

The Sandpiper

April 2024



Redwood Region Audubon Society

www.rras.org



Join us Thursday, April 18, at 7:00 p.m., with **Michael van Hattem**, Senior Environmental Scientist with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, who will present:

An Overview of CDFW Lands and Ongoing Restoration Projects

Mike is pictured here with an adult Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) in coastal Humboldt

County. Mike received his BS from Humboldt State University and MS from San Jose State University. His current interests include environmental law and impact assessment, the conservation of Species of Special Concern and Sensitive Natural Communities, wetland science, herpetology, and avian monitoring.

Programs are held at Six Rivers Masonic Lodge, 251 Bayside Road, Arcata, or go to rras.org for the Zoom link. Drinks and goodies are served at 7:00 p.m., the program begins at 7:30.



Don't miss Godwit Days! April 18-21

Join the North Coast's annual bird festival at the Arcata Community Center for many happenings, including:

- Field trips and workshops for beginners and experts
- Keynote speakers: April 19, "Stories from the Nest," by Sequoia Park Zoo biologists, and April 20, "Birding Fast and Slow," by Alvaro Jaramillo, renowned bird guide and author
- Bird Fair: commercial vendors and informational booths by conservation organizations
- Bird art from local artists and students

For more offerings and all the details, visit the website at godwitdays.org.

RRAS FIELD TRIPS IN APRIL



Every Saturday, 8:30-11am. Join RRAS at the Arcata Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary for a free guided field trip with an experienced birder. Spring is well on its way, and many resident birds may be singing, nesting, and showing signs of breeding activity. Shorebirds will likely be quite abundant as well so keep an eye and ear out for willets, godwits, sanderlings, avocets, and curlews in the tidal areas, the islands in the ponds, and the mud around the marsh. Bring your binoculars and meet the trip leader at the end of South I Street (Klopp Lake).

Trip leaders for April: April 6, Larry Karsteadt ~ April 13, Kathryn Wendel ~ April 20, Dan Greaney ~ April 27, Michael Morris

More Field Trips

Sunday, April 14, 9-11am. Join trip leader Ralph Bucher for a walk at the Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge. This two-mile walk is along a wide, flat, gravel-packed trail easily accessible on foot. Just south of Eureka, this refuge offers access to tidally influenced habitats that host a variety of ducks, raptors, and shorebirds. Email Ralph to sign up at [thebook\[at\]reninet.com](mailto:thebook[at]reninet.com).

Sunday, April 21, 9-11am. Ralph Bucher leads a walk at the Eureka Waterfront, starting at the foot of Del Norte Street. This walk is on a flat, paved trail that is **wheelchair accessible**. Be on the lookout for shorebirds, cormorants, loons, grebes, and activity on an Osprey nest across the bay. Email Ralph to sign up at [thebook\[at\]reninet.com](mailto:thebook[at]reninet.com).

Saturday April 27, 9-11am. Wigi Wetlands Volunteer Workday. Help restore a section of the bay trail behind Bayshore Mall. Bring water and gloves, we provide tools and snacks. Contact Jeremy Cashen at jeremy.cashen@yahoo.com or 214-605-7368, for more information.

Saturday, April 27, time TBD. Join RRAS in **Southern Humboldt** on the fourth Saturday of every month at Tooby Park, one mile west of Garberville on Sprowl Creek Road. These walks will be easy, lasting two to three hours each. *Trip leader for this walk is TBD*, heavy rain cancels, call Ann Constantino for start time at (707) 296-8720.

Check rras.org for pop-up field trips planned after the Sandpiper deadline.

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President's Column

By Kathryn Wendel



Greetings fellow birders and conservationists! My name is Kathryn Wendel, and I am honored to introduce myself as the new president of Redwood Region Audubon Society. Since graduating from the former Humboldt State University with a degree in Wildlife, I have been volunteering with Audubon chapters all over California, from the Bay Area to San Diego. My family and I moved back to Humboldt a few years ago, and I had hoped to continue volunteering with Audubon. I am pleased to have been so welcomed into guiding bird walks and serving on the RRAS Board of Directors.

Many of you have already gotten to know me as an avid birder and leader of guided walks, but beyond the birds, I also believe bird conservation depends on a strong community of birders and bird-lovers, and we will continue to build on this by engaging others in the joys of watching birds, learning about their needs, and advocating for policies that protect them and their habitats.

In March we had our annual banquet and

silent auction, which not only serve to strengthen the birding community by bringing everyone together, but also serve as a major fund-raiser, and this year's event easily met both goals. Many thanks to all the awesome local businesses and wonderful individuals for the generous donations, and a big thank-you to all the volunteers who make the banquet such a success.

I would also like to welcome our newest board member, Jolian Kangas, who has graciously accepted the position of Secretary. Jolian is a local business owner who values conservation, and we are pleased to have him on the board. Thank you for joining!

We are always looking for more volunteers on every level, from once-a-year events like the banquet, to leading bird walks, or even volunteering on the board of directors. We currently have an open board position. As a member of the board of directors you will help advocate for the protection of birds and other wildlife by increasing the understanding and appreciation of the natural world, and by initiating and supporting local conservation and education efforts. If you are that person, please contact me, Kathryn Wendel, katwend82@gmail.com, or Gail Kenny, gailgkenny@gmail.com.

Bird News Round-Up

Compiled by Gina Rogers

PBS Nature recently released an episode focusing on bird migration that's worth a watch. **Flyways** (Season 41, Episode 10), which premiered on February 7, spotlights ornithologists and citizen scientists following shorebirds (curlews, yellowlegs, and godwits among them) as they travel from feeding grounds in the southern hemisphere to breeding grounds in the Arctic and back again, with a goal of better understanding their crashing populations amidst climate change and urban development. ☺ For programming with a local flair, check out the **KEET Field Trips**. Though designed primarily to show middle-school students how math and science are used in various professions, they feature some local birding spots and people, such as the Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge with Denise Seeger and the Arcata Marsh with George Ziminsky. ☺ And then there's the news that **For the Birds: The Birdsong Project** won the GRAMMY for the Best Boxed or Special Limited Edition Package. Birding is definitely

making it into the mainstream media! The set

includes more than 200 tracks of original music and bird-related poetry pulled together by several creative artists who started listening to bird songs when COVID hit, and they dreamed up the idea of an original

collection of music that would celebrate birds and raise awareness to the environmental threats they face. ☺ In **Bird Populations Are Declining** (January 17, 2024), *Washington Post* analyst Harry Stevens reported on the staggering loss of three billion breeding adult birds (30 percent of the population) in just half a century. The article includes an interactive map drawing on eBird data that lets you explore whether bird populations in your local area are declining or increasing. One response to the report has been a call for more native plant gardens to help resident and migrating bird species locally. You can answer the call by marking your calendars for the North Coast California Native Plant Society's Spring Sale, which takes place May 4 and 5 at their nursery at Freshwater Farms



KID'S CORNER Wowza Wildlife!

By Leslie Scopes Anderson

YOUR TURN
TO GET THE
BILL!



WHERE IN THE WORLD?

Marbled Godwits can be seen at the Arcata Marsh during migration in the spring and fall. They come in such big numbers we even have a festival named after them in April!

FUN FACTS:

Marbled Godwits are large shorebirds that have a long, upturned bill that allows them to forage for aquatic invertebrates and plant tubers in the mudflats.

“Bird Talk Around Town”

Featuring interviews with locals on all things bird!

By Gary Friedrichsen

Gary met Daniil Suchkov and Evelina Nagornykh when they joined one of the RRAS Saturday morning walks he was leading at the Arcata Marsh. Their interesting backgrounds and easy way of sharing their bird sightings inspired him to do this interview to learn more about them.

Что новор? That is as close as I can type with the Cyrillic letters available on my keyboard for the words “What’s new?” in Russian. It would be pronounced *shtoh NOH-vuh-vuh*. Like most Russian words, they are tongue twisters for Americans. And yet Russian is a phonetic language that is much more straightforward to learn than our incredibly complex English.

Daniil Suchkov (pronounced “Dani-ill”) and his wife Evelina Nagornykh can both verify this fact. And they chuckle about the confusion our mother tongue delights in inflicting on those that were not born to this language. This young couple can often be found at the Arcata Marsh complex with their large-lensed cameras pointed at birds and other



wildlife in the ponds. As a docent for RRAS, I have had the pleasure of meeting them on several of my marsh walks this past year. So, it was fun for me to sit down with them recently and learn a little bit about them and their impressions of their new neighbors.

When I asked my first question “*Where are you from in Russia?*” I was expecting to hear Moscow or maybe St. Petersburg, but not Siberia! They both grew up in the city of Angarsk, which is located just north of Lake Baikal, and they attended different universities in

the much larger city of Novosibirsk, just a mere thirty-hour train ride to the west. They laugh about our relation to distances, noting that the entire continental United States fits quite nicely within the borders of Siberia, with room to spare.

My next question was the one I had been wondering about since our first meeting – “*How in the heck did you get from Siberia to Arcata?*” The quick answer “on a plane” was followed with some details. Daniil had found work in Novosibirsk with Azul Systems, a Java-based software company, and he was almost immediately tagged to work from the headquarters in Sunnyvale. Unfortunately, Covid-19 gummed up the works. The couple were supposed to arrive in the spring of 2020, but had to wait until fall to make the flight to the Bay Area. Sunnyvale proved to be too warm for these Siberians, and on a vacation, they traveled up to visit Trinidad and fell in love with this area. Daniil can work from home, so they chose to relocate up here.

When asked about their reception into this community, both Evelina and Daniil said they loved how willingly people shared their knowledge.



“The things we learned on all the bird walks added a whole new dimension to our appreciation for the nature of this region. Before moving here, we had no idea what a unique place Humboldt Bay was. And on the walks, no one judged us for not knowing how to tell a Northern Pintail from a Green-winged Teal.”

Next question: “*How did you find RRAS in the first place?*” Daniil accidentally stumbled upon the Northcoast Environmental Center (NEC) office on Google Maps, and then from the NEC list including RRAS as one of their member groups, he found our website. He added, “The bird walks sounded like a good way to learn more about this place and to socialize a bit” (which is a challenge if you’re an immigrant who works from home). They have been delighted to find a local community of people who share their interests.

They both grew up with a love for nature and wild animals. Evelina has volunteered at a wildlife rescue center, showing me photos of a recovering



hedgehog and family of Great Tits. She and Daniil each have their own Sony camera and are always willing to talk about their equipment. I am amazed at Daniil’s ability to hold his big zoom lens and teleconverter steady, and how both are able to capture the birds, even when they are moving around and mostly hidden. Evelina and Daniil recommend using cameras as a tool to help study nature. Many times, things appear when the photos are reviewed on the computer, and discoveries are made. Daniil spoke of how he noticed, in one of their photos, the flexibility of the bill on the Wilson’s Snipe. They use it to clamp down on prey items deep in the mud.

So the next time you run into this lovely couple at the marsh, don’t hesitate to ask for a peek at their cameras. You just might learn something new.

PHOTOS: left, Marsh Wren tending its nest, by Daniil; top left, Wood Duck, by Evelina; top right, Bufflehead, by Daniil; bottom, juvenile Red-shouldered Hawk, by Evelina.

Do You Hear Something Knocking? Maybe It's a Downy Woodpecker

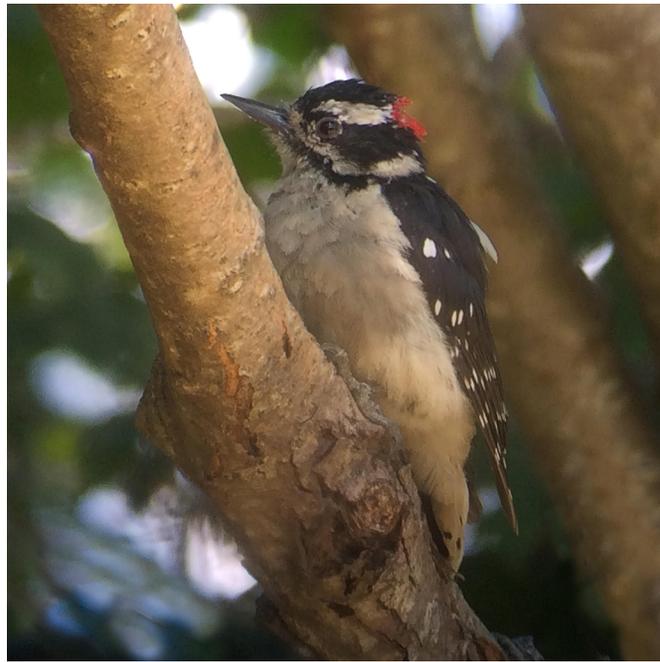
By Hal Genger

Photo by Gary Bloomfield

The Downy Woodpecker is one of my favorite year-round yard birds! This dapper black-and-white bird is the smallest member of the American woodpeckers. It is easily identified by its small size, black wings with white spots, white belly, and a dark head and white stripe above and below its eye. Males have a red patch at the back of the head. Besides its size, the easiest way to tell the Downy from the similar-colored Hairy Woodpecker is by the bill size. The Downy's bill looks smaller and is about one-third the head length, while the Hairy's bill is three-quarters of its head length. Also, the Downy Woodpecker's white outer tail feathers have black bars while the Hairy Woodpecker's are solid white. The Downy Woodpecker is now *Dryobates* (*dryo* = tree; *bates* = one that walks) *pubescens* (= downy for white patch on back between wings), although you may see it listed by its older genus, *Picoides* (*pic* = woodpecker).

These woodpeckers live in a variety of habitats: deciduous and evergreen forests, orchards, parks, and neighborhoods all over the United States up into Alaska and Canada. They have the standard undulating flight of many woodpeckers and move up, down, sideways, or out on small twigs. Sometimes they are in bushes on the ground.

Downy Woodpeckers feed on all types of crawling insects—attached (e.g., scale insects) and boring insects. Maybe a quarter of their food comes from vegetation, grain, and small berries. Males generally feed higher in the trees and out on smaller branches where food is more prevalent. This limits females to larger branches and trunks. Cornell Lab notes that when males are removed from an area, females will move out to smaller



branches. They really like to eat my suet and occasionally the black sunflower seeds in my feeders!

This time of year is breeding time for many birds, including the Downy Woodpecker. They can burrow nests in live or dead trees or even use fence posts. Because of their small size, they only need a tree or branch to be four inches in diameter, but generally choose a larger size. Both sexes work on the nest, but the male does most of the chipping. Nests are 10-30 feet above the ground and have an entrance of 1-1½ inches. This increases in size toward the larger brooding chamber, which is 6-12 inches from the mouth. The nest may take one to three weeks to complete depending on the wood type, with the male using half of the daylight hours to work on the burrow.

The female lays three to eight (usually four to five) white eggs and both parents alternate sitting on them until they hatch in twelve days or so. The male always takes the night shift while the female sleeps elsewhere. The young are *altricial* (born naked) and will almost double their weight the first day. Hatchlings take seventeen to eighteen days to become fully grown. Both parents feed the young continually during the day, often switching to larger prey items as demand increases. Soon the young look just like the adults, except the juvenile males have more of a red crest than the adult males do. When it's time to fledge, the parents decrease feeding so the young will leave the nest. The young usually perch in nearby trees. Within a week, the young follow the parents and learn to find food. It's a real treat to have the parents bring the young to my suet feeder and show them how to look for bugs in the tree.

As the days get longer and warmer and you get out in nature, look for the active and colorful Downy Woodpeckers, and hopefully you'll get to see this year's new crop of woodpeckers too!



DID YOU KNOW?

From the CatBird
Committee

Predators in nature tend to be rare compared to their prey populations. Wild predators depend on their prey and will naturally decline when prey populations go down. But domestic cat predation of birds is unlike that of any native predator, most importantly because cats are fed by people. The cat population is therefore maintained far above any natural carrying capacity.

Adapted from "Proceedings of the Fourth International Partners in Flight Conference: Impacts of free-ranging domestic cats on birds in the United States," N. Dauphine and R. J. Cooper, 2009.

Your membership in Redwood Region Audubon supports our field trips, programs, education, and conservation efforts. You may also join us online at www.rras.org and click the JOIN US button. We have two different types of memberships:

Local membership For just \$15 a year you will receive *EcoNews*, with the *Sandpiper* inserted. To join locally mail a check for \$15 made out to RRAS with your name, address, and email address to: Redwood Region Audubon Society
PO Box 1054, Eureka, CA 95502

National membership Join National Audubon and receive *EcoNews* with the *Sandpiper* along with *Audubon* magazine. Please use our Chapter Code C24 so that we receive our share of your membership.

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