



The Sandpiper

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2017



REDWOOD REGION AUDUBON SOCIETY www.rras.org

FIELD TRIPS

Every Saturday: Arcata Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary. These are our famous, rain-or-shine, docent-led field trips at the Marsh. Bring your binocular(s) and have a great morning birding! Meet in the parking lot at the end of South I Street (Klopp Lake) in Arcata at **8:30 a.m.** Trips end around 11 a.m. October 7: Larry Karsteadt; October 14: Cédric Duhalde; October 21: Cindy Moyer; October 28: Alexa DeJoannis.

For some of our more far reaching trips we would like to suggest donating gas money to drivers on field trips. A good rule of thumb is \$5 per ½ hour drive time to field trip destination.

Sunday, October 8: Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge. This is a wonderful, 2- to 3-hour trip for people wanting to learn the birds of the Humboldt Bay area. It takes a leisurely pace with emphasis on enjoying the birds! Beginners are more than welcome. Meet at the Refuge Visitor Center at **9 a.m.** Call Jude Power (707-822-3613) for more information.

Saturday, October 14: Willow Creek Birdwalk. Meet at Studio 299 (75 The Terrace, Willow Creek) starting at **9 a.m.** We will depart promptly at 9:30 for our

destination; carpooling available. **This month we will be traveling to the coast in celebration of migration!** Contact Melissa to join us on the coast. We will be birding Humboldt Bay in search of shore and pelagic birds; local experts will help co-lead the walk. All ages, abilities, and interest levels welcome! For more information, please contact Melissa Dougherty at 530-859-1874 or email willowcreekbirdwalks@gmail.com.

Saturday, October 14: Southern Humboldt Community Park. All ages and experience levels are encouraged to participate on this easy, 2- to 3-hour walk. Binoculars are not provided (but often shared!). Water and a hat with a brim are recommended. **We will park for our walk at the main entrance (near the playground) on Sprowl Creek Road at 9 a.m.** If you arrive late, we will be heading west past the farmhouse, after possibly checking out the river first. No dogs, please. For more information please call 707-943-9786. David Fix will lead.

Sunday, October 15: Eureka Waterfront. Meet at **9 a.m.** at the foot of W. Del Norte St., where we will scope for birds off the public dock until everyone assembles.

We will then drive to the base of the Hikshari' Trail at Truesdale Street and bird along the trail to the Elk River Wildlife Sanctuary. Leader: Ralph Bucher (707-499-1247; thebook@reninet.com).

Sunday, October 29: College of the Redwoods. The College campus offers a variety of habitats: shrub hedges, fields, forests, marsh, and pond. We are likely to see and hear migrating songbirds, soaring hawks, and wetlands-loving birds. Meet at **9 a.m.** at the flagpole in front of Administration. Parking is free on weekends! Led by Alexa DeJoannis (202-288-5174).

Saturday, November 4: Coastal Lagoon Trail, Lake Earl Wildlife Area. Ken Burton will lead a walk through fields and forest to the lagoon for a variety of raptors, songbirds, and waterfowl. Time permitting, we will visit other nearby sites along Lake Earl's eastern shore. Meet at the trailhead, on Lake Earl Dr. just north of Audree Ln., at **9 a.m.** for this half-day, rain-or-shine outing.

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OCTOBER PROGRAM: FRIDAY, OCT 13

THE NORTH PERU BIRDING ROUTE

New Zealander photographers and tour guides **Detlef and Carol Davies** will present a fantastic talk featuring the colorful birds of a relatively little-known part of Peru. They will describe the unusual diversity to be found along the 'Birding Route' which spans all the different habitats from the Amazon's tributaries in the east to the coastal marshes and dry mountain scrub in the west, and travels along the mighty Andes Mountain Range at over 11,000 feet. The talk will include photos of many unique regional species found along the route.



Yellow-scarfed Tanager



Marvellous Spatuletail

NOVEMBER PROGRAM: FRIDAY, NOV 10

TEACHING NATURAL HISTORY TODAY: THE CALIFORNIA NATURALIST PROGRAM AT COLLEGE OF THE REDWOODS

The California Naturalist program was created by the University of California to promote environmental stewardship, volunteerism, citizen science, and science education. It is offered at partnering institutions across the state but most are private or non-profit organizations; few are colleges. This is ironic: most biologists will attest to the fundamental role of natural history in biological research, yet rarely do colleges offer a natural history course. College of the Redwoods has offered a course in California Natural History for decades and is in its second year of offering California Naturalist certification in association with the course. The talk will examine the state of natural history education today, what the California Naturalist program looks like at College of the Redwoods and will highlight specific examples of student capstone projects for the course. **Karen Reiss**, Professor of Biology at the College of the Redwoods, will present.



The programs start at **7:30 p.m.**

at the **Six Rivers Masonic Lodge**, 251 Bayside Rd., Arcata.

Bring a mug to enjoy shade-grown coffee, and please come fragrance-free.

CHAPTER LEADERS

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Thinking of Joining the National Audubon Society?

If so, please use the coupon below. By sending in your membership on this form, rather than replying to solicitations from National Audubon, \$20 is sent directly to RRAS. This is how NAS rewards local chapters for recruiting national members. (Otherwise, the RRAS dues share per new member is only a couple of dollars.) Thank you.

Chapter Membership Application

Yes, I'd like to join.

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)

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-----LOCAL CHAPTER-----
 REDWOOD REGION AUDUBON SOCIETY
 P.O. BOX 1054, EUREKA, CA 95502

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

By Hal Genger

Fall is upon us and the fall bird migration in in full swing! I hope everyone is able to get out, view nature, and practice identifying birds in their winter plumage. Now is the time to prepare for the Christmas Bird Counts.

We are in the process of developing the ballot for the 2018 RRAS Board elections. Upcoming positions will be the President, Vice President, Secretary, and a director or two. Let me (or any board member) know if you are interested in any of these positions. Your service would be greatly appreciated.

Conservation issues are ongoing. Drop by the monthly conservation committee meeting to learn about

unregulated marijuana grows, regulation of the aquaculture industry, bird-friendly areas, and more. Please contact Jim Clark, or better yet, attend our Conservation Committee meetings held the second Thursday of the month at noon at Rita's Margaritas and Mexican Grill, 1111 Fifth Street in Eureka. Tell us how much time you can commit (one hour per month or more) and what you would like to be involved with. Your service, large or small, is needed.

CELEBRATE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE WEEK AT HUMBOLDT BAY NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE'S CITIZEN SCIENCE FAIR ON OCTOBER 13 & 14

What is Citizen Science and how can you participate? A good way to learn is by example and that's why we are featuring a few local projects. To kick off the activities, join us on Friday, October 13, from 7 to 8 p.m. for an overview of the North Coast Chapter of the Seabird Protection Network's **Trinidad Seabird Citizen Science Project** by Humboldt State University professor Dan Barton and BLM Arcata Field Office seasonal seabird biologist Shannon Murphy. They will share their citizen science monitoring effort for seabirds of the Trinidad California Coastal National Monument. Learn how this project contributes to North Coast seabird conservation, why that is important, and what you can do.

On Saturday, October 14, from 1 to 4 p.m. a **Citizen Science Fair** will include informative displays, demonstrations, activities, and games for all ages and levels of interest. Learn about Project FeederWatch, eBird, and other phenology projects that incorporate citizen observations of plants and animals to generate long-term data sets used for scientific discovery and decision-making. Meet both days at the Richard J. Guadagno Headquarters and Visitor Center, 1020 Ranch Road in Loleta.

For more information, call 707-777-5406 or visit www.fws.gov/refuge/humboldt_bay/

THANK YOU, VOLUNTEERS!

The RRAS greatly appreciates volunteers. In fact, we are an entirely volunteer-run organization!

Please join us for our Annual Volunteer Appreciation Celebration on Friday, October 27, from 6 to 8 p.m., at the Humboldt Area Foundation, Emmerson Room, 363 Indianola Road, Bayside. All of you who donated time to our chapter in the past year are cordially

invited. RRAS will furnish a selection of hot dishes, salads, beverages, and desserts. Feel free to bring a food item or beverage to share! Keeping with the tradition and the upcoming holiday, you are welcome to wear a special hat or costume. Please RSVP with your choice of beverage and number in your party by October 23 to Denise at daseeger@gmail.com or 707-444-2399.

FIELD TRIPS (CONT. FROM PREVIOUS PAGE)

Saturday, November 4: Bear River Ridge. Tour the open prairies and forest edges in search of Rough-legged Hawks, Golden Eagles, Horned Larks, and bluebirds. Dress in layers and expect to return between 1 and 2 p.m. Meet across from the Fernbridge Market at 8:30 a.m. Keith Slauson (707-845-7779) will lead.

Saturday, November 11: Southern Humboldt Community Park. See October 14. Jay Sooter and Ann Constantino will lead.

Sunday, November 12: Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge. See October 8.

Saturday, November 18: Willow Creek Birdwalk. Meet at Studio 299 (75 The Terrace, Willow Creek) starting at 9 a.m. We will depart promptly at 9:30 for our destination; carpooling available. This month is **Bring-a-Kid Birding Day**. In an effort to encourage youth of all ages to get outside, we'll be doing a kid-friendly walk this month. I have a limited number of kid binoculars to share. Come on out and help support our young birders in the making! Walks generally run 2-3 hours. All ages, abilities and interest levels welcome! For more information, please contact Melissa Dougherty at 530-859-1874 or email willowcreekbirdwalks@gmail.com.

Sunday, November 26: College of the Redwoods. See October 29.

CRESCENT CITY FIELD TRIP REPORT

by Alexa DeJoannis

Some twenty or so bird-watchers turned out for Ken Burton's walk along North Pebble Beach Road in Crescent City in September. The area's magnificent rocky coastline provided a stunning backdrop for our walk as patchy clouds and fog allowed the landscape to sparkle and fade during the morning.

First, we scoped the Castle Rock area for seabirds, meanwhile enjoying a large colony of vocal sea lions and seals resting and feeding around the large, offshore rock. A Red-necked Grebe was seen here. Also of note, a pair of Peregrine Falcons perched atop Castle Rock's highest peak, showing a clear difference in size between the sexes. Then we drove to Ninth Street and walked back to Castle Rock, stopping along the way. Craig Strong, the marine biologist who had given us a program on the previous evening about his ongoing at-sea surveys of Marbled Murrelets, pointed out a pair of those very birds several hundred meters offshore. They're the smallest seabirds we

saw; they hold their heads low against their bodies, like their bigger cousins, the murrelets.

At a few locations, including a picnic table where they lingered suggestively nearby and a creek crossing the beach where they took turns bathing, we got some good looks at gulls. They were mostly Western Gulls (WEGU), with a few California and Glaucous-winged Gulls (GWGU). Since they were so obligingly patient, we got good looks at some slightly different gulls among them: Western/Glaucous-winged hybrids! The two species are of a similar size and have heavy-looking bills, but their colors differ. The hybrids wear a mantle intermediate in color between the dark gray of WEGU and the paler color of GWGU, and their wing-tips are similarly intermediate between black and gray. Also, their white heads are faintly streaked in brown. WEGU never get streaks. The two species breed together along the Pacific Coast somewhat north of California, Ken told us, and migratory individuals

appear on our coast in small numbers.

We got to see the three resident cormorants among the sea stacks and flying by. Juveniles still show pale necks, but the fabulous breeding bling of the adults had faded. An osprey perched alertly in one of the spruces clinging bravely to the bare basalt. Three whimbrels paced athletically along the beach before a leashed dog, picking up invertebrates in the high tide zone. Both crows and ravens frequented this zone where comfortable homes fronted narrow, sandy beaches and rock cliffs.

On the landward side of our walk, we spotted a flock of Band-tailed Pigeons banking around houses. A few chickadees, woodpeckers, waxwings, warblers, and phoebes tootled among the scattered trees and dense shrubberies. One of these was a Say's Phoebe, a somewhat notable sight along the coast, since they like drier country. As usual with tyrant flycatchers, it gave us good looks as it perched ostentatiously on a power line.

After thanking Ken for the walk, I went to the Lake Earl Coastal Lagoon Trail in the afternoon and enjoyed a ramble in a small, open wood, edged by pastures and the marshy lakeshore. Chickadees, waxwings, kinglets, woodpeckers, jays, warblers, rails, ducks, hummingbirds, and raptors use the varied habitat. Ken's next walk (November 4) will take place there, and from what I saw, it looks like some good birding.



LOOKING AT DEAD BIRDS FOR [CITIZEN] SCIENCE

by Alexa DeJoannis



A Pelagic Cormorant in winter plumage

Ah! I spot what looks like a bunch of feathers sticking up from an indeterminate bundle in the ragged masses of wrack at the high-tide limit. I walk over and kneel beside it. Tiny creatures flee my approaching feet as I walk through the wave-tossed debris laid on the beach by the high tides. Depending on the beach and the day, I may see flies, pillbugs, and sand hoppers merrily feasting upon bullwhip kelp and leafy seaweeds, eelgrass, and the occasional dead bird.

I have to detangle the limp, scavenged body from persistent threads of eel grass so I can examine it closely. I brush off the feathers with an old toothbrush. It's been on the beach for maybe a week, and though the skin is still pliable, most of the flesh has been efficiently removed by birds (there are V-shaped notches bitten out of the breastbone where ravens wrestled with the protein-rich flight muscles) and invertebrates. It's skin, bones, and very tough ligaments now. Most of the dead birds I find on the beach look like this: well preserved by the salt wind and sun. They don't smell much, and the little scavengers have moved on to look for fresh plunder.

Since I'm collecting scientific data for the Coastal Observation and Seabird Survey Team (COASST), a citizen science research program based at the University of Washington, I pull out some tools from my backpack to process this new find: a field guide to beached birds, a tape measure, a pair of calipers, and a clipboard. The carcass in hand has got two feet and two wings attached, but the head has been lost on its journey up the beach. Birds' heads give some helpful field marks, so this will be a bit of a challenge.

I'll look at the feet first. There's a key in the

book: it takes me through a series of questions about webbing, number and arrangement of toes, and other special features that will help me place this specimen within a group. These feet are small, with three webbed toes pointing forward, and a small toe, really just a toenail, pointing backwards. My book tells me that this carcass belonged to a Tubenose. I measure the length of the ankle bone with the calipers. It's 58 mm (millimeters are a lot easier to use for these measurements than fractions of an inch), which is about the length of a wine cork. The biggest kind of Tubenoses, albatrosses, have ankle-bones as long as my palm, and the bones of the littlest, the storm-petrels, measure the length of a fingertip.

Now that I know I'm looking at one of the seabirds that live out beyond the breakers, cruising over the waves in dynamic, soaring flight, I pull on the longest wing feathers to draw out the long, narrow span of the wings. They're really pointy, with very long feathers towards the tips and many short feathers filling in the



A small Horned Grebe wing

“forearm” and “upper arm” parts of the wing. My tape measure gives a longish wing-chord measurement of 31 cm. The feathers are an indiscriminate sooty gray on the top and bright white beneath. I use the wing key in the book to determine that this bird was once an (aptly named) Sooty Shearwater. The wing and ankle measurements match, as do the foot and plumage descriptions.

Most of the finds are simple to identify, like the Common Murres that are indeed common off our coast.



One of the largest Tubenoses, a Black-footed Albatross, cruising over the waves

But there are also somewhat unusual finds, such as a Rhinoceros Auklet (I found one still bearing its “rhino horn”!), Storm-Petrels (notoriously sneaky birds in life), or even landbirds. I found a Northern Mockingbird on my beach in July, for example. I get an excellent sense of what birds are living locally from this engaging exercise.

I fill out the rest of the data on my data sheet about this find, like if I found petroleum oil or fishing gear on it, and if the feet have gone stiff. Later, after I've finished my monthly beach walk, I'll transfer my data to the COASST website. My data, along with data collected by hundreds of volunteers along the West Coast, contribute to studies on seabird ecology. These studies help us all understand larger trends affecting our oceans. But for me, one of the most immediate benefits is that I get to learn about pelagic seabirds while enjoying a walk on the beach; I can get close to birds that are usually hard to observe and challenge myself to identify beached birds using clear, well-defined keys. Pretty good fun for a bird-lover and environmentalist!



Sometimes the birds at the beach are alive! Black oystercatchers