



The Sandpiper

May 2021



Redwood Region Audubon Society

www.rras.org

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A Not-So-Common Lesser Nighthawk

By Rose L. Albert

My name is Rose Albert, I am 22 years old and was born and raised in Laguna Niguel, California. As a kid, I had an obsession with learning about animals. As I got older, I realized that my interest in wildlife was the one hobby that I never got tired of. This eventually

led me to study Wildlife Management and Conservation here at Humboldt State University. It wasn't until I took an Ornithology class that I became unbelievably intrigued by birds.

Over the past 2 years, I have made it a part of my daily routine to get out and bird. Being able to identify what you are seeing in nature is very rewarding, and even when I do not know what I am seeing, it is fun to look through my guide and talk with peers – which also helps me grow my knowledge of bird identification.

In Humboldt County, there is such a large community of birders due to the fruitful ecosystems here that provide for a diverse range of bird species. Being a young, female birder, it is my goal to open up this community and make it even more inclusive to all people.

On March 21, I was driving down Lanphere Road in Arcata to watch the sunset when a bird with a white bar on each wrist flew in front of my car. From what I'd learned in Frank Fogarty's Ornithology class, I knew that these markings were a key feature of this bird. A few days later I did some research and decided that the only species it could be was a Nighthawk.

I reached out to a few of my professors but they all thought that this was impossible because the Lesser Nighthawk's breeding range is not this far north or west; instead, it's more in Southern California and throughout

the Central Valley up to Sacramento. Later, my colleague, Jayde Blair, told me he had also seen a Nighthawk that week. Then, more people started to see the bird, mostly off the Hammond Bridge over the Mad River, and my identification was confirmed. It turns out that s/he is a vagrant Lesser Nighthawk; the first confirmed Lesser Nighthawk in Humboldt County.

The Lesser Nighthawk (*Chordeiles acutipennis*) is a member of the Caprimulgidae family of Nightjars. This species' range more regularly includes Mexico and parts of Central America. During the breeding season, they can be found in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and Southern California.

This bizarre-looking bird can often be seen flying low to the ground, foraging for flying insects. Like most Nightjars, the Lesser Nighthawk forages most actively at dusk or at night. During the day, they can be found roosting most commonly on the ground, but sometimes in trees or shrubs where their intricate feather patterns serve as the perfect camouflage.

In flight, one will notice that the Nighthawk has a white bar close to each wing-tip. This feature is unique to Nighthawks. On the Lesser Nighthawk, the white bars are slightly closer to the wing-tip than on the Common Nighthawk, and males have a white band across the tail. Up-close, one will notice that this bird has unusual, rectangular-shaped eyes and a small bill.

Generally speaking, the Lesser Nighthawk inhabits low elevation, desert ecosystems with short vegetation. Environments like these often fluctuate between extreme heat and cold. Luckily, the Lesser Nighthawk has the ability to enter torpor - a state at which an animal undergoes decreased physiological activity, or in some cases, reduced body temperatures and metabolic rate.

I am very passionate about getting others as excited as I am about nature and wildlife. I hope to show my community that birding is for everyone; you do not need a higher education in wildlife, nor fancy gear. All you have to do is get outside and look around!

Above: Rose L. Albert on Hammond Bridge, by Gisèle Albertine. Below: Lesser Nighthawk over willows, and over the Mad River, by Jeff Todoroff.



RRAS Virtual Program

Please join us on Friday, May 14, at 7pm for a presentation on

Northern Saw-whet Owls, by Ken Sobon

What do you know about Saw-whet Owls? If you're like most of us, probably not much. But these little birds are all around us, year-round, fighting out their fierce lives in our forests and woodlands. Come learn about these neighbors from Ken Sobon, director of the Northern Saw-whet Owl Research and Education Project in Northern California.

Ken Sobon is an avid birder, field trip leader, Vice President of Altacal Audubon Society, and is now the Northern California representative on the California Audubon board of directors. For the past five seasons he has been the director of the Northern Saw-whet Owl fall migration monitoring project. In addition, Ken has been a science teacher to middle school students in Oroville since 1995. He has shared his love of science and birding with his students both in the classroom and in the field.

View rras.org for the link to view this program.



Above left: Northern Saw-whet Owl. Right: Ken Sobon with Northern Saw-whet. Photos by Brenda Sobon.

NEW! Monthly Bird Watching Trips for Women & Girls – Led by Women Birders!

Starting Sunday, June 6th – RRAS begins a 6-month series of monthly bird watching trips on the first Sunday of the month (June through November), for women and girls; focused on creating inclusive, collaborative spaces for both novice and experienced female birders.

Watch our website and The Sandpiper for more details! Registration will be required, so sign up for any month, with our Field Trips Chair, Janelle – who is leading the first walk in the Blue Lake cottonwoods – at janelle.choj@gmail.com.

Nighthawks

They scissor edges of twilight, cutting black shapes into sky. The wet silver of quick wings open against eternity, as if to erase an end with a beginning.



By Yusef Komunyakaa (1947-)

From *Night Animals* (Sarabande Books, 2020)

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RRAS Field Trips in May!

On the 1st and 4th Saturdays in May, RRAS will be offering two walks at the Arcata marsh. May is a great month for seeing and hearing breeding songbirds. This time last year some of the species observed at the marsh included flycatchers (Pacific-slope, Western Wood-pewee, Black Phoebe), and warblers (Common Yellowthroat, Wilson's Warbler, Orange-crowned Warbler), as well as some oriole and grosbeak species with their colorful plumage and gorgeous songs. Trips around Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge (May 9), and the Eureka Waterfront Trail (May 16), will also continue this month with some great species to see, including Semipalmated Plovers, and Red-necked Phalarope; and listen at the reedy areas for the unique duet song of the male and female Red-winged Blackbirds. This also is a great time of year to work on identifying birds by song, so see if you can help document for the **female birdsong project!** View rras.org to register.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Opinions expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the National Audubon Society or its local chapters. As editor, my goal is to print a variety of viewpoints, explore new avenues, and initiate healthy discussion.



President's Column

By Gail Kenny

Redwood Region Audubon Society is an all-volunteer organization. That means we are only as good as the energy our volunteers put into helping us achieve our mission and goals. We like to recognize our most dedicated volunteers with the *Volunteer of the Year* award. This year it goes to Gisèle Albertine, our newsletter editor!

Gisèle came to us through the Arcata Marsh walks. She was a regular on the walks after catching the birding bug while volunteering at Humboldt Wildlife Care Center. She stepped up to be *The Sandpiper* editor just as we went from publishing 6 to 11 times a year. She quickly picked up the job after working on an issue with the former editor, last summer. Gisèle has professional journalism experience and it really shows in her work. She has a positive attitude, is inquisitive, energetic, and is an effective networker. She is receptive to different ideas which has enabled our contributors to do their tasks well, resulting in a newsletter we are really pleased with. It shows in the variety of *Sandpiper* content over the past year. She has also taken an active role in RRAS as a whole and is a valuable addition to our organization. Thank you so much for your dedication and expertise – congratulations, Gisèle!

Gisèle would like to thank all those who have helped her out over the last year, but the list is too long so – you know who you are, and that includes all the awesome contributors!



RRAS Volunteer of the Year 2021
Gisèle Albertine



We will be hosting an online, AUCTION fundraiser from Friday, May 28 – Sunday, June 6; in partnership with Godwit Days. We have already gathered a wide variety of really nice items and services. I have personally donated a quilted bag I made, and five pints of jam from a variety of berries I grew in my garden. The auction link (www.biddingowl.com/godwitdaysRRAS), will be up and running by the end of the month on our website; in *The Sandpiper* and other local media. This fundraiser is in place of the silent auction we would normally have had at our canceled annual banquet – so I hope you will check it out and do some bidding!

Left: Print by artist, Patricia Sennott; one of the many, great items donated to the auction by generous merchants and community members.

Humboldt County Science Fair Winner!

Redwood Region Audubon Society advocates for protection of birds and wildlife by supporting local education and conservation efforts to protect wildlife and their habitats. Our organization applauds the Humboldt County Office of Education for continuing the Science Fair each year, engaging and encouraging youth in scientific inquiry. This year we honor Miriam Hohl, Jacoby Creek School 8th grade student, for her project, “What Location of Bird Feeder Do Birds Prefer?” We awarded her \$100 and a year's membership to RRAS.

What Location of Bird Feeder Do Birds Prefer?

By Miriam Hohl, 8th Grade, Jacoby Creek School

A bird feeder was hung from a tree on the edge of a wooded location. A second feeder was hung from a house in an area of

high human activity. The number of birds visiting each feeder and the amount of food eaten were observed. The feeder in the tree received many more visits and had much more food eaten than the feeder by the house.

Abstract:

My project was to determine which placement of bird feeder birds prefer. Two bird feeders were hung up. One from my house and the other from a small tree in my backyard. The bird feeders were identical with the same type and amount of food in each. I wrote down the amount of food that was eaten from each feeder on Mondays and Thursdays and observed how many birds were at each feeder for about three minutes each day. The feeder hanging from the tree had lots more food eaten from it and more birds were seen at the feeder. I concluded that the birds prefer the feeder farther away from the house.

Below: Photos of Miriam and her project, by Jonah Hohl.





Conservation Update

Eating Hay in Transylvania

By Jim Clark

During the summer of 2019 I was on a music and ethnographic tour of Transylvania. Included were two visits to villages in the Bihor Mountains. Upon arrival we were offered the traditional bread and salt and as much *palinca* (local plum brandy) as we dared drink. After appetizers of fantastic local cheese, cured meat, cheese cakes, and cubes of pork fat, we had an opportunity to scythe part of a meadow; which gets me to the hay part. These meadows typically consist of about thirty species of grasses and forbs per square yard, and have been maintained for about two thousand years. Average elevation of this gently mountainous area is four thousand feet, with predominantly Norway Spruce (*Picea abies*) forest. The cultural practice of making hay has evolved to the point that preservation of wildflower color in the finished hay is a sign of quality. One could say that it is gourmet hay. The rolling hay meadows are often bordered by spruce forest that can be harvested for logs.

Although different in elevation and climate, the similarity of this area with our north coast prairies surrounded by forest intrigued me. People have lived in this area for at least 2,000 years, trading for salt, metals and wheat with people on the surrounding Transylvanian Plateau. Likewise, local indigenous people also had cultural practices that maintained local prairies in a way that contributed to their sustained survival for much longer than 2,000 years. In both cases the landscape was been altered by humans and sustained them, and other species, for millennia.

The recent (150 years) incursion by modern European immigrants brought different land management practices to our forests and prairies that involved logging forests, grazing prairies with cattle and introducing non-native plants. This has allowed the adaptable Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) to encroach into prairies, altering the hydrology and habitat in ways that are not beneficial to some prairie-dependent wildlife and anadromous fish.

My point is that whether we eat cheese and pork fat in Transylvania or salmon and elk in Humboldt County, we are eating grass and hay.

Our decision on how to manage uplands should be based on a millennial time scale and what is most beneficial to us humans, all other species, and the earth, in the long term.

Below: Woman turning hay in Romania, by Jim Clark.



RRAS is Hosting a New Bird Walk at Trinidad Head!

Join RRAS board president, Gail Kenny and secretary, Andrew Orahoske on Sunday, May 23, from 8 – 11a.m., for a bird walk around Trinidad Head. We will focus on local seabirds, including Common Murre, Pigeon Guillemot, Pelagic Cormorant and more. We may also encounter Peregrine Falcon and Bald Eagles along with terrestrial species currently breeding and migrating. Reservations are required and space is limited. Please view rras.org for COVID guidelines, and sign up with Andrew at Andrew.RRAS@gmail.com. Please include the name, phone number, and email address for each participant.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR:



In his April 2021 “Conservation Update,” Jim Clark, RRAS Conservation Chair, argues (correctly) that science, education, and law are all key elements in achieving conservation objectives. Over the years I’ve seldom disagreed with Jim’s judgements, but I do disagree about one element of the ‘science’ mentioned in the April column, which is the assertion that the success of Douglas-fir in colonizing oak woodlands constitutes a fundamentally negative effect on the extent or value of water-dependent and other resources in North Coast landscapes.

It’s now generally known that Doug-fir populations in the Klamath region are adapted to establish in conditions that range from open-canopy ‘bare mineral soil’ (following a fire, for example) to germinating under the canopy of other vegetation like shrubs and hardwoods. Young trees grow slowly until they overtop the canopy of the competing broadleaved vegetation, then accelerate their growth. Eventually Doug-fir will form an overtopping coniferous canopy.

Values are important, of course. If one’s values are shaped by the resources of grasslands and oak woodlands, then the natural dynamic of Doug-fir colonization and dominance will be seen as an issue that needs to be addressed by managing the Doug-fir to prevent the dominance. However, eco-systems don’t actually have a preference for which species are dominant, so ‘science’ doesn’t tell us that we should prefer one outcome or the other. Indeed, it’s well known that forested ecosystems in the Klamath region are among the most dynamic in North America and may well exhibit a natural set of ‘alternative stable states’ where regular disturbances favor both hardwood dominance and conifer dominance (or tree dominance vs. shrub dominance) at different places and different times [e.g., Odion et al./J. Ecol./98:96 (2010); Tepley et al./Global Change Biol./23:4173 (2017)].

Getting a better handle on the relevant science is important for conservation in the Klamath region, never more so than now, as the Forest Service is embarked on updating the Northwest Forest Plan and the individual management plans for the four National Forests in northwestern California. The relative dynamics in different regions within the Pacific Northwest, including California, are synopsized in the Bioregional Assessment of Northwest Forests (available from www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd762774.pdf and www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd762774.pdf).

I encourage RRAS members to engage with this interaction among science, education, law, and conservation.

– Best, Chad Roberts

Conservation Ecologist, Senior Professional Wetland Scientist, Society of Wetland Scientists, Senior Ecologist, Ecological Society of America.

Responses from Jim Clark, and RRAS Vice President, CJ Ralph:

I generally agree with Chad. My article was focused on a limited geographical, cultural and temporal circumstance. We know the effects of the adaptable Douglas-fir on prairies and related watershed and need to decide what is “good” for all species, and future generations.

– Jim

Chad is partially right on one level. I would say that science can inform us. Once you decide your preferred end point, science can help you get there. So, if you want maximum species diversity of plants, mammals, and birds, (we are in large part a bird organization), you go for a mixed oak woodland. That is also the habitat that the indigenous people preferred for a host of reasons, one being that it was more fireproof. They used fire to manage their forests, of course. If you want timber production, then go for a solid stand of Doug-fir.

– CJ

Public Review of Proposed Fish Factory on Samoa Peninsula!

We urge the public to review this proposal. You will have only 30 days to comment on the proposed massive fish factory on the Samoa Peninsula. As of publication, the Nordic Aquafarms, LLC project’s Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/MND) is out for public review. Details and information on how to submit comments can be found here: <https://ceqanet.opr.ca.gov/> (search “Nordic Aquafarm”).

There are many concerns with this project that will raise non-native Atlantic Salmon, a species that requires significant inputs of fish oil and fish meal; products that are derived from industrial scale exploitation of forage fish; the small, schooling fish that feed on plankton and are foundational to the marine food web. Naturally, forage fish are the primary food source that countless seabirds and other marine wildlife rely upon for their very survival. It is no secret that forage fish, seabirds and whales are all in trouble, with populations declining throughout the North Pacific Ocean, and worldwide.

This has prompted Congressman Huffman and others to introduce legislation to protect forage fish. (HR 2236, Forage Fish Conservation Act); view www.audubon.org/news/fish-are-legislative-menu-recent-congressional-hearing. Recent studies have shown that 90% of all forage fish that are used for fish meal could instead be consumed by humans directly, revealing the incredible inefficiency of fish farming and the sheer magnitude of this global industry. www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2017/02/13/515057834/90-percent-of-fish-we-use-for-fishmeal-could-be-used-to-feed-humans-instead. **Watch our website for the comment period dates!**

Benefits of Native Plant Sanctuary Networks

By Monterey Caid, Lost Foods Nursery, Redwood Acres, Eureka

If every city created native plant sanctuaries, they could preserve all the native species from the area in which the city is located and make sure that they are available for propagation and restoration. This would ensure native plants, and the species who depend on them such as local birds, bees and butterflies, do not go extinct and that seeds and plant materials of all native plant species are available for planting in urban and agricultural areas, along roadways, in community gardens, and other land restoration projects. Citizens can also create native plant sanctuaries on land they have access to, no matter how big or small, to help create a *native plant sanctuary network*. Every native plant becomes its own sanctuary for the native species that depend on them, so even adding one native plant can make a big difference.

A native plant sanctuary and native foods gardens, provides the community with a place to view, enjoy, study, gather, and manage the traditional native plants used for food, medicine, baskets, tools, crafts, clothes, decoration, ceremony, and more. They preserve our local native plant species, many of which are hard to find, endangered, or locally extinct. Many of these plants along with the wildlife that depend on them, and the traditions and cultures connected to them, are in danger of being lost. A sanctuary becomes a living seed bank of our diverse native plants. A portion of the seeds and cuttings can be collected, distributed or propagated to help restore native plant diversity and abundance. Native plant species that are unavailable now, can be added to the Sanctuary whenever they are located and propagated.

The Native Plant Sanctuary also becomes an educational center where community members can study and learn about our native plants. Educational activities could include native plant and weed identification, traditional uses of native plants, native plant and wildlife interdependence, plant propagation, land and habitat restoration, Indigenous land management and Traditional Ecological Knowledge, along with the many benefits of growing and using native plants for food, medicine, utilitarian material and ornamental values.



Wood chips from local tree service companies, green garden waste, branches, and wood from the sanctuary and other sources can be recycled on site to create trails, control weeds, improve soil health, and improve habitat value.

These sanctuaries and gardens can demonstrate how restoring our rich, native biodiversity can produce more food than our current farming practices, while conserving resources, supporting wildlife and rebuilding our damaged ecosystems.

Grow Local! Grow Natives! Recover Lost Foods!

Above: Downy Woodpecker feeds on insects living off Cows Parsnip stalks. Above: Monty in his family's native plant sanctuary. Top: Painted Lady butterfly on Seaside Daisies. Top right: a pollen-collecting bee on Checkerbloom. All photos courtesy of Monty Caid.



Lost Foods Native Plant Sanctuary and Nursery – for Native Plant Sales, Consulting, and Sanctuary Tours
Donations are welcome!

Location: Redwood Acres Fairgrounds 3750 Harris Street, Eureka
Driving Directions: Enter gate #3 at Redwood Acres, turn left after the first building, go straight and park at the end of pavement
Hours: Open year-round, 12-5pm Tues, Thurs, Sat.
Contact Monty Caid at (707) 268-8447, or email montycaid@yahoo.com. Website: <http://lostfoods.org/>.

Next Month – Create Your Own Native Plant & Wildlife Sanctuary!

Kid's Corner
WOWZA WILDLIFE!
By Leslie Scopes Anderson

**CAN'T CATCH ME!
I'M NO SITTING DUCK!**

WHERE IN THE WORLD?

Wood Ducks are native to California and can be seen in Sequoia Park pond and sometimes at the Arcata Marsh & Wildlife Sanctuary. They nest in holes in trees!

FUN FACTS:
Wood Ducks are among Nature's masterpieces! The male has a myriad of gorgeous colors to attract the female. She has more neutral coloration for camouflage while tending the ducklings.