



The Sandpiper

August 2025



Redwood Region Audubon Society

www.rras.org

Celebrating RRAS Field Trips and Volunteers!

The Saturday morning bird walk at Arcata Marsh, led by RRAS volunteers since 1982, has become an institution. Add to this the walks at Humboldt Bay Wildlife Refuge, Eureka waterfront, and Southern Humboldt, all led by volunteers, which have been ongoing for over twenty years. In 2024 and 2025 there has been an increase in new field trips, led by volunteers who want to share a well-loved birding spot or one they want to check out. These are too numerous to name all, but some highlights are the lagoons trip; Horse/Grouse Mountain; King Salmon; Cock Robin Island and Crab Park; Potawot Health Village for Mother's Day; and, most recently, a three-day trip to Eel River Canyon Preserve. To top it off, May 2025 saw the first of monthly pelagic trips, with up to five volunteer guides.

Weekend Field Trip to Eel River Canyon Preserve

Text and Photos by Gail Kenny

Eight participants joined Ken Burton in May for a three-day trip to the 30,000-acre Wildlands Conservancy Eel River Canyon Preserve southeast of Garberville. Visits are limited to groups only, so Ken arranged to lead a RRAS field trip there. The preserve is accessed from Alderpoint Road out of Garberville. Carpooling in three cars, we drove past the widespread 2020 August Complex fire scar along this road that follows the ridge, stopping at several points to bird.



Lark Sparrow

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May Pelagic Trip Scores Rare Murphy's Petrel

By Sean McAllister

Eighteen birders boarded the *Stellar Sunrise* at Woodley Island on Saturday morning, May 10, joining Captain Lowell Wallace Jr. and his first mate, Dick. We headed west by southwest out of the Humboldt Bay entrance channel, cruising at 11-12 knots on 4-5 foot swells with a period of approximately 10 seconds, wind out of the north at approximately 5-10 knots. Our strategy was to reach the continental shelf and then begin to attract seabirds with a slick of menhaden oil while adrift. Most birders on board were hopeful that we would encounter the rare and highly seasonal Murphy's Petrel, which had been reported regularly over the previous week.

Within a mile out of the entrance channel, we encountered two Marbled Murrelets in alternate plumage on the water. Captain Lowell maneuvered the boat

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Participants and leaders Kathryn Wendel, Sean McAllister, Owen Sinkus, Lucas Stephenson, and Tristen McKee, aboard the *Stellar Sunrise*. Photo by Humboldt Charter Co.

RRAS FIELD TRIPS IN AUGUST

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 August: Aug 2, Gary Friedrichsen ~ Aug 9, Tylor Bell-Rogers ~ Aug 16, Bob Battagin ~ Aug 23, Kathryn Wendel ~ Aug 30, Mark Colwell

NEW Saturday, August 2, 8-11am. Join RRAS field guides for a birding walk around the recently developed Elk River Estuary Restoration Project at the south end of Eureka. Since its completion, this

site has already been hosting good numbers of both resident and migratory waterbirds. Let's go see what the early fall migration period produces here! Meet at the Tooby Road Accessible trailhead parking area. Bring binoculars and spotting scopes if you have them. Contact Sean McAllister (707-496-8790 / whiteouters@gmail.com) for more information and to register for this free event.

Sunday, August 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 flat gravel-packed trail easily accessible on foot. Email Ralph to sign up at [thebook\[at\]reninet.com](mailto:thebook[at]reninet.com).

Saturday August 16, 7am-4pm. Pelagic Trip. Join

us for a trip out of Humboldt Bay aboard the *Stellar Sunrise* with Captain Lowell Wallace Jr. and his crew. Experienced guides will be on board and on the lookout for albatross, storm-petrels, jaegers, and other birds seldom seen from shore. Cost is \$150 per person, with student discounts available. To reserve a spot for this or future trips, contact Sean McAllister (see **August 2**). Also see rras.org for more information about these trips.

Sunday, August 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 beginning to arrive! Email Ralph to sign up at [thebook\[at\]reninet.com](mailto:thebook[at]reninet.com). *continued on page 2*

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President's Column

My Breeding Bird Survey Experience

By Kathryn Wendel

The U.S. Geological Society Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) is a continental-wide effort between Canada, the United States, and Mexico that has been running for over fifty years, with a primary goal of collecting bird demographic data. This in turn aids in the conservation and management of birds as well as fuels a \$75 billion dollar wildlife-watching industry.

Last month I had the privilege of conducting my third consecutive BBS around the vicinity of Lord Ellis Summit in central Humboldt County. Each route requires three completed seasons in a row in order for the collected data to be entered into the database, where it can be used by scientists, land managers, consultants, and data miners.

Every BBS route measures 25 miles long, with a three-minute survey every half mile. My route begins in Redwood Valley from Bair Road, and this small valley is my only spot for Yellow-breasted Chat on the entire route. Chats are a special status bird, and a key indicator species for the health of riparian systems. You may recognize their stylized image as the poster bird for the Klamath Bird Observatory, which is a banding station located in southern Oregon originally founded by C.J. Ralph, one of our board directors for RRAS. As the sky started to lighten towards dawn, I heard a Northern Saw-whet Owl call out their loon-like cry, and I was thrilled to be honored with this species, a first for me on this route.

Once out of Redwood Valley, this route winds



up to Lord Ellis Summit, where it continues along Snow Camp Road. Besides the ubiquitous Swainson's Thrushes, Spotted Towhees, and Oregon Juncos, this is the best section to observe higher-elevation pine forest breeders like Hermit and MacGillivray's Warblers. I have heard Willow Flycatchers *fitz-bewing* in the wet ravines here before, but this year I didn't hear any. Perhaps, I speculated, this is because the recently replanted trees post-logging are starting to mature beyond their shrubby sapling phase, and the present structure isn't as suitable for nesting.

After Snow Camp Road, the route turns back west onto Bald Mountain Road, and the habitat changes into more open prairie and farmland along a second-growth forest edge. This section is always good for Western Wood Pewees, Olive-sided Flycatchers, Lazuli Buntings, and raptors. Swallows also abound, with one large barn in particular hosting dozens of Barn, Cliff, and Violet-green Swallows.

Finally, the route ends on Maple Creek Road, where the forest turns back to Coast Redwood and Douglas Fir, and Western Flycatchers and Wilson's Warblers seem to be on every stop. One species that seemed not as abundant as previous seasons was Cassin's Vireo, a species in decline in the west.

It is hard to call any trend in bird numbers from just a few seasons, which is why the long-term data from decades of BBS counts is vital for management and conservation. If you would like to get involved, they are always looking for volunteers, and there are several local routes that are currently vacant. Go to pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs/ to learn more!

DID YOU KNOW?

Love your cat and birds too

We're gaining ground: the camp promoting keeping cats indoors to save birds and other wildlife is making progress. The data are clear that cats are the number one direct killer of birds in the US. This is one issue we can do something about! Keep up the good work: keep kitty indoors, in a catio or on a leash, and ask your friends to do the same. The birds thank you.

Source: American Birding Association interview with Peter Marra, Georgetown Univ. Earth Commons Institute



RRAS Field Trips, continued

Saturday, August 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 for more information.

NEW Saturday, August 30, 8-12noon. Table Bluff and Ocean Ranch. Join us for a combined seawatch and hike around one of the area's premiere wetland birding sites. We will start with a seawatch from Table Bluff, then go to the Ocean Ranch Unit of the Eel River Wildlife Area. With good visibility, Table Bluff serves as a great location to scope the ocean for migrating seabirds and whales. Ocean Ranch is a hotspot for shorebirds, other waterbirds, sparrows,

raptors, river otters, and more! Meet at the Waluph Lighthouse Ranch at Table Bluff. Bring binoculars and spotting scopes if you have them. Contact Sean McAllister (see **August 2**) for more information and to register for this free event.

Sunday, August 31, 4pm-? Join Ken Burton for a 3.4-mile evening bird walk in the **Arcata Bottoms**. Jackson Ranch Road passes pastures and wetlands on the west side of the Bottoms. We'll look for uncommon species such as Ross's Goose, Greater White-fronted Goose, and Pacific Golden Plover along with the more common species. The start time coincides with high tide, when shorebirds will be more likely. Participants can turn back on their own for a shorter walk. Meet at the intersection of Highway 255 and Jackson Ranch Road. Contact Ken (shrike3 AT gmail.com) if you have questions.

Eel River Canyon Preserve Field Trip

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At eBird hotspot Alderpoint Road Mile 5.9, the group had 17 species, including great looks at Purple Martins. We stopped several more times before arriving at the preserve gate where we met an employee who gave us an orientation and led us through the preserve. On a side trip to Rice Lake we walked about a mile and a half around the lake and observed 25 bird species, along with lots of blooming wildflowers, including Checkered Lilies and Hooker's Catchfly. Bird species included Wood Ducks, Sora, Red-winged Blackbirds, Hermit Warblers, Western Tanagers, and Black-headed Grosbeaks.

Next stop was along the ridgetop with panoramic views of green meadows and colorful swaths of wildflowers. To the east were the snow-topped mountains of the Yolla Bolly Wilderness and to the west was the King Range. We arrived at the lodge where there were plenty of beds for the group to use, a great kitchen, and a plethora of books. We had Western Bluebirds, Bullock's Orioles, Lark Sparrows, and Acorn Woodpeckers at the lodge, and we were delighted to hear a Screech Owl after dark.



The dawn chorus did not disappoint. Saturday began with a 6:30 a.m. walk near the lodge, and after breakfast we drove down to the Eel River. More than 100 Cliff Swallows were gathering mud at the river's edge, and we found their colony farther down river on a vertical face of a large rock. Bird species included Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Ash-throated Flycatcher, and Common Mergansers. After lunch at the lodge, a group took another walk, logging 34 species with Mourning Doves, California Quail, and Acorn Woodpeckers being most abundant. In the evenings we gathered for potluck dinners, sharing the day's activities and getting to know each other.

Sunday morning saw a 6:00 a.m. bird walk; then it was time for breakfast and cleanup. On leaving, we took a different road through oak woodland and conifer forest. A highlight was Lawrence's Goldfinches at one of the stops. Interesting wildflowers were Common Fiddleneck and Bowtube Iris (shown here). In the conifer forest we found Spotted Coralroot (an orchid) and Western Fairy-slipper (another orchid), along with Mountain Quail, Warbling Vireos, and Nashville Warblers.

For all the eBird lists from this trip, go to: <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L44515576/recent-checklists>.

Kid's Corner WOWZA WILDLIFE!

By Leslie Scopes Anderson

GO TAKE A
FLYING LEAP!



FUN FACTS

Great Blue Herons are very territorial around their nests! This one built a nest of sticks on a special high platform at a bird refuge. They usually have 2-3 chicks.

WHERE IN THE WORLD?

Great Blue Herons live near wetlands and fields, and can be seen at the Arcata Marsh. They eat a wide variety, from fish and frogs to gophers. They look more gray than blue.

Rare Birds Spotted During 2024 Vie for Award

By Sue Leskiw, with contributions from Levi Ashe, Frank Fogarty & Lucas Stephenson

2024 was a stellar year for rare avian visitors, as all three finalists for the **12th annual Humboldt County Bird of the Year** award turned out to be the first confirmed sightings for those species here. And four others—Wilson's Storm-Petrel, Least Storm-Petrel, Guadalupe Murrelet, and Short-tailed Albatross—were either first or second county records.

First-place Eastern Wood-Pewee was spotted June 11 on the North Spit by Cal Poly Humboldt (CPH) wildlife professor Frank Fogarty. "The only reason I found the bird is because my friend and former student, Emmett Iverson, texted me, 'I bet there's an Eastern Wood-Pewee on the North Spit'. I checked and he was correct! Emmett is a phenomenal field ornithologist with great understanding of bird movement and habitat use. After Eastern Wood-Pewees had shown up elsewhere in California that week, he thought Humboldt was due for its first record and Horse Pasture Patch was the most likely spot. The bird was in plain view at eye level 10 meters away when I walked by. It sang a clear Eastern song within a few minutes to clinch the identification. I think about 20 others saw this one-day wonder."

In second place was (Eastern) Bell's Vireo, sighted and identified April 13 on

Heindon Road just north of Arcata by CPH freshman Lucas Stephenson and his father Mark. "I was birding with my dad at 6:20 p.m. at a spot that hadn't been checked all winter, which was enticing because the season had been exceptional for passerine vagrants. After a few minutes of pishing, my dad noticed an odd, colorful passerine with white wing bars and a long tail that I recognized as an (Eastern) Bell's Vireo. The bird was chase-able for the next two weeks and many enjoyed amazing views."

Third-place Black-backed Woodpecker was found by Six Rivers National Forest employee Levi Ashe on September 28 near Orleans while performing fire suppression repair. "I was inspecting a location to assess its suitability for a log deck when I heard a chirpy woodpecker-like call that was different from the common local species. I started recording. Thirty seconds later a very dark, medium-sized woodpecker flew by, making a chirp call with an intermittent rattle call in between. I used my recording to ID the species and was pleasantly surprised when Rob Fowler informed me that it was a first county record. I wish others could have looked for the bird, but a forest closure was in effect and only fire personnel were allowed."

The Bird of the Year award honors rare species that find favorable habitat here for a single day to several months and the dedicated birders that "pound the patches" to dig them out. The 2024 award presented at Godwit Days, April 2025, was sponsored by the tomleskiw.com website, Jude Power, and Keith Slauson.

Renewal and Restoration on a Grand Scale:
The Klamath Dams Project
By Jim Clark, Co-Chair of RRAS Conservation Committee

In April, our family had a get-together in Ashland, Oregon, including a planned tour of the recently drained Iron Gate and Copco Reservoirs on the Klamath River, with a stop at the Collier Rest Area on I-5 just north of Yreka to look for Lewis’s Woodpeckers. We got a good look at a pair of the woodpeckers but did not complete the loop of the former reservoir sites due to road conditions on Copco Road. Nevertheless, our tour was successful for birding and views of the newly exposed lakebed.

As many of you may know, the main purpose of the Klamath River Renewal Project is to restore the Klamath River salmon fishery. Although the Klamath River Renewal Corporation says that up to 400 miles of anadromous fish habitat has been “opened up,” the actual river miles under the former reservoirs is about 40. While the 40 miles for plant restoration compared to over 400 for fish may seem small, it is significant and diverse. This is where the Klamath cuts through the volcanic Cascade Range. It goes around the hard basalt flows and meanders through areas of cinder cones, volcanic ash layers, and sediment. Its current flow through these many bends appears to have an even depth, but will soon form the typical bottom profile of river bends and pools and riffles as sediment flushes and is redistributed. Local Osprey will fish from free-flowing river pools instead of stagnant lakes.



As the river restores its natural profile, so will 40 miles of riparian habitat on both sides, which sometimes comprises simply a rock face but more often a gradual transition from riparian to oak savannah. Cottonwoods and willows should be well established along the banks in ten years and provide nest cavities in fifteen. The former lakebed has been seeded with billions of native plant seeds, and this will be complimented by volunteer plants.

If this is beginning to sound like bird habitat restoration rather than fish restoration, it’s actually environmental restoration on 40 miles of river and 2,400 acres of formerly flooded land. Restoration of the river for fish is more predictable than restoration of the formerly submerged land. Dam removal results in a valley floor that not only has been submerged for decades, but has undergone sedimentation unique to its watershed. Unlike the main river channel, much of the valley floor soil will weather in place and develop new soil profiles and plant communities. As this happens, we will see an evolving landscape and an evolving birdscape. The landscape scale of this project demonstrates that targeted environmental restoration is an illusion. Successful restoration involves all environmental factors.

The former reservoir and dam sites are now a construction zone where restoration and final hydroelectric infrastructure dismantling is taking place. Touring the area is limited to Copco Road, but is still a worthwhile tour for birding, geology, and simply seeing the Klamath flowing free. I hope that interpretive tours will soon be made available so the interested public can fully appreciate the beneficial effects of dam removal and lakebed restoration.

May Pelagic Trip, continued

so that all aboard could get good looks at them. Farther out, we began to see good numbers of Sooty Shearwaters and Red-necked Phalaropes. The chumming worked well, especially on our first of two such stops, which rather quickly produced 15 Black-footed Albatross, and yes, eventually a couple of Murphy’s Petrels appeared for all to see! After lingering for nearly an hour at the first chum spot, we continued west, eventually stopping for a second chumming, where another Murphy’s Petrel was observed.



The Cal Poly Humboldt research vessel *North Wind* could be seen to our southwest. We hailed it on the radio to see how the ornithology class trip was going and let them know we had seen multiple Murphy’s Petrels flying in their direction. We continued west, spotting several Fork-tailed and Ashy Storm-Petrels, a single worn Northern Fulmar, and remarkably a Common Loon in basic plumage 30 miles offshore!

From here we left the Eel River Canyon and headed north along the shelf until we had to turn east and head back to the bay. While enroute, we came into a moderate-sized pod of Pacific White-sided Dolphins which briefly rode our bow wave, delighting us all. Numerous Northern Fur Seals were seen basking, and we had a handful of distant whale sightings. Back in the bay, a surprise Laughing Gull was spotted in a mixed gull flock, loafing on the mudflat. As we pulled into the dock, only crumbs remained in the donut box.

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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

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