

The Sandpiper



Redwood Region Audubon Society

www.rras.org

Join us Thursday, December 21, at 7:00 p.m. for a program on the colorful and exotic **Birds and Mammals of Brazil**, presented by Roy Lowe



The beautiful Brassy-breasted Tanager is one of 213 endemic bird species in Brazil's Atlantic Rainforest.

In the fall of 2022, Roy traveled to Brazil for birding and photography. On the first leg of the trip, he visited the Atlantic Rainforest where only eight to ten percent of this ecologically diverse habitat remains supporting many rare and endemic birds, such as Green-headed Tanager and Saffron Toucanet. Next stop was the Brazilian Pantanal, the world's largest tropical wetland. His primary focus here was to observe and photograph Jaguars in their

native habitats, but other highlights included Tapirs, Giant Otters, Hyacinth Macaws, and Toco Toucans.

Roy graduated from Humboldt State University with a BS in Wildlife Management in 1977 and worked for US Fish and Wildlife Service for 30+ years. His



A Plain Parakeet perches on Roy's lens.

career included stints in the southeastern US, at the San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge Complex, which at the time included Humboldt Bay and Castle Rock NWRs, and, finally, on the Oregon Coast. Since retiring, he has assisted with training of coastal wetland managers in the People's Republic of China, and since 2017 he has been monitoring the return—after a 39-

year absence—of Western Snowy Plovers to Lincoln County, OR. Roy resides in Waldport, OR.



Female Jaguar in hunting mode about to swim across a tributary of the Rio Cuiaba.

Photos by Roy Lowe

Programs

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

RRAS Field Trips in December 2023 & January 2024

Every Saturday, 8:30-11am. Join RRAS for a free guided field trip at the Arcata Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary. Meet at the end of South I Street (Klopp Lake) for easy-to-walk trails and a beautiful view of Humboldt Bay. *Trip leaders for December: Dec 2, Dan Greaney ~ Dec 9, Cindy Moyer ~ Dec 16, Bill Rodstrom ~ Dec 23, Kathryn Wendel ~ Dec 30, Ken Burton*

For January's trip leaders and more field trips in the new year go to our website: rras.org.

More Field Trips in December

Sunday, Dec 10, 9-11am. Join trip leader Ralph Bucher for a walk at the Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge along a two-mile wide, flat, gravel-packed trail easily accessible on foot. Email Ralph to sign up for this field trip and next Sunday's trip at [thebook\[at\]reninet.com](mailto:thebook[at]reninet.com).

Sunday, Dec 17, 9-11am. Ralph Bucher leads a walk beginning at the foot of Del Norte Street in

Eureka. This walk is on a flat, paved trail that is **wheelchair accessible**.

Saturday, Dec 23, 9-11am. Wigi Wetlands Volunteer Workday. Help restore a section of the bay trail behind Bayshore Mall. Bring water and gloves, we provide tools and snacks. Contact Jeremy Cashen at Jeremy.cashen@yahoo.com or 214-605-7368 for more information.

Thursday, Jan 18, 2024

One California Condor's Story: A New Exhibit at Cal Poly Humboldt's Wildlife Department

Presented by Tamar Danufsky

Last year Cal Poly Humboldt's Wildlife Department put a new specimen on display, a spectacular California Condor. Former Curator Tamar Danufsky will talk about this bird's story, the hurdles to acquiring the carcass and the challenges faced in preparing the bird and putting it on exhibit. With condors finally soaring again in

Humboldt skies,* here is the opportunity to learn about the plight of this critically endangered species through the story of one bird.

Tamar has worked in the field with seabirds, songbirds, raptors, bears, and beetles. She has a master's from Humboldt studying shorebirds on Humboldt Bay, and was the curator of the CPH Wildlife Museum for 23 years.



Tamar showing condor 367's eight-foot seven-inch wingspan

* See page 4 in this issue for all the latest news on the now-eleven condors released by the Yurok tribe!

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President's Column

By Gail Kenny



Late October marked the passing of another former RRAS board member. In the 1990s during my first time around on the RRAS board I had the pleasure of serving with Sherri Miller. I was President Elect (Vice President) while she was President. At the time, Sherri was deeply involved with her studies on Marbled Murrelets at Redwood Sciences Lab. When her partner fell ill, I assumed the President position early so she could focus on family. More recently my path crossed with hers when we both were volunteers at the Humboldt County Animal Shelter in McKinleyville.

CJ Ralph has this to share: Sherri worked with the US Forest Service's Redwood Sciences Laboratory, and the Klamath and Humboldt Bay Bird Observatories, both in Arcata. She brought her delight in the natural world and keen observer's eye to many important studies throughout northern California, southern Oregon, and Alaska, including monitoring Marbled Murrelets on land and in nearshore waters, American Dippers in streams, and various species of land birds with censuses and banding. She published many important papers on her observations in prestigious scientific publications and received awards from the Forest

Service and ornithological societies for her ground-breaking work. She was a kind mentor and role model to many young biologists, and provided sage advice to all who were fortunate enough to work with her. RRAS was fortunate to benefit from Sherri's leadership and passion for birds.

You can read Sherri's obituary here: <https://lostcoastoutpost.com/2023/oct/26/obituary-sherri-l-miller-1946-2023/>

Plans are under way for the annual RRAS banquet and silent auction in February or early March. That is always a fun event! We will mail the announcement about the banquet soon and also send the ballot for 2024 officers and board of directors to our regular (not local only) membership.

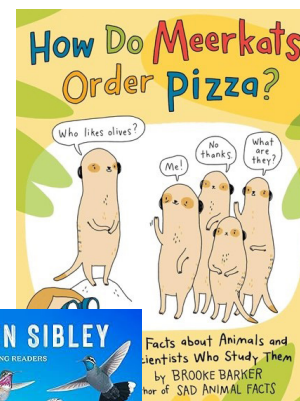
In other bird news, the American Ornithological Society has decided to change the English names for any US and Canada birds currently named after people to address past wrongs and to engage far more people in the study, protection, conservation, and enjoyment of birds. They are asking the public for ideas on what to rename seventy to eighty birds. Locally, Ken Burton is inviting the birding community to email him with ideas for new English names for these birds. You can email him your suggestions by December 31 to shrikethree@gmail.com.

New Books for Young Readers (and the Young at Heart)

By Gina Rogers

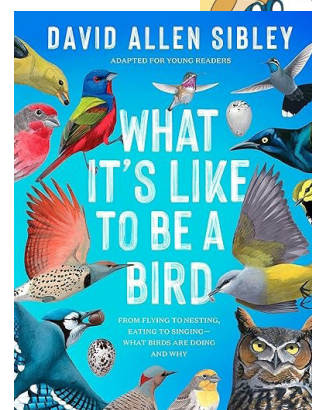
An edition of David Allen Sibley's *What It's Like to Be a Bird: Adapted for Young Readers* was just published in October.

It provides a wealth of fascinating information covering flying and nesting, eating and singing, with beautiful drawings and maps and simple-enough context about the science behind bird behavior. A portfolio with two-page spreads on over eighty different birds is also included. I just read the section about feathers, and it was packed with interesting facts. It would make a perfect gift to encourage a young birder but has enough detail for adults, too.



Another book, *How Do Meercats Order Pizza?* by Brooke Parker, is geared for a slightly younger audience, focusing on scientists studying a range of different animals, emphasizing how they do their research and including

crazy facts they've learned. There's a chapter on crows (profiling one of local Janelle Chojnacki's mentors!), one on MacGillivray's seaside sparrows, and one on a biologist studying birds and their dinosaur relatives, all with great drawings and context that will make you laugh out loud.



KID'S CORNER WOWZA WILDLIFE!

By Leslie Scopes Anderson

NOW THAT'S A MOUTHFUL!



FUN FACTS:

This is a juvenile Cedar Waxwing. The adult has a crest on its head. These birds specialize in eating fruit, but also eat bugs. They form large flocks during migration.

WHERE IN THE WORLD?

Cedar Waxwings migrate through our area in spring and fall. Since they love fruit, you can attract them to your yard by planting native berry bushes.

Indistinguishable LBB

By Kate Rowe



Kate enjoying a favorite pastime.

I remember when I first started birding, I saw so many indistinguishable “Little Brown Birds,” also known as LBBs. I was young, unemployed, and filled most of my free time with trips to the Arcata Marsh. I struggled to figure out the differences between the LBBs in the bushes versus the LBBs in the trees. One of the first birds that stood out to me was the **Song Sparrow** (*Melospiza melodia*). Commonly found throughout the North Coast, the Song Sparrow is a medium-sized sparrow that boasts a rich palette of

earthy tones, with streaks of brown decorating its upper body and a creamy white underbelly. One of its most distinctive features is the dark spot that adorns its chest, resembling a miniature pendant.

Other than the streaking on its breast, I first began distinguishing these sparrows from others by their behavior. While walking along Klopp Lake at the marsh, I would notice one perched at the top of a blackberry bramble. As I followed the path, it would hold its ground and watch me as I passed. Other times, I would hear a quick *chiwawa*-like chirp and then a round, bulbous body with a short tail would fly across the path.

As I continued to bird, I could pick up on the complexities of the Song Sparrows’ melodies, which vary across regions and individual birds. The songs I heard around the marsh varied slightly from the “family” of Song Sparrows I heard in a Kneeland backyard. While the specific details of a Song Sparrow’s tune can vary, some general characteristics are common to all. A typical song is a series of varied and distinct musical phrases, often delivered in a repetitive pattern. The phrases can include trills, whistles, and musical warbles, creating a diverse and captivating repertoire. These birds are known to incorporate elements from their surroundings into their tunes. This might include mimicking other bird species or even imitating mechanical sounds they pick up from their environment.

The more I watch Song Sparrows, the more I fall in love with them. Their lively demeanor keeps me entertained and like a close friend, I can always find them when traveling around the county or country. They are highly adaptable and can be found in a variety of habitats, from dense shrubbery and



Photo by Gary Bloomfield

woodlands to urban parks and gardens. I’m not sure if I would have continued birding if I didn’t find the Song Sparrow so interesting and joyful to watch. Witnessing their everyday activities gives me a sense of appreciation for LBBs, and I’m looking forward to watching them do something new.

Christmas Bird Counts

Contact the compilers to help with the counts.

The Arcata count, on Saturday, December 16, was first organized by John Sterling in 1984 and has become one of the highest recording counts in our area. This circle comprises coastal habitat that includes ocean, bay, saltmarsh, and freshwater estuary. It also covers a good deal of pastureland, coastal forest (conifer/riparian), and urban habitat. Tony Kurz is the compiler and has been for the last seven years. Contact him at tonyk_71220@hotmail.com.

The Del Norte count, on Sunday, December 17, 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. Lucas Brug is the compiler. Contact him at lucas.hendrik@hotmail.com.

The Centerville count, on Sunday, December 31, is the oldest of our local counts. The origin of this CBC has been traced back to 1947, when Dr. Clarence Crane and his wife Ruth of Ferndale began the Humboldt County New Year’s Bird Count with their children and extended family. Ruth always made Boston Baked Beans and coleslaw for the participants after the count. A very homey affair. The event was eventually adopted as one of the Audubon Society’s annual CBCs, with formal record-keeping dating back to 1962. Gary Falxa is the compiler. Contact him at garyfalxa@gmail.com.

The Willow Creek count, on December 26, with a rainout date of December 28, was started by David Anderson and Roger Weiss in 1976. Contact the compiler Max Brodie at brodiemaxa@gmail.com.

The Tall Trees count, on Thursday, January 4, 2024, 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. 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.

And Then There Were ELEVEN! and Other Condor News

By Gina Rogers

There has been a flood of news from the Northern California Condor Restoration Program (NCCRP) over the last few months, some very exciting but some quite concerning. Condor sightings have been reported in more and more locations in Humboldt and Del Norte counties, capped by great excitement in late July with news that a group had spent their first night roosting on the Yurok Reservation. To date, the longest distance traveled from the release site is 52 miles. Good news also came in on the Avian flu front, as all eight birds from the first two releases tested negative in their biannual checkups; a matching fund drive for a condor health and quarantine facility raised over \$43,000 allowing construction of an isolation unit at the NCCRP site to begin; and a new vaccine that protects birds has seen promising early results.

Then some bad news. Several condors were found to have fed on a poacher-killed elk within



California Condors soaring over Bald Hills Road, November 12, 2023. Photos by Jeff Allen

Redwood National Park that was contaminated with lead, and in the birds' planned autumn health check, five out of eight were found to have elevated lead levels in their blood. Levels for one of them warranted treatment; he was sent to the Sequoia Park Zoo for X-rays and chelation treatments, and then returned to recover in the NCCRP release facility. Although California banned the use of lead bullets for hunting in the state in 2019, hunters/poachers using old supplies or bringing ammo from other states still pose significant risks. Yurok Wildlife Director Tiana Williams-Claussen stresses that *"the biggest barrier to establishing self-sustaining populations is lead poisoning, which currently causes 50 percent of condor mortality."* Everyone should reach out to those who can help get this message out: do not use

lead ammunition or fishing tackle, lead is not only toxic to scavenging wildlife, but also to humans, especially babies and pregnant and nursing mothers.

But there's more good news, too. Three 18-month-old condors arrived from the Los Angeles Zoo on October 9, and a month later the gates were opened for their release. Yurok names were given to these birds emphasizing their personalities and relationship to the land: *Pey-gel* "Fighter" (B0, a female); *Pue-leek* "Downriver" (B1, a male); and *Pey-cheek* "Upriver" (B2, a female). Personalities emerged. B0 and B2 left the pen within twenty minutes of each other. B2 was cautious, while B0 came out like gangbusters, and had a tussle with one of the first-release birds before getting put in her place. B1 waited until the next day before venturing out. All three were given the Avian flu vaccine before they arrived. Two additional birds coming from the Oregon Zoo were delayed due to the timing on their Avian flu vaccinations, but are expected in spring 2024. The names *Per-werh* "the direction south along the ocean" and *Hehl-kew* "in or towards the mountains" have been saved for them.

From a Yurok Press Release:

If you want resources to help communicate the dangers of lead ammunition, please visit the Yurok Hunters as Stewards page or huntingwithnonlead.org. For help finding non-lead ammunition, please check out Ventana Wildlife Society's RimfireRoundup.com.

Winter Birds of SoHum,

by Ann Constantino

SoHum, or Southern Humboldt, stretching from Rio Dell and Petrolia in the north to Garberville and Shelter Cove in the south, offers a wide variety of birding locations. If you are not familiar with the area, a good place to start is the community park in Garberville.



Southern Humboldt Community Park (formerly Tooby Park) welcomes many species of birds in the winter, including Northern Harriers and a pair of Kestrels joining the year-round raptors White-

tailed Kites, Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks, and Red-tailed and Red-shouldered Hawks. Winter sparrows have arrived, including Golden-crowned,

White-crowned, Lincoln's, and White-throated. The park is alive with hundreds of American Robins feasting on Madrone and Toyon berries. Cedar Waxwings also enjoy the berries. Hermit and Varied Thrushes are more discreet in their berry pursuit, but can be seen with some patience. Acorn and Pileated Woodpeckers can reliably be seen or heard. Go anytime to explore, or join the RRAS free guided field trip on the fourth Saturday of the month. Contact Ann Constantino for start time and location: 707-296-8720. *Photos: Northern Harrier and American Robin, by Ann Constantino*

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:
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PO Box 1054, Eureka, CA 95502**
- National membership: Join National Audubon and receive EcoNews with the Sandpiper inserted as well as Audubon magazine. Please use our Chapter Code C24 so that we receive our share of your membership.

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