

Remembering David Anderson (January 2002)

by David Fix

Less than an hour ago I learned of the death of David Anderson. While I was not shocked to learn of his passing, I am saddened to lose a friend. David and I built a cordial friendship based on mutual respect and a willingness to sit and listen to the other person. He brought to any group discussion the fruits of long pondering and the frank pragmatism of an everyday 'man of letters', striving to allow all sides of an issue their due share of examination.

David was a gentleman, a deep thinker, and a person given to unfailingly courteous ways. His penchant for storytelling was founded upon an uncommon ability to frame his insights, experiences, complaints, and wishes with few and precise words---while never missing an opportunity to inject a wry turn-of-phrase. Enjoying David Anderson carrying forth over a beer and a burger at a Christmas Bird Count dinner was a treat. In his ponderous Down East voice, he offered opinion and adage nineteen-to-the-dozen. He was able to begin a conversation speaking of some odd bird he saw on the Lewiston, Maine CBC years back, explain the word origins of a Chinese proverb somewhere in the middle, and a moment later describe the persona of Falstaff.

As I think of who David Anderson was, I think of the Good Fight fought. As a naturalist doing journalism for a small-town newspaper, David had to have suffered inner turmoil while reporting the latest shenanigans of corporate industry in Humboldt County. If he did, the tenor of his reportage failed to indicate a jaundiced outlook. Dealing on a daily basis with countless facts and figures, occasionally he got one wrong. Despite this, he presented contentious issues to the readership of the Times-Standard with both eyes open, no cheek turned, and without 'spin'. David's writing did not sugarcoat the natural resources issues we face in Humboldt. Nor did he rely on the calculated ambiguity to cover the questionable ethics of industry. With respect to the many good people at the Times-Standard, I have to say I suspect he was out of his league in the office in which he worked.

David loved birds---the nuthatches and White-throats of Manila will never know what an admiring audience they've lost. David's wishes were to be cremated and interred on his property in Manila. He was a remarkable person and he will be remembered warmly.

1/14/2002



High Flying Antics at the Arcata Marsh (October 2002)

by Stan Harris

Someone flying a large red and orange arch-shaped kite for only a few minutes at the I street parking lot of Klopp Lake , 27 Sep, in violation of the Arcata City Code, panicked ALL the birds from the westernmost 2 islands of Klopp Lake and the open water of the western half of Klopp Lake and the surrounding waters of Humboldt Bay. Involved were AT LEAST 60 Brown Pelicans, 15 Double-crested Cormorants, 45 Greater Yellowlegs, 10 Willets, 10 Dowitchers, 100 gulls (Ring-billed, California, Western, Glaucous-winged), 1 Bonaparte's Gull, 4 Great Egrets, 2 Snowy Egrets, and 4 Mallards. The birds still had not returned 2 hours later (SH). The birds flushed in a pell-mell panic flight the instant the kite appeared above the tree tops of the parking lot. This is a classic illustration of the reason that overhead obstructions of any kind were originally prohibited at AMP many years ago. Such panic flights cause the birds to expend energy unnecessarily, expose them to greater potential for predation, and deny them the use of habitats created specifically for them. Such activities of humans definitely are not compatible with the primary purpose of the AMP.

Five Golden Rings, Fo(u)r Calling Birds... (November 2002)

by Sue Leskiw

This December, the 103rd Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs) will occur. Five circles will be covered in Humboldt, Del Norte, and Trinity counties. As a prelude to the counts, RRAS will sponsor a bird identification brush-up session on Friday, December 13 at 7:30 p.m. The event will be held at the Humboldt Area Foundation Community Center on Indianola Cutoff, Bayside and be preceded by a potluck dinner starting at 6:30 p.m. Please join us for some great food and conversation before the Arcata count the next morning!

There are many ways you can participate in CBCs. First, simply giving counters access to your property opens up new territory to explore. Second, stay warm and dry inside and note the birds that use your feeder on count day. (for example, Hartford, Connecticut had the most participants of any US count in 1999, and 59 of the 216 counters were feederwatchers.) Third, join a team to cover a territory near your home – new birders are paired with veterans, so you don't have to be an expert to participate. Fourth, travel to help with understaffed counts (Del Norte, Willow Creek, Lewiston). Call the contacts listed below to participate at any level

Compilation dinners are held after each count. Participants are invited to convene at a local restaurant, where the compiler first reads through a list of "usual" birds. Each team who saw that species answers "Yes." Then, the compiler asks each team leader what other species were discovered. For unusual birds, a sighting report form is completed.

Arcata, Saturday, December 14, contact Ron LeValley (839-0900) (ron@madriverbio.com)

The Arcata count was started by John Sterling in 1986 but was not submitted to National Audubon until 1988, when Ron took over as compiler. The count circle is centered on Arcata, stretching north to McKinleyville south of Murray Road, west to Samoa and Manila, east to Bayside up to the golf course, and south to Eureka along the waterfront to Bayshore Mall. The compilation occurs at the Village Pantry on Central Avenue, McKinleyville.

In 2001, 48 people (plus 5 feederwatchers) participated in the Arcata CBC, logging 177 species and 78,117 birds in 197 party-hours. Temperatures ranged from 39 to 52 degrees F, with no rain.

Del Norte, Sunday, December 15, contact Gary Lester (work 443-8326, home 839-3373) (garylester@w-and-k.com)

Del Norte is the second oldest local count, started around 1964. Alan Barron has been compiler since about 1986. The count circle includes Crescent City, Smith River, Fort Dick, Lake Earl, Jedediah Smith Redwoods State Park/Redwood National Park, and the western portion of the Smith River National Recreation Area. Participants meet at 7 am at Denny's on Highway 101, Crescent City.

Gary states that the count circle's diverse habitats – from Point St George reef to 3000-foot elevation pine forests – translate to a wide variety of species: from pelagic tubenoses to Mountain Chickadee, Mountain Quail, and Ruffed Grouse.

Willow Creek, Saturday, December 21, contact Gary Lester (work 443-8326, home 839-3373, garylester@w-and-k.com) or Alan Barron at 465-8904 (flockfinder@yahoo.com)

The Willow Creek count was started in 1974 by Ferndale native, now Oregon resident, Dave Anderson. Gary has been compiler since 1994. The count circle, centered on Willow Creek, includes Salyer and the southern Hoopa Valley. The compilation occurs at Cinnabar Sam's.

Gary notes that Willow Creek is often overlooked as the inland "poor stepchild" of the local CBCs but there have been some notable winter highlights, both for the county and for the state: Blue Jay, Greater Roadrunner, and Rustic Bunting. The 1998 madrone berry crop hosted an American Robin cloudburst of over 74,000 birds!

In addition to mega-rarities, participants relish the challenge of their particular area. Counters seek to detect White-headed Woodpeckers in the Horse Mountain pines, a Northern Mockingbird in the Hoopa Valley, a Swamp Sparrow skulking through farm stubble, or a Spotted Owl in the quiet wood.

In 2001, 12 people participated in the Willow Creek CBC, logging 90 species and 10,745 birds in 89 party-hours. A morning light rain turned heavy in the afternoon, with temperatures ranging from 30 to 52 degrees F.

Lewiston, Saturday, December 28, contact Barbara Peck (bapeck@jeffnet.org)

The Lewiston count has been conducted during 31 CBC seasons, beginning in 1965, then not again until 1970. Since then, very few years were missed, generally due to snow.

Barbara has been compiler since 1985.

Lewiston and Weaverville are the two towns in the circle. Participation tends to be light, so birders are assigned large territories. Counters meet in Lewiston at 7:30 a.m. in front of the Lewiston Valley Motel and often rendezvous midday at the Rush Creek fishing access near Lewiston. The compilation site varies, depending on where participants are from.

Barbara says that the challenge is to reach a count of 100 species. The high count has been 91 (lots of owls) in 1980/81. Breaking the 100-species mark would depend on having a great collection of waterfowl on Lewiston Lake, lots of participants, cooperative weather, and involving local residents who could give access to private property.

In 2001, 6 people participated in the Lewiston CBC, logging 69 species and 13,368 birds in 19 party-hours. Temperatures ranged from 45 to 55 degrees F, with a light afternoon rain.

Centerville Beach to King Salmon, Sunday, December 29, contact Stan Harris (822-3802)

The oldest of the five local counts, Centerville was started in 1959 by Dr. Crane of Ferndale and was essentially a family operation until 1969, when RRAS was established. Stan has been compiler since 1973. The count circle is centered on Loleta, divided into geographic sectors of 1) Fields Landing, King Salmon, College of the Redwoods; 2) Table Bluff; 3) Loleta; 4) Fortuna; 5) Ferndale; 6) Centerville Road; 7) Port Kenyon Road; 8) Grizzly Bluff Road; 9) South Spit; 10) Centerville Beach; 11) Elk River Valley; 12) Humboldt Hill; and 13) Salt River. The compilation is held at the Village Pantry on South Broadway in Eureka.

Stan mentions that observer numbers usually range from 40 to 73, with a high of 85 in 1980. The lowest number was in 1964, after the devastating Christmas week flood that inundated the entire Eel River bottom. The only segment not underwater was Table Bluff. An intrepid two counters canoed near there and recorded 68 species!

The highest number of species in one count was the 185 recorded in 2000, with 270 total different species reported all-time.

In 2001, 49 people participated in the Centerville CBC, logging 170 species and 114,215 birds in 208 party-hours. Temperatures ranged from 45 to 48 degrees F, with afternoon rain.

[NOTE: Visit the Audubon CBC site (www.audubon.org/bird/cbc) to see past data and get other good information.]

Audubon Chief of Science Calls on States to Employ Integrated Pest Management (September 2002)

Ivyland, PA, August 28, 2002 - Today, Audubon Senior Vice President of Science Dr. Frank Gill called on health and pest control authorities in affected states to employ an integrated approach to the management of mosquitoes carrying the West Nile Virus.

"West Nile Virus is a disease that, unfortunately, has come to stay in the Western Hemisphere," he stated. "It affects people, horses, bats and other small mammals, and our native birds. While more than 99 percent of West Nile cases turn out to be completely harmless, the risk of West Nile nationwide has caused communities to take prudent measures against the mosquitoes that carry the disease. Our experience with West Nile in the Northeast shows that an integrated approach to pest management is the most effective and safest method available. Audubon advises states to enact measures that will quickly effect this change. It will greatly help people, other mammals, and the birds which are the disease's primary victims."

Integrated pest management calls for elimination of mosquito breeding habitat, the use of environmentally sound tools to combat the insects, and a more targeted approach to the use of pesticides. "Communities can greatly enhance their ability to eliminate the threat of disease-carrying mosquitoes by replacing chemical larvacides with bacteria-based products, which kill mosquitoes, but not beneficial insects, such as dragonflies; amphibians; and fish that prey upon mosquitoes," Gill continued. "By eliminating pools of stagnant water in parks and at dumps, and by allowing some drainage of dammed areas, communities also decrease the available breeding ponds for mosquitoes. Homeowners can help; cleaning out gutters and removing tarps, tires, and other objects where water can collect also prevents mosquitoes from reproducing.

"To minimize collateral damage to people and wildlife, National Audubon calls on public health officials to follow the New York State Health Department's West Nile Response Plan, which calls for a measured reaction to the presence of the virus," Gill said. "Aerial spraying of pesticides has been shown to be less effective than targeted, localized spraying. If pesticides are to be employed, a focused, limited, and timely response works best. Combining this approach with the use of highly effective bacterial larvacides and community and home cleanup of standing water is the most effective and efficient use of our states' energies and limited resources."

Gill also notes the effect of West Nile falls primarily on our nation's birdlife. "America's birds - especially crows and jays, and increasingly, it seems, our beloved hawks and owls - are the most common fatal victims of the disease," he stated. "This integrated approach to controlling mosquitoes will not only help people, but will also help our beleaguered birds to be more resistant to West Nile."

Finally, Dr. Gill called on immuno-compromised people, especially the elderly, to take reasonable precautions against mosquito bites. "By using insect repellent, wearing long pants and socks, and by staying indoors during dusk and nighttime, older Americans and those with serious illnesses can greatly decrease their chances of contracting West Nile."

A Singular Woman (December 2001)

by Jude Power

Of the congenial community of birders in Humboldt County, I believe most would agree the joy of birding is not in the size of one's species list, but in the exhilaration of birding itself. After all, what significance could a long list of "county birds" have compared to the lily-lined country roads, spring's first Swainson's Thrush song, the sumptuousness of October light at day's end? But for many thousands of birders countrywide, the county list becomes something more: a measure of just how observant one has been, the variety of habitats visited, and the relative status of birding among life's priorities. At this time, a Humboldt County list of 400 species is considered an outstanding feat; a badge of distinction and an indication that one has a keen understanding of avian distributional and seasonal patterns. Only seven or so Humboldt birders have attained that status since Stan 'Doc' Harris broke the barrier in 1992, and only one of them is a woman.

This year, Lauren Lester, botanist, birder, wife, mother of three, became the only woman ever to see 400 bird species in Humboldt County, and she is likely to enjoy that singularity for some time to come. Lauren has been birding in Humboldt County since Fall 1979 when she moved here to attend HSU for her fourth year of college. Though she got started birding at The Evergreen State College in Washington, she credits Ron LeValley's local birding class with getting her enthused (or, as some would say, addicted). More than the class, though, Lauren credits her parents, "naturalists from the heart", for her lasting connection with nature and all living things. As a girl, she roamed hundreds of wild acres just outside her front door and was mentored by both parents on botanical collecting trips. So birding has, for her, been simply another chapter of a life spent in nature.

Aside from a passion for the natural world, several other factors had to be in place for Lauren to reach the milestone of 400 species in her home county. A long list of loyal, understanding babysitters for one. And a spouse who not only supports the quest, but abets it by phoning her the instant he hears of new county bird sightings. Gary shares Lauren's passion for nature and birding, as well as her commitment to weaving nature into the fabric of their family's life. Their daughters are enthusiastic campers and hikers as well as fledgling feeder-watchers at home. Not surprisingly, nine of Lauren's county birds have been discovered in her own yard.

If you have been following Stan Harris' Field Notes column in the Sandpiper, you know that 2001 was a great year for rare birds on the northcoast, most spectacularly the Common Greenshank, Lauren's 400th bird. That is, until she reviewed her list and discovered it was actually her 402nd! Turns out she had reached 400 with Yellow-billed Cuckoo near Fernbridge last July, and 401 with Blue-headed Vireo at Shay Park in October. Which just proves Lauren's point that the primary focus is the thrill of the chase, and the pleasure of sharing the world with birds.

Will she chase county birds less doggedly now that she has reached 400? No. Was reaching 400 a goal in itself? No. (In fact, reaching 300 county birds before the birth of her first child was a far more compelling goal. She did it on June 3, 1987— three weeks before Kelsey's birth - by hiking at night atop Whitey's Peak near Orleans to find Common Poorwill!) Are there any particular birds she still really wants to see in Humboldt? Yes - the elusive Williamson's Sapsucker. Also a host of pelagic birds, missed because of her reluctance to take motion-sickness medication around the births of the three 'Lesser Lesters.' Does she have a favorite bird? Yes – American Dipper, "because when you see one, you know you're in a good place." Not a surprising answer for a woman who has spent much of her life in nature's "good places." Go girl!