



The Sandpiper

February 2025



Redwood Region Audubon Society

www.rras.org

Don't Miss Out!

RRAS Annual Banquet and Program

Saturday, February 15

Silent Auction :: Gourmet Dinner :: Presentation by Dr. Frank Fogarty on Lewis's Woodpeckers

RRAS's annual banquet fund-raiser takes the place of the regular program on February 15 at the Arcata D Street Neighborhood Center. This fun-filled event is a great opportunity to support RRAS while enjoying the company of fellow birding and conservation enthusiasts. The always-delicious gourmet dinner catered by Gary Friedrichsen includes both meat and vegetarian options and locally sourced additions like Brio bread and dessert from Ramone's. Everyone is always thrilled with special finds at the silent auction, where natural history artworks such as carvings and paintings, books, and a variety of other donated services and items are available. Do come join us, it is always a fun evening!

- Date: Saturday, February 15
- Place: Arcata D Street Neighborhood Center, 13th and D Streets
- Time: Social hour begins at 5:30 and dinner at 6:30 p.m.
- Speaker: Dr. Frank Fogarty -- **Lewis's Woodpecker: Conservation Challenges for a Unique Fire-associated Species**
- Cost: \$35/person by February 8, \$50/person after that
- Deadline: Reservations must be received by February 12
- Payment: Send check made out to RRAS to PO Box 1054, Eureka CA 95502
- Info: email gary@jacobyreek.net with Banquet in the subject line



The evening will be capped off with a presentation by Dr. Frank Fogarty on the conservation challenges facing the Lewis's Woodpecker. Dr. Fogarty is an Assistant Professor of Applied Avian Ecology in the Wildlife Department at Cal Poly Humboldt. His lab studies how potential disturbances, including wildfires, climate change, habitat fragmentation, timber harvest, and cattle grazing, interact with bird communities. His lab has recently been working on the conservation and management of Lewis's Woodpeckers in Oregon, and he will discuss their unique habitat use, including association with post-fire landscapes and complex migratory behavior. Dr. Fogarty is an avid local birder, with eBird contributions especially for the North Myrtle town neighborhood Hot Spot.

Lewis's Woodpecker submitted by Dr. Fogarty

Recent Sightings on RRAS walks in January: Common Goldeneye, Barn Swallows, White-tailed Kites, Canvasbacks, Redhead, Long-eared Owl

RRAS FIELD TRIPS IN FEBRUARY

Every Saturday, 8:30-11am. Join RRAS at the Arcata Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary for a free guided field trip with an experienced birder. The meet-up spot is the parking area at the end of I St. (Klopp Lake). Bring binoculars and scopes if you have them. If not, come on out anyway!

Trip leaders for February: Feb 1, Michael Morris ~ Feb 8, Larry Karsteadt ~ Feb 15, Tamar Danufsky ~ Feb 22, Chet Ogan

Sunday, Feb 9, 9-11am. Join trip leader Ralph Bucher for a walk at the Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge. This two-mile walk is along a wide, flat, gravel-packed trail easily accessible on foot. Email Ralph to sign up at [thebook\[at\]reninet.com](mailto:thebook[at]reninet.com).

Sunday, Feb 16, 9-11am. Ralph Bucher leads a walk on the Eureka Waterfront Trail, starting at the foot of Del Norte Street and continuing on a flat, paved trail that is **wheelchair accessible**. Shorebirds are numerous this time of year, and there are usually some surprises along the trail. Email Ralph to sign up at [thebook\[at\]reninet.com](mailto:thebook[at]reninet.com).

Sunday Feb 16, 10-12am. Join Sean McAllister for a free guided field trip along the shoreline of Humboldt Bay at King Salmon, where we will observe and work on identification of loons, grebes, cormorants, ducks, gulls, shorebirds, and more during a rising tide. This trip will involve

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RRAS Web Page www.rras.org
RRAS Listserv groups.io/g/rras
THE SANDPIPER:

RRAS FIELD TRIPS, continued

a gentle hike along the established trail and beach, ending with an overview from Buhne Point. Meet at the Gil's by the Bay parking lot at the end of King Salmon Ave. Please contact Sean (707-496-8790 / whiteouters@gmail.com) prior to the date to confirm, in case of questionable weather conditions.

Saturday, Feb 22, 9-11am. Wigi Wetlands Volunteer Workday. Join a fun group of volunteers to create bird-friendly habitat in a section of the bay trail behind Bayshore Mall. Bring water and gloves. We provide tools and snacks. Contact Susan Penn at susanpenn60@gmail.com for more information.

Saturday, Feb 22, time TBD. Join RRAS in Southern Humboldt for a free guided bird walk, trip leader TBD. Call Ann Constantino, 707-296-8720, for meeting time and place.

President's Column

By Kathryn Wendel

We saw a lot of birds over the holidays: the Redwood Region conducted five Christmas Bird Count (CBC) circles within a three-week window around Christmas spanning from Centerville to Del Norte and out to Willow Creek, and we couldn't have done it without the staunch dedication of many hearty volunteers. Thank you to all who participated in the CBCs, from birders waking up in predawn hours for owls, to the volunteers that helped wash dishes at the compilation gathering, and everyone who supported in between. Here's a quick review of the numbers and highlights from each count.

Arcata topped out at 178 species—Emperor Goose a top target and a first record for the count. The Arcata circle also included American Bittern, Vaux's Swift, Northern Shrike, Tricolored Blackbird, and Lapland Longspur. The **Del Norte** count was the very next day, and they had a total of 160 species.

Willow Creek had to reschedule last minute due to weather conditions, but even so, that circle observed 77 species and had a good spread of sparrows: Clay-colored, Chipping, and Lark Sparrows being the highlights.

The **Centerville** count, the longest running CBC in our area, netted a respectable 162 species despite a rainy and windy start to the day. Highlights for that count include birds that may not be considered rare but have been observed less than ten times over the last fifty years that this count has been running: Eurasian Green-winged Teal, Golden Eagle, Tropical Kingbird (it's been quite a productive winter for this species in general!), Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Western Tanager, and Orchard Oriole. Centerville also picked up Cattle Egret, a species that has seen a declining trend



over the last several decades.

Finally, the **Tall Trees** count based in Orick found a total of 119 species. This circle traditionally does very well with game birds, with Mountain Quail and both Sooty and Ruffed Grouse included this year. All in all, a successful

Christmas Bird Count season for our region. If you would like to be involved on any level with any of the CBCs, please contact me at president@rras.org.

With February already on the calendar, make sure you get your early-bird tickets for our annual banquet on February 15. This is one of our major fund-raising events, and this year our keynote speaker is Frank Fogarty, an applied avian ecologist in the Wildlife Department at Cal Poly Humboldt.

He will be speaking on the charismatic and enigmatic Lewis's Woodpecker.

Additionally, our silent auction is currently gathering items for the banquet. If you have any bird or nature-related items that you would like to donate to the auction, or you are a local business that would like to donate a gift certificate or goods, please email me.

Our local birding festival, Godwit Days, is coming up on the third weekend of April. They are always seeking volunteers for help with the many activities during the festival. This year they are also accepting donations of gently used binoculars to use on field trips; so if you have an extra pair that you would like to go to a good cause, please contact info@godwitdays.org to donate (or volunteer!). RRAS is pleased to continue sponsoring the Big Sit at Godwit Days this year, and in addition to that free event held at the Arcata Marsh Interpretive Center, Godwit Days offers many other trips that showcase our beautiful redwood region and all the diverse birds and wildlife that it contains (for more details on the festival, see page 3 of the *Sandpiper*). *See you there!*

Cattle Egret and Emperor Goose courtesy of Jeff Todoroff



Sunday, Feb 23, 9-noonish. *Wedding Rock* is one of the county's best sea-watch locations, and we'll spend the morning scanning for goodies that could include Rhinoceros Auklet, Ancient Murrelet, Black-legged Kittiwake, Iceland Gull, and Northern Fulmar. We'll also share sea-watching techniques and seabird identification tips, and this will be a good opportunity to compare optics. This will be a relaxed morning

of birding and camaraderie. In case you're unfamiliar with the site, it does require a short but somewhat strenuous walk to reach. Meet leader Ken Burton (shrikethree@gmail.com) on the east side of Patrick's Point Drive just north of the Sue-meg State Park entrance to carpool into the park, or meet us at the rock later if you wish. Bring scopes and park passes if you have them and snacks to share if you wish.



Registration for Godwit Days Spring Migration Festival Is Open!

Don't wait to check out the amazing selection of field trips, presentations, and workshops that will take place during the annual Godwit Days festival **April 17-20**. Popular trips fill up fast! Experienced local guides lead tours throughout the biodiverse habitats of our region. Return-

ing this year are the Spotted Owl (three sessions) and California Condor trips (offered on two days). The Bear River Ridge trip returns in 2025 along with new trips including Birding Photography, Hidden Gems of McKinleyville, Humboldt Botanical Gardens, Cock Robin Island and Loleta Bottoms, and Birds, Bikes and Brews.

There will also be two Big Day trips (by carpool)—one held Saturday, April 19, and the other on Sunday, April 20—with both offering some friendly competition to see which group can spot the most bird species.

The Arcata Community Center will again serve as the festival's hub housing vendor booths, art, nature crafts, and other activities for both adults and children, open to the public beginning at 3 p.m. Friday, April 18. Entries from the Student Bird Art Contest lining the hallways are always a popular draw for attendees.

Friday's opening keynote speech (April 18, at 6:30 p.m.) features local ecologist and author Michael Kauffmann, who will share stories about the climate, geology, plants, and animals (birds!) accumulated during the development of his book *The Klamath Mountains: A Natural History*. On Saturday, Rosemary Mosco will present "Connecting Through Comics: How Humor and Art Make Birding Better" (April 19, at 7 p.m.). Rosemary is an author, illustrator, and speaker who has written and drawn for the *New York Times*, Audubon, PBS, and creates a regular comic strip for the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's *Living Bird* magazine.

For a complete list of fields trips and events, and to register, go to

godwitdays.org.

Remember, many Godwit Days trips fill up early!!

Calling All Student Writers & Artists

By Sue Leskiw

RRAS is sponsoring its 20th annual *Student Nature Writing Contest*. Up to six cash prizes will be awarded for the best essays and poems on "What Nature Means to Me" by Humboldt or Del Norte County students in grades 4 through 12. First-place winners will be published in the *Sandpiper*. All winners will be published in a booklet posted on the RRAS website by mid-May.

For the 22nd year, Friends of the Arcata Marsh (FOAM) and RRAS are co-sponsoring a *Student Bird Art Contest*, with up to \$650 in prizes awarded to Humboldt County K-12 students who submit a drawing of one of forty suggested species or another bird seen locally.

Entries for both contests must be received by 5 p.m. Saturday, March 22 (no exceptions).

The contests are held in conjunction with the Godwit Days Spring Migration Bird Festival. All art entries and winning writing pieces will be available for viewing starting at 3 p.m. on Friday, April 18, at the Arcata Community Center. Awards will be presented the morning of April 19. Color copies of winning artwork will be shown at the Arcata Marsh Interpretive Center during May and June, with a booklet of winners and award ceremony photos posted on the FOAM and RRAS websites by mid-May.

Complete submission instructions are posted at rras.org, godwitdays.org, and arcatamarshfriends.org, or can be picked up at the Interpretive Center, 569 South G Street, Arcata, after January 31. Email questions to sueleskiw1@gmail.com.

Take Part in a Community Event for the Great Backyard Bird Count at Ma'le'l Dunes, by Denise Seeger, Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge

The annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC), organized by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Audubon, and Birds Canada, will take place over four days, February 14-17. It is a significant citizen science event where observations from individuals and community groups all over the globe are combined to develop better understanding of bird populations and patterns. The history and impact of the count can be found at birdcount.org/.

Here in Humboldt County, the Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge, Bureau of Land Management, and Friends of the Dunes are planning a cluster of fun events to get people out birding on the north peninsula of Humboldt Bay at Ma'le'l Dunes and the Humboldt Coastal Nature Center. Visit friendsofthedunes.org for details. Volunteers are needed at the activity stations and to support observation tracking on the hikes. Join us and be part of a global conservation effort!

Birding at Ma'le'l Dunes, photo by Denise Seeger



Did You Know?

From the CatBird Committee

Time to Take Action

CATS. It's a four-letter word in bird conservation. Domestic cats (*Felis catus*) can make wonderful pets, but their predatory presence roaming the environment is a nightmare for birds. Ornithologists have been sounding the alarm about cats and their impacts for over a century. It's time we take notice—and take action. For starters, keep your cat indoors, in a catio, or on a leash, and ask your friends to do the same. Thank you.

Source: American Bird Conservancy

POINTS OF VIEW

As the US Fish and Wildlife Service's Barred Owl Management Strategy gets under way, it remains a controversial topic. This month's and the March edition of the Sandpiper will present different ways of looking at the issue.



Dealing with Unforeseen Consequences

By Jim Clark, Co-Chair of RRAS Conservation Committee

“Animal Wellness and Other Groups Condemn Biden Administration for Costly, Unworkable, Inhumane Plan to Massacre 450,000 Barred Owls” reads the headline from the Center for a Humane Economy and Animal Wellness Action’s (CFHE) website. The Center is taking legal action against the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in an attempt to stop its Barred Owl removal program. The local Environmental Education and Information Center (EPIC) is planning to intervene in the case to defend the position of the USFWS.

One of the main agenda items for our conservation committee meeting on November 19 was to discuss the Barred Owl situation and advise our Board of Directors on whether or not to support EPIC in its intervention. Unfortunately, we were unable to reach a consensus.

CFHE’s actions are largely based on alleged inhumane treatment of Barred Owls but fail to fully consider that the Barred Owl invasion is likely a result of western expansion by Europeans across North America in recent history, compared to the tens of millennia of evolution of the coastal redwood biome and western forests in general. If we allow the Spotted Owl to go extinct, we do not know what the effect will be on other wildlife and overall biodiversity of western forests. We have tinkered with nature through logging and colonization; now we are trying to compensate by repairing a misplaced cog, wheel, or lever (apologies to Aldo Leopold). CFHE accuses the USFWS of “playing god”; we used to call it “stewardship.”

Audubon bases its positions on science, law, and education. Law and science point to controlling the Barred Owl. Our chapter and USFWS provide the education. It is the responsibility of those of us who care about birds and all wildlife to educate ourselves on these issues and act accordingly.

To keep updated and discuss this and other conservation topics, join us on Zoom or at our somewhat quarterly in-person meetings (dates and times to be announced). The Zoom link is given below and posted on our website.

[https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87263853457?](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87263853457?pwd=RHNKR0FrWEJ4WHJJeFZFWDB4M0FFZz09)

[pwd=RHNKR0FrWEJ4WHJJeFZFWDB4M0FFZz09](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87263853457?pwd=RHNKR0FrWEJ4WHJJeFZFWDB4M0FFZz09)

An Earth Law Approach to the Plight of the Spotted Owls

The following is from “To Kill or Not to Kill? The Controversial Plan to Kill Half a Million Barred Owls,” by San Kwon and Joyce Fang. The full text can be read on the blog (earthlawcenter.org/blog) of the Earth Law Center, a legal nonprofit working to advance Earth-centered laws and community-led movements that respect and protect all life on the planet. Used with permission.

What would it look like if the legal system took the interests of Barred Owls, Spotted Owls, and their shared ecosystems into account, with appropriate human guardians or proxies representing those interests? Rather than forcing the Barred Owl to bear the burden of our own practices of habitat destruction, we must explore solutions that address the root causes of the Spotted Owl’s population decline.

For instance, the loss of old-growth forests is the other major factor in the decline of Spotted Owl populations. Currently, old-growth forests are protected primarily through the Endangered Species Act, which protects them so long as the Spotted Owl and other species that rely on these forests as habitat remain endangered. Current laws fail to proactively prevent logging *before* a species

To the Editor of the *New York Times*

The August 8, 2024 New York Times printed a guest column titled “A Dystopian Effort Is Underway in the Pacific Northwest to Pick Ecological Winners and Losers,” by Avram Hiller, Jay Odenbaugh, and Yasha Rohwer. The following is a letter in response by R. J. Gutiérrez, Professor and Gordon Gullion Endowed Chair, Emeritus at the University of Minnesota. Professor Gutiérrez’s areas of expertise include endangered species conservation, habitat ecology, sustainable wildlife management strategies, and he has conducted research on Spotted Owls and other owls for over forty years.

No one wants to kill Barred Owls. But humans have made such choices for millennia to reduce impacts to species, agriculture, and ecosystems. In this case, Barred Owls also prey on smaller owls, birds, mammals, frogs, and salamanders. So, their impacts go far beyond Spotted Owls. Barred Owls are not native to the West. That a very vocal, aggressive owl could go undetected until the 1970s defies belief. Accordingly, scientists have documented their invasion in real time.

There is compelling evidence that Barred Owl control is feasible and cost effective. An experimental Sierra Nevada removal ended their initial invasion threat quickly. Removing Barred Owls—native to eastern forests and only moved west because humans changed the landscape—has nothing to do with returning to 1850 but everything to do with saving Spotted Owls from extinction right now in 2024.

The authors of the column state that old-growth forests (Spotted Owl habitat) have intrinsic value—they do. But apparently, they believe a species’ very existence does not. Now that is a dystopian view!

Professor R. J. Gutiérrez

McKinleyville, California, August 12, 2024

becomes endangered in the first place, leading to the continual destruction of the habitat along the West Coast. To protect old-growth and legacy forests independently from the endangered status of Spotted Owls would be a starting point to address the root causes of their decline.

To get at the heart of this current moral crisis concerning Barred Owls, we need to sit with the grave prospect that *half a million* living owls could be killed with no guarantee of success, many possible unintended consequences, and no parallel responsibility for humans to stop degrading and destroying owl habitats. Yes, the invasion of Barred Owls is a human caused problem, and recognizing this means we must be even more cautious in our approach to intervening in Nature, to prevent further exacerbation of environmental harm.

Ultimately, the current crisis reflects what happens when humans come to a crossroads confronting our own ongoing impact on the environment. The USFWS believes it has made a difficult yet necessary decision. Yet the current lethal management plan causes unjustifiable harm to Barred Owls, at an unclear benefit to Spotted Owls. An ecocentric perspective that recognizes the rights and dignity of Barred Owls prevents us from making a decision so destructive to their fate, in favor of long-term, sustainable solutions that do not require other species to bear the burden of our failure.