



The Sandpiper



August 2023

Redwood Region Audubon Society

www.rras.org

Creating Bird-Friendly Habitat at Wigi Wetlands

By Susan Penn

Tucked away behind the Bayshore Mall are fifteen acres of land which RRAS is slowly but steadily enhancing to create more bird habitat, as well as a more enjoyable experience for everyone who uses the Bay Trail, which passes through this property. Known officially as Parcel 4, and locally as the Devil's Playground, this area was formerly used by the timber industry. When Eureka built the Bay Trail in that area, many concrete structures were simply crushed, and their remnants leveled to create fill. Walking this stretch of the trail, you will still see remnants of the industry.

And yet this area, which we call Wigi Wetlands, is full of life. While Scotch broom, fennel, white sweet clover, pampas grass, and other opportunistic introduced plants have established strong footholds, native plants, and the birds that live in balance with them, thrive in a few areas, and are making strong returns in areas that we have cleared of invasives over the past few years since we assumed responsibility for organizing a monthly cleanup.

We have about ten acres of wetlands. Some of this is directly on Humboldt Bay. Old pilings often boast cormorants, gulls, terns, and other visitors. At low tides shorebirds feast on the muddy shore, oblivious to old pipes and bricks. Humboldt Bay gum plant grows in abundance along the shore, and owls clover, pickle weed, cinquefoil, and arrow grass cover many areas of the wetlands nearby.



July 2020 Trey and Jessica start to remove the white sweet clover that obscures the view of the bay, and surrounds the twinberry, which can just be seen poking through. Photo by Susan Penn

When we cleared the Scotch broom and white sweet clover from this area, we also discovered a handsome twinberry, and as we watched, a Cedar Waxwing landed, just feet away from us, enjoying the now-visible berry-laden branches.

There is a large, square upland area that was filled with Scotch broom and pampas grass three years ago. The bay was hidden behind this tall, dense growth, but monthly brigades of weed-wrench-wielding volunteers cleared all but the last remnants, opened up the view of the bay for us, and the view of the meadow for the White-tailed Kite that often sits atop a small, dead alder at the meadow's edge. Nestled under the invasives were some stalwart natives—coyote brush, yarrow, and asters appeared here and there. With the area now cleared, more



July 2023 Sweet clover removed! The twinberry is thriving, the bay is visible, and grindelia, arrow grass, and silverweed provide ground cover. Photo by Gina Rogers

of these are appearing, and we have finally started planting more natives that should thrive in that location. Among them are native lupines and plantains, beach strawberries, bunch grasses, and poppies. This is so exciting!

There is lots left to do, and everyone is welcome to join this adventure. Tasks include (but are not limited to) cutting seed heads and flowers from invasive plants that we can't remove right now, digging and extractigating recalcitrant old-growth broom, collecting seeds from native plants, and, unfortunately, cleaning up trash. Come fall, we will be planting more natives. We offer tools, information, human and avian companionship, snacks, and the great feeling that comes from doing something beneficial to wildlife.

We hope you'll join us on one of our work days! We meet the fourth Saturday of the month, from 9-11 a.m. behind Walmart. (See the August 26 field trip below.)

RRAS FIELD TRIPS IN AUGUST

Every Saturday, 8:30-11am. Join Redwood Region Audubon Society at the Arcata Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary for a free guided field trip with an experienced birder. Bring binoculars and scope if you have either and meet the trip leader at the end of South I Street (Klopp Lake) for easy-to-walk trails, a beautiful view of Humboldt Bay, and the opportunity to hear and see a diverse range of species. August marks the beginning of shorebird migration, and the ducks that call the marsh home for the winter should be trickling in as well. Construction is ongoing at the marsh, so if I Street is closed at any point, meet at the closure.

Trip leaders for August: **August 5**, Michael Morris ~ **August 12**, Chet Ogan ~ **August 19**, Dan Greaney ~ **August 26**, Rob Fowler

More Field Trips

Sunday, Aug 13, 9-11am. Join trip leader Ralph Bucher for a walk at the Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge. This two-mile walk is along a wide, flat, gravel-packed trail easily accessible on foot. Just outside of town, this refuge offers access to tidally influenced habitats including mudflats, riparian vegetation, conifers, and bay, which host a variety of geese, raptors, shorebirds, and waders. Email Ralph to sign up at [thebook\[at\]reninet.com](mailto:thebook[at]reninet.com).

Wednesday, Aug 16, 6-7:30pm. Enjoy the extended light of the summer months and join RRAS to see what the marsh birds are up to in the evening! Trip leader Janelle Chojnacki will guide a walk through the oxidation ponds on this midweek, evening walk. Meet in the Arcata Marsh Interpretive Center parking lot off G Street to add some birds to your weekday.

Sunday, Aug 20, 9-11am. Meet Ralph Bucher at the foot of Del Norte Street for a walk along the Eureka

waterfront. This walk is on a flat, paved trail that is **wheelchair accessible**. Shorebirds and ducks that overwinter in the bay will be on their way in August, so keep an eye out for early migrants. Email Ralph to sign up at [thebook\[at\]reninet.com](mailto:thebook[at]reninet.com).

Saturday, Aug 26, 9-11am. Wigi Wetlands Volunteer Workday. Help restore a section of the bay trail behind Bayshore Mall. Bring water and gloves, we provide tools and snacks. Contact Jeremy Cashen at Jeremy.cashen@yahoo.com or 214-605-7368 for more information.

Sunday, Aug 27, 8:30-noonish. Ken Burton will lead an outing to Samoa Dunes Recreation Area, where we'll bird the thickets, tree groves, and shoreline of this BLM property looking for migrant songbirds, shorebirds, and seabirds. Be prepared for about a mile of walking. Meet Ken (shrikethree@gmail.com) at the Bunker Road parking lot (40.770056, -124.222326). Contact Ken with your location if you want to carpool. Optional picnic lunch at the end.



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President's Column

By Gail Kenny

Our monthly public speaker programs start up again in September. We will most likely be meeting on the third Thursday of the month. Look to the September *Sandpiper* to see the topic and speaker. In the meantime, we have lots of field trips on our schedule. The RRAS Board of Directors continues to meet in the summer along with several of our committees. The Conservation Committee is working to comment on plans for the offshore wind energy terminal in Humboldt Bay, among other things. The CatBird Committee has installed the model catio at the Arcata Marsh Interpretive Center and is working with Friends of the Arcata Marsh and the City of Arcata on plans to install interpretive panels at the marsh to educate the public about keeping cats from free-roaming to protect birds and other wildlife. There are also plans to install a catio at the Sequoia Park Zoo for public education.

My husband and I spent some time camping near Mount Lassen and in Plumas County in late June. Our first night near Lassen was in a small out of the way Forest Service campground. This area burned two years ago in the Dixie Fire. There were many burned and dead trees, along with some surviving trees with active logging going on. It was very green on the ground with lots of wildflowers blooming.

I heard Cassin's Finches singing, which are common breeders in forests located between 3,000 and 10,000 feet elevation. We were treated to a male Cassin's Finch dropping from a branch down to

the ground and catching and eating a big bug (see photo). It's a real treat to see them since I'm not often in their habitat.

Other bird highlights of the trip were White-headed Woodpecker, Red-breasted Sapsucker, White-breasted Nuthatches, and Mountain Chickadee in our campsite in Plumas National



A Cassin's Finch eyes its meal.
Photo by Gail Kenny

Forest. Nearby were singing Fox Sparrows, Warbling Vireo, Yellow Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Dark-eyed Junco, and Spotted Sandpiper. Next, we moved onto a campground near Quincy at a wilderness trailhead. We heard lots of birds, including Mountain Quail. I saw MacGillivray's Warbler, Green-tailed Towhee, Dusky Flycatcher, Spotted Sandpiper, Common Merganser, Western Tanager, and more. I heard a robust dawn chorus one morning. It was a fun time apart from falling and injuring my knee (which recovered quickly) and the biting midges (gnats) that bit us around the eyes and on our hands all day long. The flowers were abundant! I took lots of photos and am still working to identify them.

Your membership in Redwood Region Audubon Society supports our field trips, programs, education and conservation efforts.

Membership in our chapter is just \$15 a year, and you will receive *EcoNews*, with the *Sandpiper* inserted. To join our local chapter, either fill in the form below, and mail it with a check for \$15 made to RRAS, or join through our website, RRAS.org.

To join National Audubon and receive the *EcoNews* as well as *Audubon* magazine, either join through our website link at RRAS.org or follow the instructions below.

Membership Application

Please enroll me as a member of the National Audubon Society and of my local chapter. Please send *Audubon* magazine and my membership card to the address below.

My check for \$20 is enclosed. (Introductory offer)

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____

ZIP _____

email _____

Local Chapter Code: C24

Please make checks to the National Audubon Society. Send this application and your check to:

**National Audubon Society
P.O. Box 422250
Palm Coast, FL 32142-2250**

**LOCAL CHAPTER:
Redwood Region Audubon Society
P.O. Box 1054, Eureka, CA 95502**

Conservation from Local to Global

By Jim Clark

The National Audubon Society, of which Redwood Region Audubon Society is a member, started out with the specific goal of stopping the slaughter of Great Egrets for the purpose of supplying the fashion industry with plumes for women's hats. The result was resistance from the industry, including the murder of a game warden. Eventually, through the application of education, science, and law, the Great Egret was protected. Similarly, our chapter protected egrets locally by getting a crook put in the bridge over Humboldt Bay to bypass an egret rookery. Both of these egret conserving accomplishments had specific goals applied to one species in defined areas; Florida and Humboldt Bay. Fast forward to 2023 and conservation issues for our chapter have become much more

complicated and global in scale.

We are facing anthropogenic climate change that is threatening bird species globally, and part of the solution is a project that also threatens some bird species on a hemispheric and local scale. Both the threats and the partial solution are of a scale that is difficult to grasp. Although wind power is only part of the solution to climate change, National Audubon Society and our chapter recognize that economic and political realities make it the most feasible one now. The end goal of the Humboldt Wind Energy Area (HWEA) is to produce about ten times as much energy as can be produced by the Humboldt Bay Generating Station.

The first of the three Humboldt Wind Energy projects is the Humboldt Bay Offshore Wind Heavy Lift Multipurpose Marine Terminal (terminal), a project of the Humboldt Bay Harbor, Recreation

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October Minty, Arcata High

Great Egret: Iconic Bird of Many Names

by Hal Genger, Drawings from Godwit Days 2023 Student Bird Art Contest

How do you tell an American Egret, Common Egret, Great White Egret, Great White Heron, and a Great Egret apart? You don't! They are the same bird with a different common name, depending on what decade or in which nation you observed them. The American Ornithological Union has taken on the task of standardizing common names to avoid the confusion of many vernacular names for the same bird. Although I first learned this bird as the Common Egret, currently the Great Egret is the preferred name for this majestic "long-necked white bird." *Egret* was derived from *aigrettes*, the long plumes which

grow out of their backs during breeding season. These plumes were sought after for hats and almost led to the bird's demise. The National Audubon Society was formed to stop this needless slaughter of egrets and other birds. Redwood Region Audubon originated to stop destruction of the egret and heron rookery on Tulawat Island when it was threatened by the construction of the Samoa Bridge.

Linnaeus corrected the naming problem by using the unique two-word Latin names to identify an organism and also depict its genetic relationship to other members of their group. Thus, the Great Egret, which I learned as *Casmerodius alba* is now *Ardea* (= *heron* in Latin) *alba* (= *white* in Latin) to show its closer relationship to the Great Blue Heron, *Ardea herodias*.

The Great Egret is a large wading bird with solid white plumage, a long S-curved neck, yellow bill, and black legs. During breeding season, they develop green skin coloring between their bill and eye and long plumes called *aigrettes*. Males and females look the same. When gracefully flying, they curve their neck by bringing the head back to the shoulders and let their legs trail behind.

I began admiring this stately bird when I started grad school at Humboldt State University (Cal Poly Humboldt). It was a common site along any route I took from Eureka to Arcata — Highway 101, Old Arcata Road, Samoa Boulevard. They like to hunt near water, whether it is marine, estuary, or fresh. They also stalk prey in pastureland and upland areas. Often, they are seen standing on the banks or up to their belly in water waiting for prey to pass. They have been known to swim after prey. Great egrets eat a wide variety of prey, from fish, amphibians, reptiles, insects, crustaceans, small birds, eggs, to small mammals. At very high tides, I've seen them go after rails which have lost their hiding place in the submerged marsh.

Great Egrets nest in social groups of egrets and herons and choose sites near the tops of trees, but can choose bushes and, in rare cases, use the ground. Males select the area and use sticks to build a platform. After pairing up, the male, or male and female, complete the nest with more pliable material. The nest ends up around three feet across and a foot

or so deep. Females lay an average of three to four eggs. They usually have one brood per year but can add eggs during the brood. Eggs hatch in 23-27 days and chicks remain in the nest another three weeks. Nestlings can be competitive, and the older more dominant ones may peck subordinate ones to death.



Maya Losh, Union Street Charter

Great Egrets are widely dispersed in the US and worldwide. They can migrate with the more northern ones heading south for the winter. Because the hat and clothes industry decreased the US population of Great Egrets by 95 percent during the late 1800s and early 1900s, the Massachusetts Audubon Society was formed around 1896 to help protect the birds by discouraging acquaintances from buying items with bird feathers. Within a few years, sixteen more Audubon groups were formed and started to lobby the government to stop harvesting birds for garments. They had some successes with state legislatures and in 1913 succeeded nationally with the passage of the Migratory Bird Act and again in 1918 with passage of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. These acts limited or closed legal hunting seasons and put restrictions on importation of birds. Great Egret populations started to increase in most areas and expanded northerly. The conservation organization Partners in Flight estimates this continent has 9.5 million breeding Great Egrets and thus low conservation concern. So thank you, Audubon, for helping keep this bird around for us to admire.

CONSERVATION, CONTINUED

and Conservation District (District). The terminal will assemble and service the 600-foot-high wind turbine devices (WTDs) for offshore wind farms from Morro Bay to Coos Bay. The terminal is a large industrial development that will involve deepening parts of Humboldt Bay for assembly and staging of the WTDs. Lighting, habitat restoration, and alternative site analysis are other environmental impact aspects of the project that need to be addressed in the draft environmental impact review. Our comments to the District are due by August 3.

The remaining two parts of the wind energy project are the environmental assessment of the offshore HWEA development, and the power transmission system from here to the Western grid.

Both are huge projects about three and five years in the future.

Homelessness: Many Suggestions, Few Solutions

Recent studies have shown that the main cause of homelessness is loss of housing due to loss of income and that many of the problems homeless people have is the result, not the cause of homelessness. We have seen that clearing out, aka "sweeping," homeless encampments moves the environmental damage to another area and increases total wildlife habitat damage. This points to a near-term solution of stabilization. A common theme

from RRAS members and board is that green spaces designated for wildlife and public enjoyment should be off limits to camping outside of permanent recreational public campgrounds. Although we are not a social service nonprofit, we need to advocate for an effective way to solve the homelessness problem to protect urban and suburban bird habitat.

The Conservation Committee meets at noon on the fourth Tuesday of the month on Zoom (<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87263853457?pwd=RHNKR0FRWEJ4WHJlZlZFWDB4M0FFZz09>). You can also contact Jim Clark at clarkjimw@gmail.com.



Enjoy expansive vistas while birding the area around Lord Ellis Summit. Photo by Kathryn Wendel

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

Breeding Bird Survey Reaps Rewards

By Kathryn Wendel

Birding as a recreational activity can be a very rewarding experience, but the citizen science aspect of it takes it to a whole other level. The Breeding Bird Survey falls into both categories of recreational and scientific, and both are equally rewarding. The North American Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) is a joint project between the United States Geological Survey and the Canadian Wildlife Service that monitors regional trends in breeding bird demographics across the United States. Originally started on the East Coast of the US in 1966 in response to the impacts of the pesticide DDT on bird populations, it has since spread all over the United States and Canada. Nearly 3,000 routes are currently actively surveyed, including several here in Humboldt County.

This July, I had the privilege of surveying a route near Lord Ellis Summit that has been in existence since 1972, but had been inactive for several years. A BBS route runs about 25 miles long, with a quick three-minute survey every half mile, totaling fifty points altogether. I started my survey shortly after 5 a.m., and right off the bat I heard a Yellow-breasted Chat whistling, tooting, and croaking from the depths of the dense vegetation along the creek by my starting point. Anyone familiar with chats knows that they serve as an important indicator species for riparian habitats. If you have breeding chats on your river, then you know your river is in relatively decent shape—not to mention, chats are charismatic birds that are always a challenge to find, since they are more likely to be heard than seen.

As I slowly worked my way up the mountain out of Redwood Valley, I heard plenty of Swainson's Thrushes and Warbling Vireos. I was hoping for an owl in these predawn moments, but the closest I got were the hootings of Band-tailed Pigeons, which were

plentiful. As I worked my way over the summit and started down Snow Camp Road through clear-cuts and primary growth forests, I was thrilled to hear Willow Flycatchers *fitz-bewing* along with a healthy dash of warblers actively singing and foraging. I saw both Hermit and MacGillivray's Warblers, all strikingly beautiful in brilliant breeding plumage. From there, my route wound west and south towards Maple Creek, and by now the morning had warmed up and bird activity was starting to drop. I emerged from the forest into farmland, and along a fence near a small rock quarry, I heard an unusual bird. My first thought was a Lazuli Bunting, but once I got my binoculars on a singing male perched high on a pine sapling, I was amazed to see it was actually an Indigo Bunting! Not just a county life bird for me, but also a new bird species for the route. Pleased with my find, I kept on birding down the valley until I made the turn onto Maple Creek Road, where the hot, sunny grassland changed into cool, shady redwood forest, and the Pacific-slope Flycatchers (I mean, Western Flycatchers) became the new bird voice of the forest in addition to the ever-present Swainson's Thrushes. Wilson's Warblers were also still active and singing, but it was getting late in the morning and I had reached the end of my route. A bit dusty, yet well satisfied, I ended up with 49 species total along a 25-mile transect, and had added valuable new data to an old route.

And that's where the big reward of citizen science birding comes in: typically, I just bird on my own for fun, but as a trained field biologist turned avid birder, I also have the skills to contribute to a large-scale, long-term avian monitoring program whose data is used to provide an index of population abundance that serves conservation efforts of research and wildlife managers across the continent. There are still several available routes locally in Humboldt County; so if you are inspired and would like more information on how you can get involved in this wonderful program, please visit <https://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs/>.

DID YOU KNOW?

From the CatBird Committee

Some states are proposing legislation to contain free-roaming cats. For example, Maine's legislature recently introduced language to include cats in anti-trespassing language that

already exists for dogs. Although the bill failed to pass, it represents a common-sense solution to address public health, wildlife conservation, and other concerns, and may serve as an appropriate starting point for effective cat management in other states. Thanks to the Maine legislators who championed this wildlife-friendly legislation. (Source: American Bird Conservancy)

four hundred brown birds and one elegant egret

four hundred brown birds sit on their island in the marsh all facing the same direction their big chests puffed out like capital letter Cs they sit one behind the other in a thick congregation almost entirely covering the long island the place to be today for the members of the faith

a flock in flight of seven with tilted wings nose dives near my head their necks stretched out they nearly knock me off the spit so close to my face do these whirling birds come I could almost reach up and touch the soft delicate feathered brown bellies

the squadron fans out as it arrives at the island each pilot lowering down like a helicopter into the group as the nearby fellows move over to receive their late arriving brothers and sisters mildly murmuring irritation with a quiet scolding of wings

out there now completely merged into the text of look-alike birds sits the seven member chapter that nearly took my head off the great volume which is the collective body has taken their brethren back into the fold to sit facing the same direction with nothing more to do today nothing at all but make another C

standing alone neck extended one white egret gazes down over the church-going flock of brown birds all facing the other way he turns in slow motion this proud and singular bird loops in easy ambulation to the island's other end pulling up at the shallows he waits with razor-thin beak motionless ready to pluck out willowy flash of light crossing the dark silt.

– Daniel Duncan, Arcata

Mark Your Calendars!

The annual **BIRDATHON** for 2023 is October 1-10. Go birding for a day and get a chance to win prizes! Look for more information in the September *Sandpiper*, or go to yournec.org/birdathon