

The Sandpiper

March 2025



Redwood Region Audubon Society

www.rras.org

MARCH PROGRAM Birding Papua New Guinea

Join us Thursday, March 20, at 7:00 p.m. for a presentation by Ken Burton

The tropical island of New Guinea is one of the biologically and culturally richest areas on the planet and also one of the least developed, and thus it ranks high on many travelers' bucket lists. Yet it also has a reputation for being among the world's most challenging and dangerous travel destinations, so relatively few tourists actually get it off their lists. Ken recently ventured to Papua New Guinea with two friends and lived to tell us about it! He'll share photos, videos, and audio recordings of some of the wildlife, people, and scenery they encountered, including representatives of the island's seven endemic bird families.

Note: This program will *not* be available on Zoom, but will be recorded and made available to view.

Programs are held on the third Thursday of the month, September through May, at Six Rivers Masonic Lodge, 251 Bayside Road, Arcata. Drinks and goodies are served at 7:00 p.m., the program begins at 7:30.

Photos by Ken Burton: Raggiana Bird-of-Paradise (top left); Brehm's Tiger-Parrot (top right); Masked Lapwing



Godwit Days Coming Soon *Don't Miss Out!*

The North Coast's annual bird festival runs from April 17 to 20. Registration is required, and trips are filling up fast, so get on over to godwitdays.org for the full schedule and to register.

An amazing selection of over seventy field trips and workshops are available, with options for experts and beginners alike and even some non-bird trips (dragonflies * reptiles/amphibians * coastal dunes). The Arcata Community Center is the hub for the festival. Plan to stop by for activities including:

- Informative displays at tables sponsored by conservation organizations and vendors
- Bird art by local students lining the hallways
- Silent auction with beautiful, useful, and eclectic offerings
- Local ecologist, educator, and author Michael Kauffmann presenting on the Klamath Mountains (April 18) and acclaimed illustrator and author Rosemary Mosco, creator of *Bird and Moon Comics*, on how connecting birding and art make birding better (April 19)
- Family nature craft activities

Continued on next page

RRAS FIELD TRIPS IN MARCH

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 March: March 1, Ken Burton ~ March 8, Chet Ogan ~ March 15, Kathryn Wendel ~ March 22, Dan Greaney ~ March 29, Rob Fowler

Saturday, March 1, time TBD. The *SoHum bird walk*, formerly on the fourth Saturday of the month, has a new trip leader, Tess McGuire. Contact her at tmcguire@gmail.com for meeting time and place of this walk, and look for future walks in the *Sandpiper* and on rras.org.

Sunday, March 9, 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, March 16, 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, March 22, 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.

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

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Did You Know?

*From the CatBird
Committee*

Many people now bring cats into public parks, trails, and land on a leash or in a cat backpack or stroller. One tip to prevent cats from getting loose and lost is to have them harnessed and leashed even when they are in a backpack or stroller. This way, they can be easily caught by their leash if they get loose. Make sure any zippers are fully closed and locked.

From *My Humboldt Life*, August 2024

President's Column

By Kathryn Wendel



Thank you to everyone who attended Redwood Region Audubon's Annual Banquet! We raised essential funds through record ticket sales and generous donations from local businesses and members for the silent auction. These funds enable us to support bird-friendly restoration projects like Wigi Wetlands, publish the *Sandpiper* newsletter, and host guided bird tours.

At the banquet, we announced our election results, welcoming new board member Tony Kurz and continuing members Samantha Bacon, Sean McAllister, and Gary Friedrichsen. Officers continuing in their positions are Treasurer Catherine McNalley, Secretary Jolian Kangas, Vice President CJ Ralph, and me as President. We appreciate all members who voted. Remember, there are two types of memberships: national and local. With national membership you can

vote in chapter elections, and we receive money from NAS, but only for the first year. If you choose local membership for an additional \$15, all of your dues are retained by the chapter.

The topic of the US Fish and Wildlife Service's management proposal for Barred Owl removal in old growth redwood habitats, aimed at facilitating the recovery of the endangered Northern Spotted Owl, has garnered significant attention. For our program on Thursday, April 17, RRAS will host Tom Wheeler from the Environmental Protection Information Center (EPIC), who will provide an in-depth discussion on this critical conservation issue.

Exciting news! Due to last fall's successful pelagic birding trip, we are offering eight trips this year from May to November. Check our website and upcoming *Sandpiper* issues for dates, and email me or our field trip coordinator, Sean McAllister (whiteouters@gmail.com), to sign up.

More About Godwit Days...

Look for these other special events:

- The RRAS-sponsored Big Sit all day Sunday, April 20, at the Arcata Marsh
- **Pints for Non-profits Fundraisers** on March 13 at The Wild Hare Tavern (915 H St., Arcata) and April 3 at The Pub at The Creamery (824 L St., Suite A, Arcata)
- Pictorial history of the festival presented as a timeline organized around photos of each year's T-shirt on display at the Arcata Marsh Interpretive Center during March and April



Godwit Days artwork by Patricia Sennott

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED Godwit Days wouldn't be Godwit Days without the many wonderful people stepping up to lend a helping hand! RRAS volunteers are needed for activities over the course of the event. Help staff the RRAS table in the main room at the Community Center, where we answer questions, sell merchandise, or just greet and chat with attendees. There are two- or three-hour shifts on Friday (4/18) from 3 to 7 p.m., Saturday (4/19) from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m., and Sunday (4/20) from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Contact Gail Kenny at gailgkenny@gmail.com. Volunteers are also needed to help with nature crafts and hosting/bartending/washing dishes at the keynote events on Friday and Saturday nights.

Join a fun group on Friday, April 18, at 1 p.m. to help hang the hundreds of entries in the **22nd Student Bird Art Contest**, co-sponsored by RRAS and Friends of the Arcata Marsh. Bring a lightweight hammer and a bag/apron to hold push pins and be prepared to post artwork along the hallways and lobby of the Community Center. The task generally takes two hours. Contact Sue Leskiw at sueleskiw1@gmail.com. Thank you!



February eBird Alerts in Humboldt

Left, Vermillion Flycatcher by Jeff Todoroff;
 center, White-breasted Nuthatch by Ann Constantino;
 right, Painted Bunting by Kathryn Wendel



Raptor Rapture, text and photos by Ann Constantino

Ann writes a (mostly) weekly blog called “Free Range Photography,” at free-range.blog, with postings of her observations in words and pictures of birds and wildlife in southern Humboldt County. “My hope is to bring visitors to this site into the world I am privileged to experience whenever I step out my back door to soak in the natural world around me. For me, this is the ‘real world’.” The following is an excerpt from her December 29, 2024, post.

OVER TWO DIFFERENT DAYS in December, between downpours of rain, I had the good fortune to observe twelve different species of raptor (birds of prey) in Humboldt and get photos of ten of them. A Bald Eagle and a Cooper’s Hawk made appearances near my house when my camera was not on hand. However, four buteos, three falcons, one owl, a harrier, and a kite were captured by the technology of my camera, whose ability to make the best of less than optimal light on dark rainy days is quite amazing.

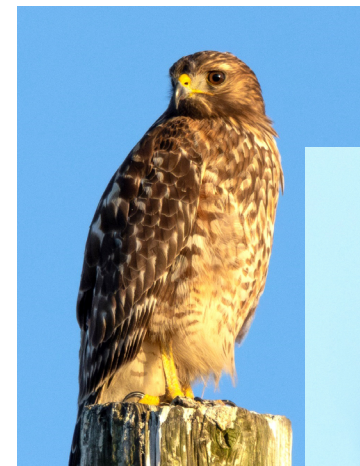
The Buteos

Buteos are mostly large raptors with broad, rounded wings and bulky bodies. We see Red-tailed and Red-shouldered Hawks pretty regularly in Humboldt all year.

In the winter Ferruginous Hawks and Rough-legged Hawks visit from their colder or more northern breeding grounds.

You might know Red-shouldered Hawks by their loud insistently whiny call that belies their striking beauty. A smaller buteo, we have them year round in Humboldt.

Every year I look forward to seeing a Ferruginous Hawk when fall arrives. This year they’ve turned up both on Bear River Ridge and in the Ferndale bottoms. They have an eagle-like



Immature Red-shouldered (above) and Red-tailed Hawks



countenance and an elegant beauty. Our largest buteo, they have a characteristic broad gape (the opening of the beak stretching all the way back to under the eye). The plumage from underneath can be quite variable, from mottled to much lighter. The legs (tarsi) have rust-colored feathers all the way to the feet, forming a “V.”



Face and underwing detail of Rough-legged Hawk

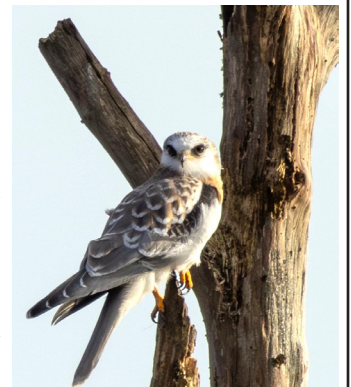
It’s been a couple years since I’ve seen a Rough-legged Hawk. Named for their feathered legs, these hawks breed in the far north where the extra insulation is needed. I have seen them on Bear River Ridge and in the Loleta Bottoms alongside Cannibal Island Road, but searches the past two winters have been unlucky. So it seemed like the best Christmas present I could ever ask for to see one along Upper Bear River Ridge Road on December 25.

The Falcons

Falcons are built for speed with their streamlined bodies and narrow pointed wings. American Kestrels and some peregrine varieties live in Humboldt year round. Merlins and Tundra Peregrines pass through on migration or winter here. The American Kestrel is our smallest falcon, and one of few raptors who hover over prey before diving for the catch. The Merlin, slightly larger than the kestrel and a much more adept hunter, often takes prey bigger and heavier than itself.

White-tailed Kite

We are lucky to have a breeding pair of these gorgeous predators right in southern Humboldt, less than a mile from my house. The bird shown here was seen in the bottoms of Ferndale and Arcata. Kites live in Humboldt year round and are often seen hunting over open fields. Their characteristic hovering is followed by an unusual floating descent onto prey. The immature kite shown at the right is told by the light scalloped edges on the feathers and buffy mottling on the breast.



Northern Harrier

Harriers live in Humboldt year round and may turn up in different areas in different seasons. They are beautiful acrobatic flyers who swoop low over their hunting grounds, often marshy areas, which gave it its previous name of Marsh Hawk. The harrier’s owl-like facial disc is captured in the photo below.



Short-eared Owl

So far this winter, I’m counting myself lucky to see one of these visiting beauties, but not lucky enough to get any close pictures. Nevertheless, there was plenty of action when one had prey in its talons, and a harrier showed up to harass the owl into dropping its prey. The owl retained possession after a big swoop by the harrier. The harrier tried another approach, and the poor rodent was caught in a tug o’ war. It was getting very dark at this point, but I believe the owl successfully hung on to its catch and sped away toward a safe place to dine.

AFTER NEW YEAR’S DAY I start to feel a pull toward the excitement of what spring will bring. But for now, my birding cup feels full to overflowing with these many sightings of raptors.

The *Wallhecken* and a Beneficial Human-Altered Environment, text and photos by Jim Clark, Co-Chair of RRAS Conservation Committee

My wife Donna and I recently visited friends in Friedeburg, Lower Saxony, Germany. Friedeburg is a typical town of the region with a little over 10,000 population and an altitude of ten feet. This region of Germany is also in Ostfriesland (East Frisia) that extends from the barrier islands in the North Sea about ninety miles to the south with the western border at the Netherlands. Being a cultural area, the east and south boundaries are a bit nebulous.

Our friends live about a mile from the town center in a house next to the family farm. Breakfast in the dining room with a south-facing patio window featured the typical array of winter Northern European yard birds with a view across their field to a beautiful beech tree marking the boundary with their neighbor's field.

As we traveled from town to town, the effect was like going through a forest, yet agricultural fields predominated. How could this be? Going back to that beautiful beech tree is where the story of the *wallhecken* begins. Our host explained that such trees are protected by ordinance in this area. It's not just a large tree, but part of agricultural development over the last 5,000 years. The beech tree represents a remnant of a *wallhecke*, roughly translated as "growing wall."

Typical *wallhecken* consist of a foot-high linear mound of soil where native shrubs and trees grow. They are primarily between fields and along roads and ditches. Plants consist of beech, oak, birch, and spruce, and shrubs like hazel and berries in ratios that vary with elevation and soil type. As wood material becomes available, branches and vines are stacked among the living shrubs and trees to create an organic wall up to about a yard or more high. The result is a linear forest/fence that often provides a corridor to a natural forested area or commercial forest. Fields surrounded by *wallhecken* range from four to ten acres.

Considering the thousands of fields bordered by *wallhecken*, the amount of forest and edge habitat is significant and supports mammals and birds in addition to reducing wind speed, providing summer shade, and controlling soil moisture. All main roads between towns have a wide, separated, and surfaced bike/pedestrian path on at least one side. Forest-sheltered paths encourage nonmotorized transportation.

The Eel and Mad River bottoms once had scattered thickets of wildlife supporting Sitka spruce and redwood that no longer exist. Could the *wallhecken* concept improve and expand wildlife habitat while providing other benefits? The answer to that,

in my opinion, deserves more consideration. Immigrants from Europe, including some of my ancestors from Lower Saxony, came to a new land that often required a different type of agricultural practice. Over the short span of settlement some of the "old ways" were abandoned in favor of maximizing cultivated area or by necessity of climate and soil. However, we should not forget how some ancient and successful practices might be appropriate, even on a different continent.



Portion of a *wallhecke*, or "growing wall"

Hope Is the Thing with Feathers Emily Dickinson

Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words,
And never stops at all.

And sweetest in the gale is heard;
And sore must be the storm
That could abash the little bird
That kept so many warm.

I've heard it in the chilliest land,
And on the strangest sea;
Yet, never, in extremity,
It asked a crumb of me.

First published in 1891 in Poems by Emily Dickinson, second series. The poem has been set to music for choirs and by the band Trailer Bride.

Kid's Corner WOWZA WILDLIFE!

By Leslie Scopes Anderson

SLIP
SLIDING
AWAY!



WHERE IN THE WORLD?

Snowy Egrets can be seen at the Arcata Marsh and similar wetlands flapping, jumping, and running around to catch their prey.

FUN FACTS

Snowy Egrets are the smaller of the two egrets in our area. The larger one is a Great Egret. When they are seen fishing together, the Snowy is usually the more active one.