FIELD TRIPS

Interested in leading a walk? Have ideas on where you think we should go? Please let us know! We welcome any and all feedback regarding these events! Email Melissa (nevrdoughn@gmail.com).

Every Saturday: Arcata Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary. These are our famous rain-or-shine, docent-led field trips at the Marsh. Bring your binocular(s) and have a great morning birding! Meet in the parking lot at the end of South I Street (Klopp Lake) in Arcata at 8:30 a.m. Trips end around 11 a.m. Walks led by: Cindy Moyer (Oct 5); Ken Burton (Oct 12); Gary Friedrichsen (Oct 19); Michael Morris (Oct 26). If you are interested in leading a Marsh walk, please contact Ken Burton at shriketree@gmail.com.

Monthly walks at Southern Humboldt Community Park near Garberville. This is an easy 2- to 3-hour walk. Shade-grown coffee and extra binoculars are usually provided. No dogs, please. For the date, time, meeting place, and walk leader contact somumbirds@yahoo.com or 923-2695. Text messages can be sent to (707) 845-1079.

For some of our more far-reaching trips, we would like to suggest donating gas money to drivers on field trips. A good rule of thumb is $5 per ½ hour drive time to field trip destination.

Saturday and Sunday, Oct 5-6: Godwit Days Fall Preview. A free family birding trip, birding by kayak, and dragonflying. Join experienced leaders on any of six small-group trips (maximum of 10 registrants, except the family birding trip allows 20) selected to cover the area’s best birding locations. Held at the end of the peak period for migrating birds, the Fall Preview is intended to give registrants a taste of the North Coast during a time of year with high potential for rare bird sightings. These trips by carpool or boat range from $0 to $40 each. Meeting locations are specified in online trip descriptions. To register or get more information, visit www.godwitdays.org and click on “Events” in the top banner or send an email to godwitdaysreg@yahoo.com.

(continued on next page)

Program: October 11

Birds and Other Wildlife 'Down Under'

In a presentation by this author and sporadically local biologist, Ken Burton will share photos and stories from his two-month journey last year through eastern and southern Australia in search of chow-chillas, logrunners, plains-wanderers, and other birds with funny names. There will be kangaroos and cockatoos, too, as well as other strange creatures and stunning scenery. Ken will also talk about Australian biogeography and conservation challenges.

A Bush Thick-knee by Ken Burton

Program: November 8

Digital Birding: Enhance the Birding Experience with eBird

Would you like to learn more about eBird, the interactive database used by birders all over the world, including here on the North Coast? Local eBirder Amaya Bechler addresses some frequently asked questions about the popular and useful tool. eBird is a place to store sightings lists, explore others’ sightings and birding hotspots, and it sends rare-bird alerts, too! Operated by a respected institution, eBird collects our data to fuel essential research about our changing world.

Doors open at 7 p.m., program starts at 7:30 p.m. at Six Rivers Masonic Lodge, 251 Bayside Road, Arcata. Bring a mug to enjoy shade-grown coffee and come fragrance-free.
Bird Feeders Increase Abundance Across Many Species

By C.J. Ralph

We sometimes hear from folks that feeders aren’t really good for birds, as they crowd them into unnatural and potentially unhealthy concentrations. However, recent research by scientists with the British Trust for Ornithology* suggests that feeders not only increase the diversity of birds in our yards, but birds are also better off. First of all, they found that the number of species frequently feeding were steadily increasing over their 40-year study period (along with the increasing variety of foods becoming available to people feeding birds). Also, these species’ abundances were also rising in nationwide and local censuses. Importantly, the abundance of non-feeder-using species remained constant in comparison! Researchers found that the populations of the feeder-using species were significantly increasing, probably due to greater winter survival because of backyard feeding. The critical part of the study is that this increase in feeder-using abundance did not occur in rural areas where there were no feeders.

These new findings provide crucial evidence of the combined impact we all have on bird communities through the decisions we make in the privacy of our own gardens, including bird-feeding and excluding cats. No matter our intentions, stocking up our feeders makes a positive difference to the birds around us. That’s certainly food for thought!

*A British study of bird communities showed that by feeding, you’re increasing the diversity of birds in your yard, and specifically, an increase in non-feeder species abundance. https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-019-10111-5

Field Trips (continued)

Saturday, Oct 12: Willow Creek Bird Walk. Meet at Studio 299 (57 The Terrace, Willow Creek) starting at 9 a.m. We will depart promptly at 9:30 for our destination; carpooling available. Walks generally run 2-3 hours. All ages, abilities and interest levels welcome! For more information, please contact Birgitte Ellebek at 707-267-4140 or email willowcreekbirdwalks@gmail.com.

Saturday, Oct 19: Arcata Bottoms. Meet leader David Juliano at Uniontown Shopping Center by CVS in Arcata at 9 a.m. Weather can be unpredictable, so dress accordingly. We’ll go out South V Street, then head through the bottoms looking at shorebird flocks and waterfowl (and hope for early-arriving, wintering raptors). Bring a scope if you have one. There will not be a restroom on the route. Contact David at villosus1971@gmail.com for more information.

Sunday, Oct 13: Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge. This is a wonderful 2-to 3-hour trip for people wanting to learn the birds of the Humboldt Bay area. It takes a leisurely pace with emphasis on enjoying the birds! Beginners are more than welcome. Meet leader Ralph Bucher at the Refuge Visitor Center at 9 a.m. Call 707-499-1247 or email thebook@reninet.com for more information.

We want to publish your photos! Send in photographs of birds, birders, or habitat to board@rras.org.

Thinking of Joining the National Audubon Society?

If so, please use the coupon below. By sending in your membership on this form, rather than replying to solicitations from National Audubon, $20 is sent directly to our chapter. This is how National rewards local chapters for recruiting. (Otherwise, the share of membership dues that RRAS receives is only a couple of dollars.) Thanks!

Yes, I’d like to join. Please enroll me as a member of the National Audubon Society and of my local chapter, and send AUDUBON magazine and my membership card to the address below. My check for $20 is enclosed (introductory offer).

NAME
ADDRESS
EMAIL
Local Chapter Code: C24. Please make sure to check to the National Audubon Society, and send with this coupon to Box 97194, Washington, DC 20090-7194.

A Purple Finch party at Gary’s platform feeder in Arcata. Photo by Gary Bloomfield.
Caring for Overwintering Birds in Your Yard

By Jude Power

You may have noticed that the birds you see in your yard are different in fall and winter. The flashy neotropical migrants that come to Humboldt County each spring to breed are now leaving us as they return to warmer climes. Ideally, your yard provided them a nourishing and safe summer habitat in which they could breed and raise their young. If it did... thank you!

Like the tropical migrants, many other birds that breed far north of us are now traveling south to overwinter in warmer locations. Coastal Humboldt offers temperate weather and a variety of habitats providing specific conditions which appeal to different types of birds. The most obvious change in the avifauna in your yard this winter is likely to be increased numbers and species of sparrows and finches, plus the raptors that feed on them. Another noticeable change will be the presence of large flocks. Many of our finches and sparrows form flocks when they’re not breeding, and they’ll mob sunflower and niger (thistle) feeders, or millet on platform feeders in the case of sparrows, throughout the winter months, affording hours of entertaining viewing from the comfort of an armchair, hot drink in hand.

Your location, be it near open pasture, a creek or marsh, established conifers, or a typical in-town neighborhood, will determine which species are more likely to show up in your yard. What they all will require in winter is a food source, water, and plenty of cover to which they can retreat to rest, roost at night, groom their feathers, and escape from cats. Even the species we see pulsing across the sky or perching atop trees in summer will feed on the ground in winter, where they pick up seed spilled from feeders or grasses, or in the case of Northern Flickers, pluck ants from soil made soft by rain and drizzle. Thus, many common wintering backyard birds are vulnerable to predation by unsupervised cats, a primary cause of bird deaths. Even Downy Woodpeckers (I’m watching a neighborhood-fledged juvenile as I type) will feed within one or two feet of the ground on lingering weed stalks.

So how to care for all these winter birds? First, I’ve read more than once that migrant birds whose natural winter food sources are supplemented by human feeding successfully fledge more young on the breeding grounds. Don’t be afraid you’ll make them dependent on humans; it appears that you’re actually helping them when you augment what they can find in the environment. Besides providing seed and suet feeders, you can also augment available food during winter by filling your yard with local native plants, especially trees and shrubs.

For example, I have several cascara and red elderberry shrubs in my yard and the berries attract many birds in fall. Local natives also support more robust populations of local insect eggs, pupae, etc., which are valued for their protein, and also offer hiding places for birds.

Second, plant plenty of shrub- to tree-sized vegetation spaced close enough to allow birds to move around the yard without having to travel through open space. The more hidden they are, the less vulnerable to predators. This arrangement more closely mimics natural environments they evolved and feel comfortable in.

Third, wherever you decide to feed birds – by hanging feeders outside a window, spreading seed on the ground, posting suet cages or platforms – be sure there’s cover close at hand. Nearby shrubbery or overhanging eaves will cause birds to feel protected while feeding, making your feeder area more attractive to them and encouraging them to avail themselves of the extra calories you’re offering.

Note: If birds are feeding on the ground, be sure they are not next to ground-level greenery that can harbor cats. Last year, I was checking out the winter sparrow flock feeding in front of my huge rhododendron when I spied a pair of eyes among the leafy branches at ground level. This occurred on two different days with two different neighborhood cats. I immediately pruned the entire rhododendron up three feet to eliminate the cats’ stalking cover. It was a big task but worth it. Now sparrows, quail, and doves are much safer and I don’t have to worry when I spread seed every morning. Although I’ve never known it to be enforced, Arcata – along with Crescent City, Petaluma, Los Angeles, and many other cities – have laws in the municipal code that make it unlawful for cats to enter another person’s property without the owner’s permission. This can be a delicate situation best handled by talking directly to the cat’s owner. But try it; the lives of millions of birds are at stake.

So watch for changes in your yard birds this fall! Though you’ll still see many of the same species that were here in smaller numbers during summer, watch for increased numbers, large flocks, and a few new species you haven’t seen since last winter or early spring. Resident species in some yards include Wrentit, Chestnut-backed or Black-capped Chickadees, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Steller’s Jay, Anna’s Hummingbird, Black Phoebe, Song and White-crowned Sparrows, and House Finch. Species you may not have seen for a while are Sharp-shinned Hawk, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Golden-crowned and White-throated Sparrows, Yellow-rumped Warbler, and Pine Siskin. The more bird-friendly your yard becomes, the more you’ll enjoy watching the winter birds it brings in. Good luck!
By Cindy Moyer

Since the 1930s, the Audubon Society has operated a summer camp on Hog Island, just a short distance off shore from Bremen, Maine. Originally conceived as a place to provide K-12 educators with training in all areas of natural science, Hog Island now offers week-long camps for adults, teens, and families. While the adult and teen camps are mostly bird-focused, the family camps offer a wide range of outdoors and natural-history activities.

Hog Island Audubon Camp

Atlantic Puffin. Photo provided by author.

From May 26-31, I attended the Spring Migration and Monhegan Session at Hog Island. Camp began on Sunday afternoon with the boat ride to the island, unpacking in our rustic (and unheated!) dorm rooms, followed by some informal birding around the camp buildings and an introductory wine-and-cheese reception prior to dinner. We were also introduced to The Mystery of the Day, a series of questions about birds or Hog Island history with a prize at the end of the week for the person who had the most correct answers.

The Hog Island kitchen prides itself on serving delicious meals with mostly local ingredients. All sorts of special diets are accommodated with ease; my roommate collected several recipes for gluten-free desserts – the best she’d ever had, she said. A number of Hog Island traditions center around mealtimes. Dinners begin with one of the program leaders reading a quote from a natural history book. Food is served family-style, and from each table a “sweeper” cleans up after the meal. (Campers compete to be awarded “Sweeper of the Week” on the final evening!). To be as environmentally-friendly as possible, Hog Island campers use cloth napkins. Along the edge of the dining room there are clotheslines for storing used, but not-too-dirty-for-reuse napkins. To help identify your napkin, each clothespin is labeled with a local bird, animal, or plant: mine was a Kestrel.

Each evening at camp, there is a presentation given by one of the program leaders or someone associated with the Hog Island Program. We heard from Steve Kress, talking about the work he had done – and is still doing – bringing Atlantic Puffin colonies back to islands in mid-Maine, including the nearby colony at Eastern Egg Rock; Holly Merker, informing us about eBird and the Maine Bird Atlas projects; and Richard Crossley, describing the reasons for and process of creating his field guides.

Our birding experiences were diverse, and at times, quite spectacular. We were fewer than 25 campers and 3 outstanding leaders (Mark Garland, Holly Merker, and Richard Crossley), as well as some other Hog Islanders (Program Manager, Bookstore Clerk, etc.), who were very capable leaders in their own right. When we headed out into the field, we were able to divide into several smaller groups with one or two leaders for each group. Our “local” field trips took us to an area managed for grassland and wetland birds where we had fantastic looks at Bobolinks, along a stream and fish ladder full of Alewives migrating in from the ocean, a boat trip around the Hog Island area, a forest and bog where we had lots of warblers and other forest birds, and hiking around Hog Island.

The highlight of the week was our overnight trip to Monhegan Island, eleven miles out, and famous as a migrant “trap”. On the way, we stopped and repeatedly circled Eastern Egg Rock, where the highlights were over a hundred Atlantic Puffins, two Razorbills, and many Common and Arctic Terns as well as my “lifer”, Roseate Terns. We also observed the multiple blinds and the “Egg Island Hilton,” a plywood shack that is the center of the ornithological work done by a group of student researchers who spend their summers on the island. Once we arrived on Monhegan Island, we checked into our delightfully-old-fashioned hotels and settled down to serious birding. I’m not sure that “fallout” was quite the term for what we saw, but in various places we experienced steady streams of warblers, Red-eyed Vireos, and flycatchers working their way through the trees, constantly in motion and very actively searching for food. We had dozens of Chestnut-sided, Yellow, Yellow-rumped, and Blackpoll Warblers (that were busy flycatching), as well as a few Magnolia and Bay-breasted Warblers. By mid-afternoon, predicted rain had begun, so many of us retreated to the Monhegan Brewery for liquid refreshment. By the next morning, the rain had stopped, and our spectacular birding continued with the highlights being a Yellow-bellied Flycatcher (NOT an expected bird), and some Magnolia and Chestnut-sided Warblers that were foraging on a small beach area. After watching for a while, we walked out onto the beach, which must have stirred up additional insects, causing one of the Chestnut-sided Warblers to hop between our legs and several times land on people’s shoes.

Chestnut-sided Warbler. Photo provided by author.

My time at Hog Island was an excellent experience: outstanding guides, an adult version of the “summer camp” experience, a chance to meet lots of like-minded people, plus wonderful birding and teaching about birding in a spectacularly beautiful place. I heartily recommend the programs to anyone: adult birder, teen birders, or families. For more information, visit http://hogisland.audubon.org.