



# The Sandpiper

October 2023



Redwood Region Audubon Society

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

Join us on Thursday, October 19, at 7:00 p.m.,  
for a presentation by **Mike Graybill** on:

## Is Floating Offshore Wind a Good Option for the Pacific Northwest?

Over the past several years, the US Department of Interior's Bureau of Ocean Energy Management has initiated efforts to lease large areas of the Pacific Ocean to businesses intending to develop large-scale electric power plants. Unlike most other areas where offshore wind turbines have been installed, the continental shelf in the windy region of the Pacific Northwest is narrow, severely limiting the opportunities to mount wind turbines on foundations fixed directly to the seabed. The deep waters of the Pacific Coast will involve installation of hundreds of the largest wind turbines ever built to be mounted



Mike at Fossil Point, Coos Bay, OR

on massive floating foundations anchored to the seabed. Mike Graybill will present an overview of the technology and challenges associated with building, installing, maintaining, and distributing electricity produced using the winds that blow off

our coast.

Mike is a marine scientist, educator, and conservation professional who has been based on the southern coast of Oregon for over fifty years. His familiarity with the coastal and ocean ecosystems of the Pacific Northwest has engaged him in a variety of coastal conservation and development activities, including nearly thirty years as the manager of the South Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve in Coos Bay, a protected watershed on the Coos Estuary dedicated to research and education focused on improving the management and understanding of coastal environments.

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 October

**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, yellow-legs, 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 October:* Oct 7, Elizabeth Meisman ~ Oct 14, Larry Karsteadt ~ Oct 21, Keith Slauson ~ Oct 28, Kathryn Wendel

### More Field Trips

**Sunday, Oct 8, 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).

**Thursday, Oct 12, 5-6:30pm.** It's Oc-TOE-ber, let's explore bird toes and feet! Join trip leader Janelle Chojnacki at the Arcata Marsh for this midweek walk focusing on the incredible diversity of bird feet present at this local hotspot. We'll hope to see shorebirds with their webbed toes, raptors with their sharp talons, and hopefully woodpeckers, creepers, and/or nuthatches with their feet adapted for moving up and down tree trunks. We will be at the marsh until sunset, so we may also see owls, night herons, and other more nocturnally active species, and yes, we will discuss their feet as well!

**Sunday, Oct 15, 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, Oct 28, 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.

## Bird News Tidbit

*From Gina Rogers*

**BirdCast migration dashboard:** Fall migration will be well under way by the time this newsletter reaches you, but it is probably still worth checking out the nightly *BirdCast* data to see what's been happening overhead. When I checked this morning (Sept. 14), it reported that 96,600 birds crossed Humboldt County last night. Seeing a high number of birds the night before just might spur you to get up to go birding!! Developed by ornithologists and computer scientists from Cornell and Oregon State Universities, *BirdCast* has evolved into a nationwide system **showcasing the spectacle of bird migration in real time**. The system was created to develop better understandings of migratory bird movement, promote steps property managers can take to mitigate the danger and stress that migrating birds face, and raise public awareness about the sensitivity of migratory bird populations. Here's the link to the dashboard; just specify Humboldt County: <https://birdcast.info/migration-tools/migration-dashboard/>

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## President's Column

By Gail Kenny

We recently lost a prominent birder in our community.

David Fix co-authored *Birds of Northern California* with Andy Bezener (published by Lone Pine International, 2020). David worked as a professional biologist, which included training other biologists to survey Marbled Murrelets and Spotted Owls. He did breeding bird surveys with a core group of birders and then drafted the species accounts for *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Humboldt County, California*, published by Redwood Region Audubon Society in 2005. His friend Dave Irons blogged on *birdfellow.com* about birding with David in Humboldt in 2012. He wrote that David's knowledge of the status and distribution of the birds of Humboldt and Del Norte counties borders on encyclopedic, and he can tell you the common and scientific names for virtually any tree or shrub that you encounter along the way.

Along with Jude Power, David led monthly RRAS field trips to the Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge for 22 years as well as a variety of other field trips. He also assisted with editing and paste-up of the *Sandpiper* for several years. He was well liked for his humor, writing, art, and ability to share the wonder and joy of the natural world with other people. Look for Tom Leskiw's article about birding with David Fix in this newsletter.

**RRAS to Keep the Audubon Name:** After recent discussion among board members, we have voted to keep Audubon in our name. We are a chapter member of the National Audubon Society (NAS), and we want to retain our connection with NAS through our name. NAS deliberated for a year about whether to remove "Audubon" from its name due to the history of John James Audubon having owned slaves. NAS ultimately decided to keep the name while committing financial resources and energy towards diversity and inclusion. Some of the reasons we decided to keep Audubon in our chapter name are that NAS did not change its name and we want to retain our connection with NAS through our name; also, many people don't know who John James Audubon, the man, was and associate the name "Audubon" with birds due to the bird paintings and books he published. NAS was formed to bring awareness to the devastation of bird populations around 1900 due to the killing of birds for use of their feathers as decorations on hats. NAS chose to include "Audubon" in the name due to its association with birds at that time. Another reason for our decision is, as a registered nonprofit organization, changing our official name would not be straightforward, requiring time, energy, and money that we feel could be put to better use.

It is the intention of RRAS to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion in our organization. We could benefit from some creative ideas and connections to new ways of encouraging more diverse participants in our events and membership. If you have ideas to share or want to help us with this, please email me at [gailkenny@gmail.com](mailto:gailkenny@gmail.com).

## FIELD TRIPS CONTINUED

**Saturday, Oct 28, 8:30am.** Join Redwood Region Audubon Society in Southern Humboldt on the fourth Saturday of every month at Tooby Park, one mile west of Garberville on Sprowl Creek Road. These outings will be easy walking lasting 2-3 hours each. Trip leader for this walk is Max Brodie, heavy rain cancels.

**Sunday, Oct 29, 9am-noon.** Join Ken Burton in exploring the McKinleyville portion of the Mad River floodplain. We'll walk lower Fischer Avenue before venturing out into the fields bordering the riparian strip, then walk up to the new restoration area and see what's on the pond. The site holds potential for interesting sparrows and blackbirds and potentially shorebirds and waterfowl. Be prepared for mud if there's been rain. If time permits, we'll also check out Silva Road. Meet Ken ([shrikethree@gmail.com](mailto:shrikethree@gmail.com)) at the south end of Fischer (north end of the Hammond Bridge; 40.925291, -124.120201).

## DID YOU KNOW? From the CatBird Committee



### Cats Hunt 24 Hours

Cats are not exclusively nocturnal hunters. No matter when local wildlife is active – day or

night – it can be subject to cat attacks. When your cat is sleeping, the neighbor's cat may be hunting. A 2022 study looked closely at urban location and timing of cat interactions with wildlife – both wildlife that cats kill, and wildlife that kills cats. They found that the best way to protect both cats and wildlife from death, injury, and disease transmission is to prevent cats from having access to the outdoors 24 hours a day, unless they are on a leash or in an enclosed outdoor space.

Source: *Frontiers in Ecology and Evolution*

## KID'S CORNER Wowza Wildlife!

By Leslie Scopes Anderson

INCOMING!  
LOOK OUT  
BELOW!



### WHERE IN THE WORLD?

Double-crested Cormorants live along the coast in our area. They build nests of sticks in high trees. Their 'double-crest' is visible only during mating season.

### FUN FACTS: Double-crested

Cormorants are gangly, water birds that eat mainly fish, which they dive for. You may see them with their wings spread out to dry, because they have less oil on their feathers than other water birds.

## American Bittern - Veiled in the Marshes

By Jeremy Cashen

As I walked down I Street with my wife, on a pleasant summer day, I was filled with a desire to see one bird above all. As a very new and excited birder, the beauty of the *Ardeidae* family filled my mind. Great Egrets and Great Blue Herons were a new and magnificent sight. Their dinosaur-like features had left me with an overwhelming connection to a history that's long past. A glimpse inside of a world I'll never truly know. Walking calmly with my wife Breana, I thought about how beautiful it would be to see an American Bittern. I'd only seen it in my field guide before. What an amazing bird to see in person, I thought to myself. As a resident species in this area, there was definitely a possibility of catching a glimpse. As we walked past Gearheart Marsh, I peered into my newly purchased binoculars and scanned the perimeter. In a couple of seconds I was aghast. "Yep, there's a bittern," I said to my wife. I was completely shocked and taken aback. My expectations of the walk had been fulfilled. We sat in silence watching this bittern for fifteen or so excited minutes. Little did we know how lucky we were. We wouldn't see another one again.

American Bitterns are the masters of camouflage. The streaky brown and white plumage



that they don is perfectly suited to blend into the reeds, cattails, and bullrushes of freshwater marshes where they live and hunt. They are very rarely out in the open. They are the secret agents of the marsh. Blending in to stalk their prey of fish, frogs, crustaceans, and insects, they secure their food with

quick reflexes, a narrow bill, and eyes that can focus downward. These adaptations, and their ability to be deathly still, make them superb hunters.

While they are great at hunting, they may be even better at blending in with their surroundings. When a threat is perceived, they point their head up to the sky and extend their neck. Swaying ever so slightly back and forth, they mimic the reeds and grasses around them. Look closely when scanning vegetation in a marsh because you may see an American Bittern swaying with the breeze and being one with its surroundings.

Similar to rails, it may be easier to hear them rather than see them. The American Bittern has a beautiful and unique call. In the spring, you can go to the Arcata Marsh and hear their mating song. It consists of loud, bounding musical gulps and head bobbing that is reminiscent of a Greater Sage-Grouse.

Every time I walk through a freshwater or brackish marsh I am looking for my favorite bird -- the American Bittern. Its elusive nature, beautiful brown and white plumage, and guttural song make this bird a once in a lifetime find while you're enjoying a marsh walk. If you see one, take a few breaths to witness its slow and deliberate allure. Just remember to look closely and be patient because the reeds you're staring at may end up being the most beautiful thing you've ever seen.



## John Hewston 100 Years Old

By Gary Friedrichsen

Join us in celebrating John Hewston's 100 years of traveling around the sun. Born August 21, 1923, in the small town of Roy, Washington,

John began paying attention to birds while in elementary school. By the time he was in junior high he started his first birding newsletter and has maintained his interests in avifauna to this day.

John joined the war effort right after Pearl Harbor when he was nineteen. He served in the Army Air Corps and soon discovered two things: he was an exceptional aerial marksman, and flying made him very sick; so he served out the war as a supply sergeant for the B-24 ground crew. John's itinerant education included college (Pacific Lutheran in Tacoma, Washington), a master's (Oregon State), and a PhD (Utah State). He met his wife Audrey in Washington, and they lived in Bismark, North Dakota, while he worked for U.S. and state fish and wildlife. In 1966 John was hired at Humboldt State College in the Natural Resources Department, where he taught until his retirement in 1987.

John was instrumental in the formation of RRAS in response to California Transportation's plans to route the Samoa Bridge through the middle of heron and egret rookeries on Tuluwat Island. He was our first vice president, and president more than once during his fifty years' involvement with our chapter. Most notably, he

was editor of the *Sandpiper* for its first twenty years and an admirable chapter historian.

For many years, John had a "Birding Awareness" class, initiating countless individuals to the joys of bird and wildlife viewing. Redwood Audubon member Leslie Scopes Anderson says she got into local birding through John's class. "His enthusiasm was contagious and his knowledge astounding," said Leslie, who credits him with inspiring her to become a bird photographer and author. "John is the best!"

We concur! Thanks for all of your work on behalf of RRAS and the area we and our birds call home.



## Commemorating a Passing

*Writer's Note:* David Fix wasn't the sort of person who liked drawing attention to himself. In 1999, when I shared with him what follows, I told him it was slated for my monthly column in our local Audubon chapter's newsletter, the *Sandpiper*. He was adamant that the piece *not* be published. I felt it was a worthy piece, but honored his request until now. I suspect his reluctance to have the piece shared with folks was borne out of his desire to remain on the "down-low"... But if we can't honor your life now, when?

### With Eyes Fully Open

*If I were to begin life again, I should want it as it was.*

*I would only open my eyes a little more.*

—Jules Renard

Early in January 1999, David Fix, John Hunter, Jude Power, and myself walked the train tracks south from Alderpoint, along the Eel River. Our purpose was to learn if Rufous-crowned Sparrows—first discovered by John and me in Humboldt County near Cain Rock on May 24, 1998—were permanent residents. Although not known to be migratory, it was possible that they withdrew from this extreme northwest corner of their range during winter. Descending the grade from the Harris junction, we were overjoyed to see deep blue skies—not even the river valley contained a wisp of tule fog. John got onto the first of two Rufous-crowned Sparrows that we would see that day. We ate lunch, reveling in the crisp winter weather.



Steller's Sea-kinglet, by David Fix

"Wait... calling, across the river: Rock Wren." Our spirits were high: to learn something of the winter distribution of the sparrow had been priority one. And now, Rock Wren: truly icing on our cake.

On the way back, David pointed to a tree, wanting to know why it still retained its leaves. I lifted my binoculars and scanned the tree. Its silhouette suggested an oak, but—unlike the neighboring leafless oaks—this tree's copper and auburn leaves remained. The leaves were about the size of a black or white oak, yet there was something different about their shape. The lobes were pointed, holly-like. David collected a branch, while John began a search for acorns at the base of the tree. When we returned home, we called upon Gary Lester's botanical expertise. What we learned is this: the tree was a hybrid known as "Oracle Oak" and is the result of a cross pollination between black oak and interior live oak (*Quercus wislizenii*). This unusual offspring had yet to be

found within Humboldt County, although it's known to occur in the Branscomb area of northern Mendocino.

As we rode the bituminous snake back to Garberville, I reflected on the day. Inland Humboldt—

in the winter, no less—is *not* a likely place to dig out a rare bird. Yet, by keeping his senses attuned, Fix encountered something unusual, something that expanded upon what we know.

The moral(s) of the story? Well, it all boils down to this:

1) Attuned naturalists remain mindful of their surroundings. They never stop asking the question, "Why?" And, Fix's oft-repeated maxim to birders, especially less-experienced Christmas Bird Counters: "Look high, look low. Look far, look near. And don't forget a backward glance."

2) Forget the weather. Forget the season. True naturalists never go off the clock; they are likely to turn up something noteworthy, regardless of the odds.

3) Although there are better places to bird than others, there's still no habitat quite as productive as an attentive, attuned mind.

*Humboldt County is blessed with an abundance of keen-eyed, top-flight naturalists. Spending some time in their company is a great way to jump start—or maintain—one's interest in the natural world.*

Tom Leskiw

January 31, 1999

**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:  
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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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