



# The Sandpiper

## Redwood Region Audubon Society



### October 2006

[www.rras.org](http://www.rras.org)

### RRAS FIELD TRIPS

Carpooling to and on RRAS field trips is very strongly encouraged. It's economical, it's fun, and it's the right thing to do! Carpools to trips will meet at the following Park & Ride lots at the times indicated in the trip announcements: Trinidad (Main Street exit, east side of 101), Eureka (Elk River Road exit), and Fortuna (Kenmar Road exit). Be there a few minutes early and see if anyone else is there for ridesharing. If you would like to participate in a carpool from another community, please contact Ken Burton (839-5179) at least two days before the trip.

**Every Saturday—rain or shine—8:30 a.m. Arcata Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary.** These are our famous, docent-led field trips at the marsh; take your binocular(s) and have a great morning birding! Meet in the parking lot at the south end of I Street in Arcata. Carpools: Trinidad 8:10 a.m., Eureka 8:05 a.m., Fortuna 7:45 a.m.

**Sunday, October 8. Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge.** This is a wonderful 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. From Highway 101, take the Hookton Road exit (between the College of the Redwoods and Loleta) and follow the signs to the Refuge Visitor Center. Meet at 9 a.m. Call Jude Power or David Fix (822-3613) for more information. Carpools: Trinidad 8:10 a.m., Eureka 8:45 a.m., Fortuna 8:45 a.m.

**Sunday, October 15. Eureka Marsh.** This monthly walk offers some great birding in downtown Eureka. We will spend an hour or two on a flat loop that will take us through a variety of habitats from bay and mudflat to riparian and marshland. Meet in the parking lot at the foot of West Del Norte Street at 8:30 a.m. Call Pablo Herrera (845-8166) for more information. Carpools: Trinidad 7:55 a.m., Fortuna 8:05 a.m.

**Sunday, October 15. Southern Humboldt Community Park.** Jay Sooter (444-8001), Robert Sutherland, and/or Doug Wallace (peregrination@asis.com) will be leading this monthly walk. All ages and experience levels are encouraged to participate and revel in the beauty of the Community Park and its avian inhabitants on this easy 2- to 3-hour walk. Binoculars are not provided, and dogs are not allowed; field guides are usually available, but please provide your own if possible. From Garberville, take Sprowel Creek Road 1.1 miles west and turn left onto Kimtu Road, immediately before the bridge over the south fork of the Eel. Proceed for about 1/2 mile down Kimtu Road and turn left into the parking lot by the lone oak. Steady rain cancels. Meet at 8:30 a.m. Carpools: Trinidad 6:30 a.m., Eureka 7:05 a.m., Fortuna 7:25 a.m.

**Sunday, October 29. Fay Slough Wildlife Area.** The California Department of Fish and Game has allowed RRAS to lead guided walks through the closed portions of Fay Slough, which are normally off limits to the public

(sorry, no pets allowed). We will be looking for waterfowl, raptors, and songbirds in the varied habitats. Waterproof boots are recommended. Meet Pablo Herrera (845-8166) in the public parking lot at 8:30 a.m. Take Highway 101 to the Highway 101 Auto Center just north of Eureka, turn left immediately after exiting, and follow the gravel road to the gate. Carpools: Trinidad 8:00 a.m., Eureka 8:15 a.m., Fortuna 7:55 a.m.

**Saturday, November 4. Bear River Ridge.** Tour the open prairies and forest edges in search of Rough-legged Hawks, Golden Eagles, Horned Larks, and bluebirds. Dress in layers and expect to return between 1:00 and 2:00 p.m. Meet at the parking lot across from the Fernbridge Market at 8:30 a.m. Pablo Herrera (845-8166) and Laura Bradley will be the leaders. Carpools: Trinidad 7:40 a.m., Eureka 8:15 a.m.

### Other Free Guided Trips

#### Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge

Join Volunteer Naturalist Louise Bacon-Ogden on **Wednesday, October 4, and Wednesday, October 18,** from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. for bird walks at the Salmon Creek Unit of Humboldt Bay NWR. Meet at the Richard J. Guadagno Visitor Center. The walks are free, and everyone is welcome. Take the Hookton Road Exit off Highway 101 and follow the brown signs to the Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge Salmon Creek Unit Headquarters and Visitor Center. For more information or special accommodation, please call 733-5406.

#### Hookton Slough Canoe Trip

Sunday, October 8, 2006, 11 a.m. – 3 p.m.  
Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge  
Celebrate National Wildlife Refuge Week with us! More than 540 National Wildlife Refuges will be holding special events during National Wildlife Refuge Week, October 8-14. The annual event celebrates the refuge system's pivotal role in offering visitors outdoor recreational opportunities and showcasing the conservation and recovery of wildlife species on refuges across the country.

Join us for a guided canoe trip around Hookton Slough and Teal Island in southern Humboldt Bay. This is a great opportunity to learn more about the refuge and current habitat restoration and enhancement projects as well as a chance to get out on the bay and view wildlife.

Participants must have their own nonmotorized boats, preferably hard-keel canoe or kayak, and life jackets for all persons in boat. No pets please. Dress in layers and bring water and snacks or lunch.

Please call to reserve your space. Meet at the Hookton Slough Parking Area/Boat Launch. Take Hookton Road Exit off Highway 101 and follow Hookton Road approximately 1 mile west toward the South Spit. Look on the right for gravel road and signs to Hookton Slough Parking Area.

For more information, special accommodation, or to reserve your space, call (707) 733-5406.

### October Program

#### Can Birds Reduce Pests on Coffee Plantations?



Environmentally conscious coffee consumers must select from "bird-friendly" in addition to the more familiar "organic" and "shade-grown." Whereas production techniques behind such specialty coffees may benefit birds, is it possible that the birds in turn may benefit coffee farmers? Coffee is subject to many insect pests, and many tropical bird species are insect eaters. Might pest control be provided by birds? If proved effective, this natural pest control could offer farmers an incentive to encourage birds in their plantations—e.g., by retaining traditional techniques involving shade trees.

Join us to learn about an experiment Jherime L. Kellermann and Matthew D. Johnson of the Humboldt State University Department of Wildlife conducted on coffee farms in the Blue Mountains of Jamaica involving a common coffee pest, the coffee berry-borer, and the role of birds in controlling this pest.

**The program will be held on Friday, October 13, 2006, at 7:30 p.m. at the Humboldt County Office of Education west of the Burre Center at Myrtle and West in Eureka. Bring a mug to enjoy shade-grown coffee.**

**CHAPTER LEADERS  
OFFICERS**

**President—Pablo Herrera** .....845-8166  
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**Sandpiper—Jan Andersen** .....444-3501  
**—Gary Bloomfield** .....822-0210  
**Volunteer Coordinator**.....HELP NEEDED  
**Lake Earl Branch—Sue Calla**.....465-6191  
**Birds in the Balance—Rob Hewitt**.....269-0271  
**RRAS Web Page**.....www.rras.org  
**Arcata Bird Alert** .....822-LOON (822-5666)

The Sandpiper is published nine times each year by  
**Redwood Region Audubon Society**  
**P.O. Box 1054, Eureka, CA 95502.**

**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 RRAS. This is how NAS rewards local chapters for recruiting national members. (Otherwise, the RRAS dues share per new member is only a couple of dollars.) Thank you.

**Chapter Membership Application**

**Yes, I'd like to join.**

Please enroll me as a member of the National Audubon Society and of my local chapter. Please send AUDUBON magazine and my membership card to the address below.

**My check for \$20 is enclosed. (Introductory offer)**

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*Please make checks to the National Audubon Society.*

*Send this application and your check to:*

**National Audubon Society**  
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-----LOCAL CHAPTER-----

**REDWOOD REGION AUDUBON SOCIETY**  
**P.O. BOX 1054**  
**EUREKA, CA 95502**

**President's Column**

**Students Welcome**

By Pablo Herrera

With the first month of school now completed, many students may find the time for some fun extracurricular activities. I invite our local students, of any grade level, to take advantage of all that our free RRAS events have to offer. Our frequently scheduled field trips are open to the public and offer the chance to go birding with some amazing naturalists who can help even the most novice birdwatcher gain confidence in the identification and appreciation of birds and their habitats. RRAS not only provides this opportunity every Saturday at the Arcata Marsh but we also lead trips across northwest California to some unique and wonderful places that students might otherwise miss.



Willet

© Gary Bloomfield

**Humboldt Bay Shorebird Survey**

Mark Colwell of Humboldt State University is seeking volunteers to conduct a one-day survey of shorebirds in the Humboldt Bay area. Some of you may remember the Pacific Flyway Project initiated by Point Reyes Bird Observatory and coordinated by Eric Nelson and Mark back in the early 1990s. Well, Mark is working with PRBO to repeat that effort, and he's looking for volunteers to survey the weekend of November 4 and 5 during a 2-hour interval shortly after sunrise. If you're interested, contact him at mac3@humboldt.edu or (707) 826-3723.

With our monthly programs, we also offer the chance to enjoy some first-class presenters from around the country. At these meetings, you'll get firsthand information about conservation issues, a chance to mingle with natural resource professionals, and insights into research techniques and analyses—all the while enjoying a free cup of coffee or tea and cookies. You don't have to be a member to attend, and the Redwood Transit Bus provides service from stops at 4th and U Streets and 5th and U Streets before and after our programs (just follow V/West St. about 3 blocks south to the Humboldt County Office of Education).

As a volunteer organization, RRAS also has many opportunities to take on leading roles in annual events such as our Godwit Days Café, garden tour, annual banquet, and even on the Board of Directors (we currently have one student board member). So I welcome all students to join in on some fun and fabulous opportunities with the Redwood Region Audubon Society.

**Redwood Region Audubon Society welcomes the following new members and subscribers:**

Arcata – Penny Lynn Dunn  
 Eureka – Florence Allen, Teddee Boylan, Elsie Moore, Susan Penn, Philip Perrett  
 Crescent City – Blance Balder, Phoebe Martone, James Strong  
 Smith River – Teresa-Stephen Burriss

**We look forward to seeing you on field trips and at our monthly programs.**

**RRAS Board Meeting**

The RRAS Board of Directors meets the first Thursday of the month (except during the summer months) at 7 p.m. The October meeting will be at the Northcoast Environmental Center, 575 H Street, Arcata. Chapter members are invited to attend these meetings.

**RRAS Conservation Committee Meeting September 21, 2006**

Attendees: Chet Ogan, chair. Jim Clark, Mel McKinney, Sue Leskiw, Frances Madrone, Barbara Kelly, Gil Saliba, and Mark Lovelace

Gil reported on the TAMWG meeting he attended Sept. 12-13, 2006. They passed a resolution requesting full funding (\$14.8 M) so that they can continue their program but leaving budgetary adjustments up to the director. They emphasized priority projects such as ongoing flood plain modification, completion, and implementation of the wildlife assessment program and planning and implementation of the gravel augmentation. The Lower Clear Creek restoration between Whiskeytown Reservoir and Anderson has been working well. There is a fivefold increase in the numbers in the fall Chinook run, and migratory passerines are increasing with restored riparian habitat. Nina Hemphill reported that even though there are pathogens still active in the Klamath River, incoming Chinook appear to be in good condition. Doug Schleusner, Director of the Trinity River Restoration Project, supported the funding for wildlife concerns.

Jim reported on changes at the NEC and asked if Chet would be willing to represent RRAS on conservation issues. Chet agreed.

Sue reported on the Coastal Commission tour last week. They looked at the 101 corridor between Arcata and Eureka, the proposed changes in the town of Samoa, but

not at the South Spit as scheduled because Lynda Roush wants to extend the 3-year plan one more year.

Mark Lovelace asked if RRAS could donate money to help cover the final \$45,000 needed to buy the Sunnybrae Forest. Jim responded that this item was discussed at the Del Norte Board meeting on Sept. 8 where the board agreed that we might loan part of the money needed, but would not like to donate the money. Mark also said that the Humboldt Watershed Council has some concerns about how the former Twomby Ranch in southern Humboldt is not following provisions of the Williamson Act.

Jim, Sue, and Mel expressed concerns that the City of Eureka is not following its own statutes in dealing with the homeless situation north of Fourth Street and is maintaining a public nuisance. Transients and campers are leaving human waste, needles, and garbage in many areas between Elk River and Target. Bags of garbage from a previous cleanup effort last year were not picked up and are now falling apart and are strewn all over the area. Whenever we are in the area, we should start documenting the homeless encampments and messes that we encounter. This documentation process can then be provided to the city as evidence that policies and rules are not being enforced.

Next Conservation Committee meeting will be October 19, 2006, at noon at the Golden Harvest Restaurant in Arcata.

## An Interview with Dr. Stan Harris

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### BIRD OF THE MONTH Clay-colored Sparrow

By David Fix

It's often not until the gangs of Dark-eyed Juncos and the first White-throated Sparrows show up in backyards that many people put out millet and other small-bird seed mixes. Putting out seed earlier in the season, such as in mid-September, increases your chances of hosting a rare migrant such as a Clay-colored Sparrow (*Spizella pallida*).

The Clay-colored Sparrow is, for the most part, a "birder's bird," a small, pale sparrow characteristic of the North American interior. These birds breed in brushy places, parklands, and semiopen country in western and southern Canada and in the north-central United States. They winter chiefly in Mexico. Clay-colored Sparrows are common within their range. Each year, as in many bird species, a small minority of the juveniles that are produced "spin off" as vagrants, flying in a direction contrary to the normal migration corridor for long distances. Some of these end up on the Atlantic Coast, while others get detected by sharp-eyed birders at desert oases in the Great Basin or in varied habitats in the Pacific coastal lowlands. Surely the great majority are never encountered by knowing humans.

Clay-colored Sparrows have long been known to occur in small numbers in California, with the bulk of historical reports statewide from September through November, but with many birds wintering or attempting to do so and a handful of records in late spring. We know that among many hundreds of White-crowned or Savannah Sparrows one looks at during this time of year near the coast, there will ultimately come the sudden vision of a smaller, trimmer sparrow with them: one known by its dusky ear patch, pale lores, gray sides of the neck, and unstreaked buffy breast.

The identification of the Clay-colored, Chipping (*Spizella passerina*), and Brewer's Sparrow (*Spizella breweri*) threesome is aided by a long look at the field guides. When encountering such a bird in fall, know it as a *Spizella* by its small size, small head and bill, slender tail with a notch at the tip, and a facial pattern more complex than that of a young brown White-crown. Brewer's Sparrows have thin but apparent eye rings and a thoroughly streaked crown lacking bold lateral stripes. Chipping Sparrows generally are a dingier gray-brown than Clay-colored Sparrows, and they have a thin black line running through the lores from the eye to the base of the bill whereas a Clay-colored Sparrow will have pale lores. Chippies usually have entirely dark auriculars (the cheek patch); in Clay-colored Sparrows, the cheek is often "hollow" or paler in the middle—outlined in dark above and below. Clay-colored Sparrows have a subtle but distinct contrast between the gray sides of the neck and a pale brownish upper breast. Rob Fowler once saw an August 25 "Clayke" that still had streaks of juvenile plumage on the breast, so that can happen. The color of the rump of these two species is often cited as a field mark, and it is a good one (brown in Clay-colored, gray in Chipping), but I've found this difficult to observe—except in the moment the birds fly off—because the rump is persistently covered by the wingtips as the birds forage.

In the region covered by Stan Harris's books (which I sometimes imagine as "Harrisia"), there have now been close to 200 reports of Clay-colored Sparrow, the first on November 4, 1972, in the Arcata Bottoms. Ninety percent have been in the period from September 1 through December 31. Harris (2005) has described the habitat as "edge cover along fence rows, patches of willows, riparian strips, or at urban feeders." As October and November roll along, take a second look at any small pale sparrow, and you may find a treat.

*Interviewer's Note:* Although I never took a wildlife course at Humboldt State University, I too am indebted to HSU professor emeritus Dr. Stan Harris. In March 1992, I wrote my first column for the *Sandpiper*. The occasion was Doc's impending 400th Humboldt County bird. For this, my 100th column for the *Sandpiper*, I liked the idea of symmetry, of bringing things full circle by sitting down with Doc to find out what he's been up to since his retirement in 1992.

**TL:** The story of how Roger Tory Peterson became interested in birds—touching a Yellow-shafted Flicker, believing it to be dead, then being startled as it burst into flight—is fairly well known. What got you interested in birds? Can you point to a singular moment, or did it happen gradually—the accretion of several experiences?

**SH:** Gradually, I guess, stemming from a long-term interest in nature on the Montana prairies in the 1930s as a child. Not having any guidance, binoculars, or even being aware of field guides, etc., but being fascinated by crane migrations and fantasizing about their travels and wondering what it would be like to go along, or watching young burrowing owls in ground squirrel holes, or being impressed by the territorial defense of Eastern Kingbirds and the flashiness of Lark Buntings ("white-winged blackbirds" to me) flushing from the dirt roadsides of the prairies, or receiving a shotgun for my 13th birthday and bagging 9 Green-winged Teal, 1 Blue-winged Teal, and 5 Ring-necked Pheasants during my first fall of hunting, or finally in 1948, when a junior in college, taking my first ornithology course, being introduced to binoculars, the original edition of Peterson's western field guide, and seeing my first Lazuli Bunting. These and more recollections are mentioned briefly in the third edition of *Northwestern California Birds*.

**TL:** You are known as an enthusiastic world traveler. Since your retirement, where have you visited? Is there a location and/or bird that stands out as the most memorable?

**SH:** Well, I've always felt that one should live for the moment, so the most-memorable places, birds, or events are the ones immediately at hand at any instant. I can find joy and wonder every time I see any crane, rhea, booby, mallard, fox, otter, albatross, shortwing, condor, etc., no matter what it is or where it is or where I am. I never fail to be amazed at how critters fit into their particular environment and how specific patches of the environment—niches, if you like—seem to "fit" the critters that you find there. Even the seemingly most-exotic critters seem to fit in when you study them in their particular niche, and they then suddenly become no longer "exotic."



Sandhill Cranes

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Some of the places I have visited since 1992, mostly for birds but also to soak up the environments there and sometimes on invitation to participate in conservation activities, include Texas (twice), Washington (twice), Minnesota, Wisconsin, New York, North Dakota, Alaska, Churchill in Manitoba (mostly to experience polar bears), Antarctica, South Georgia, Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Midway Island, India, and the islands of Java, Borneo, Bali, Lombok, Sumbawa, Rinca, and Komodo.

Also since retiring in 1992, among other things, I helped my son build his self-designed home (we did 85 percent of the work ourselves), converted our garage into living space, helped my daughter remodel her house in Texas, participated in many pelagic and land field trips for HSU classes, helped my wife design and build museum displays at HSU, joined my wife as primary care giver for her mom's last three years, kept a nearly daily check of birds at the Arcata Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary, revised *Northwestern California Birds* twice, and continue to maintain the north coast bird database available to anyone.

**TL:** Is there a location a bit further afield than the Arcata Marsh that you also consider your "beat," returning there time and again to experience the birds or ambience of the place?



Dr. Stan Harris

© Bruce Garlinger

**SH:** Not really. I would like to return to several locations visited in the past, but these are not really accessible on a regular basis. Some places that come to mind are southeast Arizona (particularly Cave Creek Canyon), Australia, Galapagos Islands, Midway Island, any wild part of Africa south of the Sahara, etc. In this vein, I have discovered that if you have warm, fuzzy feelings of nostalgia about a place, it is probably not a good idea to revisit it because human encroachment will have changed it for the worse. Besides, there are always new places yet unvisited, and time is growing short. Some of the unvisited places high on my wannabe list are Madagascar, the Panatol, and New Guinea.

**TL:** Imagine for a moment that you are a new wildlife graduate student in search of a thesis topic. Are there some neglected areas of research or emerging issues that you'd feel compelled to explore?

**SH:** I cannot answer this question from the perspective of a new, unincubated graduate student as you asked because few new graduate students have enough experience or wisdom to even know what areas of research are neglected or emerging. But here are some thoughts about projects from an old fogey who would like to see some graduate students tackle.

First, let me point out that it may come as a surprise to most readers that I consider myself primarily a wetland ecologist and secondarily an ornithologist. I actually have more botany credits on my college transcripts than wildlife credits. My Ph.D. dissertation was a study of the interactions of marshes and their environmental parameters under a program of deliberate water-level

## An Interview with Dr. Stan Harris (cont.)

fluctuations. I created and taught the wetland ecology and management class at HSU from 1967 to 1992, worked on Black Brant nesting areas in Alaska in 1962 and 1963 (where my primary assignment was to analyze and describe the specific habitat niches used by brant for nesting), and I have been asked to consult on wetland matters here and there. Also, my interest in research has always been to support or engage in projects that have an immediate application for land managers.

I am not particularly interested in projects that have no direct management goal. In conservation today, we are constantly pressured to “restore” this or that habitat patch back to some mythical condition of the past under the often-mistaken view that the habitat would serve our modern needs better if it could be returned to its “original” (whatever that is) condition. Such efforts are almost always doomed to fail because, one, we often have not thought through our priorities about how best a particular habitat patch could be used to meet modern human needs and goals; two, we don’t have enough detailed knowledge about what exactly the original conditions were like to set realistic goals; and, three, we don’t have the working knowledge, techniques, or resources available to actually set the environmental clock back, even if we knew what to do.

So rather than promote the impossibility implied in the word “restoration,” we should be thinking in terms of “creating” environments that would best fill some specific, well-defined, modern, achievable goal. In view of the current efforts at so-called salt marsh restoration at Humboldt Bay, it is obvious to me that before we embark on such efforts—all of which have failed miserably in the past—we desperately need to define specific goals for doing so and to seek out or do the research necessary to gain basic information on the ecology of our salt marshes and their value to wildlife (and I define wildlife in the broadest possible sense), none of which we have available at present. Our local salt marshes are so different from those elsewhere in the nation that we cannot really apply research findings from other areas to local conditions.

A few (only) of the needed potential thesis topics that come to mind are: (1) Are local salt marshes net importers or exporters of nutrients to surrounding environments? If so, by how much? (2) Are local salt marshes net importers or exporters of detritus and organic sediments to adjacent environments (mudflats, the bay water column, etc.) If so, by how much? (3) What long-term successional changes are taking place in our salt marshes? (4) What, if any, is the actual wildlife use of a representative salt marsh here at Humboldt Bay? How, if, and when do wildlife actually use these marshes? (5) What are the impacts of the nutrients contained in Arcata’s sewage outfall on the biota and shorebird numbers (and other bird or fish use) of the downstream waters and mudflats in the outfall and Butcher Slough estuary? I predict that it would be shown to be a positive for shorebirds. How far downstream from the outfall can any impacts be detected? (6) Does the exotic densely flowered cordgrass in our salt marshes have any value as wildlife habitat, a contributor of nutrients and detritus, or some other unrecognized ecological value? If not, is control of it even remotely possible, or must we learn to live with it? I could go on and on, but you get the idea. There are endless thesis topics just in the salt marsh aspects of our local ecology.

**TL:** In 1992, I contacted your daughter, Tonna Harris-Haller, for her prediction on your 400th Humboldt County Bird. She opined, “Some peep from the Aleutians.” What was your 400th? Is there a special memory attached to the circumstances of its discovery or of your seeing the bird?

**SH:** I didn’t really know. I had to look it up and am still not sure I have the right answer. Keeping lists was once described to me as “playing ornithological golf,” but one of the joys of birding is that one can be as casual or as intense about it as one wants to be and everyone, casual

or fanatic, is generally accepted by others as an OK person. About my mythical 400th Humboldt County bird: Using the 1992 date cited in your question as a starting point, I consulted my notebooks and identified 3 species new to my county list that year: a King Eider found at King Salmon by Brooks Allen and seen by me on 7 Jan 1992, and a Little Stint found at Pound Road by John Sterling and seen by me on 16 Sep, but my notes do not say which county number either of these were for me. On 16 October, I viewed a Vermillion Flycatcher on the North Spit found the day before by R. J. Adams, and my notebook entry carries the notation that this was “the third new species for the Northcoast list this fall, my 401st “Humboldt County bird.”

So I guess Tonna was right when she predicted “some peep from the Aleutians” because it appears that, at least at the time, the Little Stint was my 400th. But of course, every time the great white fathers of the AOU checklist committee come out with another split, lump, or some other edict, everything changes as we gain or lose “administrative” lifers, so using the present AOU list, the King Eider, or even some bird previous to that would be the current number 400! Ah, the trials and futility of keeping score! Bah. No moment or memory attached to these [is] anymore special than [with] any other bird. Live for the moment. Every new bird is as special as every other one for me.

**TL:** I’m impressed by your work ethic and the speed with which you completed the 2005 edition of *Northwestern California Birds*. What kind of writing projects are you currently working on?

**SH:** I am currently up to my neck in a remodel of our kitchen, which does not involve any substantial writing except to write checks to pay the bills!

**TL:** There are now eleven members of the Humboldt 400 Club, you being the first. I know you count five species of introduced birds. What’s your current Humboldt list at? Any prediction for the next addition to the list?

**SH:** I had to look this one up, too. Under the current AOU checklist, I think it is 434. No, I have no idea what my next county bird might be. I have tried this silly game of prediction in the past and have never even been close to the mark. So I will just wait for that moment and enjoy it when it comes.

**TL:** Looking back, what in your career stands out as a source of pride for you?

**SH:** Marrying the perfect girl for me; raising 2 children that we both are proud of; helping thousands of students find their way to satisfying careers; serving as a member of a 3-person “Citizen’s Committee Regarding the Development of Gunther Island” organized by Rose Stebbens, which resulted in moving the Samoa-to-Eureka bridge 800 feet from its intended path and saving the Gunther Island heronry; serving for 4 years on a 5-member advisory committee on the California Condor to the Department of Fish and Game and Fish and Game Commission that helped steer the condor recovery effort down the path of captive breeding, an action that has to date kept the gene pool of this species from becoming extinct; serving as a member of the 5-person task force that helped design and promote the Arcata Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary; leaving a legacy at HSU of specimens and display mounts in the Wildlife Building; creating 3 scholarships at HSU for wildlife students; and continuing to maintain the database on bird occurrence for northwestern California that was the basis for my book *Northwestern California Birds* and will hopefully be a useful historical reference for future ornithologists in the region.

Tom Leskiw

# Field Notes

22 August - 20 September, 2006

The fall migration "silly season" is well underway. A period of "typical" early fall north coast weather means overcast, foggy, cool mornings, clearing with NW winds in the afternoon on the coast, hot inland, with only one feeble shower period. A pelagic trip to 20 miles W of Eel River early in September for the HSU Ornithology Class was hampered by fog and calm seas and recorded only the usual suspects. Perhaps the most outstanding observation was 50+ (my estimate) to 150+ (GL's estimate) Harbor Porpoises seen just outside Humboldt Bay, the most either of us had ever seen on one trip. Abbreviations used: **AB** = Arcata Bottoms; **AMP** = Arcata Marsh Project; **AOP** = Arcata Oxidation Ponds; **BSE** = Butcher Slough Estuary; **CRI** = Cock Robin Island; **HSUPT** = Humboldt State University pelagic trip, 9 Sep (fide GL, SH, LG, et al.); **ID** = insufficient details; **KS** = King Salmon; **MER** = mouth of Elk River; **MJC** = mouth of Jacoby Creek; **MLR** = mouth of Little River; **mo** = many observers; **MRC** = mouth of Redwood Creek; **MRCP** = Mad River County Park; **MRE** = Mad River Estuary; **MRFH** = Mad River Fish Hatchery; **MWC** = mouth of Willow Creek; **NC** = not confirmed; **NB** = North Humboldt Bay; **ND** = no details; **SRB** = Smith River Bottoms.

## Critters - Rails

**Critter highlights:** **White-sided Dolphins:** 2, HSUPT. **White-fronted Goose:** 25, Eureka Channel, 26 Aug (BA). **Blue-winged Teal:** 1 female, Allen Marsh, 5 Sep (SH); 1 male, Eureka Sewage Pond, 11 Sep (TL). **Ducks:** Substantial numbers of fall arrivals were recorded at AMP/AOP and elsewhere by: 4 Sep (**American Wigeon**, 30 [up to 70 by 12 Sep and 300 by 19 Sep]; **Gadwall:** 12 [up to 40 by 12 Sep], both SH); 29 Aug (**Showeler**, 190; **Cinnamon Teal**, 67, both SH), 28 Aug (**Green-winged Teal**, 22 [up to 200 by 4 Sep, SH], AL). **Redhead:** 1, AOP, 3-4 Sep (SH, AC, AL). **Harlequin:** up to 8, Virgin Creek Beach, 1-22 Aug (DT). **Long-tailed Duck:** 1 male (holdover), 10-Mile River, 1-22 Aug (DT). **Hooded Merganser:** 3, MRC, 20 Sep (KI). **Red-breasted Merganser:** The female summering over at Klopp Lake was last reported 8 Sep (SH). **Sooty Grouse:** 2, Mail Ridge, 10 Sep (JGa). **Wild Turkey:** 1 female with 10-12 young at Hwy 299 x Brown Creek, near Weaverville, 20 Aug (MK). **Red-throated Loon:** 1 (reported as juvenile), Trinidad, 30 Aug (MeH). **Black-footed Albatross:** Perhaps up to 15-20 all day (no more than 5 at any single bait station), HSUPT. **Northern Fulmar:** 25-30, HSUPT. **Pink-footed Shearwater:** 35-40, HSUPT. **Sooty Shearwater:** 75-100, HSUPT. **Buller's Shearwater:** 7 (only), HSUPT. **Ashy Storm-Petrel:** 25-30, HSUPT. **Brown Pelican:** Massive numbers in and near Humboldt Bay, mostly immatures, continued throughout the period with 750 in NB, 19 Sep (AL). **American Bittern:** 1, AOP, 3 Sep (AL); 1, Loleta pond, 3 Sep (SMcA). **Little Blue Heron:** 1, adult plumage (first one ever in this plumage for the north coast), Smith River, 27 Aug through at least 15 Sep (DCo, AB, JGt, et al.). **Green Heron:** 1, MRC, 9 Sep (AL); 1, BSLP, 11, 13 Sep (SH, MA). **White-tailed Kite:** 2 on Mail Ridge were at a seldom-reported location, 10 Sep (JGa). **Bald Eagle:** 1 adult, MWC, 23 Aug (TL). **Cooper's Hawk:** 1, Waterdog Lake, 31 Aug (TL). **Merlin:** Singles reported at Lake Earl and MRC, 9 Sep (AL), and Mail Ridge, 10 Sep (JGa) included 2 reported as "very dark." **Peregrine:** Juvenile chasing an adult, Trinidad Head, early-late Jul (MeH); plus singles reported at AMP/AOP and AB, 3, 19 Sep (BA, SC, AL). **Virginia Rail:** The usual summer daily number of detections of 1-2 increased suddenly to >10-12 at AMP/AOP, 28 Aug, 5 Sep (AL, SH). **Sora:** After a lean summer, singles began to be heard/seen at Pound Road, AOP, AMP, 4, 5, 12, 13, 14 Sep (TL, AL, SH). **Coot:** Numbers at AOP increased from 10 on 8 Sep to 125 on 13 Sep (SH).



Red-necked Phalarope

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## Charadriiformes

**Pacific Golden Plover:** 2 adult Virgin Creek Beach, 12-20 Aug (DT); 1 molting adult, W end Samoa Bridge, 6 Sep (SMcA). **Snowy Plover:** 2, CRI, 30 Aug (SC). **Semipalmated Plover:** 40, MJC, 25 Aug (DF); 30, CRI, 30 Aug (SC). **Black-necked Stilt:** 1, V St. Loop and Klopp Lake, 21-26 Aug (AL, DCo, GZ, EE). **Avocet:** New migrants included 1, MRCP, 1 Sep (AL); 5, Teal Point, Lake Earl, 4 Sep (AB, JGt), 2, Eel River Bottoms, 9

Sep (SMcA), and gradually increasing numbers at BSE from 3 (3 Sep, AL) to 27 (18 Sep, SH). **Lesser Yellowlegs:** 1, MRE, 30 Aug (AL); 3, W flat at foot of I St., Arcata, 19 Sep (SH). **Bar-tailed Godwit:** 1 juvenile reported at Virgin Creek Beach with a **Marbled Godwit**, 6-16 Aug, good description, photo said to exist (MaMa, DT, et al.). **Ruddy Turnstone:** 3 reports of 1-2 at CRI, MJC, Klopp Lake, 19-29 Aug (AL, DF, SC). **Red Knot:** 1, Eureka Channel, 26 Aug (BA); 5, MJC, 28 Aug (DF); 6, CRI, 29 Aug (SC). **Baird's Sandpiper:** 15 reports of 1-12 from AMP, MRCP, CRI, V St. Loop, 10-Mile Beach, Lake Tolowa, Teal Point, 13 Aug-10 Sep (mo). **Pectoral Sandpiper:** 9 reports of 1-5 from Indian Beach, CRI, MRCP, Loleta Pond, MLR, Lake Tolowa, 22 Aug-19 Sep (mo). **Stilt Sandpiper:** 1, V St. Loop, 3 Sep (SC); 1 juvenile, Lake Tolowa, 8 Sep (Lucas); 1, Gobel Lane, 9 Sep (SMcA). **Buff-breasted Sandpiper:** 1, Big Lagoon spit, 30 Aug (AI, MF); 2 juveniles, W side of Lake Tolowa, 4 Sep (AB, JGt). **Ruff:** 1 juvie, MRCP, 28 Aug-5 Sep (RF, DCo, SFB, AL, KR); 1, Teal Point, 4 Sep (AB, JGt); 1, Loleta Pond, 3, 9 Sep (SMcA). **Red-necked Phalarope:** Many onshore reports included up to 300-600 at AOP, 19 Aug-4 Sep, down to 100 by 19 Sep (mo), but only 40-50 at sea, HSUPT. **Red Phalarope:** 1, MRCP, 3 Sep (DCo, AW); 1, AOP, 3, 5 Sep (AL, SH, AC); 3 (only) at sea, HSUPT. **South Polar Skua (NC, ID):** 1 reported without details or confirmation at Humboldt Bay Jetty Channel, a startling location, 16 Sep (ABr, KR). **Pomarine Jaeger:** 2, KS, 6 Sep (MW); 1, HSUPT. **Parasitic Jaeger:** 5 reports of 1-5 from NJ, CRI, KS, HSUPT, 23 Aug-9 Sep (DF, SC, MW, SH, GL, et al.). **Long-tailed Jaeger:** 1, HSUPT. **Sabine's Gull:** 2, HSUPT. **Elegant Tern:** 150, Eureka Channel, HSUPT. **Common Tern:** 2 immatures, MJC, 8 Sep (DF). **Forster's Tern:** 4 flyby, 10-Mile Beach, 22 Aug (DT); 4, AOP, 3 Sep (AL); 1, Klopp Lake, 8 Sep (SH). **Black Tern:** 1 very actively foraging, AOP, 2-4 Sep (JK, et al.). **Marbled Murrelet:** 67 off Luffenholtz Beach, 4 Sep (SC); 22, between Scotty Point and Elk Head, 10 Sep (MiM). **Cassin's Auklet:** 4 (only), HSUPT. **Rhinoceros Auklet:** 1, KS, 29 Aug (SC); 10-20, HSUPT.

## Doves - Pipits

**Eurasian Collared Dove:** 4 reports of "several" to 8, Smith River, 29 Aug-15 Sep (AB, EC, SL, JGt, OA). **Yellow-shafted Flicker:** 1, Trinidad, 11 Aug (MeH); "hybrid" flickers (ND) said to have fledged near Trinidad this summer (MeH). **Olive-sided Flycatcher:** 1, Shay Park, 27 Aug (SC); x, Grogan Hole, 14 Sep (TL). **Western Wood-Pewee:** Singles at Mad River x Hwy 299, Bayshore Mall, Mad River Road, 13 Aug-10 Sep (SH, RF, TL, SC). **Willow Flycatcher:** 11 reports of 1-3 from Arcata, MWC, Orleans, Hawkins Bar, MRCP, MRFH, Orick Dump, 23 Aug-20 Sep (mo). **Hammond's Flycatcher (how ID'd?):** MRCP, 28 Aug (RF). **Pacific-slope Flycatcher:** 1, AMP, 28 Aug (AL); 1 (type), Shay Park, 6 Sep (DF). **Say's Phoebe:** 1, Kneeland, 6 Sep (BB, DVZ). **Ash-throated Flycatcher:** 1, AMP, 3-19 Sep (DCo, EE, SC, JW, SH, AL). **Western Kingbird:** 1, Shelter Cove, 2 Sep (BA). **Eastern Kingbird:** 2 together, Shelter Cove, 2-4 Sep (BA [photos], LS). **Cassin's Vireo:** Singing singles at Lake Cleone, Shay Park, Bayshore Mall, Orleans, 22 Aug-7 Sep (DF, DT, TL). **Blue-headed Vireo:** 1 singing (ND, NC), MRCP, 9 Sep (DC, AW); 1 (ND, NC), Redwood National Park Visitor Center, 11 Sep (KI). **Hutton's Vireo:** 1, Shay Park, 6 Sep (DF). **Warbling Vireo:** ~20, Shay Park, 6 Sep (DF). **Philadelphia Vireo:** 1 Mad River Road, 5, 10 Sep (KI, DCo, SC); 1 (ND, NC), Redwood Natl. Park Visitor Center, 8 Sep (KI). **Red-eyed Vireo (ND, NC):** 1, Orick dump, 6-8 Sep; 1, Crannell, 10 Sep, 1, MRCP, 19 Sep (all KI). **Gray Jay:** 1 pair reported to have fledged 7 young at Trinidad in Jul/Aug (MeH); 3, Sunny Brae, 11, 13 Sep (MiMo). **Clark's Nutcracker:** 1 heard on ridgetop above East Boulder Lake, Scott Mountains ("I hear/see them every time I hike up there in late summer/fall"), 12 Sep (DK). **Ruby-crowned Kinglet:** 1, Kneeland, 31 Aug (BB, DVZ); 1, Blue Lake riparian, 12 Sep (PL, fide GL). **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher:** 1, Redwood Natl. Park HQ, 8 Sep (KI). **American Pipit:** New arrivals, "several locations," Eel River Bottoms, 9 Sep (SMcA).

## Warblers

**Nashville Warbler:** Migrants at Capetown, 22 Aug (DF), and Arcata, 23 Aug (RF). **Northern Parula:** 1, Orick dump, 13, 15 Sep (KI, AL). **Yellow Warbler:** The usual September wave of migrants is passing through the coastal riparian cover as this is written, with flocks of up to 10+ seen in a single location many days, 27 Aug-19 Sep (mo). **Chestnut-sided Warbler:** 1, Russ Park, 30 Aug (Lisa, fide KM); 1, Fairhaven, 12-13 Sep (KI, SC); 1, Arcata, 15 Sep (GB). **Magnolia Warbler:** 1, MER, 6-7 Sep (TL, BA). **Cape May Warbler (NC, ND):** 1, Ender's Beach, 18 Sep (OA). **Myrtle Warbler:** 4, AMP, 19 Sep (SH, MA). **Audubon's Warbler:** 1, Bayshore Mall, 6 Sep (TL). **Black-throated Gray Warbler:** 1-2 migrants at Arcata, MRCP, Bayshore Mall, HBNWR, 23 Aug-11 Sep (mo). **Townsend's**

by Stan Harris

**Warbler:** 6 reports of 1-2 from MRCP, Arcata, Eureka, 28 Aug-15 Sep (mo). **Hermit Warbler:** 1 Shay Park, 6, 12 Sep (DF, AL); x, Bayshore Mall, 6 Sep (TL). **Bay-breasted Warbler (ND, NC):** 1, Orick dump, 6 Sep (KI). **Blackpoll Warbler:** 1, Shay Park, 12 Sep (BA); 1, Orick dump, 20 Sep (KI). **American Redstart:** 1 female, Trinidad, 24 Aug (anon, from Marsh Interpretive Center board); 1 male, MRCP, 29 Aug (AL, RF, DCo); 1 female, MRCP, 3 Sep (DCo, AW); 1, Orick dump, 8 Sep (KI); 1, HBNWR, 9 Sep (SMcA). **Northern Waterthrush:** 1 AOP, 3 Sep (SH, AC); 1, Shay Park, 11-12 Sep (BA); 1, Fairhaven, 12 Sep (SMcA, AL).



Connecticut Warbler

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**Connecticut Warbler (A Gee Whiz Bird):** 1, Shay Park, 15-16 Sep (KR, DCo, et al. [photo by SMcA]). **MacGillivray's Warbler:** Single migrants at MRFH, MRCP, Vigo St. Marsh, 22 Aug-5 Sep (AL, SC, TL). **Common Yellowthroat:** The usual September migratory wave, AMP, AOP, MWC, Orleans, Bayshore Mall, 23 Aug-19 Sep (mo). **Wilson's Warbler:** Usual migrants with up to 15 in coastal riparian cover, 27 Aug-15 Sep (SC, DF, TL, GB). **Yellow-breasted Chat:** 1, Arcata, 22 Aug (RF); 2, MRFH, 22 Aug (AL); 1, MWC, 7 Sep (TL).

## Sparrows - Finches

**Green-tailed Towhee:** x, Waterdog Lakes, 31 Aug (TL). **California Towhee:** 2, Dunn Creek, Del Norte Co., 12 Sep (OA, fide AB). **Brewer's Sparrow:** 1, Klopp Lake Dike, 4-6 Sep (SH, et al. [photo by KR]). **Lark Sparrow:** 1, AB, 1 Sep (AL). **Lark Bunting:** 1, V St. Loop, 3-9 Sep (SC et al. [photos]). **Savannah Sparrow:** Sudden increase from 0-1 to 10+ at MJC, 25 Aug (DF). **Sooty Fox Sparrow:** Newly arrived, 2, Fairhaven, 10 Sep (BA); x, AMP, 17 Sep (MA). **Lincoln's Sparrow:** 1, AMP, 3, 19 Sep (SH); 1, Grogan Hole, 4 Sep (TL). **White-crowned Sparrow:** 4-5, AMP, 18-19 Sep (SH). **Golden-crowned Sparrow:** 1, Azalea Hill, 13 Sep (GL); 1, Grogan Hole, 14 Sep; 2, AMP, 18 Sep (SH). **Lapland Longspur (ND, NC):** 1, Lake Tolowa, 4 Sep (Lucas). **Rose-breasted Grosbeak:** 1, MRCP, 10 Sep (BA). **Dickcissel:** 1, Crannell Road, 10 Sep (KI). **Bobolink:** 1, Teal Point, Lake Earl, 13 Sep (OA). **Red-winged Blackbird:** The usual fall foraging flocks of 300-500 have been present on AMP/AOP salt marshes throughout the period (SH). **Yellow-headed Blackbird:** 3, Alexandre Dairy, 11 Sep (OA). **Red Crossbill:** 22, Trinidad (15 were juveniles), 29 Aug (MeH); 4, Cummings Road, Eureka, 29 Aug (TL).

## Contributors

Many thanks to the following who shared reports with us this month. Please accept my apologies for not having space to include all of the interesting reports turned in. Brian Acord, Marge Adams, Onik Arian, Stephen F. Bailey, Art Barab, Alan Barron, Gary & Jane Bloomfield, Adam Brown, Heather Brown, Barbara Burek, Scott Carey, Daryl Coldren, Eileen Cooper, Dick Cromberg, Alexandra Curry, Elias Elias, David Fix, Michele Forage, Rob Fowler, John Gaffin, Joe Gartland, Luke George, Melody Hamilton, Stan Harris, Ken Irwin, Jhermie Kellermann, Dale & Marge Kuhn, Alexandra Lamb, Tom Leskiw, Gary Lester, Lisa, Sky Lloyd, Paul Lohse, Lucas, Matthew Matthiessen, Sean McAllister, Kathy Michaels, Michael Morris, Mark Morrissette, Mildred Mossman, Kerry Ross, Larry Silva, Dorothy Tobkin, Amber Transou, Dan Van Zile, Matt Wachs, Adam Waehel, Jim Welsh, Gretchen Ziegler. Please call future reports to the Arcata Bird Box (707) 822-5666, to me at (707) 822-3802, send them to me at 1595 Charles Ct., Arcata, 95521, or write them on the observation board at the Arcata Marsh Interpretive Center.

**Help! Because of family commitments, I will be unable to participate in any local Christmas Count this year and am looking for some volunteer to coordinate and compile the Centerville Count this one year: please call me soon at 822-3802 if interested. The count date is 31 December.**