

Five Golden Rings, Fo(u)r Calling Birds... (November 2003)

by Sue Leskiw

In December (and January), the 104th Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs) will occur. Five of California's 117 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 12 at 7:30 p.m. The event will be held at the Humboldt Office of Education on Myrtle Avenue, Eureka, and be preceded by a potluck dinner starting at 6:30 p.m. Bring a dish to share; we'll provide drinks and place settings.

There are many ways you can participate in CBCs. First, simply giving counters access to your property opens up new territory to explore (call the contact listed by each count to see whether you are located in their circle). 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. (Any comments you've heard that CBCs are "too competitive" and "only for top-flight birders" are false. The competition is to keep Arcata and Centerville – 14th and 15th, respectively in 1999 - in the top 20 counts nationwide, a goal to which ALL participants contribute.)

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.

Weather greatly affected most of the local CBCs in 2002, with the numbers of counters, species, and birds generally down from 2001.

Del Norte, Sunday, December 14, contact Alan Barron at 465-8904, flockfinder@aol.com or Gary Lester (work 443-8326, home 839-3373, garylester@w-and-k.com)

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 a.m. at Denny's on Highway 101, Crescent City.

This year, Del Norte kicks off the local counts and does NOT fall on the day after the Arcata CBC, which may encourage more of you to participate. In 2002, 16 counters spent 52.5 party-hours finding 148 different species and 16,718 total birds. Heavy rain was encountered in the afternoon. Statistics for 2001 are not available on line but in 2000, 37 people logged 113 party-hours locating 162 species and 64,528 total birds.

Arcata, Saturday, December 20, contact Ron LeValley (839-0900; ron@madriverbio.com)

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 just south of Bayshore Mall. The compilation occurs at the Village Pantry on Central Avenue, McKinleyville.

In 2002, Eureka experienced record rainfall on count day, which may explain the big jump in snug-and-dry feederwatchers, to 12! Some 34 hardy souls slogged through the rain and wind to tally 45,287 birds during 191

party-hours. One hundred fifty-six different species were logged. Compare this to 2001, when 48 people (plus 5 feederwatchers) participated, locating 177 species and 78,117 birds in 197 party-hours.

Willow Creek, Saturday, December 27, contact Gary Lester (work 443-8326, home 839-3373, garylester@w-and-k.com)

The count circle, centered on Willow Creek, includes Salyer and the southern Hoopa Valley. The compilation occurs at Cinnabar Sam's.

In 2002, 9 birders spent 48 party-hours (down almost 50% from the previous year) in light rain spying 86 different species and 7,085 individuals. In 2001, 12 people participated in the Willow Creek CBC, logging 90 species and 10,745 birds in 89 party-hours.

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

Lewiston and Weaverville are the two towns in the circle. Participation tends to be small, so birders get assigned large territories. Counters meet in Lewiston at 7:30 am 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.

In 2003, 3 counters spent 14.75 party-hours locating 47 species and 3,950 total birds. Rain increased from light in the morning to heavy in the afternoon. In 2001, 6 people encountered a light afternoon rain during the Lewiston CBC, logging 69 species and 13,368 birds in 19 party-hours.

Centerville Beach to King Salmon, Sunday, January 4, contact Stan Harris (822-3802)

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.

In 2002, the number of party-hours increased slightly (to 214) with 12 fewer counters (37). The number of species reported was identical to the preceding year (170) and the number of individual birds was slightly more (116,673). In 2001, 49 people participated in the Centerville CBC, logging 170 species and 114,215 birds in 208 party-hours.

[NOTE: Visit the Audubon CBC site (www.audubon.org/bird/cbc) to see past data and get other good information or the California Audubon site <http://ca.audubon.org/cbcs.htm> to get dates for other counts in California]

Christmas Is Coming, the Birds Are Getting Counted (November 2003) **by Sue Leskiw**

Did you know that by participating in the Christmas Bird Count (CBC), you:

- Are joining more than 50,000 observers?
- Are contributing to the longest-running database in ornithology?
- Are setting an example of citizen science in action?
- Don't even need to leave your house? (feeder observations count, too!)

Prior to the 20th century, people commonly engaged in a holiday tradition known as the Christmas "Side Hunt." They would choose sides and go afield with their guns; whoever brought in the biggest pile of feathered quarry won. Conservation was in its beginning stages at the turn of the century and many observers were becoming concerned about the indiscriminate slaughter of wildlife and concurrent declines in bird populations.

On Christmas Day 1900, ornithologist Frank Chapman, an early officer in the Audubon Society, called for an end to the slaughter. He suggested that, rather than shooting birds, people count them. So began the Christmas Bird Count. Thanks to the inspiration of Chapman and the enthusiasm of 27 dedicated birders, 25 CBCs were held that day. The locations ranged from Toronto, Ontario to Pacific Grove, California, with most counts in or near the population centers of northeastern North America. Those original 27 Christmas Bird Counters tallied a total of 90 species (about 18,500 individual birds) on all the counts combined.

Modern-day CBCs are not limited to Christmas Day but are scheduled for a 24-hour period between December 14 and January 5. Celebrating the CBC's second century in 2000, 52,471 participants were involved in 1823 counts. In 2003, 73,137,878 birds (an increase of over 20 million individuals from the previous year!) were tallied in 1981 counts. The counts have expanded beyond the original United States and Canada to include locations as far south as Argentina, changing the focus from North America to the Western Hemisphere. The CBC's primary objective is to monitor the status and distribution of populations across the Western Hemisphere through an all-day census of early winter bird numbers. When these data are combined with other surveys (e.g., Breeding Bird Surveys), we begin to see a clearer picture of how the continent's bird populations have changed in time and space over the past century.

All are welcome to participate on any CBC. If you've every heard yourself say, "Maybe it'd be fun to learn birds," here's a great opportunity. Beginning birders are teamed with experienced ones. [Personal note: I make myself useful to my team by keeping track of how many of which birds are seen and exclaiming "There's a bird!" for others to ID.] Participants count within a designated 15-mile circle on the given day. At the end of the day, counters are invited to meet at a local restaurant for the 3 C's: compilation (of results), camaraderie, and (a bit of friendly) competition as to whom located the rarest bird! Each December, RRAS holds a pre-CBC brush-up session on bird identification. A local expert shows slides of species that may be seen during the local counts.

Mark your calendar for **Friday, December 12, starting at 6:30 pm** at the Humboldt County Office of Education, as we will continue last year's successful practice of leading off with a potluck dinner. As long as there are birds to be counted, the Christmas Bird Count will go on being the most popular, fun, and rewarding bird census the world over. We look forward to welcoming YOU to our growing community of citizen scientists. To access data from past counts, visit the National Audubon Society website at www.audubon.org/bird/cbc.

Southern Humboldt & Northern Mendocino Birders and Birding (October 2003)

by Doug Wallace

A group of southern Humboldt and northern Mendocino county birders gathered at Southern Humboldt Community Park on September 6th to enjoy a guided bird walk through the Park, discuss the possibility of forming a group to encourage, develop and coordinate recreational birding activities throughout the area, and explore the desire to contribute to bird conservation at the Park and beyond.

The September 6th walk at Southern Humboldt Community Park, SHCP, kicked off a month of weekend birding trips. Participants on this walk enjoyed a House Wren and Peregrine Falcon. The Park walk led by RRAS on September 14th afforded "lifers" for some with Say's Phoebe, American Pipit, and Lark Sparrow.

The on-going Community Bird Census for the greater Park area, being conducted by volunteer area birders, was endorsed with everyone receiving the easy census form to begin their contribution to the final checklist. The culmination of this cooperative undertaking will be the production and distribution of a field checklist for both Southern Humboldt Community and Tooby Parks.

Anyone interested in participating in the census project or being on a birding activities email and phone list can contact Doug Wallace at PeregrineNation@asis.com, or 923-2521.

The SHCP is located west of Garberville along the south fork of the Eel River. It encompasses both banks of the South Fork, potentially including the headwaters of several large springs and provides diverse habitats including: riverine, riparian, grassland/farmland, and a mosaic of forest types.

The final size of this private, nonprofit Park will be determined by the availability of financial support. Generous contributions from community and other donors, and the constant work of the SHCP Board of Directors have resulted in the successful acquisition of 275 acres of this unique and diverse community treasure. The fundraising drive continues towards the goal of purchasing up to 300 more acres, primarily of upslope mixed forest including residual ancient Douglas fir. The maximal Park could end up being five times the size of Garberville. There are SHCP accounts at the Garberville banks to enable continuing community donations.

Wildlife & Native Plant Garden Tour July 26 (June 2003)

By Sue Leskiw

July 16 is the last day to mail order tickets [[use form on Calendar page](#)] for the July 26 Wildlife & Native Plant Garden Tour, co-sponsored by RRAS and the California Native Plant Society. Until the day of the tour, tickets can be purchased at Pierson's Garden Shop & Nursery, 4100 Broadway, Eureka; Strictly for the Birds, 123 F Street, Old Town Eureka; Freshwater Farms, 5851 Myrtle Avenue, Eureka; the Northcoast Environmental Center, 575 H Street, Arcata; Blake's Books, 2005 Central Avenue, McKinleyville; and Miller Farms Nursery, 1828 Central Avenue, McKinleyville.

A ticket to all 10 tour locations costs only \$15 per person. (Plus each ticket contains a coupon for 10% savings at Freshwater Farms and Strictly for the Birds!) Following is a bit about each property, to whet your appetite.

Garden 1 (Downtown Eureka): An Oriental term for this garden is wabi-sabi, meaning a mix or jumble. It combines natives, wildflowers, traditional garden flowers (mostly perennials), herbs, wildlife-friendly plants, shrubs, trees, and a vegetable garden.

Garden 2 (Downtown Eureka): A bevy of native plants — including red and golden currant, blue and yellow-eyed grass, red columbine, western azalea, blueblossom, elderberry, huckleberry, dogwood, and hazelnut — have been incorporated into a former lawn with a couple of fruit trees. A drip bath, seed feeders, suet and nectar feeders, and homemade nest boxes beckon avian visitors.

Garden 3 (Eureka near Freshwater): Over two dozen species of *Salvia* form the centerpiece, providing hummingbird nectar year round. Rock terraces host other plants attractive to bees, butterflies, and hummers — *Penstemon*, *Agastache*, Jupiter's beard — along with native fuchsia, columbine, dogbane, and monkeyflower. A south-facing slope has been planted with succulents.

Freshwater Farms, situated on 80 acres adjacent to the Freshwater Creek estuary, focuses on producing coastal California native trees, shrubs, grasses, and herbaceous perennials for wholesale and retail. This is the refreshment and restroom stop, with punch, cookies, Celtic music, and portapotties provided. AmeriCorps will lead tours of the proposed estuary restoration.

Garden 4 (Freshwater): This property boasts semi-natural habitat diversity with a variety of food sources for birds, tree and shrub hedgerows for cover, *Salvia*, *Buddleia*, feeders, an organic garden, and bird and bat houses. In 6 years, 112 bird species have been recorded.

Garden 5 (Bayside): A woodland garden where Himalaya berries have been supplanted by native plants that provide food and habitat for birds and animals. A changing kaleidoscope throughout the year featuring currant, trillium, ginger, bleeding heart, lily-of-the-valley, iris, rhododendron, western azalea, huckleberry, and *Darlingtonia*.

Garden 6 (Bayside): The north side of this professionally landscaped garden welcomes moist-site, shade-loving natives. A berm along the south side is planted with local white oak, tan oak, and madrone. Front yard flower borders are complemented by native shrubs, a trellis with hops, and a pond well-used by birds (167 species).

Garden 7 (Downtown Arcata): This compact city garden is an eclectic mix of native California plants featuring alpine and subalpine rock, vegetable, and herb gardens. One bed is filled with native bulbs (lilies, fritillaries, *Calochortus*, *Brodiaea*, *Trillium*, *Erythronium*). Others feature native iris, grass, *Ribes*, *Mimulus*, *Penstemon*, western azalea,

Matilija poppies, *Salvia*, manzanita, *Fremontia*, *Carpenteria*, vine maple, *Vancouveria*, *Heucheras*, *Ceanothus*, and *Lewisias*.

Garden 8 (McKinleyville): This half-acre garden in a suburban neighborhood combines over 50 species of native plants with an array of ornamentals. The garden is diverse and lush, with a somewhat wild character. It includes a riparian corridor, small pond, woodland garden, and vegetable garden.

Garden 9 (Westhaven): During the past two decades, more than 100 species of California natives have been “turned loose” here, including Pacific reed grass, pine-mat manzanita, *Camas*, *Penstemon*, coyote brush, and Western azalea. 82 species of birds, 11 mammals, 9 amphibians, and 2 reptiles have been observed or their sign recorded.