

The Sandpiper

May 2024



Redwood Region Audubon Society

www.rras.org

Join us Thursday, May 16, at 7:00 p.m. for a presentation by **Jeff Jacobsen** on:

What's Song Got to Do with It? The "Mystery" of Humpback Whale Song

Song is an integral part of our daily lives: Top 40s radio, guitar and campfire, traditional tunes and spontaneous improvisation, all with rules of rhythm, rhyme, and repetition that vary among cultures, and evolve. Did we learn song from birds, part of our evolutionary landscape, or are we just projecting our definition of song onto them, or both? Is song an honest signal of fitness? Was song a step on the way to language? And how the heck could a big fat wet naked nose-breathing mammal that hasn't heard a bird in millennia contribute to the conversation? Jeff will review what has been learned about humpback whale song since the 1970s, include research at Isla Socorro Mexico (along with an update on bird conservation there), and end with zero conclusions to the above questions whatsoever. Please bring your own observations/definitions/questions about song.

Jeff's career spans decades of work with whales and related projects in conservation and

ecology. In 1977, near the end of completing his Oceanography degree at HSU, he was easily enticed to go camping via 14-foot Zodiac inflatable boat along the shores of Northern Vancouver Island, BC, and look for killer whales. Over eleven summers most of the northern resident salmon-eating orcas were familiar by sight, their social interactions the basis of Jeff's master's thesis finished in 1990.

In 1987 he went to the remote island of Isla Socorro in the Mexican Pacific to help study breeding behavior of a small population of humpback whales that migrated there in the winter. Recording and analyzing humpback whale song was an important component throughout. Island ecology became a side project, including conservation of one of the most endangered sea birds, the endemic Townsend's Shearwater, threatened by introduced cat predation. That project endured until 2006, and meanwhile, in 1996, Jeff joined an ocean acoustics company,



Bio-Waves Inc., assembling and deploying towed hydrophone array systems on surveys across the North Pacific and in the Gulf of Mexico. He is now easing toward the sidelines, still recording song here, still wondering if we'll ever figure it out from our side of the air-water interface.

Programs are held at Six Rivers Masonic Lodge, 251 Bayside Road, Arcata, or go to rras.org for the Zoom link. Drinks and goodies are served at 7:00 p.m., the program begins at 7:30.

Text and photo by Jeff Jacobsen

RRAS FIELD TRIPS IN MAY

Every Saturday, 8:30-11am. Join us at the Arcata Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary for a free guided field trip with an experienced birder. We will be checking out shorebirds along with other local resident birds. The meet-up spot is in the parking area at the end of I St. (Klopp Lake). Facilities – one portable. Bring binoculars if you have them. If not, come on out anyway!

Trip leaders for May: May 4, Dan Greaney ~ May 11, Chet Ogan ~ May 18, Cindy Moyer ~ May 25, Bill Rodstrom

More Field Trips

Sunday, May 12, 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. Just outside of town, this refuge offers access to tidally influenced habitats that host



a variety of ducks, raptors, and shorebirds during the spring. Email Ralph to sign up at [thebook\[at\]reninet.com](mailto:thebook@reninet.com).

Sunday, May 19, 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**.

This relatively urban trail offers the potential to observe a variety of species abundance and diversity. We will be checking for shorebirds, cormorants, loons, and grebes. Email Ralph to sign up at [thebook\[at\]reninet.com](mailto:thebook@reninet.com).

Saturday May 25, 9-11am. Wigi Wetlands Volunteer Workday. Help create bird-friendly native habitats and restore a section of the bay trail behind Bayshore Mall by removing invasive plants and trash. Bring water and gloves, we provide tools and snacks. Contact Jeremy Cashen at jeremy.cashen@yahoo.com or 214-605-7368, for more information.

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President's Column, by Kathryn Wendel

Spring has long sprung, and bird migration has been in full swing. From increased activity and brighter plumages of our beloved backyard birds, to the full-on hunt for year birds and rarities around your local patch, everyone is glad for the refreshment in season from winter to spring and all the change it brings. I know that for me, spring marks the transition from gathering my winter birds like gulls and waterfowl to birding in migrant-trap habitat looking for rare neotropical migrants like warblers, flycatchers, and other vagrants.

What is “migrant-trap habitat,” you may wonder? Here in Humboldt County, it is usually the small groves of willow and alders along the creeks and sloughs that serve as an oasis for these birds that need to rest and fatten back up a bit for the next leg in their journey. In our urban landscape, especially here in Eureka, the concrete jungle is like a desert with small islands of vegetation scattered about. The trick is to understand that as birds move up the coast, they are forced to stop in these areas, and they tend to concentrate in these patches of habitat rather than be evenly spread out over the city.

One excellent spot to check for vagrants, rare birds, or even just uncommon migrants is behind the



Bayshore Mall. Despite all the clothing and other retail stores, it's not typically thought to be the most fashionable place to be walking around with optics, overlooking the trash and litter to look in the bushes and trees. But the proof is in

the pudding, highlighted by the number of rare birds that have been found there over the years.

The mall occupies a large section of land along the bay, and as many birds follow the coastline as they migrate, the marshy riparian vegetation that parallels it is an opportunity to stop and rest. This important stopover habitat is one reason why the Redwood Region Audubon Society has endeavored to restore the Wigi Wetlands, a section along the Eureka Waterfront Trail behind Planet Fitness. We have monthly cleanups and vegetation restoration projects going on in the Wigi Wetlands, where I have found many interesting birds in the willows and ponds, including Yellow-breasted Chat, Western Wood Pewee, Cassin's Vireo, and rare warblers. Check our website (rras.org) for more information on upcoming bird walks and volunteer opportunities.

RRAS Field Trips, continued

Saturday, May 25, time TBD. Join RRAS in **Southern Humboldt** for a free guided bird walk on the fourth Saturday of each month (except July, August, and September). Meet at Tooby Park, one mile west of Garberville on Sprowl Creek Rd. These walks will be easy, lasting 2-3 hours each. *Trip leader for this walk is TBD*, heavy rain cancels, call Ann Constantino for start time at (707) 296-8720.

Sunday, May 26, All-Day Birding Tour of Horse/Grouse Mountain with Ken Burton. This is Humboldt's premier montane birding destination. We'll visit sites such as Horse Mountain saddle, Road 6N38, Meteor Hill, Clear Lake, Trinity Alps viewpoint, and Grouse Mountain. Target species include Mountain Quail, Sooty Grouse, White-headed Woodpecker, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Dusky Flycatcher, Mountain Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, Townsend's Solitaire, Chipping Sparrow, Green-tailed Towhee, and Nashville Warbler. Meet Ken (shriethree@gmail.com) on Valley West Blvd. in front of Pepper's Arcata at 7:30 a.m. or at the bottom of Titlow Hill Rd. at 8:15 a.m. Please be willing to carpool, pack a lunch, and be prepared to be out all day.

Kid's Corner
WOWZA WILDLIFE!
By Leslie Scopes Anderson

WHERE IN THE WORLD?
Barn Swallows migrate into our area in spring. They can be seen swooping around farms, fields and marshes to catch flying insects.

FUN FACTS
Barn Swallows build nests of mud on barns or under bridges. The nests require more than 100 trips to a mud puddle by the parents! They lay 4-5 spotted eggs.

2024 Volunteer of the Year—Susan Penn

By Gail Kenny

The 2024 Redwood Region Audubon Society volunteer of the year is Susan Penn. She has a background in working for nonprofits and has always loved anything to do with nature, probably due to the influence of her grandmother and her father. She took the Friends of the Dunes Coastal Naturalist training decades ago, led lots of walks for them, and was on their board. She's not sure how she got involved with RRAS, but most likely she attended some Arcata Marsh walks and was recruited to be on our board by Jim Clark.

Susan has been consistently doing important monthly work for the chapter since 2013. She served as membership chair, which requires a monthly accounting of membership data from the National Audubon Society. She was volunteer coordinator for a few years and played a major role in creating and putting on our bird-friendly garden tour in 2019. As an active member of our conservation committee, she worked with others from 2015 to 2017 to limit Coast Seafood's proposed expansion in Humboldt Bay.

In 2016 Susan worked with Cindy Moyer to get a new website for our chapter. She and Cindy also worked together getting the original switch made over to Charity Advantage website hosting. She is currently our webmaster and is doing a great job of keeping the website updated. A couple of years ago she took the lead in getting the website updated to a new format that would work better with smart phones.

The Wigi Wetlands restoration and cleanup project wouldn't be what it is today without her. She is cochair and a frequent volunteer at

the Saturday workdays. In 2019 she connected RRAS with the Volunteer Trail Stewards (VTS) for support at Wigi Wetlands. Jim Clark had gotten the ball rolling with the City of Eureka in 2017, but work was sporadic until we joined with VTS, which has also provided financial support for our restoration work. A large part of Susan's reason for her continuing involvement with Audubon is because of our conservation ethic and efforts.

A fun fact about Susan is she lives on a sailboat in Humboldt Bay. She loves being so close to nature. She bought her boat in Washington State and spent some time sailing around the San Juan islands. She rarely sails it now. When living on a boat, if you don't have mechanical skills, you should know someone who does. You need to enjoy living in a small space. It does help prevent you from being a hoarder! Susan especially appreciates her community of fellow boaters. They all know their neighbors and look out for each other. While most of them work on their boats by themselves, other boaters are always willing to help when an extra pair of hands, or help with thinking something through, is needed.

She is one of our volunteers consistently doing the big jobs in the background that keep our organization functioning well.

Big thanks to you Susan!



Photo: Susan Penn by Susan Penn



DID YOU KNOW?

From the CatBird Committee

Keep Kitty Safe

It has been demonstrated numerous times that Trap, Neuter, Re-abandon (TNR) programs do not solve the problem of suffering cats and decimated wildlife. The problem is humans, not cats (I love my cat!). As long as people abandon unwanted pet cats outdoors, colonies will continue to ensure distress for cast-off cats and for the birds they injure or kill. Let's love our cats by keeping them safe and never abandoning them outdoors. If you must let your pet go and can't find a new home for them, a reputable shelter that does not place unadopted cats in outdoor colonies is a good choice. The birds will thank you.

You never know what you are going to see when you go on an RRAS field trip! Those joining Janelle Chojnacki's March 27 evening walk at the Arcata Marsh, billed as "an easy-going evening walk," were certainly in for a surprise. After checking out shorebirds, the group headed toward Mt. Trashmore, when *Osprey-Eagle Drama in the Skies* unfolded. First a raptor was spotted madly flapping its wings—was it a kite? No, it was an Osprey, and we all realized it was holding a fairly sizeable fish. Suddenly, the Osprey dropped the fish; we watched it slowly fall all the way to the ground, and that's when we spotted first one Bald

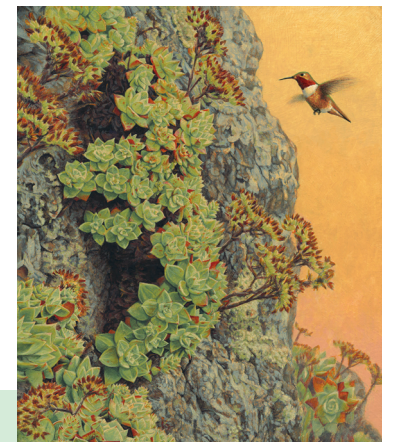
Eagle, and then a second. That Osprey must have decided a fight with an eagle over the fish was just not worth it. Funny part of the story, after all of us watched the fish drop to the ground, we had lots of conversation about who might eat that fish—the eagles swoop back for it? A raccoon come by? So we decided to go look for it, and amazingly, all of us had totally different impressions of where it might have landed. Futile search, but fun part of our walk.

Many thanks to Janelle for leading the trip, and to her husband John for bringing the scope. Wonderful way to end the day.

Shawn Gould: *The Art of Getting Lost*

An exhibit at the Morris Graves Museum of Art

Do some birding indoors this month at the Morris Graves Museum in Eureka! On view until May 19 are spectacular paintings from local artist Shawn Gould's trips to the Punta Gorda Lighthouse beginning in 2021. Since a camping trip to the Lost Coast Trail in 2002, Shawn has nurtured an interest in the area, resulting in this new body of work on display for both art and bird lovers to enjoy. Shown here, courtesy of the artist, detail of *Hanging Garden*.



Chestnut-backed Chickadees

By Dan Greaney

Chickadees are among those charmers whose common presence can lead us to lose our sense of their exquisite beauty. We cannot, however, blame visitors to our area for feeling that Chestnut-backed Chickadees are perhaps the cutest on the continent.

They share with their chickadee cousins the inquisitive, all-angles peeking and pecking through the tips of conifer branches, the squeaks and chitters that keep their small flocks in touch, and the diminutive fluff of distinctive black-and-white feathering. But they add color with a rich redwood splash on their backs and, variably, their flanks. Close up at feeders or on any wooded walk, at any time of year, they are likely to appear right before you, or to disappear as flitting silhouettes in forest canopies. They frequently anchor mixed-species flocks, in which passing warblers may benefit from the local knowledge of the nonmigrating chickadees.

Chestnut-backed Chickadees are our West Coast specialties, living in a Pacific arc from Santa Barbara to Anchorage. Fossils indicate they may have expanded northward with coast redwoods as glaciers retreated over the last tens of thousands of years. Now extending well beyond redwood range, the chickadees are also expanding inland, with resident populations in the Sierras and northern Rockies. Fire policies may have supported their expansion as suppression has promoted thicker fir forests versus the more open pine country where Mountain Chickadees thrive. In a nod to the ever-carving forces of evolution, the chestnut-backs expanding away from the redwoods into the Central Sierras show much less chestnut, particularly on their flanks, nudging them closer toward the look of the Mountain Chickadees they are replacing.

Our Humboldt birds will come to feeders, where they commonly do takeout. Chickadees are vulnerable at feeders and need time to hold down their selected sunflower seed and pound at it. An open branch away from



the hazardous bustle of the feeder can provide this time. Chickadees will also use nesting boxes. The nesting gurus recommend a one-and-an-eighth-inch hole to keep out larger cavity nesters, but the birds on their own will have to chase off the occasional bumblebees and hornets that can compete for the cavity.

The male seems to help select the nesting site, but the female builds the nest. Typically low, from one to twelve feet above ground, it has a bottom layer of incense cedar bark that may deter infestations of parasitic flies, whose larvae commonly suck blood from nestling chickadees, apparently without crippling results. The bulk of the nest is animal fur, when available. The female works for a week to build the nest, then takes a day off before beginning to lay eggs, one a day for another week, producing a clutch that routinely weighs three-fourths as much as the female. Then she rests on the eggs, incubating them for two more weeks. The male, meanwhile, delivers food to the brooding female, and once the young hatch both birds become busy. Entomologist and wildlife biologist Doug Tallamy, in a study of Carolina Chickadees, found that the birds needed 6,000 to 9,000 caterpillars to raise one brood of nestlings. Small, soft-bodied, and high protein, apparently caterpillars are the go-to food for songbird hatchlings. Tallamy has created a website dedicated to referring people to the native plants that will offer caterpillar-rich diets for their local birds (homegrownnationalpark.org/native-plants-finder/), and the California Native Plant Society website also has location-specific recommendations. Back at the nest, the young, grown to ten times their hatch weight, will fledge in about three weeks. They then fly their own little flecks of color and query into the world. The parents, if they have the energy and caterpillars, may have a go at raising a second brood.

Photo: Dan captured the brilliant chestnut back and flanks on this chickadee at his feeder.

Your membership in Redwood Region Audubon supports our field trips, programs, education, and conservation efforts. You may also join us online at www.rras.org and click the JOIN US button. We have two different types of memberships:

Local membership For just \$15 a year you will receive *EcoNews*, with the *Sandpiper* inserted. To join locally mail a check for \$15 made out to RRAS with your name, address, and email address to: Redwood Region Audubon Society
PO Box 1054, Eureka, CA 95502

National membership Join National Audubon and receive *EcoNews* with the *Sandpiper* along with *Audubon* magazine. Please use our Chapter Code C24 so that we receive our share of your membership.
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