



The Sandpiper

March 2023



Redwood Region Audubon Society

www.rras.org

Please join RRAS for the program Earbirding in Humboldt County: Recording, Editing, and Learning Birdsongs, by Robert Childs

Robert will talk about his motivation and procedures for creating the website earbirdinghumboldt.com, and share tips for identifying birds using their songs and calls. This will include descriptions of how to use your phone to record and learn bird songs, along with steps for using easy-to-use sound editing software to turn your recordings into phone alarm sounds or for submissions to Cornell Labs. Robert believes

that many people who spend time outdoors are interested in birds but are stymied by the difficulty of spotting them in the foliage. Robert will be playing recordings of some unusual local bird sounds, sounds made by mammals that are commonly mistaken as bird sounds, and some of his favorite bird recordings from Guatemala and Australia.

Robert received a BS in Wildlife Management from the University of Missouri, Columbia in 1975. He moved to Humboldt County in 1989, where he taught for 21 years at Eureka High School. He's birded in more than 20 countries.

The live program will be held at the Six Rivers Masonic Lodge, 251 Bayside Road, Arcata. It will be simultaneously zoomed – please go to RRAS.org for the Zoom link. Hot drinks and goodies will be served at 7 p.m. so bring a mug to enjoy shade-grown coffee. Please come fragrance-free.

Above: Marsh Wren, by Ken Burton.



Left: Robert holding a parabolic dish to record bird sounds. Photo by Delores Haskamp.

DID YOU KNOW? Submitted by the RRAS Cat & Bird Safety Committee

Did you know that excluding cats and other predatory mammals has helped conservationists save a rare seabird in the US? In a first, a Hawaiian Petrel chick hatched at a predator-free site on the island of Kaua'i. It took 10 years of effort by many cooperating partners to pull off this bid to save the Hawaiian Petrel from extinction, and excluding cats was an essential component of the project's success. If you have a bird-friendly yard, you can contain your yard in a cat-proof fence to protect overwintering and breeding birds from neighbors' free-roaming felines. You just might help sustain populations of "your" backyard birds!

FIELD TRIPS IN MARCH!

Sat. March 4th – 8:30-11am. Birding at Arcata Marsh, led by Cindy Moyer. Bring binoculars and a scope if you have one and meet at the south end of I Street (Klopp Lake). Reservations not required.

Sat. March 11th – 8:30-11am. Arcata Marsh, led by Kathryn Wendel.

Sun. March 12th – 9-11am. Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge with leader Ralph Bucher. Meet at the Visitor Center.

Sat. March 18th – 8:30-11am. Arcata Marsh, led by Rob Fowler.

Sat. March 18th – 10-12. **Beginning Birdwatching & Project Feederwatch** at Jacoby Creek School garden on Bayside: Every third Saturday through April. Family-friendly, all ages welcome! Contact Denise Seeger at daseeger@gmail.com for more info.

Sun. March 19th – 9-11am. Ralph Bucher will lead a walk on the Eureka Waterfront. This trail is paved and is wheelchair accessible.

Sat. March 25th – 8:30-11am. Arcata Marsh, led by Michael Morris.

Sat. March 25th, 8:30-10:30am. Join Redwood Region Audubon Society in **Southern Humboldt** on the fourth Saturday of every month at Tooby Park, one mile west of Garberville on Sprowl Creek Road. These walks will be easy walking lasting 2-3 hours each. Start time is variable so please text or call Ann at 707-296-8720 for start time each month. Heavy rain cancels.

Sat. March 25th – 9-11am. Wigi Wetlands Volunteer Workday. Contact Jeremy at jeremy.cashen@yahoo.com or (214) 605-7368 for more information.

Sat. March 25th, 8am-12n. Join Ken Burton for a field trip in Ferndale bottoms that will include a half-day visit primarily by car, to various birding hotspots. There should be many signs of spring. We'll be looking for Ferruginous Hawk and Lark Sparrow among other species. Meet Ken at 8 am in the large parking area between Fernbridge Café and Fernbridge Street. Be prepared to carpool from there. If you want to carpool to Fernbridge, let Ken know (shrikethree@gmail.com or 707-499-1146).

Sun. March 26th – 6:30am. This month's RRAS **Women and Girls' Walk** is for **early birds!** Please join trip leader, Denise Seeger for a sunrise walk at the Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge. Meet at the Visitor Center where we will walk the Shorebird Loop Trail to hear and hopefully see, hundreds, if not thousands, of Aleutian Cackling Geese lift off their nighttime roosts! Who knows what other surprises may be in store? Waterfowl, shorebirds, secretive marsh birds, and more. Contact Denise at daseeger@gmail.com.

Sun. March 26th, 9-11am. Hal Genger will lead a free guided birding tour at the Wigi Wetlands portion of the Humboldt Bay Trail. Meet Hal at the Bayshore Mall parking lot behind Kohl's Department store for a stroll along the trail looking at birds, plants, and the progress on restoration.

*Contact Ralph at thebook@reninet.com for any walks he leads.

*Contact Field Trip Chair, Janelle Chojnacki at janelle.chojnat@gmail.com for more information on all other walks, unless otherwise specified.

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President's Column

By Gail Kenny

Spring is almost here! When you read this some of our local birds will already be singing again. I heard a Pacific Wren singing in early February. It is such a pleasure to hear birds singing again. Most of them sing for a few short months of the year, so it's important to get out while it's happening.

The free Merlin App's sound ID is a great way to learn bird songs. As an older person, I have lost the acute hearing of my youth, especially the higher pitches. I recently had a hearing test looking to get hearing aids so I could hear birds again, but my hearing loss is not advanced enough to warrant them. The audiologist said most of the over-the-counter hearing aids are amplifiers, which wouldn't help me hear the higher pitched birdsong.

Then I heard about a free app called Hear Birds Again (<https://hearbirdsagain.org/>) that uses binaural headsets to lower the pitch of birdsong so people like me can hear birds again. The binaural headsets have microphones on each earpiece that allow for directional hearing so you can identify where the birdsong is coming from. I purchased the headset that was listed as the second best because it was available and the better one was not. Now the *Hear Birds Again* website also lists a kit with assembly instructions that guides you through making your own better headset. I have tried out the *Hear Birds Again* app a few times. You can control the pitch shift, frequency (kHz), output level, and iOS audio volume with the app. Now I can hear the birds when I bird on my own and won't have to rely so much on my birding companions to detect the birds and tell me where the sound is coming from. A major drawback is that the birds sound different at a lower pitch so there is a learning curve to get used to how different species sound with the app. Also, the headset I have partially plugs your ears making it hard to hear my birding companions talking. The kit for the alternative headset solves that issue. I am looking forward to getting more experience hearing birds again in the next few months!

I encourage you to get out on your own in the coming months or to come on some field trips listed in this newsletter to experience and learn more birdsongs while they are singing! Also, Godwit Days field trips in April are a great way to get out and hear and see birds this spring.

In RRAS news, I have just started my fourth and last year as RRAS President. I'd like to thank outgoing board member Pia Gabriel for her service. I also want to thank continuing Board Members Jeremy Cashen, Kathryn Wendel, and Harriet Hill for renewing their terms; and Kate Rowe who is starting her first term.

We are still in need of a Treasurer, and are also seeking *Sandpiper* committee members to help with various aspects of producing the newsletter, as our current editor, Gisèle Albertine, is stepping away after almost three years. Thank you, Gisèle!

Please email me at gailkenny@gmail.com if you are interested in any of these volunteer opportunities.

Welcome!

Hear Birds Again is an iOS app for bird enthusiasts who can no longer hear high-pitched bird sounds, but who can still hear lower-pitched sounds reasonably well. In brief, it works by shifting high-pitched sounds into a lower range where you can hear them.



"I'm so happy to hear the high-pitched bird songs again!"

Sunrise at the Refuge

Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge invites you to "Sunrise at the Refuge" Every Saturday and Sunday in the month of March the entrance gate will open 45 minutes before sunrise, rain or shine, to allow visitors the opportunity to view the habitats of southern Humboldt Bay at sunrise and quite possibly witness thousands of Aleutian cackling geese fly off their night time roosts.

Begin at the Shorebird Loop Trailhead located at the Richard J. Guadagno Headquarters and Visitor Center, 1020 Ranch Road in Loleta. For more information, please call (707) 733-5406 or visit www.fws.gov/refuge/humboldt-bay.



Bird Nesting Season is Here!

Please avoid trimming or removing vegetation

Bird Nesting Season is February through August. Avoid disturbances to vegetation and, if disturbances are necessary, be sure to take measurements to ensure there are no bird nests in the planned area.

Kid's Korner WOWZA WILDLIFE!

by Leslie Scopes Anderson

YOU'RE A PAIN
IN THE BUTT!



WHERE IN THE WORLD?

Black Skimmers live along the ocean shores from central California south. Their range may be increasing, however, as the climate warms.

FUN FACTS:

Black Skimmers feed by "skimming" for fish with their long lower bill in the water. They are related to terns and fly in flocks on their long wings. They nest on the sand, so be careful walking on the beach!

The Aleutian Cackling Goose

Compiled by Eric T. Nelson, retired Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge Project Leader 2001-2019

The history of Aleutian cackling geese (ACG) is a fascinating story that has many twists and turns and covers many refuges of the Pacific Flyway, from Alaska Maritime NWRC in the far north of the Pacific Ocean where they nest to San Joaquin NWR in the southern Central Valley of California, and many refuges in between, including Castle Rock and Humboldt Bay.

Once thought to be extinct, this small-bodied (4-6 pounds) migratory goose has made one of the most astounding recoveries in the history of wildlife management. The population has soared from <800 individual birds in 1974 to >100,000 since 2005. Aleutian Cackling geese were formerly known as Aleutian Canada geese until taxonomists renamed and “regrouped” them in 2004.



The Aleutian goose’s problems began when fur farmers and trappers released Arctic and red foxes on more than 190 islands within the goose’s nesting range in the Aleutian Islands of Alaska. Most fox releases took place during the height of the fur industry from 1915 to 1936, but some occurred as early as 1750. The foxes nearly wiped out the Aleutian goose populations because the birds had no natural defenses against land predators on the previously mammal-free islands.

The geese were not seen in the Aleutian Islands from 1938 until 1962, when U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologists, led by Robert (Sea Otter) Jones, discovered a small population on tiny (7.4 sq mi), rugged, remote Buldir Island in the western Aleutian Islands. The nearest two islands to Buldir are ~65 miles away. This isolation is what likely saved the geese, as it is probable foxes were never put on the island by fur farmers. In summer 1963, the number of Aleutian geese on Buldir Island was roughly estimated at 200 to 300 birds, and some birds were caught and banded. This species was one of the first animals designated as endangered in 1967, under the Endangered Species Preservation Act of 1966, however the breeding grounds were so remote and difficult to survey that the first accurate count didn’t take place until 1975 at a spring stopover point near Crescent City, California.

ACG were initially found on the north coast of CA during the waterfowl hunting season of 1974-75. First, a banded ACG was shot at Lake Earl, near Crescent City in December, then several weeks later on 16 January, four geese which were determined to be ACG were shot out of a flock of 30 birds by two high school students on the Eel River bottoms. Later in March, banded ACG were sighted on Castle Rock and in pastures near the airport in Crescent City. This led to intensive observations directed by Dr. Paul Springer, a USFWS Research Biologist and member of the Aleutian Goose Recovery Team. Dr. Springer worked for the Northern Prairie Research Station which had aligned with Humboldt State University (HSU). In 1974 Dr. Springer recruited Dennis Woolington, an MS candidate at HSU to study ACG. On April 14, 1975, a total of 790 ACG were counted flying off Castle Rock and by April 28 all the geese had departed.

Over time, conservation initiatives from the Aleutian Canada Goose Recovery Program were instituted. These included removal of foxes from nesting islands, closing of Canada/cackling goose wintering and migration areas (primarily areas in the Central Valley of CA and along the CA and OR coast) to hunting, translocation of wild geese caught in the Aleutians to other islands where foxes had been removed, and habitat conservation. By the mid-1980s, limited numbers of breeding geese had been discovered on two other islands in the Aleutian chain. The birds began

to increase after recovery actions were put into place, particularly re-establishing geese on islands where they formerly nested. Getting geese re-established on very large (85 sq mi) Agattu Island gave a big boost to recovery efforts. As of 2006 ACG were known to be breeding on ten different islands in the Aleutian chain. As the Aleutian goose population began a steady recovery the subspecies was reclassified as threatened on December 12, 1990. The goose was finally removed from the list of ESA-listed threatened and endangered species on March 20, 2001, some 34 years after they were originally listed.

Aleutian geese typically arrive in California in early October each year. The majority of the population currently bypasses the north coast and migrates to their primary wintering grounds in the northern San Joaquin Valley and delta of central California. However, since 2002, there has been a relatively small number (<10,000) of geese that spend fall and winter in the Humboldt Bay area. In late January, the geese wintering in the Central Valley begin moving north, and by mid-February most of the Aleutian goose population is located in northwestern California. From approximately 2002-2015 large numbers (>30,000) of Aleutian cackling geese roosted in Refuge wetlands and foraged on Refuge pastures and over 60,000 could be found in the Humboldt Bay area at their peak in the spring, however these numbers decreased by approximately half between 2015-2020. Some ACG move up to Del Norte County and SW Oregon in March and early April but virtually all ACG depart for the Aleutian Islands by mid-April and nest and molt on islands there through the summer.

As the goose population has grown so has their impact on grasslands in Del Norte and Humboldt Counties (as well as up the Oregon coast). Until 2001, the geese primarily used pastures in Del Norte County during late winter and spring, while spending the nights roosting on Castle Rock NWR located offshore of Crescent City. However, as a result of hazing in Del Norte County and continued population growth, goose use shifted primarily to Humboldt County. From 2002 to 2020 Humboldt County has and still does, receive the majority of Aleutian goose use on the northwest coast from January through April. A working group of landowners, biologists, and others have met in efforts to manage this sometimes-contentious situation. Stakeholders work together to develop innovative ways to deal with depredation issues, while still providing the feeding areas needed by geese to attain nutrient reserves necessary to successfully migrate and reproduce.



Since 2001 ACG have been legal to hunt, and currently up to 10 birds can be harvested per day during the goose season. Beginning in spring 2007, California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) allowed a late season (~2-3 weeks in late February and early March) on private lands only with the intent to “push” geese off private lands and onto public lands. This “late” season and a “corridor” of public lands (from south to north: the Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge, City of Eureka, CDFW, City of Arcata) around the eastern edge of Humboldt Bay have reduced goose depredation impacts on private grazing lands substantially, but certainly nowhere near completely. Heavy goose use still occurs annually on private lands, especially in the Arcata Bottoms and the Eel River Bottoms. As the ACG population has increased, the population has also increased its geographic range. Sightings of ACG now regularly occur from throughout other parts of California, western Oregon and southwestern Washington.

Photos of Aleutian Geese, by Mike Peters.

Bird Talk Around Town; featuring interviews with locals, on all things bird!

By Gina Rogers

Gina met Daisy Ambriz-Peres when both were taking the California Coastal Naturalist Training program. Daisy's love for birds came through in her Capstone Project, a brochure identifying local birds and providing tips on bird ID, all in Spanish.

Tell me about your background and where your love for the outdoor world came from: I was born and raised in Las Vegas; my parents were immigrants from Mexico. It was a love of spiders that first drew me to nature. I was always watching the ones in my backyard, especially the poisonous ones. I loved how the spiders danced on their webs, looking just like ballerinas. But my family did not really feel welcome at parks or going hiking. So, I never even had any vocabulary for the environmental world. I somehow latched onto the word ecologist and decided that is what I would become.

How did you end up in Arcata? I first went to college at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas majoring in ecology. I was able to get an internship with the Conservation Lands Foundation which was working to establish the Basin and Range National Monument. One fateful day, on the two-hour drive to the property, I rode with the project's lead ecologist, who just happened to be a Wildlife Management graduate from Humboldt State. He listened to my interests and told me I just HAD to go to there. He was a birder and a hiking advocate, and his enthusiasm became my enthusiasm.

So, I transferred! In the application, I checked off Wildlife for my major, not even realizing that to study spiders I should have been in Zoology. But on the thin thread that birds eat spiders, I took my first ornithology course. I got to volunteer at the Humboldt Bay Bird Observatory, where I just loved the mist netting, holding the bird, seeing how alive it was. I was hooked.

How has your career focus evolved? I thought I'd be working on the research side. I love math, and the mapping and analysis research involves. But while I was doing field work (Marbled Murrelet surveys), I started to reflect on the importance of bridging the gap between science and the community. I became interested in environmental education, and was lucky to get a job with Friends of the Dunes. As Outreach Manager there, I'm now helping a more diverse audience access natural spaces. Through a program we call Explorando Juntos, I've offered Spanish-only and bilingual bird walks, guided nature walks, and children's programs.

Do you have a favorite bird? That one's easy – the Black Phoebe! It was the first bird I could positively identify. Growing up, birds for me were just a big blur, I really didn't know at all about the wonderful diversity of birds. But when I came to Arcata, I started looking more closely, and at my house a phoebe would sit on a post in my backyard and flick its tail, as if saying "good morning" especially to me. It made such a personal connection. I even named my dog Phoebe!



What important take-away do you have about successfully entering the environmental field? For me, it really took a village. I had so many great mentors who took the time to explain things to me, teach me how to teach, and gave me support. Now I want to pass that on, creating spaces where people feel welcome and can gain an understanding and appreciation for the environment that will then inspire conservation.

Above: Daisy teaches children about birding.



Above: Zitkála-Šá, courtesy of National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institute.

NATURE QUOTES: By Zitkála-Šá

"A wee child toddling in a wonder world, I prefer to their dogma my excursions into the natural gardens where the voice of the Great Spirit is heard in the twittering of birds, the rippling of mighty waters, and the sweet breathing of flowers. If this is Paganism, then at present, at least, I am a Pagan."

"I seem to be in a spiritual unrest. I hate this eternal tug of war between being wild or being civilized. I am what I am. I owe no apologies to God or men."

Born in 1876, Zitkála-Šá (Red Bird) was just eight years old when missionaries recruited her from the Yankton Indian Reservation in South Dakota to attend their boarding school. She did not speak any English and it was forbidden to speak tribal languages at the school. Her hair was forcibly cut, and her name was taken away. Nonetheless, she remained conflicted since her love for learning to read, write, and play the violin coincided with the grief of losing her heritage and being forced to assume another culture. On a rare visit home she recalls how, "I was a wild little girl of seven. Loosely clad in a slip of brown buckskin, and light-footed... with a pair of soft moccasins on my feet, I was as free as the wind that blew my hair, and no less spirited than a bounding deer. These were my mother's pride – my wild freedom and overflowing spirits... the cloud shadows which drifted about on the waving yellow of long-dried grasses thrilled me like the meeting of old friends..."

A prolific writer, she wrote about the Native American way of life that, for the first time in history, challenged the stereotypes of Native Americans that were often used in defense of why Native Americans should be assimilated into American culture. Her works, which were highly critical of the boarding school system, were published in numerous journals. She wrote a piece for Harper's Monthly where she described the profound loss of identity that she experienced. After the article was published, she was promptly fired. Her decision to leave her teaching post at Carlisle Boarding School, was predicated on the question that "palefaces have failed to ask themselves whether real life or long-lasting death lies beneath this semblance of civilization." Having "forgotten the healing in trees and brooks," she characterizes herself as "a slender tree ... uprooted from my mother, nature, and God ... shorn of my branches.... The natural coat of bark ... [has been] scraped off to the very quick."

A gifted musician, in the early 1900s Zitkála-Šá composed the critically acclaimed opus, *The Sun Dance Opera*, with professor, William F. Hanson. Inspired by Sioux ritual, she played Sioux melodies on the violin for the piece. In 1916 she became the secretary of the Society of the American Indian, and she and her husband moved to Washington, D.C., where she served as a liaison between the society and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. She lobbied for citizenship rights leading her to found the 1924 Indian Citizenship Act. Zitkala-Ša, also known as suffragist and voting rights activist Gertrude Simmons Bonnin, died in Virginia in 1938.

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