

The Sandpiper

February 2026



Redwood Region Audubon Society

www.rras.org

RRAS FIELD TRIPS IN FEBRUARY

Every Saturday, 8:30-11am. Join RRAS at the Arcata Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary for a free guided field trip with an experienced birder. Meet in 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 February: Feb 7, Michael Morris ~ Feb 14, Jonny Sperling ~ Feb 21, Dan Greaney ~ Feb 28, Tylor Bell-Rogers

Sunday, Feb 8, 9-11am. Join trip leader Ralph Bucher for a walk at the Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge. This easy two-mile walk is along a wide, flat, gravel-packed trail. Email Ralph to sign up at thebook@reninet.com.

Sunday, Feb 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 have arrived! Email Ralph to sign up at thebook@reninet.com.

Sunday, Feb 15, 8-10am, with option for Sunday brunch. King Salmon Baywatch Join RRAS for a two-hour baywatch at the Buhne Point overlook in King Salmon. This elevated site provides a grand view of Humboldt Bay directly opposite the entrance channel with expanded views of the south and central portions of the bay. This time of year is great for viewing all kinds of waterbirds, including wintering ducks, gulls, cormorants, shorebirds, loons, and grebes, as well as raptors and a mix of landbirds. We will meet at Gill's by the Bay parking lot and walk the shoreline to the Buhne Point overlook and spend up to two hours, depending on conditions. As an option for participants, we may continue to watch birds while enjoying brunch on the observation deck at Gill's. Contact Sean McAllister (whiteouters@gmail.com; 707.496.8790) to sign up so we can confirm that it isn't canceled due to inclement weather and to determine how many want to be included for brunch.

Annual RRAS Banquet & Auction – Saturday, February 21, 2026

Join us for our annual fund-raising event! This year the banquet will be catered by Cassaro's Catering, with dessert from Ramone's Bakery, and, of course, the traditional barbecued oysters. Social hour begins at 5:30 p.m., giving you time to greet friends and browse silent auction items. Place your bids on artwork, special services by local businesses, natural history items, and all manner of bird-related treasures, and find out who made the winning bid at the end of the evening. Dinner is served at 6:30, followed by our program:

Birds at the Crossroads: Science, Culture, and the Path Forward, with Ivan Phillipson

Host and creator of *The Science of Birds* podcast, Ivan Phillipson is a professional birding guide with a background in scientific research. Ivan has loved animals and nature his whole life, beginning with an interest in amphibians and reptiles, then expanding to plants, fungi, and all animals. Birds have become his greatest passion. He will explore how we are living at a pivotal moment in the history of birds—when a convergence of knowledge and passion gives us an opportunity to protect the planet's remaining avian diversity.



Where: Arcata D Street Neighborhood Center, 13th and D Streets

When: Social hour begins at 5:30, dinner is served at 6:30, followed by Ivan's talk

Tickets: \$50/person until Feb. 18, \$65 thereafter (the last day to reserve is Feb. 19)

Send check made out to RRAS to PO Box 1054, Eureka, CA 95502, or email gary@jacobyecreek.net with Banquet in the subject line, or phone (707) 496-6581

Saturday, Feb 21, 8:30-noon. Samoa Dunes Recreation Area This BLM-managed site at the tip of the Samoa Peninsula offers a wide variety of habitats and birds in a small area. Join leader Ken Burton (shrikethree AT gmail DOT com) for a half-day outing to explore the willow thickets, eucalyptus groves, dunes, jetties, and adjacent bay and channel for passerines, shorebirds, waterfowl, and raptors. Meet at the Samoa Dunes OHV Staging Area; wear appropriate shoes for trails that could be muddy or flooded.

Saturday, Feb 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, Feb 28, 8:30-11am. Join RRAS in Southern Humboldt for a free guided bird walk. Meet leader Tess McGuire at Tooby Park, one mile west of Garberville on Sprowl Creek Road. Contact Tess (tmcguire9130@gmail.com) with questions and to sign up.

continued on next page

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The Sandpiper is published ten times a year by
 Redwood Region Audubon Society
 P.O. Box 1054, Eureka, CA 95502

RRAS Field Trips, continued

Saturday, Feb 28, 9-11am. Meet at **Gray Falls Campground** (located a few miles east of Hawkins Bar on HWY 299). This is a good spot to see a variety of species with limited hiking. Among them are Hairy, Downy, and Acorn Woodpeckers, Nuthatches, Varied Thrushes, and Bushtits. Other possibilities include Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, Western Screech Owl, Northern Pygmy Owl, and Mountain Quail. Raptors can be seen here as well, including Bald Eagles. Most species are visible close to the day use area, but for those who want to explore, waterproof boots are highly recommended! Contact Sean McAllister (whiteouters@gmail.com; 707.496.8790) for more info and to sign up.

President's Column

By Kathryn West (Wendel)

Happy New Year, dear members!

January started off with a bang, with the final Christmas Bird Counts of the Redwood Region completed the first week of the year and the RRAS-hosted Compilation Gathering for all CBC participants providing a forum for sharing experiences. Dozens of birder volunteers gathered to celebrate the count and compile lists of species. All in all, it was a great season for our local CBCs, considering the rainy weather. The highlights:

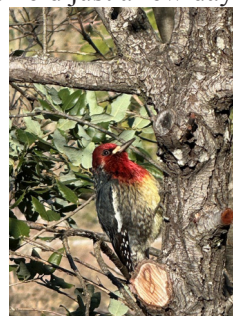
- The **Centerville** count, the last count in, benefited from the weather window between atmospheric river storms and king tides. But many areas were inaccessible due to flooding, dampening observations, especially for those early morning owls. They still gathered 161 species, not a record but very respectable



Flooding along Coffee Creek, by Jeff Todoroff

concerning the weather! Of special note, they picked up a seasonally rare Bullock's Oriole.

- The **Tall Trees** CBC occurred just a few days earlier, with a final count of 116 species. Two highlights were the *nation's* leading count of Short-billed Gulls and 7 American Condors!
- The **Willow Creek** count was held just a few days after Christmas, making it almost a true "Christmas" Bird Count. Their rough count was around 77, with a few paper lists still pending. This hovers right around last year's result. Highlights include Mountain Quail, N. Pygmy-Owl, N. Saw-whet Owl, Townsend's Solitaire, and a single Cedar Waxwing.
- The **Arcata** count collected 176 species, the highest count of the Redwood Region. Highlights include Snow Goose, a single Redhead, one seasonally rare Short-Billed Dowitcher, Rock Sandpiper, Burrowing Owl, Northern Shrike, Evening Grosbeak, and a handful of rare warblers—Black-and-white, Tennessee,



Red-breasted Sapsucker, by Gary Lester



Virginia's, and Palm Warbler. They also ran a pelagic section of the circle, which no doubt helped boost their final species count, adding such ocean birds as Pink-footed Shearwater, Cassin's Auklet, Ancient Murrelet, and Northern Fulmar.

- The **Del Norte** count, which kicked off the local CBC season, finished with one more than last year's count with 161 species. Highlights are Ring-necked Pheasant, an increasingly rare Ruddy Turnstone, over 8,000 Common Murres, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Hooded Oriole, a double handful of Tri-colored Blackbirds, and a very seasonally rare Wilson's Warbler.

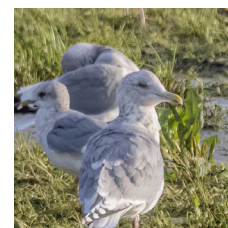
January also kicked off the start of the *California Breeding Bird Atlas*, a major inter-agency effort to catalog the distribution of breeding birds across the state. RRAS is supporting this effort as much as we can. Our goal is to raise \$10,000 to become a Founding Member and have RRAS join the data-gathering effort that will have a multigenerational impact supporting management and conservation of California's birds.

For starters, we hope to lead guided birding trips into under-birded areas of our region to help fill in data gaps. You can help by always marking breeding bird behavior whenever you observe it in the field using eBird's breeding bird codes within the app. A significant chunk of Humboldt County has never had even one minute of eBird effort, let alone breeding bird codes submitted. Most of these areas lie in the southeast region of Humboldt. Please check our website for upcoming trips this summer to these locations.

In other news, RRAS has upgraded our website! We have switched platforms and hosts. It is more streamlined, quicker to upload, and easier to navigate. Check it out at rras.org.

Finally, our annual banquet is just weeks away. See the article on the first page of *The Sandpiper* for details and how to buy tickets. We are excited about keynote speaker Ivan Phillipson, a passionate naturalist with a background in scientific research, years of experience as a professional naturalist guide, and creator of the nationally acclaimed podcast *The Science of Birds*. See you there!

Hooded Merganser, Iceland Gull, and Ferruginous Hawk, courtesy of Jeff Todoroff, from the Centerville CBC.





Registration for Godwit Days Spring Migration Festival Is Open

From Amy Fetz, Godwit Days Coordinator

Don't wait to check out the amazing selection of field trips, presentations, and workshops taking place during the annual Godwit Days Spring Migration Festival, April 16–19. Popular trips fill up fast.

Experienced local guides lead tours throughout the biodiverse habitats of our region, with 75 scheduled, including several sessions of the popular Spotted Owl and California Condor trips, trips designed for beginners as well as experienced birders and even non-birders. There are a dozen new trips in 2026, including Trinidad Head and Flatiron Rock; Birding and Biking the Bay Trail; Ethnobotany of Humboldt County (at Digawutkh); What's Up With Them Bird Feet and Bills?!; and a Bird Flight Photography Workshop with Krisztina Scheeff. If a trip has already sold out, add your name to the waitlist by emailing godwitdaysreg@yahoo.com.

The two Big Day trips will be by bus this year—one on Saturday, April 18, and the other on Sunday, April 19. Both offer some friendly competition to see which group can spot the most bird species. Be sure to stop by the Arcata Marsh Interpretive Center on Sunday, between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. to participate in the RRAS co-sponsored Big Sit, an all-day event. Drop-ins are welcome.

The Arcata Community Center will once again serve as the festival's hub,

featuring vendor booths, art, optics, nature crafts, and other activities for both adults and children. It will be open to the public beginning at 3 p.m. on Friday, April 17. Saturday hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Sunday hours are 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Entries from the Student Bird Art Contest lining the hallways are always a popular draw. Admission is free.

This year's logo design was created by Eden Smith. From a young age, Eden has had a fascination with birds, which led her to a career in field biology as well as wildlife illustration. Her art has been published in scientific journals, though she primarily creates private commissions for clients. Festival T-shirts will be available for purchase onsite.

Friday's opening keynote at 6:30 p.m. will feature local nonprofit the Integral Ecology Research Center (IERC) presenting "*Listening to the Wrong Owl for the Right Answer: How Barred Owls Help Uncover Toxic Threats to Spotted Owls and Other Forest Wildlife.*" Admission is free. On Saturday at 7 p.m. Krisztina Scheeff will present "*Photographing the Spirit of Birds.*" Scheeff is an award-winning professional nature photographer and avid birder whose work has been recognized by the National Audubon Society, Bird Photographer of the Year, and Wildlife Photographer of the Year competitions. Her photography has been published worldwide, including in *National Geographic*. Tickets are \$10 at the door or may be purchased online in advance through April 12.

For a complete list of field trips and events, and to register, visit godwitdays.org. Remember—many Godwit Days trips fill up early.

Calling All Student Writers & Artists, by Sue Leskiw



RRAS is sponsoring its 21st annual *Student Nature Writing Contest*.

Up to six cash prizes will be awarded for the best essays and poems on "What Nature Means to Me" by Humboldt or Del Norte County students in grades 4 through 12. First-place winners will be published in *The Sandpiper*. All winners will be published in a booklet posted on the RRAS website by mid-May.

For the 23rd year, Friends of the Arcata Marsh (FOAM) and RRAS are co-sponsoring a *Student Bird Art Contest*, with up to \$650 in prizes awarded to Humboldt County K-12 students who submit a drawing of one of forty suggested species or another bird seen locally. The Red-shouldered Hawk shown here is a 2025 entry by Isolde Thayer-Randall.

Entries for both contests must be received by 5 p.m. Saturday, March 21 (no exceptions).

The contests are held in conjunction with the Godwit Days Spring Migration Bird Festival. All art entries and winning writing pieces will be available for viewing starting at 3 p.m. on Friday, April 17, at the Arcata Community Center. Awards will be presented the morning of April 18. Color copies of winning artwork will be shown at the Arcata Marsh Interpretive Center during May and June, with a booklet of winners and award ceremony photos posted on the FOAM, RRAS, and Godwit Days websites by mid-May.

Flyers with complete submission instructions are posted at rras.org, godwitdays.org, and arcatamarshfriends.org (art contest only), or can be picked up at the Interpretive Center, 569 South G Street, in late January. E-mail questions to sueleskiw1@gmail.com.

Kid's Corner WOWZA WILDLIFE!

By Leslie Scopes Anderson



FUN FACTS

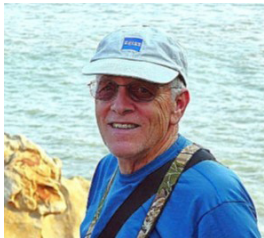
American White Pelicans are one of our largest birds. They 'hunt' in packs, herding fish together to scoop into their large pouches. They glide on their webbed feet to land.

WHERE IN THE WORLD?

American White Pelicans prefer inland lakes and rivers. They nest in colonies. Embryos can squawk inside the egg if they get too hot or cold!

RRAS “Almost Ready” to Move on Third Slough Enhancement Project (TSEP)

From Jim Clark, Co-Chair of the Conservation Committee



On December 9, 2025, the RRAS Board of Directors accepted a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Humboldt County that allows our chapter, under specific conditions, to begin Phase I of the TSEP. TSEP aims to enhance the natural environmental functions of seven acres of county property at 2769 Lucas Street between Harrison and Myrtle Avenues, just east of the Eureka city limits. The property consists of about three acres of second-growth redwood/spruce forest, and the remainder is wetland/riparian forest primarily of alder, willow, and slough sedge.

The county tried to sell the parcel in 2019 for \$375,000. There were no bids. Current zoning allows for eighteen office or small apartment residential units, but the Planning and Building Department has informally confirmed that no commercial development is possible due to slope setbacks and wetland constraints.

Over the years, this property has suffered stream alteration by filling and covering, illegal trash dumping, camping, soil disturbance and vegetation trampling from recreational use, and invasive vegetation due to yard waste dumping and habitat alteration. The goal is to restore as much of the environmental function of this property as possible for wildlife, water quality, and reduced spread of invasive plants.

TSEP Phase I will consist of periodically removing trash and garbage, and clearing invasive plants, such as Himalaya blackberries, ivy, and holly. This is to be accomplished by periodic events in which volunteers can participate. Volunteers will be needed to plan and manage the events as well as doing the work of cleaning, cutting, and hauling.

RRAS needs to form an Event Planning & Management Team* to go from “almost ready” to “ready” on this exciting enhancement project. We are seeking to fill the following volunteer positions:

Event Planning and Logistics Section Leader: Coordinates subsection volunteers in close cooperation with the Project Manager, a position that I am filling,

coordinating with the county, other nonprofits, RRAS Board of Directors and Conservation Committee, and Event Manager.

Finance Subsection Assistant: Responsible for seeing that all financial transactions related to the project are reported to the chapter treasurer.

Health and Safety Subsection Assistant(s): Responsible for health and safety of event participants including pre-event health and safety sessions, ensuring on-site sanitation facilities, appropriate disposal of hazardous materials, first aid availability, and monitoring of volunteer crews.

Waste Disposal Subsection Assistant: Responsible for disposing of vegetative material to prevent spread of invasive plants, and separating and disposing of litter and trash.

Volunteer Appreciation Subsection Assistant: Responsible for supporting volunteers by providing food and recognition.

Publicity and Outreach Subsection Assistant: Responsible for meeting publicity requirements of the MOU. Works with chapter Publicity Committee to publicize and document events through multiple forms of media.

If you are interested in volunteering for any of these positions, please visit <https://tinyurl.com/rras-tsep>, or scan the QR code, then complete and submit the form. You will be contacted as we assemble the team.



*The TSEP event organization, based on the National Incident Command System, is designed to spread the workload in an organized manner so that no single position is overwhelmed. The time span from planning through wrapping up should be no more than four months, at which time volunteers will have completed their tasks and it will be time to party!

DID YOU KNOW?

Hawaii's Leadership

Threats to birds can be as widespread as the invasion of non-native species, such as outdoor domestic cats. Last year, the Hawai'i County Council took a meaningful step toward reducing the threat birds face from cats when it passed an ordinance that prohibits the feeding of all feral and stray animals on county-owned properties (which cover the entire island). Cutting off food sources is essential to reducing feral populations and safeguarding wildlife. Hawai'i is leading the way on protecting birds from non-native species.

Source: American Bird Conservancy



JOIN US! RRAS offers local chapter memberships at a yearly \$30 or more donation. Your membership includes an emailed copy of *The Sandpiper*. If you wish to receive a paper copy as well, please add \$10 to cover printing and mailing costs.

To join, mail a check payable to RRAS with the notation, “Local Membership,” your name, address, and email address to:

Redwood Region Audubon Society
PO Box 1054, Eureka, CA 95502

Or join electronically through our secure PayPal platform on rras.org by clicking “Become a Member/Donate”. All proceeds go to Redwood Region Audubon Society and are tax deductible.



Stay Updated: www.northcoastcnps.org facebook.com/NorthCoastCNPS • CNPS welcomes everyone. No expertise required.

Potted Plants for Sale

The chapter's nursery has inventory that needs to get into people's yards a.s.a.p. Plants are for sale at good prices during our working days and hours: Wednesday, Friday and Sunday 10:00–1:00. Visit us at Freshwater Farms Reserve, 5851 Myrtle Ave. Email questions to northcoastcnps@gmail.com.

Evening Program

Second Wednesdays at the D Street Neighborhood Center, 1301 D Street, Arcata or register on Zoom via northcoastcnps.org. Doors open at 5:45. Speaking starts at 6:00. The lecture will be followed by a social hour.

The Role Of Mosses+ In Society

Wednesday February 11, 6:00–7:30 p.m.

This lecture will include an introduction to the bryophytes (mosses, liverworts and hornworts), their pharmacological importance, the many uses of Sphagnum, ethnobotanical examples, and other curiosities. The speaker, John McLaughlin, publishes academic papers on bryophytes and has taught related content at San Jose State University and in Jepson workshops. He promises to tell great stories about how people connect with these little plants over the ages.



The moss Pogonatum contortum has a persistent juvenile stage that is filamentous.

Credit: P. Wilson

Field Trips

Plant ID outdoors, identifying Sequoia Park invasive species.

Reduce the Green Blur 2: Protecting the Park
Saturday, January 31, 1:00 p.m.

Meet at the fountain at T & Glatt, for a fun short plant walk. We'll review the native plants you met last time and learn to spot non-native and invasive species that can crowd out our park's natural residents. Help reduce the green blur, see the park in sharper focus, and take action to protect Sequoia Park and the surrounding area. Bonus: Participants under 18 receive a free native plant to take home! Come meet a few plant villains, learn why removal is important, and become a guardian of the park's native plants! Leader: Joann Kerns.

Plant walk. Hammond Trail at Clam Beach

Sunday, February 22. 10 a.m.–12 noon or later

Along this level, paved trail (handicap accessible) we will find wetland, dune, and common weedy plants, both native and non-native, some invasive. With many plants in their winter aspect, we will use seed pods, dry leaves, and twigs to identify them. Other plants will be well into their growing season and may even have flowers. Energetic people may explore one or two side trails into the dunes toward the creek and beach. The paved trail makes an out-and-back walk of about two miles. Participants may leave at any time. Meet at 9:45 a.m. at Pacific Union School (3001 Janes Rd., Arcata) or 10:00 a.m. at the southern parking area for Clam Beach County Park. Dress for the weather, including wind. If you want to explore further and longer, bring lunch and water. Leader: Carol Ralph, 707-822-2015, theralphs@humboldt1.com.

Herbarium Tour at Cal Poly Humboldt

Saturday, February 28, 10:30 a.m.–1:00 p.m.

Collection Manager Robin Bencie welcomes us to the California Polytechnic Institute Humboldt Vascular Plant Herbarium (<https://www.humboldt.edu/biological-sciences/facilities/herbarium>) for a tour of this essential resource in documenting biodiversity. Herbaria worldwide are among the most vital repositories of plant specimens and associated data, and Humboldt County is fortunate to have access to a collection of about 107,000 mounted vascular plant specimens, collected from throughout northwestern California and the world beyond. Such collections provide invaluable information on plants,

about morphology, genetics, phenology, and ecology, while also functioning as an educational resource for students and plant enthusiasts. Robin will include in her tour information on the status of recent research on the chemistry of fragrances in Trillium. The herbarium is located along B St., south of Laurel Drive, on the CPH campus, in Alistair McCrone Hall, Room 161A. Parking is free on Saturday. Parking lot 11 is about a 3-minute walk from the herbarium. Please register for this trip with Peter Warner at phytopagan@sonic.net or 707-235-2713, as space is limited.

Recurring Events

Native Plant Garden Tour

Saturdays, Feb 7 · Mar 7, 1:00–2:00 p.m.

Native Plant Garden Tour at the Arcata Community Center Native Plant & Wildlife Garden with Pete Haggard. The garden is on the hillside to the left of Healthsport, Arcata (300 Community Park Way), opposite the Arcata Community Center. Free. This walk repeats every first Saturday. If rain, bring an umbrella.

Rohner Park Restoration Work Party

Saturdays, Feb 21 · Mar 21, 2026, 9:00–11:00 a.m.

Help preserve Fortuna's exceptionally old second-growth Redwood forest by removing invasive plants. Meet at the Fireman's Pavilion. Tools and gloves provided, but it helps to bring your own. Co-sponsored by the North Coast CNPS Chapter and the Fortuna Parks and Recreation Department. A third-Saturday event. For more, call Steve Underwood 707-601-6753.



Manzanitas are one of the first plants to flower, and thus a crucial resource for emerging bumblebees.

Photo: P. Wilson



continued from previous page

Events of allies

Online lecture. Discovering Mosses & Liverworts in Humboldt County

Wednesday, Jan 28, 6:00 p.m.

Lecture w/ Paul Wilson for Friends of the Lost Coast. On Zoom

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/81373129078?pwd=b7kplG9BjayDaVCOZQIjL77SJJm4fP.1>

Meeting ID: 813 7312 9078, Passcode: 256152

Work days in Eureka. Remove Invasives.

Sunday February 1, 10:00–2:00, come late, leave early Redwood Invasive Plant Eradicators (RIPE) and The Environmental Protection Information Center (EPIC) will be removing some really bad fruiting invasive ivy infestations at the Humboldt County Office of Education at 901 Myrtle Ave, Eureka. Park in the southernmost part of the parking lot, then walk down to the gate on Myrtle Avenue, that is across from 8th St. Over 50 trees have severe ivy infestations, each producing thousands of berries which are being eaten by birds and spread throughout the area. Check out Carl's presentation on how this event fits into restoration efforts. We will have tools and safety equipment for everyone, but it helps us a lot if you bring your own. Bring thick long-sleeved clothing and water, and bring gloves if you have them.

This event is similar to and in addition to the regular Wednesday (February 4 • 11 • 18 • 25) work days at Cooper Gulch Park: <https://www.riperadicator.org/upcoming-events>

Invasive Removal Work Days. Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park

Sun, Feb 1 • 10:00 a.m. and many more. 127011 Newton B. Drury Scenic Parkway, Orick

Help out our State Parks. Check out this and other work days at

<https://www.eventbrite.com/o/redwood-parks-conservancy-72844133383>

Gongfu Birding

By Sean McCann

Gongfu, or kung fu as most people are probably used to seeing it spelled, refers to skill developed over a long period of time spent on a particular activity. One can, of course, develop gongfu in the fighting arts, but one can also develop gongfu in cooking, making tea, gardening, or say, birding. Beyond the cultivation of skill, this concept includes the idea that long periods of time spent on any pursuit will bring about changes in the mind and body. Ideally, these are positive changes associated with healthy activities, but that is not always the case. As one of my Chinese medicine teachers liked to say, if you spend a lot of time perfecting sitting on the couch, your body and mind will change to fit your couch better.

So, if you are someone who spends a lot of time birding, you may find it worthwhile to pay attention to the physical and mental habits you are cultivating in pursuit of this avocation (or vocation for some). With the goal of helping readers find joy and wellbeing through birding, I invite you to join me in the following exploration:

Lift your binoculars to your eyes. Notice your neck, shoulders, arms, and hands. Do you find tension or pain anywhere? Try relaxing the muscles at the base of the skull, dropping your shoulders away from your ears, relaxing your chest, and holding your binoculars with only enough force to keep a good grasp on them. The resulting position should be much more comfortable. It may also require that you explore different settings for your binoculars (adjusting the eyepieces, width, or focus) to work with this new posture.

Set down your binoculars for a moment. Bring your attention to your lower back, hips, legs, and feet. Does your lower back hurt? Are your knees locked? Are you holding tension in your hips or calves? Do you tend to stand with your weight on one foot more than the other? Experiment with standing with your feet shoulderwidth apart, unlocking and softening your knees, and relaxing your hips (in taiji, we say the hips are as if you are



about to sit down on a bench behind you, which helps prevent unnecessary tension in the pelvic girdle). Now, rock backward and forward slightly until your balance point is just behind the balls of the feet and your weight is equally distributed between them. You may also shift your weight first to one side and then the other, but try not to habitually stand on one leg significantly longer

than the other on a regular basis, unless of course you have good reason.

Now, maintaining this awareness of the lower body, bring your binoculars back to your eyes, relax the upper body as before, and allow your breath to flow freely into your relaxed abdomen. This should feel comfortable and stable. Adjust as needed to deepen your comfort and eliminate pains where possible.

There are many aspects of alignment, posture, and body mechanics to assess and explore, whether concerning looking through a scope, driving long distances to a new or favorite hotspot, or figuring out a comfortable way to sleep in your vehicle or on the ground when on a longer excursion. The important thing is to pay attention to what feels good and what doesn't, what helps and what hurts, and then make tangible changes for the better.

This is also true mentally and emotionally. Birding can be a wonderful way to cultivate mindfulness and a sense of connection with nature. Thankfully, there are many ways to go about it. Some people enjoy watching their backyard feeders and getting to know the avian visitors there day after day and season after season, while others find listing and chasing rare birds to be invigorating and exciting. Some enjoy solitary birding, while others view it as a social activity or way of developing community. Some like to explore every inch of their home counties, while others enjoy far flung field trips to see new species. Whether you seek peace or passion, are driven by conservation or competition, I encourage you to find the way that suits you best, and don't be afraid to change as needed.

Good Times on the Tall Trees CBC

Story and photos by Sean McCann

We arrived before dawn with the hope of seeing/hearing Marbled Murrelets moving about in the forest across the fields. No luck. By dawn, ravens were calling and sparrows were chipping, so we set out to begin counting birds along the Redwood Creek levee and adjacent blackberry hedges, fields, and riparian areas along our section of the creek. We encountered large numbers of sparrows—Song, Fox, White-crowned, and Golden-crowned—as well as Red-winged Blackbirds, starlings, kinglets, and more. A highlight in this section for my visiting friend, Miles Horton, was his first Black-capped Chickadee in California (he lives in Sonoma County, which is beyond the normal southern range of this species). We ended up seeing 8 of them.

Further along the levee, we approached the Orick rodeo grounds, where a herd of Roosevelt Elk blocked our path. Comically, it took us almost an hour to figure out how to get around them to the beginning of the Orick Horse Trail. The trail was a wonderful surprise, giving some of the best looks I've ever seen of redwood canopy structure. There were old-growth redwoods interspersed with stands of grand fir, Sitka spruce, and red alder. Along the ridge, many of these trees had shredded bark and evidence of nails scraping on trees. Bear sign!

The entire hike was around 11 miles with about a half mile of elevation change. It required a solid effort, but we were rewarded with 22 Red Crossbills, several Brown Creepers, a Pileated



Sean McCann



Miles Horton

Woodpecker, Varied Thrush, and lots of chickadees and kinglets.

Near the end, we found a tree with a large amount of what appeared to be owl wash (droppings) on the trunk and ferns at its base. Being rather tired from the day, we each lay on our backs in different spots with binoculars pointed into the tree, looking for the roosting owl. Unfortunately, we didn't see it, but it

was certainly a pleasant way to search.

This was my first year participating in Christmas Bird Counts. The best part was knowing that we were getting a lot of good data on an area that has had very little coverage on previous counts. I plan to do this section again next year and highly recommend you find a count to join next year!



Shredded bark and scrapings are signs of bears.



Droppings on a tree and ferns alerted us to a possible roosting owl.



More signs of bears.



Western Bluebirds by Gary Bloomfield



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Horned Lark photo by Gary Bloomfield



Godwit Days Teaser

Still deciding on your [Godwit Days](#) schedule? Check out the Bear River Ridge trip on Saturday, April 18. Bear River Ridge is the only location in Northwestern California where Horned Larks breed, and this is your chance to see them. Coincidentally, the Horned Lark is the American Birding Association's "2026 Bird of the Year"! Go to <https://www.aba.org/the-2026-aba-bird-of-the-year-horned-lark/> to follow the celebration in art and stories of this fascinating species.