oystercatchers are on rocky beaches. The BLOYs have an advantage in that they are a longer lived species, averaging 15 years versus the SNPLs' 3-5 years. That information can help make the annual oystercatcher numbers look a little more reasonable when compared to the plover numbers.

If you'd like to get involved with either of these volunteer programs, please contact us! We can always use more shorebird stewards out on the coastline. Huge thanks to the sixty plus volunteers who dedicate hundreds of hours talking to the public or staring at an incubating

Oystercatcher, waiting to count how many eggs are under there. You are all appreciated!

We can be reached at info@MontereyAudubon.org

Table 1. Nesting results for the Snowy Plovers comes from California State Parks. The Black Oystercatcher data comes from our internal Monitoring Project.

SHOREBIRD PROGRAMS 2024 SEASON STATS			
Snowy Plover (<i>Anarhynchus nivosus</i>)			
Total Nests	Total Eggs	Total Chicks	Total Fledged
496	1488	639	141
Black Oystercatcher (<i>Haematopus bachmani</i>)			
Total Nests	Total Eggs	Total Chicks	Total Fledged
24	52	18	4

FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS



Marbled Godwit Ballet, Davol Tedder

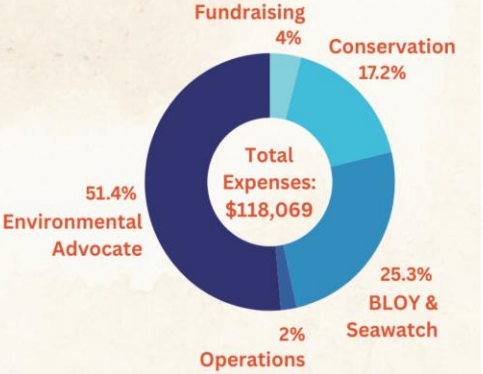
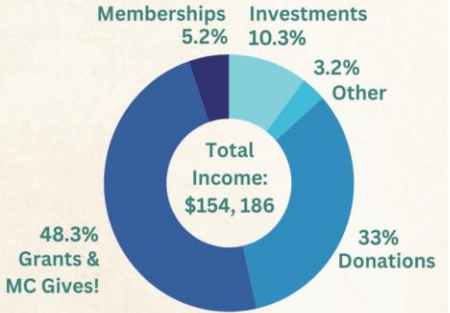
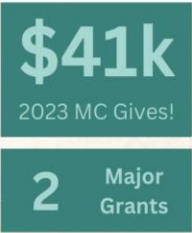
Our 2023-24 fiscal year ending in June of 2024 saw some record achievements in the Monterey Audubon Society's (MAS) financial picture. Not only have we continued to engender the confidence of one of our major donors in support of the Black Oystercatcher census program (a \$15,000 donation), we certainly must have done so for the community at large. We had another significant donor step up and fund our Pt. Pinos Seawatch program from last Fall with a \$5,656 donation. This was previously entirely self funded by MAS in the past. This philanthropic momentum continued as we had a very successful Fall 2023 fundraising campaign through the Community Foundation for Monterey County (CFMC) MCGives! matching program which netted approx. \$41,000 and an equally impressive membership renewal drive that garnered another \$23,000. These totals exceeded by far anything we had achieved in past fundraising.

In addition to the above community fundraising activities, Amanda Preece, our Environmental Advocate, had successfully acquired two significant grants, one from the Monterey Co. Fish & Game Commission Propagation Fund for a radio tracking system for monitoring bird/bat migration (MOTUS system-\$5,000). The other grant came from National Audubon for

approximately \$12,000 to do a map of our South County grassland Important Bird Areas (IBA). Another part of the grant was designing, implementing, and distributing a brochure to help with community outreach in underserved communities of south Monterey Co. and to foster a more diverse birding and conservation community.

One of the most encouraging aspects of our financial situation is the fact that when we embarked on having paid staff several years ago, our financial "nest egg" was approximately \$400K. We anticipated that at this point we would very likely have drawn down our asset base substantially until we could get some traction in the fundraising department. Thankfully this hasn't been the case as we ended the fiscal year at almost the same monetary amount as in FY 2021, approximately \$400K.

On a more personal note, I will be stepping down from the board as Treasurer effective Jan. 1, 2025. After serving our birding community for over 28 years as a board member, it has been an honor and privilege to have worked with so many dedicated and enthusiastic board members and birders. I will miss the camaraderie and shared love of our avian wonders, but it is time to let others in our community help lead our organization on to more ambitious goals and endeavors. Thank you to all the local birders, past and present, who have helped shape and guide Monterey Audubon over the years.



CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT



Celebrate the 125th Annual National Audubon Society's Christmas Bird Count.

The count occurs December 14 to January 5 every year.

Año Nuevo - December 28, 2024

Crystal Springs - December 14, 2024

Contact - Chris Macintosh cbc@sequoia-audubon.org

San Mateo County Bird Alliance (Formerly Sequoia Audubon Society)

Pinnacles National Park - January 5, 2025

Contact - Steve Lombardi hotrock175@gmail.com

- Daniel George dgeorge.nps@gmail.com

Panoche Valley - January 3, 2025

Contact - Debi Shearwater debi@shearwaterjourneys.com

Moss Landing - January 1, 2025

Contact - Kat Bailey kitkatbailey@gmail.com

Monterey Peninsula - December 27, 2024

Contact - Rita Carratello merops22@gmail.com

ADA sites available

Big Sur - December 15, 2024

Contact - Blake Matheson gypaetusbarbatus1@gmail.com

Santa Cruz - December 21, 2024

Contact - Alex Rinkert arinkert@gmail.com

- Nicholas Levendosky n.levendosky@gmail.com

Gull with Urchin, Davol Tedder

JOIN US



Brown Pelican, Parham Pourahmad

Support Monterey Audubon Society

Thank you for supporting the Monterey Audubon Society and our mission to protect the birds and habitats of Monterey County. Our work is made possible through the generosity of donors like you, who help fund crucial programs such as bird conservation, educational outreach, and community science initiatives. Your continued support ensures we can sustain these efforts and face growing environmental challenges together.

Please consider renewing your support or making a gift today. Together, we can make a lasting impact for Monterey County's birds and their future.

For more information about supporting us:

Email: info@montereyaudubon.org

Shannon.Conner@MontereyAudubon.org

Website: <https://www.MontereyAudubon.org/Donate>

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*Black-footed Albatross,
John Tsortos*

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