



The Sandpiper

February 2024



Redwood Region Audubon Society

www.rras.org

Join us on **Saturday, March 2, 2024**, for our **Annual Banquet and Auction and Program on:**

THE MEXICAN BIRD RESURVEY PROJECT: POPULATION AND RANGE CHANGES IN MEXICO'S BIRDS OVER THE PAST 100 YEARS



Ryan is Science Director
at the Klamath Bird Observatory
in Ashland, Oregon.
Photo by Kelsey Reckling

Ryan Terrill will talk about results from the Mexican Bird Resurvey Project, a broad collaborative effort to understand population and range changes in Mexico's birds over the past 100 years by comparing historical and modern data. New statistical methods in occupancy modeling allow for comparison of radically different types

of data, for example, museum specimens and community science observations. These methods allow use of historical data to understand which species of birds in Mexico may be declining or increasing and where. This study is the first countrywide analysis of changes in occupancy in birds, and results show that both climate and land-use change have contributed to declines and homogenization of the diversity of Mexico's birds.

Ryan obtained his BS in ecology and evolutionary biology from UC Santa Cruz and his PhD from Louisiana State University. He grew up birding in California and has made study of birds in the Americas his career, with a focus on ecology, evolution, and conservation.

The banquet and auction will be held at the Arcata D Street Neighborhood Center, 13th and D Streets. Social hour begins at 5:30 p.m., with dinner at 6:30. Dr. Terrill's talk will follow.

Our fun-filled silent auction features natural history items, usually bird related, original paintings, special services, and many other items. We will feast on a delicious gourmet dinner catered by our own Gary Friedrichsen, with savory stuffed chicken, butternut squash lasagna, green salad, and dessert from Ramone's Bakery.

Cost: \$35/person until February 24, when it goes to \$50. Send check made out to RRAS to P.O. Box 1054, Eureka, CA 95502, email gary@jacobyecreek.net with Banquet in the subject line, or phone (707) 496-6581. The last day to make reservations is February 29th.

NOTE: *There will not be a public program on the third Thursday in February, but we will return to our usual schedule in March, with a program on March 21.*

RRAS FIELD TRIPS IN FEBRUARY

Every Saturday, 8:30-11am. Join RRAS at the Arcata Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary for a free guided field trip with an experienced birder. Bring your binoculars, come bundled up for the February cold, and meet the trip leader at the end of South I Street (Klopp Lake) for easy-to-walk trails, a beautiful view of Humboldt Bay, and the opportunity to hear and see a diverse range of overwintering birds. Keep an eye out for otters that frequent the marsh ponds, even feeding on some of the ducks here!

Trip leaders for February: Feb 3, Dan Greaney ~ Feb 10, Bob Battagin ~ Feb 17, Gary Friedrichsen ~ Feb 24, Elizabeth Meisman

Sunday, Feb 4, 9-11am. Trip leader Janelle Chojnacki will lead a bird walk along the Hammond Trail, making frequent stops to look out over the Mad River. We hope to see urban birds like sparrows, finches, and thrushes as well as aquatic species around the river like cormorants, gulls, loons, and grebes. Meet at the small parking lot where Murray Road meets the Hammond Trail, at the corner of Murray and Kelly.

Sunday Feb 11, 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 winter. Email Ralph to sign up at [thebook\[at\]reninet.com](mailto:thebook[at]reninet.com).

Sunday Feb 18, 9-11am. Ralph Bucher leads a walk at the Eureka Waterfront, starting at the foot of Del Norte Street. This walk is on a flat, paved trail that is **wheelchair accessible**. Be on the lookout for shorebirds, cormorants, loons, and grebes. Email Ralph to sign up at [thebook\[at\]reninet.com](mailto:thebook[at]reninet.com).

Saturday Feb 24, 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.

Saturday Feb 24, time TBD. Join RRAS in **Southern Humboldt** on the fourth Saturday of every month at Tooby Park, 1 mile west of Garberville on Sprowl Creek Road. 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, Feb 25, 8:30am-noon. Join leader Ken Burton for a half-day outing to the **Humboldt Bay South Spit**. This nearly treeless peninsula presents bay and ocean habitats. Among the commoner species, we'll also be looking for Common Goldeneye, Red-necked Grebe, Snowy Plover, Ruddy Turnstone, Parasitic Jaeger, Black-legged Kittiwake, and Burrowing Owl. This will be primarily a driving trip, with some short walks on sand and other soft surfaces. Meet Ken (shrikethree@gmail.com) at the beach parking lot below Waluplh-Lighthouse Ranch (40.69711, -124.27547). Pack food if you wish to stay for lunch.



Common Raven
Photo by Jeff Todoroff

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Letter to the Editor:

“Mourning Doves: Scarcity Makes the Heart Grow Fond,” by Kathryn Wendel. Like Ms. Wendel, I count Mourning Doves as one of the first birds I learned to identify after the American Robin. Over the years I have learned what attracts them to my garden in Fieldbrook. I maintain a broad (4-5 feet) flat area of annuals. I use annual native plants, especially Clarkia, in this area. Clarkia seedlings appear in winter, flower in late spring and summer, and produce seeds and then die. They leave the ground bare and drop a huge amount of seed. From midsummer into fall I normally have Mourning Doves feeding in this area on a regular basis. We are responsible for using our gardens to maintain endemic plants and native wildlife. – Pete Haggard



President’s Column

by Gail Kenny

Our local birders have been enjoying a very productive December and early January with lots of rare birds reported.

The most notable is the Purple Gallinule at the Arcata Marsh—a bird normally found in Florida, Texas, and areas farther south. (See the article below.) Another notable bird, the Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, which breeds in Canada and is normally found east of the Rockies in migration, was found by Gary Bloomfield while scouting for the Arcata Christmas Bird Count. To keep up with the latest Humboldt County rare birds go here: ebird.org/alert/summary.

We have a new Instagram account where we post announcements about our events and other information related to our organization: search for *redwoodregionaudubonsociety* and click *follow*. You can also follow us on Facebook at *Redwood Region Audubon Society (RRAS)*.

I want to thank Jeremy Cashen for his service on the board for a few years and as board secretary for the past year. Jeremy is our Wigi Wetlands volunteer coordinator, a role he will continue in. He has been very reliable in his dedication to organizing and participating in a monthly restoration and cleanup day at Wigi Wetlands behind the Bayshore Mall. In December, RRAS rented an excavator to remove pampas grass from Wigi Wetlands but couldn’t get it all to the

dumpster for removal. If you know someone who can loan us a tractor with a shovel or a backhoe during one of our cleanup days on March 23 or April 27 to get the rest into a dumpster, email Hal Genger, hal.genger@humboldt.edu.

We are searching for someone to fill the vacant board secretary position. This requires attending monthly board meetings and writing up the minutes. We also have a vacant board member position to fill. This position also requires attending monthly board meetings and any other duties they volunteer for. Please email me, gailkenny@gmail.com, if you are interested in volunteering for either of these positions.

RRAS is busy getting ready for our annual banquet fund-raiser on March 2. (See the banquet announcement on page 1.) It takes a group effort to put on an annual event like this. We need volunteers to help Gary Friedrichsen with the catered dinner and to set up the hall before the event and clean up afterwards. Our most urgent role to fill is a reliable volunteer to dishwash during the dinner. If this is a task you would be happy to fill, let us know! Email Gary, Gary@jacobyecreek.net, to volunteer. In addition, we are collecting donated silent auction items, preferably new or lightly used, such as nature-related art, optics, objects, or books, or gift certificates to local businesses. Please contact Kathryn Wendel, katwend82@gmail.com, to donate silent auction items. We hope to see you at the banquet!

Our Winter Ambassador

By Gina Rogers

When a rare, gaudily-colored bird landed at the Arcata Marsh on November 24, 2023, it took the birding community by storm. With long yellow legs and iridescent blues and purples and greens on its back, and a bill colored and shaped just like candy corn, it was, unmistakably, a **Purple Gallinule**. Common in its normal range along the Gulf Coast and Central and South America, it had only been spotted in California five other times, and never before in Humboldt County.

The gallinule took up residence at the marsh in the willows and reeds along East Pond, right off the path that goes around Brackish Pond. As word got out, hordes of excited birders flocked to the marsh, hoping to see the rarity. People came from all over the state and Oregon, too, many with very early starts and very long drives. The result was daily congregations of crowds at the marsh, 20-30 people toting big cameras, binoculars, and spotting scopes. Experienced birders were so gracious about sharing information, and all worked together to keep a watch out for another appearance.



The Purple Gallinule tiptoeing in reeds at the Arcata Marsh (November 26, 2023).

Photo courtesy of Cedrik von Briel, President, Cal Poly Humboldt Birding Club

Sightings were reported every day for the first ten days, although it was the luck of timing whether a visitor was actually able to see our bird ambassador. Subsequently, sightings began to tail off. As we went to press, the last reported sighting was on 12/30/23. But no matter what, this crazy-looking bird brought a burst of joy and an influx of visitors to the marsh, creating a lot of excitement around the holidays.

An unusual number of rarities and vagrants have been seen this winter--see the article on results of the Christmas Bird Count on page 4 of this issue.

Godwit Days Spring Migration Festival April 18-21

Registration is open – go to godwitdays.org
for all the details!

The bonanza of birding field trips, workshops, and social events that make up the annual Godwit Days Festival kicks off with field trips beginning on Thursday, April 18, and continuing throughout the weekend. The Arcata Community Center will be abuzz with vendor booths, art, nature crafts, and other activities, all open to the public beginning at 3 p.m. Friday, April 19. Displays of all entries in the Student Bird Art Contest will line the hallways of the Community Center (see the article below for more about the annual art and writing contests).

The event's opening lectures feature a series of presentations on avian-related activities under way at the Sequoia Park Zoo, titled "Tales from the Nest: Sequoia Park Zoo's Conservation Partnerships." Alvaro Jaramillo, owner of the international birding tour company Alvaro's Adventures, is the keynote speaker on Saturday, April 20, at 7 p.m. Alvaro is a well-known ornithology researcher, author of the *Birds of Chile* portable field guide, and leader of international birding tours and a full schedule of pelagic trips in California. In his presentation, "Birding Fast and Slow," he will delve into different ways some aspects of what we do as birders is reflexive, while other aspects are deeply thoughtful and contemplative. Drawing on different modes of brain function is what makes birding so rich. Alvaro will also be leading two trips over the festival weekend. Other new field trips this year include a special "Gold" trip led by Gary Friedrichsen and Kathryn Wendel, one just on grouse, and one on the river otters at the marsh.

RRAS members are needed as volunteers for many important activities over the course of the event, with tasks ranging from hanging student art, staffing informational booths, helping out with nature crafts, and hosting/bartending/washing dishes at the keynote events. Mark your calendar and get ready to help!

Calling All Student Writers & Artists

By Sue Leskiw

RRAS is sponsoring our 19th annual *Student Nature Writing Contest*. Up to six cash prizes will be awarded for the best essay(s) or poem(s) on "What Nature Means to Me" by Humboldt or Del Norte County students in grades 4 through 12. First-place winners will be published in the *Sandpiper*. All winners will be published in a booklet posted on the RRAS website by mid-May.

For the 21st year, Friends of the Arcata Marsh (FOAM) and RRAS are co-sponsoring a *Student Bird Art Contest*, with up to \$650 in prizes awarded to Humboldt County K-12 students who



Black Phoebe courtesy of Ken Burton

The Black Phoebe, a Striking Flycatcher

By Harriet Hill

If you watch birds at all, you have probably noticed this charming tuxedoed flycatcher flitting around in your neighborhood or near fresh water. *Phoebe* is derived from a Greek word meaning clear or radiant, which fits the Black Phoebe's looks and some of its sounds. Black Phoebes are a "gateway" flycatcher for beginners because their crisp black-and-white plumage makes them among the easiest flycatchers to ID. Females and males look identical, and juveniles appear similar to adults except for their buffy wing bars.

Their behavior can also be striking (pun intended). Once they spot an insect, they burst off into the air, snag a bug, and return to their perch to wait for more food. This flashy "sallying" behavior, sitting in the open and suddenly making an aerobatic rush for food, is a typical flycatcher trait. Another frequent habit of the Black Phoebe is that it wags its tail. In fact, like many birds, it pumps its tail a lot! On his website, *sibley.com*, famed ornithologist David Sibley says, "If we could ask a phoebe why it wags its tail all the time, I suspect the answer would be 'Do I!? I don't know, it's just a habit'."

Sibley continues, "Tail-wagging can be thought of as a signal that the phoebe and hawk both understand, but it is a very basic and instinctive signal, not really a conscious attempt to communicate. When we get nervous, we fidget; when phoebes get nervous, they wag their tails. When a predator sees fidgeting or tail-wagging,

it gets the message that this is a healthy and alert animal and not worth chasing." A study by Gregory Avellis had confirmed this—when he played back a recording of a Cooper's Hawk, this caused the Phoebe's pumping to triple, whereas other potential stimuli had no effect.

The Black Phoebe's tail pumping seems to have successfully warded off predators based on the high numbers of these birds. They currently abound with a global breeding population of around 5 million, and unlike so many other bird species, populations have increased significantly since the 1960s. In much of Humboldt County, even on a bad birding day, you probably will spot a Black Phoebe. They are common around water sources all along the western side of California (and into Oregon and South America).

Black Phoebe calls include a loud *tseew* and a sharp *tsip*. Their thin whistled song consists of two different phrases: a rising *sa-wee* followed by a falling *sa-sew* often strung together one after the other. Their loud, sweet calls easily penetrate the sound of murmuring waters or the drone of traffic.

Black Phoebes originally nested in places like sheltered rock faces, streamside boulders, and tree hollows, but they readily take advantage of nest sites created by humans, including buildings, culverts, and bridges. Even a nearby cattle trough or a park fountain works since they need to have a water source to create their mud-cup nest. They can have up to three breeding attempts in a single year. The bonded pairs are monogamous and will usually nest in or around the same place each time every year. They're generally solitary birds outside of breeding.

Black Phoebes eat insects and other arthropods almost exclusively. Their diet includes bees, wasps, flies, beetles, bugs, grasshoppers, damselflies, dragonflies, termites, and spiders. They perch within about seven feet of the ground or the water and keep a sharp eye out for prey. In addition to sallying, they will glean crawling insects, or snatch them from the surface of a pond. They even occasionally seize small minnows from just below the water's surface. Because they're not seed-eaters, they won't come to your bird feeders, but you can still attract them if you plant pollinator gardens on your property.

So, sally out on the next nice day and find a Black Phoebe—just search for a small bird who is sporting a tux, calling sweetly, and pumping its tail... unmistakable!

submit a drawing of one of forty suggested species or another bird seen locally.

Entries for both contests must be received by 5 p.m. Saturday, March 23.

The contests are held in conjunction with the Godwit Days Spring Migration Bird Festival. All art entries and winning writing pieces will be displayed during the festival in the Arcata Community Center. Awards will be presented the morning of April 20.

Color copies of winning artwork will be shown at the Arcata Marsh Interpretive Center during May and June, with a booklet of winners and award ceremony photos posted on the FOAM and RRAS websites by mid-May.

Complete submission instructions will be posted at rras.org, godwitdays.org, and arcatamarshfriends.org, or can be picked up at the Interpretive Center, 569 South G Street, Arcata. E-mail questions to sueleskiw1@gmail.com.

Christmas Bird Count Results Are In!

Compiled by Gary Friedrichsen



Yellow-bellied Flycatcher
courtesy of
Gary Bloomfield

From Tony Kurz: The Arcata CBC on Saturday, December 16, had good participation and quite the amazing day recording a total of 182 species! Numerous highlights lingered until count day, and a few rare species were found the day of the count. Highlights include: Purple Gallinule, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Gray Flycatcher, Vermillion Flycatcher, Dusky-capped Flycatcher, two Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, House Wren, Clay-colored Sparrow, Nelson's Sparrow, three Black and White Warblers, American Redstart, Northern Parula, and a Dickcissel. Thank you everyone for all your efforts on a very memorable count.

From Gary Falxa: The 62nd Centerville CBC, the longest-running count in our area, took place on the last day of 2023. We had a great turnout, with 49 participants on 25 teams counting birds from Centerville Beach north to King Salmon on Humboldt Bay, and from the mouth of the Eel River inland to Fortuna. The weather cooperated and so did the birds, with about 70,000 birds counted in total, representing 187 bird species observed, which is a bit above the average number of species observed on past counts. Numerically, ducks (including American Wigeon and Northern Pintail), European Starlings (sigh), Cackling Geese, Short-billed Gulls (formerly known as Mew Gulls), and Dunlin were the most abundant species—in keeping with the pattern observed in our area this winter. The count documented a number of vagrants rare for here, including eleven (!) species of warblers, three species of sapsuckers, and four species of swallows. Not too shabby! Kudos and many thanks to all the observers who helped make this count happen!

From Max Brodie: The Willow Creek CBC, on December 26, was marked by firsts in species and numbers. A continuing Clark's Nutcracker was heard from within the count circle and later seen nearby. This represents a first for the count and species #162 for the count all-time high (since 1973). Both Snow Goose and Common Goldeneye were reported on only two previous counts in the past 45 years. Ruffed Grouse have been reported on only five previous counts, and 160



Ruffed Grouse courtesy of Ken Burton

Red-breasted Nuthatches is an all-time high nearly doubling the previous high of 86.

From Ken Burton: The weather generally cooperated for the Tall Trees CBC on January 4, and eighteen people participated. Preliminary numbers are 9,794 birds of 119 species, with seven additional species found during count week (CW). Highlights are Cackling Goose (9), Northern Pintail (3), Red-breasted Merganser (1), Mountain Quail (9), Sooty Grouse (2), Least Sandpiper (CW), Brandt's Cormorant (1), Brown Pelican (CW), California Condor (CW), Osprey (1), "Yellow-shafted" Northern Flicker (CW), Tree Swallow (at least 2), Barn Swallow (at least 6), Lesser Goldfinch (1), Lapland Longspur (CW), and *cismontanus* Dark-eyed Junco (1).

DID YOU KNOW?

From the CatBird Committee



Cat Stats

The United States hosts between

a quarter and a third of the global domestic cat population and by far the largest number of cats of any single nation with an estimated total of 148-188 million domestic cats. About 88 million of these are pet cats of which about 57 million are free-ranging outdoor cats for at least some part of the day. In addition to this, there are an estimated 60-100 million stray and feral cats, nearly all of which range free outdoors.

Source: Proceedings of the Fourth International Partners in Flight Conference, 2009



Clark's Nutcracker courtesy of Ken Burton

From Lucas Brug: The Del Norte CBC was held on December 17, and we had fourteen participants. We had a total of 162 species with European Starling being the most numerous and probably still undercounted. Notable species included Wilson's and Black-throated Gray Warblers, Common Yellowthroat, Ruffed Grouse, Mountain Quail, Ancient Murrelet, and Snow Goose. No real rarities were present. Thanks to everyone helping out!

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 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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Burrowing Owl
courtesy of
Jeff Todoroff