

President's Column

Birding and conservation: conflict or compatibility?

January 2006

by Jim Clark

I recently had a pleasant discussion with a longtime RRAS member on memorable experiences we had while birding. We agreed that many of our better observations seem to occur when we let the wildlife come to us. This is a far cry from "big day" type birding, both philosophically and environmentally.

Big day birding events, notably the celebrity and/or benefit ones, don't spare the petroleum fuel or greenhouse gases to get to as many hot spots as possible in a day. When energy expenditures for scouting and ground support are added to the jet fuel for the primary participants, one wonders about their overall effect on bird habitat.

The opposite of the corporate big day birding is that which is limited to the home feeder watch. This conserves resources and avoids generating greenhouse gases and pressure to extract more petroleum. The downside is that the feeder-watcher-only may never see interesting birds just a short walk or drive away in a different habitat.

Most of us enjoy birding between these two extremes. Regular RRAS field trips to the Arcata and Eureka marshes and the Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge are great examples of park-and-walk birding that minimize petroleum use and maximize outdoor birding enjoyment.

Many birders are professional, with enough disposable income to travel. That's what makes birding festivals economically viable and birding a worldwide economic force. Many of us travel thousands of miles to see new and exotic birds. Last summer Donna and I flew to Borneo to stay at an ecolodge. It seems that this irony is inescapable because the square riggers stopped their scheduled transoceanic voyages!

We are fortunate to be able to go to the far corners of the earth and back more easily than our great-grandfathers did, even though we might have a greater impact on the environment. The least we can do is to give some thought to minimizing our impact once we get to our destination.

Some birders are so intent on birds that other interesting natural events are virtually ignored. What value is there to putting a bird's name on a list when it is merely seen and identified? When we take the time to see how individual birds interact with their environment, we learn more about the birds than any field guide can describe and we understand more about their surroundings. By slowing down, we can become part of the environment, rather than just passing through it. We also have less of a negative effect on it by using fewer resources. What could be more compatible?

President's Column

We take all kinds

November 2005

by Jim Clark

Birdwatching, aka "birding," has different meanings to different people and many variations among those who enjoy it. Folks who enjoy a particular aspect of it may regard a different aspect as extreme or obsessive. Yet, birders at the opposite ends of the continuum recognize each other as birders.

We have inherited from the British the peculiar notion of "listing." I don't mean just writing down the birds that you see, but making separate lists for the day, month, year, lifetime, yard, county, state, country, and continent. I have witnessed deliberation about what county list to enter a bird in if it is seen in Humboldt County from across the south fork of the Trinity River in Trinity County. If it flies across the river, should it be put on both lists? What if it's on the county line?

Other variants of listers are Big Day, Big Month, and Big Year birders. These are the derby birders. How late and how far will a big day birder stay out and go to get that "last" species? As late and as far as needed until there is no hope of seeing it.

At the other end of the spectrum are the birders who like looking at birds, and that's it.

Then there are the optics. Big Dayers and listers tend to go for binoculars and scopes costing over \$1,000 each, paying a premium for European labor costs to get the last word in optics. The casual birder might not have a binocular or may use a \$49.95 "headache special."

Most of us are between the extremes. We bird because we like watching birds and are interested in their behavior and how they interact with the environment. Our optics are adequate to add to our enjoyment and enable us to identify birds without undue eyestrain. We keep a record of what we see because it might be useful, eventually, to help us or other birders enjoy seeing a particular bird. We participate in Christmas Bird Counts because we recognize their importance.

Lastly, there is the professional. This breed of birder actually gets paid to bird. Listing, derby birding, and good optics are required to hone and maintain professional skills. The pros who participate with us armateurs make a valuable contribution to birding and Redwood Region Audubon Society.

Although differences among birders are many, they are overcome by the cohesive force of love of birds and their environs. I invite all who love birds and want to protect their habitats to participate in our chapter. Whether you are a hot or casual birder, an expert grant writer, a teacher or a parent who wants more RRAS activities for children, we welcome your ideas, criticism, professional opinion, expertise, and creativity.

President's Column

October 2005

by Jim Clark

Mark Colwell and Steve Hackett's have recently submitted an opinion piece regarding the economic analysis of the establishment of critical habitat for Snowy Plovers ([See their article in this issue](#)). Please read it carefully and let others know about it. It embodies what Audubon is all about. Science and education can lead to better laws.

President's Column

May 2005

by Jim Clark

The Redwood Region Audubon Society Board of Directors acknowledges the dedication, imagination, and careful consideration given to the many decisions, issues, and opportunities in the 13 years between the inception and printing of the Humboldt County Breeding Bird Atlas by every officer and board member and many members during the creation of the atlas. On behalf of the RRAS Board of Directors, thank you!

At our Conservation Committee meeting on Thursday, April 21, Chet Ogan read an e-mail forwarded to him about several recent rulings and attempted legislation that are antibird: air pollution standards, drilling for oil in ANWAR, forest practices, and other policies that our current administration claims are "environmental." Then the author called attention to an organization in England named Royal Society for Protection of Birds (RSPB). Seems that RSPB started at the turn of the 20th century by a group of people concerned about the use and collection of birds and plumage for decorating women's hats. Currently, the author claims, the RSPB has more political clout than any single political party in England. No party can get anywhere if they run afoul of RSPB, and they really should get RSPB support to assure a successful campaign. The author went on to say that it might be a good idea to form something similar to RSPB in the United States.

The National Audubon Society (NAS) had its roots in the same cause as the RSPB. It was a driving force to change wildlife management from a "hook and bullet" to a conservation philosophy. It remains to be seen whether NAS will match the clout of the RSPB. Do we really need another national organization for protecting and appreciating birds? I hope not. It's up to the members of local chapters to make the NAS the 800-lb egret that it needs to be.

Perhaps NAS should adopt the Ivory-billed Woodpecker as a symbol of resurrection to the scrappy and radical organization that it once was.

President's Column
March 2005

by Jim Clark

I attended the recent forum sponsored by the Humboldt County Department of Health and Human Services, Community Development Department (Planning) and the State Department of Health Services. The County Health Officer, Ann Lindsay; County Director of Community Development, Kirk Girard; and State Health Officer, Dr. Richard Jackson, and other officials and interested persons were present.

The topic for the evening's discussions was Planning Healthy Communities. The basic premise was that communities and neighborhoods have evolved to encourage automobile traffic and discourage pedestrian travel, resulting in an epidemic (pandemic, I think) of obesity and related diseases. The facts and statistics presented by Dr. Jackson were, indeed, staggering. Worse, it seems as if we are getting fatter cars (SUV's) to accommodate our obesity, requiring even more space for roads and parking.

There was much discussion about making our streets and communities pedestrian friendly through planning. Most of the discussion was fairly familiar planning concept material. The role that nature plays in making life enjoyable, however, was missing. When community planning is discussed, we sometimes forget that we live in wildlife habitat, however altered or degraded it might be. So why not include appropriate wildlife, like birds, as assets to our neighborhoods? It's time that we started including wildlife, rather than merely avoiding negative impact to it, in the planning process. More people will walk more often if it is enjoyable, not just utilitarian and healthy.

As Audubon members, you can help by encouraging wildlife-friendly planning and landscaping in your community. After all, it's where you live.

President's Column

January 2005

by Jim Clark

Science often leads us to more difficult questions and decisions, rather than simple answers and clear direction. This is the situation that has evolved with regard to the effect of oyster culture on eel-grass in Humboldt Bay.

Recent studies on the effect of the spacing of oyster "long lines" (elevated lines on which oysters are grown in the intertidal zone) over eel-grass revealed that line spacing had an effect on eel-grass density. Density increased with increasing distance between lines. Lines 2.5 feet apart showed significant density reduction compared to 5-foot spacing, and there was no significant difference between lines 10 feet apart and eel-grass control areas with no long lines. At the last Mariculture Monitoring Committee meeting, Greg Dale, manager of Coast Seafoods Humboldt Bay Operations reported that the 10-foot line spacing appeared to yield only about half as many oysters as the 5- or 2.5-foot spacing. We don't know why eel-grass does better and oysters do worse with the 10 foot spacing. These findings, however raise several important questions about mariculture on Humboldt Bay:

Is there an optimal line spacing between 5 and 10 feet that is good for eel-grass and oysters? If 10 foot spacing is what is required to prevent eel-grass reduction, would it be appropriate to quadruple the mariculture acreage to get the same oyster yield compared to 5 foot spacing or eight times the area compared to 2.5 foot spacing? Could Coast Seafoods' Humboldt Bay operation survive at such low densities? What is best for birds and the natural environment, high-density limited-area mariculture with less eel-grass, or low-density large-area mariculture? What is "permissible" by regulatory agencies? This type of dilemma is something that businesses, government, environmental organizations and the general public wrestle with on many public trust issues in Humboldt and Del Norte counties.

As an Audubon member, you can help find solutions to these dilemmas by letting the Board of Directors know what you think and offering suggestions. Each of us has a unique set of abilities, perspective, and experience that can help.

When we try to win, we create the possibility of losing. When we try to solve a problem, we create the possibility of resolution.

President's Column

December 2004

by Jim Clark

Hal Genger left a message at work that *The Sandpiper* was going to be assembled Tuesday night November 30, that's tonight. I like to get things done some time before the last minute, and I was prepared to write this column the night before. I got home from work to find a plumbing leak, and by the time I found out what I needed to fix it, the stores were closed. No hot water for the kitchen sink or dishwasher is no big deal, but it was too late to do the column. I got home late from work with the right part on Tuesday, and after another hour, it was fixed.

What in blazes does this have to do with Audubon or birds? As the Chambers Brothers (Remember them?) would say: TIME! Tick, tock; tick, tock!

There is a core of dedicated members that have given time and steadfast effort to RRAS. To see many of their names, look at the list of our directors and officers in this *Sandpiper*. Many of them have served well beyond their anticipated term because they feel it is time well spent and because there has been no one to take their place.

I am in my third term as President and came in without being President Elect. It would be nice to know that I might be replaced next year by someone who has "learned the ropes" as President Elect or Director. Our bylaws specify a three-year term as President Elect, President, and Immediate Past President to ensure a smooth transition of leadership. Don't want to make such a commitment? Talk to a Board member of your choice, and we'll see whether we can accommodate you. See something else that interests you? Contact a committee chair and volunteer for one specific project or task. The best gift that RRAS could get for the holidays is the gift of your time.

I can put the money I saved by not calling an after-hours plumber toward a new spotting scope. I can never get the time back.

Happy Holidays and clear days for the Christmas Bird Counts!

President's Column

November 2004

by Jim Clark

9:00 a.m., Sunday, April 8, 2007

Imagine yourself with visiting friends birding at a marsh on Humboldt Bay. Cormorants getting their breakfast in the bay as a Kingfisher loudly proclaims its territory. You can also smell the rich bay mud as the tide recedes and the scent of fresh vegetation from the freshwater fringes of the adjacent salt marsh. You and your friends can also hear a subtle chorus of birds in the salt marsh and alders that greet you as you arrive, waiting to be identified and observed. You and your guests are entering a restored marsh just minutes from downtown Eureka, yet seemingly much farther away.

This is the Eureka (formerly PALCO) Marsh. It was bought by the City of Eureka in 1985 with a grant from the Coastal Conservancy. Now, 21 years later and just two years after the start of physical restoration, there is more wildlife in the marsh and shorebirds are flying over the dike from the salt marsh to the edge of the bay as the tide goes out.

Now imagine you and your friends at the same place, same date and time, but something is different. The Kingfisher can barely be heard, you can't smell the bay mud or the marsh vegetation, and there is not a bird to be heard in the marsh. As you watch the shorebirds fly across the dike, you notice several dead ones at the side of the road. Road? Yes! Very little can be heard due to traffic noise, and the smell of exhaust obliterates more subtle aromas. Although it took you longer to get here than before the road was built, it seems closer to town.

It's 9:10 a.m. Sunday, April 8, 2007. Time to go home before the traffic picks up the normal 4,000-vehicle day typical of Sunday traffic on the Waterfront Drive Extension.

The second scenario is the one the City of Eureka is promoting, despite its conflict with the marsh restoration and probable violation of the Coastal Plan and the City's own policy.

Redwood Region Audubon Society has joined with other environmental organizations to oppose the Waterfront Drive Extension south of Del Norte Street and save what can be a major asset to Eureka. We insist that the City of Eureka honor its contract with the Coastal Conservancy and fulfill its public trust obligation.

Please support our effort. Contact your City Councilperson if you live in Eureka, the Coastal Conservancy, California Coastal Commission, and spread the word. Watch for more information and workshop announcements.

President's Column

October 2004

by Jim Clark

Listen!

A few years ago Donna and I were hiking on Grizzly Peak above Ashland, Oregon. It's an easy trail through fir forest mixed with open meadows sprinkled with wildflowers. While looking for the actual "peak" on this rather flat lava flow, we heard ground squirrels scolding. Aha, maybe a Golden Eagle! Nope, not a single raptor could be seen in the sky. Then we heard a slight scraping sound above us and looked up to meet the saucer-eyed gaze of a Great Gray Owl. Had we not been listening, and kept listening after seeing no flying raptors, we would have missed that wonderful eyeball-to-eyeball contact with the owl.

There is more to listening than just hearing, it goes beyond birding to philosophy. The art and practice of listening openly and impartially allows one to see past initial impressions and to gather more useful information. Impartial observation is a feature of many religions and philosophies and is a central theme in science.

When we participate in public discourse, we hear from concerned people that have differing points of view. If we begin listening expecting to disagree with everything, they say we will not really hear everything they have to offer. Open listening will enable the listener to evaluate what the speaker is presenting more objectively. When this is done, points of agreement and common goals are more likely to be observed.

"Listening" to someone with a different point of view as an adversary is equivalent to birding while listening to music (or worse, your own philosophy) on an MP3 player. Opportunities to find common ground will be missed and so will knowledge that can be used to promote your point of view.

Let nature provide the lesson. Bird with open eyes and ears. Participate and advocate for birds and bird habitat with an open mind. Redwood Region Audubon Society provides ample opportunities to enhance your listening skills with a variety of field trips and informative monthly meetings.

President's Column

The General Plan Update: What nobody seems to know and what should have been done that wasn't *September 2004*

by Jim Clark

I participated in the deliberative sessions last spring to help create sketch plans as concepts for updating the Humboldt County General Plan for the next twenty years. The plans ranged from no change to expansive growth to "city centered" growth. RRAS favors Sketch Plan Three's (SP3) concept of concentrating growth within existing urban areas and utility districts that provide water and sewer. SP3 appears to have the best chance of preserving open space and working agricultural and forest lands near the edges of urban areas.

I attended most of the Board of Supervisor's workshop on August 24 and listened to presentations by "Healthy Humboldt" "HELP" (Humboldt Economic and Land Plan), The Farm Bureau and the Humboldt Realtor's Association and North Coast Builders. The presentations represented different points of view. There were even differing opinions among speakers in the same organizations.

As usual, the shared concerns were more interesting than the predictable differences. All of the presentations that I heard had strong and weak points and focused on the need to increase our affordable housing stock and preserve the viability of our agricultural land, timber land, and open space. What nobody seemed to know was the actual amount of buildable land available for housing. Richard Dorn's presentation accurately described a recent survey that indicated only about half of the land zoned for housing is actually buildable. Some of the restrictions are due to policies and laws that Audubon and other conservation organizations have fought for. Other land is just too steep or unstable to build on.

One of the speakers with the Farm Bureau group emphasized the need to re-combine lots of record in rural areas to preserve farm, ranch and timberland integrity. He asserted that, although the law allows such action, the county has not proceeded with it.

The two most important things that I got out of this workshop were:

The amount of land for housing must be verified before any planning concept can be seriously considered.

Re-combining of rural lots of record should be part of the Updated General Plan.

President's Column
Summertime fun on the Klamath

July 2004

by Jim Clark

On the seventeenth and eighteenth of June, Donna and I joined two visiting friends from England to raft down the upper Klamath River between Boyle and Copco dams.

We rafted the upper two thirds the first day, and the lower two thirds the second day. We repeated the middle third with the Class IV-V rapids.

Although fun, it was an outing of contradictions. We were on a "Wild and Scenic River" on which we waited to be turned on to have enough flow to raft. We were told the river was healthy, but algae along the river's edge smelled like a day old cow patty. The Bureau of Land Management "manages" the canyon in this area but there are essentially no improvements left not vandalized.

The birding was good: four Bald Eagles, two Golden Eagles, a dabble of Dippers, gobs of Black Headed Grosbeaks for a morning chorus, Yellow, Wilson's and McGillivray's Warblers herons, cormorants, mergansers galore, a nice nighthawk camp fly-through. kingfishers, flickers, woodpeckers and more.

I asked our guide if his outfit did birding oriented trips, and he thought it might be a good idea.

I wondered what the natural flowing river might be like if its main source of nutrients were the volcanic rock through which it flows, and how big a fish our assistant guide might have caught instead of a ten-inch trout.

What I did most though is enjoy the ride and have fun. A good experience in a place can help re-commit to protecting and restoring it.

Go forth and have fun!

President's Column

You know, you really should do something about your parents

May 2004

by Jim Clark

Those of you that still live at home with your parents might not control the family budget, but you probably control your parents more than you know. If you're reading this you probably care about the environment already. So, how would you like to do some good things for your environment, maybe reduce your work around the house, have some fun, and best of all, improve your parents behavior?

Lawn: Early in the last century a guy named Scott said that the mark of civilization was a well-kept lawn. Not coincidentally a company by that same name tells people to put chemical fertilizer and pesticide, a major cause of urban water pollution, on lawns. The goal is to make them look like astroturf, provided you mow it. Now nothing is wrong with a patch or strip of lawn here and there, but why make it a major feature that messes up our waterways?

Three-ton vehicles: Suddenly many folks my age think they need a large gas guzzling SUV to go shopping. Did they forget that they grew up and survived, went camping, shopping and vacationing with moderately sized two-wheel drive cars? Just think how the extra money spent on four wheel drive and gas could be spent on good gear for you instead. What rhymes with gas and gets big when you sit on it too much? Walking is a great way to enjoy the outdoors.

Bad plants: Want to attract rats to your house? Try ivy and pampas grass. Rats are not only a threat to public health but eat bird eggs and nestlings. There are lots of varieties of native plants that are good ground covers or shrubs that don't attract rats and take less care. Once again, you come out a winner on the yard care angle.

Corvids: AKA Crows, Ravens and Jays. These birds have increased drastically in the urban and agricultural areas of Humboldt County. Garbage such as a dropped French fry, attracts them and once they are here they eat the eggs and nestlings of songbirds. Help control the corvid population by not allowing them to feed on garbage and pet food. You can use half the time you used to spend on yard chores to pick up corvid food.

Local Food: Encourage your parents to buy locally grown and caught food when they can. It helps the local farmers and fishers and takes less fuel to haul it to our area. Locally raised grass fed beef (for you omnivores) is better for you and the land and does not harbor the kind of *E. coli* that makes people seriously ill, like grain fed beef does.

Use parent coercion techniques (PCT) effectively: Eye rolling, groaning, pleading work well if not used to excess. Don't forget to reward your parents with praise when they do good. Remember, your parents could be a bit set in their ways, so be patient.

President's Column

Boy, Beetle, or Elder?

April 2004

by Jim Clark

In his welcoming speech and songs opening of the 2004 Aleutian Goose Festival, Tolowa elder and preserver of the Tolowa language Loren Brommelyn told a Tolowa story of a boy who tried to kill a beetle on a freshly swept trail by stepping on it. He was stopped from doing so by an elder who explained that the boy had no right to kill the beetle unless there was a need to do so. The beetle could be another beetle's mother or father, dinner for a bird or useful in some way that we do not understand.

As I listened, I became aware of the same process occurring on a different scale today. The Western Snowy Plover first came to mind. For years we have used our beaches for many things; some have abused the beaches without caring, others have used them carefully and with respect. As we learned more, we found that even some of the most careful beach users were unknowingly making it difficult for the Snowy Plover to breed. Like the child about to squash the beetle, society needs to stop and listen to those who try to stop the inadvertent destruction of a seemingly insignificant form of life. As Audubon members, it is our duty to inform society that to dismiss a little shorebird as insignificant, or that its population on a beach where its ancestors have bred for thousands of years is not important, is arrogance born of ignorance. As we continue to learn more about our ecosystem, it is humbling to learn how much we don't know. We now know a lot about the biological details of the snowy plover, but we don't know very much about the chain of events that might occur because of local extinction. Let's listen to everyone on this issue, including those whose important activities might be affected. We could just as well be that beetle as the boy's foot.

Another example is that the Siskiyou National Forest (SNF) wants to salvage log the Biscuit fire area in southwestern Oregon and Northwestern California. "Salvage" logging is proposed in areas where few marketable trees were burned and the fire mostly stayed low and cleared out the undergrowth. I saw second-year growth from brush, and a profusion of early blooming wildflowers found no where else on earth in the "severely burned" area. Like stepping on a beetle, one SNF proposal would create a damaging permanent fireline to protect the burned low fire danger California portion from the adjacent mismanaged private timberlands that are the true fire threat. We need to remember that our relationship to our government is as a parent (elder) to a child. We also must remember that we are all the beetle, the boy, and the elder depending on the situation. Let's strive to be the elder most of the time.

Thank you Loren for your inspiration.

President's Column

March 2004

by Jim Clark

I look forward to serving as President of Redwood Region Audubon Society and thank Chet Ogan for accepting the chairmanship of the Conservation Committee.

The cornerstones of Audubon action are science, education and law. We sponsor and use science as a justification for action, and educate ourselves and others on scientific findings related to birds and the environment that we share. If we find that the laws that are supposed to protect the environment are inadequate or not being followed we seek a legal remedy through legislation or through the courts. Science requires curiosity and objectivity, and a little skepticism doesn't hurt. Rather than just saying no to a project, we demand conditions that assure environmental protection.

Nothing challenges a philosophical position or a mission like controversy. Such a controversy exists now with the proposal to build a liquefied natural gas (LNG) plant on the North Spit of Humboldt Bay. Some of our fellow environmental organizations have taken a hard line against the LNG facility from the first word of the proposal. These are organizations that have been and will continue to be our allies in many environmental battles. Although Redwood Region Audubon Society may not take the same approach as our sibling organizations, we need to accept that diversity among environmental organizations is just as important as it is among individuals. As part of that diversity, we need to remain true to our principles and stand out as an organization of unified independent thinking members.

I hope that every member of Redwood Region Audubon Society is concerned about the important environmental issues surrounding the proposed LNG facility. I also hope that Audubon members will accept statements from both promoters and detractors of the LNG project only if they are backed by sound science, and so become more educated on this subject. Be skeptical, ask questions.

The "law" part comes when we participate in the opportunities for public review and input legally mandated for this type of project. Keep an open line of communication. Talk to friends, your elected representatives, attend workshops, testify, talk to a chapter board member. Be proud of being a member of Redwood Region Audubon Society, and don't forget to have fun.