



The Sandpiper

August 2024



Redwood Region Audubon Society

www.rras.org

Birding Around the World: Reports from RRAS Member Experiences

Panama 1981: Over 300 Species in a Day!

By Larry Karsteadt - Dedicated to the Memory of Billy Clow



Although it was over forty years ago, I remember our trip to Panama like it was yesterday. Back in March 1981, I joined up with my Humboldt State (now Cal-Poly Humboldt) friends Gary Friedrichsen and Mark “Mud” Andrews (as close friends called Mark back then) on a once-in-a-lifetime birding trip to Panama, led by guide Billy Clow.

Looking back, I remember vivid green vegetation and ponds at the Tocumen Marsh, and the first bird I recall seeing—jet black with a beyond-

bright scarlet rump, aptly named the Scarlet-rumped Cacique—hooked me for life on tropical birding (pictured above). The marsh was thriving with life, so many new species of birds all at once. It took me weeks to sort through the many new and strange names, like Chachalaca, Oropendola, Euphonia, Jacana, Motmot, with colors that kept, well, knocking my jet leg off. Then this once-upon-a-time Mammalogy TA saw a strange new mammal swimming in one of the ponds. Gary correctly guessed it was the weasel relative, a Greater Grison, but before I could exalt much over a new mammal to me, Mark suddenly jumped up and yelled, “SNAKE!!!” I almost stepped right on a huge Common Lancehead (*Bothrops atrox*) with a tick on its head. Fortunately for us, this highly venomous pit viper stayed curled up, and we went on our wary way.

New birds for me were everywhere: Anhinga, Tri-Colored Heron, Glossy

Ibis, Prothonotary Warbler, Lineated Woodpecker, Rufous Motmot with its stunning racket-shaped tail. And that was just the start of Day One! We headed into Panama City to find a place to stay, surprised to find it full of traffic, packed with people for the annual Mardi Gras celebration. We had a heck of a time finding rooms, finally found two... but that’s another story. We were there to bird!

True to tropical birding, we got up every day around 4 a.m. and headed to a wild place to hear the dawn chorus, which in the bird-busiest parts of Panama was so loud we could barely hear one another. We’d bird until early evening with an afternoon break when the birding slowed down. Some nights, we’d go owling too. It was magical, exhausting, and beyond exhilarating.



Just north of Panama City and the Canal is the Pipeline Road, well known by the global birding community as an exceptionally rich area to see lots of feathered friends. That was an understatement. And the mammal species diversity was not bad either. We saw my first

Woolly Opossum, Two- and Three-toed

Sloths, a Giant Anteater, Tamandua, and many species of nonhuman primates, most notably, Howler Monkeys. But back to the birds. Driving before dawn one day, everyone’s first and for me only Sunbittern (above) walked across the road. We heard the Great Tinamou and saw the Little, along with White-necked Jacobin, Sungrebe, Tiger Herons, Plumbeous Falcon, antshrikes, spectacular toucans,

continued on page 2

RRAS FIELD TRIPS IN AUGUST

Every Saturday, 8:30-11am. Join RRAS at the Arcata Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary for a free guided field trip with an experienced birder. The meet-up spot is in the parking area at the end of I Street (Klopp Lake). Facilities – one portable. Bring binoculars if you have them. If not, come on out anyway!

Trip leaders for August: August 3, Bill Rodstrom ~ August 10, Dan Greaney ~ August 17, Kathryn Wendel ~ August 24, Larry Karsteadt ~ August 31, Tamar Danufsky

More Field Trips

***NEW* Sunday, August 11, 1pm.** Join Pete Haggard for an insect and native plant walk at the I Street parking lot just before the railroad tracks. Highlights may include swallowtail butterfly larva, woolly worm moth larvae, and their food plants.

Sunday, August 11, 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. Email Ralph to sign up at [thebook\[at\]reninet.com](mailto:thebook[at]reninet.com).

Sunday, August 18, 9-11am. Ralph Bucher leads a walk on the Eureka Waterfront Trail, starting at the foot of Del Norte Street and continuing on a flat, paved trail that is **wheelchair accessible**. This relatively urban trail offers the potential to observe a variety of species on the bay and along the trail. Email Ralph to sign up at [thebook\[at\]reninet.com](mailto:thebook[at]reninet.com).

Saturday August 24, 9-11am. Wigi Wetlands Volunteer Workday. Help create bird-friendly native habitats and restore a section of the bay trail behind Bayshore Mall by removing invasive plants and trash. Bring water and gloves, we provide tools and snacks. *See the bulletin on page 2.*

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

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President's Column

By Kathryn Wendel

Redwood Region is a small but active Audubon chapter, known for its birding field trips, but did you know we are also very active in local bird conservation concerns? We are closely following the off-shore wind project, and keeping up with all the latest developments. Our Conservation Committee meets once a month to discuss this conservation concern as well as many others, such as the proposed restoration project along Lower Redwood Creek near Orick or, closer to home, the rezoning of a parcel of land in Eureka for public use and wildlife conservation rather than development. Look for more information on these projects in future issues of the *Sandpiper*.

You don't have to be a top birder to contribute to local bird conservation. RRAS is always looking for



more volunteers, and we currently have an open board position and are also seeking a new coordinator for our ongoing Wigi Wetlands restoration project. Volunteer workdays at the Wigi Wetlands are held on the last Saturday of the month. See the listing on the field trip schedule on page 1, and an update on our progress (below).

RRAS is pleased to announce that we will be hosting a **pelagic birding field trip** this fall! Join us aboard the *Stellar Sunrise* on October 5 for an oceanic bird and wildlife tour down to the Eel River Canyon with leaders Sean McAllister and myself, Kathryn Wendel. Space is limited to fifteen people and is expected to sell out quickly. The trip cost is \$160, or if paying with cash or check, \$150/person. Please email me at president@rras.org to sign up, and always be sure to check our website (rras.org) for the latest updates on both field trips and how to get involved!

Bulletin

Wigi Wetlands Restoration Project Needs a New Coordinator

A group of itinerant volunteers meets the fourth Saturday of every month from 9 to 11 a.m. to do cleanup at the Wigi Wetlands portion of the Humboldt Bay Trail. We meet at Bayshore Mall behind Walmart. Our main tasks are to remove invasive species like pampas grass, Scotch broom, and Himalaya berry and help the area return to a safe haven for native species. Recently, we have started

adding native species to the area. We also pick up trash.

Our past coordinator, Jeremy Cashen, recently resigned, so we need someone to take over the job. **Thank you, Jeremy, for doing a wonderful job for the past FIVE years!** The main duties of the coordinator entail: 1) Send out email reminder to past volunteers every month; 2) Schedule a dumpster and wheelbarrows to be delivered to the site; and 3) Pick up and return tools to the storage shed for each cleanup. If you are interested please contact Hal Genger at hmg1@humboldt.edu or Susan Penn at susanpenn60@gmail.com.

Panama 1981, continued

cotingas, honeycreepers, bacards, Rufous Mourners whistling “wwhhiiPP” and Rufous Pihas exploding “peceea, peceea,” and oh my oh my, my overloaded head just kept spinning.

After birding the Pipeline Road several days in a row, we took the train across the Isthmus to the Caribbean side of Panama and the next morning, birded the famous Achiote Road. Here, we connected with the top birder in Panama, Dr. Jaime Pujals, a cardiologist with a unique birding technique. He'd ID a bird



by call and then start yelling at it, “I’m going to get you, stay there, I’m gonna get you, you...” (perhaps with a few curse words thrown in). The avian diversity was extraordinary: kites, forest-falcons, screech owls, cuckoos, maybe 20 species of tanagers (including the most lovely Golden-hooded), more honeycreepers, and on and on. Most of the birds were seen, but Billy, Gary, and especially Dr. Pujals knew all the calls. At the end of the day, we sighted or heard over 300 species, including several rare ones, such as the Rosy Thrush-Tanager. That's one-third of all the species in Panama, which is ranked 18th in the world in avian diversity. I've never come close to that number since.

On a subsequent drive north to the volcano

area, a birder-friendly land owner gave us permission to hike through his property, which included a stop at a solo tree that had maybe 14 species of warblers in it, with at least four new ones—Bay-breasted, Blackburnian, Chestnut-sided, and Black-throated Green. At the mountaintop we entered a cool, rich green forest with tall trees. We binocularized up until our necks ached, and yes, high above I saw my first Resplendent Quetzal, one of the most beautiful birds I've ever seen with its bright red breast and long Quetzalcoatl green tail.

It was a perfect way to bring the trip to a close. Our bird list totaled 369 species seen or heard. In all of my bird-focused travels, I have never even come close to this astounding density. But key to my great memories of the trip is the time spent with my fellow birders. I was fascinated to learn that Billy Clow managed a cattle ranch with his wife and two children. I saw Billy only once again before he tragically fell off his horse while moving cattle. I visited him in the hospital, but he never regained consciousness and died soon after. I miss the twinkle in Billy's eyes, especially when he talked about family or saw a new bird. This article is dedicated to him with love and thanks!



Photo credits: Page 1, Scarlet-rumped Cacique courtesy of Bob Friedrichs, Macaulay Library; Sunbittern, courtesy of Kathy Doddridge, Macaulay Library. Page 2, Resplendent Quetzal (left) and Black-throated Trogon by Larry Karsteadt.

The Crows Start Demanding Royalties

Of all the birds, they are the ones
who mind their being armless most:
witness how, when they walk, their heads jerk
back and forth like rifle bolts.
How they heave their shoulders into each stride
as if they hoped that by some chance
new bones there would come popping out
with a boxing glove on the end of each.

Little Elvises, the hairdo slicked
with too much grease, they convene on my lawn
to strategize for their class-action suit.
Flight they would trade in a New York minute
for a black muscle car and a fist on the shift
at any stale green light. But here in my yard
by the Jack-in-the-Box Dumpster
they can only fossick in the grass for remnants

of the world's stale buns. And this
despite all the crow poems that have been written
because men like to see themselves as crows
(the head-jerk performed in the rearview mirror,
the dark brow commanding the rainy weather).
So I think I know how they must feel:
ripped off, shook down, taken to the cleaners.
What they'd like to do now is smash a phone against a wall.
But they can't, so each one flies to a bare branch and screams.

—Lucia Perillo

From *Time Will Clean the Carcass Bones*, 2017, used by permission of Copper Canyon Press.



Poet Lucia Perillo's poems are infused with unflinching depictions of the natural world. A wildlife management major at McGill University, she worked at both the San Francisco Bay Wildlife Refuge and Mount Rainier National Park. She was an active backcountry hiker and longtime member and supporter of the Olympia WA Black Hills Audubon Society. Her poetry has been published in seven collections, and she was a winner of the prestigious MacArthur "genius" grant in 2000. Perillo was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis when she was in her thirties, and many of her later poems are outspoken examinations of her life as a person with disabilities. She died in 2016 at the age of 58.

Image by James Rudy, courtesy of Copper Canyon Press.

DID YOU KNOW?

From the CatBird Committee



The U.S. National Park Service will be removing stray and feral cats from a National Historic Site. This action will reduce impacts on wildlife species and address human health and safety concerns. Cat numbers have been increasing at the historic El Morro fortress in San Juan, Puerto Rico, where more than 100 species of wild birds have been reported, including pigeons, doves, cuckoos, flycatchers, thrushes, sparrows, and warblers, many of which breed here in North America during spring and summer. Thanks to the National Park Service for containing free-roaming cats in order to protect birds and other wildlife, as well as to protect the public from cat-transmitted diseases.

Source: National Park Service Free-Ranging Cat Management Plan

Find a Variety of Species and Habitats at Blue Lake Hotspot

Text and photo by Gail Kenny

The Mad River Fish Hatchery in Blue Lake is a great local area for birding, with a total of 191 bird species recorded on eBird. My favorite time to visit is in spring when the neotropical migrants return for breeding season. It is open to the public with a parking lot and a public restroom next to the fish hatchery. There are wires across the fish runs to keep fish-eating birds from eating the stock. Look for Purple Martins here, as they make their nests in the open ends of the pipes that hold the wires in place. You are likely to see Tree and Barn Swallows flying around the area too.

Walking down to the river edge nearby, you will see water birds, such as Great Blue Heron, Belted Kingfisher, Common Merganser, Spotted Sandpiper, and maybe even a Bald Eagle. Along the trails to the north of the hatchery, the riparian vegetation of cottonwood trees and willows provides habitat for a



variety of songbirds. This is a good area to see and/or hear Yellow-breasted Chat, Bullock's Oriole, and several flycatchers, including Olive-sided Flycatcher (pictured here), Willow and Western Flycatcher, and Western Wood-Pee-wee. This is warbler habitat, and Wilson's and Orange-crowned Warblers are often seen, along with both Chestnut-backed and Black-capped Chickadees. You might want to use the sound ID on Merlin to confirm some of the singing birds. Yellow-breasted Chats are typically heard and not seen. It is a real treat to see one!

You will want to spend at least an hour if not longer birding this hotspot. If you have more time, on your way out, I recommend stopping at one of the other nearby hotspots such as Blue Lake Cottonwoods (192 species on eBird), Mad River Hatchery Road Bridge (132 species on eBird)—good for White-throated Swifts in the breeding season—or North Fork Mad River Levee and Riverbed (go east on the levee, 157 eBird species). I birded the levee in early May and enjoyed good looks at Lazuli Bunting. Last year a rare Indigo Bunting was reported there.

To find hotspots on eBird, go to the Explore Regions search option, type in "Humboldt, California," then from the overview menu (on the left in the internet browser) under the subheading Explore, click on Hotspot Map. Then zoom in and click on a pin to access specific checklists for that hotspot. Good birding!

It’s Snowy Plover Nesting Season: Be Mindful When You’re at the Beach! By Gina Rogers



We are in the middle of the Western Snowy Plover’s breeding season right now, and with the Pacific Coast population listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), it is worth a reminder that seemingly benign beach activities can pose significant threats to them.

Here in Humboldt County, active management strategies have been making a difference in breeding success. The establishment of Plover Protection Areas, including “symbolic” fencing and educational signage, have helped reduce conflicts in key areas. And, since the plovers need flat, open sand dunes in order to see predators from afar, projects removing the dense invasive European Beachgrass are also helping. This season, Centerville Beach in Ferndale has been a particular hotspot for nesting, as well as the Eel River Wildlife area. Up north at Tolowa Dunes plovers successfully nested last year, with seven chicks fledging

after over forty years with none, taking advantage of areas cleared of invasives by ongoing remediation projects.

Breeding season extends from March 15 through September 15, so with time left this season, Micah Ashford, biologist with the USFWS and coordinator for the Snowy Plover monitoring and protection efforts in our region, and Justin Windsor, wildlife biologist with the Arcata Field Office of Bureau of Land Management, provided some important ways beachgoers can aid in the Snowy Plover’s recovery:

- Mind the rules for seasonal Plover Protection Areas; never trespass in these areas.
- Keep your dogs on leash and away from the plovers, including a large distance around any birds and nest; a dog (or you) walking too close can scare the birds away, wasting their energy and keeping the parents from their important feather-fluffing activities that help the babies thrive.
- For activities like running and flying kites and frisbee tossing, stay on the wet sand and away from upper parts of the beach where the Snowy Plovers are found.
- Pack out your trash; trash on beaches attracts crows, ravens, gulls, and raccoons; these predators then happily raid bird nests while they are in the area.
- No drones should be flown within 300 feet (horizontal distance) of plover areas.

Building Birding Community

Six other Audubon Society chapters in Northern California and two more in southern Oregon, like RRAS, are dedicated to all things bird and offer a range of field trips, programs, and special events. Some are within a day-trip’s distance, others require overnight stay; but if you want to see a different variety of birds, plan to do some traveling, or just need a getaway, check their websites for what’s on tap.

- Altacal Audubon Society (Chico et al; Butte, Glenn, Tehama Counties), *altacal.org*
 - Mendocino Coast Audubon Society (MCAS) (Mendocino, Fort Bragg, etc.), *mendocinocoastaudubon.org*
 - Peregrine Audubon Society (inland Mendocino County; Ukiah), *peregrineaudubon.org*
 - Plumas Audubon Society (Plumas County), *plumasaudubon.org*
 - Redbud Audubon Society (Clearlake; Lake County), *redbudaudubon.org*
 - Shasta Birding Society (Redding, Shasta County; formerly Wintu and/or Mt. Shasta Audubon Society), *shastabirdingsociety.org*
- Southern Oregon**
- Kalmiopsis Audubon Society (Port Orford; Curry County/Southwest Oregon), *kalmiopsisaudubon.org*
 - Klamath Basin Audubon Society (Klamath Falls), *klamathaudubon.org*

Look for announcements in future issues of the *Sandpiper* about activities of interest to our local birding community.

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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My check for \$20 is enclosed. (Introductory Offer)

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