

The Sandpiper

May 2022



Redwood Region Audubon Society

www.rras.org

Wigi Wetland Restoration Volunteers Wanted!

Come join us for a volunteer workday to help restore beautiful wildlife habitat in Eureka. Behind the Bayshore mall lies a wonderful section of trail and surrounding habitat called Wigi Wetland. The area is right on Humboldt Bay and on any given day you may see an array of shorebirds, waterfowl, song birds, deer, frogs, and even river otters. It is also home to a myriad of native plant species, but is partially overtaken by invasive plants. During the workday we focus on removing the invasives and picking up trash. This will allow the native plants to flourish, maintain the beauty of the area, remove potential hazards to wildlife, and help restore the overall ecosystem. We meet directly behind Walmart on the 4th Saturday of every month from 9-11am. If you want to have fun in the sun (or rain) and help restore our local wildlife habitat, email Jeremy Cashen at jeremy.cashen@yahoo.com, text at (214) 605-7368, or just come on by! We'll provide snacks, tools, and a great time! Just bring yourself. *This month's volunteer day is May, 28th from 9-11 a.m. (See Field Trips below.)*



Photos – Far Left: Wigi Wetland Volunteers, Breana DeMatto, and Volunteer Coordinator, Jeremy Cashen, by Alexa DeJoannis. Left: Volunteer, Haleigh Holgate, by Jeremy Cashen.

RRAS Field Trips in MAY!

Sat. May 7th – 9-11am. Join Daisy Ambriz-Peres for the monthly **Women and Girls' Walk** - a **bilingual** birding trip at Ma-le'l Dunes North. This gorgeous location combines the beauty and birding of Humboldt's wetlands, forests, and dunes with shorebirds and waterbirds using the Mad River slough and many species of sparrows, warblers, finches, and thrushes singing and likely starting to nest in the forests as well. The native dune vegetation here is also a hallmark for native dune restoration. *For reservations and meeting location contact [Janelle Chojnacki](mailto:Janelle.chojnacki@gmail.com) (see below).

Únase a Daisy Ambriz-Peres para un viaje bilingüe de observación de aves para mujeres y niñas en Ma-le'l Dunes North. Este magnífico lugar combina la belleza y la observación de aves de los humedales, bosques y dunas de Humboldt con aves playeras y acuáticas que usan el lodazal del río Mad y muchas especies de gorriones, currucas, y zorzales cantantadoras; que probablemente están comenzando a anidar en los bosques. La vegetación nativa en este lugar es un sello distintivo de la restauración de dunas. Para reservar su lugar, mande un correo electrónico a daisy@friendsofthedunes.org.

Sat. May 7th – 8:30-11am. Arcata Marsh, led by Larry Karsteadt.

Sun. May 8th – 9-11am. Ralph Bucher will lead a walk at the Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge.

Sat. May 14th – 8:30-11am. Arcata Marsh, led by Michael Morris.

Sat. May 14th – 8-12pm. West End Road. We'll spend the morning birding along the entire length of West End Road from Arcata to Blue Lake. Emphasis will be on birding by ear. Contact leader Ken Burton for more details (shrikethree@gmail.com). We should be back by noon.

Sun. May 15th – 9-11am. Ralph Bucher will lead a walk on the Eureka Waterfront. This trail is paved and is **wheelchair accessible**.

Sat. May 21st – 8:30-11am. Arcata Marsh, led by Bob Battagin.

Sat. May 28th – 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 will provide tools and packaged snacks. Please bring your own water, gloves, and face mask. Please contact Jeremy Cashen at jeremy.cashen@yahoo.com or 214-605-7368.

Sat. May 28th – 8:30-11am. Arcata Marsh, led by Drew Meyer.

*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 all other walks.

Please join us for the RRAS monthly virtual program;

Why Birdsong is Music - the Theory and Application

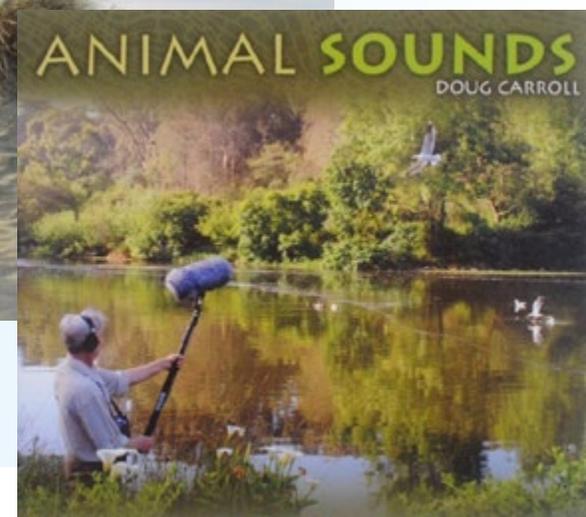
With Dr. Doug Carroll

On Friday, May 13th, at the Humboldt Unitarian Universalist Fellowship (HUUF) 6:30 – 8:00 pm on the HUUF patio (coffee, tea and goodies will be served from 6:30-7pm and the talk will be from 7 - 8 pm).

Dr. Doug Carroll will discuss his theory of defining music to include birdsong and not just human artistic creation. The talk will focus on the songs and sounds of birds but also will feature those of insects and mammals, and additionally he will cover natural sound recording techniques. The program will conclude with an interspecies musical piece performed live by Carroll on cello and accompanied by recorded birdsong. This will be the first in-person program hosted by Redwood Region Audubon Society since the pandemic, and weather permitting, it will be held outdoors, so it may also incorporate some live bird melodies!

Doug is a cellist, composer and audio engineer whose work has spanned decades. He has performed in Europe and North America at major music festivals, and with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company in the world premiere of "Ocean." Doug taught audio and radio production at San Francisco State University and Menlo College. He studied composition at the Royal Conservatory in the Hague, the International Musicians Institute in the Netherlands, and Mills College in Oakland. He holds a BA in Music Composition from the University of Alabama, an MFA in Electronic Music and Recording Media from Mills College and an EdD from the University of San Francisco. Doug has recorded three CDs featuring animal sounds including "Music for Cello and Wild Animals" and has received over 1 million streams and downloads on Spotify, iTunes, and Apple Music. He is originally from Birmingham, Alabama.

(*Reservations are required – please call (707) 267-4055 and leave name and number of attendees. In case of rain, the program will be held inside the Fellowship where attendees must be masked and only 45 people can be accommodated. There will **not** be a simultaneous Zoom of the live program).



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President's Column

By Gail Kenny

Spring will be in full swing by the time you read this. That means migrating and breeding birds and lots of wildflowers. I hope you get out and partake in the wonder and joy of exploring the natural world. Send in your photos to *The Sandpiper* editor!

I got out for the March, Moonstone Beach Field Trip and Social hosted by our Field Trip Committee Chair, Janelle Chojnacki. It was a beautiful evening, and the event was well attended with a nice mix of folks. There were quite a few newer people including a fair number of wildlife students from Cal Poly Humboldt, along with some longtime RRAS members. The birding highlight was a dozen ravens hanging out together on the other side of Little River. It looked like they were having their own get together!

RRAS is planning our first in-person evening program since the COVID shut down, on Friday, May 13, outside in the garden at the Unitarian Church in Bayside. This should be a fun event with opportunities to socialize and hear some music played along with birdsong. See the front page of this *Sandpiper* for more information on the

program. I hope to see you there! This will be our last regular program evening meeting until September when we will start them up again in-person and/or hybrid with a zoom option.

RRAS has an opening for secretary. The main task of the secretary is to take and submit the minutes of our board of directors' meetings once a month. This is an easy task starting with the agenda and making notes regarding action items. We also are looking for a new publicity chair. The publicity chair mainly prepares the emailed press releases announcing our field trips, regular program meetings, and other events each month. Please contact me at gailkenny@gmail.com for more information if you are interested in helping with either of these tasks.



Spring has sprung – send us your photos! Above left: Rufous Hummingbird. Above right: Anna's Hummingbird chicks. Both photos submitted by Zsazsa Dallenbach.



Purple Martins Back at Blue Lake Hatchery!

By Ralph Bucher

Purple Martins return every year to the Mad River Fish Hatchery in Blue Lake to make their nests in the pipe ends of the protective structure that supports the cables hanging over the salmon runs.

This structure protects the fingerlings from birds who like to feed on the steelhead and salmon grown in the runs. In the past I've photographed four nests at the entrances, with young begging to be fed. I took this photo in April this year.

Spotlight on Denise Seeger

Interview by RRAS President, Gail Kenny

Denise has enthusiastically served RRAS for several years in many roles and although she is stepping down from the board, remains as a valuable volunteer. I chose to interview Denise out of appreciation for all she does.

Gail: How did you get involved in RRAS?

Denise: I think it was in February 2014. Ken Burton asked if I wanted to be involved with the RRAS education committee. We had met through various environmental education activities when I worked with a Friends of the Dunes project called, "Share the Beach" doing Western Snowy Plover outreach, and then through my work at Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge (HBNWR). I thought RRAS was a well-greased machine. It seemed like there were a bunch of volunteers doing really great things. I ended up joining the board. I have been the publicity chair, volunteer coordinator, and education committee chair. Due to other commitments, I recently resigned from the board but want to continue with the Education Committee because that is where my main interest is. I am honored to be part of RRAS. We are looking for a volunteer to take over our monthly publicity, so if anyone out there would like to help out RRAS, that would be fantastic! (Contact Gail Kenny at gailkenny@gmail.com.)

Gail: What is your educational background and what got you interested in environmental education?

Denise: Growing up in Marin County, on Mount Tamalpais, I literally lived across the highway from Muir Woods. I didn't understand how fortunate I was until I



Above: Denise Seeger, self-portrait.

moved away. Not everybody has a national monument in their front yard. Many school field trips were to Audubon Canyon Ranch, Point Reyes, Angel Island and Muir Woods. I always thought it was cool that rangers got paid for taking people on hikes. I wondered how to go about doing that. In college I bounced around several disciplines and finally found Humboldt's natural resource planning and interpretation major. My career has included a lot of visitor services, volunteer management, and environmental education but I enjoy the education aspect the most. My birding interests really increased while working at HBNWR - kind of had to!

I became enamored at how charismatic birds are, and as representatives for their habitats. Birds make it easy to connect people to their environment. I think a lot of humans have forgotten that they are even part of nature. That's what you are always trying to do as an educator, find the pathway that connects people to information and experiences that will expand their understanding.

Gail: What was your first job after you graduated?

Denise: I was a seasonal park aide at Humboldt Redwoods State Park during the summers while attending school. I continued as an interpretive specialist eventually becoming full time with the Humboldt Redwoods Interpretive Association. I got to work in that incredible place for 14 years. Time for a change led me back to school to study early childhood education and then the opportunity to work at Friends of the Dunes.

(Continued on next page)

(Denise Seeger – continued from previous page)

Gail: Are you more of a generalist naturalist?

Denise: Yes. I have a holistic view. I am interested in every part of the natural world, observing it and learning about it every day, either at home in the garden or at work or in the field. When I notice something new or I am curious, I've got to learn more. I'm an amazed birdwatcher now, marveling at their adaptations and behaviors.

Gail: What is that feeling?

Denise: Wonder and joy. I respect and appreciate nature so much for its beauty, abundance, tenacity and resilience. Have you ever noticed horsetail fern growing up through asphalt or a crack in the sidewalk? Now there is some kind of power there. I see trees and I'm so grateful that they help us breathe. Thank you trees and all plants! I love being outdoors, especially with kids. They have open perspectives. Even in the face of environmental crisis, they generally choose to find the positive. They will randomly say something like "Did you know that evidence found in rocks and ancient lake beds suggest that birds evolved from small dinosaurs that survived the last environmental catastrophe?"

There are a lot of problems on Earth right now, but we are the solution. Our job is to work with, and for each other, and for the Earth. Now go outside! •

For Keeps

Sun makes the day new.
 Tiny green plants emerge from earth.
 Birds are singing the sky into place.
 There is nowhere else I want to be but here.
 I lean into the rhythm of your heart to see
 where it will take us.
 We gallop into a warm, southern wind.
 I link my legs to yours and we ride together,
 Toward the ancient encampment of our
 relatives.
 Where have you been? they ask.
 And what has taken you so long?
 That night after eating, singing, and dancing
 We lay together under the stars.
 We know ourselves to be part of mystery.
 It is unspeakable.
 It is everlasting.
 It is for keeps.

– Joy Harjo



Joy Harjo was appointed the new United States poet laureate in 2019. Born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 1951, Harjo is a member of the Mvskoke/Creek Nation. She is the author of several books of poetry, including *An American Sunrise*, (W. W. Norton, 2019), and *Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings* (W. W. Norton, 2015). She is a current chancellor of the Academy of American Poets and lives in Tulsa, Oklahoma. (Photo/copy reprinted from poets.org.)

Five years as an apprentice Steller's Jay

By Pia Gabriel



It's hard to estimate how many thousands of hours I spent chasing, stalking, trapping, annoying, and enjoying Steller's Jays, all over the HSU campus and the Arcata streets, yards, and parks, in my effort to learn more about why they do what they do. I had convinced myself that I had trained this raucous neighborhood of jays.

A lot of them – most of them, in fact, were now showing up more often than not whenever I gave a specific whistle as I was filling strategically placed feeders with peanuts. These feeders were housed by friendly, curious, and very helpful folks throughout Arcata neighborhoods opening

their yards to me, my binoculars, and my observational data sheets. Many of those friendly folks regarded Steller's Jays as a general nuisance when my study began. Those little blue rascals show up at bird feeders, chasing away the smaller peeps and making a mess scattering the small seeds to get to the bigger prizes; they raid outdoor cat food and dog food bowls, and they'll enjoy the fruit of your hard labor in your orchard, picking at all the fruit until they find the one that's just perfectly ripe for their plucking.

Thanks to their unique social system where individual home-ranges overlap widely among neighboring pairs, you might get 6, 10, even 20 jays showing up for some ephemeral but particularly profitable food source in your yard, and the ensuing racket as individuals and pairs squabble over who gets which choice bits becomes overwhelming. But annoyance usually gave way to fascination with our little blue corvid neighbors once my friendly feeder hosts had learned to tell apart their resident and visiting jays by the colored leg bands I adorned them with.

Like me, they were picking up on the astounding variety of calls Steller's Jays give (from sex-specific "rattle" and "chink" calls, over soft warbling songs exchanged among mates, to startling mimic calls of resident raptors), and their

behavioral adaptability and ingenuity that makes them so successful in human-built environments. Some cold January morning, one of my feeder hosts told me with amused excitement how she watched a shy young female learn how to dart into the feeder after her cantankerous mate is done "shopping" for the best, biggest peanut in the pile, and how she quickly chooses not one, but two peanuts at a time, which she artfully crosses over in her beak to be able to carry both of them off. Another enthusiastically helped me test the hypothesis that jays will adjust the distance they travel to cache a peanut based on who is watching: I suspected that they cache close to the feeder when they are alone, farther away when their mate is watching and might pilfer the cached prize, and make the greatest effort at concealing their cache (i.e., fly farthest away before caching) when an unrelated neighbor is present.

Turns out I was right! Jays are capable of considering the outcome of their action in relation to the assumed action of another animal – an accomplishment that behavioral ecologists consider as requiring a "theory of mind." Thousands of hours into watching goofy jay fledglings wander around in noisy juvenile bands and trying to figure out what a peanut is and how to open it, or watching one of the oldest birds in "my flock" – a 13+ year old male – bring mating gifts of food to his mate of many years, and I never had a dull moment. I learned that some of them are homebodies, while others travel far and wide; that having a homebody for a mate when you are a homebody yourself is a good thing; similar personalities are better at rearing offspring together; that trapping a traveler is easier than trapping a homebody (and realized the conservation implications that come with differential trapping ability of different personality types...); among so many other fascinating details of their winged lives. I also figured out that these beautiful, boisterous little corvids had trained me just as much as I thought I had trained them. They trained my eyes, my ears, my patience, my curiosity, and my humility.



Above Left: Pia Gabriel works with a Steller's Jay.

Above: Steller's Jays squabbling over peanuts. Both photos by Jeff Jacobsen.

The 17th Annual Student Nature Writing Contest

Submitted by Sue Leskiw

2022 was the second year in a row that nearly 100 poems and essays were submitted by students in Humboldt and Del Norte counties. RRAS awarded \$100 in prizes to the following students in grades 4 through 12 who explored the topic “What Nature Means to Me”:

Junior Division (Grades 4-8) Winners

First Place: Bony McKnight, Grade 5, Coastal Grove Charter

Second Place: Trillium Pitts, Grade 6, Alder Grove Charter

Third Place: Indumati Stewart, Grade 5, Coastal Grove Charter

Honorable Mentions: Jasmine Christian, Grade 5, Six Rivers Montessori; Aviva Orlandi, Grade 6, Fieldbrook Elementary; Kael Ahlstrom, Grade 7, Blue Lake School; Zaine Moore, Grade 7, Agnes Johnson Charter; Arianna Benitez, Grade 8, Alder Grove Charter.

Senior Division (Grades 9-12) Winners

First Place: Abigail (A.J.) Garcia, Grade 9, McKinleyville High

Second Place: Jadalyn Weber, Grade 9, McKinleyville High

Third Place: Talon Rodriguez, Grade 11, McKinleyville High

Honorable Mentions: Asa Ryce, Grade 9, Academy of the Redwoods; Olivia Horn, Grade 9, McKinleyville High; William Hufford, Grade 9, McKinleyville High; Lauren Guynup, Grade 11, McKinleyville High.

A booklet containing all nature writing winners will be available for downloading in May at www.rras.org.

First Place Winner, Junior Division

Crashing Waves

By Bony McKnight, Grade 5, Coastal Grove Charter



The past two years have been really hard for me. Nature has been the main way I've dealt with all the difficulties Covid has brought. Hanging out with friends is way more stressful with masks and social distance, and there's so many boundaries for everything, with the threat of Covid hanging over us all, even if we're vaccinated. Getting outside, away from all my troubles and difficulties has something really calming about it. It's like waking up and realizing I can just step away from everything for a minute, and when I come back I'll be calm enough to carefully sort everything out, and not get frustrated halfway through.

I've been really anxious lately, about almost everything, and I don't have much patience with anything. School, accidents, arguments, so many things I just don't have patience for. Nature helps calm me down, and center me. In some ways nature also reminds me of the world of Covid we're living in right now. Mainly the ocean. Sometimes you have to let the waves of fear crash over you, before you can reach calmer water. But you have to be strong mentally, and physically, to pull through. Not everyone makes it. Wearing a mask and getting vaccinated is like starting to swim through the waves of fear and confusion and work your way to calmer water. There's so many things to be worried about, but for me nature's not one of them. It's a whole world of calm and wonder that I can let myself relax in.

I remember running my hands through the sand at a beach looking for shells. And then I saw a shell, a very small shell, rolling around right where the waves were crashing. It's just very magical, seeing something so small and fragile not being destroyed by something so big and powerful. Seeing it made me think “I can do this too. I can be strong enough to stay strong during such overwhelming times.” You don't need to be physically strong, you just need the strong thought of “I can do this,” and you just need to believe in yourself.

Nature has taught me to believe in myself, and I'll do everything I can to help it, in return.

First Place Winner, Senior Division

What Nature Means to Me

By Abigail (A.J.) Garcia, Grade 9, McKinleyville High

But what would Nature matter to the world that may destroy it?

Why would we write poems or essays,
Documents, legal instruments

On the topic of Nature when we in fact
Do not give a single care

A single drop of sweat on what Nature means
to us?

We are not dreary or morose
Because we ourselves as the human race
do not care about Mother Nature or what
surrounds us.

We have instead built walls and Eiffel towers
in place of garden walls

We have polluted the seas with plastic and
empty beer cans

Homo sapiens inhabit this Earth with
arrogance and egos.

We flood our streets with epicaricacy,* burn
our homes with the heat and radiance of
global warming.

Would you care about the dying Earth if no
one else did? Why are we so focused on what
the majority of us think?

Would you behave so cold and wretched like
the King of Kings, *Ozymandias*?

I wrote this poem because it wasn't an essay.

I wrote this poem because I was told I had to.

I write this but I actually seem to derive joy in writing this poem

Because I can use words

Like how protesters can use words

Weapons

Fancy declarations of compassion to Gaia

But we use these declarations to present war as well

So at what cost are we going to go to save what Nature means to us?

When the world is crippling and crumbling

Will we cry? Or beckon upon our “God” to save us?

To take back our sins to what damage we have inflicted.

It's all about politics or war or walls

Garden walls.

Sacred garden walls might save us from this cruel dying world.

But it doesn't quite matter when the ocean is choking up bleach.

Or when rhinos are being wiped out of existence.

But words

And long documents help

Poems help – difficult, hard to understand poems.

The line is blurred from what Nature means to me, and how Nature might not mean anything when we are through with it.

Where are the resplendent azaleas, or the insouciant owl?

Where may I bask in the sun and not worry about Nature?

What Nature means to me.

But what would Nature matter to the world that may destroy it?

**The judges had to look this one up. Epicaricacy means “rejoicing at or derivation of pleasure from the misfortunes of others.”*



Photos submitted by students:

Left: Bony McKnight.

Above: Abigail (A.J.) Garcia.