



# The Sandpiper

November 2023



**Redwood Region Audubon Society**

[www.rras.org](http://www.rras.org)

Join us *Thursday, November 16, at 7:00 p.m., for an in-person and virtual presentation that answers the intriguing question:*



Andrea Tuttle presents a story of ecological recovery in New Zealand.

## Where the Heck Are the Snares?

### The Story of Ecological Recovery in the New Zealand Sub-Antarctic

*Presented by Andrea Tuttle*

The remote islands south of New Zealand are home to many endemic species of birds and marine mammals, but all have been subjected to the ravages of sealers and penguin-oil dealers bringing cats, rats, and rabbits. After several false starts in eradication efforts, and many millions of dollars later, victory has finally been declared in the Macquarie and Campbell islands. Andrea takes us on an exciting travelogue of a Christmas 2022 trip with National Geographic that offers spectacular scenes of the flora and fauna of these windswept outposts and tells the story of hard-fought recovery of the endemic Campbell Teal,

long declared extinct.

Andrea Tuttle is a retired bird duffer, having received much of her birding education on walks with RRAS. Professionally her career has focused on forest and climate policy, including attendance for twelve years as an Observer at the UN Framework Committee on Climate Change negotiations, appointments on the California Coastal Commission and North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board, and service as the first woman director of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

The live program is held at Six Rivers Masonic Lodge, 251 Bayside Road, Arcata. It will be simultaneously Zoomed—go to [rras.org](http://rras.org) for the link. Drinks and goodies will be served at 7:00 p.m., the program begins at 7:30.

## RRAS Field Trips in November

**Every Saturday, 8:30-11am.** Join Redwood Region Audubon Society for a free guided field trip at the Arcata Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary, one of the best birding spots in our area and host to a great diversity of migratory and overwintering species. Shorebirds especially can be abundant here, so be on the lookout for avocets, sandpipers, yellowlegs, godwits, curlews, and multi-species murmurations as well as the waterfowl species that call the marsh home in the winter. Meet at the end of South I Street (Klopp Lake) for easy-to-walk trails and a beautiful view of Humboldt Bay.

*Trip leaders for November:* **Nov 4**, Gary Friedrichsen ~ **Nov 11**, Carol Wilson ~ **Nov 18**, Dan Greaney ~ **Nov 25**, Kathryn Wendel

### More Field Trips

**Sunday, Nov 12, 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, with

a variety of habitats that host ducks, raptors, and shorebirds during the winter. Email Ralph to sign up for this field trip at [thebook\[at\]reninet.com](mailto:thebook[at]reninet.com).

**Sunday, Nov 19, 9-11am.** Ralph Bucher will lead a walk beginning at the foot of Del Norte Street in Eureka. This walk is on a flat, paved trail that is **wheelchair accessible**. Be on the lookout for cormorants, loons, and grebes in the bay and, depending on the tide, a variety of shorebirds along the trail. Email Ralph to sign up for this field trip at [thebook\[at\]reninet.com](mailto:thebook[at]reninet.com).

**Saturday, Nov 25, 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](mailto:Jeremy.cashen@yahoo.com) or 214-605-7368 for more information.

**Sunday, Nov 26, 1:30-4:30pm.** North Spit jetty with Ken Burton. The Humboldt Bay jetties are thrilling, if sometimes daunting, places to bird. They provide terrestrial access to the nearshore pelagic realm. We'll hit the North Jetty at low tide in search of Rock Sandpiper and other specialties. Be prepared to walk about two level miles on slippery surfaces and

some sand. Meet Ken ([shrikethree@gmail.com](mailto:shrikethree@gmail.com)) at the southwest corner of the Lincoln Road loop in Samoa Dunes Recreation Area, where the new restroom is (40.761532, -124.227010).

## Redwood Region Audubon Society Research Grant Application

RRAS is offering a research grant (one award per year) of up to \$500 for studies on birds. This grant is available to undergraduate and graduate students at Cal Poly Humboldt and College of the Redwoods. Its purpose is to encourage learning about birds in Humboldt, Trinity, Siskiyou, and Del Norte counties and to support projects that will advance knowledge of them. Applications are due on December 1, 2023. Please check our website, [rras.org](http://rras.org), for application details.



## CHAPTER LEADERS:

President – Gail Kenny .....gailkenny@gmail.com  
Vice President – CJ Ralph .....707-822-2015  
Secretary – Jeremy Cashen .....214-605-7368  
Treasurer – Catherine McNally.....  
Past President – Hal Genger .....707-499-0887  
DIRECTORS-AT-LARGE:  
Ralph Bucher .....707-499-1247  
Harriet Hill .....707-267-4055  
Chet Ogan .....707-442-9353  
Gary Friedrichsen .....707-822-6543  
Kathryn Wendel .....  
Kate Rowe .....925-391-0468  
Eric Nelson ..... etn3115@icloud.com

## OTHER CHAPTER LEADERS:

Conservation – Jim Clark .....707-445-8311  
Membership – Ralph Bucher .....707-499-1247  
Facebook – Kate Rowe .....925-391-0468  
Field Trips – Janelle Chojnacki .....janelle.choj[at]gmail.com  
Arcata Marsh Walks - Ken Burton shrikethree@gmail.com  
Programs – Eric Nelson .....etn3115@icloud.com  
Publicity – Kate Rowe .....925-391-0468  
Publications – CJ Ralph .....707-822-2015  
Website – Susan Penn .....707-672-3346  
NEC Representative – CJ Ralph .....707-822-2015  
Historian – Gary Friedrichsen .....707-822-6543  
RRAS Web Page .....www.rras.org  
RRAS Listserve .....groups.io/g/rras

## THE SANDPIPER:

Newsletter Coordinator .....Judi Brown  
Proofreader/Copyeditor .....Pia Gabriel  
Layout .....Gary Bloomfield

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## Rare Bird Alert!

*Contributed by Gina Rogers*

Wondering how birders know about those rare birds they chase? Well, there's an app for that (as well as online access and an alert system), all provided by Cornell Lab of Ornithology's eBird program. You can sign up for email alerts (daily, or hourly ones if you dare), simply by going to ebird.com, clicking on the Explore tab, and scrolling down to the Alerts button. Click on that, then go to the section titled 'Rare Bird Alerts' and enter 'Humboldt, California' (a list of suggestions appears as you type). Then you can choose View to see recent ones, or click the green Subscribe button to get emails sent to you. To subscribe and for some of the other Explore functions, you will need an eBird account, but it's free and easy to sign up using the 'Create account' button on the eBird home page.

When I first moved to Humboldt County, I followed the map locations they provide with each rare bird listing. It was a fun way to explore the county. More recently, I'm always checking my daily list to see if there have been any new sightings of the condors.



## President's Column

*by Gail Kenny*

According to BirdCast, fall bird migration in Humboldt County really gets going in September, continues into October, and tapers off after that. Just before, we have a period when the local breeding birds get quiet and not a lot of rare birds are about. But come September, things get exciting!

I'm not an active birder finding rare birds, but I do enjoy the chance to see "other people's birds." In my younger years and when my life list was smaller, I was more active trying to see the rarities. Now, when a rarer bird is reported, I will check my life list to see if I have seen the species before. If it would be a "lifer" I make more of an effort to chase the bird.

To be most successful chasing other people's birds, you must be ready to stop what you are doing and quickly change plans to chase the bird. The more time that passes from when the bird is first seen, the less likely it is to be found in the same place. That is a priority for some birders, but for me it works better to pick and choose when chasing the bird fits in with my schedule.

There is an emotional boost that comes with seeing a rare bird, especially a lifer. First there's the excitement of the possibility of seeing the bird, studying the field guides and reports and photos of the bird, then the intensity of the pursuit. When the bird is found, there's the focus on observing the bird for a long enough time to clearly identify the species, then a boost of joy from having the experience. If the bird is missed, there can be disappointment or letdown.

A Ruff showed up near the mouth of the Little River near Moonstone Beach early in September. Though they are seen in Humboldt, I'm guessing almost annually, I had not yet seen one. I was working that morning but had time in the afternoon to look for it, and the location wasn't far from home. When I arrived in the parking lot several people had just come

back from seeing the bird. One guy showed me the photos he had taken and described where he left it. It was about a mile hike through dry sand with some ups and downs, which was hard. After navigating around a wet area, I saw some shorebird wings fluttering in a hard-to-see spot towards the Little River bridge. I kept going to the coordinates for the Ruff, but there



Bar-tailed Godwit (left) with a Marbled Godwit at Clam Beach

were no shorebirds to be seen. I hiked over to the beach and though there were shorebirds there, no Ruff was with them. I finally gave up and hiked back to the car. I'm waiting for the next Ruff I chase to be in an easier to access area.

Lately I have been striking out regularly chasing other people's birds. But I recently visited the Russ Ranch Wetlands with a birding buddy to see the American Golden Plover reported there. The first birds we observed in the wet area were two American Golden Plovers. That was very satisfying. We observed a Peregrine Falcon flush the birds and later heard the plovers calling while flying around the ponds.

While we were observing the golden plovers, there was a report of a Bar-tailed Godwit at Clam Beach. A few hours later I looked for it on the way home, but the beach was socked in with fog and I was tired and out of time. I tried again four days later and, Success! It's not a lifer, but a good bird to observe in Humboldt County. I even got some decent photos.



## The Wandering Talliers' Big Day Report from the 8th Annual Tim McKay Birdathon, October 1-10 Story and photos by Gary Friedrichsen

Morning had a tough time breaking through this morning. Our group met in Sunny Brae and the fog/overcast gave us dim prospects for the day. But with coffee and smiles we headed out in the dark towards the Mad River fish hatchery via North Bank Road amid a surprising number of early morning commuters. Our team, consisting of Laurie Lawrence, Bill Rodstrom, Daniel Burmester, and myself, began slowly, just like the morning, as we worked to hear and see some of the common birds. A Song Sparrow here, a Robin overhead, the "pik, pik" of a nearby Downy Woodpecker. No owls were chiming in so we continued to the fish hatchery and realized, not for the first time or the last, that we were about two weeks late for a number of birds that had nested in this area. A little daunted, we pressed on and came upon a very active feeding flock of Yellow-rumped Warblers and Black-capped Chickadees with a few tag-a-longs mixed in. A faithful Bewick's Wren called from its hidden perch and a Great-blue Heron made an unlikely image perched high and well concealed in a large Cottonwood. But we were



The Wandering Talliers: clockwise from left:  
Daniel, Gary, Laurie, and Bill

### A Big Boost for Wigi Wetlands

A big thank you to Humboldt Bay Marathon for donating \$1,000 to Volunteer Trail Stewards (VTS). VTS plays an important role in the restoration efforts of Wigi Wetlands, as well as many other trail cleanups. They offer financial support for tools, snacks, and equipment. Rachael Garcia, VTS Coordinator, also provides invaluable aid through volunteer recruitment, data

management, recognition events, and, most importantly, general support for anything we might need. The money that Humboldt Bay Marathon donated will specifically help RRAS's goal of renting an excavator in November 2023. This will enable us to remove large swathes of pampas grass from Wigi Wetlands, contributing greatly to the overall health of the native ecosystem. Without support like this our mission wouldn't be possible.

gaining sightings and appreciating Daniel's ears, as the other three of us are aging out of the higher pitched calls. He would call our attention to a bird, then we would listen intently until one of us heard the call. The screams of two Red-shouldered Hawks were impossible not to hear.

A quick stop at the Blue Lake cottonwoods where we found no White-throated Swifts but loads of Cedar Waxwings, a Hairy Woodpecker, and more Black Phoebes (our only flycatcher of the day). We then attempted to climb out of the fog by driving up towards Snow Camp. While good in principle it only added two birds to our short list. A nice family of California Quail and a group of Varied Thrushes. So, we tucked our tail and drove back down into the fog.

Then on up to Trinidad Pier where it was blowing a crisp twelve to fourteen knots, and it was still foggy. Go figure. We could not see Flat Iron Rock. Grrrr! Doesn't Ma Nature know we're trying to help. We did see a few good birds here, but we knew we were missing a bunch more. The team began lobbying for a May count rather than fall. This was not working out.

Back to our comfy vehicle, we headed south to the Arcata Marsh Project and happily immersed ourselves in good numbers of shorebirds, as the tide was coming in. What a great place this has become, even with the present disorder of reconstruction and enlargement. But it was already past midday and we were not happy with the species count, so off to Eureka and then King Salmon. We birded along the Hikshari' Trail at the mouth of the Elk River and the willows between the tracks and the bay at the Wigi Wetlands. Nothing



Red-shouldered Hawk

rare but we added Whimbrel and White-tailed Kite. One highlight at King Salmon was a very dark phase Parasitic Jaeger that flew past us as we were scanning the bay for divers. As the sun began its steep descent, we opted to give the Arcata oxidation ponds our last-ditch effort. This turned out perfect, giving us our last five ticks as the sun did its swan dive into the Pacific. A calling Virginia Rail got Daniel and Bill's attention while Laurie and I were calling out some new ducks. We were happy to find a lone Blue-winged Teal and a lone Ring-billed Duck along with several Ruddy Ducks and Shovelers. It was a long, somewhat frustrating day, but we licked our wounds along with some great food at the Redwood Curtain Brewery. We toasted Tim McKay and ourselves with a fine well-deserved beer for our 102 species day.

### DID YOU KNOW?

*From the CatBird Committee*



#### Cats and Rabies

Domestic cats are consistently the top source of rabies among

domestic animals in the US. The number of rabid cats as a proportion of all rabid domestic animals increased from 31 percent in 1991 to 74 percent in 2020. Cats living in outdoor colonies do not receive recommended rabies vaccinations annually, thereby posing a risk to humans as well as to the birds and other wildlife they prey on. Let's keep people and birds safe by ensuring every cat is responsibly owned and cared for.

Source:  
American Bird Conservancy



## Mourning Doves: Scarcity Makes the Heart Grow Fond

By Kathryn Wendell

Here in Eureka, a birder can expect to find several species of pigeons and doves, from the native, forest-loving Band-tailed Pigeon to the increasingly common, non-native Eurasian Collared-Dove. Infrequently, a rare White-winged Dove may be spotted by some lucky birder, but that's more of a random occurrence since White-winged Doves do not breed locally. And always in the urban heart of town, you will find flocks of Rock Pigeons winging around. But of all of them, to me the most elusive and special are the Mourning Doves.

Growing up in Southern California, Mourning Doves were one of the first birds I learned to identify by sight and sound. They have a lovely svelte silhouette highlighted by a long pointy tail, and they flush easily at the slightest provocation, leaving with their characteristic, if not outright chastising, wing whistle. So ubiquitous were they in my neighborhood, I quite took them for granted. So when I first moved to Humboldt in 2000 to attend



Photo by Gary Bloomfield

the university, I never thought twice about finding Mourning Doves. I assumed they were numerous throughout California, just as any other urban bird like House Sparrows or American Crows. Oh, how I mourn my lack of appreciation for these doves then, because now after recently moving back to Humboldt and birding my patch (the five-mile radius around my home), I was amazed to discover how challenging it can be to find a Mourning Dove in the greater Eureka area.

As the months went by and I had yet to tick off a Mourning Dove, I sadly found that I had to hunt them right here in town, which, as a Southern California birder, was quite frankly absurd! And soon, after constantly dipping on them in Eureka, I formed a dark conclusion that half the reports of Mourning Doves were misidentified Eurasian Collared-Doves, and that these birds were not as common as I had assumed.

Looking at their current range map for this area, I discovered that they are quite scarce along the coast and nearly absent in central Eureka. Small numbers can be found along the outer edges of Eureka and Arcata, and in my patch the most consistent spots to find them are in Manila and throughout the Freshwater Creek valley. Even so, I'm lucky to make more than one observation all year without having to leave my patch and travel inland, where they are a bit more numerous.

According to eBird's Trend map, since 2007 Mourning Doves in coastal Humboldt have experienced about a 40 percent decline in estimated relative abundance. In fact, all over North America, Mourning Doves are declining in abundance, with a few exceptions. Possible causes for this include habitat loss, changes in agricultural practices, and the increasing abundance of predators in urban areas. Loss of



Courtesy of Sarah Hobart (June 11, 2023, North Spit)

nesting habitat has also been studied as a possible cause, and any field biologist or naturalist who has spent time observing their nesting behavior will know that Mourning Doves are the sloppiest of nest builders, sometimes placing a crudely constructed stick nest full of gaping holes in a bare tree branch at eye level right off the path. It is a wonder they ever became so abundant in the first place!

The many reasons behind the overall decline in Mourning Dove numbers emphasize how important it is for the public and birders alike to contribute to conservation efforts supporting recovery of native birds in our increasingly urbanizing world. It can be as easy as keeping cats indoors, participating with our Audubon chapter's Conservation Committee, or volunteering at the many cleanups and restoration projects around town. Check out rras.org to see how you can get involved.

Your membership in Redwood Region Audubon supports our field trips, programs, education, and conservation efforts. You may also join us online at [www.rras.org](http://www.rras.org) and click the JOIN US button. We have two different types of memberships:

- Local membership: For just \$15 a year you will receive EcoNews, with the Sandpiper inserted. To join locally mail a check for \$15 made out to RRAS with your name, address, and email address to:  
Redwood Region Audubon Society  
PO Box 1054, Eureka, CA 95502
- National membership: Join National Audubon and receive EcoNews with the Sandpiper inserted as well as Audubon magazine. Please use our Chapter Code C24 so that we receive our share of your membership.

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

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