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 1 Street (Klopp Lake) in Arcata at 8:30 a.m. Trips end around 11 a.m. Walks led by: Amaya Bechler (Feb 2); Michael Morris (Feb 9); Christine Vertical (Feb 16); Cindy Moyer (Feb 23). If you are interested in leading a Marsh walk, please contact Ken Burton at shrikethree@gmail.com.

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.

Interested in leading a walk? Have ideas on where you think we should go? Please let us know! We welcome any and all feedback regarding these events! Email Melissa (nevrdaughn@gmail.com).

Saturday, February 9: Willow Creek Bird Walk. 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. Walks generally run 2-3 hours. All ages, abilities and interest levels welcome! For more information, please contact Birgitte Elbek at 707-267-4140 or willowcreekbirdwalks@gmail.com.

Sunday, February 10: Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge (HBNWR). This is a wonderful 2-3 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. Contact Leader Ralph Bucher (707-499-1247 or thebook@reninet.com) for more information.

(continued on next page)
President’s Column

By Alexa DeJoannis

This will be my last column here. While being president of the board was a valuable experience, my time can be better spent concentrating on committee work.

As ever, many hands make the work easier. RRAS needs volunteers to organize monthly programs, maintain membership records, edit the Sandpiper, collect auction items for the banquet and help Gary with food and drink service there, and participate on committees and the Board of Directors.

If RRAS’s mission is important to you, then it’s up to you to support it. I have found that volunteering can be very rewarding in a way paid work rarely is. As a volunteer, I choose how involved I will be, and I enjoy the sense that I am working with like-minded others towards a critical, long-term goal. I think Audubon’s mission is one I can support, and I hope you can, too.

I’ve spent many pleasant and memorable hours gleaning in Humboldt farms and orchards for the food bank, reading to kindergartners, and discussing the finer points of bird identification and dune ecology on nature walks. These commitments have led to meeting new people, exercising my mind and body, and exploring the world in finer detail.

This year is RRAS’s 50th! Committed people have been making this organization go since 1969. RRAS continues to be involved in local conservation and introducing people to birds. RRAS enjoys a loyal following among the community, but membership is not very diverse. Think about sharing your love of RRAS with family, friends, and acquaintances; there are plenty of people, and more being born all the time, who have not had the pleasure of bird-watching. Let’s share our well-kept secret!

In closing, I want to note the passing of an active member of the birding and education communities, David Schumaker. David was a fount of positivity, hugs, and hope. He organized Project FeederWatch at local schools, Godwit Days vendors, and was once the editor of the Sandpiper. I didn’t know him very well, but I was always glad to see him.

FIELD TRIPS (continued)

Saturday, February 16: Southern Humboldt Community Park in Garberville. Join Redwood Region Audubon Society on a bird walk in southern Humboldt. Meet leader David Fix at 9:30 a.m. in Tooby Park, one mile out Sprowl Creek Road on the right. The walk is an easy 2- to 3-hour stroll. If you are late you can easily catch up by walking towards the barn. Organic, shade-grown coffee and extra binoculars are usually provided. No dogs, please. A Potapotty is available on the trail. Contact Jay Sooter at 707-923-2695 or jaysooterr10@gmail.com. Heavy rain cancels.

Sunday, March 3: Wigi Wetlands Walk. Meet leader Amaya Bechler at the Truesdale St. parking lot to access the Bayshore Trail south of the shopping mall. This newer portion of the trail gives views of the bay and adjacent wetlands. Meet at 9 a.m. Walk ends around 11 a.m. Contact Amaya (email amayabechler0@gmail.com) for more information.

Saturday, March 9: Willow Creek Bird Walk. See February 9.


Sunday, March 17: Eureka Waterfront. See February 17.

Saturday, March 23: Southern Humboldt Community Park in Garberville. Meet leader Chet Ogan at 9 a.m. See February 16.

Sunday, March 24: Azalea State Natural Reserve. Let’s amble through the thickets, looking for songbirds. Exit Hwy 101 north of the Mad River onto North Bank Rd., then turn left on Azalea Rd. in about a mile. Park on the left just after the turn. Meet leader Alexa DeJoannis at 9 a.m. Call 707-826-7031 for more information.

Saturday, March 30: Ferndale Birding Stroll. A rural setting and nearby Russ Park offer lots of habitat diversity. Meet leader Alexa DeJoannis at 9 a.m. at the Ferndale Public Library. Call 707-826-7031 for more information.
Audubon Nature-Writing Deadline on March 22

Redwood Region Audubon Society is sponsoring its 14th annual Children’s Nature Writing Contest. Up to six cash prizes will be awarded for the best essay(s) or poem(s) on “What Nature Means to Me” by Humboldt or Del Norte County students in grades 4 through 12. Winners will be published on the RRAS website, www.rras.org, with awards presented at the 23rd Annual Godwit Days Festival in Arcata on Saturday, April 20 at 10 a.m.

Entries should be no more than 450 words in length; one entry per person. Topics suitable for exploration include, but are not limited to, bird feeding, duck hunting, animal rescue, and observations of the natural world. Entries must include student, teacher, and school names; grade; address; phone number and/or e-mail. Deadline for receipt is Friday, March 22, 2019.

Send submissions to adejoannis@hotmail.com with “Nature Writing Contest” in the subject line. Submissions can be attached Word documents (preferred method), Google docs, or text within the body of the e-mail, or mail a printout to Alexa DeJoannis, PO Box 125, Fields Landing, CA 95537.

March 22 Deadline for Student Bird-Art Contest Entries

For the 16th year, RRAS and Friends of the Arcata Marsh are co-sponsoring a Student Bird Art Contest in conjunction with Godwit Days. At least $550 in prizes will be awarded to Humboldt County students from kindergarten through high school who submit a drawing of one of 40 suggested species or another common local bird. Prize(s) also will be awarded for the best rendition of a bird in its natural habitat.

Entries will be judged by local wildlife artists and educators. Awards will be presented at the 24th Godwit Days Spring Migration Bird Festival on Saturday, April 20 at 10 a.m. All entries will be displayed at the Arcata Community Center during the Festival and copies of winning artwork will be shown at the Arcata Marsh Interpretive Center during May and June. A downloadable booklet of winning artwork and photos from the awards ceremony will be posted at www.rras.org by mid-May.

A flyer with complete rules and a list of suggested birds is posted on the RRAS website (link can be found in right column on home page) or can be picked up at the Arcata Marsh Interpretive Center, 569 South G Street, Arcata. Flyers have been mailed to all schools in Humboldt County.

Artwork may be dropped off at the Arcata Marsh Interpretive Center or mailed to Sue Leskiw, 155 Kara Lane, McKinleyville CA 95519.

Bird Safety from Predators at the Feeder

By Alexa DeJoannis

Feeding birds is not (usually) as easy as loading seeds in a feeder and hanging it in the yard. Birds will probably not patronize your offering unless they feel safe. Bird safety means good visibility around the food resource to see predators approaching, and nearby features to which they can dash for cover. For example, a dense shrub or the corner of a building that allows someone to get close to the feeder without being spotted by the birds will make them nervous and hesitant to visit. But if the feeder is in the middle of a stretch of lawn, birds will also be reluctant to venture so far from shrubby edges.

Bird feeders can also become very attractive to various non-target species, including squirrels, raccoons, rats, and bears. There are many ingenious devices designed to keep mammals from raiding the feeder, available where feeders are sold. One simple approach to this problem is to bring the feeder inside at night, when many mammals are active. Another way to manage both bird safety and feeder-raiding is to protect the feeder area with a fence.

Common visitors to feeders in residential neighborhoods are free-roaming cats, who are inextricably attracted to these sites of bird activity. These are either homed cats who go out sometimes or they’re living outside, without owners. Cats are capable of ranging miles from home, so cats may be visiting your feeder though you are not aware of it. I use a motion-triggered camera (also known as a camera trap or game camera) to monitor the feeder area. You might also find out if mammals are visiting your feeder by laying boards dusted liberally with fine plaster or carbon around it to capture animal tracks.

I use flimsy plastic fencing around my feeder to keeps cats away from feeding birds. Motivated cats are excellent fence climbers, but they can’t climb something that won’t support their weight. Cats can leap the 3-foot-high fence, but the obstacle prevents them from stalking birds inside. Raccoons occasionally pilage the feeder, though, so I was interested to hear a friend, Ralph Bucher, describe his fence.

Ralph lives in the country and uses an electric fence to protect his feeder from bears, raccoons, and cats. To install a small electric system, first drive in fence posts (these could be steel T-posts or wooden stakes), attach standoffs (plastic or ceramic devices that insulate the post from the electrified wire), and then string several levels of suitable wire. You can buy a fence energizer that runs from your domestic power source. Keep vegetation from brushing the wire and interrupting the current. The shock delivered by the energized wire is meant to be unpleasant and surprising, not lethal, and animals quickly learn to respect the enclosure. Birds perched on electrified wire are unaffected because they do not provide a path for the current to the ground.

Of course, protecting feeding birds from predators adds expense, but when I have created an artificial attraction for birds, I am responsible for any negative result to birds. So I need to provide for bird safety around my feeder.
A Twenty-Six-Year Legacy of Wildlife Appreciation

By Jude Power

It happened at an Audubon board meeting in 1991. Someone was updating us on the progress of the slowly evolving Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge. I suggested that Redwood Region Audubon could support the refuge and establish a presence south of Eureka by offering monthly field trips there. Anyone who has served on a board or committee knows what happened next: I was accorded the honor of leading the trips, beginning February 1992.

At the time, I was an enthusiastic but inexperienced birder who couldn’t reliably identify our common birds, so I brought more experienced birders along to help out. Steep learning curve. It didn’t matter; I was intoxicated by the Refuge’s beauty and wild offerings, tucked into an unexplored corner of Humboldt Bay. For years there was no Visitor Center, and field trips mustered at the parking area on Hoonah Road to wander westward along the levee. In some ways, I miss these early walks and the dynamism of the slough and adjacent wet pasture. Fluctuations in tide level, weather and season played out up close in a wide open landscape, which I am partial to.

It’s difficult to assign relative value to the many experiences I shared with participants and co-leaders over the years. There was the time a Northern Shrike charged out of nowhere to strike and carry-off an airborne Savannah Sparrow over the slough. And there was the buffy fledgling Sora in Wild Wings Pond who didn’t mind that the group was standing on the deck, rapt, as it learned to find its own food. And there’s the crowd-pleasing Bald Eagle who nests east of the Refuge and often perches on snags along the skyline.

But certainly one of the most meaningful trips was a recent one for which a McBride family member showed up. Her family had owned and lived on the section where the Visitor Center is today. She wanted to see what had become of the family ranch. It’s hard to know what she was feeling, but I was thrilled to walk her through some of the habitats that have been developed since the McBrides lived there, and to let her know that many, many people cherish the land and water that was once inaccessible. If you haven’t visited this tucked-away gem, do as soon as you can.

Editor’s Note: Jude Power has documented sightings of more than 400 bird species in Humboldt County. She still leads occasional walks at the Arcata Marsh. RRAS will continue to organize monthly field trips at Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge under the leadership of Ralph Bucher, who has birded the Refuge many times with Jude. Thanks for the countless hours of patient mentorship with us less experienced birders, Jude!