



# The Sandpiper

November 2024



Redwood Region Audubon Society

www.rras.org

Join us on Thursday, November 21, at 7:00 p.m. for a presentation on:

## Using an Automated Tracking System to Understand Seasonal Movements of Hoary Bats

By Ted Weller

Motus Wildlife Tracking System is a collaborative automated radio-telemetry system established to learn about the behavior and migration of small, mobile species. Originally envisioned to learn about movements of birds it has increasingly been used to learn about the movements of bats. The work with Motus has resulted in detection of hoary bats tagged in northwestern California to be detected in British Columbia, Nevada, and Baja California. This has important conservation implications, as hoary bats are the bat species most frequently killed at wind energy facilities, and most of the fatalities occur during the period of autumn migration.



An ecologist with US Forest Service's Pacific Southwest Research Station in Arcata, Ted has worked with bats in northwestern California for over twenty years, investigating aspects of their natural history, especially those that make them vulnerable to fatalities at wind energy facilities. His field site in northern California is the most productive site in the world for encountering hoary bats, allowing him and his colleagues to break new ground in understanding the behavior of these fascinating and beautiful animals.

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



## The Christmas Bird Count Is Coming Your Way!

We need new energy for the Christmas Bird Count tradition that first came to our county back in 1947! That year, the Crane family of Ferndale began a holiday count, with the event officially added to the Audubon Society's annual CBCs in 1962. Please choose a location and date below and contact the compiler to help with the counts.

The Arcata count, on Saturday, December 14, was first organized by John Sterling in 1984 and has become one of the highest recording counts in our area. This circle comprises the coastal habitats around Arcata and Eureka that include ocean, bay, saltmarsh, and freshwater estuary. It also covers a good deal of pastureland, coastal

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## RRAS FIELD TRIPS IN NOVEMBER

**Every Saturday, 8:30-11 am.** 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 November:* Nov 2, Chet Ogan ~ Nov 9, Michael Morris ~ Nov 16, Carol Wilson ~ Nov 23, Mark Colwell ~ Nov 30, Kathryn Wendel

**Saturday, Nov 2, 8:30-11:30 am.** Join Cedrik von Briel, Cal Poly Humboldt wildlife student and birder extraordinaire for some dynamic fall birding along the spit at **Stone Lagoon**, where all at once you can view the lagoon, the sand spit, and the ocean. Seabirds, waterfowl, gulls, raptors, and shorebirds are all likely. Pipits, longspurs, and Snowy Plovers are also possible. Meet at the Stone Lagoon Visitor's Center on Highway 101. Dress in layers, be prepared for hiking on sand for 1-2 miles each way. Contact Cedrik at (650) 315-4968 or [cedro.de.bryl@gmail.com](mailto:cedro.de.bryl@gmail.com).

**Saturday, Nov 9, 8:30-11:30 am. Cock Robin Island and Crab Park.** The Eel River estuary and adjacent habitats are a great place to watch birds, especially in fall and winter. The river hosts an abundance of waterbirds and shorebirds, while the adjacent riparian areas can be great for warblers, and the agricultural fields often host raptors, pipits, longspurs, finches, and sparrows. Some easy hiking may be involved. Meet Sean at the one and only Loleta Market in "downtown" Loleta. Call or text Sean at (707) 496-8790. or email [whiteouters@gmail.com](mailto:whiteouters@gmail.com).

**Sunday, Nov 10, 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, Nov 10, 9-11am. Women & Girls bird walk is back!** This month's walk will be led by RRAS President Kathryn Wendel on Eureka's Hikshari' Trail. Enjoy birding with Kat along this relatively urban trail that offers the potential to observe species abundance and diversity comparable to many more remote locations. This walk is on a flat, paved trail that is **wheelchair accessible**. Meet at the parking lot at the end of Hilfiker Street Email Kathryn, [president@rras.org](mailto:president@rras.org), to sign up for this field trip.

**Sunday, Nov 17, 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).

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## President's Column

By Kathryn Wendel

Election season is finally coming to an end, and if you haven't voted yet, please consider voting Yes on Proposition

4. Redwood Region Audubon, along with California Audubon and many other state chapters, support the Prop 4 Climate Bond for birds, people, and our shared future. Prop 4 provides for the resources birds and people need to adapt to the intensifying effects of climate change, paving the way for a brighter and climate-resilient future. Given the alarming prediction that two-thirds of North American bird populations could face extinction by 2100 due to climate change, the urgency is clear. Prop 4 is particularly special because it allocates **at least 40 percent of its funding to underserved and climate-vulnerable communities**, many of which have not received funding in past bond efforts. Check out California Audubon's website for more details.

And now with election season nearly over, holiday season is upon us, and we all know what that means: Christmas Bird Counts! Join the fun this year and get involved counting our resident winter birds, and afterwards come celebrate with all of us at the compilation gathering after the Arcata Count on December 14. The compilation gathering is a big thank-you to our wonderful birding community and all the volunteers, and will be at the Masonic Lodge at 5 p.m. There will be food and drink while we compile our numbers and share stories over which awesome birds were found and notable misses on birds we should've found. To participate in the CBC, please contact one of the compilers of the circle (or circles!) if you would like to join: Centerville



(Sean McAllister [whiteouters@gmail.com](mailto:whiteouters@gmail.com)), Arcata (Tony Kurz [tonyk\\_71220@hotmail.com](mailto:tonyk_71220@hotmail.com)), Orick/Tall Trees (Ken Burton [shrikethree@gmail.com](mailto:shrikethree@gmail.com)), Willow Creek (Max Brodie [brodiemaxa@gmail.com](mailto:brodiemaxa@gmail.com)), or Del Norte/Crescent City (Lucas Brug [lucas.hendrik@hotmail.com](mailto:lucas.hendrik@hotmail.com)).

Whether you are able to participate in the CBC or not, remember that RRAS is always hosting guided bird tours throughout the month. We recently hosted a special pelagic birding tour for the first time in many years and spent a beautiful day out on the ocean finding such pelagic species as Black-footed Albatross, South Polar Skua, shearwaters and jaegers. Plan to join us next year on one of our future pelagic trips, which will likely be in the late summer/early fall, and always be sure to check [rras.org](http://rras.org) for other upcoming trips.



The pelagic trip team: from left, Tristan McKee, Sean McAllister, Kathryn Wendel, Ken Burton, John Sterling, Casey Ryan, and Tony Kurz

## RRAS Field Trips, continued

**Saturday, Nov 23, 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](mailto:susanpenn60@gmail.com) for more information.

**Saturday, Nov 23, 9-11 am.** *Humboldt Bay at King Salmon.* Join us as we scope the bay for a variety of waterbirds, including ducks, loons, grebes, gulls, and cormorants, among others. Meet at Gill's by the Bay restaurant parking lot. Call or text Sean at (707) 496-8790. or email to [whiteouters@gmail.com](mailto:whiteouters@gmail.com).

**Saturday, Nov 23, 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.

KID'S CORNER  
**Wowza Wildlife!**  
By Leslie Scopes Anderson

**INCOMING!  
LOOK OUT  
BELOW!**

**FUN FACTS:**  
Double-crested  
Cormorants are gangly, water birds that eat mainly fish, which they dive for. You may see them with their wings spread out to dry, because they have less oil on their feathers than other water birds.

**WHERE IN THE WORLD?**  
Double-crested Cormorants live along the coast in our area. They build nests of sticks in high trees. Their 'double-crest' is visible only during mating season.

## Bulletin

### Volunteers Needed for Arcata CBC Compilation Dinner

You can be part of the fun of counting the bird species and hearing the stories at the compilation gathering even if you don't participate in the count. RRAS is asking for volunteers to help prepare and serve the food and clean up afterwards. The dinner is Saturday, December 14, from 5 to 7 p.m. at the Six Rivers Masonic Lodge. Please email Gail Kenny at [gailkenny@gmail.com](mailto:gailkenny@gmail.com) or call her at 707-601-1582 to volunteer and get more information.

### Recent Sightings

*Antigone canadensis* A solo Sandhill Crane at the V Street Loop and *Calidris pugnax* Ruff at the Oxidation Ponds, Arcata Marsh



## eBird Protocol Tips: Part II

### Selecting a Location

By Ken Burton

Choosing the right location for eBird reports will improve the quality of data for everyone. There are two types of eBird locations: hotspots and personal locations. Both types are points that represent areas of variable and often indeterminate extent; many people feel this is one of eBird's greatest weaknesses. At present, locations are defined only by their names, which are often ambiguous, and any checklist can be assigned to any location. Which type—hotspot or personal—to use depends on the circumstances. Hotspots generate more information that is accessible to the public and are usually preferable where they exist, but personal locations can be more precise and may be better for certain lists, especially stationary counts.

Many eBirders automatically choose the hotspot closest to their starting point, even when their birding route goes well beyond what the hotspot is intended to include (as judged from its name). This practice renders hotspot statistics such as species lists and birder rankings meaningless at best and misleading at worst. If there isn't a hotspot that captures the entirety of your route, use a personal location instead, *even if the eBird app recommends a nearby hotspot*; the app isn't smart enough to make that decision for you.

Granted, it isn't always easy to figure out what a hotspot's boundaries are, but until hotspots have official boundaries and the app won't let us bird outside them, it's up to us to use hotspots judiciously. (A separate website called Birding Hotspots describes and delineates hotspots, but hardly any of our hotspots have been added.) And always remember that the less distance, the better. *eBird requests that checklist distances not exceed five miles*, and many longer lists are now being rejected automatically.

Northwest California has a very high density of eBird hotspots; Humboldt County alone has 563! Some hotspots overlap with, or are adjacent to or nested within, other hotspots. In some cases, it is virtually impossible to compile a complete checklist (that is, a list that includes all the birds you detect) for a hotspot without including birds in adjacent hotspots as well. A good example of this is the Arcata Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary (AMWS), which is a hotspot with about a dozen smaller hotspots at least partially within it. If you try to eBird the Brackish Pond hotspot, for instance, by walking the levee around it, you will

As an unparalleled research and reporting tool, eBird has revolutionized birding. It's up to all of us in the birding community to make the quality of the data the best it can be. All eBird protocols are spelled out on the website on the eBird Rules and Best Practices page in the Help Center. Here I highlight how to select your location, one of three areas where errors in reporting compromise the quality of information. Part I, in the October 2024 *Sandpiper*, provided tips on reporting distance and how to avoid duplicate lists.



have that hotspot on one side of you and a succession of four other hotspots on the other side! Which hotspot should you use?! Keeping these guidelines in mind should help you make the right choice:

- In general, complete checklists are more useful than, and therefore preferable to, incomplete ones. Complete checklists should include *all* identified birds, no matter how far away they were. It's understood and accepted that some of those birds likely were not technically within the hotspot, especially if the hotspot is small and/or you were on the edge of it.
- Your entire birding route should be within or on the edge of whatever hotspot you choose. It likely will be appropriate to use the smallest hotspot that meets that criterion. If there is no such hotspot, use a personal location.

Applying these guidelines to the Arcata Marsh, most checklists there should be assigned to the comprehensive AMWS hotspot, regardless of where you start. If you do a stationary count, encircle a single wetland, or submit an incomplete list to report an unusual bird, you likely will want to use one of the smaller hotspots. The Oxidation Ponds hotspot is isolated enough that it usually warrants its own checklists.

On the flip side, I see many, many checklists that should have been assigned to hotspots assigned to personal locations instead. This is less problematic but still reduces the value of hotspots as data repositories. Use hotspots when it makes sense to do so. That said, if you are birding a fixed route or doing a point count that will be repeated (for example, as part of a standardized monitoring program), you probably should designate it a personal location, even if it's within a hotspot. For example, I conduct a *point-count transect*, repeated annually, within the Arcata Community Forest (a hotspot) for Audubon's Climate Watch Program. Each of my points is a personal location that I use every year for that purpose only.

### Christmas Bird Count, continued

forest, and urban habitat. To join, contact Tony Kurz at [tonyk\\_71220@hotmail.com](mailto:tonyk_71220@hotmail.com). A post-count gathering will be held at the Masonic Lodge at 5:00 p.m. after the count. (See the President's Column and Bulletin, on page 2, for details.)



**The Del Norte count**, on Sunday, December 15, was begun in 1962 by Paul Rail, and Gary and Lauren Lester continued this very popular count.



The count circle includes Point St. George, all of Crescent City, and as far east as Gasquet. This circle allows for a generous amount of coastal habitat as well as a bit of offshore waters. To join, contact Lucas Brug at [lucas.hendrik@hotmail.com](mailto:lucas.hendrik@hotmail.com).

**The Centerville count**, on Sunday, December 29, is the oldest of our local counts, begun by the Crane family of Ferndale in 1947. To join, contact Sean McAllister at [whiteouters@gmail.com](mailto:whiteouters@gmail.com).

**The Willow Creek count**, date to be determined, was started by David Anderson and Roger Weiss in 1976. To join, contact Max Brodie at [brodiemaxa@gmail.com](mailto:brodiemaxa@gmail.com).



**The Tall Trees count**, date also TBD, was started in 2012 by Ken Burton, who remains the compiler. The count circle is centered on the Tall Trees Grove in Redwood National Park near Orick. A few species that are regular on this count, such as Ruffed Grouse and White-breasted Nuthatch, are not typically found on any of the other counts in the region. Contact Ken at [shrikethree@gmail.com](mailto:shrikethree@gmail.com).

Photos: Snow Goose (page 1), White-breasted Nuthatch, and Long-eared Owl by Ken Burton; Mountain Quail by Jeff Todoroff



## Lively Lagoons Field Trip: Sharing Knowledge and Camaraderie

By Gary Friedrichsen

A fantastic fall day greeted the participants and leaders as we convened at Humboldt County Park in Big Lagoon on September 29. This was really appreciated as the day before had been very cold and blustery, and birds were scarce during scouting. Twenty people had signed up, and with only a couple last-minute cancellations we were able to fill the trip with folks off a waiting list.

After introductions, Tom Lisle gave us a thumbnail tour of tectonic activities and the subsequent wear and tear Mother Nature provides to build these lagoons. All the while we listened as Northern Flickers, Wrentits, and Chestnut-backed Chickadees made their presence known.

Tom's lucid explanation was followed by Clare Golec's discussion of plant and tree life of the Pacific North Coast Subregion and its varied habitat including dune mat, brackish freshwater marshes, coastal scrub, and shore pine forest. Clare provided a handout that listed the primary members of the lagoon's flora.



We were fortunate to have Michael Morris and Michael Force along to help with bird identification. I've worked with Michael Force for over thirty years on NOAA's marine mammal cruises. From British Columbia, he has been an excellent addition to our seabird team, and together with local Marsh RRAS trip leader Michael Morris, these two were a great help in hearing the many birds that flew over us calling but not always seen well.

As in years past, we caravaned from the parking lot to stops mid-Big Lagoon, Dry Lagoon with its eye-catching "Point Rock," and on to Stone and Freshwater Lagoons. Along the way we learned how to tell shore pine from Monterey pine, had good looks at Red Knots and Pectoral Sandpipers, Ospreys fishing, and more details from Tom about the drying of Dry Lagoon for unsuccessful farming. A very distant small gull gave us consternation, but Michael Force's guess of a Sabine's Gull was assured when the gull briefly raised its wings and we saw the diagnostic triangle pattern.

Some of our best looks at birds came from flocks seen while we drove the back road of Freshwater Lagoon and encountered feeding Cedar Waxwings and foraging warblers. Ducks were not as prevalent as they had been in 2022, but we snagged a few, including Common Merganser and White-wing Scoters, while flights of arriving Aleutian Canada Geese passed overhead.

We hope to have another of these field trips before the year is behind us; a waiting list has been started, email [gary@jacobycreek.net](mailto:gary@jacobycreek.net) if you are interested.

Photos: top: Tom Lisle started us off with a review of how the lagoons were formed (by Gary Friedrichsen); left: Dry Lagoon beach (by Michael Force)



## Conservation News from Jim Clark City of Eureka Resurrects Gulch/Greenway Planning

On October 1 the Eureka City Council held a study session on a proposed Gulch/Greenway Plan. The plan would flag property near gulches and assure that development would protect the gulch/greenway environment.

The gulches of Eureka are a series of small canyons that bisect the Eureka coastal plain. This plain consists of weathered uplifted coastal dunes that have been bisected by a series of small streams that either formed randomly or by small faults. These gulches progress from steep-sided erosional gullies to coastal marshes or sometimes depositional plains such as Martin Slough. Geomorphology aside, the gulches provide rich wildlife habitat and streams that feed Humboldt Bay. Wildlife include most of our region's species of small mammals, deer, bear, and cougar as well as bird species that thrive in this riparian habitat. Early European immigrants also found gulches convenient for dumping industrial and household solid and liquid waste. Modern residents sometimes dump pet and yard waste along the gulch

edges. As a result, ivy and other non-native invasive plants often dominate gulches. Ivy in particular threatens birds by providing rats shelter and access to bird nests.

The proposed Gulch/Greenway Plan, as presented, appears to be a good start in protecting gulches from further degradation while providing much needed housing. In addition to the city council generally being in favor of the plan, several members expressed their preference to go beyond protecting the status quo toward restoration. This is not a plan to "save the gulches" but a development permitting plan that will recognize the environmental services that gulches and greenways provide while providing for residential development.

If you are a resident of Eureka and interested in helping the city make gulches more bird friendly, please let your city council representative know. You can also multiply your efforts by attending our Conservation Committee meetings.

## New Conservation Committee Meeting Schedule

One of the few positive changes spawned by the pandemic was the use of Zoom for meetings. Although Zoom can save time and travel it can't replace in-person contact. In an attempt to balance convenience and carbon footprint reduction with personal contact, we are moving our regular meeting day to the *third* Tuesday of the month at 12:00 noon via Zoom and introducing a quarterly "floating" meeting in person. The floating meeting won't necessarily be on a boat, but it could be. It could be a field trip, presentation, a meeting with a meal or other venue. Here is the Zoom link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87263853457?pwd=RHNKR0FrWEJ4WHJlcFZFWDDB4M0FFZz09>

For those of you reading on paper, go to [rras.org](http://rras.org) for the link.