



The Sandpiper

May 2025



Redwood Region Audubon Society

www.rras.org



MAY PROGRAM Join us Thursday, May 15, at 7:00 p.m. for a presentation by CPH Wildlife graduate student Alon Averbuj on:

Habitat Selection of Common Ravens near Western Snowy Plover Nesting Sites

Nest predation by Common Ravens (*Corvus corax*) is considered one of the most significant barriers to the recovery of the population of the federally threatened Western Snowy Plover (*Anarhynchus nivosus nivosus*) in Northern California. To increase productivity of Snowy Plovers, conservation managers employ three main techniques: placing symbolic fencing to deter pedestrian entrance to nesting areas, cutting back invasive vegetation, and placing oyster shells to help hide nests. Little is known, however, about how these techniques affect habitat selection of ravens in the area.

Alon's work focuses on geospatial analysis of Common Ravens and how their movement and habitat selection may change near Western Snowy Plover nesting sites. He modeled habitat selection of GPS-tracked beach-going ravens along the coast of Humboldt County using a resource selection function and a step selection function for a multi-scale approach. He assessed if ravens were attracted to habitat restoration techniques that may positively affect Snowy Plovers, anthropogenic resources, and previously unconsidered environmental habitat characteristics. This work can help shed light on the habitat selection preferences of beach-going ravens whose home ranges overlap with Snowy Plover nesting sites and can inform local conservation managers on future management techniques for both ravens and Snowy Plovers.

Alon completed his undergraduate degree in biology at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, then went on to study three species of endangered birds at the Kaua'i Forest Bird Recovery Project. He later joined the Forest Service in Hood River, Oregon, before coming to Humboldt.

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. Don't miss this, our last program before the summer hiatus!

Field-trip-palooza

Record turnout at March 29 marsh walk—forty people at one point! Terry Atkinson, who joins us often from the central valley, took this photo, starring our newest birder, Yosha, Daniil and Evelina's new pup (look closely lower left).



RRAS FIELD TRIPS IN MAY

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 May:**

May 3, Jonny Sperling ~ May 10, Tamar Danufsky ~ May 17, Dan Greaney ~ May 24, Kathryn Wendel ~ May 31, Bob Battagin

Saturday, May 10, sunrise-early afternoon. Join us for the first of monthly *pelagic trips* aboard the *Stellar Sunrise*. Three experienced birders will be on board and on the lookout for albatross, storm-petrels, jaegers, and other birds seldom seen from shore. Cost is \$150, limit fifteen participants. To register for this and/or any of the other trips, contact Sean McAllister at whiteouters@gmail.com or 707-496-8790.

Sunday, May 11, 8-11am. Mother's Day at Potawot Health Village. Local birder Mark Morrisette will help identify birds and other wildlife on a guided walk co-hosted by United Indian Health Services and RRAS at this community garden in Arcata. The twenty-acre garden is part of a coastal prairie in the ancestral Wiyot district of Gudinih, now known as *Ku'wah-dah-wilth* ("comes back to life") Restoration Area. Contact Sean McAllister (whiteouters@gmail.com / (707) 496-8790) to register for this event. See more about this event at our website.

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

Saturday, May 24, 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, May 24, time TBD. Join RRAS in Southern Humboldt for a free guided bird walk led by Tess McGuire. Contact Tess (tmcquire@gmail.com) for meeting time and place.

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President's Column

By Kathryn Wendel

Thank you to all who joined us or supported **Godwit Days** last month! Over 300 people from all over the nation and the local area joined us in Arcata for a four-day bonanza of celebrating the birds of the redwood region, and it was a huge success. A record number of participants joined the Big Sit, which RRAS proudly sponsors; and beyond the extraordinary birding, people enjoyed fascinating talks by our keynote speakers, delicious food at our free reception and fund-raising banquet, offerings of all the wonderful vendors and artists, as well as a visit by local zoo ambassador Chillido the owl. Godwit Days is the success it is primarily due to all the local volunteers and participants who make it happen, so another big *Thank You!* See you again next year—as always on the third weekend of April.



Looking ahead, another way our local and broader community can promote awareness and support the conservation of regional birds is with the **Birdathon, May 15-25**. RRAS partners with the North Coast Environmental Center to raise much-needed money that keeps our organizations running. You can contribute by going to go.rallyup.com/birdathon2025 and choosing a team to support. All proceeds go directly to our organizations. I am leading an all-women's team called the BushLists, which tallied 104 species last year, and you can contribute either by donating an amount per species seen or a flat amount. If you'd like to join my team, please email me!

Also in May, and beyond, be sure to sign up for one or several of our **pelagic trips** aboard the *Steller Sunrise*. See the Field Trips section on page 1 and the full schedule plus more at our website. Certain trips are expected to sell out, so be an early bird!

Photo of Kathryn and Barbara Reisman in T-shirts from 2024 Godwit Days by Sue Leskiw.



Fifth-Graders Put Up Nest Boxes at Cutten School, by Catherine McNally

Recently, fifth-grade students at Cutten Elementary School in Eureka took part in a project preparing five bird nest boxes for their school grounds. Their teacher, Jen Code, a biology major who enjoys integrating her background in wildlife across the curriculum, hopes to instill in her students a love of birds and science.

RRAS member Denise Seeger, the visitor services assistant for the Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge, supplied the boxes. Students helped Jay Seeger, the head custodian at Cutten School, put up the nest boxes in five spots on the school grounds. The boxes are situated so students can observe the nests and report any activity as they run their weekly mile.

Because humans have removed so much bird habitat, projects like this help local nesting birds such as Violet-green Swallows and chickadees. These projects also help create awareness in young people of why birds are important.

As chair of the RRAS education committee, I hope to re-create this project in other schools throughout Humboldt County. If your school is interested in participating in a bird nest box project like this next year, please email me at president@rras.org.



Research Grants Awarded to Local Students, by Gina Rogers

Did you know? One of the important things our local chapter does to advance the understanding of our region's birds and their habitats is to offer research grants of up to \$500 to undergraduate and graduate students at Cal Poly Humboldt and College of the Redwoods. The purpose is to encourage learning

about birds in Humboldt, Trinity, Siskiyou, and Del Norte counties and to support projects that will advance knowledge about them.

This year, a grant of \$500 was awarded to Samantha Bacon, a senior at Cal Poly Humboldt, to study field use by shorebirds, especially Marbled Godwits, in the Arcata Bottoms. Her study is designed to help biologists understand what features of pasturelands are required for roosting and foraging

continued on page 4

Kid's Corner

WOWZA WILDLIFE!

By Leslie Scopes Anderson

DO WE SEE EYE TO EYE?

A FEW FACTS

Great Egrets nest in colonies in high trees. They were endangered, but have recovered. You can see them at the Arcata Marsh.

WHERE IN THE WORLD?

These two Great Egret chicks have fallen out of their nest! The parents may continue to bring them food until they learn to fly.



Albatross Monitoring on Midway Atoll

Text and photos by Ken Burton

This winter (December-January), I had the rare opportunity to spend a month on Midway Atoll as a volunteer for the US Fish & Wildlife Service, with support from Friends of Midway Atoll. I was part of a team of twelve whose job it was to count all the albatross nests on the atoll. This count has been conducted since 1991 to monitor the breeding populations of the Laysan and Black-footed Albatrosses that nest there. Midway is the largest Laysan colony in the world, so it's critical to the species' survival.

Midway, comprising two small, nearly flat islands in the middle of the North Pacific, holds outsize significance both biologically and historically. The Battle of Midway turned the tide of the Pacific War against Japan in 1942. At that time, Midway was a naval base with a population of 5,000 servicemen and their families, built at the cost of countless bird lives. Today, while many signs of the base and the war remain, the atoll is essentially a bird factory, a national wildlife refuge inhabited by 40-50 refuge staff, volunteers, and contract workers. Housing is in a variety of buildings left over from the military era that also include a gym, a cafeteria and bar, a small grocery store, and even a bowling alley straight out of the 1940s! There's also an airfield that serves as an emergency landing site for commercial aircraft; most people get there on charter flights from Honolulu. During albatross nesting season, the biweekly plane comes and goes only at night to avoid bird strikes.

Let the Count Begin!

Our assignment was to count every single albatross nest on the atoll. Not estimate, count. The islands are divided into several dozen sectors, and we typically counted two to four sectors a day using two different techniques depending on the density of the vegetation. In most areas, we were able to walk in tandem back and forth through the colony, each person counting the nests between him or her and the next person with hand clickers, one for each species; we started each pass with a shouted "Counting left!" or "Counting right!" The person on the end painted a line on the ground to follow on the way back. Where vegetation was too dense, we searched for individual nests in assigned areas, putting a spot of paint next to each nest as we counted it. In most sectors, the ground was sandy and riddled with petrel and shearwater burrows, so we strapped wooden "snowshoes" over our boots to distribute our weight and avoid crushing them and potentially trapping birds inside.

The work was demanding and amounted to a full-time job, but immersed as we were in albatrosses, we had ample opportunity to observe their behavior. They were incubating their single eggs while I was there (the first chick was found the day I left). While one parent is on the nest, the other is at sea feeding. They switch every two to three weeks, the arriving bird often having to push its sitting mate off the nest.

Left: White Terns. Center photos: Red-footed Booby (top), Great Frigatebird (left), Brown Noddy (right).



They perform pair-bonding rituals such as allopreening and dancing before parting again. About half the birds are too young to breed and spend their time learning how to dance, choosing future mates, practicing nest building, and just loafing around.

Return of Wisdom

You may have heard of Wisdom, a Laysan Albatross who nests on Midway and is the oldest known wild bird at 74 years of age. Several friends had asked me to say "hi" to her. She was at sea when I arrived but returned while I was there and I did get to see her, from a distance. I have to say she looked just like the hundreds of birds nesting around her, any number of which could have been even older; we just don't know. Wisdom's chick hatched on January 30, two weeks after I left.



Year-round Haven

Of course, Midway is home to far more than albatrosses. Bonin Petrels nest there by the hundreds of thousands, and every evening the sky was so full of them as they emerged from their burrows that it looked like a mayfly swarm. There were so many on the roads at night that we had to ride our bicycles slowly and carefully to avoid hitting them. Black and Brown Noddies; Great Frigatebirds; Brown, Masked, and Red-footed Boobies; Laysan Ducks; Gray-backed, Sooty, and White Terns; Red-tailed and White-tailed Tropicbirds; and Christmas and Wedge-tailed Shearwaters also breed there (not all at the same time), as does the only pair of Short-tailed Albatrosses outside Japan. A surprising variety of waterfowl and shorebirds (including Gray-tailed Tattlers and Bristle-thighed Curlews) use the atoll's few wetlands in winter. And the beaches are important haul-out sites for endangered Green Sea Turtles and Hawaiian Monk Seals.



Trouble in Paradise

Sounds idyllic, no? But Midway is not without problems. A sobering amount of trash, mostly from fishing vessels, accumulates there. Invasive plants and animals abound, including mice that bite the nesting albatrosses, producing sometimes fatal wounds. Some chicks die of starvation because the plastic their parents feed them leaves little room for real food. Sea level rise and warming temperatures pose existential threats. And looming budget cuts are likely to throttle some ongoing monitoring and restoration projects.

Midway is a unique and amazing place, logistically hard to get to and emotionally hard to leave. I hope it, and the refuge's important work, can survive the numerous challenges facing them.

Oh, and the final nest count? Nearly 620,000 Laysan (the second highest ever) and over 25,000 Black-footed (the second lowest since 2005).



Research Grants, continued from page 2

shorebirds, information which will help in preserving and increasing habitat in the face of the loss of intertidal zones due to sea-level rise.

A second \$500 grant was awarded to CPH Wildlife master's student Elizabeth Meisman for work on Swainson's Hawks in Northern California. This research aims to explain the influence of varying agricultural crops on Swainson's Hawk territory selection and reproductive success in the Butte Valley.

Each grant awardee is required to write an article about the research results or give a presentation to RRAS, so we can all look forward to learning more about the results when they finish their work. *See also* the article on page 1 of this issue about the May program, to be presented by Alon Averbuj, recipient of the grant in 2024.

Did You Know?

Love Your Cat and Birds Too



A Model for Humboldt County? Once again, Oregon is ahead of the curve: this time, it's about roaming cats. Multnomah County, which includes Portland, has acted on behalf of human health and wildlife welfare by making it illegal for cats to trespass on private property. They have even created a Cat Trespass Complaint Form! Do you think Humboldt County would consider passing such a law someday? In the meantime, please keep your cats indoors, in a catio, or on a leash. The birds thank you.

There's still time to support Birdathon! Join the fun at yournec.org.

Nature Is Where You Help It

By Jim Clark, Co-Chair of RRAS Conservation Committee

My last three columns explored some differences between the ways that Europe and much of North America developed before and after the automobile and the problems caused by postautomobile development in North America.

Asad result of the postindustrial urbanization of our countryside is the misguided concept that "nature" is something that one goes to because it is somewhere else. Our national parks are examples of preserving grand and remote landscapes far from where most people lived and where many could not afford to visit. The concept was to visit nature rather than live with it. Another part of the notion that nature, including birds, is "somewhere else" is a result of urban and suburban residential landscaping in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Keep reading, this is not another anti-lawn rant!

Many commercial landscaping plants and trees are varieties and hybridized forms of plants not native to our area. Such vegetation is often devoid of or has only vestigial remnants of "messy" fruit or other characteristics that lend themselves to easy maintenance of a neat and tidy yard but provide little or no benefit to native birds. Some landscaping plants might even attract birds to breed unsuccessfully by providing food in the wrong season. The right native plants used for landscaping can attract and help birds when they need it *and* beautify your yard. Our red flowering currant (*Ribes sanguineum*) blooms just in time for arrival of the first north-migrating Rufous Hummingbirds.

Our one-sixth acre urban yard is now mostly native trees and plants,



including native grass ground cover. We don't know if the *Agrostis pallens* turf we installed helped volunteer wildflowers, but it appears so. Our yard provides food and cover for birds year-round. Native plants do not require pesticides and provide lots of insects for birds to eat. Imagine the benefit to local birds if native-plant landscaped yards in our area were the norm, rather than the exception.

If you haven't read one or more of the following books already, I recommend them for concept and inspiration:

- *Bringing Nature Home: How Native Plants Sustain Wildlife in Our Gardens* and *Nature's Best Hope: A New Approach to Conservation that Starts in Your Yard*, by Douglas W. Tallamy (Timber Press, an imprint of Hachette Book Group, located in Portland, OR)
- *The Living Landscape: Designing for Beauty and Biodiversity in the Home Garden*, by Rick Darke and Douglas W. Tallamy (Timber Press)

Another wonderful resource for everything native plants is our local North Coast Chapter of the California Native Plant Society. Visit their website at northcoastcnps.org or the nursery at Freshwater Farms Reserve in Eureka to find out more.

NOTE: The RRAS board of directors voted in April on a proposal to help finance enhancement of seven acres of county-owned wetland and upland forest between Myrtle and Harrison Avenues on Lucas Street in Eureka. Funding will support cleanup, planting, and more. This could be an example of native-plant landscaping and restoration to bring nature and birds closer to home.

Common Birds of Northwest California Back in Print!

By Gina Rogers

A new and revised edition of local birder extraordinaire Ken Burton's *Common Birds of Northwest California* has hit the streets. Just in time for Godwit Days, the new version again features one-page descriptions of the most prevalent birds in our region, with the 11 new species added bringing the total to 175. There is one full page for each species, including luscious photos, a graph showing prevalence here by month, and notes on identification, habitat, migratory patterns, and more. It has been designed especially to assist beginning birders and those new to the region in identifying and appreciating the most frequently encountered species here. Look for copies at local bookstores.

Side note: When I first arrived in Humboldt County, I found Ken's book at the Arcata Marsh Interpretive Center, and it became my bible for exploring all the birds here. The stunning, large-sized photos make identifications easier. Every page has fascinating information about how the birds interact with their environment, tips for decoding their calls, and insights on their behavior and lifestyle. I love the frequency charts; right away I could tell whether a particular bird should be around in any given month. I'm actually on my second copy already, as I wore my first one out, and I'll be off to buy the new version immediately. *Gina*



Sample page from previous edition.