

# The Sandpiper

July 2021



Redwood Region Audubon Society

[www.rras.org](http://www.rras.org)

In This Issue: • July 4th from an Indigenous Perspective • Poetry by Linda Hogan • Kids' Art Contest Winners • Bird Book Review • July Field Trips!

## Windsurfing Ravens

By Rose Albert

Last week I made my way over to one of my favorite birding-from-your-car spots. An area known as "V-street loop," or Old Samoa Road in Arcata. On this day, there were particularly strong winds. I pulled over to retrieve my spotting scope from the back of my car when I noticed three Common Ravens hovering over a tree.

I watched them for a little while and noticed they seemed to be using the wind to windsurf. They would start perched at the very top of a cypress tree and with each gust of wind, launched themselves off the tree together, riding the wind upward about ten feet. Next, they'd tuck in their wings and free fall back down about 15 feet before opening their wings back up and riding the wind upward once again. They repeated this for as long as twenty minutes before I decided to move along and see what other birds I could find.



Although ravens are a common, widespread species around the world and often overlooked, I find myself mesmerized by their intelligent and thought-provoking behavior. This observation got me thinking; were the ravens windsurfing to learn and practice vital life skills, or was it simply for pleasure? This question led me into a deep hole of endless scientific research papers. Scientists believe that play is a mechanism that is most frequently exhibited by mammals and birds to aid in the development of learned behaviors that will help juveniles to be better equipped with survival techniques once they are adults.

Common in mammals, play is seldom observed and much harder to identify in avian species. There is one exception to this; corvids. Play seems to be a daily activity for most crows and ravens, but especially the Common Raven. The overriding consensus by scientists seems to find that play, exhibited by corvids, is likely used to perfect motor function and survival skills. Additionally, play is, in many cases, most

correlated with a combination of delayed reproduction and lasting relationships between adults and juveniles.

This means that the likelihood of a Common Raven exhibiting play behavior is increased in individuals that reproduce at a later time than what would normally be expected for the species, whilst maintaining their juvenile relationships with other adults. This could be because ravens, who are sexually mature but have not yet reproduced, have more time to play, as opposed to focusing their energy on ensuring the survival of their offspring. To put this into perspective, the average age that humans start a family is approximately 26.9 years old. With this being said, humans that are 26.9 years old and have not yet reproduced, may have an increased likelihood to "play", given that they are not having to provide for a family.

There are 7 types of play that have been observed by scientists. The type that I observed is known as, "Flight Play" which is classified by random aerial acrobatics. Ravens utilize aerial maneuvers during dominance display, courtship, and avoidance of predatory raptors. This leads me to conclude that the windsurfing ravens were likely using "play" to aid in the development of learned behaviors that would help them in their efforts to successfully mate and/or avoid predators.

## RRAS Field Trips in July!

**Sat. July 3rd** – 8:30-11a.m. Arcata Marsh with leader, Chet Ogan.

**Sun. July 11th** – 7-9a.m. Samoa Dunes and Wetlands with Daisy Ambriz-Peres. *Be the early bird in the second of our monthly Women & Girls' Birding Walks series – this walk will be bilingual, in Spanish and English.*

Únase a la Sociedad Audubon de la Region Redwood el domingo 11 de julio de 7:00 a.m. a 9:00 a.m. para una caminata bilingüe (español / inglés) de observación de aves para mujeres y niñas en la Área de Conservación de Dunas y Humedales de Samoa con la líder Daisy Ambriz-Peres. Esta es el segunda caminata de una serie de viajes mensuales de observación de aves dirigidos por mujeres para mujeres y niñas; enfocado en la creación de espacios inclusivos y colaborativos para observadoras de aves tanto novatas como experimentadas. Se requieren reservaciones y el espacio es limitado. Visite [www.rras.org](http://www.rras.org) para conocer las regulaciones de COVID-19. Póngase en contacto con [janelle.choj@gmail.com](mailto:janelle.choj@gmail.com) para obtener más información y hacer una reserva.

**Sun. July 11th** – 9-11 a.m. Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge with Ralph Bucher.

**Sun. July 18th** – 9-11 a.m. Eureka Waterfront Trail with Ralph Bucher.

**Sat. July 24th** – 8:30-11 a.m. Arcata Marsh with Larry Karstead.

## RRAS Virtual Program Presentation

Please join us on Friday, July 9th, at 7 pm, for Humboldt Bay – premier site of conservation for shorebirds along the Pacific Americas Flyway

With Mark Colwell

Mark Colwell is a professor in the Wildlife Department at HSU where he has taught since 1989. Mark began studying shorebirds as a graduate student, working on Wilson's Phalarope and Spotted Sandpiper. HSU honored Mark as Scholar of the Year in 2007 and Outstanding Professor in 2013. He finished a 20-year study of Snowy Plovers in 2019 and continues to work to promote Humboldt Bay's importance to shorebirds, which will be the subject of his online talk.

As quintessential migrants, many shorebirds wend their way between distant breeding and non-breeding grounds, stopping at key wetlands to refuel. Humboldt Bay is one of those critical sites along the Pacific Americas Flyway. Recently, the bay received added recognition within the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network for its year-round importance to shorebirds. Mark will summarize the information justifying this recognition and address conservation threats that jeopardize shorebird populations.

Please visit our website, [rras.org](http://rras.org) for the Zoom link.



Over several consecutive days in April 2018, observers estimated over 100,000 shorebirds amassed on Arcata Bay. Above: A mixed species flock of shorebirds en route to a high tide roost on Arcata Bay. Photo by Leslie Scopes Anderson.

View [rras.org](http://rras.org) for more details and how to register for all walks, or contact our Field Trips Chair, Janelle Chojnacki at [janelle.choj@gmail.com](mailto:janelle.choj@gmail.com).

Current COVID protocols will be in place.

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*The Sandpiper is published eleven times a year by*

**Redwood Region Audubon Society  
P.O. Box 1054, Eureka, CA 95502.**

## Kid's Art Contest Winners!

*Submitted by Sue Leskiw, Contest Coordinator*

In this second spring of the coronavirus pandemic, nearly 300 school kids pulled out paints, pencils, pastels, or paste to enter the 18th Annual Student Bird Art Contest. Cosponsors were Friends of the Arcata Marsh and Redwood Region Audubon Society.

The contest is usually held in association with mid-April's Godwit Days Spring Migration Bird Festival in Arcata. When the festival decided to go virtual in 2021, the art contest followed suit, with entry and judging done online.

Some \$450 were awarded in 27 monetary prizes, plus 19 honorable mentions. Winners from 2020 and 2021 are on display at the Arcata Marsh Interpretive Center through August. Public viewing is possible on weekends only, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. A downloadable booklet containing the artwork will be posted in June at [godwitdays.org](http://godwitdays.org), [rras.org](http://rras.org), and [arcatamarshfriends.org](http://arcatamarshfriends.org).

*Please also enjoy a selection of the artwork printed on pages 3 and 4 of this newsletter.*



## President's Column

*By Gail Kenny*

Now that COVID restrictions are lightening up, I encourage you to take advantage of going on field trips whether they are RRAS sponsored, your own or with other organizations. Along with our usual monthly field trips at the Arcata Marsh, Eureka Waterfront, and Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge, we have added some additional field trips including a monthly series of Women and Girls' Birding walks.

On May 23, I co-lead a walk with RRAS Secretary, Andrew Orahoske, around Trinidad Head. After days of strong winds starting early in the day, we had a bright sunny and warm morning with little wind. Of our group of seven, three of us were new to birding. Our focus were the seabird breeding colonies on the offshore rocks where we saw hundreds of Common Murres, along with large numbers of cormorants including Pelagic, and Brandt's. We saw a few Brown Pelicans, Pigeon Guillemots, Black Oystercatchers, and lots of Western Gulls. The largest number of terrestrial birds we counted were 40 Wrentits. A bonus were the sea lions occupying the bell buoy which Andrew helped identify as Steller's Sea Lions by their vocalizations – something new I learned after living in Trinidad over 30 years!

In mid-May I attended a 4-day camping trip with the North Coast chapter of the California Native Plant Society to the North Fork of the Smith River. The weather, flowers, and company were great. We mostly explored serpentine soil habitats, which I learned are less birdy than other habitats that have soils with more nutrients. Serpentine soils are often high in pH and heavy metals and low in essential

nutrients and water-holding capacity, making it challenging for plants and animals to thrive there.

Botanists enjoy the serpentine soils because they are hosts to rare plants; some that have adapted to the environment by becoming insectivorous such as the pitcher plants (Darlingtonia). They also host a showy orchid called, California Lady Slippers (below right). There were several birders on the trip who made the trip even more fun. My favorite bird of the trip was a Townsend's Solitaire. I came home with lots of flower photos, and a decent photo of a Western Wood Pewee (below left).

Thank you to everyone who participated in our joint on-line auction with Godwit Days. It was a big success. Special thanks to Sue Leskiw for her organizational skills and encouraging RRAS to join Godwit Days in this event, and to Gary Friedrichsen for taking the lead for RRAS.

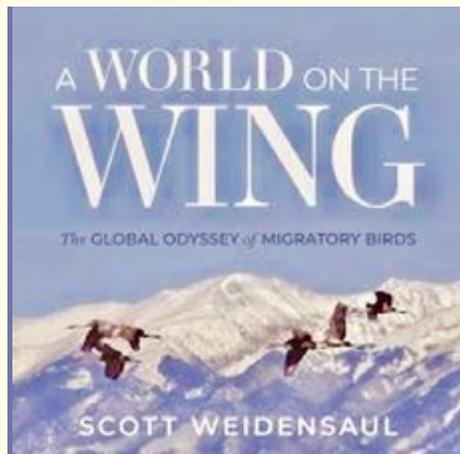


Above: Western Wood Pewee by Gail Kenny.

Above right: California Lady Slippers by Gail Kenny.

## Book Review by CJ Ralph

*A World on the Wing: The Global Odyssey of Migratory Birds, by Scott Weidensaul (2021. W. H. Norton & Co., 385 pp.)*



In this very readable book, Weidensaul takes us on a riveting tour de force into the complexity of birds and their migrations. Reading it only once was not enough for me, as he quite lyrically pulls together and upgrades the readers' understanding of the amazing adaptations that birds have evolved. Again, and again, throughout the book, he brings in salient facts in a prose style that is highly entertaining, as well as extremely informative. This book is full of cogent arguments for the importance of banding to bird conservation, the best that I have ever encountered in many decades of banding myself.

Weidensaul was a captivating speaker in Arcata for the 2011 Godwit Days festival. He has written over two dozen books on natural history, including the Pulitzer Prize finalist, "Living on the Wind," about bird migration.

He is an active field researcher, specializing in birds of prey and hummingbirds. I was in awe at his command of the scientific literature as demonstrated in this book. I learned a lot from it about the many tools used in studying bird migration, such as the tiny recorders and transmitters that banders attach to a wide variety of birds. He tells how these illustrate the complexity of migration, ranging from the incredibly diverse migration routes of a given warbler's age and sex classes, to the herculean migration of godwits and even warblers, spanning many thousands of non-stop miles.

The conservation implications and applications of capture and banding of birds is a steady beat throughout the book. As he says about miniaturized electronics, "this new capability has uncovered previously unrecognized threats, in some cases finally explaining long-standing, once mysterious declines, and giving conservationists a roadmap for reversing the damage." For instance, he relates how banders using a network of monitoring stations have found that even before Barn Swallows began their dangerous migration to Argentina, "...almost 60 percent of the young birds had perished – an unsustainable rate of loss, and one that easily explains the barn swallows' crashing population." It also shows that the perils to this particular Neotropical migrant (as well as many others) lie in large part close to home, not thousands of miles away in the tropics.

Nearest to my heart are his tributes to the "big data" that we all should aspire to gather, whether it is by participating in the cooperative banding programs that he highlights, or contributing time and data to the near-sacred temple of eBird. In summary, I can say that this book definitely made a better ornithologist of me. I strongly suspect that it will kindle (or rekindle) your interest in birds. If you have read it, good for you, if you haven't, then get into it as quickly as you can!

## An Indigenous Perspective on –



### “Independence Day.”

By Marlon Sherman (Oglala Lakota),  
Professor Emeritus of Native American Studies,  
Humboldt State University

For most people in this country, July 4th is a day to eat, celebrate and wave the stars and stripes. I pulled this from a patriotic website: “We celebrate American Independence Day on the Fourth of July every year. We think of July 4, 1776, as a day that represents the Declaration of Independence and the birth of the United States of America as an independent nation.” For me, an Oglala Lakota raised on a reservation, whose ancestors were either killed or oppressed, and whose contemporaries often still die because of government laws and actions, the 4th is a bitter reminder of who we are, and are not, in our own lands. We didn’t gain freedom because of the Declaration; we LOST freedom. We know (or should know), that at the time of its writing, the Declaration of Independence held meaning only for white, male, taxpaying, property owners. The drafters specifically excluded Indigenous Peoples, calling us “merciless Indian Savages, whose known Rule of Warfare, is an undistinguished Destruction, of all Ages, Sexes and Conditions.”

Those FFs (Founding Fathers) defined Indigenous Peoples only in terms of their ability to fight back against the genocidal invaders. The FFs ignored the broader, more intimate and more important relationships Native Peoples had with the Earth; the waters, the animals, fish and birds. Especially the birds. Many of the Peoples captured live birds such as eagles, hawks and condors, and then removed one or two feathers for use in ceremonies. Then they released the birds with thanks.

After the high-sounding Declaration, this country that holds the Christian Bible upside down, and that touches the book in order to swear solemn oaths, has also used that very book to enslave humans, to oppress women, to abuse and kill dark-skinned immigrants and to perform genocides on Indigenous Peoples; none of whom were included in the Declaration.

Instead of celebrating a document that calls us warlike savages, some new “Founders” could become our BFFs and write and celebrate something new that recognizes our Peoples’ early efforts toward peacefully welcoming and helping the newcomers survive as immigrants. This new celebration (without PTSD-inducing fireworks) could acknowledge the need for making real friends and family with people, other animals, and trees.

I think about these things and I would love to stick my head in the sand for the entire 4th, but I can’t because then I couldn’t breathe, so I sit on the sofa and turn the TV up loud, trying to drown out the sounds of little bombs exploding. •



Above: Osprey by Emileigh Schmidt, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade, Stanford Murphy Elementary, Scotia.



Images:

Above Top: Lazuli Bunting atop a Cottonwood tree on the levee.

Above: A Bullock's Oriole Nest. The chicks' parents were hovering on nearby branches.

Right: First in the Women's Birding Walk series, Blue Lake Cottonwoods.

Photos by Gisèle Albertine.



## Birding with Women

By Jude Power

On the first Sunday of June, RRAS ran its inaugural birding field trip specifically focused on women and girls. The idea was to create an environment in which women and girls would feel safe in a non-threatening, and non-competitive atmosphere, and comfortable asking basic questions or risking incorrect identifications. Although I arrived at the Blue Lake meeting place early, many parking places were already taken. A good sign.

The trip was ably led by Janelle Chojnacki, a raven researcher and experienced overall birder. In most respects, it was a typical RRAS birding trip, stopping at spots likely to offer different suites of birds: the east levee for a brilliant sunlit Lazuli Bunting, the erratic song of Yellow-breasted Chat, and lessons on White-bellied and other swallows; the Hatchery Road bridge for White-throated Swift, Northern Rough-winged Swallow and Killdeer on the gravel bar; and the enormous cottonwood stand full of flycatchers, Wilson's Warbler, Black-headed Grosbeak and Bullock's Oriole (active nest!).

But in other ways, it was not like a typical birding trip. There was an immediate spirit of comradery, and the level of enthusiasm and curiosity was high. From start to finish, novice women birders approached those with more experience, seeking clarification and understanding. The group was relaxed and excited at once, and it was a pleasure to see so much interest in the birds we share this special county with. The test of this field trip experiment may be attendance at the next five in the series. Does it make a difference to women and girls that they can go birding with other female birders such that they will continue to seek this type of opportunity? Ideally, this unique offering will bring more women and girls into the birding community.

At the very least, it was a fun time spent with a large, happy group of bird enthusiasts. Please join us July through November on the first Sunday of the month,\* to learn more about how birds change with the seasons.

See the RRAS website at [rras.org](http://rras.org) for more information on trips and how to register, or contact RRAS Field Trip Chair, Janelle Chojnacki at [janelle.choj@gmail.com](mailto:janelle.choj@gmail.com). •

(\* July's trip will be held on the 2nd Sunday to avoid July 4th, and will be led by Daisy Ambriz-Peres in Spanish and English.)



## POETRY ZONE

### About This Poem

*“This poem addresses the alive, sentient world and all its creations. It is about the arrival of the new people on this continent that came from their own failed worlds, and saw this one, as well, through their western philosophical lens, which failed in other places. Nevertheless, our older understanding of this world, and Indigenous knowledge, have remained. They have been re-acknowledged and have the brilliant intelligence of what is called now nature.”*

– **Linda Hogan**, Writer in Residence for The Chickasaw Nation, and Professor Emerita, University of Colorado.

### Map

By Linda Hogan

This is the world  
so vast and lonely  
without end, with mountains  
named for men  
who brought hunger  
from other lands,  
and fear  
of the thick, dark forest of trees  
that held each other up,  
knowing fire dreamed of swallowing them  
and spoke an older tongue,  
and the tongue of the nation of wolves  
was the wind around them.  
Even ice was not silent.  
It cried its broken self  
back to warmth.  
But they called it  
ice, wolf, forest of sticks,  
as if words would make it something  
they could hold in gloved hands,  
open, plot a way  
and follow.

This is the map of the forsaken world.  
This is the world without end  
where forests have been cut away from their  
trees.  
These are the lines wolf could not pass over.  
This is what I know from science:  
that a grain of dust dwells at the center  
of every flake of snow,  
that ice can have its way with land,  
that wolves live inside a circle  
of their own beginning.  
This is what I know from blood:  
the first language is not our own.

There are names each thing has for itself,  
and beneath us the other order already moves.  
It is burning.  
It is dreaming.  
It is waking up.

From *DARK, SWEET: New and Selected Poems* (Coffee House Press, 2014) © 2014 by Linda Hogan.



Above: Belted Kingfisher by Owen Rogers, 1<sup>st</sup> Grade, Jacoby Creek Elementary School.



Above: Northern Flicker by October Mintey, 7<sup>th</sup> Grade, Freshwater Elementary School.



Above: Ferruginous Hawk by Francisco Tovar, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade, Northern United Charter School.



## Student Bird Art Contest Winners (Also see Osprey on p. 3)



Above: Pileated Woodpecker by Xatimniim Drake, 11<sup>th</sup> Grade, Hoopa Valley High.



Above: Western Bluebird by Berna Queener, 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade, Mattole Elementary School.

**KID'S CORNER**  
**Wowza Wildlife!**  
By Leslie Scopes Anderson

MOM! I'M STILL HUNGRY!

**FUN FACTS:**  
The female Great-tailed Grackle is about half the size of the male. They can gather in huge flocks of thousands. They usually forage on land but can sometimes feed near water on frogs and small fish.

**WHERE IN THE WORLD?**  
Great-tailed Grackles are spreading north from So. Texas. They are one of US's fastest-expanding species. They like fields and marshes. Maybe you'll see one here!