



The Sandpiper

April 2022



Above: Artwork by Gary Bloomfield.

Redwood Region Audubon Society

www.rras.org

California Condor/Prey-go-neesh is Back! *Courtesy of the Yurok Tribe Website:*

The first prey-go-neesh (California Condor) has arrived in Yurok Country! Brought to the Northern California Condor Restoration Program's Condor Release and Management facility in Redwood National Park, Yurok Wildlife Department Director, Tiana Williams-Claussen, biologist, Chris West, and Redwood National and State Parks biological science technicians, placed condor 746 in the release and management facility's flight pen. The 7-year-old condor will serve as a mentor to 4 younger condors, now in the flight pen, who will soon be reintroduced in Northern California. These social, avian scavengers learn from their elders who assist them in honing the skills they need to survive outside of captivity. In a few weeks, the young condors will be released into the redwood region, where these culturally and ecologically important birds have been absent for more than a century. *Check out the Yurok Condor Cam at yuroktribe.org/yurok-condor-live-feed.*

RRAS Photo Contest Results!

By Ann Constantino

Redwood Region Audubon Society would like to thank the 25 entrants to RRAS' photo contest. These moments of interaction with birds were collected in photographic form, creating a true celebration of our avian friends, and our connection to them. Contestants submitted work in several categories including specific species or combinations of mixed species, species whose native language names were submitted, and even the tricky task of finding all local members of the nuthatch family!

The judging process demonstrated what a deep appreciation of birds and nature is held by local residents. All photos, regardless of technical quality, difficulty of shot, or artistic merit, beautifully displayed moments of human to bird connection, conveyed in a frozen frame of time through which that sense of connection radiates. We see this as a celebration rather than a competition and realize there were several great shots who are not official "winners." So, keep it up, and remember you can submit a photo or image, along with a couple of contextual paragraphs, to the editor of *The Sandpiper*, at any time throughout the year. See some of the photographs submitted throughout these pages, and all photos may be viewed on our website.

Photo: "Top Four" winner; Wood Duck duckling, by Mary Ann Machi. *(See more contest results on p.3)*



Please join us for the RRAS monthly virtual program on: **Friday, April 8th, at 7pm, with Matt Johnson, Professor, Wildlife Habitat Ecology, Cal Poly Humboldt**

Barn Owls and Winegrape Vineyard Relations

Can Barn Owls and farmers mutually benefit each other? Matt Johnson will speak about the research he and his graduate students; Laura Eschávez, Samantha Chávez, and Jaime Carlino, have been conducting with Barn Owls on winegrape vineyards in California, tracing the lab's work to better understand a reciprocal relationship between farmers and owls. Specifically, he'll summarize how farmers can use nest boxes to attract owls to their land, how many rodents the owls kill and where they hunt, and how this relationship may also be good for owls.

Matt is a professor of Wildlife Habitat Ecology at Cal Poly Humboldt, where he has taught since 1999. Before coming to Humboldt, Matt grew up in the Central Valley of California, earned a BS in Wildlife at UC Davis and PhD in Ecology from Tulane University. His dissertation research took him to the tropics, which sparked an interest in research on how birds and people can mutually benefit each other. He is especially interested in agricultural areas, and after many years of research on insect-eating birds and pests in tropical coffee farms, he is turning his attention to birds in California agriculture. He leads several graduate students, along with undergraduate assistants, on a study of Barn Owls in winegrape vineyards. His goal as an educator is to help students not only learn the skills necessary to become accomplished biologists, but also to foster an appreciation for how good land management practices can benefit both people and nature. As a researcher, his goal is to answer ecological questions that offer practical information for farmers interested in helping Barn Owls, that can also help farmers.

(Check our website for the Zoom link to our programs.)

RRAS Field Trips in APRIL

Sat. April 2nd – 9-11am. Join trip leader Janelle Chojnacki for this month's **Women and Girls Birding Walk** at the King Salmon waterfront. We'll hope to see a good variety of shorebirds, ducks, grebes, and hopefully some loons, as well as grassland sparrows and raptors. This walk will be a slow birding adventure on some beach sand and well-trodden trails. **For reservations and meeting location contact our Field Trip Coordinator, Janelle Chojnacki (see below).*

Sat. April 2nd – 8:30-11am. Arcata Marsh, led by Ken Burton.

Sat. April 9th – 8:30-11am. Arcata Marsh, led by Jude Power.

Sun. April 10th – 9-11am. Ralph Bucher will lead a walk at the Humboldt Bay Nat. Wildlife Refuge.

Sat. April 16th – 8:30-11am. Arcata Marsh, led by Carol Wilson.

Sun. April 17th – 9-11am. Ralph Bucher will lead a walk on the Eureka Waterfront. This trail is paved and is **wheelchair accessible**.

Sat. April 23rd – 8:30-11am. Arcata Marsh, led by Kathryn Wendel.

Sat. April 23rd – 9-11am. Wigi Wetlands Volunteer Workday. Help create bird-friendly native habitat and restore a section of the bay trail behind the Bayshore Mall. We will provide tools and packaged snacks. Please bring your own water, gloves, and face mask. Please contact Jeremy Cashen at jeremy.cashen@yahoo.com or 214-605-7368.

Sun. April 24th – 8:30-11am. Bring your bicycles and binoculars to join Cal Poly Humboldt ornithology lecturer, Sean Mahoney for **BIRDING AND BIKING** the Arcata bottoms! This trip will require a bicycle to navigate the flat bottoms, but frequent stops will be made to check out the grassland species that call the bottoms home, including blackbirds, egrets, herons, and often raptors like kites and hawks. Email Sean at sean.mahoney@humboldt.edu to sign up for this trip and get the meet up location.

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

**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.*

See our website for COVID protocols.



Above: Clockwise from top: "The Crew," Laura, Sam, and Jaime, by Laura Eschávez; adult Barn Owl, by Allison Huysman; Matt in vineyard, self-portrait.

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President's Column

By Gail Kenny



This edition of *The Sandpiper* is spotlighting the winners of our bird photo contest. I dabble in bird photography using a superzoom camera. It seems that everything must be just right, especially the light, to get good bird photos. It also helps with my bridge camera to be closer to the birds, but I'm careful to not get too close so as to not disturb them.



Above: RRAS Photo Contest "Honorable Mention," Juvenile White-crowned Sparrow, by Szasza Dallenbach.

In February I heard the local crow flock making a huge racket outside the house. I peered out the front window and saw a couple of birds on the ground in the middle of the street. I expected to see the crows fighting with each other. A few years ago, my husband and I witnessed two crows on the street with one attacking another one, while the crow flock dive bombed them. My first thought was this was happening again, but when I looked closer, I saw a Cooper's Hawk had ahold of a crow.

I quickly grabbed my camera, hurried outside, and started taking photos and video. The hawk was holding

onto the crow's face while other crows cawed, and dive bombed them. This went on for several minutes giving me time to find a better angle to photograph the action. The photo below is the best shot I got. The conflict ended when the hawk changed position giving the crow a chance to fly away. I witnessed a similar situation when a peregrine falcon was on the ground in a parking lot holding a crow by the ankle. It wasn't long before a group of people approached, the falcon let go of the crow, and they both flew away. I like to think the Cooper's Hawk learned that crows are too large to prey upon, especially when they have a flock to protect them.



On another note: our 7th Annual **Tim McKay Birdathon** is April 30th to May 7th this year! This supports the Northcoast Environmental Center and RRAS. Please join in the fun and support two organizations that have the community's back when it comes to environmental threats to our wildlife and their homes. Go birding for a day, keep records of your species list and ask your friends and relatives to help you by contributing a nickel or more per species. Prizes such as New Nikon Monarch binoculars, a spotting scope and tri-pod and more, will be awarded to the members of the winning teams in each category that bring in the most money. See our website for details!

Cats at the Arcata Marsh

By Jude Power

Some of you may be aware that Redwood Region Audubon Society (RRAS) has been advocating recently for the containment of free-roaming domestic cats in Humboldt County. This focus became a priority as an emerging body of scholarly research coalesced regarding the role of domestic cats in the disappearance of North America's wild birds: the evidence shows that cats kill approximately 2.4 billion wild birds in the U.S. every year. The guiding principle behind our advocacy activities is the protection of wild birds from this risk in Humboldt.

The Cat & Bird Safety Committee (AKA "Catbirds"), formed in 2019 and immediately began considering different approaches to address domestic cat predation on birds in our region, as well as ways that we might advocate for humane and responsible cat ownership.

One pathway for action seemed clear and direct: ask the City of Arcata to enforce its own ordinance titled "Regulations for the Use of the Arcata Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary," in which Section 10656 states; "The City Council finds that the presence of non-native animals in the AMWS disrupts the native ecology of that environment," and, "The Director of Environmental Services, or his/her designee, is authorized to impound and remove all non-native animals found in the Arcata Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary." How simple it seemed. We all love the renowned Arcata Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary and want to protect it as a sanctuary for wildlife, right?

Well, maybe not... let's back up. The Catbird Committee's outreach to the city about this issue began

more than two years ago, in June 2019, when it was agreed that Friends of the Arcata Marsh (FOAM) and RRAS would work together to encourage the application of Section 10656. At this time, the Mayor had already assured FOAM via email that the Environmental Services Director would be asked to delegate someone to trap cats found in the marsh and remove them to a shelter. A member of the FOAM board even volunteered to trap the cats, and a RRAS member volunteered to transport them to the shelter. Discussion with the city on a solution to the cats-in-the-wildlife-sanctuary problem commenced.

We kept in touch with the city, encouraging their action, but when no tangible movement toward removing and impounding cats had occurred as of August 2020, more than a year later, the Catbird Committee took further action, including: phone conversations with the Environmental Services Deputy Director; in-person meeting and written communications with the Environmental Services Director; speaking during oral communications to the City Council; and continuing contact with FOAM. The Environmental Services Director ultimately sent a letter to all private and commercial residents of South G Street, to inform them of Section 10656, and the Police Department cited an individual who frequently released his cat directly into the wildlife sanctuary.

Sadly, as of this writing there appears to have been no further progress on the implementation of Section 10656. We have been informed recently that no city employee or volunteer will be performing the task of removing cats from the wildlife sanctuary. There have been a couple of retirements/new hires, the pandemic's plummeting tax

revenues, grumpy cat owners, aversion to controversy, and the b-word – bureaucracy – which apparently have all got in the way of doing what we see as the right thing for birds and other wildlife. The Catbird Committee intends to continue pursuing the goals of Section 10656 enforcement, and you can help us by contacting the Environmental Services Director and City Council Members to let them know that you want the City of Arcata to stand by its original vision of a true sanctuary for wildlife within the city limits.

If you have any thoughts, please email Harriet (harrieth6@gmail.com), at the RRAS Cat & Bird Safety Committee; Emily Sinkhorn, Environmental Services Director, esinkhorn@cityofarcata.org, and Stacy Atkins-Salazar, Mayor, SAtkinsSalazar@cityofarcata.org.



Above: RRAS Photo Contest "Honorable Mention," Green-winged Teal, Arcata Marsh, by Sarah Hobart.

(Photo Contest Results: continued from front page)

Congratulations to all photographers, and to those who won prizes in the following categories:

“Top Four”

Mary Ann Machi – Wood Duck duckling, Sequoia Park Duck Pond, Eureka.

Jeff Todoroff – Northern Pygmy Owl flying, Warren Creek Road in Arcata.

Jeff Jacobsen – Great Horned Owl, north spit cypress patch, Arcata.

Rob Fowler – Common Ravens, V Street Loop, Arcata Bottoms.

“Multiple Non-Avian Wildlife Species in Shot”

Larry Jordan – Green Heron with Frog, Lema Ranch’s Hidden Pond, Redding, CA.

“Multiple Bird Species in Shot”

Dana Utman – Snowy Egret and Greater Yellowlegs, Arcata Marsh.

“Native American Language”

Connie Pearson – Cedar Waxwing, Horsethief Canyon Park, San Dimas, CA.

“On native Tongva land – Tongva (an Uto-Aztecan language of Southern California), is a language that is (re)awakening. There is no known word for “Cedar Waxwing.” The Tongva word for “bird” is: chi’iyy.”

“Three Nuthatches”

Lyndie Chiou – White-breasted Nuthatch, on Ohlone lands, Alameda Creek in Union City, CA; Pygmy Nuthatch, on Ohlone lands, Berkeley, CA; Red-breasted Nuthatch, on Ohlone lands, Gomes Park, Fremont, CA.

“Clark’s Nutcracker”

Gary Bloomfield. – Clark’s Nutcracker, feeding on Whitebark Pine, Crater Lake, Oregon.

“Brown Creepers”

Jeff Todoroff – Brown Creeper, McKinleyville.

“Greatest Photo Bomb!”

John Stuart – Northern Flicker peering at Pileated Woodpecker! Arcata.

“Rarest Bird”

Willie Hall – Hudsonian Godwit, Elk Creek, Crescent City Harbor, CA

“Youth”

Fox Flores (11 years old) – Great Egret, Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge.

“Runner Up” – A Tie Between:

Kurt Angersbach – Sanderlings, Trinidad, CA. and

Gary Bloomfield – American White Pelicans, Rocky Point, Upper Klamath Lake, Oregon.

Congratulations to the following photographers who received “Honorable Mentions”:

“Honorable Mentions:”

- Bald Eagle; + Green-winged Teal, by Sarah Hobart.
- Steller’s Jay; + Chestnut-backed Chickadee, by Chris Hansen, in Willits, CA.
- Gadwall, by Lee Rusconi.
- White-crowned Sparrow (juvenile), by Zsazsa Dallenbach.
- Spotted Towhee, by Jeremy Cashen, Santa Cruz Island, Channel Islands National Park, CA.
- Wood Duck = bitwak daday’ in Soulatluk, the Wiyot language; + Marsh Wren = jush, in Soulatluk, by Mark Larson. Soulatluk words courtesy of the Wiyot Tribe.
- Red Crossbill, female, by Lucinda Adamson.
- Marbled Godwits, by Nancy Spruance.
- Red-tailed Hawk, Smith River, by Michael A. Sommer.



Clockwise from above: Northern Pygmy Owl, by Jeff Todoroff; Pygmy Nuthatch, by Lyndie Chiou; Great Horned Owl, by Jeff Jacobsen. The word for owl in the Wiyot language, Soulatluk, is pitsou’laksh, courtesy of the Wiyot Tribe; Common Ravens, by Rob Fowler.

“Honorable Mention; Steller’s Jay, Willits, CA, by Chris Hansen. Winner of “Native Language,” category: Cedar Waxwing, San Dimas, CA by Connie Pearson. The Tongva word for “bird” is: chi’iyy.”



The Common Raven: *A Bad Rap!*

by Janelle Chojnacki

The loud, guttural call, glossy black feathers, wedge-shaped tail, and thick black bill of the Common Raven make it one of the most conspicuous birds throughout its range. These highly intelligent birds are known to associate with predators in order to find carcasses on which to feed and they also use this association to ensure that those carcasses are safe to eat. Ravens are also a playful species, which is a loaded term in ecological research as it can be very difficult to objectively define and identify play behavior in wildlife. Many of us have likely seen videos of ravens using plastic lids to sled down snowy roofs, and many dog-owners may have seen ravens playing with, or perhaps pestering, their dogs for no apparent reason, a behavior potentially dating back to ravens' associations with wolves. Uniquely for a songbird, ravens develop strong, lifelong pair bonds which are often developed over multiple years and are cultivated throughout a pair's relationship. It can take up to nine years for a raven to reach sexual maturity and there are several fascinating behavioral changes that occur before, during, and after a raven finds a partner.

Raven chicks are altricial, which means that after hatching, the young are entirely dependent on parental care for warmth, food, and protection. Around two months after hatching, the raven fledglings take off and spend the next several months learning from their siblings, parents, and other ravens how to independently find food, shelter, and other resources. Young ravens then join social groups with other young ravens and through these social groups they share information, such as the location of food, and they form relationships, including friendships as well as enemies. Remarkably, young ravens have been documented interfering with the bonding attempts of other young ravens in their social group, likely because a mated pair of ravens can more effectively defend resources than several young birds; so keeping the young social group together is a way to ensure that everyone continues sharing resources. Eventually each raven will find a suitable partner and throughout that partnership both birds continue practicing pair bonding rituals. These rituals include bowing displays, puffed head and throat feather displays, and many kinds of calls, some of which are directed quietly at only their partner while others are broadcasted up to several kilometers away. These rituals are used to form and secure pair bonds and can be observed in paired birds as well as courting birds throughout the year.

Attraction to, and then eventually avoidance of, novel items is one of the most fascinating behavioral transitions that ravens exhibit: when ravens are young, they are neophilic, meaning they actively explore new items, whether it be a stick, a piece of trash, etc. As ravens get older, they become neophobic and afraid of new things (which can be a fun way to differentiate young from old birds when observing them in the field!). All of these behaviors, especially the exceptional intelligence, have helped raven populations expand their species' range. These birds readily take advantage of human food subsidies such as the food found in parking lots, campgrounds, picnic areas, and agricultural areas. The population growth of ravens has had deleterious effects on many other species because ravens eat almost anything they can catch or find, including insects, small mammals, nestlings, and eggs. In general, more human food subsidies in an area leads to more ravens, which leads to increased predation on a huge variety of species.

Locally in Humboldt County, populations of the federally threatened Western Snowy Plover are continuing to fall below recovery goals in large part because of raven predation on eggs and chicks. For the last year, as part of my graduate research at Cal Poly Humboldt, I have been attaching GPS units to ravens captured on beaches where Snowy Plovers nest and I am using those movement data to better understand the

factors influencing raven use of Snowy Plover nesting beaches. While conducting this research I have observed numerous examples of humans feeding ravens intentionally and unintentionally on or near Snowy Plover nesting beaches and I have also followed GPS-tagged ravens to locations away from the beach where they reliably find sources of human-provided food. I'm hoping that through my research I can quantify the impact that human food sources are having on raven populations and can also perform public outreach to highlight the negative impacts that feeding wildlife, especially ravens, can have on the populations of other species.

Ravens get a bad reputation for several reasons, but I have found that some the most dedicated biologists working to conserve species like the Snowy Plover still love ravens (they just don't love raven predation on threatened species!). Ravens can be absolute goofballs and are so entertaining to observe. I recently saw a pair of ravens performing the bowing display to each other on the beach, I've observed a large male fluffing his head feathers in a macho display at a particularly reflective window, continually leaving then returning to the window to repeat the behavior, and I spent around an hour watching a raven repetitively swoop lower and lower over a road-killed barred owl the other day, presumably to make sure it was actually dead before starting to eat it. Now that the breeding season is beginning, raven pairs are exhibiting very strong territorial behavior. I've recently seen numerous raven pairs chasing single ravens or groups of young ravens away from their territories, some of which even involved locking talons mid-air for a moment! Many of us likely know that ravens can be problematic, but I hope the main takeaway from this article is that ravens are fascinating, we can (and should!) enjoy observing them, and there are things we can do to avoid subsidizing them with food to restore a balance to our local ecosystems.



Above: Janelle Chojnacki works with a raven: "I wear a whole-face mask and a hat to prevent the ravens from being able to identify me in the future, since I want to be able to survey and collect behavioral observations on the birds I tag over time."



Photo Contest Winners L-R: Sanderlings, by Kurt Angersbach; Snowy Egret + Greater Yellowlegs, by Danu Utman; American White Pelicans, Upper Klamath Lake, Oregon, by Gary Bloomfield.