

# The Sandpiper

August 2022



Redwood Region Audubon Society

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

## A Victory for the Marbled Murrelet

By CJ Ralph

At the end of June, an Oregon federal district court ruled in favor of Portland Audubon, Cascadia Wildlands, and the Center for Biological Diversity to protect an old-growth forest on private lands that is murrelet nesting habitat. The company, Scott Timber intended to clear cut old-growth forest that was previously part of the Elliott State Forest. This ruling is important for reasons far beyond the local Oregon interests. First of all, it is on private land not just federal or state lands. Secondly, the ruling codified best scientific practices for indicating what constitutes murrelet habitat.

Key to this very important action is that the judge upheld the validity of the murrelet survey protocol as law. This survey technique was put together by the Pacific Seabird Group (PSG), a professional organization of seabird specialists that determines “occupied” habitat and thus the timbered lands subject to legal protection.

“Today’s ruling is groundbreaking because it holds a private timber company accountable for plans to destroy habitat essential for imperiled wildlife in Oregon,” said Nick Cady, legal director at Cascadia Wildlands. “This ruling establishes that private timber companies can no longer violate the Endangered Species Act with abandon.”

It’s also relevant because the case discussed the importance for adequate protection of nesting habitat using surveys over multiple years in small residual stands where murrelet habitat may not be entirely contiguous and the birds may not use it every year.

“Since their listing 30 years ago under the Endangered Species Act, Marbled Murrelets have moved even closer to extinction in Oregon in large part because state and federal agencies have not done enough to protect and preserve the older forests on which they depend,” said Bob Sallinger, conservation director for Portland Audubon. “Hopefully this win and others that preceded it will encourage state and federal agencies to more aggressively pursue their responsibilities to protect and recover this amazing seabird that depends on Oregon’s older coastal forests to nest.”

The new forest resulting from the ruling retains the forest in public ownership, creates a 34,000-acre permanent research reserve on the west side of the forest to benefit murrelets and other imperiled species, protects nearly all of the remaining mature and old-growth forest left on the Elliott, and meaningfully engages western Oregon Tribes in its management.

In the Redwood region, there are currently multiple pending/planned timber harvest plans on private land that may impact murrelets and this case should create renewed urgency for more thorough PSG protocol surveys.

(For more information on Elliott State Forest, see <https://biologicaldiversity.org/w/news/press-releases/court-halts-logging-of-elliott-state-forest-tract-sold-to-private-timber-company-2022-06-28/>.)



Above: Marbled Murrelet by Rich MacIntosh, USGS

## RRAS Field Trips in AUGUST!

**Sat. August 6<sup>th</sup>** – 8:30-11am. Birding tour of Arcata Marsh, led by Bob Battagin.

**Sat. August 6<sup>th</sup>** – 8:30-11am. Join RRAS for a bird walk in the **Southern Humboldt Community Park**, and along the South Fork of the Eel River. Trip leaders Ann Constantino and Andrew Orahoske will focus on riparian species as well as juvenile birds learning their essential life skills. Email [Andrew.RRAS@gmail.com](mailto:Andrew.RRAS@gmail.com) for details, or just show up at Tooby Memorial Park to join us.

**Sun. August 7<sup>th</sup>** – 9-11am. Join RRAS for a **Women and Girls’ Birdwatching Walk** with trip leader Lila Bowen, a Cal Poly Humboldt Wildlife graduate student studying Western Gull nesting colonies and behaviors on Humboldt’s nearshore rocks. We will meet at Houda Point, on Scenic Drive, to look at activity on Camel Rock, take a trip down to the beach from there, then walk or drive north to Luffenholtz to look at Tepona Point. This trip will likely include gull, cormorant, murre, and other seabird species and will be a great opportunity to observe some of Humboldt’s incredible seabird nesting colonies and the interesting behaviors that occur on them.

**Sat. August 13<sup>th</sup>** – Join Ken Burton on an exploration of the high ridge between the Eel and Bear river valleys. Expect a mix of forest and grassland species, potentially including Sooty Grouse, Horned Lark, Purple Martin, and Chipping Sparrow. We may also visit the Bear River valley. Walking will be minimal. Take food and water; there are no facilities. Afternoon temperatures may be quite high. Meet at Angelina Woodfired Kitchen in Fernbridge at 7:30 a.m.; we will carpool from there. Plan to be back in Fernbridge by 3 p.m. If you want to carpool to Fernbridge, contact Ken directly with your location ([shrikethree@gmail.com](mailto:shrikethree@gmail.com) or 707-499-1146).

**Sat. August 13<sup>th</sup>** – Birding tour of Arcata Marsh, led by Larry Karsteadt.

**Sun. August 14<sup>th</sup>** – 9-11am. Ralph Bucher will lead a walk at the Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge.

**Sat. August 20<sup>th</sup>** – 8:30-11am. Birding tour of Arcata Marsh, led by Rob Fowler.

**Sat. August 20<sup>th</sup>** – Explore riparian areas, meadows and other habitats important to breeding birds in Eureka’s forested McKay Tract, with leaders, Jim Clark and Bob Vogt. Email Jim for details: [clarkjimw@gmail.com](mailto:clarkjimw@gmail.com).

**Sun. August 21<sup>st</sup>** – 9-11am. Ralph Bucher will lead a walk on the Eureka Waterfront. This trail is paved and is **wheelchair accessible**.

**Sat. August 27<sup>th</sup>** – 8:30-11am. Birding tour of Arcata Marsh, led by Kathryn Wendel.

**Sat. August 27<sup>th</sup>** – 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 will provide tools and packaged snacks. Please bring your own water and gloves. Contact Jeremy Cashen at [jeremy.cashen@yahoo.com](mailto:jeremy.cashen@yahoo.com) or 214-605-7368 for more information.

**Sun. August 28<sup>th</sup>** – 9-12pm. Join RRAS in partnership with local guiding company, Kayak Trinidad, for a morning viewing local seabirds from a kayak. All kayaks and gear are provided. Space is limited and reservations are required. Cost for this trip is \$109/person. Contact Andrew Orahoske ([Andrew.RRAS@gmail.com](mailto:Andrew.RRAS@gmail.com)) to reserve your spot.

\*Contact Ralph at [thebook@reninet.com](mailto:thebook@reninet.com) for any walks he leads and all Arcata Marsh walks.

\*Contact Field Trip Chair, Janelle Chojnacki at [janelle.choj@gmail.com](mailto:janelle.choj@gmail.com) for all other walks, unless specified.

## DID YOU KNOW?

*Facts shared by the Cat & Bird Safety Committee*  
The Kaua’i, HI County Council has unanimously enacted new provisions to manage cats and protect people and wildlife. Bill 2842, effective January 2023, prohibits the abandonment of cats across the island and the feeding of cats on County properties. Predation by cats is a major threat to Kaua’i’s native birds. The voices of concerned citizens, supported by scientific research, can result in positive action even when there is vocal opposition, as there was in this case.

Source: American Bird Conservancy and Kaua’i County Title VII Ordinance 1107

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## Thinking of Joining the Audubon Society?

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 your email, write “local membership” on your check, then mail to:

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You are welcome to join both nationally and locally.

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## President's Column

*By Gail Kenny*

After a quiet, winter-bird soundscape, it is delightful to experience breeding-bird songs again. There is a two-to-three-month period when singing migrating birds are passing through and local breeders are singing on territory before it tapers off again. Even experienced birders need to review birdsong seasonally to be able to identify them.

A newer birdsong ID tool is the Merlin app. When this free bird ID app from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology first became available, I figured I didn't need it because I know my local birds well and I've got the Sibley Bird Identification app on my smart phone which includes recordings of birdsongs. But I will be traveling out of the country this summer and Merlin provides free bird ID all over the world. That beats buying another bird guide, so I checked out what Merlin has to offer.

There is some setup for the Merlin app. You download a “bird pack” while your phone is connected to the internet. I downloaded the US: West Coast bird pack. Once you have the pack you don't need to be connected to the internet for it to work. Merlin can identify bird species by description, photos, or sounds using artificial intelligence (AI). What has recently been improved on the Merlin app is the sound ID feature. Sibley doesn't have that!

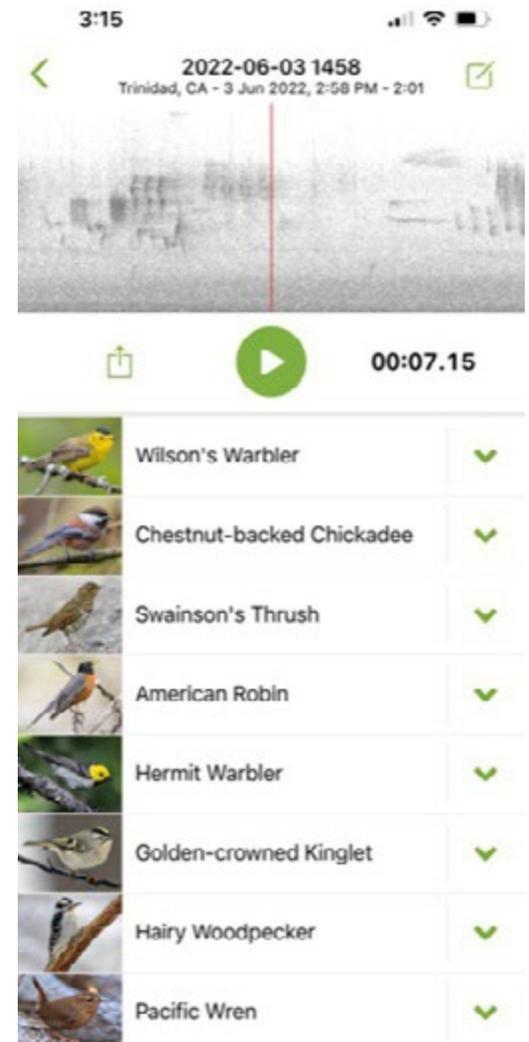
After some experimenting with Merlin Sound ID, I learned that it is as simple as opening the app, selecting sound ID, and then record. As Merlin is recording the sound it shows a diagram (called a spectrogram) of the sounds it is detecting. AI identifies what species of bird is singing based on the spectrogram. As the app recognizes the birdsong it lists a picture and name of the best matched bird species. During the recording as the bird species is singing, the name and photo of the bird is highlighted. On playback, below the best matched bird species, it lists recordings of that bird's song so you can listen to them and compare it to what you are hearing. You can confirm “this is my bird” and either save it to Merlin or eBird. Also on playback, you can select a species in the best match list, and the cursor will go to the place in the recording where this bird was singing, making it easy to find a specific recorded song.

There are some precautions with using Merlin sound ID. It's not always right. It is best used as an aid to identification. I did a recording on Stagecoach Road in Trinidad and Merlin identified a Northern Cardinal, Spotted Sandpiper, and Black-Headed Grosbeak while I was hearing the Black-Headed Grosbeak singing. I think some parts of the grosbeak song sounded like these other birds. The cardinal was obviously wrong because it would be very rare here. Also, Merlin was not able to ID birds singing farther away that I could hear. It also does not seem to be able to ID some bird calls but that could improve with machine learning.

What I like about Merlin sound ID is that now I have lost my higher pitched hearing, it will hear those Golden-Crowned Kinglets and Cedar Waxwings I can't hear. It will also detect the higher pitched parts of birdsong that I'm only hearing part of. What was a surprise to me is that along with the common Wilson's Warbler, and other

neotropical migrants singing in my local patch, Merlin identified Hermit Warblers that I wasn't picking up at all. It's nice to know that they might be here. It is especially fun to use Merlin when I'm hearing an unusual bird singing. It helped me ID a Warbling Vireo recently, but another time, it missed the Hooded Oriole I could hear in the distance.

Overall, Merlin sound ID is a wonderful new tool to use for learning birdsong in the field and the price is right! It has certainly added a fun new aspect to my birding experience.



Above: An example of the Merlin Sound App.



Above: New RRAS board member, Sue Sniado, sent in this photo of a Song sparrow feeding a cowbird, at Arcata Marsh.

## “What’s in a Name...?”

By Mark A. Colwell, Wildlife Department, Cal Poly Humboldt

In an engaging treatise on the origins of biological classification and taxonomy (Naming Nature, 2009. W.W. Norton & Co., New York), Carol Kaesuk Yoon posited that humans have an innate tendency to name and organize living things. Our ancestral ability to make sense of the world evolved from a dependence on the goods and services of nature. Today, Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), is a noteworthy example of this; Indigenous peoples maintain a deep ecological understanding of the local ecosystems upon which they rely. Moreover, the ability of humans to name biota was enhanced by our geographically localized existence (i.e., small home range), which presented a limited number of variants (i.e., species) to ponder amidst interactions of the natural world. As humans explored the world, however, we encountered an increasingly diverse assemblage of organisms to be named and classified, which created new challenges.

Fast forward to the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the advent of modern systematics, the science of naming living entities and understanding their relationships. Carl Linnaeus anticipated evolutionary theory by developing the binomial system of nomenclature. To this day, the Latin-based practice effectively conveys the evolutionary relationships among living things based on shared derived characters such as behavior, morphology and, now, almost exclusively DNA. Closely related species are grouped into a common genus, with variants assigned species epithets. The challenge to humans in classification is to make use of the best information possible to resolve these relationships and to be consistent in how we name things. Over the years, ornithologists and birders have become well aware of these challenges, often flavored with the influences of changing societal norms.

During my several decades of teaching Ornithology at Humboldt, I regularly updated the 300+ species list (common names only; not Latin binomials! ...that I came across in my advanced, “Shorebirds” class), that I required of students, down to the taxonomic level of Family. Each August, I eagerly awaited the updated “checklist” of North American birds as compiled by the committee of the American Ornithologists’ Society (AOS). Some changes included those based on the collective expertise of committee members who deemed recent phylogenetic analyses significant enough to alter the taxonomic affiliation of a species. For example, the recent move of the

Yellow-breasted Chat (*Icteria virens*) out of the wood warblers (Parulidae) into its own monotypic family (Icteriidae) came as no surprise given the species’ distinct morphology and behavior. Other changes, arguably more philosophical and resolved at a finer phylogenetic scale, addressed whether or not geographically distinct morphs qualified as “good species.” The Fox Sparrow (*Passerella iliaca*), for example, has four distinct subspecies that are easily recognized morphologically, exhibit different ranges and migratory behavior, and represent distinct lineages albeit with some hybridization. But, the AOS has yet to recognize them as distinct species.

Other checklist changes to common names were driven not by evolutionary criteria but societal values. If you possess an old version of Roger Tory Peterson’s field guide, delve into the regional names for some species such as Double-crested Cormorant for a stark example of offensive vernacular. More recently, decisions to alter common names were prompted by culturally insensitive names, as exemplified by the Long-tailed Duck’s (*Clangula hyemalis*) former name. In many instances, patronymic names honored individuals known for racism and oppression. Recently, the checklist committee received a petition and followed through by changing the common name of McCown’s Longspur to Thick-billed Longspur (*Rhynchophanes mccownii*) based on McCown’s association with confederate ideology and maltreatment of Native Americans in particular.

Curiously, however, the species’ Latin epithet continues to “honor” the individual. While the inclusivity argument for the longspur name change seems justified, I wonder what criteria will be used in future decisions to alter honorific labels, and there are a lot of them (e.g., Lucy’s Warbler, Wilson’s Warbler, Bachman’s Warbler, Townsend’s Warbler; 10 wood warblers have honorific names). About a year ago, a group of professionals endorsed an effort to replace eponymous common names of species with descriptive labels, which focused on physical or ecological attributes of taxa. I whole-heartedly endorse such an effort (with hope that others grant tolerance for future mistakes I make in mastering the changes to come!).

Carol Yoon’s characterization of early human interaction with, and dependence on, nature emphasized that names identified things of immediate and profound importance to the well-being and survival of a localized people. Today, however, we live in a much larger and more diverse world. As such, there is a need for a system of naming and communicating ideas that stresses inclusivity and does not offend, patronize, disempower or degrade others.

## Eel River Estuary Field Trip

By Gail Kenny



On June 25th, Gary Friedrichsen and I led a RRAS field trip to Eel River Estuary Preserve in Ferndale. This is a property owned by the Wildlands Conservancy which purchased it in 2008 for restoration primarily to benefit salmon. It has only recently been opened to public visitation, which is by reservation only. The habitat includes tidal wetlands, freshwater marsh, sand dunes, grassland, and part of the Eel River estuary.

The day was sunny and warm with little wind. Our group of about 12 participants met at 9 AM at the preserve’s barn where there were at least 26 Cliff Swallows flying around. They nest in the eaves of the barn. A preserve representative gave us an orientation

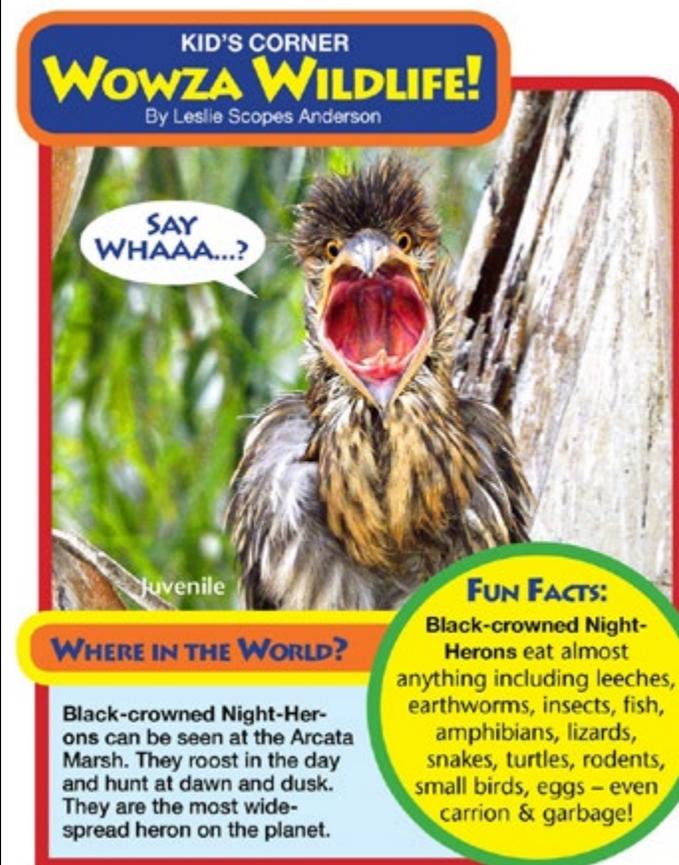
about the rules and provided a map which I had not been able to find on the preserve’s website. This was when we realized that it is a 1.5-mile hike through fields to access the marsh and other trails. The marsh loop trail is 2 miles, which would make a 5-mile hike for the morning. We compromised on a plan to hike to the marsh, then take part of the loop to the dunes trail to view the beach, reducing the hike to about 4 miles.

On the way through the fields, we had very good looks at Savannah Sparrows and came to know their markings and song well. We counted 36 individuals, our second highest species on the eBird trip checklist. We encountered Northern Harriers in the fields, heard Marsh Wrens in the marsh, there were ravens and Red-Tailed Hawks, and a flock of 37 Brown Pelicans flew by. Some of us didn’t make it as far as the marsh, but 4 of us carried onward and delighted at the wildflowers and pollinators in the dunes while picking up some seashore birds for the list.

We had hoped to have this field trip in winter but found out it was closed on the weekends for hunting during those months. A fall or winter visit would most likely yield more numbers and species of birds than early summer. If you want to visit more than the fields, you will be hiking over 3 miles. Overall, it was a beautiful day to be outside in nature and in good company.

To learn more about the Wildlands Conservancy and the Eel River Estuary, visit their website: [wildlandsconservancy.org/preserves/eelriverestuary](http://wildlandsconservancy.org/preserves/eelriverestuary).

Above left: Field trip participants, by Gail Kenny.



Above: Cartoon by Leslie Scopes-Anderson.

## The Barn Swallow

By Gail Kenny



I distinctly remember seeing Barn Swallows as a child. My father built a houseboat we kept in the San Joaquin Delta, only a few hours' drive from home in the Bay Area. We enjoyed many a summer afternoon cruising slowly through the delta with barn swallows swooping in front of the houseboat. After I moved to Trinidad, I soon became accustomed to barn swallows nesting in our carport each summer. It has been fun to witness them often raising two broods a season. We have a wire across our backyard connecting to a building. Barn swallows and violet-green swallows often perch there in the summer and we watch the fledgings hang out and get fed. I have an extra interest in Barn Swallows now because my daughter is studying their breeding behavior for her PhD [www.safran-lab.com/](http://www.safran-lab.com/).

Barn Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*), are widespread around the world and I have seen them in several countries while traveling. There are seven subspecies of Barn Swallows worldwide that vary in breast plumage color and tail length. Differences

in appearance between the subspecies are at least partially caused by the presence of different types of parasites in different regions, and geographic variation in which traits the swallows use to choose mates. The American subspecies is found locally. Barn Swallows have a distinctive long forked tail, making it easy to distinguish from other swallows. The American subspecies has a dark blue-black upper side, an orange to whitish underside, and a dark rufous throat. Their song is a sweet chittering. They are often found around water and fields. Their nest is a partial bowl made of mud mixed with grass on the outside of structures such as barns, houses, and bridges. Their diet consists of insects such as flies, beetles, moths, butterflies, and other flying insects. Humans have a special relationship with barn swallows because they breed on our structures, so there are stories and myths about barn swallows from many cultures. Check out this website to learn more about human-barn swallow relationships: <http://ritualsofthisgoodearth.com/>.

Barn Swallows are migratory birds. They breed in North America and most winter in Central and South America. Some of the Barn Swallows that breed in Colorado winter in Colombia and Venezuela. Most migratory bird populations from specific regions migrate to another specific region in winter. I learned from eBird (<https://ebird.org/science/barswa>) that although Barn Swallow numbers have dropped in the last 50 years in the US, likely due to the more widespread use of pesticides, their populations have benefited somewhat from human structures by reclaiming their territory. The subpopulations that migrate the farthest, such as those wintering in South America and summering in the US can begin their fall movements as early as July. After breeding, Barn Swallows often stage before migration in large communal roosts in grasslands or wetlands. Some Barn Swallows that winter in Argentina have even started breeding there too.

They are present in the Redwood region in late spring and summer for their breeding season. Most of them migrate south for the winter, but there have been Barn Swallows every month of the year at the Arcata Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary. They are in the highest numbers at the marsh from April through September. This is possibly a pre-migratory staging area for our local swallows. In my neighborhood in Trinidad, I have observed Barn Swallows arriving in April, flocking over the field and pond near the library, then beginning to nest by June. They start flocking together again in August and September and then they are gone again until spring. It would be fun to know where our Humboldt County population winters.

Above left: Barn Swallow in Trinidad, by Gail Kenny.



Comic (above) and text reprinted courtesy of the Yurok Tribe, and [Northern California Condor Restoration Program](#) (NCCRP): "Condor (A1) (didn't) need to wait too much longer for his chance to join the rest of his cohort as a free-flying California Condor."

On July 14<sup>th</sup>, the NCCRP was finally able to free A1 – the remaining member of the first prey-go-neesh (California Condor) cohort to be released into Yurok ancestral territory. The second group of birds is expected to arrive next month for a late summer/early fall release. The NCCRP, a partnership between the Yurok Tribe and [Redwood National and State Parks](#) (NPS), plans to reintroduce one cohort of prey-go-neesh every year for at least the next two decades. A1 joined Ney-gem' 'Ne-chween-kah (A0), Poy'-we-son (A3) and Nes-kwe-chokw' (A2), which represent the first prey-go-neesh to soar over Yurok skies since 1892.

"Like his fellow cohort members, A1 was given a Yurok nickname. His is "Hlow Hoo-let," which means "At last I (or we) fly!" said Yurok Wildlife Department Director Tiana Williams Claussen. "In line with the heavier names this first cohort carries, I interpret that as reference to the joyous day that all four of our first cohort fly free together," she said in a statement. "On a lighter note, it's definitely also a reference to poor Hlow Hoo-let's extended wait to be let out, due to his faulty transmitter! We welcome Hlow Hoo-let to the skies of Yurok and surrounding lands, and look forward to his journey with us."

Watch live on the Yurok Tribe condor cam: [www.yuroktribe.org/yurok-condor-live-feed](http://www.yuroktribe.org/yurok-condor-live-feed). Check the Yurok Tribe Facebook page ([yuroktribe.org/yurok-condor-restoration-program](http://yuroktribe.org/yurok-condor-restoration-program)) for more specifics on A1's release.