



The Sandpiper

March 2022



Redwood Region Audubon Society

www.rras.org

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March 18 Deadline for Student Bird Art Contest!

For the 19th year, FOAM and Redwood Region Audubon Society are co-sponsoring a Student Bird Art Contest in conjunction with the Godwit Days Spring Migration Bird Festival. An estimated \$550 in prizes will be awarded to Humboldt County students, from kindergarten through high school, who submit a drawing of one of 40 suggested species or another bird that has been sighted locally. Prizes also will be awarded for the best renditions of a bird in its natural habitat. Awards are scheduled to be presented on Saturday, April 15 starting at 11 am at the outdoor amphitheater near the Arcata Marsh Interpretive Center (AMIC). Copies of winning artwork will be shown at AMIC during May and June. A flyer with complete rules and instructions is posted on the Godwit Days website (www.godwitdays.org) or can be picked up at the Interpretive Center. Flyers have been e-mailed to all Humboldt County schools. Art may be dropped off Tuesday through Sunday between 9 am and 5 pm at the Interpretive Center, located at 569 South G Street, or mailed to Sue Leskiw, 155 Kara Lane, McKinleyville CA 95519. Entries must be received by Friday, March 18 to be considered. Questions? E-mail: sueleskiw1@gmail.com.

Godwit Days Is Back in 2022 – Part In-Person & Part Virtual

Join Us for Arcata's Spring Migration Bird Festival Friday, April 15 through Sunday, April 17, with 27 Total Sessions!

The Godwit Days Board has decided to offer a hybrid festival spanning three days: April 15, 16, and 17. We have selected the most popular trips from past years and added a couple of new ones, as well as four virtual sessions (including a keynote lecture). The event schedule is posted at www.godwitdays.org and open for reservations.

All in-person field trips will be limited to 10 registrants. Attendees must provide proof that they are fully vaccinated against COVID-19.

Watermark: Pileated Woodpecker by Xatimniim Drake, Hoopa Valley High, 2021.

RRAS Field Trips in MARCH

Sat. March 5th – 8:30-11am. Arcata Marsh, led by Drew Meyer.

Sat. March 5th – 9-11am. Join trip leader, Jude Power, for this month's **Women and Girls Birding Walk** at the Elk River Wildlife Area/Hikshari Trail. This section of Hikshari Trail runs through Elk River Wildlife Area, wanders along the shore of the Elk River estuary and then disappears into a large patch of willows, alders and pines. **For reservations and meeting location contact our Field Trip Chair, Janelle Chojnacki, at janelle.choj@gmail.com.*

Sat. March 12th – 8:30-11am. Arcata Marsh, led by our Historian, Gary Friedrichsen.

Sun. March 13th – 9-11am. Ralph Bucher will lead a walk at the Humboldt Bay Nat. Wildlife Refuge.

Sat. March 19th – 8:30-11am. Arcata Marsh, led by Larry Karsteadt.

Sat. March 19th – Beginning Birdwatching & Project FeederWatch. **Drop-in** 10-12 at the Jacoby Creek School Garden. Redwood Region Audubon Society is teaming up with Garden Coordinator, Sue Moore, to help with their FeederWatch every 3rd Saturday through April 9, 2022.. Bring binoculars! Contact Denise Seeger, at daseeger@gmail.com.

Sun. March 20th – 9-11am. Ralph Bucher will lead a walk on the Eureka Waterfront. This trail is paved and is **wheelchair accessible**.

Fri. March 25th – 4-6 pm. Moonstone Beach. Join RRAS for a stationary, guided **wildlife-viewing, and socializing event at Moonstone Beach!** Leader Janelle Chojnacki will welcome folks on this outing and focus on letting the birds come to us while we enjoy the sunset. Picnic blankets and camping chairs are encouraged, as are binoculars and spotting scopes.

Sat. March 26th – Arcata Marsh, led by Michael Morris.

Sat. March 26th – 9-11am. Wigi Wetlands Volunteer Workday. Help create bird-friendly native habitat and restore a section of the bay trail behind the Bayshore Mall. We will provide tools and packaged snacks. Please bring your own water, gloves, and face mask. Please contact Jeremy Cashen at jeremy.cashen@yahoo.com or 214-605-7368.

**Contact Ralph at thebook@reninet.com for any walks he leads and all Arcata Marsh walks. *Contact Field Trip Chair, Janelle Chojnacki at janelle.choj@gmail.com for all other walks. See our website for COVID protocols.*

Please join us for the RRAS monthly virtual program:

Birds and the Burn: Friday, March, 11 at 7pm

On community-powered surveys to measure effects of fire and restoration on the birds of Bear Creek

With Dr. Sarah Rockwell and Nate Trimble

In September of 2020, multiple fires damaged or destroyed much of the streamside habitat along the Bear Creek Greenway in Jackson County, OR. The Bear Creek Greenway is a 20-mile paved path that runs through a large swath of riparian habitat in an otherwise mostly urban part of the Rogue Valley. It is an important community resource for both human recreation and wildlife habitat. Riparian vegetation is crucial for many bird species that rely on deciduous plants and nearby water to nest, survive the winter, or rest and refuel during migration. Local conservation organizations and southern Oregon birdwatchers have come together to monitor changes in the Bear Creek bird community over time, including effects of the 2020 fires. The goal of the Bear Creek Community Bird Survey is to use bird populations as indicators of watershed health, and measure whether riparian areas along Bear Creek are improving through ongoing restoration efforts or continuing to degrade from factors like urban development or climate change. Sarah Rockwell (Klamath Bird Observatory) and Nate Trimble (Rogue Valley Audubon Society), two of the survey coordinators, will talk about this community-powered effort, how the data will be used, and the results so far (including 44,000 observations submitted to eBird!).

Dr. Sarah Rockwell is a Research Biologist at Klamath Bird Observatory based in Ashland, OR. She joined KBO in 2013 after completing her Ph.D. at the University of Maryland and Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center, where she studied the ecology of the then-endangered Kirtland's Warbler in her home state of Michigan. She currently studies avian response to coniferous and riparian habitat restoration, to improve conservation and management. She also leads research on specific imperiled species, including the Oregon Vesper Sparrow and Western Purple Martin.

Nate Trimble has a Master's Degree in Wildlife Ecology from Texas State University and has worked as a field biologist and community science coordinator in southern Oregon and northern California for many bird research studies over the last 8 years, including riparian birds, Black-backed Woodpeckers, and Northern Spotted Owls. He was also on the Rogue Valley Audubon Society Board of Directors. Nate is an artist who has contributed bird and plant illustrations for multiple nature education projects, including the cover art for the Birds of Jackson County, Oregon: Distribution and Abundance booklet published by the Rogue Valley Audubon Society.



Above left: Yellow-breasted Chat. Above right: Bear Creek Greenway; both photos by Frank Lospalluto.

CHAPTER LEADERS:

President – Gail Kennygailkenny@gmail.com
Vice President – CJ Ralph707-822-2015
Secretary – Open.
Treasurer – Gary Friedrichsen707-822-6543
Past President – Hal Genger707-499-0887
DIRECTORS-AT-LARGE:
Ralph Bucher707-499-1247
Pia Gabriel707-382-2101
Harriet Hill707-267-4055
Chet Ogan707-442-9353
Sue Sniadosueandscott@suddenlink.net

OTHER CHAPTER LEADERS:

Conservation – Jim Clark707-445-8311
Eductn/Schlrshps – Denise Seeger ...707-444-2399
Membership – Ralph Bucher707-499-1247
eBird Liaison – Rob Fowler707-839-3493
Facebook – Cindy Moyer707-822-1886
Field Trips
– Janelle Chojnackijanelle.choj@gmail.com
NEC Representative – CJ Ralph707-822-2015
Programs – Harriet Hill707-267-4055
Publications – CJ Ralph707-822-2015
Publicity – Open.
Website – Susan Penn707-672-3346

THE SANDPIPER: Editor, Layout, & Design

– Gisèle Albertinegiseleandco@gmail.com
– Proofreader/CopyeditorPia Gabriel
Historian – Gary Friedrichsen707-822-6543
RRAS Web Pagewww.rras.org
RRAS Listservegroups.io/g/rras

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Christmas Bird Count Highlights

The annual Christmas Bird Count, organized by National Audubon, is strongly supported by Redwood Region Audubon Society. Take a look at the highlights below. Thanks to all the hard work of the compilers before, during, and after their counts in late December 2021 and early January 2022.

ARCATA

The Arcata Christmas Bird Count (CBC), lucked out with a beautiful sunny day vs the more common rainy, cold count. With a great amount of effort this year and 31 participants, we were able to record 171 species! This count usually averages in the upper 160's. Thanks to the amazing birders of Humboldt County there were a few highlights staked out before the count. On count day our highlights included 6 unusual/rare species and 2 groups of uncommon birds. Probably our 2 best birds were an American Tree Sparrow (found originally by Greg Gray), and a Clay-colored Sparrow found prior to the count. Interestingly, they both were hanging out on the same road in the Arcata Bottoms.

On the east side of the circle Leah Alcyon added a new species to the count list off West End Road – a Wild Turkey. She had at least one! Not too surprising since the species seems to be expanding their range. Some goodies were found out on the remote Mad River spit. Dan Greaney made the trek up the beach to the north end of the circle, picking up the staked-out Burrowing Owl and also came across a Heermann's Gull and Glaucous Gull. The sunny day also brought ideal weather for doing a sea-watch off the North Jetty. Our best bird was probably a close fly-by Ancient Murrelet and since the ocean was rather flat, we were able to get a high count of 25 Marbled Murrelets. The ocean was giving us tough birds such as Black-legged Kittiwakes and Rhinoceros Auklet. The only other group of birds to note was



President's Column

By Gail Kenny

Our passion for all things birds can take many forms. In 2005 I saw my lifer I'iwi in the cloud forest of Kauai, one of the Hawaiian Islands. I'iwi is a honeycreeper that is descended from a finch-like ancestor that arrived on the island long ago. I hired a guide to take me into the Alakai Swamp. It required hiking in rubber boots due to the many creek crossings. Along with the I'iwi, I saw several other Hawaiian endemic birds including the Apapane.

At the time I had been quilting for several years. The I'iwi made such an impression on me I imagined someday quilting one. That day finally came recently when I created a machine applique block of the bird. See accompanying photo. As I write this, I am working on a California



Scrub Jay block. I wanted to share this to show that birding can go into various tangents, including art in the form of quilting. In my 20s I oil-painted birds, now I use fabric to create bird art. I've been visiting quilt shops specifically for fabric with birds to include in this quilt.

More conventional birding passions include *bird-athon* fundraisers/contests where teams seek to see as many birds as they can in one day. We are planning the **7th Annual Tim McKay Birdathon** fundraiser with proceeds split between Redwood Region Audubon Society and the Northcoast Environmental Center (NEC). Tim McKay was a long-time Executive Director of the NEC and an avid birder. I had the pleasure of attending field trips lead by him and knowing him socially.

This year the Birdathon is taking place between April 30th and May 7th. Teams will seek pledges from donors for a specific amount of money per species seen or a flat amount of money. There are three categories of teams: standard 24-hour big day outings, six continuous hours of birding, or for school students aged K-12 two continuous hours of birding. There will be prizes for the highest number of birds counted! Gary Friedrichsen is organizing this event for RRAS, please contact him at gary@jacobyecreek.net if you would like to join a team or donate money to support the cause.

Left: Gail's quilt of the I'iwi bird.

geese. We have missed Snow, Ross's and Greater White-fronted Geese on multiple counts in the past, but not this year! Overall, it was a fantastic day and a big thanks to everyone that helped.

You can see all the details on eBird at <https://ebird.org/tripreport/31364>.

Tony Kurz

WILLOW CREEK

We were not able to conduct the Willow Creek Christmas Bird Count this year because of weather challenges. The initially scheduled date, December 22, was rained out. Then three days before the December 29 alternate date, the area was hit by a wet snowstorm that left thousands of trees lying across roads and powerlines. Sightings of Anna's Hummingbirds just after the storm were uplifting. Despite the several inches of heavy wet snow covering everything, they could be found in small flocks buzzing around the blooming Loquat trees and around persimmon trees with bits of remaining rotting fruit.

Birgitte Elbek

CENTERVILLE

The 60th Centerville to King Salmon Christmas Bird Count was held on January 2nd, 2022. With the center of the 7.5-mile radius count circle situated in the Loleta bottomland, this count includes the lower Eel River delta, areas around Ferndale and Fortuna, Loleta, and Table Bluff, the Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge, Fields Landing, and King Salmon. This year, with reasonably pleasant weather conditions in the morning shifting to not-so-pleasant windy conditions in the afternoon, 41 birders tallied 81,620 individual birds involving 170 different species. The top highlight was the discovery in the Ferndale bottom of a bank of ten Trumpeter Swans – a species never before recorded on this count and a true rarity anywhere or anytime on the north coast. Another great find, also in the Ferndale bottom, was that of a Ruff – an 'old world' shorebird only recorded once on this count previously, 35 years ago. Other highlights included a single White-faced Ibis at the Russ Ranch wetlands near Centerville, White-throated Swifts over Ferndale, a Barrow's Goldeneye in Fortuna, an overwintering Wilson's Warbler in Ferndale, Barn Swallows and Tree Swallows (both rare in winter), and an Osprey that is either a rare over-wintering bird or an

exceptionally early migrant.

Both the number of species and individual birds tallied this year are respectable but are just under the average over the last ten years. Last year, the Centerville count had the highest number of any other count in the United States for 4 species: White-tailed Kite (74); Short-billed (Mew) Gull (3,129); Canada Jay (Pacific) (28); and Nashville Warbler (4). We will have to wait until all of this year's reports are in to know how results for this count compare to other counts.

Sean McAllister

DEL NORTE

The Del Norte CBC was held on Sunday the 19th of December with light rain most of the morning and turning to heavy rain later in the day. We had 19 people including 4 that drifted down the Smith River. A total of 158 species with Long-eared Owl, a family group of Trumpeter Swans, and 2 Golden Eagles being the rarest birds.

Lucas Brug

TALL TREES

On January 5, the last day of the CBC, 14 birders participated in the 11th Tall Trees count. Begun in 2012, this count is centered on the Tall Trees Grove in Redwood National Park (RNP) and includes some ocean, the Humboldt Lagoons, Orick, a lot of Green Diamond land, and most of RNP, including the Bald Hills. Morning conditions were good in the lower elevations, with perhaps the warmest start in the history of the count, but the weather deteriorated in the afternoon; conditions were poor all day higher up. The counters recorded 10,926 individuals of 114 species, which is on the low end of average for this count. Eurasian Wigeon and Great-tailed Grackle (one each) were recorded for the first time; the grackle was undoubtedly the one found there in November. Other noteworthy species were Sooty Grouse, Sanderling, Say's Phoebe, Cedar Waxwing, Lesser Goldfinch, American Goldfinch, and White-throated Sparrow. Many thanks to all the participants as well as the people who facilitated access to areas closed to the public. We look forward to next year's count!

Ken Burton

Watermark: Cedar Waxwing by Bella Tarlton, 9th Grade, Six Rivers Charter High School, 2021.

An Interview with Ralph Bucher RRAS Membership Coordinator and Field Trip Leader Extraordinaire!

By Gary Friedrichsen

You may recognize one of our most dedicated and longest-serving field trip leaders, Ralph Bucher, from one of the local field trips he has led for Redwood Region Audubon Society (RRAS). His many, loyal field-trip participants are aware of his kind and cheerful demeanor but may not know that he spent the first twenty years of his life in China Lake, California, and worked at the Naval Weapons Center, during high school and college. Ralph also attended the University of California at Riverside as a mathematics major until he dropped out due to his beliefs on the war in Vietnam.

After doing some traveling, Ralph landed in Juneau, Alaska, where he describes getting involved with his most meaningful life's work; helping run a residential drop-in home for runaway street kids. The 1970s found Ralph living in Humboldt County and married with 2 children. He enrolled as an indentured apprentice with the Operating Engineers Local #3 as a heavy-duty repairman/welder and graduated as a journeyman. He also designed and built local residential homes.

During the 40 years he has lived in Humboldt County, Ralph and his family hiked every trail in the Trinity Alps and Marble Mountains and took many skiing vacations. In 2003 Ralph decided it was time to protect his knees, and began a new hobby, learning the birds of Northern California and Oregon. Spending a great deal

of time in the winter at Lower Klamath Lake, and other California wildlife refuges, Ralph birded his way down to the Salton Sea and the Anza Borrego desert. He also began attending RRAS guided walks at the Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge (HBNWR), then led by Jude Power. It was an auspicious beginning as he took over from Jude in 2018 and has been the HBNWR guide for RRAS ever since. Ralph also restarted the Audubon Palco Marsh Walk in 2015. He credits Jude Power, David Fix, Rob Hewitt, John Hewston, and Pat Bitton for early assistance as he mastered the art of birding and hosting walks. He and Ed Schreiber have led the Christmas Bird Count (CBC), at HBNWR since 2006, and Ralph helped with the Arcata Marsh walks for several years.

Ralph can't remember exactly when he joined our chapter of the Audubon Society but believes it was soon after he started birding. He does remember when he joined our Board. While on a birding road-trip in 2006, from Tule Lake down to the Salton Sea, he received a phone call from long time Board members, Jim Clark and Chet Ogan, asking if he would consider joining the RRAS Board. He not only agreed but took on the task of distributing and retailing birding books that RRAS publishes. For the last three years Ralph has also taken on the challenge of coordinating membership—a challenging task that is much appreciated by the whole Board!

When asked what memorable events stand out during his time with RRAS, Ralph explained that much of the enjoyment he derives from leading walks, is the people. While he realizes we live in a fantastic area for birding, it's having the opportunity to meet and enjoy a

day walking with like-minded individuals that holds the most fulfillment for him. He feels most satisfaction in his role as trip leader when he can help people experience the joy of simply being with nature and appreciation for the role that wildlife plays in our lives.

You can join Ralph every second and third Sundays on his walks at the Eureka Waterfront, and HBNWR. See the first page of this newsletter for field trip information.



Above: Ralph Bucher caught on his trail cam in front of the bird sanctuary at his home.

Florida's Rooftop-Nesting Shorebirds

By Alexa DeJoannis, Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation
Commission, and former RRAS Board President

From the grassy strip behind the condos, I pitched my eyes up to the second-floor window, dazzling in the pitiless, ultra-white sunlight exploding from the pastel stucco wall. A woman looked down, her expression curious. As I smiled, the high, piercing cries of Least Terns in flight rained down on us as the birds zoomed into the rooftop colony three stories above with fish-laden beaks. Her window faced a manmade inlet, with a seawall neatly containing a finger of the Gulf of Mexico. Behind me, a mockingbird calmly reiterated its repertoire from the top of a royal palm. I explained about the seabirds' nesting colony on her roof, and how sometimes their chicks fall off buildings.



Above: Least Terns Nesting on a Florida Rooftop, by Alexa DeJoannis.

"Oh, poor little things! Terns? I thought they were gulls, pesky birds. My car is always filthy!"

Oh, dear, I thought. A roof colony can really whitewash a building, and it is the most consistent complaint from building occupants. As Florida's idyllic beaches filled with hotels and condos, roads, eateries, and recreationalists, birdwatchers 65 years ago began to document four species of seabirds and two species of shorebirds nesting on gravel roofs. (Coastal birds from these two groups are loosely called "shorebirds" for simplicity's sake.) Every year, birdwatchers report nesting on new roofs. Nesting roofs may be several miles inland, of various size or height, but they must have loose gravel in which the birds scrape nest cups.

In Florida, about half the population of Least Terns nests on rooftops. In smaller proportions, we also see Killdeer, American Oystercatchers, Black Skimmers, and Gull-billed and Roseate Terns using rooftops. Except for the Killdeer, they're all listed as threatened or endangered by the state or the federal government. Florida's agencies partner with Audubon Florida and hundreds of volunteers to oversee stewardship, outreach, and management aimed at conserving these threatened populations on the beach and on roofs. On beaches, shorebirds and their chicks face the usual challenges: predators, human activity, vehicles, over wash, and exposure. The roofs remove mammalian predators and most human intrusion, but have seen more pressure from crows and, lately, Cooper's Hawks who eat songbirds in urban areas. And roofs offer little cover from these onslaughts, or from the higher temperatures radiating off the tar. Does this use of an unusual nesting habitat sound like one of Redwood Country's most iconic birds, who also graces the RRAS logo?

Roofs, unlike beaches, are always private property, and on top of that, are often impossible to overlook from other buildings. That makes monitoring and management of rooftop-nesters a special challenge, and underlines the continued importance of education and outreach in conservation efforts. As ever, the job of wildlife biologists must include keeping the public informed and engaged with the state of our natural resources. For more information on Florida's rooftop-nesting shorebirds and our annual reports, visit the Florida Shorebird Alliance at <https://flshorebirdalliance.org/>, or reach out with questions directly to Alexa.DeJoannis@MyFWC.com.

Barn Owls in Working Landscapes

By Jaime Carlino, M.Sc. Student, WiGGS Secretary
Johnson Habitat Ecology Lab | Cal Poly Humboldt Dept. of Wildlife

Cal Poly Humboldt's Barn Owl Research Team is an ongoing project in the Johnson Habitat Ecology Lab at Cal Poly Humboldt in Arcata, California. The Johnson lab's unifying theme of habitat ecology – how animals interact with their environment - guides our team's research on Barn Owls (*Tyto furcata*) in working landscapes, specifically wine-grape vineyards. Working landscapes include farms, rangelands, and managed forests where many of us live, work, and recreate. These working landscapes provide us with the foods and fibers used to sustain human communities and economies. They can also provide homes for wildlife, sequester carbon, filter and store water, cycle key nutrients, and offer people places of refuge and inspiration - all of which are considered "ecosystem services". Ecosystem services refer to the benefits people obtain from ecosystems and the species that are a part of them. These ecosystem services, perhaps better thought of as environmental gifts, represent a reciprocal relationship between people and the rest of nature.

Our research team has monitored approximately 300 barn owl nest boxes across more than 60 wine-grape vineyards in Napa Valley, California since 2015. Napa Valley is one of the most well-known wine producing regions in the world. Rodents are common pests in agricultural settings, and they can dramatically decrease crop yield through herbivory. They can also impact ecosystems when constructing mounds and tunnels by way of altering vegetative composition, root structure, and soil quality. Many wine-grape vineyard owners and managers have installed barn owl nest boxes across their vineyards in hopes that the owls provide an ecosystem service in the form of rodent pest control, by consuming gophers, voles, and mice.

Napa Valley is special for much more than its wine reputation. It contains a diverse network of urban development, agriculture, and uncultivated habitats including grasslands, oak savannas, forests, riparian areas and hundreds of barn owl nest boxes. Some of the main research topics addressed by our research team include: 1) determining how barn owls chose which nest boxes to breed in given such a heterogenous landscape and so many nest boxes to choose from, 2) how surrounding habitats impact where owls hunt, 3) the potential of barn owls to control rodent populations, 4) how variation in the feathers that make up their breast plumage influences preferences in habitat, prey, and reproductive success, and 5) whether their preferences for certain nest boxes/habitats might be adaptive.

Some key results from studies emphasize the importance of conserving native, uncultivated habitats amongst agricultural lands to secure the ecosystem services barn owls provide. More specifically, barn owls prefer wooden nest boxes placed at least 3m off the ground, with more grasslands and less forested habitats surrounding the nest box. From a study using GPS telemetry, approximately 1/3rd of barn owl hunting locations were in wine-grape vineyards, and they actively selected native, uncultivated lands near vineyards. In terms of quantifying pest control services, a family of barn owls with 3 chicks can remove ~1,000 rodents in a single breeding season, and 3,500 in a year! Indeed, our rodent surveys indicate that the presence of owl nest boxes on a vineyard can significantly reduce gopher activity compared to vineyard areas without nest boxes.



Above clockwise from top: Jaime Carlino banding a barn owl nestling, by Laura Echávez; Adult female barn owl after banding, by Laura Echávez; Jaime Carlino, Samantha Chavez, and Laura Echávez prepare a nest box to trap for adult male barn owls in the evening, by Dr. Matt Johnson. All photos taken in Napa Valley, CA.

We share our research and key findings with many groups, including farmers, scientists, agencies, non-profits, etc. If you would like to learn more about our research team, email us at barnowlresearch@humboldt.edu and/or find us on Instagram (@[calpolyhum.barnowls](https://www.instagram.com/calpolyhum.barnowls)) and Facebook ([Cal Poly Humboldt Barn Owls](https://www.facebook.com/CalPolyHumboldtBarnOwls)). Donations for our ongoing work can be made at: <https://alumni.humboldt.edu/johnson-wildlife-fund>.

Dinosaurs and DNA

By Elliott Dabill

Jack Horner, the famous paleontologist, knows how to ruin the dinosaur party mood. He says that Jurassic Park can't work because DNA falls apart within a million years, and the dinosaurs in the films are at least 66 million years old. But then, as if to reignite dino enthusiasm, Dr. Horner says that the best way to bring them back is through the DNA already here!

Researchers know that birds are dinosaurs, and chicken embryos can develop teeth while in the egg, for example, but the teeth are reabsorbed before hatching. That means that chickens have the genes for teeth which are switched off by another gene, which we can discover and allow a chicken chopper comeback. That makes teeth atavistic in chickens, or a throwback to their velociraptor days. Similarly, velociraptors had atavistic long bony tails, which no birds today have, since it was replaced by that stubby tail bump called a pygostyle, which may be embarrassing to chickens, but they aren't saying.

So, you get the idea: we can bring back a very close relative of all birds alive today by messing with the one

domesticated bird. We can do it in labs, one step at a time to arrive at the velociraptor you see on the poster. Cool, huh? Except something will go wrong.

Velociraptors were the wolves of their day and probably hunted in packs. Hunted as in rip and tear, run fast, eat things bigger than they are, tear open bellies with the killer foot-claw, etc. And we want to bring them back while two-thirds of humans in the U.S. are overweight and mostly forgot how to run away from very fast predators? Suppose the experiments are successful and everyone is in thrall with watching velociraptors fight like gladiators in a ring, what then? Wouldn't the mad scientists want to look around for more excitement? You know humans are born with tails once in a while, suggesting that we could be prehensile once again up in the trees like monkeys. But remember Lucy? Famous hominin fossil 3.2 million years old? She died falling from a tree; all her long bones were fractured. Just saying, something will go wrong.

Now that calmer voices have been heard and chickens can remain chickens, let's consider bird body parts that are already dinosaur and be satisfied. First, feathers: all

the carnivorous dinosaurs called theropods seem to have had them – even bus-sized predators like *Hutyrannus* – which they passed on to birds. What about those reptilian scaly legs? Maybe that could satisfy the need to see ancient predator skin. The three-toed footprints and three clawed hands are still there too, albeit modified in birds, but good enough. Birds, like their dino heroes, have the most sophisticated breathing mechanics on earth; air sacs help control air flow so that the lungs get more oxygen. Can't we admire their achievement and leave them alone? I could go on, but 240 million years of dinosaurs is a heritage to be proud of, even for human observers that yearn for the older versions of perfectly adequate eagles and cassowaries.

I'm glad we worked this out. Needing an armored suit and shield to get my velociraptor dinner was sounding scary. Dr. Jack, by the way, is actually working on the chicken genes mentioned above. Lock your doors.

(Ed's Note: For an interesting read on recent dinosaur finds, see this [Washington Post](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/superbly-preserved-pterosaur-fossil-uneearthed-in-scotland/) article: www.washingtonpost.com/world/superbly-preserved-pterosaur-fossil-uneearthed-in-scotland/.)