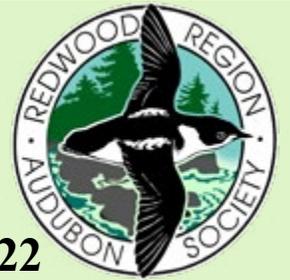


The Sandpiper

November 2022



Redwood Region Audubon Society

www.rras.org

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• Upcoming Christmas Bird Count • Nordic Aqua Farms

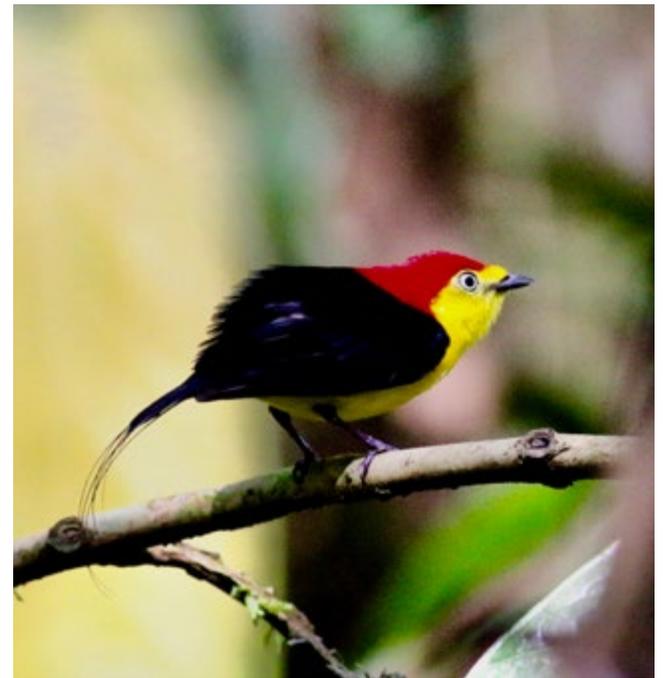
Please join Redwood Region Audubon Society on Wednesday, November 16th at 7:30 p.m. for both a live and digitally streamed program on:

Chasing Birds in the Amazon and the Alpine: Stories from a Field Biologist

Dr. Ben Vernasco will share stories from his research in two contrasting habitats, the Ecuadorian Amazon and the Willowa Mountains of Northeastern Oregon. He will begin with an overview of the Neotropical manakins, a family of birds known for their acrobatic courtship displays, and then share his work focused on the causes and consequences of individual differences in the complex social behavior of male Wire-tailed Manakins. Shifting back to North America, he will give an overview of North America's rosy-finches and share his work focused on the natural history and ecology of the Willowa Rosy-finch, a subspecies of the Gray-crowned Rosy-finch that breeds exclusively in the Willowa Mountains. Through this work, Ben will exemplify the value of combining intensive field biology with complex laboratory analyses for greatly advancing our understanding of the complex social lives of individual animals and poorly understood species threatened by global change.

Ben is originally from the North Bay Area and Sacramento. He received his undergraduate degree from the Wildlife Department at Cal Poly Humboldt in 2013, where he discovered his passion for birds through field trips with the RRAS and while volunteering at Humboldt Bay Bird Observatory. After a year of seasonal field jobs, Ben joined the Biology Department at Virginia Tech as a PhD student and the Interfaces of Global Change Interdisciplinary Graduate Education Program as a Fellow. Since Virginia Tech, he has gone on to join the School of Biological Sciences at Washington State University Pullman as a Postdoctoral Researcher in the lab of Dr. Heather Watts.

The live program will be held at the Six Rivers Masonic Lodge, 251 Bayside Road, Arcata. It will be simultaneously zoomed – please go to RRAS.org for the Zoom link. Hot drinks and goodies will be served at 7 p.m. so bring a mug to enjoy shade-grown coffee. Please come fragrance-free.



Above: A male Wire-tailed Manakin ready to display! Photo by Ben Vernasco.

FIELD TRIPS IN NOVEMBER!

Sat. November 5th – 8:30-11am. Birding at Arcata Marsh, led by Ken Burton. Bring binoculars and a scope if you have one and meet at the south end of I Street (Klopp Lake). Reservations not required.

Sat. November 12th – 8:30-11am. Birding at Arcata Marsh, led by Kathryn Wendel.

Sun. November 13th – 9-11am. Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge with leader Ralph Bucher. Meet at the Visitor Center.

Sat. November 19th – 8:30-11am. Birding at Arcata Marsh, led by Carol Wilson.

Sun. November 20th – 9-11am. Ralph Bucher will lead a walk on the Eureka Waterfront. This trail is paved and is wheelchair accessible.

Sat. November 26th – 8:30-11am. Birding at Arcata Marsh, led by Michael Morris.

Sat. November 26th – 9-11am. Wigi Wetlands Volunteer Workday. Help create bird-friendly native habitat and restore a section of the bay trail behind the Bayshore Mall. We provide tools and snacks. Bring your own water and gloves. Contact Jeremy at jeremy.cashen@yahoo.com or (214) 605-7368 for more information.

Sun. November 20th – 9-11:30am. Please join trip leader, Jude Power for the monthly **Women and Girls' Birding Walk** through the peaceful environs of the "V Street Loop" in Arcata. This loop of road, officially named "Old Samoa Road," is an open pasture area with a recently created part salt, part freshwater marsh complex. Different distinct habitats hold different types of birds; sparrows in the berry brambles lining the road, raptors such as Red-tailed Hawk and American Kestrel in the sky, shore birds and waterfowl in wet depressions, and maybe a surprise or two! It will be a relaxed ramble in a lovely, and birdy, spot. Meet at the large pullouts on V Street, just south of Samoa Blvd. Bring your binoculars and we'll see which bird species we can find!

*Contact Ralph at thebook@reninet.com for any walks he leads and all Arcata Marsh walks. *Contact Field Trip Chair, Janelle Chojnacki at janelle.choj@gmail.com for more information on all other walks, unless otherwise specified.

*See our website for Covid protocols.

Godwits Days to Return In-Person in 2023!

Godwits Days Bird Festival is pleased to announce a return to our traditional in-person venue next year on April 13-16, 2023 at the Arcata Community Center. Please check our website godwitdays.org for more details. We look forward to seeing you there!



Godwit Days logos by Gary Bloomfield.



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President's Column

By Gail Kenny

There are many reasons I am active with Redwood Region Audubon Society but one of the more pressing reasons is that birds and other wildlife can't lobby to protect the natural habitat they depend on for their survival. Advocacy is especially important when it comes to property development which affects native habitat. I might not make much impact nationally or internationally, but I can have a big impact locally.

Our Conservation Committee and Board have been reviewing and commenting on the environmental provisions for the Nordic Aquafarms Atlantic Salmon development next to Humboldt Bay. We appealed the Humboldt County Planning Commission's certification of Nordic Aquafarms' final environmental impact report (FEIR) based on non-compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act, but our appeal was denied by the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors.

One of the things we are worried about is that Nordic Aquafarms' plan to withdraw 10 million gallons of seawater a day from Humboldt Bay via an intake structure which has no permit yet. Detailed environmental impact analysis consists primarily of an Endangered Species Act compliance study for Longfin Smelt that has not been completed. Environmental impact isn't limited to endangered species. A detailed biological assessment is required to determine if there is a significant environmental impact to the bay estuary on which over 500,000 migratory shorebirds depend for their seasonal migration. There are many organisms that birds and other life-forms feed on in Humboldt Bay. We are concerned about potential detrimental effects to the volume of small life forms that could be killed in the intake valve. Having an intake from the ocean, instead of inside the bay, would likely have less of an impact on those food sources.

We are also concerned about how much fish feed would be harvested from wild fish populations – much of which is needed by larger fish and marine mammals. We object to overfishing bait fish to feed farmed fish. We also want to make sure local endangered salmon species are protected from diseases that farmed salmon might have, and the project's planned monitoring of fish diseases is not broad enough to ensure that protection. We will be taking future opportunities to advocate for wildlife as this project progresses through the permitting steps.

If you'd like to become more active with RRAS, we are looking for Field Trip committee members, and a Treasurer. Please email me at gailkenny@gmail.com for more information about these volunteer roles!

A Walk at the Marsh

By Kathryn Wendel

Our Arcata Marsh walk started off cool and foggy, but that didn't tamp down the bird numbers! A small group of bird enthusiasts joined me on this trip where we saw 38 species of birds along the Klopp Lake/Interpretive Center loop – quite good for midsummer when most of the waterfowl are still gone.

The walk began on an incoming high tide, and from the parking lot we easily picked up Marbled Godwits on the bay, where hundreds were busily probing the remaining exposed mudflats with their distinct orange and black bills. A few flocks of peeps – mostly Western Sandpipers with a few Least mixed in – were feeding along the edge of the tide as well. As we walked along the levee path between Klopp Lake and Humboldt Bay, the group was thrilled to see several Greater Yellowlegs through the spotting scopes. Greater Yellowlegs are striking shorebirds with a gray, white, and black mottled plumage that contrasts nicely with their long, yellow legs. They are also quite noisy, and a few people had the opportunity to learn their flute-y three-note call for the first time. Greater Yellowlegs can be visually confused with Lesser Yellowlegs, and so for beginners, one easy way to tell the two species apart is by their call. As we rounded the southeast bend at Klopp Lake, we watched a single red-headed American Avocet swiping its unique up-curved bill back and forth in the channel before the tide made the water too deep.

Leaving Klopp Lake and heading east along the main slough, the group was treated to a family of Bullock's Orioles flying back and forth amongst the

pinus and willows. The bright orange male showed off for a moment, affording the group a great opportunity for photos and good views through binoculars. Cedar Waxwings were also numerous here, and we were treated to a Belted Kingfisher fly-by. Another highlight before leaving this spot, was spotting a Peregrine Falcon perched on a power tower. Always great to admire this bird through a spotting scope.

As we reached the native plant garden near the Interpretive Center, we picked up Black-capped Chickadees, which although common at the marsh, was a Life Bird for one out-of-town person in the group. Heading back, bright yellow American Goldfinches seemed to be everywhere, and we were lucky to see a goldfinch perched next to a Common Yellowthroat – another small bright yellow bird present during the summer, but in a completely different family than the visually similar goldfinches. Common Yellowthroats are warblers, so as a beginner, whenever you see a small yellow bird, check the bill to see if it's thin like a needle (warbler) or thick like a cone (finch). As you practice birding, you'll notice other differences such as feeding behavior, types of calls, or whether the birds are usually seen alone or in flocks. This can be applied across all bird groups, from shorebirds to sparrows. It's a great discussion not only to begin the walk with, but end with as well.

The Redwood Audubon Society hosts a guided bird walk at the Arcata Marsh every Saturday at 8:30 a.m. We hope to see you there!

Above: Belted Kingfisher by Evie Dowd, Grades 8-9: Northern United Charter, from this year's RRAS and FOAM -sponsored Children's Bird Art Competition.



KID'S CORNER
Wowza Wildlife!
By Leslie Scopes Anderson

BAD HAIR DAY!!

WHERE IN THE WORLD?
Snowy Egrets live along the coast in our area, and forage on mudflats, wetlands and sometimes agricultural fields. They nest in colonies in high trees.

FUN FACTS:
A Snowy Egret has a black beak, black legs and bright yellow feet. It has been called the 'princess with the golden slippers'. It has a clear membrane that can close over its eyes for protection when it spears fish underwater.

Above: Cartoon and photography by Leslie Scopes Anderson.

The Thrush on Loan from Latin America

By CJ Ralph

Throughout our area, especially in coniferous and riparian coastal forests, the Swainson's Thrush blesses us with a beautiful song, varyingly described as haunting, exquisite and ethereal. People often puzzle over identifying this overall warm brown, spot-breasted thrush, as it has a strong resemblance to the closely-related (and equally musical) Hermit Thrush. As we are told by the always eloquent Ken Burton in his wonderful, "Common Birds of Northwest California," a close look at the "swainee's" eyeglass-like buffy ring around and in front of the eye, coupled in our area with its rusty-tinged back and brown rump and tail (the hermit has a rusty tail) should confirm its identity.

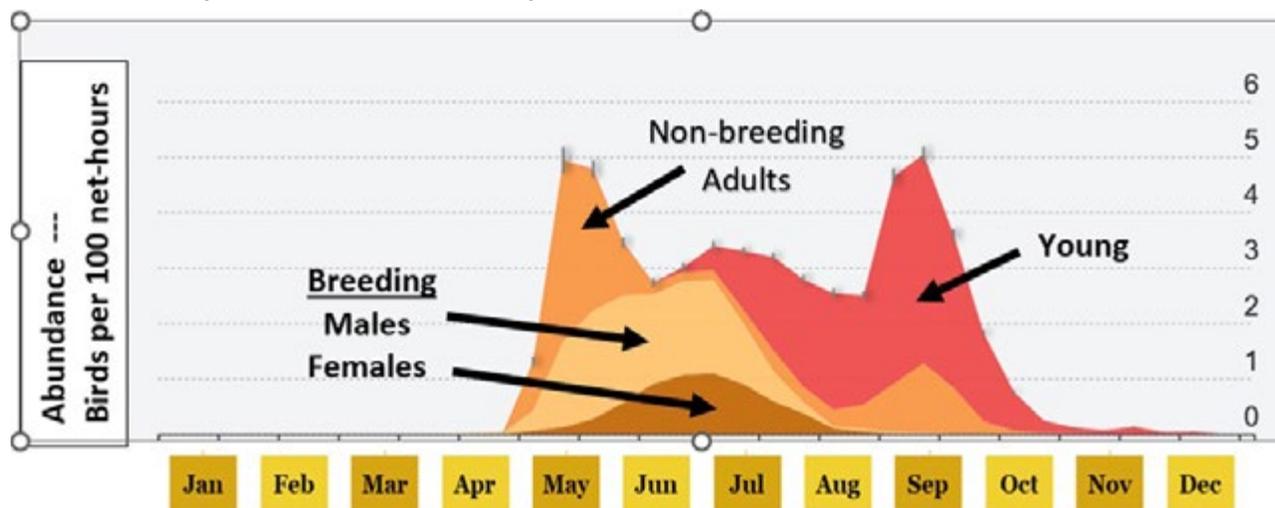
While we chauvinistically regard these summer visitors as "ours," one could easily say that they are in fact tropical forest residents on loan to us, spending most of their time in Latin America from the coastal zones of Mexico, on south through Panama, and down along the Andes to northern Argentina. Their breeding range is largely the northern coniferous forests across the continent, dipping south into California where they also inhabit riparian habitats. They visit us relatively briefly to take advantage of the spring and summer abundant resources of invertebrates and fruit, and perhaps fewer predators, returning to their "real" habitat down south. In the spring, they are relatively late to come to the table, as they are just setting up shop in any numbers by mid-May, well after all other species are deep into the complexities of breeding. While seemingly a poor strategy, in fact they are very likely timing the fledging-care period to coincide with the highly seasonal onset of fruit in our area, so as to meet the demands of young birds just leaving the nest, coupled with their critical need to fatten up for their long journeys south.

The peak of the breeding season is June and July as all the woods fill with their song. As soon as the young start fledging in late July and early August, most of the adults leave the young to fend for themselves, largely heading south. The adults do stop along the way for extended periods to fatten up and molt. Molt is very likely the most important event of their year. While birds don't have to breed, they must molt, and thereby they also get away from all those teenagers gobbling up resources. This is apparently a good strategy. The young, despite this desertion, are able to find food, and then navigate quite well over thousands of miles of unfamiliar habitats to the new and salubrious tropical forests and shrublands.

In the dune forest of the Lanphere Dunes, Jim Tietz and Matt Johnson looked at stopover habitat by juvenile Swainson's Thrushes during this post-breeding period. With the help of the banders at the Humboldt Bay Bird Observatory (HBBO), they captured and radio-tracked 26 young birds that stayed on for an average of nine days, occupying a home range of about five acres while they fattened up. The investigators found that huckleberries were the main food, as well as wax myrtle fruit. The activity of the leaner birds was focused on areas with more huckleberries as they prepared for the long journey to Latin America.

In the late summer and into the autumn, it is a race between declining food and the imperative for these young to move to their new home, where resources are less seasonal. At HBBO we have found that a small percentage of young birds are left behind, as they stay on well past the usual pulse of migration to the south, and gradually become thinner and thinner. The occasional individual will stay on well into November and even December, until they disappear in very poor condition.

But many of them, of course, make it and populate their southern home. Down there they are also largely territorial, but drift around depending upon food resources. The ones that are good at finding food and navigating well, return each year to breed, and incidentally entertain us.



Above: The distribution of the Swainson's Thrush with breeding in pink, migration in yellow, and winter in blue. From "Birds of the World" (2022) Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA.



Above: Identifying a Swainson's Thrush, courtesy of birdwatchingdaily.com. Photo by Brian E. Small.

Left: Diagram of age and abundance of Swainson's Thrush captured in mist nets of Humboldt Bay (Wigi) and Klamath Bird Observatories and cooperators in the Klamath region of Northern California and Southern Oregon. Courtesy of Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA

DID YOU KNOW?

Over North America, billions of birds have been migrating south to their nonbreeding grounds in search of the food and warmth they need to make it through the year. No matter the distance, migration is a physically taxing and dangerous journey. If you have a pet cat, one way you can help birds during fall migration is to treat it like a dog – that is, provide a safe and enriching place for your cat indoors, and keep it supervised and contained when outdoors using a harness leash, back pack, or "catio." Many warblers and sparrows move through Humboldt County every fall, and some stay for the winter. Can you spot them in your yard or the outdoor spaces you enjoy? Good birding!

Source: American Bird Conservancy.

From the RRAS Cat & Bird Safety Committee

Humboldt County and Earbirding - a Perfect Match

By Robert Childs

My love of earbirding, which resulted in the creation of earbirdinghumboldt.com, grew out of my own challenges with the visibility of local birds. I grew up in Missouri, and, well, visually this area is almost a bird desert compared to the Midwest. My sister regularly gets more than 15 species of birds at her feeders in the St. Louis suburbs. And one day I identified 14 species of (just) warblers through very poor binoculars along the creek by my rural home. It was located near the Missouri River, a wonderful migration flyway. (Incidentally, there are 18 species of warblers that nest in Missouri, and another 22 that pass through while migrating.)

And this is hard to express, but the birds here are...shy. Maybe it's the amazing abundance of nut-and-berry-producing trees and insects, but the birds in Missouri are just hopping around on the ground and tree branches, almost begging to be watched. And a lot of non-birders *do* watch, as it's hard to ignore cardinals and mockingbirds nesting and singing away in your yard. And if you hear a birdsong there, generally you can walk over and see who's singing.

Consequently, moving here was a birding shock. I eventually got better binoculars, and friends started teaching me basic earbirding - a new idea to me despite having taken ornithology in college 45 years ago. Identifying birds by sound was never mentioned.

In learning the birdsongs, I found that keeping lists of mnemonic phrases for the birds in different habitats really helped. It was still tough. Without visual feedback, my brain (and I don't think I'm alone here) had trouble remembering the tunes. And if you're a beginning birder or casual outdoors person and can't see the bird while it's singing, you don't even know where to start looking for an identity. My brain needed somewhere to start chewing on that kind of problem, and memorizing tons of birdsongs wasn't the solution.

Working with students in my Environmental Field Biology classes at Eureka High, I figured out that I had to start with what they already knew. I settled on giving them just the few birdsongs that they were most likely to hear. Based on where they lived, they got the "town + campus loudbeaks," the "redwoods/residential + campus loudbeaks," or the "Kneeland + campus loudbeaks." This worked pretty well, given that they started out greatly disliking birds due to the gulls that swarmed them on campus at break and lunch. (They literally groaned when I would announce "birds" as the next unit of class.)

The introduction of iBird, and more recently the song identification apps, has been a huge plus for birders. For those who don't want to become too involved but are interested in knowing what they're hearing-but-not-seeing, those apps are a big jump. I designed my website with those people in mind. It gives them bite-sized chunks tailored for where they spend outdoor time. Hopefully, for some of them, it will lead to more involvement in this wonderful aspect of the outdoor experience.

To learn more, visit Robert's website at: www.earbirdinghumboldt.com.



Above: The parabolic dish focuses the sound waves onto the tip of the microphone, and the recorder/amp processes and stores the signal with a time stamp.

Photo courtesy of Robert Childs.



Christmas Bird Counts (CBC) 2022-23

Please join us at 7:30 p.m. on December 7th, at the Masonic Lodge, 251 Bayside Road, for an orientation to this year's Christmas Bird Counts.

Sean McCallister, Tony Kurz, and Ken Burton will provide information regarding the Centerville, Arcata, and Tall Trees Counts and provide information about the Del Norte and Willow Creek Counts as well.

All welcome!

Please contact the compilers listed below if you are interested in joining their count:

The Centerville Count - January 1st, 2023; Sean McCallister compiler (707) 496-8790.

Arcata Count – December 17th, 2022; Tony Kurz compiler (559) 333-0893

Del Norte Count – December 18th, 2022; Lucas Brug compiler (707) 954-1189.

Tall Trees Count – Between January 3-5, 2023; Ken Burton compiler (707) 499-1146.

Willow Creek Count – December 21st, 2022; Brigitte Elbek (707) 267-4140.

Photos by Gary Friedrichsen – clockwise from left: Eurasian Wigeon, Long-billed Marsh Wren, and Marbled Godwit.