

The Sandpiper



February 2022

Redwood Region Audubon Society

www.rras.org

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 (giseleandco@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 (see exception 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!

Above: American Avocet, by Leslie Scopes Anderson.



Photo: Shutterstock

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 discusses 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.

RRAS Field Trips in February!

Sat. 5th – 8:30-11am. Arcata Marsh, led by Drew Meyer.

Sat. 5th – 9-11am. Our monthly Women & Girls' Birding Walk will be at the Wildlands Conservancy Seawood Cape Preserve in Trinidad, and led by Maria Morrow, a mycologist extraordinaire and botany professor at College of the Redwoods, and will focus on mushrooms as well as birds. *For reservations and meeting location contact our Field Trip Chair, and raven researcher, Janelle Chojnacki, who will co-lead the walk, at janelle.choj@gmail.com. (The March 5th Women's walk will be led by Jude Power – see our feature on Jude on back page of this newsletter!)

Sat. 12th – 8:30-11am. Arcata Marsh, led by Rob Fowler.

Sun. 13th – 9-11am. Ralph Bucher will lead a walk at the Humboldt Bay Nat. Wildlife Refuge.

Sat. 19th – 8:30-11am. Arcata Marsh, led by Elizabeth Meisman.

Sat. 19th – Beginning Birdwatching & Project FeederWatch. Drop-in 10-12 every 3rd Saturday at the Jacoby Creek School Garden. Bring binocs! Contact Denise Seeger, at daseeger@gmail.com.

Sun. 20th – 9-11am. Ralph Bucher will lead a walk on the Eureka Waterfront. This trail is wheelchair accessible.

Sat. 26th – Arcata Marsh, led by Ken Burton.

Sat. 26th – 9-11am. Wigi Wetlands Volunteer Workday. We will provide tools and packaged snacks: Contact Jeremy Cashen at jeremy.cashen@yahoo.com or (214) 605-7368.


*Contact Ralph at thebook@reninet.com for any walks he leads and all Arcata Marsh walks. *Contact Field Trip Chair: Janelle Chojnacki at janelle.choj@gmail.com for all other walks. COVID protocols apply to all RRAS events; see our website.

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.

KID'S CORNER
Wowza Wildlife!
By Leslie Scopes Anderson

DON'T CALL ME LOONEY!



FUN FACTS:
A Common Loon is shown here in its beautiful summer plumage. It is a powerful diver, catching fish in fast underwater chases. Its feet are designed for swimming, so it can't walk well on land.

WHERE IN THE WORLD?
Common Loons can be seen close to shore along the sea-coast and in many inland reservoirs and lakes. They nest in Alaska and western Canada.

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President's Column

By Gail Kenny

Rare Waterfowl Beware



In early December 2021, a rare King Eider in South Humboldt Bay was reported to eBird. I was out of town but looked forward to a chance to see it when I got back. It did stick around for a bit, and I was on my way to look for it when I got the news that it had been killed by a hunter who posted photos of it to a Facebook group. There were no reports of the individual bird later which seemed to confirm the dead bird was the same one.

Then rare Emperor Geese were reported on eBird in South Humboldt Bay and the same thing happened. Shortly after, there were reports of two Emperor Geese shot by hunters. This was jarring news to those of us who find pleasure in seeing rare birds. The thought that our rare bird reports could have been instrumental in getting hunters on the birds was heartbreaking. Birders asked whether it was legal to hunt these birds and what we could do to prevent rare waterfowl from being hunted.

Per California hunting regulations, it is not legal to hunt Emperor Geese; but it is legal to hunt any duck, including King Eiders. It was still not clear whether it was legal to hunt the eider in the place and time it was killed. It turned out that there were more than two Emperor Geese, probably 5-6 originally and only two were still being reported in late December. The Emperor Geese kills were reported to the authorities and some action was being taken to address it. Rumor has it that the Bean Goose that was in the Arcata Bottoms earlier in Fall, 2021, was also shot by a hunter.

The discussion of how to protect rare waterfowl from hunters is wide-ranging. Some birders feel strongly that rare waterfowl should not be reported to public sources



Above: Emperor Goose, by Jeff Todoroff.

such as eBird and Facebook until after the birds are gone. Some feel that waterfowl hunters have done a lot to preserve and protect waterfowl and without them there would be fewer of them to hunt and fewer rare birds for birders to see. Redwood Region Audubon Society acknowledges the contributions of the hunting community towards habitat and gamebird conservation. It can also be argued that if we don't share locations of rare birds publicly, we are losing out on opportunities to educate the public about birds. If we share rare bird sightings with only a select few, then birding becomes too exclusive.

There are also many instances of large groups of birders showing up and disturbing rare species. These human actions potentially cause harm to birds through harassment, energy loss, or disruption of essential behaviors, such as feeding and breeding. The American Birding Association has a Birder's Code of Ethics (www.aba.org/aba-code-of-birding-ethics/) that is worth review. Ultimately it is up to each birder to decide whether to report rare waterfowl or not, or whether to delay reporting until after hunting season.

We strongly encourage people to make decisions that put the welfare of the birds first.

Top-Down Influences of Predators

By Mark A. Colwell, Wildlife Department, Humboldt State University

Predators, "red 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 Benefit from Beached Brown Algae*, in the last issue of *The Sandpiper*, I characterized the trophic ladder of ocean-fronting beaches. One linking allochthonous 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 aeries, 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 fear: 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 arrayed 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 views, on occasion small sandpipers form "aerial roosts" which entails nonstop circling flights at dusk, prior to moving to nocturnal roost sites.



Above: Remains of a juvenile Snowy Plover depredated by a Peregrine Falcon on Little River State Beach, by David Orluck.

The Dunlin is the most abundant wintering shorebird on Humboldt Bay; they are common prey of falcons. During the day, when falcons are hunting, individuals roost together on the periphery of the bay. But at night, Dunlins are more likely to roost

(Continued on next page)



Above: A mass of talitrid amphipods (shorebird food), courtesy of M. Colwell.

(Top-Down; Continued from previous page)

alone in pastures more distant from the bay. One of my former graduate students, Dr. Jesse Conklin, marked (with radio transmitters) ~50 Dunlins during three consecutive winters to study their use of roosts. What he found suggested that although Dunlin form dense flocks, they "...have no friends." Specifically, although any individual may be in a large flock, their day-to-day co-occurrence with other marked Dunlin was unpredictable, suggesting that it was more important to be with a lot of conspecifics rather than any specific individual. And, Dunlin often moved among different roosts during a given high tide, especially when chased by falcons! It is challenging to measure the direct effects of falcon predation on shorebird populations because falcons move widely, making accurate estimates of the true number of prey killed difficult. Several studies, however, suggest that mortality from all raptors (e.g., falcons, hawks, owls) can be substantial in some winter populations, especially among juveniles.

These observations suggest a strong "top-down" effect of predatory falcons on the distribution of shorebirds occupying ocean-fronting beaches. That said, "bottom-up" effects are also important. Without the accumulation of brown algae on ocean-fronting beaches, foraging shorebirds would be hard pressed to make their daily energetic budget, and they would be forced elsewhere to search for food. So, food sets the table for shorebirds, and falcons scramble the meal!

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 Humboldt 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 graceful 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 beamed 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 trooped 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.



Above: Nonbreeding Bonaparte's Gull adults, by Evan Lipton.



Above: Bonaparte's Gull on nest, by Matthew Perry (mperry@usgs.gov).

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 Kneeland, 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, Hookton 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 Hookton 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 P. 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 settler recreation, 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 McGlennen 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 McGlennen