RRAS PHOTO CONTEST!

Redwood Region Audubon Society is holding a bird photo contest, open to all ages, and everyone is encouraged to submit their photographs under the following guidelines:

All birds must have been photographed within the states of California or Oregon.
Photos must have been taken within approximately the last year.
All submissions should be emailed to the editor (giselleandco@gmail.com) by March 1st, 2022.
(Include precise location and date of photo, age if under 18, full name, address, and phone.)
Results will be in the April issue of The Sandpiper.
Points will be awarded as follows:
5 Points per photo of any bird within the specified geographical area
- maximum of two entries per person
(except for nuthatches below)
5 extra points for:
• Creepers
• Multiple bird species in the same photo
• Submitting the Native American name of the bird from the Tribal Territory the bird was seen
• 3 species of Nuthatches (Red-breasted, Pygmy, and White-breasted), (3 photos allowed)
• A Clark’s Nutcracker
• A bird with a non-avian, wildlife species in the same photo
Extra points will be awarded for clarity, beauty, and unusual qualities.

Prizes include artwork by Gary Bloomfield, and a pelagic birding trip with Gary Friedrichsen.
Photos will be judged by The Sandpiper Editor, Gisèle Albertine, along with local photographer and graphic artist, Leslie Scopes Anderson, and local wildlife photographer, Ann Constantino.

Have fun!

RRAS Field Trips in February!

RRAS Virtual Program: 7pm, February 11, 2022
Please join us for our Annual Membership Meeting and,
**A Presentation on: 20 Years of Cats vs Wildlife, by Monte Merrick**
A wildlife rehabilitator with over 20 years’ experience discuss the enormous toll free-roaming domestic cats take on native wildlife, and what works to protect birds, reptiles and small mammals – and also allows domestic cats to enjoy the outdoors. Monte Merrick has been the co-director of Humboldt Wildlife Care Center/Bird Ally X for the last ten years.

Previously, Monte has worked in the field of wildlife care in Washington and across California, specifically as an emergency responder during oil spills, rescuing and rehabilitating oil-impacted wildlife. He has responded to spills around the state, and internationally. Monte is co-author of Introduction to Aquatic Bird Rehabilitation, the only manual of aquatic bird rehabilitation in existence.

**Godwit Days-associated Contests to Continue in 2022**
Flyers with complete information about entering two student contests sponsored by RRAS – the 19th annual bird art contest and the 17th annual nature writing contest – are posted on our website (www.rras.org). The entry deadline for both is Friday, March 18. The art contest, which is cosponsored by Friends of the Arcata Marsh, is open to Humboldt County students in grades K through 12, while the writing contest is open to Humboldt and Del Norte students in grades 4 through 12.
Top-Down Influences of Predators
By Mark A. Colwell, Wildlife Department, Humboldt State University

Predators, “rod in tooth and claw,” have captivated humans owing to the dramatic and violent roles they play in nature; falcons exemplify this perspective. In my article, Bottoms-Up! Birds Benefited from Beached Brown Algae, in the last issue of The Sandpiper, I characterized the trophic ladder of ocean-fronting beaches. One linking allolothionous algal debris, an incomplex assemblage of detritivores, and the (mostly shore-) birds that prey on them in the wrack and swash zone. But I left out the top rung of the ladder: predatory falcons! Here, I give examples of the ecological importance of Peregrine Falcons on the behavior, habitat use, and populations of their prey, with a focus on local falcons and shorebirds.

History: The recovery of raptor populations is a conservation success story attributable to legal protections that reduced direct (e.g., shooting, falconry) and indirect (e.g., pesticides) negative human impacts. Today, falcons are widespread and celebrated denizens of cities with their daily breeding activities broadcast via “critter cams.” Here on the north coast, Peregrine Falcons breed at inaccessible sites, located mostly on prominent rocky headlands. The local population is unique in that breeding individuals reside year-round within territories centered on their nest sites. This resident population is bolstered by passage birds (i.e., migrants) and nonbreeding residents. Collectively, falcons have a dramatic effect on the behavior, ecology, and populations of their prey.

Ecology of prey: Predators have diverse effects on their prey, including behavioral shifts and changes in habitat use, with consequences for individual survival that affect prey population growth. When I began studying shorebirds in the 1980s, studies of Sanderling wintering near Bodega Bay described feeding territories arrays linearly along ocean-fronting beaches. Now, however, Sanderlings NEVER occur alone on such territories. Instead, they form dense flocks. The cause of this change in sociality is indisputably falcons! Other small sandpipers (aka “peeps”) show equally dramatic behaviors driven by predatory falcons. Around Humboldt Bay, mixed semi-diurnal tides (i.e., two highs and two lows of unequal amplitude) predictably alter accessibility to invertebrate prey within foraging habitats. Consequently, shorebirds predictably move between intertidal habitats and high-tide roosts that confer safety from falcons. At times, thousands of peeps aggregate in dense flocks driven by natural selection for behaviors that minimize risk of predation and maximize vigilance. Although these dense aggregations typically form in open habitats that afford unobstructed viewscapes, on occasion small sandpipers form “aerial roosts” which entails nonstop circling flights at dusk, prior to moving to nocturnal roost sites.
above: a mass of talltid amphipods (shorebird food), courtesy of m. colwell.

bonaparte’s gull — the gull that nests in trees

by harriet hill

bonaparte’s is the most common small gull in north america, especially inland. it breeds in the boreal forest across southern alaska and canada’s interior. it is common in hmboldt county, especially during migration. it can be seen regularly in fall and winter when the adults are mostly in nonbreeding plumage and immatures in their first winter plumage. in these seasons, both have pinkish legs and a mostly white head with a dark ear-spot. immatures also have heavy brown and black markings on their wings. (gulls are notoriously difficult to identify so see a bird guide for details. around here, bonaparte’s could most likely be confused with the black-legged kittiwake.)

bonaparte’s gulls (chroicocephalus philadelphia) often feed like terns by their gracefull diving and dipping small prey off the water surface. indeed, they were initially classified as terns in 1815. they later were included in the genus larus but recent dna studies show that they fit neatly into the masked gull group, genus chroicocephalus. they are not named for napoleon, but rather after his nephew, charles, a french ornithologist who studied american birds.

like all gulls, bonaparte’s are opportunistic feeders, but they seem more health-conscious than some. unlike the stereotypic “seagull” that seeks out junk food, they rarely dine at landfills and have a varied array of feeding strategies. their diet includes small, swift organisms such as zooplankton and midges that are too fast for larger gulls. they also eat salmon eggs and small fish. they pick fly larvae off washed-up seaweed and pull marine worms from mudflats. they spin on the water like giant phalaropes to stir up prey.

and of course, they feast on the massive bloom of flying insects in the summertime boreal forest.

the nesting behavior of these gulls is unique. adults arrive on their arctic breeding grounds sporting slick black hoods and build a stick nest in a tree, which no other gulls do. in 1977, i observed bonaparte’s gulls nesting in tamarack trees near churchill, manitoba, during a rockefeller university field biology class. when the chicks were around five days old, i heard one of the parents’ voice’s persistent soft calls from the forest floor. eventually, i was thrilled to see the chicks jump off branches one by one, fall awkwardly about 12 feet down, and land on the duff. when all except one were on the ground, the chicks followed this parent to a nearby pond. this parent eventually returned and convinced the last chick to take the leap.

observing these gulls was my short-term research project for the class and it was not without hardships. i had to don a helmet before approaching my study site since i was repeatedly bashed by a colony of arctic terns on the way. my head net thwarted the bloodthirsty insects, but it was hard to see through it with binoculars, and loads of powerful bug repellent on my hands caused the outer layer of my binocs to melt onto my palms. polar bears occasionally wandered by. this was long before cell phones, so we all carried whistles and blew them full tilt when a bear was near, then trudged back to take temporary shelter in several dusty rental cars until it was “safe” to return.

the summertime arctic is a challenging environment for humans, but it is also a glorious place. i am grateful to have seen jumping bonaparte’s chicks, wandering polar bears, and legions of birds nesting all over the tundra 45 years ago, before the impacts of climate change really set in.

(top-down: continued from previous page)
Crack the Door Open to Nature –
A Visit with Jude Power

By Denise Seeger

One of Redwood Region Audubon Society’s former chapter leaders, and most popular field trip guides, Jude Power, recently took a moment to sit down and talk with me about what drove her to become a birder and a leader in this community.

“There was this moment while picnicking in Yosemite with my parents when I was 8 years old. There were birds singing and singing everywhere around us and I just had to know what they were,” Jude recalls.

After a visit to the nature bookstore, she found out they were Red-Winged Blackbirds and wrote a school report on them. Both Jude and her father continued birding at home, with him eventually becoming active and accomplished, while Jude got busy with other things in her life.

Years later after purchasing property on Knuckles, she was immersed in nature again and that same curiosity to know the birds around resurfaced.

“There were so many! I puzzled over the birds and decided I wanted to be a birder. I went on every single Redwood Region Audubon Society (RRAS) field trip.”

Learning how to really look at birds – not just what they look like, but how they behave and what habitat they favored – was the most gratifying aspect of birding.

“Here’s the thing, you’ve got to learn the most common birds around you first – the birds you see in the park and in your yard. Those are the ones you really need to know because then you will know when you’re seeing something new. You’ll become curious when you see something different. It’s exciting. You get a little confidence, gain some knowledge and it makes you want to expand what you know.”

At the time, RRAS board member Ron LeValley noticed she was actively participating and mentioned that there was an empty chair on the board of directors. That quickly evolved into ‘do you want to be president?’

The organization was preparing to celebrate its 25th anniversary and Jude found herself, along with Chet Ogan, and current President, Gail Kenny, planning the festivities.

At the same time, Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge was developing public access to its south bay units, Hooken Slough and Salmon Creek and Jude noted that RRAS could lead field trips there, just as they were at Arcata Marsh. Boom! She was put in charge of RRAS involvement and shortly began leading monthly field trips at Hooken Slough during the winter months, since there were more birds at that time of year. Eventually, she decided to hold the trips year-round and moved them over to Salmon Creek’s Shorebird Loop Trail.

Over 26 years and 250 field trips later, she retired from that position in 2016. Still active leading trips at Arcata Marsh and other locations and reminiscing about birding trips to Tule Lake, her energy is also involved with the Cat & Bird Safety Committee which just pulled off a successful Catio Tour in Arcata. After seeing Peter F. Marra speak at Godwit Days about his book, Cat Wars: The Devastating Consequences of a Cuddly Killer, Jude was motivated to do something. Unsure about the Catio Tour at first, but being a cat owner herself, she knew the best way to relate to other cat folks was through compassionate solutions to keeping both cats and birds safe.

Known as the Bird Lady at her workplace, Jude was amused and touched by her coworkers as they described birds to her that they’d recently seen. She installed some posters of common north coast birds in her office to help people figure out what they were seeing. Once people knew they could ask her questions, they asked a lot more questions, and she appreciated their natural curiosity.

“When people come on field trips repeatedly and I see them learn and get excited about what they’re seeing and doing – that is when I am filled with gratification.”

For Jude it’s about more than just birds. It’s skill building – using optics, assessing habitat. She added, “People have to learn to use binoculars. I can totally relate. Looking though a scope is a skill, not automatic, and you have to practice.”

“If people love something – they will save it.”

One of Jude’s missions is helping people connect to nature; “My bottom line in leading bird walks is to connect people to birds and wild spaces where the birds are. You can be unaware of things that are going on all around you – and suddenly you begin to see so much more, and then become aware that you were unaware.”

Jude’s passion for birds, and protecting their habitat is clear; “By protecting wild places next to urban areas, people can easily get outdoors and expand their awareness, maybe even love of nature. As Baba Dioum said, “If people love something – they will save it.”

“I think the whole birding community is recognizing the importance of including all people under the birding community umbrella. The November Sandpiper had an article by Mark Colwell, on HSU and Humboldt being a Mecca for Aspiring Ornithologists that emphasized how the Humboldt birding community is really supportive. The more folks you bring in, the more accepting, more cohesive and more inclusive it will be.”

“Birding is a great way to connect to nature. Even if it’s just the door cracking open, it links you to the boundless natural world.”

(Editor’s Note: Jude will be leading the March 5th Women and Girl’s Birding Walk.)

Photo of Jude Power, by Ken Burton.

POETRY ZONE

About This Poem: Courtesy of Poets.org:

“Vermilion is one of the largest lakes in northern Minnesota. Official state documents boast its capacity for settlers, the ‘lake of the sunset glow.’ The lake was already named, however, before French fur traders ever translated what they deemed discovery. As Ojibwe language scholar, poet, and friend Margaret Noodin told me, the Anishinaabe knew and named the place in a storied and cartographically rich way. For Native peoples, the land is carefully remembered and related to. Those are the stories that I am interested in telling through poetry, the ones that orient our relationship to places on Indigenous terms.”

Molly McGlennon is a poet of Anishinaabe descent and the author of Our Bearings (University of Arizona Press, 2020); Fried Fish and Flour Biscuits (Salt Publishing, 2010); and Creative Alliances: The Transnational Designs of Indigenous Women’s Poetry (University of Oklahoma Press, 2014), which won the 2015 Beatrice Medicine Award for Outstanding Scholarship in American Indian Studies.

Vermilion

The red eye of a loon
for vision,
depths of water
who can say
what will pass
as, protection
reeds
edges of place
are only
temporary,
circling filters the blues
and greens
as they have
always done
dives for minutes
crayfish, light re-fracted,
what could be
slowed
just enough
to catch a meal
or your eye,
indelible flash,
a crimson ribbon
ablaze, crossing
the lake
where you stand
watching
just then
with the grasses
from shore.

— Molly McGlennon