

The Sandpiper

Dec 2024/Jan 2025



Redwood Region Audubon Society

www.rras.org

December Program Coming Up One Week Early

Join us on **Thursday, December 12**, for an orientation on the upcoming Christmas Bird Count!

Our December program is moved up a week from its traditional third Thursday of the month to cover the basics of the CBC count circles of our area before the first count in Arcata on December 14. Come and learn the history of our local counts as well as basic protocols and fun facts about bird trends over the years.

This is also a last-minute opportunity to volunteer for a count in your area, but you don't have to wait until the 12th to sign up in person. RRAS conducts several counts, and whether you'd like to help out with one or all of them or simply contribute a quick thirty-minute backyard bird count on the day of your local count, it's easy to sign up electronically. Simply email me at president@rras.org to inquire about the circle closest to your home (or heart!), or email one of the circle leaders to sign up directly:

- Arcata: Dec. 14, Tony Kurz tonyk_71220@hotmail.com
- Centerville/Loleta: Dec 29, Sean McAllister whiteouters@gmail.com
- Del Norte/Crescent City: Dec 15, Lucas Brug lucas.hendrik@hotmail.com
- Orick/Tall Trees: Jan 2, Ken Burton shrikethree@gmail.com
- Willow Creek: date TBD, Max Brodie brodiemaxa@gmail.com

The program will be held at our regular venue, Six Rivers Masonic Lodge, 251 Bayside Road, or go to our website for the Zoom link. Hot drinks and goodies will be served at 7:00 p.m., the program begins at 7:30. **All welcome!**

January 2025 Program



Male Purple Martin (left), by Lorelle Sherman; Vesper Sparrow with antenna (behind the bird), by Frank Lospalluto

Join us on **Thursday, January 16**, at 7:00 p.m. for a presentation on:

To Southern California, Brazil, and Back: First GPS Tracking of Oregon Vesper Sparrow and Western Purple Martin Migration, by Sarah Rockwell

One of the biggest challenges in identifying ways to help migratory birds is that we simply don't know where they are for most of the year. Without this basic information, it is challenging to identify and prioritize conservation actions. Archival GPS tags light enough to place on small songbirds have been available for about a decade, and they are revolutionizing our understanding of bird migration and migratory connectivity.

continued on page 3

RRAS FIELD TRIPS IN DECEMBER

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 the parking area at the end of I St. (Klopp Lake). Bring binoculars and scopes if you have them. If not, come on out anyway!

Trip leaders for December: Dec 7, Dan Greaney ~ Dec 14, Michael Morris ~ Dec 21, Gary Friedrichsen ~ Dec 28, Larry Karsteadt

Sunday, Dec 8, 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, Dec 15, 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**. Shorebirds are numerous this time of year, and there are usually some surprises along the trail. Email Ralph to sign up at [thebook\[at\]reninet.com](mailto:thebook[at]reninet.com).

Saturday, Dec 28, 9-11am. Wigi Wetlands Volunteer Workday. Join a fun group of volunteers to create bird-friendly habitat in a section of the bay trail behind Bayshore Mall. Bring water and gloves. We provide tools and snacks. Contact Susan Penn at susanpenn60@gmail.com for more information.

Saturday, Dec 28, time TBD. Join RRAS in Southern Humboldt for a free guided bird walk, trip leader TBD. Call Ann Constantino, 707-296-8720, for meeting time and place.

NOTE: Regular Saturday morning Marsh walks will continue in the new year. For more January 2025 field trips, see our website rras.org.

CHAPTER LEADERS

President – Kathryn Wendel president@rras.org
Vice President – CJ Ralph707-822-2015
Secretary – Jolian Kangas
Treasurer – Catherine McNally.....
Past President – Gail Kenny gailkenny@gmail.com
DIRECTORS-AT-LARGE:

Ralph Bucher707-499-1247
Jim Clark 707-445-8311
Gary Friedrichsen707-822-6543
Harriet Hill707-267-4055
Eric Nelson etn3115@icloud.com
Chet Ogan707-442-9353
Sean McAllister
Samantha Bacon
OTHER CHAPTER LEADERS:

Conservation – Jim Clark707-445-8311
Membership – Ralph Bucher707-499-1247
Facebook – Kate Rowe 925-391-0468
Field Trips – Sean McAllister
Arcata Marsh Walks
– Ken Burton shriethree@gmail.com
Programs – Eric Nelsonetn3115@icloud.com
Publicity – Kate Rowe925-391-0468
Publications – CJ Ralph707-822-2015
Website – Susan Penn707-672-3346
NEC Representative – CJ Ralph707-822-2015
Historian – Gary Friedrichsen707-822-6543
RRAS Web Pagewww.rras.org
RRAS Listservegroups.io/g/rras
THE SANDPIPER:

Editor Judi Brown
Contributing Writer/Editor Gina Rogers
Proofreader Pia Gabriel
The Sandpiper is published eleven times a year by
Redwood Region Audubon Society
P.O. Box 1054, Eureka, CA 95502

President's Column

By Kathryn Wendel

As 2024 comes to an end and 2025 draws ever closer, many important and exciting events are coming up for Redwood Region Audubon Society. In just a few weeks, the Christmas Bird Count will be held in several circles around the tri-county area, and our December program is moved up a week from its traditional third Thursday of the month to Thursday, December 12. See page 1 for full details.

We are also pleased to be hosting a Christmas Bird Count Compilation Gathering this year to thank all the birders and volunteers who help make the CBC so successful. We hope you can join us! It will be after the Arcata Christmas Bird Count on Saturday, December 14, at the Six Rivers Masonic Lodge from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. We will provide a chili feed dinner and potluck, and encourage everyone to bring a favorite dish to add to the feast. We are also looking for extra help in setting up and running



the food tables, as well as cleaning up afterwards. Please email Gail Kenny at gailkenny@gmail.com to volunteer.

And if all these parties aren't enough, coming up on February 15 is our annual fund-raising banquet, a fun gala complete with a silent auction and keynote speaker who will discuss one of the most poorly understood bird species in the western US: the Lewis's Woodpecker. Dr. Frank Fogarty, from Cal Poly Humboldt, will discuss this decidedly atypical woodpecker known for its striking appearance and unusual behaviors. Dr. Fogarty will discuss their unique habitat use, including their association with post-fire landscapes and complex migratory behavior, and conservation challenges surrounding efforts to better understand and protect this species in a rapidly changing environment. Be sure to check rras.org for more details. If you are a member of RRAS, expect an invitation in the mail soon regarding the February banquet.



DID YOU KNOW?

From the CatBird Committee

Changing Society's Outlook on Cats

In 2017, a US District Court in New York found that the state's Parks Office Commissioner violated the law by failing to stop people from feeding un-owned cats near a beach with an imperiled bird species. The cats had been observed killing the birds. Of interest to bird-watchers everywhere is that the plaintiffs' potential loss of aesthetic and recreational value in observing the birds constituted an "injury" in the eyes of the court! Our pleasure in watching birds is meaningful and important. Please keep your cat indoors, in a catio, or on a leash to protect Humboldt's wild birds and human pleasures.

Letter to the Editor

I am responding to "Native Plants, Native Birds, Happy Warriors," by Jim Clark in the October 2024 *Sandpiper*. On a walk in August Jim noticed two non-native plants overrunning the Arcata Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary (AMWS)—spongeplant and Himalaya blackberry—and lamented the failure to control them. Friends of the Arcata Marsh (FOAM) recently took action to deal with both of these issues.

In October and November, FOAM organized two workdays that removed an estimated 1,000 pounds of spongeplant (aka frogbit) from the Log Pond. This South American plant had completely covered open water in the south section with a 3- to 4-inch-thick mat, with attached roots up to several feet long. Frogbit, which blocks birds' access to water, seals the water surface from oxygen, and crowds out natives, has been spreading in the Log Pond since about 2017.



FOAM president Elliott Dabill throws the Rakezilla

FOAM Board members, the Cal Poly Humboldt Natural Resources Club, and City of Arcata employees used a "Rakezilla" borrowed from College of the Redwoods, potato hooks, pitchforks, shovels, and kayaks to pull massed

clumps to the dock, then move them via tarp or wheelbarrow to a storage area to dry. FOAM has allocated up to \$1,000 for commercial disposal of the dried vegetation away from waterways. Remaining spongeplant is on the pond's fringes, entangled in cattails, and will require a more precise touch to remove. Regular maintenance removal will be needed for up to five years.

Regarding Jim's observation of vegetation blocking interpretive trails and views at the Marsh, FOAM had been speaking with the city for months about this problem. Discussions resulted in the city hiring a part-time groundskeeper dedicated to the Marsh. Jake Barger started in October, and FOAM helped underwrite his salary by donating \$5,000.

I invite RRAS to join FOAM, by contributing labor and/or money, to solve problems at the Marsh, which is beloved by both our organizations.

Sue Leskiw, Treasurer, FOAM
(FOAM Board members Paul Johnson and Lynn Jones and city employee Heather Schmidt contributed to this letter.)

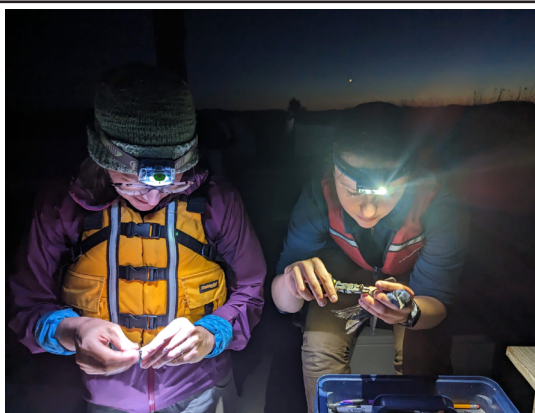
(Right) Dragging a load to the storage location. Photos by Paul Johnson



To Southern California, Brazil, and Back, continued from page 1

The Klamath Bird Observatory (KBO), along with partners at USFS, USGS, Cape Arago Audubon, and Avifauna Northwest, is using lightweight archival GPS tags to track the migratory routes and overwintering locations of both Oregon Vesper Sparrow and Western Purple Martin, two imperiled subspecies unique to the Pacific Northwest. These are the first studies of their kind with these subspecies—the first to track them with GPS technology year-round! These birds have returned with fascinating information, revealing new discoveries about their incredible journeys, including unexpected lengthy fall stopovers, and for Purple Martins, winters on the beach in southeastern Brazil. In this talk, Sarah will share photos and maps from this research, and give a peek into the amazing window we now have into the incredible voyages these birds undertake.

Dr. Sarah Rockwell is a Senior Research Biologist at KBO, where she manages several research programs studying the ecology of bird species of conservation concern, and monitoring birds at riparian, oak, and coniferous



where she fell in love with birds during her study abroad experience in Ecuador. She lives in Ashland, Oregon, with her husband and four-year-old daughter.

Programs are held at Six Rivers Masonic Lodge, 251 Bayside Road, Arcata, or you can join via the Zoom link found on our website. Drinks and goodies are served at 7:00 p.m., the program begins at 7:30.

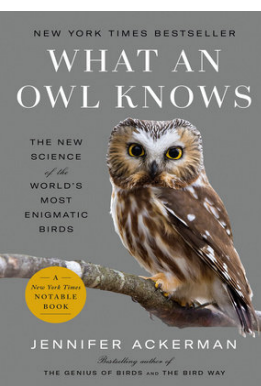
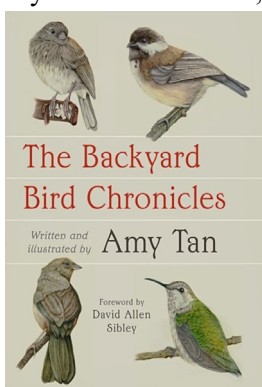
Photo: Sarah and a colleague night-banding, by Daniel Farrar

BOOK CORNER

Holiday Gift Ideas for Birders

Compiled by Gina Rogers

With the holiday season fast approaching, we asked several local retailers for recommendations of gifts for people who love birds. Northtown Books in Arcata noted that author Amy Tan's recent book, ***The Backyard Bird Chronicles***, has been selling briskly, with joyous drawings and journal-like entries giving her backyard birds character, just like in a novel. Eureka Books spotlighted Jennifer Ackerman's 2023 book ***What an Owl Knows*** and her earlier book ***The Genius of Birds*** as its most popular bird-related books right now. Wildberries (Arcata) suggests checking out the ***Decomposition Notebooks*** along their front wall. They often have ones with bird themes, and if you can't find one you like, look online, they sell a boxed set of ***Birds of***



Prey, with companion-themed pencils and pens. Booklegger (Eureka) pointed us to a Charley Harper jigsaw puzzle. And the staff at the Arcata Marsh Interpretive Center love local artist Maureen McGarry's book ***Louie Learns a Lesson***. It tells the story of the recovery of the Aleutian Geese, with scenes from the Arcata Bottoms and Bayside serving as the backdrop for McGarry's watercolor paintings of the geese.

And if that isn't enough:
The Screech Owl Companion, by Jim Wright & Scott Westen
The Bird that Audubon Missed, by Kenn Kaufmann
And one more review on page 4!



Agunalaksh: "The Shore Where the Sea Breaks Its Back"

Book Review by Judith Brown

Where the Sea Breaks Its Back: The Epic Story of Early Naturalist Georg Steller and the Russian Exploration of Alaska, by Corey Ford, is not a new book, but it caught my eye in a quest to know more about the people behind eponymous bird names. It is a stirring account, not only of the complex character of the man behind the Steller's Jay, Steller's Eider, Steller Sea Lion, and other legendary creatures, but also of what it means to undertake a sea voyage in the eighteenth century across the unknown territory of the North Pacific.

Two hundred years after Vitus Bering set sail from Avacha Bay on the Kamchatka Peninsula to "discover America," Corey Ford was aboard the Alaska Game Commission cruiser, *Brown Bear*, on a survey count of sea otters in the Aleutian Islands. He took with him two volumes of *Bering's Voyages*, by F. A. Golder, containing the ship's log of the *St. Peter* and the complete journal of the voyage by Georg Wilhelm Steller. Visiting the same spots that Steller observed on his journey in 1741, on islands that had not changed in 200 years, Ford began to feel a close personal identification with the young German naturalist. The result is the story of how Steller came to be the ship's doctor on the *St. Peter* and the first to document the unique wildlife of the Alaskan coast.

Finally allowed to go ashore on what is now Kayak Island, Steller and his Cossack servant Lepekhin raced to observe and gather specimens and as much information as possible. As they were forced to return to a waiting yawl, Lepekhin brought a specimen of a bird Steller recognized as similar to an eastern American bluejay whose likeness he had seen in a book. He identified it as its west coast cousin, now known as Steller's Jay.

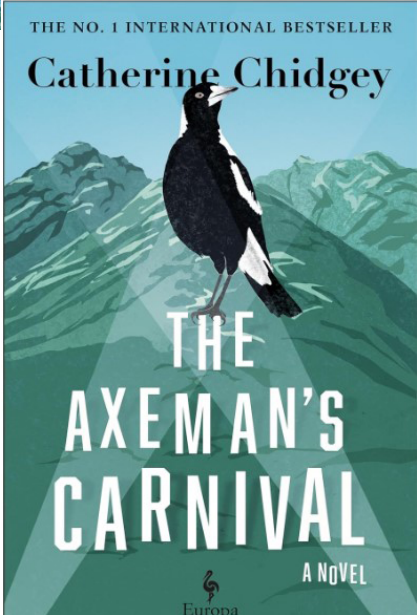
"This bird proved to me that we were really in America." Georg Steller
Steller's Jay by Sequoia Manchester,
Eureka High School



NewsFlash: Very rare Painted Bunting at Kathryn Wendel's feeder Nov. 16-17 in Eureka, where twenty birders were able to view it. Previous county records five and ten years ago.

From the Magpie’s Perspective

Book Review by Gail Kenny



The Axeman’s Carnival, a novel by Catherine Chidgey, is an excellent read! It is a story told from the perspective of an Australian Magpie who is rescued by a New Zealand sheep farmer’s wife. I loved the way the author put herself in the mind of the bird to create this story. I am convinced that birds can be quite intelligent, self-conscious beings, and it was delightful to get into the mind of a bird this way. Being transported to the perspective of the bird’s experience flying around the sheep farm was fun.

The story is about Tama the bird’s relationships with the farmer’s wife, Marnie, her abusive husband, Rob, and Tama’s own wild relatives—his father and sister. Tama is free to come and go from the house as he pleases. He observes the three farm dogs, the farmer Rob, and his owner Marnie. This fictional bird can imitate people talking, and what he says almost makes sense. I did an internet search on talking Australian Magpies, and some can say a few words, but nothing like Tama! As the story emerges, there is tension in Marnie and Rob’s relationship. They are barely making it financially as sheep farmers. Rob is controlling of Marnie and

only allows her to work one day a week. He can be jealous of Tama. Marnie starts taking videos of Tama and posts them on social media. Eventually she gains a large following and begins to make money by selling merchandise in the likeness of Tama. They hire a social media expert who has them install a livestreaming camera in several rooms in their house. Soon fans begin dropping by. The story culminates with the Axeman’s Carnival, Rob’s sport of competing in wood chopping competitions.

What is most fascinating is in real life prior to reading this book I had been seeing Facebook posts in early 2024 of an Australian Magpie in Australia who was rescued as a young bird. Molly was raised in a house with some dogs, Peggy and Ruby. Molly barks like a dog, wrestles with Peggy, and plays with the dog toys. The posts turned frantic when the Australian government confiscated Molly because it is illegal to keep a wild bird without the proper permits which are specifically for rehabbers and researchers. Also, Molly’s owners had been making money on social media off Molly’s fame. Her family pleaded for public support for Molly’s return. After several months, the government “found the bird was highly habituated and may have developmental issues meaning it could not be returned to the wild. The magpie was returned on the condition there is no further commercial gain from the bird, [the] carers undertake wildlife training and there is ongoing work with the agency to ensure the bird is receiving the best care and enrichment.” (<https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/social-media-star-molly-the-magpie-reunited-with-carers-and-dog-friends/e1u02uvya>).

This made me wonder, did Catherine Chidgey have knowledge of Molly as she was writing her book? Molly is now four years old, and the book was published in 2022, so it seems unlikely, but how coincidental!

Conservation News from Jim Clark
Countering Mythinformation

The term “myth” implies ancient stories that may be part of a belief system, but the modern proliferation of misinformation, disinformation, and outright lies has spawned a modern mythology that eschews science, facts, and evidence-based practice. As a public benefit corporation with the purpose of preserving the earth’s natural systems with an emphasis on birds, Redwood Region Audubon has an obligation to educate the public on the differences between myth and reality with respect to our purpose. We do this through our monthly membership meetings, the *Sandpiper* and *EcoNews*, field trips, and work with our local sibling organizations on conservation issues.

The conservation committee reviews local, state, and national conservation issues and advises our Board of Directors on what action to take. Sometimes it’s an easy “yes” or “no,” or it could be a hard choice. It’s the “noes” that can be most difficult. Just saying no is not enough. Providing factual evidence to refute a draft environmental impact review (DEIR) is akin to writing a thesis. Common

knowledge is no better than a myth without authoritative sources to back it up. In addition to scientific references, there are also a slew of regulations that lead to legal analysis.

A current example of a difficult “no” is the DEIR for two proposed wood pellet plants in Tuolumne and Lassen and San Joaquin counties. The DEIR was submitted without appendices and involves complex issues such as total carbon emissions, supply sustainability issues, life cycle, and other environmental impacts. All of the environmental impacts affect birds. Opposition so far consists of concerns about forest impact, carbon emissions, air pollution, and sustainability. Little has been mentioned about effects on birds. Other issues we will need to tackle are the upcoming DEIR on harbor development of wind farm maintenance, intervention in a lawsuit on Barred Owl management, and the new administration’s effect on conservation.

Join us for the December 17 conservation committee meeting at noon at <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87263853457?pwd=RHNKR0FrWEJ4WHJlcFZFWDDB4M0FFZz09> to discuss and decide on conservation issues.

Thinking of joining Redwood Region Audubon? Your membership supports our field trips, programs, education, and conservation efforts. You may also join us online at 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.
National Membership Application:
My check for \$20 is enclosed. (Introductory Offer)

Name:.....
Address:.....
City:.....State:.....Zip:.....
Email:.....
Local Chapter Code: C24
Mail form and check to:
National Audubon Society
Attn: Donations
225 Varick Street, 7th Floor
New York, NY 10014