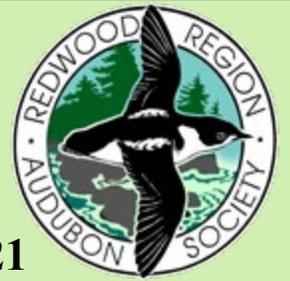


The Sandpiper

February 2021



Redwood Region Audubon Society

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In This Issue: • Guroush (Curlew): A Wiyot Story • The Oldest Snowy Plover on Record • The Finch Irruption!

In the Beginning...

By Elliott Dabill

You may already know that birds are descended from dinosaurs. What many people don't realize is that birds are not just kinda related to dinosaurs or sorta suggestive of dinosaurs, but birds actually *are* dinosaurs. The idea is now widely accepted, even though a hundred years ago it was a non-starter, and people would smirk and ask for your credentials if you suggested it. It may be surprising to know, then, that the general idea came from Charles Darwin, who wrote *The Origin of Species* in 1859, and was strongly supported by his defender, Thomas Huxley, when a fossilized feather named *Archaeopteryx* was found in Germany just a year later.

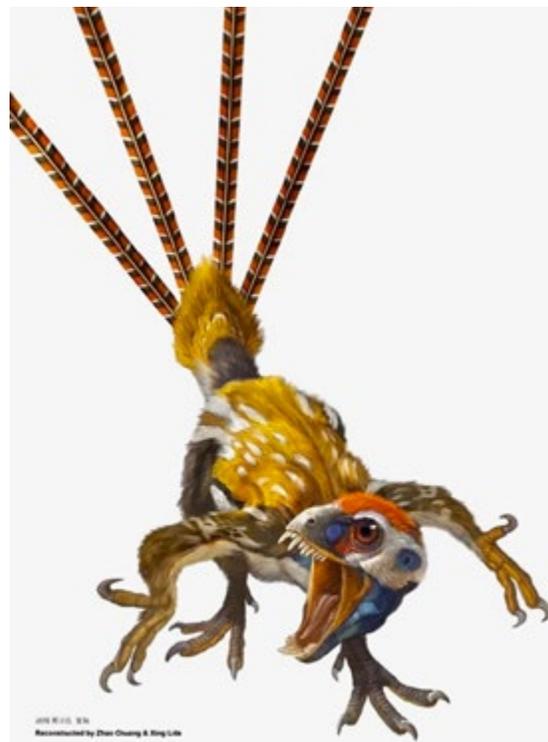
Huxley was on to something – he compared a later fossil of *Archaeopteryx* feather impressions that became for him an exemplar of a transitional species, as Darwin predicted: animals slowly evolved into new groups of animals due to natural selection. Huxley listed the dissimilarities between this fossil sort-of-bird and birds we know today: it had teeth and a long tail, claws on the wings, and other eye-poppers. Yet it had feathers, the defining character for birds, and there had to be something to the connection. Huxley was correct, of course, and prescient, but all his insight was quickly forgotten for some decades while the science world looked in other directions for bird origins. In the 1970s, John Ostrom wrote that Huxley was, in fact, correct and talked about dinosaurs like *Deinonychus* as hot-blooded, running, and hunting animals, like birds.



Above: *Sinosauropteryx prima*, courtesy of the Nanjing Institute. This fossil instantly confirmed the origins of birds as dinosaurs. Note the fuzzy lines on its back and tail, all shown to be feathers. Microscopic analysis also showed the colors, so this dinosaur was ginger with white tail stripes.

But it all hit the fan in 1996. A fossil called *Sinosauropteryx* was surrounded by fluff, later identified as feathers, in a dinosaur that was not a bird. The fluffy nature of the feathers suggested that insulation, not flight, was the functional origin for feathers, and evidence gushed from the rocks of Liaoning, China, in the following years to the extent that only Donald Trump would deny their reality. There are now enormous Chinese museums that show exquisite details of over 40 different dinosaurs with feathers.

The artist's impression below, of a fossil is of the flightless *Epidexipteryx*, with feathers for insulation, for show or balance, and possibly for camouflage.



Above: *Epidexipteryx hui*; reconstruction and photo by Zhao Chung & Xing Lida. This fossil is over 152 million years old – older than the more-famous *Archaeopteryx* – from the mid-Jurassic period. Its surprises include the long tail feathers, which either attracted mates or were used for balance. The torso feathers added insulation and the red cap may also be for attracting others of its species.

ARCHAEOPTERYX

Archaeopteryx lived around 151 million to 149 million years ago — during the late stage of the Jurassic era.

Archaeopteryx means "ancient wing"

Length: Up to 20 inches (50 centimeters)
Weight: 1.8 to 2.2 lbs. (0.8 to 1 kilogram)
Diet: Feasted on lizards, frogs, beetles, dragonflies and mites

Archaeopteryx was most notable for its well-developed asymmetrical flight feathers.

It had jaws with sharp teeth, three fingers with claws, a long bony tail and hyperextendible second toes known as "killing claws."

It was believed that Archaeopteryx did not spend time in trees.

Above: Image courtesy of Livescience.com.

Since the 1996 beginning of the early bird discovery wave, evidence – whether it was by the shared presence of a wishbone or other features – has come from all over the world, reinforcing the transition from dinosaurs to birds, as with the iconic *T. rex*. It has been suggested that another large group of dinosaurs called ornithischians, an extinct clade of mainly herbivorous dinosaurs characterized by a pelvic structure similar to that of birds, had some kind of primitive feathers, indicating that maybe all dinosaurs were involved in this conspiracy. Some scientists have suggested that non-dinosaur pterosaurs had feathers, but that is under dispute. If it was true, and feathers are older than the taxonomic group we call dinosaurs, then they and birds are all late comers to the party, since the common ancestor with pterosaurs would have feathers.

Now you can load up your binoculars and go dinosaur watching. If that idea makes you smile, it's just one example of truth being stranger than fiction, or wonders of the natural world that link us back in time to something like 230 million years ago, or more, as Mother Earth was recovering from the greatest extinction ever and decided to mix things up a little. That means that dinosaurs are that old and that they dominated most of that period. We humans have been here 200-300 thousand years, and could stand a little humility about dominance.

Like the topic? Read more in *The Rise and Fall of the Dinosaurs* by Steve Brusatte, Macmillan, 2018.

HAPPY CHINESE NEW YEAR OF THE OX!

The Chinese New Year on February 12, one of the world's most important and popular festivals, is the cause of the largest, annual, mass human migration in the world.

This holiday is celebrated in countries like Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia, Australia, the Philippines, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Southeast Asia, and Mauritius, but also Europe, Australia, New Zealand, America, and Canada, especially in areas with a large Chinese community.

Article courtesy of thechinesezodiac.

Below: Image courtesy of freepik.



Virtual Program: February 12 at 7 pm

Please join us for a Zoom presentation by

Dr. Peter Hodum on Tufted Puffins and Rhinoceros Auklets

His research focuses primarily on the conservation and ecology of threatened seabirds and island ecosystems in Chile and Washington State. His work also has a strong focus on community-based conservation, including how communities can be more effectively and authentically involved in conservation. Moving between islands, seascapes, and species of the Outer Coast, Peter Hodum will share stories about a collaborative research program focused on improving our understanding of the ecology and the birds' conservation status.

Christmas Bird Counts (CBC) 2020-21

Compiled by CJ Ralph

Our Christmas Bird Counts, conducted between December 19 and January 5, 2020-21, were successful! Here are brief summaries of the results presented by the compilers of each count.

Del Norte: The compiler came down sick just before the count and cancelled it. However, 15 awesome birders came anyway and shared their eBird checklists. On count day 131 species were found, 20 species lower than last year, as several significant areas were not covered and several very easy species were missed because of that. Great birds were a Long-eared Owl and Loggerhead Shrike, both new to the count. — *Lucas Brug*.

Tall Trees: The 10th Tall Trees CBC was held on a dry day sandwiched between two very wet ones. The circle includes the Humboldt Lagoons, Orick, lots of Green Diamond land, and much of Redwood National Park. The 14 participants came up with around 118 species; about average. At times it seemed that if you looked at the cloud cover hard enough, it would prove to be flocks of siskins; one person had over 1700! Noteworthy species included Barred Owl, White-throated Sparrow, Lesser Goldfinch, Greater Yellowlegs, Palm Warbler, Brandt's Cormorant, Band-tailed Pigeon, Northern Pintail, Say's Phoebe, and three new species: Vaux's Swift, Prairie Falcon, and Rock Wren. — *Ken Burton*.

Willow Creek: This year's core group of enthusiasts, many of them from the Coast, had 82 species, up slightly from recent years. Even with the decent weather on count day, there was a bit of snow falling on Horse Mountain, just enough to show a beautiful, and disconcerting, set of fresh Mountain Lion prints! Of note were the many siskins and also two unexpected summer residents (an Orange-crowned Warbler and two Black-headed Grosbeaks). We appreciate that the authorities in Hoopa issued a specific exemption for our party to go into Hoopa territory, which has been locked down due to Covid. — *Birgitte Elbek*.

Arcata: The count went very well – a big Thank You for all that helped out. We ended up with 168 species. Weather was wonderful, with only a small wave of light rain in the morning hours. Ocean conditions could have been better, but we had a couple of participants who managed to get some much-needed ocean species. The turnout was good, with 36 participants and good coverage of backyards and residential areas. It was interesting finding out that most of the Black Brant seem to be using North Humboldt Bay this winter, with 1,956 counted. Our highlights included 32 Snowy Plover, one Northern Mockingbird, one Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (still being observed), one Clay-Colored Sparrow, and the one continuing Sandhill Crane. — *Tony Kurz*.

Centerville to King Salmon: This was the 59th year and was graced with more than 50 volunteers. Although we were prepared for very wet and windy conditions, we enjoyed fair weather, with only a little rain in the afternoon. A total of 174 species were tallied. Highlights included six White-throated Swifts flying over Ferndale, a continuing Mountain Plover at Centerville Beach, Violet-green and Barn Swallows (rare in winter), Tropical Kingbird, Barrow's Goldeneye, and a mystery bird near Loleta that turned out to be a Eurasian Skylark – a first for Humboldt County and one of very few California records! Tony Kurz recorded the call, Frank Fogarty analyzed the spectrogram, and Russ Namitz photographed and identified the bird. — *Sean McAllister*.
(See last page for a photo of the Eurasian Skylark.)



President's Column

By Gail Kenny

By December 2020 it was apparent that local Pine Siskin numbers were way up. I was seeing lots of them and other birders were reporting them. One day between rain showers I observed a cloud of them fluttering about some alder trees on the bluff overlooking Trinidad Bay.

This irruption of Pine Siskins is part of a larger phenomenon of finches moving south from the boreal forests of Canada in winter when food sources are scarce. The East Coast benefits most from the finch movements, with upwards of eight species including a large irruption of Evening Grosbeaks this year. The West Coast must make do with Pine Siskins, at least so far. Theories about what is driving this "superflight" of boreal finches include a large outbreak of spruce budworm in spring into summer and then a poor seed crop of conifers and other boreal trees in the fall. The birds benefitted from plenty of food during the breeding season, which probably allowed greater survival of young birds. Many of the boreal forest trees produce seeds in cycles, with lots of seeds some years and very little in other years. This helps to limit the squirrel populations that depend on the seeds and allows the trees to reproduce more

Irruption

By Sarah Hobart

It started the day before Christmas, just after lunch: a soft *tchee-tchee-tchee* outside the kitchen window. I glanced up to see a slim, streaky finch at the feeder. Grabbing my binoculars, I noted the sharp, little bill and hint of yellow in the plumage. A Pine Siskin, the first of the season! I made a happy note in my feeder log.

Moments later, a dozen more suddenly crash-landed on the feeder, stabbing at the trays with such voracious appetites that millet showered the deck below. My dog and I stood at the window watching them. Already the seed level had dropped to the halfway mark and I wondered if I had enough reserves to feed everyone. A chickadee landed on the railing and a sortie of siskins chased it off.

The twittering swelled to a deafening crescendo as at least a hundred more swooped in. They clung bottom-side-up to the feeder and carpeted every inch of the deck; others settled in the pine trees, the boughs sagging under their weight. In less than a minute the feeder was empty and every stray seed gobbled up.

A few birds hopped onto the windowsill and stared at us boldly through the glass, emitting soft, ominous *tchees*. My faithful companion whined and backed away.

"I'm going out there," I told her. "Are you with me?" She ran to her kennel and huddled in the far corner.

Whump! A siskin was plastered against the window, its wings drumming a tattoo against the glass. One beady eye was fixed on me.

I grabbed the plastic bucket of spare birdseed, took a deep breath, and slipped out the kitchen door. The birds didn't budge an inch as I unhooked the feeder. Prying the lid off the bucket, I rapidly began to shovel seed into the plastic tube.

As if by unspoken signal a hundred feathered bodies launched into the air and enveloped me in a dense, chattering cloud. I threw down the scoop and emptied the bucket in the general area of the filling tube. After desperately trying to re-hang the feeder, I fled inside. Siskins swarmed like locusts over the feeder, tossing sunflower seeds right and left. I grabbed the phone and dialed the hardware store.

"Seed!" I gasped when someone picked up. "I need birdseed!"

"No problem," he said. "We have Fruit and Nuthatch, Sparrow Supreme, Crunchy Mealworm Delight—"

"Anything," I said. "Surprise me."

"Hold a moment." While I waited, the seed level dropped three-quarters of an inch.

He came back on the line. "Well, it's the darndest thing, but this stuff must be flying off the shelves. Looks like there's just one bag—"

"I'll take it!" I rattled off my credit card number and hung up.

The clerk was waiting in the lot with my bag of seed and tossed it in the rear hatch. "Thanks!" I yelled. He leaped back as I peeled out of the lot, tires chirping as I sped home.

successfully. But birds can fly to find food, so they head south in poor seed crop years. They come even further south during widespread crop failures like this year.

With large numbers of Pine Siskins around, be on the look out for sick birds at or around your feeders. Pine Siskins typically are among the first to get sick with salmonella at feeders. They will look larger with puffed-up feathers, will be sluggish, and may have pasted vents or swollen eyelids. There are measures to help limit the disease. Feeders must be cleaned every day. This maintains the very positive effects of a bird feeder, especially in the winter, for both you and the birds. Hose down the feeder daily to remove old food and fecal material, clean with soapy water, rinse thoroughly, and dry. Some recommend taking down your feeders for 2-3 weeks. Before you put them back up, clean, then disinfect with a 10% bleach solution, rinse thoroughly, and dry. This needs to be done frequently if sick birds are around. Also, it can help to set up different types of bird feeders that allow only a few birds to visit at a time.

In RRAS news, many thanks to those who made end-of-year donations! The pandemic has made it a challenging year for fundraising. Another way to support us is through buying a local membership at rras.org. Also, watch for opportunities to support us in spring through an online fundraiser.

All was quiet as I pulled up to the house. Too quiet. The pine needles rustled in the breeze – but there was no breeze.

I hoisted the bag from the back. As I did, I heard the first soft *tchee-tchee-tchee*. A prickle of unease went down my spine. I stumbled up the stairs and took down the empty feeder. With trembling fingers, I ripped open the bag.

"*Tchee-tchee-TCHEE!*" The trees erupted and the sky went dark. Flapping wings fanned my face and something spattered on my hair. The bag slipped from my hands. I ducked my head and ran.

From the safety of the kitchen, I peeked out the window. Siskins had taken over the deck, tearing at the spilled birdseed. One in particular caught my attention, perched like a sentry on the fallen bag. His eye, dark and bottomless, met mine.

Right about then I decided it was time to start using the back door. At least for the rest of the finch season.



Above: Pine Siskins galore! Photos by Sarah Hobart.



2020: YEAR IN REVIEW

By Jim Clark

The year started off with a post mortem of the failed Monument Ridge Wind Power project, the Cooper Gulch City of Eureka housing proposal that was recently dropped, a Samoa motocross proposal that will probably be dropped, the Hilfiker Lane transitional housing project that is going forward, and a discussion of the Last Chance Grade project. The Cat and Bird Safety Committee continues to work on a model ordinance to regulate cats similarly to dogs, regarding their licensing, vaccination, and containment.

We made a March 12 field trip to a County-owned parcel on Lucas Street, just east of the Eureka city limits. The Committee wants to see this four-acre parcel conserved for its wetland value and open space potential. This was our last face-to-face field trip and meeting before pandemic restrictions slowed things down. Discussion of the Lucas Street parcel continues but at a slower pace. Pandemic restrictions have slowed things down considerably for our sibling non-profits and regulatory agencies and has restricted communications to email, Zoom, and telephone.

July saw two major items: Our chapter's long-standing interest in the Blue Lake cottonwoods was piqued by the City of Blue Lake's application for a planning grant and request for RRAS to contribute. Due to a lack of bird conservation-related items in the pre-planning application, we decided not to contribute at this time but we are still interested in partnering with the City in conserving wildlife habitat in this significant coastal riparian area. The

second item was the Adesa Organics, LLC application to establish a large cannabis-growing facility eight miles south of Maple Creek. A hasty letter was written to the Board of Supervisors supporting the appeal of the Planning Commission's approval, but the permit went through with minor concessions from the applicant.

In August we began discussing what may be the most important local conservation issue of 2021: The Rolling Meadows, LLC proposal to establish a massive cannabis growing operation on the prairies above the north bank of the Eel River near McCann in Southern Humboldt. This project would cover over seven acres of Coast Range Prairie/Oak Savannah habitat with greenhouses. This project, and as many as 10 similar proposals, have potential negative impacts to Golden Eagle and Grasshopper and Savannah Sparrows, as well as the Prairie/Oak Savannah habitat in general. **(PLEASE REPORT SIGHTINGS of Golden Eagle, Grasshopper Sparrow, and Savannah Sparrow to eBird!)**

Guroush (Curlew): A Wiyot Story

Edited and summarized by Lynnika Butler,
Linguist for the Wiyot Tribe; reprinted courtesy
of the Wiyot Tribe's Cultural Department.



The following is a Wiyot story told by Birdie James, published in Reichard, Gladys A. (1925), Wiyot Grammar and Texts. University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology 22(1):146-147. Spellings have been converted to the approved Wiyot writing system and English translations have been edited for clarity.

This story tells how, long ago, Wiyot people faced starvation because the tide never went out, leaving them unable to dig for **houlihi'** (clams, which are harvested in mudflats at low tide). According to the story, the wind controlled the tide, and because for a long time the wind only blew from one direction, the tide remained high. **Guroush** (Curlew) decided to go north to **Dagachuwawawik** (Trinidad) to buy **rra'dughu'n** (north wind; literally, 'big wind') from the people there, using dried and fresh seaweed as trade offerings. After negotiating the purchase and beginning his return trip, **rra'dughu'n** started to blow and became so strong that **Guroush** was blown against the rocks and killed; but **rra'dughu'n** pushed the tide out and the people were able to dig for **houlihi'** again. They only discovered later that **Guroush** was killed saving his people.

The **Soulatluk** (Wiyot language) name for the small rocky island known in English as Devil's Gate Rock, just off the coast 2.5 miles south of **Sikyout** (Cape Mendocino), is **Gurou'sh Da' Lhvalhuli'**, meaning "where Curlew was blown through." This suggests that his home (and the setting of the story) was somewhere in the southernmost part of coastal Wiyot territory. (**Vusya** [Bear River] is generally accepted as the southern boundary of Wiyot territory, but perhaps **Guroush** was blown past his home.)

Please enjoy this story in the original **Soulatluk** with English translation:

Goujewilh galu wutsuwetguk.

Long ago, the tide did not run out.

Sayughurr lhugayughurr.

Wind blew from one direction, the southeast wind blew.

Gawu wulh da'louy.

They began to talk about it.

Daghurriel dou wadagh voduwuku lughilh.

Their bellies were starving, famine came.

Gitga rradughu'n va lu ve'lurr.

They decided to go buy wind.

Guroush hi lughilh gitga.

Curlew was going to go.

Guroush hi lughilh.

Curlew went.

Hi rralhetsuvou' wouda dou laluphamu'n.

Along the way, he was given sea plants.

Jouwa wulh hi' rouluwouy'.

He took them all.

Dagachuwawawik da qhi youwilh.

He arrived at Trinidad Cove.

Hi yililh, "Wikut wulh hanou."

He said, "I come from the south."

"Rra'dughu'n hu va wulhi lal."

"I came about the wind."

"Galu vutsuwetguk jouwa wulhe lou'w."

"The tide does not run out, that is what I came for."

"Va lu veluvu' gitga."

"I'm going to buy it."

"Wi yutsuvous pijoul."

"I will give you dried kelp."

"Va luqhsous gutsoulighulhwat, pishoudulhwat."

"I'm going to give you seaweed and live kelp."

Hi yituwani'l, "Ka louluwu'gh gitga."

He was told, "You will not take it [wind]."

Hi yililh, "Rrawulh louluwu'."

He said, "I want to take it with me."

"Wi wulut gou chge lughilh, gitga bi'k gou lughiyu'm, ya dou dawilhat wi wulut."

They said, "You will see. You will go back first, when you get halfway look back and then you will see."

Hiyu wulilh.

He saw it.

Hiyu wudavi'milh.

He was glad.

Da' dalilh.

He went on.

Gawu louhidurrayuqi'l.

The wind began to get stronger.

Rrakut hi lalhulim.

He was blown southward.

Ga gou rralhililh.

He did not get up again.

Hi lalhulim plhutqhaqh.

He was blown against the rocks.

Hi dalou'dalilh.

It blew him through the air.

Hi lhwalhilim.

He was blown through it.

Da hinuqh.

He died.

Rra'dughu'n hi lughilh.

The north wind went on.

Hi da louwilh shwouri lugaw'.

It came southeast.

Hiyu vutsuwetguk.

The tide went out.

Houlhi hi gawu jaqulu'wurr.

They began to dig clams.

Gawu gaqawou'm.

They did not know about him.

Chviyuwan gas gaqawurr da huwurruk.

Much later, they found out that he died.



Curlew images by Nick Maine (above left); Асен Игнатов (above).

Next month: Bitsoulaksh (Owl), a Wiyot story.

The Oldest Snowy Plover on Record Lives on – in Humboldt County!

By Mark A Colwell, Wildlife Department, HSU



Above: OR:YR, the 19-yr-old Snowy Plover, by Mark Colwell.

I began my professional career as an ornithologist steeped in the value of studying individually marked animals such as Spotted Sandpipers (*Actitis macularius*) and Wilson's Phalarope (*Phalaropus tricolor*). Consequently, when I began work on Snowy Plovers in 2000, my first endeavor was to capture and band as many individuals as possible. One bird in particular stands out in the local plover population.

On June 26, 2001, I worked with Sean McAllister (North Coast Field Biologists) and Amber Transou (California State Parks) to band a newly hatched chick in a brood of three from a nest located on the ocean-fronting beach south of Table Bluff. A year later, we recaptured this male elsewhere in the county, gave him his full complement of leg bands (orange over red on the left leg, and a yellow over red on his right), and named him OR:YR.

OR:YR is unique among plovers breeding along the Pacific Coast of the US. Remarkably, he is still alive over 19 years later! The previous longevity record (15 years) came from a Snowy Plover breeding in Oregon. Given that the average plover survives for three years, this individual is truly special. Coupled with long life, OR:YR has successfully reared 21 chicks, adding two this past summer from his breeding location in northern Humboldt County. However, his long life can

be split into two contrasting periods of approximately equal length. The first was as a largely unsuccessful breeder on Clam Beach, followed by a move to breed far more successfully at a new home further north. In fact, OR:YR has been 10 times more successful at rearing chicks as he aged and occupied other beaches in Humboldt County.

The Western Snowy Plover (*Charadrius nivosus*) was listed by the US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) as Threatened in 1993. For 20 years, I have worked with Humboldt State University students, state and federal biologists, and local citizens to monitor the plover population in Del Norte, Humboldt, and Mendocino counties. One of the most interesting facets of that project entailed keeping track of the survival and reproduction of plovers marked with colored leg bands. For hundreds of individuals, we accumulated detailed data on their 1) origin (i.e., hatched locally or an immigrant from elsewhere along the Pacific Coast), 2) age (in years); and 3) reproductive output (i.e., number of nests, eggs, chicks, and surviving juveniles). Collectively, this information is essential for evaluating whether or not the local population was growing, as required by the recovery plan for this species.

Conservation is founded in ecology. Ecologists seek to understand factors such as habitat, predation, and food that influence the distribution and abundance of a species; conservation biologists seek to apply this knowledge to maintain healthy wildlife populations. Nowhere is this more critical than with species that are at risk of extinction, especially those protected under the US Endangered Species Act, where federal law requires actions to increase population size.

The question remains: did OR:YR's ability to rear young correlate with learning (i.e., experience as he aged), was it that the specific habitats were better for rearing young, or both? We may have to do more research to answer that question, but based on our 20-year study, we discovered some interesting features of Snowy Plover demography in coastal Northern California. First, annual breeding population size varied between 19 and 74 adults, which was well below the 150 set by the USFWS recovery plan. Each year, immigrants, especially from Oregon, comprised roughly

2/3 of the breeding population. Second, the typical adult plover lived about 3 years, with males surviving slightly longer than females. Annually, most adults (60-100%) survived from one year to the next, although in one year, a majority of plovers died for unknown reasons. Finally, breeding success of individuals was often low and insufficient to replace adults that died each year, which gives further evidence to the importance of immigration.

The value of long-term studies of individually marked animals is apparent in these demographic data. It allows evaluation of the effectiveness of management practices such as habitat restoration and predator control, to be undertaken to effect conservation goals. In this case growing the number of plovers by increasing reproductive success and enhancing survival.

People often ask me "What is your favorite bird?" My answer depends on whether one asks about species or individuals. If it's the latter, then "OR:YR" is an easy call! •



Here are four tips from the Audubon Society for making our beaches safer for birds:

- Avoid areas that have been fenced off for nesting birds and if you see Snowy Plovers outside of fenced areas, give birds plenty of space by walking around them.
- If pets (DOGS) are permitted on beaches, keep them leashed and away from birds.
- Remove trash and food scraps, which attract animals that might eat shorebirds' eggs and/or chicks.
- Do not drive on beach dunes or other nesting areas.

Wildlife photographer Ann Constantino keeps track of seasonal birds in Southern Humboldt

Ruby-crowned Kinglets spend their winters with us after breeding in the Far North. They are especially abundant along the South Fork of the Eel River this winter. The tiny, yellow-green-gray birds might be heard first by their chatter, kind of like an old electric typewriter. They flit around constantly in brush or trees foraging for insect food. Only the male sports the ruby crown, which he can raise like spikes when he is agitated.

Below: Ruby-crowned Kinglets by Ann Constantino.



More Rare Sightings in Humboldt County!

A Eurasian Skylark (below left), found by Tony Kurz at Cock Robin Island and photographed by Russ Namitz at the recent Centerville Christmas Bird Count (CBC); a juvenile Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (not shown), spotted during the Arcata CBC, as well as an adult (below center) in Blue Lake on December 30, were both found and photographed by Tom Leskiw; and a Black-and-White Warbler (below right), taken at Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge by Ralph Bucher.

