



The Sandpiper

October 2021



Redwood Region Audubon Society

www.rras.org

In This Issue: • California Condor – Return of prey-go-neesh • Birding in Colorado • Poetry Zone

RRAS Virtual Program: Please join us on Friday, October 8, at 7 pm, for a presentation on: **Uncovering the Hidden World of a Secretive Seabird**

With Jennifer Bailey Guerrero, MS, Program Manager, Oregon State University, Forest Ecosystems and Society.

The Marbled Murrelet is an endangered seabird that nests in old-growth, coastal forests from central California to Alaska, up to 50 miles inland. This seabird species has long challenged both scientists and land managers alike with its unique life history and secretive nature. With little known information about murrelet nesting in Oregon, public and private forest managers struggle with how to address the conservation of this species. Since 2017, Oregon State University scientists have been tracking this elusive species on its long journey from the ocean to the coastal forests, collecting data that will help to inform future policy on land management.

Jennifer Bailey Guerrero was born and raised in Oregon, grew up exploring all that Oregon's wild has to offer. From the coast to the mountains to the plains, Jennifer set out at a young age to spend as much time outdoors as possible, a passion that gradually evolved into a career in science. In 2008, Jennifer received a Bachelor's of Science in Environmental Earth Science from Northern Colorado University, and a Master's of Science in Biological Oceanography from the University of Rhode Island – Graduate School of Oceanography in 2012. She now serves as the program manager for the Oregon Marbled Murrelet Project and provides the ocean expertise for ongoing research efforts.



Above: Jennifer Guerrero by Derlis Guerrero.

Left: Marbled Murrelet by Brett Lovelace/OSU.



Seabirding by Kayak on Trinidad Bay

By Andrew Orahoske

This August and September, Redwood Region Audubon Society (RRAS) partnered with local outfitter guides, Kayak Trinidad, for two professionally guided kayak adventures. These trips, with everyone in individual kayaks on the water, are meant to increase appreciation for our local birds and other marine wildlife. Based on our observations, and the positive feedback from participants, we will be offering a further seabirding kayak trip in October.

The August trip started out foggy, so some bird species were initially either not visible or inactive, but kayakers were impressed with their ability to see deep into the water and watch seabirds chasing schools of fish. There was something special about the feeling of peace, and the ability to float past wildlife and observe without disturbing them.

During these foggy conditions, our group stopped and admired the robust stands of Pacific Bull Kelp, rising from the ocean floor much like an old forest. We remarked on how these marine kelp forests are vital nurseries and refuge for countless fish, like anchovies, vital food for local nesting colonies of seabirds. On cue, an adult Common Murre appeared, surfacing with a good size fish in its bill, meant for a nearby juvenile murre.

Once the fog lifted, a whole world opened up and we saw many more locally breeding seabirds, including a Pigeon Guillemot feeding her nestling in the ferns of a sea stack, and the juvenile Black Oystercatcher was definitely a highlight. Osprey and Peregrine Falcons, countless cormorants and gulls, and a few Marbled Murrelets were sighted. Many overflights of Brown Pelicans through the fog and sun certainly made one realize; dinosaurs still exist!

Trip organizer, and RRAS Secretary, Andrew Orahoske, remarked, "Overall, these kayak trips have been a great success and we hope to continue offering these sea-birding trips in the future. Immersing people in Nature is always most gratifying, and I look forward to leading more water trips."



Left: Kayakers on Trinidad Bay, by Andrew Orahoske.

RRAS Field Trips in October!

Sat. Oct. 2nd – 8:30-11am. **Arcata Marsh**, with Michael Morris. Fall is here, which means ducks! Enjoy **FIVE** Saturday morning marsh walks this month and see how many migratory duck species you can spot! Ring-necked Ducks and Blue-winged Teals are some of the less common but still quite likely to be seen, duck species that call the Marsh their winter home. Plus, the more common species like Wigeons, Northern Shovelers, and Northern Pintails will likely be dabbling and diving through the ponds.

Contact Ralph at thebook@reninet.com for information on walks he leads, and all Arcata Marsh walks.

Sun. Oct. 3rd – 9-11am. The fifth walk in our monthly **Women & Girls' Birding Walks** series. Co-leading this raptor-centric walk are Jaime Carlino of *Raptors Are The Solution* (RATS), and Laura Echavez who specializes in long-distance raptor ID. Both leaders research Barn Owls at HSU. This walk will take place at the V Street Loop in Arcata where Northern Harriers, Red-shouldered, and Red-tailed Hawks, smaller falcons, as well as multiple owl species abound.

For reservations and meeting location contact our Field Trip Chair, Janelle, at janelle.choj@gmail.com.

Sat. Oct. 9th – 8:30-11a.m. **Arcata Marsh**, with Jude Power.

Sun. Oct. 10th – 9-11a.m. Ralph Bucher will lead a walk at the **Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge**, where many ducks and other waterbirds are likely to be returning for the winter.

Sun. Oct. 10th – **Seabirding Kayak Trip** on Trinidad Bay. Contact Andrew Orahoske at andrew.rras@gmail.com for more details and to reserve a spot.

Sat. Oct. 16th – 8:30-11a.m. **Arcata Marsh**, with Gary Friedrichsen.

Sun. Oct. 17th – 8am. Frank Fogarty will be leading a walk at **King Salmon** focusing on sea ducks, loons, and grebes. Frank, an instructor at Humboldt State on ornithology and other bird-related courses, has a wealth of knowledge on avian ID, behavior, and ecology. Meet at the parking area at the end of King Salmon Avenue.

Sun. Oct. 17th – 9-11a.m. Ralph Bucher will lead a walk at the **Eureka Waterfront**, located in the urban center of Humboldt County, which offers an incredible diversity of waterbirds and shorebirds, including loons, grebes, pelicans, terns, gulls, and many species of sandpipers.

Sat. Oct. 23rd – 8:30-11a.m. The fourth (but not final!) **Arcata Marsh** walk this month will be led by Larry Karsteadt.

Sat. Oct. 23rd – 9-11am. **Wigi Wetlands Volunteer Workday**: We will provide tools and packaged snacks. Please bring your own water, gloves, and face mask. Please contact Jeremy Cashen at jeremy.cashen@yahoo.com or (214) 605-7368.

Sat. Oct. 30th – 8:30-11a.m. The final **Arcata Marsh** walk this month will be led by Janelle Chojnacki – with Halloween the next day, **costumes are encouraged!** View rras.org for more details. Local, state, and federal COVID protocols will be followed on all trips.

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By sending in your membership, either directly or on the form below, to National Audubon, (rather than replying to solicitations from National Audubon), **the fee is sent directly to our chapter – if you use the Code RRAS C24.** However, when you renew with National, the share of membership dues that RRAS receives is only a couple of dollars.

If you join the local Chapter, RRAS, directly, we receive the total dues both initially and on renewal.

To do so, write a check out to RRAS for \$15 and be sure to include “local membership” on your check, then mail to:

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President’s Column

By Gail Kenny



I’m writing this from Boulder, Colorado in early September on a visit with our daughter. This is my first time in Colorado, so I am especially interested in seeing “life” birds. That is getting tricky since I have been birding, mostly in California, for at least 42 years. There are a few possible life birds here including White-tailed Ptarmigan and Broad-tailed Hummingbird.

In the six days we have been here, I haven’t gotten a lifer. I have seen some nice birds, including a Prairie Falcon at 12,000 feet in the tundra habitat of Rocky Mountain National Park where there was a chance at ptarmigan. I don’t know if it’s my imagination, but it seems like there aren’t as many birds here as there are in Humboldt and Del Norte Counties this time of year. There is an engaged birding community here based on the eBird checklists I have studied. On one birding foray I chatted with another birder who leads walks for the local Audubon Society. There is also an abundance of open space parks and preserves to explore, which is cool.

Balancing birding with taking care of myself is my intention for this trip. On another trip in the last couple of years, I overdid it and came home with a bad cold. As I have aged, it has been necessary to change the way I bird. I don’t do well with early mornings, long hikes, or long days. To feel well and enjoy birding, I have learned

to pace myself and to enjoy the birds I see at mid-morning and later, and to keep my birding to shorter time periods. I don’t see as many birds, but I feel better. I also have an interest in wildflowers. They are stationary so easier to observe than birds! I found a couple of gentian species which made me happy, including the Arctic Gentian in the photo included here. We all appreciate birds and nature in a variety of ways. Since many of us are birding for pleasure, it’s important to do it in a way that works well for each of us. I will have quality time with my family and enjoy the late summer weather in this high desert and alpine habitat.



Above: Arctic Gentian flower, at Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado, by Gail Kenny.

Birding With Women *By Jody Greaney*

The fourth gathering of the Women & Girls’ Birding Walks was led by Samantha Chavez, a friendly, knowledgeable, and enthusiastic guide. About a dozen of us gathered in early September, and were entertained and informed with Samantha’s stories of mist netting and bird banding. As the fog lifted, we strolled along Hiller Park bike path for great viewings of a Black Phoebe, Wrentits, Song Sparrows, Chestnut-backed Chickadees, Golden-crowned Kinglets, Wilson’s Warblers and even an elusive Pacific Wren.

After passing the pond and enjoying the Mallards swimming there, we looped back around through the dog park and were gifted with a visit from an Osprey that glided in and perched on a nearby branch to feast on a hearty catch of what appeared to be a salmon. We watched the fish still wriggling in its grasp when a Cooper’s Hawk swooped by and disturbed the Osprey, but delighted us! That tough-to-top event was shortly followed by more excitement as we enjoyed great looks at a female tanager feasting on Cascara berries. A brighter male tanager could also be seen in further-off conifers and more Golden-crowned Kinglets and Chestnut-backed Chickadees joined in the feasting in this birdy area.

Samantha was a great guide, and all participants did their best to help each other identify the birds. In spite of masked faces that tended to cloud our binoculars, the skies were clear and the crowns of the kinglets were brilliant! Much was learned with pleasant conversation and plenty of laughs along the way.



Poetry Zone

“Hope” is the thing with feathers -
That perches in the soul -
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all -

And sweetest - in the Gale - is heard -
And sore must be the storm -
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm -

I’ve heard it in the chilliest land -
And on the strangest Sea -
Yet - never - in Extremity,
It asked a crumb - of me.

Emily Dickinson



Left: Osprey dining on a fish dinner – viewed by walk participants at Hiller Park, by Jenell Jackson.

Returning prey-go-neesh

By Tiana Williams-Claussen, Yurok Tribal Member, Director of the Yurok Tribe Wildlife Department.

‘Aiy-ye-kwee’. Nek’ new Tiana Williams-Claussen, kwesee Wehl-kwew mey’-womey-chook’. ‘Ne-chek-os ‘w-ew Desma; ‘ne-me’y ‘w-ew Morri. ‘Ne-pee-ch-o-wos ‘w-ew Juke Williams, ‘aa-wokw. I introduced myself, Tiana, this way, in recognition of the tradition that serves as my foundation. As a Yurok Tribal member, where I come from, the village of Wehl-kwew, and who my family is across generations; including my mother, my daughter, my grandfather who has walked on; are important markers of and inextricable from who I am as a person. This traditional introduction puts my identity within a context of both place and time. I introduce myself in Yurok because there are specific connotations with each word chosen, such as ‘aiy-ye-kwee’, which indicates a particular heft, or depth, to a greeting, as I address many of you whom I have not met but with whom I am happy to share my story of restoration. As a Yurok Tribal member, this sense of identity, this grounding in time and place both as a recipient of the prayers and actions of those who came before, and responsible for the well-being of those who come after, is what has led me to where I am today, currently serving as the Director of the Yurok Tribe Wildlife Department.

“Balance, healing, and world renewal are our reason for being, foundational to the Yurok ethos.”

I grew up on the North Coast. As a teenager, I did not know what path I wanted to take in my life, but I did know that I wanted to do something to help the Yurok world. Balance, healing, and world renewal are our reason for being, foundational to the Yurok ethos. We consider ourselves “Fix the Earth” people. In our contemporary world there are many needs and many ways to contribute to healing and restoring that balance. I have always had a love for science, so when I was accepted as an undergraduate at Harvard University I chose to concentrate in biochemical sciences, with the idea that I might return to serve as a doctor, a hard position to fill and keep filled in our rural region. Fast forward four years later, and I realized that not only did I not want to be a doctor, but I still had no idea what I wanted to do with my life! Upon graduation I was privileged to receive an internship through our Education Department which placed me with our Office of Self-Governance. Led then by Dr. Thomas Gates, this would be my introduction to California Condor (condor), prey-go-neesh, and finding my path to world renewal.



Above: Yurok Tribe Wildlife Department Director, Tiana Williams-Claussen, (in red), releasing a bird along with Ventana Wildlife Society staff, by Chris West.

Condors have been locally extinct on the California north coast for over 100 years now. In 2003, a panel of Yurok Tribal members tasked with prioritizing natural and cultural resource restoration in Yurok country chose prey-go-neesh as the highest priority land-based animal to bring back to Yurok ancestral territory. For us, and many tribes in our area, condor is integral to that foundational world renewal ethic. The loss of condor, a species critical to the cultural and ecological vitality of our region, has been a

major wound to the system. This taskforce was coordinated by Dr. Gates, who took that priority and pursued making it happen through Tribal government pathways, acquiring a grant in 2008 from the US Fish and Wildlife Service to conduct a feasibility analysis for bringing condor home. It was this funding which initiated what is now the Yurok Tribe Wildlife Department, with condor as its flagship species. I joined as its first employee, a Wildlife Technician at that time, and was joined shortly after by Senior Wildlife Biologist Chris West, the Northern California Condor Restoration Program manager.



Above: prey-go-neesh, by Chris West.

Our initial work focused largely on using Western science to assess the viability of local habitat to support condor reintroduction. While we knew that condor once thrived here as a part of our ecological community, our system had been severely rocked post-colonization. Condors had reached an all-time population low of 22 individuals by the mid 1980s, and were lost from our region around the turn of the 20th century. Their near extinction was likely largely due new pressures and impacts imposed by the influx of colonizers. Such impacts included a major reduction in the megafauna which the species relied on due to market hunting. Condors also suffered from habitat loss from the destruction of old growth forest and loss of prairies which were no longer maintained by Tribal people through traditional burning due to our peoples’ forcible removal from the land. Condors were further incidentally poisoned as landowners put out carcasses laced with strychnine for predators. And our environment was introduced to new toxic elements such as DDT and its eggshell thinning and reproductive impacts, and lead, which primarily comes from the use of lead ammunition. This latter remains the number one cause of known condor mortality in the wild, accounting for over 50% of deaths.

“Condors also suffered...habitat loss from the destruction of old growth forest and loss of prairies which were no longer maintained by Tribal people through traditional burning due to our peoples’ forcible removal from the land.”

Our primary initial questions related to available habitat; the potential presence of DDT and its breakdown metabolites DDE and DDD (combined total DDTs or tDDT); and the risk from environmental lead exposure assessed through avian scavenger surrogates. To address the first question, we used geospatial analyses to look at the life history needs of the birds, including foraging, roosting, nesting, and flight corridors. And despite the massive changes to our landscapes, which likely contributed to making our home less hospitable for a time, our remaining old growth redwoods; cliffs and pothole caves; extant prairie; and the river corridors, coasts, and mountains that not even mankind can dramatically impact, do look to provide ample high-quality habitat for the birds.

We assessed the potential for tDDT contamination over the course of several years, across an area spreading from the California/Oregon border to Fort Bragg. We looked at marine mammal carcasses because DDT is a fat binding molecule which bioaccumulates over the long lives of these blubbery animals. While we assessed any marine mammal that we encountered, we primarily focused on California Sea Lions, representing a migratory species which might bring external pollutants in, and harbor seals as a non-migratory species representative of our local environmental health. Our results were very encouraging. Though DDT and metabolites are known to impact the condor flock managed by Ventana Wildlife Society in central California, due to their heavy reliance on marine mammals in that region, we found that our DDT levels were 4x lower than those found in that region, representative of an overall decreasing trend in DDT from south to north. While this does not mean we will have no impact, the central California flock is nearing a tipping point in which more birds are expected to be reproductively successful than fail due to DDT, leading to positive reproduction with less intervention. We hope that our relatively low levels are indicative of an even lower threat from DDT.

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“A piece of lead as small as the head of a pin is enough to kill a condor.”

Lead contamination was our biggest concern. The use of lead ammunition has been implicated as the primary source of lead contamination, and resulted in 50% of known condor mortality in the wild last year. Upon impact, the relatively soft metal within lead ammunition fragments heavily, radiating from the impact point and contaminating the remains. While it may be less of an impact to most human adults, because of this potential to distribute lead throughout the flesh, the Center for Disease Control has indicated that children under the age of five should not be fed game meat harvested with lead ammunition in order to limit their potential exposure to this neurotoxin. It becomes an issue for condors when an animal is either lost by the hunter, or lead fragments spread to the offal pile which is generally left behind. While normally an excellent food resource for scavengers, representative of the important role that hunters play in our system, a piece of lead as small as the head of a pin is enough to kill a condor. Lead is also lethal to Bald and Golden Eagles who scavenge on these remains. Hunters will be critical contributors to condor conservation as we transition as a human population to non-lead ammunition alternatives.



Above photo: Senior Wildlife Biologist Chris West at the LA Zoo, providing lead chelation-therapy to a bird suffering from lead contamination, courtesy of the Yurok Tribe.

“Hunters will be critical contributors to condor conservation as we transition as a human population to non-lead ammunition alternatives.”

In order to assess the threat from lead contamination, we studied Turkey Vultures and Common Ravens as local avian scavengers who might indicate lead availability in our area. Our results were about as expected given the magnitude of the issue; 24% of our Turkey Vultures had elevated blood lead levels, at a threshold which would indicate a problem for a condor. We could not study Turkey Vultures during the hunting season, our season of most concern. Their migration schedule caused them to be passing through, confounding a study during that time because we could not firmly pinpoint a geographic source of contamination. However, a parallel study in non-migratory ravens indicated a clear increase in lead contamination within the hunting season, a study which duplicated results seen in several areas throughout California. The good news was, our findings amongst local scavengers indicated that our lead contamination levels were lower than any place else studied throughout California, potentially due to low human populations in our region. Still there was work to be done to combat the threat.

In response to the threat from lead, our Department developed the Hunters as Stewards (HAS) project. HAS was designed to reach out to the strong conservation ethic within many of the hunters in our region. Our approach was to relay the information regarding the threat from use of lead ammunition, provide them with knowledge about making a transition to non-toxic alternatives, primarily copper-based, and allow them the opportunity to become voluntary partners in condor conservation. Based on surveys of outreach event participants, anywhere from 85-95% of the hunters we talked to indicated they had been completely unaware of the impact, and that they would be happy to make a switch to non-lead alternatives. Because of the strong hunting tradition that exists in this region, continued outreach and partnership building within the hunting community is going to be critical for success of the species. Some great information about lead's impact and making a switch to non-lead alternatives can be found at huntingwithnonlead.org, developed by the Institute for Wildlife Studies.

“This partnership-based approach has been critical to our success from the beginning.”

This partnership-based approach has been critical to our success from the beginning. Even before that initial funding was found to jumpstart the Yurok Tribe Wildlife Department, the Yurok Tribe had approached our neighbor, Redwood National and State Parks (RNSP), about the project, with the idea that integrating species recovery into habitat restoration and protection would meet both Tribal and RNSP conservation goals. An invitation to join as partners was enthusiastically accepted in 2007, and we will be releasing birds within Redwood National Park boundaries less than a year from

now. It also resulted in a 16-party Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by representatives from federal, state, industry, utility, and non-profit partners, all agreeing that not only would condors benefit from reintroduction to our region, but that the region would benefit from condors' return home. This MOU was built upon years of partnership development in which we reached out to the relevant stakeholders, heard their concerns, figured out how to address them, and came up with a mutual plan for moving forward together. We have also received training and advice from existing rearing and release facilities within the broader California Condor Recovery Program, and developed a treatment MOU to provide whatever sort of health care is needed. One of our major treatment partners is our local Sequoia Park Zoo. We cannot count the number of organizations and individuals within our community and throughout the country who have stepped up to support us in one way or another.

“We cannot count the number of organizations and individuals within our community and throughout the country who have stepped up to support us...”

The Environmental Assessment (EA), required under the National Environmental Protection Act was begun back in 2017, and was finalized with a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) just this March! This approved reintroductions in our area, under the preferred alternative, as a Non-essential Experimental Population (NEP) under the 10(j) rule of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), approved through a separate federal rule released the same day. An NEP is special in that it allows conservation managers to strategically craft protections that suit the species in question, prioritizing their conservation needs, but also providing flexibility under the ESA to protect the social and economic needs of a region that might not be in conflict with the species, but which might be negatively impacted by full implementation of the ESA. The EA and the specific rules associated with the 10(j) designation underwent a federal review process that received thousands of public comments, providing both support for the project and constructive feedback, resulting in an approach that would really work for the North Coast.

Since then, it has been a matter of pushing hard to get the necessary materials and supplies to make this happen. National construction material shortages have caused delays in construction of our release and management facility. These shortages have also significantly driven up costs, and being funded almost entirely by grants and private donations, every dollar counts. Computer chip shortages are causing delays in acquiring the necessary computer technology and telemetry to support the project. Vehicle shortages are causing us to reevaluate how we get the job done for a bird that can fly as much as 200 miles in a day, though our juvenile birds, 2-3 years old upon release, will hopefully give us a break before they fly that far. But for every obstacle we are finding a solution, often in partnership with others. Currently we are targeting a release of four birds in the spring of 2022. These birds are currently staged at the Ventana Wildlife Society's (VWS) condor management facility as we prepare our site for their arrival. VWS has been a great friend and partner to our project since its start, and the birds can be seen on the San Simeon Cam at ventanaws.org/condor_cam.html, and are designated by number as #'s 696, 973, 1010, and 1045 (visually identified by the last two digits on a wing tag). We aim to release an additional six birds every year for the next 20 years, fitting each with satellite and radio telemetry and tracking them daily to help support their wellbeing.

“I look forward to finally, after nearly 20 years, fulfilling the dreams of my elders.”

We still have a long way to go. Though it has taken us nearly 14 years to get here, this is just the beginning. I look forward to finally, after nearly 20 years, fulfilling the dreams of my elders. I dream myself of helping repair a century-old wound, as part of a much larger restoration journey led by the Yurok Tribe and its people, working to revitalize our rivers, forests and prairies, our language, and our ceremonies, and to bring all back into balance. I'm proud to know that my 3-year-old daughter will not have to grow up in a world without condor, and will always live in relationship with him. Through prey-goneesh I found my path to contributing to world renewal and restoration.

Photo: Condor, courtesy of Yurok Tribe.

