



The Sandpiper

June 2021



Redwood Region Audubon Society

www.rras.org

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RRAS Feature on: Women Birders "Spark"

By Sarah Hobart

How are birders created? Are they hatched with binoculars and Sibley in hand? Or is there a pivotal moment in time that sparks a passion for everything feathered?

It's that age-old question of nature versus nurture. I don't have the answer, but I do remember the exact moment I became a birder. I was eight years old, the youngest of four kids growing up in Keene, New Hampshire, and my two sisters and I were standing by the window watching a chipmunk in our back yard. With no family pets of our own due to a strict anti-dander policy, we were obsessed with animals, particularly those of the cute and furry variety. And this little critter was adorable, bright-eyed, soft, and striped, busily stuffing seeds into her cheek pouches to prepare for the long winter ahead. We pressed our faces against the glass, entranced.

Without warning, a bird swooped down and snatched the chipmunk right off her haunches. With a few flaps, s/he carried her prize to the top of our swing set and began to eat it.

"Chippie!" shrieked one sister, and ran to her room crying.

My father, never one to let a teachable moment pass, brought out a pair of beat-up Bushnell's and a field guide. I picked up the binoculars and with a few adjustments was able to bring the bird into focus.

S/he had a rust-red back and bluish wings. There was a black mark like a mustache on her/his face. It was about the size of the robins I'd seen pulling worms from our lawn, but with a longer tail and a hooked bill from which a strand of pink tissue dangled.

"I'm gonna throw up," the other sister said, and off she went too.

Dad and I opened the field guide to the raptor section, and I ran a stubby finger down the illustrations until I reached the falcons. And there was our bird: A Sparrow Hawk, or American Kestrel to you youngsters.

"Neat," I said. And that was it. The Moment.

Fast-forward 20 (okay, 30) years: I was busy raising my own little family in Humboldt County when the local rare bird hotline reported a Burrowing Owl at the Arcata Marsh oxidation ponds. I'd never seen one

before, and owls, of course, are extra special cool. For some reason I decided to bring my youngest, who was a toddler at the time. I drove us to the sanctuary and loaded him into a backpack for the trip to the treatment ponds. It was a long walk, and he was a chunky little guy, so my feathers were drooping by the time I got to the rock pile where the owl had been spotted.

And . . . nothing. So it goes in birding.

But just as I was about to start the long trudge back, a round head with big yellow eyes popped out of a crevice – and I had my Burrowing Owl.

My boys are mostly out of the nest now, and the story of how I lugged my young son along on the owl quest has become part of our family lore. But whether I've succeeded in fostering a love of birding remains to be seen: there was a lot of competition from Pokémon, and later girls and cars, and girls. The other day, though, my youngest confided rather diffidently that he'd started a life list. It's in a little spiral-bound notebook, and I confess that I'm dying to take a peek. Because I really want to see if that Burrowing Owl is on it.



Above top left: Sarah Hobart, courtesy of Sarah. Above: Burrowing Owl, courtesy of iStock Photos.

NEW! Monthly Birdwatching Trips for Women & Girls – Led by Women Birders!

Starting Sunday, June 6th – RRAS begins a 6-month series of monthly birdwatching trips on the first Sunday of the month* (June through November), for women and girls; focused on creating inclusive, collaborative spaces for both novice and experienced female birders.

See our website at rras.org or contact our Field Trips Chair, Janelle, at janelle.choj@gmail.com, for more details.

Advance registration is required; sign up for any month with Janelle, who will lead the first walk in the Blue Lake Cottonwoods on **June 6th, 8:30-11am.**

(*July's walk is on the 2nd Sunday, due to the 4th.)

RRAS Virtual Program Presentation Please join us on Friday, June 11th at 7 pm, for Ornithology in Equatorial Borneo – on the Brink of Discovery

By Dan Froehlich

When you're tackling "one of the biggest remaining biogeographic puzzles of modern times" you've got to bring stamina and perseverance. Eureka moments in Field Ornithology aren't pursued with a peak experience at dawn on top of a mountain, but by slogging through day after day in tough conditions on the quest for one bit of data after another: we're looking for puzzle pieces scattered in the jungle, wondering what the picture we put together will look like.

On June 11th I will share an update on my research in some of the hottest forests on earth, right on the equator in Malaysian Borneo. Our team is tracking down the life history cycles of little-known understory birds with curious names like Fluffy-backed Tit-Babbler and Hook-billed Bulbul, and bringing to light interesting patterns in the strategies they have evolved in these ancient habitats. Come join me and get distracted by the amazing creatures and adventures we encounter along the way – and the sobering reality of some of these last great places on earth where the elusive Bornean Bristlehead ominously appears out of nowhere and only vestiges of the kingdom of the Black-naped Monarch (pictured) remain.

Dan is an ornithological vagrant on the heels of avian phenomena. His peregrinations around the globe yield insights into constraints driving life-history scheduling – from highly seasonal polar taxa to stable tropical forest species, with an emphasis on the evolution of molt strategies.

KID'S CORNER
WOWZA WILDLIFE!
By Leslie Scopes Anderson

HEY MUDNOSE!
HURRY IT UP!



FUN FACTS:

Barn Swallows
once nested in caves, but
now they mainly nest on struc-
tures like barns and bridges.
It may take as many as 300 trips
to a mud puddle to
gather enough mud to
build a nest.

WHERE IN THE WORLD?

Barn Swallows are found across No. America in summer, and migrate to So. America in winter. They can be seen swooping over water or meadows to catch insects.

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President's Column

By Gail Kenny

I am really enjoying seeing and hearing the spring migrating birds and arriving breeders this time of year. It is a fun change from the quiet of March. One way I have found to feed my bird nerdiness as well as entertain myself while driving or doing things around the house is listening to birding podcasts.

I got started with birding podcasts when Sharon Stiteler spoke at Godwit Days. She had a regular podcast she did with her husband, “Nonbirding Bill.” They chatted about interesting and weird bird news. Once they broke up the podcast stopped. I still follow her on Facebook and Instagram and really enjoy her humor and posts.

Through Sharon’s podcast, I learned about the Hannah and Erik Go Birding podcast (www.gobirdingpodcast.com/). They chat about their birding adventures and do some interviews too. Hannah also has a Women Birders Happy Hour podcast where she interviews women birders and shares a recipe for a mixed drink based on the guest’s favorite bird. As a nondrinker, I have no interest in the mixed drinks she shares, but I do enjoy the interviews of her guests and about the extra challenges women birders can have.

The American Birding Podcast (www.aba.org/podcast/) hosted by Nate Swick put out by the American Birding Association is a lively one with notes about current

rare birds in the ABA area, interviews with bird experts or authors, or a group of birders discussing current issues in birding. Don’t miss listening to the credits where Nate creates puns related to the topics and contributors to the podcasts.

Suzy Buttress is a UK birder who produces The Casual Birder Podcast (<https://casualbirderpod.libsyn.com/>). She chats about birding in her yard, her birding trips, and interviews people knowledgeable about birds. She also hosts an international birding community that is free to join and has a newsletter for the members of her group. It is all about really enjoying birds without the competition that sometimes comes with birding.

The host of the Bird Banter Podcast, birders talking about birding, is Dr. Ed Pullen, a retired physician living in Washington State. He is an enthusiastic and interested interviewer. It’s been especially fun to hear him interview people like John Sterling, a well-known, formally local birder and bird researcher.

The easiest way to find these podcasts is to use the podcast app on your smart phone by searching for them by name or search for them in your internet browser.

Don’t forget to check out the auction items posted on our online fundraiser in partnership with Godwits Days from Friday, May 28 to Sunday, June 6 at www.biddingowl.com/godwitdaysRRAS. You will be helping support our organizations by bidding on our auction items. Thank you to everyone who has contributed for helping make this fundraiser possible and for supporting our organizations.

Unravelling the Mystery of Marbled Murrelets

By Gary Falxa

Marbled Murrelets do not readily reveal their lifestyle secrets to human observers. It was not until 1974 that the first murrelet nest was found – by a tree surgeon – high in an old-growth redwood. We now know that murrelets nest almost exclusively on large limbs of big conifer trees within flying distance of the coast. Murrelets are seabirds, relatives of murres and puffins in the alcid family, spending most of their lives on coastal ocean waters. While most alcids nest in colonies on sea rocks and islands, murrelets nest in large trees (typically in old-growth redwood forests in NW California). Marbled Murrelet numbers have declined dramatically in the last century due to loss of old forests, resulting in them being an endangered species.

A challenge for studying murrelets is that they lay a single egg on a flat spot on a large limb with nearby foliage, often 100 feet or more high, without building any nest—which would be easier to spot. Plus there’s the stealth behavior of coming and going from their nest during the low light of dawn and dusk. This likely reduces risk of predation on the parent murrelets and their offspring, but also makes finding nests really, really difficult.

Given all this, a recent study by Oregon State University (OSU) scientists provides an eye-opener into an unknown aspect of Marbled Murrelet ecology – whether they choose to nest near other murrelets. We know that their relatives mostly nest in colonies. You’ve likely heard about the efforts to entice Atlantic Puffins to recolonize historic nesting islands, and how “social attraction” techniques, such as puffin decoys and playing the calls of puffins, has been key to success. Biologists have hypothesized that nesting murrelets might be social like their relatives, but were unable to test that hypothesis due to the challenge of finding murrelet nests.

The OSU study tested whether murrelets are attracted to forest stands with other murrelets present. To do this,

they picked 28 stands of potential breeding habitat and randomly divided them into two groups of 14. For one group (“treatment sites”), they simulated presence of nesting murrelets by playing murrelet vocalizations during the 2016 breeding season, and collected data on whether murrelets visited the stands, as indicated by actual vocalizations recorded by sound recorders placed in the stands. At the other 14 stands (“control sites”), they did not play calls, but recorded actual murrelet vocalizations.

The results were striking. By late in the breeding season the chance of detecting murrelet calls in the treatment sites was about 15 times greater than in the control sites. The researchers went further to confirm these results. The next breeding season (2017), they did not play vocalizations, but visited the forest stands and conducted surveys to detect murrelet behaviors associated with breeding (recall that finding actual nests is extremely difficult). Remarkably, the effect continued a year after playing vocalizations, such that the odds of murrelets occupying the treatment sites were 10 times greater than for the control sites, where no vocalizations had been played.

These findings have conservation implications for this endangered seabird. It adds to accumulating evidence that larger blocks of murrelet nesting habitat are more effective at conserving murrelets than many small isolated patches, as larger habitat blocks should better maintain groups of nesting murrelets. Also, restoring habitat around known nesting sites may help protect current and future murrelets by providing habitat for more nesting murrelets, and for new murrelet pairs to join existing pairs nesting in those areas.

Studies of wild animals do not often find such clear and relevant results. We now know that Marbled Murrelets are likely attracted to nesting habitat with other murrelets present.

(Valente, J.J.; S.K. Nelson; J.W. Rivers; D.D. Roby; M.G. Betts. 2021. *Experimental evidence that social information affects habitat selection in Marbled Murrelets. Ornithology, vol. 138: 1-13.*)



Above: Marbled Murrelet on her egg. Photo by Brett Lovelace, Oregon State University.

16th Annual Student Nature Writing Contest: “What Nature Means to Me.”

In this second year of Covid-19 shutdowns, students ramped up their participation to exceed 90 poems and essays; the second highest total entered since the contest began in 2006. RRAS awarded \$100 in prizes to the following schoolchildren who explored the topic. (A booklet containing all nature writing winners is available for downloading at rras.org.)

First Place Winner, Junior Division:

On Hummingbird Wings

By Bony McKnight, Grade 4, Coastal Grove Charter



I am going for a walk with my family. We're visiting Berkeley, and it's raining, and it's been raining the whole time we've been here. I'm feeling grumpy because my mom insisted that we go out and get exercise, even though it's soaking wet. We were walking on a path in between houses. The path was made of cobblestones and the rain made them slippery. I feel so grumpy I think I hate nature.

I wish I could've been inside, reading a book and drinking tea or hot chocolate. But I'm not. My raingear is wet on the inside, and I can't take it off because it's clinging to my skin.

We're finally walking back, and I'm feeling even grumpier, because I'm even wetter. And wetter. And wetter. Suddenly a hummingbird zips out of a nearby loquat tree and hovers a few feet away. "That's suspicious," my mom says. She walks over to the loquat tree and pulls down a branch, lifting up the leaves. Everyone comes over and gasps when we see what's underneath the leaves: a perfect nest, constructed of lichens and lined with soft feathers.

Inside are three pure white eggs, smaller than marbles.

I'm so amazed I just stare at them for a while. Everyone does. I've never seen a hummingbird nest before. It's so small and perfect. It's amazing it doesn't get blown away by the wind. I feel so awed by how one hummingbird could build that and lay her eggs and take care of the eggs and then the young hummingbirds as they grow, without ever letting the world know. Being able to hide them so well in places that people would never normally think to look.

And I think about what I thought before about how much I hated nature when it was so dripping and wet. But

now I feel glad to be outside in the rain. I'm glad to have found the nest. And I'm not even feeling how wet my rain gear is anymore.

And so I realize that even if I'm not happy about the rain, I can find something I love about nature in whatever I'm not liking about nature. I don't feel like reading a book anymore. I feel like being outside and enjoying nature. With the hummingbirds.

First Place Winner, Senior Division:

Moonlight Escapade

By Naomi Harrison, Grade 9, Academy of the Redwoods



I bathe
In the moonlight, I bathe
The light flows down around me like a pool of water
I am still

Silently my wings rise
I tip forward, at the very edge – !
Glide into flight
A dark shape swishing through the trees

My eyes peer into the darkness
Searching
I need no light to guide me
I can see

A rustle catches my ear
The wind?
Or something more?
I swoop around just in case

Twitching
The sound of soil
Nervous chatter vibrates through the forest
I can hear

Shadows fall
Rise
The distant crickets chirp sadly to an unknown pattern
I circle around the area

The wind changes
Scents shift
There it is, what I am looking for, my very purpose
I can smell

Wings, hovering
Air pushes me up
The cool night air has no effect on my warm feathers
I make sure of its place

There
I swoop, fast and silent
Crushing through the hiding place my claws meet fur
I can feel

A short battle
Desperate tiny claws
The place is too cramped to fully spread my wings
My teeth and talons do the work

I prepare myself
C-r-a-c-k
My beak comes back stained with blood
I can taste

I see the bright moonlight
It is quieter now
The smell of death is pungent in the air
My claws clamp
My tongue still stained

Floating silent
Through
The
Air.

RRAS Seeks Volunteer for Liaison to Tolowa Dee-ni'

Redwood Region Audubon Society (RRAS) has recently allied with the Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation in Del Norte County. The primary purpose of forming this relationship is to assist in the repatriation/rematriation of what is currently known as the Reservation Ranch, back to the Tolowa Dee-ni'.

In order to facilitate communication between the Tolowa Dee-ni' and RRAS, it would be helpful to establish a liaison that is a resident of their territory (Del Norte County) and a member of our RRAS Chapter. Please contact our President, Gail Kenny, if you are interested.

You can find out more about the Tolowa Dee-ni' efforts to regain their land at www.arcgis.com/apps/Cascade/ and www.tolowa-nsn.gov/REZRANCH_StoryMap.

RRAS Field Trips in June!

Sat. June 5th – 8:30-11am Arcata Marsh with Gary Friedrichsen.

Sun. June 6th – 8:30-11 am Blue Lake Cottonwoods with Janelle Chojnacki. *This is the first of our monthly Women & Girls Birdwatching Walks series!*

Sun. June 13th – 9-11am Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge with Ralph Bucher.

Sun. June 20th – 9-11am Eureka Waterfront Trail with Ralph Bucher.

Sun. June 26th – 8:30-11am Arcata Marsh with Elizabeth Meisman.

View rras.org for more details and how to register for all walks.

COVID protocols will be in place.



Pitsou'laksh (Owl) – 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 Della Prince, published in Teeter, Karl V. and John D. Nichols. 1993. Wiyot Handbook. Memoir 10, Algonquian and Iroquoian Linguistics. Winnipeg: Department of Linguistics, University of Manitoba, pp. 9-12. Spellings have been converted to the approved Wiyot writing system and English translations have been edited for clarity.

This story tells how, long ago, **Pitsou'laksh** (Great Horned Owl) did not provide for his family, but hoarded all the food he hunted for himself. His wife discovered his secret and banished him to live alone in a dark place far from other people.

Please enjoy this story in the original **Soulatluk** (Wiyot language), with English translation, with a few key words and phrases in bold type along with their English equivalents:

1. Gouqe gou dali', **pitsou'laksh** hi wisubuli.
*Long ago, where he used to live, **Great Horned Owl** was married.*
2. Hou dula gish dawikuvuqu'l, **viwi'**, wanaqh, hou daliqu'l.
*He looked around in vain for **food** when he went hunting.*
3. Hou **mabu'lilh** da vulh, gi youtwilh.
*He never brought anything in his **fishnet**.*
4. Galu wulou' **jejach**.
*There was no **meat**.*
5. Lhe gou shvi **youwilh**.
***He came** back with nothing.*
6. Juwa vulh daghurru'l da klhe **vadagh**.
*That's why [his family] eventually was **starving**.*
7. Dalhda hou danughurruk, gawu **svitwamilh**, gawu bubouchguqurrilh.
*Some time later, [his wife] started **thinking about it**; she started to get sores.*
8. "Shuwa yulh da gida rruqi'lak?"
"What's wrong with me?" she wondered.
9. "Svawi **viwurrilh** rrou gouwi'."
*"My husband is very **fat**."*
10. "**Wugilh** gitga dawilham."
"Now I'm going to watch him."
11. "Hou **duruwulhari'**, diqlhil gitga."
"Tomorrow I'll lie down."
12. "Gawitw."
"I'll start to close my eyes."
13. "Lhe **gaqou'm**, hou rra'lhuliqu'l."
*"Then **I'll know** when he gets up."*
14. Hi tighudalilh.
Then he went out.
15. "Gurra lu vitsurru'."
"I'm not asleep," [she thought.]
16. "Dalu **vi'shaqh** vulh."
*"I'm still **awake**."*
17. "Hi wulu hou gou guduwiq'u'l, **vus** hidouwughurru'n."
*"I see him coming back in, he's building a **fire**."*
18. Da nitwilh.
She kept her eyes closed.

19. **Vadi'**, hi vou vou'luvilh.
*He brought **wood**.*
20. Hi wusatoumilh, hi gawouluwilh, hi gawu **lulhuliv**.
*He carried it and set it on the fire, and **it burned her**.*
21. "Lhe gurra rarutkshi'."
"I won't move," she thought.
22. "Hi wulu vulh **hou dumiqu'l**."
*"I see **him sitting** there."*
23. Gawu' shanadi'milh **vutseshura'wulh** gou dali'm.
*He started to reach for **the stone mortar** that lay there.*
24. Ji ya gawu' **shanadi'milh**, gourr vutseshura'wulh gou dali'm.
***He reached for** the mortar lying there.*
25. Gawu' shanadi'milh, hi **noulunuvilh** viwi'.
*He started to reach for it, and **he lifted out** food.*
26. Gawu lhe'n, wourr vulh hulu'n viwi'.
He took out all kinds of food.
27. Gawu **bouwilh**.
***He started to cook**.*
28. **Vutsu'n**, simi' gaplhoy.
*He started to eat **dried food** and fresh food.*
29. Gidubulouy.
He finished eating.
30. Hi gou gawu **dali'silh**, hi gou shab lanuli'silh.
*He **put it back down** again just like it was before.*
31. Gou diqlhiv.
He lay back down.
32. Huruwulhari', gou rralhamilh.
The next morning she saw him leave again.
33. Wanaqh va **gou** lalilh.
*He went hunting **again**.*
34. Wa ga nou gurruwulhari', hi na'lhulilh daqoun, **tsek** daqoun.
*The **children** got up not long after it got light.*
35. "**Rralhu'li**, va gajvelhighurrou'si, valhuduk gitga, gawu bou gitga."
*[Their mother told them,] "**Get up**, go wash your faces, we're going to feast, I'm going to start cooking!"*
36. "Lhu **wulu** viwi' gou dali'm."
*"**I saw** where the food lies."*
37. Hi **lughilh**.
*Then **she went**.*
38. Hi nadouluwilh gourr vutseshura'wulh.
She lifted up that stone mortar.
39. Duwayulhagi, viwi'!
"Just look at the food!" [she cried.]
40. "Juwa **dali'm**."
*"That's where **it lies**."*
41. "Yil da gilh vadagh."
"I'm starving!"
42. "**Gawu** bou."
*"I'll **start to cook**."*
43. Hi valhilh.
Then she feasted.
44. Tsek hi dou **valhilh**.
*Then the children **feasted**.*
45. Biju lu wula lhukilh daqoun, tsek.
The children had enough to eat.

46. Hi rou tighudalilh, gawu **ra'rughurrarilh** daqoun.
*Then they all went out and started **playing**.*
47. **Shabayuqh** walh vulh hi gou valhilh.
***At noon** they feasted again.*
48. Svawi **vouyughurruk**, tsek gutgalhul.
*Late in the **afternoon**, the children were outside.*
49. Juwa gas **gou louwilh**.
*That's when **he came home**.*
50. Ya ga nughurruk, ya qi **tulimilh**.
*When he arrived, **he spoke harshly to them**.*
51. Shuwa dou rruqi' daqoun?
"What's the matter with them?" he asked.
52. **Dali'** da gou louwilh.
*He came back **inside the house**.*
53. Gou loushishvedarilh.
Again he brought nothing with him.
54. "Gawu tulis, gitga **qalhwa** ji vulh hulaqi'lum?"
*[His wife said], "I'm going to talk to you. **Why** do you treat me this way?"*
55. "Wugilh juwa da gaqou'm qalhwa, juwa vulh hulaqi'lum."
"Now I know why you do that to me."
56. "Da douwilhulut."
"You burn me."
57. "Da'gh da gilh vadagh."
"We are starving."
58. "Ka yawi' ya? Kulak da'l gitga."
"Aren't you ashamed? You can't stay here anymore."
59. "**Gou'wigaqh**, ga gou rruda'l."
*Never go **among people** again.*
60. "Da **sisvulou'nek**, juwa gitga du dalit."
*"You must go where it is **pitch dark**."*
61. "Juwa hi da **da'lut**."
*"There **you can talk**."*



pitsou'laksh
Della Prince

Above: Great Horned Owl, courtesy of iStock.
Left: Hover your phone camera over the audio file to hear the word, pitsou'laksh (owl) in Soulatluk (Wiyot).