

The Sandpiper

October 2022



Redwood Region Audubon Society

www.rras.org



Please join RRAS for an in-person, and virtual program on:

The Path to Sea Otter Reintroduction in Oregon

Presented by Frank Burris, of the Elakha Alliance on Wednesday, October 19, at the Six Rivers Masonic Lodge, 251 Bayside Road, Arcata; this program will be simultaneously zoomed and the link will be available on the RRAS website. Social hour with goodies and hot drinks will start at 6:30 p.m. and the program will begin at 7 p.m.

The Elakha Alliance's mission is to restore a healthy population of Sea Otters to the Oregon Coast and thereby make Oregon's marine and coastal ecosystem more robust and resilient. Restoration of sea otters will benefit the entire kelp ecosystem, including seabirds that breed locally. Sea Otters are a keystone species whose predation and behavior have a profound effect on the mix of species around them. In their absence, Oregon's marine ecosystem has suffered, becoming ecologically less diverse. In January of 2022, the Elakha Alliance published a scientific feasibility study on sea otter reintroduction in Oregon. In August 2022, the US Fish and Wildlife Service utilized Elakha's study in publishing their own feasibility assessment of Sea Otter

reintroduction in Northern California and Oregon. Both studies concluded that, YES, it is feasible to return sea otters to Oregon. What now? Join Frank Burris, Elakha's Oregon South Coast Community Liaison, as he discusses the next steps.

Frank Burris is the South Coast Community Liaison for the Elakha Alliance. Frank served as the Watershed Management Educator for the OSU Extension Service and Oregon Sea Grant from 2000-2022 and was the County Leader of the Curry County OSU Extension office from 2007-2022. His interests include water quality, wetland and estuary education and restoration, and tourism and economic development. A short assignment as Interim Coastal Region Director, a special assignment with the Association of Oregon Counties working as the Mid-Coast Coordinator to improve and complete the Oregon Coast Trail and serving as facilitator for the Rocky Habitat selection process broadened Frank's knowledge of the coast and the people working to protect and preserve its beauty and strong sense of community. Frank can be reached at Frank@ElakhaAlliance.org.

RRAS Field Trips in OCTOBER!

Sat. October 1st – 8:30-11am. Birding tour of Arcata Marsh, led by Jim Clark. Bring binoculars and a scope if you have one and meet at the south end of I Street (Klopp Lake), reservations not required.

Tues. October 4th – 5-7pm. Join trip leader Janelle Chojnacki for a weekday, evening walk around one of Humboldt Bay's most birdy spots. Spice up a weekday evening with this free guided walk around the Arcata Marsh. We may see night herons take off from their diurnal roosts, and evening walks always carry the possibility of seeing owls out and about! Bring binoculars and a scope if you have one and meet at the south end of I Street.

Sat. October 8th – 8:30-11am. Birding tour of Arcata Marsh, led by Kathryn Wendel.

Sun. October 9th – 9-11am. RRAS will offer a special 4 mile walk at Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge to areas not normally open to public access. The refuge will be celebrating National Wildlife Refuge Week - "Walk on the Wild Side" - by opening public access for the day to the area north of the Shorebird Loop Trail and around the outer levee. It should provide some great birding opportunities! Meet leader Ralph Bucher at the Visitor Center and email him at thebook@reninet.com to sign up.

Sat. October 15th – 8:30-11am. Birding tour of Arcata Marsh, led by Gary Friedrichsen.

Sun. October 16th – 9-11am. Ralph Bucher will lead a walk on the Eureka Waterfront. This trail is paved and is wheelchair accessible.

Sat. October 22nd – 8:30-11am. Birding tour of Arcata Marsh, led by Bill Rodstrom.

Sat. October 22nd – 9-11am. Wigi Wetlands Volunteer Workday. Help create bird-friendly native habitat and restore a section of the bay trail behind the Bayshore Mall. We provide tools and snacks. Please bring your own water and gloves. Contact Jeremy at jeremy.cashen@yahoo.com or 214-605-7368 for more information.

Sat. October 29th – 9-11am. Come explore both birds and plants with Kate Rowe and Barbara Reisman on the **Monthly Women and Girls' Birding Walk**. Bring your binoculars and we'll see which bird species we can find along the Freshwater Creek trail. We'll then make our way to the California Native Plant Society's North Coast Chapter's native plant nursery and demonstration garden. Meet trip leaders at the Freshwater Farms Reserve trail parking lot, 5851 Myrtle Avenue, Eureka. Hope to see you there!

Sat. October 29th – 8:30-11am. Birding tour of Arcata Marsh, led by Larry Karsteadt.

Sun. October 30th – 8:30am. The Loleta area contains a nice mix of riparian, wetland, pasture, and estuary, resulting in a wide diversity of wildlife. Ken Burton will lead a half-day outing in search of waterfowl, shorebirds, waders, raptors, and songbirds. Meet at the intersection of Eel River Drive and Summer Street. Be prepared to carpool. For more information or arrange carpooling, contact Ken at 707-499-1146 or shrikethree@gmail.com.

October TBD – 8:30-11am. Since the usual second Saturday won't work for October, there may be a spontaneous morning bird walk on another date in Southern Humboldt. Trip leader Ann Constantino will contact folk by word of mouth. Email Ann at annconstantino@gmail.com for more information.

*Contact Ralph at thebook@reninet.com for any walks he leads and all Arcata Marsh walks.

*Contact Field Trip Chair, Janelle Chojnacki at janelle.choj@gmail.com for more information on all other walks, unless otherwise specified. See our website for Covid protocols.



Above: Frank Burris, courtesy of Frank.

Above top left: Sea Otter floating in kelp, by Robb Lansdowne, Flickr.

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President's Column

By Gail Kenny

In my August column I alluded to my upcoming international travel plans which prompted me to try out the Merlin App. I went to South India for my daughter's traditional Hindu wedding to her husband who is from there. The first birds we saw when leaving the airport in Chennai in the early morning hours were House Crows. We saw them everywhere! The next day from the vantage point of the hotel rooftop pool, I added Black Kites and Rock Doves. We also saw a large owl flying by while dining at the rooftop restaurant.

On the drive to Tirupati I spotted a perched Indian Roller, the turquoise color stood out and I was surprised at how large it was. There were many Black Drongos perched along the way. The hotel in Tirupati also had a rooftop pool which was an excellent spot to bird from. There was a marsh I could see and with my spotting scope I was able to ID quite a few birds. An example of birds I added to my list from there were Green Bee-eater, Indian Pond Heron, and Gray-headed Swampphen with giant red feet. Little Swifts and Asian Palm Swifts flew by.

We managed to fit in early morning guided birding field trips in Tirupati and Chennai. With persistence we found a company called Key Terns which offered guided birding field trips in Chennai. I was able to set up the Tirupati trip by emailing the company directly. Paying for it was tricky, but we finally got that figured out.

The field trips had us out in the field by about 6 a.m. and having breakfast by 10 a.m. After 10:30 a.m. the heat can be oppressive. Our first field trip was in Tirupati. We were ready for the van to pick up eight of us (family and friends from the US) at 5 a.m, but it was 40 minutes late. We were a little late arriving at the IISER Tirupati--Mangalam Campus ebird hotspot, on a science-based graduate school campus on the north side of town. I noted 17 bird species there. Highlights were Bronze-winged Jacana, Baya Weaver, and Golden Oriole. Then we went to Sri Venkateswara National Park where the bird guide, Birdman Karthik (check out his Instagram page!), works as a wildlife biologist. I logged another ten species including Jungle Babbler, Coppersmith Barbet, Shikra, and White-spotted Fantail. We also saw Rhesus Macaque monkeys, an Indian Giant Squirrel and Asian Palm Squirrels. We enjoyed a short hike to a beautiful waterfall and took several group photos with locals we met along the way. The heat and humidity were a real challenge for me. I was sweating profusely by the time we went to breakfast!

The day after the wedding, we took a drive to the nearby Sri Venkateswara Swamy Vaari Temple grounds. On the drive up we saw Black-faced Gray Langur monkeys. One stopped car had a monkey sitting on top! Our driver decided not to stop. We walked on some trails leading to shrines where I added Asian Emerald Dove, Gray Wagtail, and Yellow-throated Bulbul to my list.

Our second field trip was in Chennai towards the end of the trip. This time the van was early, but it was raining so the guide pushed the start time back 30 minutes. I had requested to bird at a local marsh that had a good ebird list, but I also wanted to see songbirds. To my delight, the guide, Subramanian Sankar, arranged for us to visit Nanmangalam Reserved Forest which is not open to the public. We arrived in good time to witness birds waking up and posing on top of the trees and bushes, and singing,

including Purple-rumped Sunbird, Blue-tailed Bee-eater, and Indian Silverbill. Next, we went to Pallikaranaï marsh where we picked up Red-wattled Lapwing, Black-winged Stilt, and Painted Stork, as well as other birds.

The Merlin App India, South pack was quite useful. However, it was missing some birds that we saw, and the sound ID didn't recognize much. I was grateful that my daughter brought along a field guide to the birds of India that I could also study.

What made my birding experience on this trip extra fun was sharing my bird obsession with my family, son-in-law, his cousins, and my daughter's friends who came. It has been a long time since I got so many lifers! It became overwhelming. I had a hard time recognizing and retaining the bird songs I heard. I ended the trip with about 65 lifers! We are planning to have Birdman Karthik zoom in for one of our programs in the spring to teach us more about the birds of India.



Above top: Shikra (*Accipiter badius*), a small bird of prey in the family Accipitridae, and above middle: House Crow (*Corvus splendens*), both by Gail. Above: Birding trip participants in Tirupati, India.

KID'S CORNER Wowza Wildlife!

By Leslie Scopes Anderson



WHERE IN THE WORLD?

Southern Sea Otters are found along California's central coast. Northern Sea Otters live on the coast of Alaska and Washington. This mammal is endangered.

FUN FACTS:

Sea Otters actually help maintain their marine environment by munching on urchins and crabs. This helps kelp forests and eel grass flourish. Otters are in the weasel family.

Above: Cartoon and photography by Leslie Scopes Anderson.

Wiyot Tribe Acquires Bird-Rich, Undeveloped Forest and Wetlands for Cultural and Ecological Restoration

By Gina Rogers

One of the last pieces of undeveloped coastal wetlands near Humboldt Bay (Wigi) has just been reacquired by the Wiyot Tribe. This represents the first time that the State of California has funded Tribal reacquisition of ancestral lands for coastal and sea level-rise resilience. The 46-acre property, located upland of King Salmon and surrounded by residential development on Humboldt Hill – “wolf’s house,” in Soulatluk, the Wiyot language – is on the land of the historical Wiyot village site named Mouralherwaqh. With almost 14 acres of ecologically diverse habitat, the land is a haven for birds.

The purchase was led by the Wiyot Tribe in partnership with Cal Poly Humboldt, Humboldt Baykeeper, and Friends of the Dunes. A grant from the California Ocean Protection Council’s nature-based solutions program provided the funds to acquire the parcel from a private landowner.

A special Mouralherwaqh Return Ceremony was held on the property in mid-August. Wiyot elders and youth wearing ceremonial regalia performed dances and the smell of salmon roasting on spits wafted across the crowd. Wiyot Tribal Chair Ted Hernandez stressed the importance of providing access to culturally-significant natural resources and making a strong connection to their ancestors. Tribal Leader Cheryl Seidner began singing the melody of the Wiyot “Coming Home” song. As if drawn to the chorus, a Great Blue Heron flew over, delivering an encouraging squawk, stretching out to full length and then flying slowly and majestically over the crowd. It was a magical moment. The Great Blue Heron, ‘meluqhiyan’ in Soulatluk (just one of several words for the bird according to Wiyot linguist Dr. Lynnika Butler), figures strongly in Wiyot myth, and it was also fundamental to preserving parts of Mouralherwaqh. As a timber harvest was being planned for the property in 2013, a nearby resident called the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) to inform them of a longstanding rookery on the site. It had never been reported by the forester on any of the harvest plans, and after CDFW biologist verification, a buffer zone was created that protected many old-growth spruce from logging.

The property’s importance as an avian paradise immediately became apparent to the birders at the ceremony, as the Wiyot songs started to mingle with the sounds of birds chirping. Keen ears picked up Chestnut-backed Chickadees, Northern Flickers, and the bouncing ping-pong ball sound of the Wrentit. With acres of large sedge- and cattail-dominated freshwater wetlands surrounded by mature Sitka Spruce and some northern

coastal scrublands, it offers access to spruce root, important in Wiyot basketmaking, as well as hazelnut, huckleberry, salmon berries, and mushrooms, which up until now could only be accessed off Tribal lands under special agreement or by trespassing.

Adam Canter, Natural Resources Director for the Wiyot Tribe, has been thrilled to see the wide variety of birds the habitat encourages. In addition to being a rookery site for egrets and herons, there are a large number of raptors including Red-tailed Hawks and Ospreys, and Turkey Vultures riding the updrafts are a common sight. Chickadees are always bouncing through the conifers, while Steller’s Jays and Cedar Waxwings have been making themselves heard. Northern Flickers and other woodpeckers are present, sacred to the Wiyot, who also use their feathers in ceremony regalia.

Restoration plans for the property will prioritize cultural connections, restoring important species habitats (potentially for Marbled Murrelets), developing more sustainable water systems, and addressing climate change resiliency. Volunteer teams are already being organized to tackle the aerial infestations of English Ivy.

Canter points out that because Mouralherwaqh has both low-lying and upland habitat, the project represents “a great opportunity for the tribe to really contribute to nature-based solutions by stewarding this property to allow for the migration of sea level rise and habitats inland.”

The Wiyot Tribe is protecting Mouralherwaqh from public access at this point, but hopes to work with groups like Redwood Region Audubon Society to host field trips and invasive species removal work days in the near future.



Wiyot Tribal Leaders cutting the ribbon at the Mouralherwaqh land return ceremony, by Adam Canter.

Exciting End to Owl Season

By Pete Carlson, Research Associate, Colorado State University, Dept. of Fish, Wildlife and Conservation Biology

I have been privileged to spend most of my 3-decade research career with the Northwest California Northern Spotted Owl (NSO) Demography project, one of the longest studies on spotted owls, started by Alan Franklin in 1985. This study is part of long-term NSO monitoring on federal lands set up under the Northwest Forest Plan. The end of this 38th field season was quite an interesting one for me, Angela Rex (who co-leads the field work) and our field crew.

August can be a challenging time to complete surveys as sometimes we get nighttime detections in unexpected locations. These are often prospecting birds: individuals that may be new to the area, or a neighboring owl exploring outside their normal territory. During the first week of August, we followed up on two such detections. In one area, south of Horse Mountain, Angela and others found a pair on two occasions. Both owls were banded previously; the male was found on a different territory last year and the female had fledged last year in a nearby territory. In another area, also where we had not located owls previously, a banded female was located who had moved from her previous territory of two years ago. We also heard an unknown male in the area.

I did an additional visit to the area to confirm if it was a pair and who the male might be. While we did not

detect the female again, we did hear a male well after dark. Eventually he flew towards us, and we confirmed that he was not banded – a new bird for our study. Nighttime captures can be difficult, since visibility is reduced and owls are often more active. I was lucky this time and captured the male, possibly the last spotted owl I will band. Finding additional owls for this season was quite exciting given the continued decline in the spotted owl population. This was certainly already an exciting way to finish the field season, my 28th and Angela’s 17th on the study. But on the morning of August 5th, we awoke to news of several lightning-caused wildfires. Some, now combined as the Campbell fire, were close to the communities of Willow Creek and Salyer. A couple of others, combined as the Ammon fire, were in the heart of our main study area. These were quite concerning given the large fires in this region over the last few years.

We followed fire updates closely and evacuated our field station. Fortunately, efforts to keep the fires from burning any houses were successful. And the generally slow growth of the fires indicates that they should be mostly low to moderate fire severity, especially in the mature forest habitat. We do not expect such fires to have a negative impact on the owls and their habitat; on the contrary: in the long term, they may be beneficial. Several studies have found that low to moderate severity fires have minimal impact on owl populations. Regardless, it was quite a surreal way to end our field season. And unfortunately, we will not be able to determine the impact of these fires on the owls. The United States Forest

Service will no longer be funding our long-term study. This coincides with a shift in the method for long-term monitoring of the owl population on public lands to using passive bioacoustic surveys. Autonomous Recording Units (ARUs) are being used more often for wildlife monitoring and have many benefits, such as recording multiple species of interest simultaneously. While less invasive than banding studies, detailed information such as survival rates and specific nest and roost locations will be lost without follow up survey work. Hopefully the recent fires will be beneficial and future efforts to monitor and protect the spotted owl will be successful.



Above: Female and juvenile NSO in previously burned stand, by Peter Carlson.

Local Photobirders, Leslie and Mike Anderson, Chase Cooper's Hawk Nest

By Leslie Scopes Anderson

In mid-August we received a tip that there was a pair of nesting Sharp-shinned Hawks in the Arcata area – and the homeowner was willing to share! We arrived early one morning, cameras in hand, hoping to get some good shots of these birds. As the mist clung to the towering redwoods, the homeowner welcomed us warmly, but no feathered residents were evident. “They’re around,” he said optimistically. He showed us a nibbled carcass of a passerine that had been dropped during the feeding process, and said one just missed falling on his head!

As we waited, the day brightened somewhat, but stubborn shadows still lingered in the deep woods. “I saw something!” called Mike, “It flew by way up high.” I figured ‘it’ was just a turkey vulture glimpsed in the small patches of gray sky visible through the trees. Then we started hearing soft, squeaky calls, and suddenly there was a commotion about 40 ft. up in the giant redwood

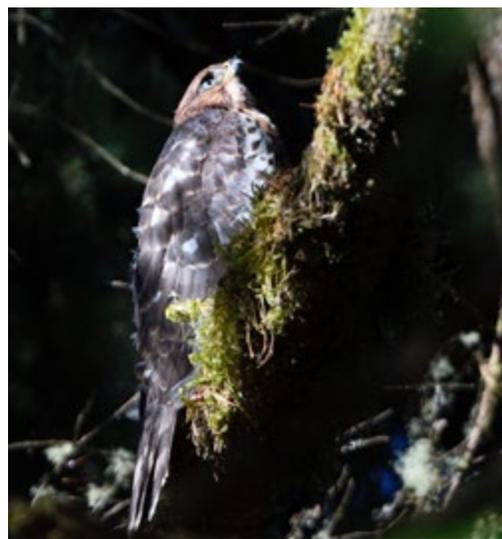
that dominated the yard. Hidden behind branches, we could barely make out three hawks in a dense area that could have been a nest. As it turned out they were juvenile Cooper's Hawks! I surmised that a parent had brought in a snack for the fledglings. But, still there was no possibility of a photo, and my neck was loudly protesting the constant straight-up gazing!

Then, luckily for us, the two juveniles flew out into the nearby trees. We were able to get a few shots, even in the low light. We were never able to capture an adult with our cameras. We returned later that afternoon when the sun broke through the ‘marine layer’, but our subjects were uncooperative.

I came back on a rare sunny morning a day later to witness the juveniles dashing between trees, one landing in a sunny spot! Then another meal was delivered by a parent, and they were up in the mammoth redwood again. I was excited to see Cooper's Hawks, as my photos of them are few. They definitely seemed at home in this Humboldt County forest.



Below middle: COHA by Leslie Scopes Anderson. All other juvenile COHA photos by Mike Anderson. For more information on Leslie and Mike, see this article in the Times Standard: <https://www.times-standard.com/2013/09/29/photobirding-two-accomplished-photographers-tell-all/>.



The Western Meadowlark, By Hal Genger

I didn't start birding until I was in graduate school at HSU and took “Beginning Bird Watching” from a close friend, Ron LeValley (Jan. 1, 1947 – June 4, 2022). We had been looking at shorebirds at Gary Friedrichsen's ‘Little Red Shack’ (Sandpiper Aug 2021) at the mouth of Jacoby Creek when I spied a familiar bird from my youth, the Western Meadowlark. I focused my binoculars on it and ‘Wow’! I'd seen this bird from where I was born in Downey, California all the way to the plains of Montana and was never aware of how spectacular it would look through binoculars. I've looked at birds more seriously since then!

The Western Meadowlark is an easily identifiable bird with brownish back and wings, yellow belly, and a dark black ‘V’ shape on its chest. Both sexes look similar although the male may have brighter colors. The Western Meadowlark's scientific name was derived by John James Audubon, *Sturnella (starling-like) neglecta*, (neglected, because of the similar Eastern Meadowlark). They are grouped in the family Icturidae which includes the cowbirds, blackbirds, and orioles, but are commonly discussed as one of the grassland birds because of their preference for prairies, meadows, grasslands, pastures, and lawns. Studies show them doing best in more thick, diverse habitats which provide cover for nesting and feeding.

Western Meadowlarks often have two broods per year with around five eggs per clutch. Males maintain territories and are often polygamous. Females select and build the nest site and raise the chicks. The females make a well-hidden, domed nest on the ground, often intertwined with other vegetation to hide it from predators. It may even have a tunnel leading to the nest!

Western Meadowlarks feed on the ground eating seeds and insects. Depending on their location, they eat grains and seeds in winter and fall and insects in the summer. They use a somewhat unique feeding behavior called ‘gaping’ in which they insert their closed beak into the ground or thick vegetation, then open their mouths creating a larger hole to search for food.

Locally, Western Meadowlarks are common year-round, but American Bird Conservancy says their overall population has decreased by 40% in the last 50 years. This tragedy is explained by several possibilities. The decrease in natural habitat due to farm activity like high maintenance pastures and monocultures lead to poor breeding success, decreased food availability, and less protection from predators. Urban development and fire repression also remove natural grassland. This is one of the reasons RRAS supports natural grasslands. The other problem is the widespread use of Neonicotinoid (neonics) pesticides on farms and urban areas. These types of pesticides are used on growing crops and also for coating the seed (e.g., corn, soybean, sunflower, oilseed rape, etc.) which decrease insect diversity and numbers.

Whenever I see a Western Meadowlark or hear its rich gurgling song, I am reminded of my life-long enjoyment of nature and my desire to encourage folks to spend time doing the same.



Above: Western Meadowlark, by Saanvi Virnave, Grade 4, Fuente Nueva Charter School from the 2018 annual Bird Art Contest sponsored by RRAS and FOAM.