

The Sandpiper

June 2026 • Breeding Season



Redwood Region Audubon Society

www.rras.org

Annual Children's Issue

(See pages 4, 5, 6)

RRAS FIELD TRIPS IN JUNE

Friday, June 5, through Sunday, June 7, weekend field trip to **Groves Prairie, Jim Jam Ridge**, and surrounding areas. This field trip is part of the California Bird Atlas Big Weekend. We will spend Friday at Grove's Prairie and environs, owling and camping that night at Grove's Prairie. We will proceed the next morning to the Jim Jam Ridge area, where we will atlas multiple sites before owling and camping at Denny Campground. We will return after birding Denny Campground on Sunday morning. Both campgrounds have vault toilets, but neither has potable water. Please prepare accordingly. Ruffed Grouse, Canada Jay, American Goshawk, Flammulated Owl, and Broad-tailed and Black-chinned Hummingbirds are exciting possibilities. Please meet at Studio 299, 75 Terrace Lane in Willow Creek at 8 am on Friday, June 5. Please email seanmcannlac@gmail.com to RSVP or request additional information.

Arcata Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary, Saturday, June 6, from 8:30 to 11 a.m. Bring your binoculars and meet trip leader Bob Battagin at the end of South I Street (Klopp Lake) in Arcata for incredible views of Humboldt Bay, easy-to-walk trails, and a great diversity of birdlife.

Embark into under-birded **Bridgeville** and surrounding areas on **Sunday, June 7**, with RRAS President Kathryn West and Programs Director Eric Nelson. Trip leaders designed this trip to observe and document breeding bird behavior during the California Bird Atlas "Big Weekend". The trip will also serve as a brief workshop on how to join the project and link your eBird account to the CBA effort. Plan to meet at the Bridgeville Post Office at 8 am. We will bird a loop around the Van Duzen River, Community Center, Bridgeville Cemetery, with the option to travel up Kneeland Road to observe raptors (possibility of Golden Eagle!) and other upland birds. Please RSVP to Kathryn West at president [at] rras.org to register.

Arcata Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary, Saturday, June 13, from 8:30 to 11 a.m. Bring your binoculars and meet trip leader Michael Morris at the end of South I Street (Klopp Lake) in Arcata for incredible views of Humboldt Bay, easy-to-walk trails, and a great diversity of birdlife.

Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge, Sunday, June 14, from 9 to 11 a.m. Meet leader Ralph Bucher at the Visitor Center for this two-mile walk along a wide, flat trail that is packed with gravel and easily accessible. Just outside of town, this refuge offers astounding and easy access to tidally-influenced habitats, including mudflats, riparian vegetation, conifers, and a bay that hosts a variety of geese, raptors, shorebirds, and waders. Email Ralph to sign up at thebook@reninet.com.

Arcata Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary, Saturday, June 20, from 8:30 to 11 a.m. Bring your binoculars and meet trip leader Chet Ogan at the end of South I Street (Klopp Lake) in Arcata for incredible views of Humboldt Bay, easy-to-walk trails, and a great diversity of birdlife.

Pelagic Birding and Whale-watching Trips aboard the Steller Sunrise with Captain Lowell Wallace, Humboldt Charter Company. The Steller Sunrise is a 43-foot US Coast Guard-inspected vessel featuring a spacious exterior walk-around deck, an enclosed bathroom, and a heated cabin, making it ideal for these 6- to 8-hour trips at sea (depending on conditions). Join us as we go offshore from Humboldt Bay in search of seabirds, whales, dolphins, and other wildlife. RRAS leaders will be on board to help spot and identify wildlife. These are very popular trips, are limited to 15 people per trip, and cost **\$150 per person**, with discounts available for students. Field trip dates include: **June 20th** (Saturday), **July 18th** (Saturday), **August 15th** (Saturday), **September 5th** (Saturday), **October 10th** (Saturday), and **November 21st** (Saturday).

Eureka Waterfront Trail, Sunday, June 21, from 9 to 11 a.m. with leader Ralph Bucher. This relatively

urban trail offers the potential to observe species abundance and diversity compared to many more remote locations. Watch out for cormorants, loons, grebes, and even otters diving for their meals in the bay alongside the trail. This walk is on a flat, paved trail that is wheelchair accessible. Meet at the foot of Del Norte Street. Email Ralph to sign up for this field trip at thebook@reninet.com

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Breeding Bird Surveys Are Under Way!

By Rob Fowler

Four breeding bird surveys have been conducted at the **Arcata Marsh** (through May 7). So far 12 species have been confirmed breeding there, and 21 species have been categorized into the "probable breeder" category. Most exciting is a Northern Flicker (red-shafted) taking up residence and digging out a cavity at the southeast corner of the Log Pond. A female has been seen at the nest, too, confirming a new breeding species for the Marsh—very exciting! Other fun confirmed breeders are a Green Heron nest, first found by George Ziminsky on April 23, and the first Lesser Goldfinch nest found this season on the April 23 survey. The first Canada Goose broods were seen a few weeks earlier and are pretty much always the first waterfowl to hatch at the Marsh followed closely by Mallard, which were just popping out at the beginning of May. The two known Bushtit nests at the Log Pond have fledged as of the first week of May.

The May 7 survey confirmed 4 new breeders: Mallard (four ducklings with female on Allen Marsh), Northern Flicker (already confirmed earlier but first confirmation for the breeding bird survey), Common Raven (nest on Mount Trashmore where suspected), and Tree Swallow (carrying a feather into a cavity at the southeast corner of Brackish Pond). Two new probable breeders—White-crowned Sparrow and Yellow-breasted Chat—were added to the list. The first juvenile Marsh Wrens were confirmed this past survey with two fledglings being fed by a female while the male looked on from a cattail perch.

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President's Column

By Kathryn West

Redwood Region Audubon Society is a nonprofit organization whose mission, in short, is to advocate for the awareness and protection of birds and wildlife through conservation and education. We sincerely thank you and all of our members for their support through local membership, donations, and volunteerism that keep our mission going strong.

Our ongoing Wigi Wetlands restoration project, in partnership with the Volunteer Trail Stewards and the City of Eureka, actively continues to restore and beautify the wetlands behind the Bayshore Mall, creating just that much more habitat for breeding and migrating birds.

We were able to join the California Bird Atlas (CBA) project as a Founding Member thanks to all of your support, and now our small but mighty chapter is actively working with the CBA to document the breeding birds of this under-birded region of the state. Did you know that special status species Purple



Martins so far have had breeding behavior confirmed in only seven CBA blocks in California, three of which are in Humboldt? CBA committee member Ken Burton discovered this fact while perusing the data-rich maps of the CBA website (ebird.org/atlascalifornia/home) that are slowly being filled in by birders all over the state. If you haven't checked it out, please do! And if you discover a nest in your backyard, please report it to us. RRAS would be happy to send a representative out to identify the species and document the nest for the CBA.

The first "Big Weekend" of the CBA is this month, June 4-7. Please visit our website's calendar for special guided field trips, some of which are specifically targeting under-birded areas of the Redwood Region, designed to gather breeding bird data and provide the opportunity to join the project.

Workshops, Scholarships, and More

In addition to our work in conservation, we promote education, and last month we hosted a workshop about minimizing the impact of bird collisions on windows. Participants made their own cord-based window BirdSaver to take home.

We also provide scholarships for local college student projects concerning birds. If you or a local college student you know would like to apply, the application can be found on our website.

Our next big fund-raising event is coming up in a few months. The Tim McKay Bird-a-Thon will be held in the first week of October this year. Support your favorite team, or form your own! I will be leading Team Bushlists, and if you would like to pledge any amount in our quest to log as many species as possible in a 24-hour period, please email me at president@rras.org.

And finally, just how many species is it possible to see in one day in Humboldt? The Big Day record for Godwit Days is now 134. But the newest record for most species ever recorded in one day for the county has now been moved up to 210! Set by Cal Poly Humboldt Wildlife Department's Birding Club members Aidan Brubaker, Owen Sinkus, and Lucas Stephenson on May 2, they had an extraordinarily amazing, well-planned, and lucky day that will go down in Humboldt history. Make sure you read their full account of their Big Day in this issue!

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Conservation Corner:

Conserving for Our Economy

By Jim Clark, Co-Chair
of the Conservation
Committee



What are we conserving anyway? Probably a lot more than we realize. Soon after I retired, I took a three-class certificate course in ecotourism from Humboldt State University, now Cal Poly Humboldt. The course was not so much about how to run an ecotourism business as it was about understanding how ecotourism works with local economies. The basic model for *worldwide* ecotourism is generally thought of as people from wealthy nations going to less wealthy nations to enjoy and learn about the natural environment and authentically interact with the local culture. Here on the coast of northern California and southern Oregon, we need to modify the ecotourism model to fit our isolated situation if we are to realize the full economic potential that ecotourism can provide.

An outstanding example of ecotourism underlies our chapter's local field trip program and support of bird-related activities in our area. My biased opinion is that our chapter surpasses other Audubon chapters in the number of field trips offered and people participating. Add to that field trips led by local

professional guides and Godwit Days. This outdoor recreation contribution to the local economy is substantial, especially considering meals and lodging from visitors to our area. Three important components of generating ecotourism revenue are attracting people to visit, giving them a reason to stay longer, and giving them a reason to return.

Based on the focus of our chapter field trips—that is, birding—more numbers and species of birds attract more people. More conservation of bird habitat supports more birds. Only one degree of separation exists between bird habitat conservation and tourism revenue. So, in addition to improving the overall quality of our environment, effective conservation and restoration of our natural environment is good for our local outdoor recreation tourism economy.

The June 3-5 inaugural California Outdoor Recreation Summit will occur at the Cal Poly Humboldt Aquatics Center in Eureka. I am planning to attend, to be sure the voice of birding in outdoor recreation planning is represented. For more information on this event go to humboldt.edu/applied-health/ca-outdoor-economy. Stay tuned for updates on the outcome of the conference in future issues of *The Sandpiper*.

Recently, this column has explored several aspects of conservation, but this is by no means comprehensive. In our region, we have many conservation organizations ranging from land trusts to invasive plant bashers. We hope you will step up and choose to participate in one that fits your passion. You will help the local economy and be rewarded by better birding.

The Sandpiper is the official newsletter of the Redwood Region Audubon Society. With this June issue, we will begin quarterly publication of the *print* issue, so watch for your next issue in September. Field trip and program information

will always be kept up-to-date on our [WEB site](#) and through our email event notifications. They will also be included in the Northcoast Environmental Center's monthly digital [EcoNews](#) editions.

A New Chapter for the Humboldt Bay Bird Observatory

By Matt Johnson



Ornithologists estimate bird age in part from relative differences in feather wear. In owls, UV light can help, as newer feathers fluoresce pink. Photo by Vitek Jirinec

This spring marks the beginning of an exciting new chapter for bird research and conservation on Humboldt Bay. The Humboldt Ornithology Collective (HOC), a new initiative anchored at Cal Poly Humboldt, is working to revitalize the Humboldt Bay Bird Observatory (HBBO) and expand its role in research, education, and community engagement.

For decades, HBBO has been a cornerstone of avian monitoring on the North Coast, thanks in large part to the vision, leadership, and tireless dedication of Drs. C.J. Ralph and Carol Ralph. Their contributions have left an enduring legacy, and we are deeply grateful for the foundation they built. We also extend our sincere thanks to William and Kimberly Rich, the new owners of the HBBO site, for their support and stewardship as this next phase takes shape.

The HOC's goal is not only to continue HBBO's long-term monitoring efforts, but to grow them. Central to this vision is the hiring of a full-time staff ornithologist who will oversee bird banding operations at both HBBO and the Wright Refuge in Eureka, helping to train the next generation of field biologists. Working alongside student interns, this program will provide hands-on experience in avian research while contributing valuable data to regional and continental monitoring efforts.

This work will be carried out in collaboration with long-standing regional partners, including the Integral Ecology Research Center (IERC) and the Klamath Bird Observatory (KBO), strengthening an already vibrant network of conservation organizations along the Pacific Flyway.

We were thrilled to kick off this renewed effort with a small season of Northern Saw-whet Owl banding this spring led by Evelyn Wilhelm, a local biologist, and Vitek Jirinec, an ecologist at the IERC (see photos). Looking ahead, we aim to resume full songbird banding operations in time for the upcoming Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship (MAPS) season.



Evelyn Wilhelm and Bill Rich carefully remove a Northern Saw-whet Owl from a mist-net. Photo by Vitek Jirinec

There is something powerful about the continuity of place in bird research—about returning, year after year, to the same nets, the same marshes, the same migrations. With the launch of the Humboldt Ornithology Collective and the revitalization of HBBO, we hope to honor that continuity while building something new: a hub for science, training, and community centered around the birds of Humboldt Bay. We look forward to sharing this journey with the birding community in the months and years ahead.

Cal Poly Birders Set New Big Day Record

On May 2, Lucas Stephenson, Owen Sinkus, and Aidan Brubaker undertook a Humboldt County Big Day. A Big Day, for those unaware, is when a group of birders attempts to see as many birds as possible in a 24-hour period from 12:00 a.m. to 11:59 p.m. The previous Humboldt County Big Day was set in 2015 by Elias Elias, Tristan McKee, Brad Elvert, Gary Bloomfield, Sean McAllister, and David Fix, who saw a combined total of 199 species (although Sean pegs it at 198). Read on for a firsthand account of a Big Day!



From left: Owen Sinkus, Aidan Brubaker, Lucas Stephenson

Aidan: We drove over 300 miles, birding for 24 hours without stopping.

We started off our big day with a nocturnally singing Yellow-breasted Chat west of Redway, before moving

east along Alderpoint Road and up to Mt. Lassic, successfully finding seven species of owls, along with a Common Poorwill. We then birded Lassic in the early morning, before moving east back through Alderpoint, grabbing things like Cassin's Finch, Rufous-crowned Sparrow, and Oak Titmouse. We left Garberville with 88 species, stopping along the way north for Hermit Thrush.

We then worked our way north through Ferndale and Loleta, seeing things like Pacific Golden-Plover, Common Gallinule, Eurasian Wigeon, and a surprise Wilson's Snipe! Next stop, Arcata, where we saw a Palm Warbler and Solitary Sandpiper, along with our only Pied-billed Grebe of the day. We then raced to McKinleyville, where the continuing Yellow-throated Warbler put on a show, dancing low through some cypresses.

By the time we reached Sue-meg State Park, we had seen a respectable 183 species. We rapidly added birds here, leaving with 197 species, including a Canada Jay and Pileated Woodpecker, both of which can be difficult on big days. From here, we stopped at Trinidad, adding a Black Oystercatcher and Brandt's Cormorants, tying the 2015 record.

We then stopped at Crannell Road north of McKinleyville, where we broke the record with Swainson's Thrush. Swainson's Thrush is the first bird I think of when picturing Humboldt in the summer,

and as such, it seems fitting that we broke the record with that species.

Continuing back to the south, we added Sanderling and Wandering Tattler along the North Jetty, as well as a few Blue-winged Teal and an American Bittern at the Arcata Marsh. We finished the day looking for Sooty Grouse south of Kneeland, where a surprise Spotted Owl was our final bird of the day, and our 210th species! We drove well over 300 miles on this day and birded straight for 24 hours without stopping once to rest.

I would like to give massive props to the 2015 Big Day team for reaching 199 species. We honestly didn't think we had a chance of beating that record, which was set when most people were not using eBird. Big Days have completely changed with the advent of eBird, as the ability to search for and see where birds have recently been seen is a massive advantage when scouting. Finally, I want to thank the AWESOME birding community here in Humboldt. I have always been overwhelmed by how kind everyone is, and this Big Day wouldn't have been possible without the support of so many people!!!

Owen: Each person must be fully committed, unwavering, and focused.

Everything seemed to fall into place for a great day, starting with our phenomenal scouting the day before,

Results of 23rd Annual Student Bird Art Contest

By Sue Leskiw, Contest Coordinator



Some 679 school kids pulled out paints, pencils, pastels, or paste to enter the 23rd Annual Student Bird Art Contest co-sponsored by Redwood Region Audubon Society and Friends of the Arcata Marsh. The contest was held in association with mid-April's Godwit Days Spring Migration Bird Festival in Arcata. All entries were displayed at the Arcata Community Center for public viewing during the festival.

This year's cash prize and honorable-mention winning artwork will be on display at the Arcata Marsh Interpretive Center during May and June. Winners were spread across 24 different schools, plus homeschooled. Public viewing is open Tuesdays through Sundays between 10:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. and Mondays from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. A downloadable booklet containing the artwork and photos from the April 18 awards ceremony will be posted in late May at www.godwitdays.org, www.rras.org, and www.arcatamarshfriends.org.

Awards totaled \$660, with 42 cash prizes plus 33 honorable mentions. Depending on the number of entries per grade, some levels were combined and others received more than one set of awards, to even out the chances of winning.

Winners of the Student Bird Art Contest

Kindergarten & Grade 1

First Place: Lily Varzгах, Homeschooled, American Goldfinch; Lily Borque, Jacoby Creek, Common Loon
Second Place: Lorelei Schenkelberg, Blue Lake Elementary, Anna's Hummingbird; Misa Gambrel-Mikolai, Union Street Charter, Spotted Owl
Third Place: Harlow Fillmore, Union Street Charter, Western Grebe; Josie Hays, Northern United Charters, Black Oystercatcher



Haylee Scotti; Wood Duck



Ivan Tokarev; American Kestrel



Penn Kerhoulas; Marbled Godwit

Honorable Mentions: Caleb Redner, Blue Lake Elementary, Marsh Wren; Arrow Quinlan, Union Street Charter, Bald Eagle; Douglas Brner, Blue Lake Elementary, Western Meadowlark; Sophia Torres, Garfield Elementary, Anna's Hummingbird; Nolan Benzinger, Garfield Elementary, Osprey

Grade 2

First Place: Asher Stein, Northern United Charters-Briceland, Brown Pelican
Second Place: Mason Atherton Friend, Redwood Coast Montessori, Anna's Hummingbird
Third Place: Roman Zaragoza, Garfield Elementary, Spotted Owl; Eimilei Byrne, Fuente Nueva Charter, Red-breasted Nuthatch
Honorable Mentions: Ember Freedlund, Mattole Elementary, White-tailed Kite; Dart Poitier, Northern United Charters, Bufflehead; Isaac Cookman, Freshwater Elementary, Mallard

Grade 3

First Place: Helena Yang, Northern United Charters, Great-horned Owl; Skye Forest Queener, Mattole Elementary, Pileated Woodpecker
Second Place: Sage Farrell, Garfield Elementary, California Gull; Oscar Smith, Fuente Nueva Charter, Bald Eagle
Third Place: Alder Antonio, Coastal Grove Charter, Spotted Owl; Avery Herrera, Fuente Nueva Charter, House Sparrow
Honorable Mentions: Lyra Drake, Alder Grove Charter, Western Tanager; Solvei Arnold, Redwood Coast Montessori, Snowy Plover; Fiona Varzгах, Home Schooled, Great Egret; Hazel Sperry, Northern United Charters, Black-capped Chickadee

Grade 4

First Place: Sylvia Tout, Garfield Elementary, Spotted Owl; Vasili Tokarev, Arcata Christian, Belted Kingfisher
Second Place: Olive Zevine, Union Street Charter, Anna's Hummingbird; Naiya Trees, Northern United Charters, Black-capped Chickadee
Third Place: Nevaeh Ortega, Arcata Elementary, Barn Owl; Emory

Thoreson-Veeh, Garfield Elementary, American Avocet
Honorable Mentions: Etta Ray, Fuente Nueva Charter, Bald Eagle; Rowan Dunn, Union Street Charter, California Quail; Indy Wirthman, Union Street Charter, Anna's Hummingbird; Evelyn Kauffman, Garfield Elementary, Western Grebes; Lexi Roth, Union Street Charter, Steller's Jay; River Ott, Freshwater Elementary, Steller's Jay

Grade 5

First Place: Jack Werner, Pacific View Charter, Peregrine Falcon; Lyon Williams, Northern United Charters-Briceland, Great Blue Heron
Second Place: Shaina Bateman, Garfield Elementary, Mallard; Esa McGowan, Homeschooled, Bald Eagle
Third Place: Brynn Thrash, Garfield Elementary, Snowy Plover; Eric Graybill, Fuente Nueva Charter, Western Bluebird
Honorable Mentions: Iris Hernandez, Arcata Elementary, Wood Duck; Persephone Gradine, Arcata Elementary, Belted Kingfisher; Priscilla Bumphus, Arcata Elementary, American Goldfinch; Maliya Boudreaux, Arcata Elementary, Red-breasted Nuthatch; Sarafinn Clemans, Freshwater Elementary, Steller's Jay

Grades 6&7

First Place: Adelaide Elkins, Freshwater Elementary, Great Blue Heron; Lorela Garcia, Zane Middle School, Western Meadowlark
Second Place: Mia Hong-Novotney, Sunny Brae Middle School, Varied Thrush; Ivan Tokarev, Arcata Christian, American Kestrel
Third Place: Margot Nims, Garfield Elementary, Northern Flicker; Penn Kerhoulas, Garfield Elementary, Marbled Godwit
Honorable Mentions: Heidi Tout, Garfield Elementary, Belted Kingfisher; Mira Iversen, Winship Middle School, Wood Duck; Berna Queener, Mattole Elementary, Western Tanagers; Davida Bumphus, Sunny Brae Middle School, Tufted Puffin

Grades 8-12

First Place: Jolie Micheal, Winship Middle School, American Kestrel
Second Place: Evie Herrera, Arcata High, Marsh Wren
Third Place: Aleah Allender, Casterlin School, Red-tailed Hawk
Honorable Mentions: Cruz Girsback, Fortuna Middle School, Western Grebes; Irena Fugate, Northern United Charters, Snowy Plover; Dannika Bessett, Zane Middle School, Spotted Owl; Haylee Scotti, Academy of the Redwoods, Wood Duck; Alysiana Fouquette, Academy of the Redwoods, Least Sandpipers; October Mintey, Eureka High, California Quail Family

Best Bird in Habitat Awards

Tristen Welsh, Grade 1, Union Street Charter, Pileated Woodpecker; Halo Lamb, Grade 5, Morris Elementary, Great Blue Heron; Madden McCall, Grade 6, Northern United Charters, Cinnamon Teal; Elena Cudahy, Grade 6, Jacoby Creek Elementary, Belted Kingfisher; Mahala Broussard, Grade 11, Academy of the Redwoods, Red-tailed Hawk

21st Annual Student Nature Writing Contest Results



Nearly 80 Humboldt students in grades 4 through 10 entered an essay or a poem in a contest associated with the 2026 Godwit Days Spring Migration Bird Festival. RRAS awarded six cash awards totaling \$100 plus five honorable mentions to the following schoolchildren who explored the topic *What Nature Means to Me*.

Junior Division (Grades 4-7) Winners

First Place: Penn Kerhoulas, Grade 6, Garfield Elementary

Second Place: Riley Bergstrom, Grade 6, Hydesville Elementary

Third Place: Taylor Kercher, Grade 7, Miranda Junior High

Honorable Mentions: Maria Lopez Casas, Grade 7, Miranda Junior High; Lily Gardner, Grade 7, Sunny Brae Middle School

Senior Division (Grades 9&10) Winners

First Place: Amaya Teraoke, Grade 9, McKinleyville High

Second Place: Albee McCovey, Grade 9, McKinleyville High

Third Place: Cameron Bunnell, Grade 9, McKinleyville High

Honorable Mentions: Autumn Stonecypher, Grade 9, Academy of the Redwoods; Alejandra Villagrana-Torres, Grade 9, McKinleyville High; Lilia Mendes, Grade 9, McKinleyville High

Look online for a downloadable booklet containing submissions from all the winners at www.rras.org.

“What Nature Means to Me”

By Penn Kerhoulas

Clear water flowing from a wild mountain stream, wildflowers enveloping long green fields. Fish darting through the stream like spots of sunlight. A deer gently lifts her head to gaze softly through big dark eyes, the balmy evening air smells as sweet as honey as I breathe it in slowly. Sparkling water glints like diamonds below me as it rushes under the bridge I am perched on. Above me warm Montana sky drifts slowly past me, bugs buzz happily and it seems as if the world has stopped and just gone silent.

Mountains rise up in front of me blanketed in soft evening air and tall green trees, vast fields are



spread under the mountains. Grazing horses move slowly and quietly through the fields, they have no hurry or care, they're simply enjoying the night. Chirping grasshoppers and a rustling breeze are the only noises I can hear. I close my eyes and savor the night, and the peace, here there is no tension or sadness, just nature and me. I open my eyes and see a red-tailed hawk swooping far above. Tentatively a bunny pokes her coffee-colored head out of her burrow as the soft green grass whispers secrets through the night. If only everybody on earth could get to see this. Chimney smoke curls its way through the night sky forming delicate spirals through the warm air.

Softly two Sandhill Cranes glide gracefully down to the shore. How I wish every night I could spend here, a warm gust of wind blows freely through my tangled hair. Somewhere far away behind me a cow bellows to their herd. The creek bubbles below me, its waters now dark with shadow. Nothing seems real here, there's no worry, anxiety or fear, only thoughts. A burst of joy seems to spill from my heart, through me, into me, it fills me with the great and utter joy for life and love of the world. Nature surrounds me, it is above me, and below me, and nature is in me, it is filling my heart with foaming creeks, whispering grasses, vibrant wildflowers, and soft feathered cranes.

Nature calms me, it nurtures and loves me, Nature whispers secrets in my ears as the wind rushes by, it laughs with me like a bubbling brook, to me nature means peace, and joy, nature means love and acceptance.

Nature is not only here though, it's everywhere, it's flowers overflowing from pots in our garden, it's dusty redwoods stretching for the sky, and it's warm sun soothing my fears and worries. To me nature is like a friend, or a sister, or a spirit. Yes, like a spirit running wild and freely through the honeysuckle and flowers singing and dancing. She is swimming in the cool waters of the creek, she is flying high above me with the hawks, she is sitting beside me watching the evening fade to night. She is inside me, and she is always with me.

“River Time”

By Amaya Teraoke

As the glass-clear arms of the Smith wove their way through the carved rock of the gorge, I remembered the smiles in my pictures from all those years ago. Here I was, still doing the exact same, extraordinary thing. Whitewater rafting. I still hear the rushing water sculpting out the serpentine of the Smith. I still feel the rush of adrenaline after dropping into a rapid I know by heart. I will get to remember my experiences, not just as the boater I have become, but as the little girl, squealing with joy after gulping



Davida Bumphus; Tufted Puffin

down a mouthful of water after a tiny, seemingly insignificant wave. I am still her, and she will always be me.

When I awoke the morning of February 16, 2026 I felt the rush of excitement, mixed with a tinge of fear, that I always feel before embarking on a new run. Racing the dawn of the transcendent day, we made our way to the fern-covered Craig's Beach put-in. Our dazzling green boats appeared even brighter when glissading down the immense wall of forest green that comes alongside the Smith River. As we navigated our way through boulder fields strewn across the river we tried to keep pace with the kayaks of every color and the boats guided by my best friends.

After a countless number of drops and pools, I caught my first glimpse of the canyon walls, still slick with early morning droplets of rain, cascading straight down into the superficially bottomless Smith. I went quiet with awe. When I'm on the river I'm too joyful and surrounded by love to ever become silent. As we drifted through the ravine we hoped would never end, we fell behind the rest of the group. Nobody made any effort to catch up. We were surrounded by everyone and everything we would ever need.

Sometimes I forget to look around, notice all the miniature details in life. I get caught up with all the “important” things, I forget to look at the simple ones. The way Darlingtonias look like cobras, the smiles after dropping into a rambunctious hole, and the way the river curves its way into the ocean. My experience on the south fork reminded me to slow down and just look.

At the take out there is an arched bridge spanning the width of the river. Attached to that wonderful structure there is a rope swing. It was there, at the highest possible place to swing into the clearest river, that I hesitated, just for a moment. I was slightly scared. As I reflected on all the beaming moments, I wouldn't have it any other way. When faced with fear, the best thing to do is leap. And so I did. It seems to me that that tiny, seemingly insignificant wave from back when all I had to worry about was covering my mouth before a rapid, was the most important part of life. It led to all of this, it led to me.

RRAS Science Fair Award Goes to Zane Garwood

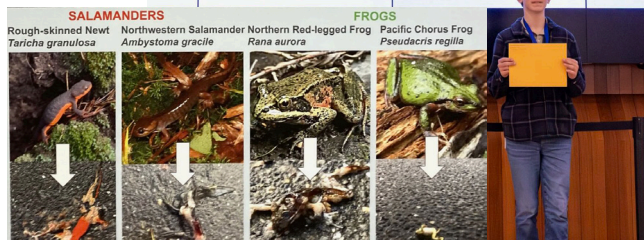
By Sue Leskiw

The Humboldt County Science Fair was held in Eureka in mid-March. Tom Leskiw and I served as judges on behalf of RRAS and awarded a \$50 prize for the best project related to birds or their habitat to Zane Garwood, a seventh-grade student at Jacoby Creek School. This marked RRAS's 20th annual Science Fair Award.

The purpose of Zane's project, "Real Life Game of Frogger on Arcata's Roads Leads to Amphibian Deaths," was to survey amphibians killed after each rain on a 720-foot stretch of road in Arcata during three months in winter. He discovered four native species of amphibians -- two of salamanders (rough-skinned newt and northwestern salamander) and two of frogs (northern red-legged and Pacific chorus) -- run over by vehicles in the study area, which encompassed a large wetland near prime upland habitat.

Pond-breeding amphibians must move to access different resources. In summer, many forage in moist upland areas, while in winter, they are generally in or near breeding ponds. Amphibians need rain to move

2026 Humboldt County Doris Niles Science Fair



Amphibian poster from Zane Garwood's project
Photo by Tom Leskiw

between these habitats, which may require them to cross roads to complete their life cycles, turning those surfaces into wintertime death traps.

After each rain, measured to the nearest hundredth of an inch, Zane and a helper put on high-visibility vests and photographed all the dead amphibians within the stretch of road. The dead creatures were identified and their locations mapped during 18 surveys. Rainfall was 99 percent of normal.

Seventy-four amphibians were observed as deceased, at least four of them carrying eggs. Since the breeding season lasts 6 months, Zane estimated that 148 amphibians could be dying on just this 0.14-

mile section of Aldergrove Road in the Janes Creek watershed. Extrapolating this to the approximately 5.5 miles of paved roads in Arcata that are within 100 feet of mapped wetlands with amphibian breeding habitat, the amphibian mortality could be 5,976 individuals.

Zane's results were:

- A total of 74 deaths from vehicle strikes – 18 salamanders, 43 frogs, and 13 that could not be identified to group.
- Red-legged frogs made up nearly half of the deaths.
- The average number of deaths per survey was 4.1, with a range from 1 to 9.

Zane proposed some solutions to reduce amphibian mortality: 1) install safe passages such as modified speed bumps containing a small culvert or tunnel; 2) put up fencing to direct animals to these safe crossing areas; 3) create a seasonal safety crossing volunteer program as in other cities; and 4) conduct a citywide driver education program. He observed much speeding during his surveys. "The main points are to educate the public about this problem and to document the local impacts. Most people don't know this is a problem, so I hope this research brings awareness on amphibian life cycles and migrations around the roads we use," Zane concluded.

Godwit Days 2026 Recap: Strong Showing from Out-of-Towners!

By Amy Fetz, Kathryn West, and Rob Fowler



Big Day trip leaders Owen Sinkus and Kathryn West with two trip participants

The 30th annual Godwit Days Spring Migration Bird Festival had 380 people register this year, and the people who signed up actually came! It was the second-most well attended festival in terms of percentage of registrants attending, with just 2016 having a stronger showing, and that was the year the

event hosted David Sibley. More people continue to come in from out of town to attend; 41 percent of all registrants traveled from outside Humboldt County, with 14 different states represented! Thankfully, there was a break in the rain during the festival—always appreciated.

During de-briefings at the end of the day, people highlighted the classic Marbled Murrelet, California Condor, and Spotted Owl trips. But the more entertaining story is that the grouse trip, which sadly missed seeing grouse, got to see a flock of 17 condors together and saw over 20 condors total—including the breeding pair A0 and A1! Attendees also commented that the herpetology, ethnobotany, and native plant tours were among their favorites. Registrants appreciated the expert field guides and the new connections they made with fellow bird and nature enthusiasts. The final tally this year was 209 species of birds, 21 more than last year. Tennessee and Yellow-throated Warblers were new species, and other highlights included Royal Tern, Calliope Hummingbird, and Tropical Kingbirds.

There was a big influx of Cal Poly Humboldt students helping out as volunteers this year. It was fun to introduce them to Godwit Days and make it possible for them to attend field trips. Local engineering and environmental firm SHN donated five \$100 student vouchers so that five individuals could attend some of the most popular field trips. The Wildlife Graduate Student Society joined in as a vendor and had a great response. Some students also helped co-lead trips. The hope is to encourage even more involvement in the future!

Children's events are always a big draw. Sue Leskiw reported that the Family Nature Crafts Mega-

palooza had a great turnout, and Karen Reiss's Owl Pellet Dissection Workshop was a resounding success, with kids (and their parents) enthralled with breaking apart owl pellets to see what the birds had been eating, using microscopes to compare what they found with bone samples.

Two Big Day trips took place by bus this year, with the friendly competition ending with the Kathryn West & Owen Sinkus Sunday team setting an all-time Godwit Days Big Day record with 134 species, over leader Scott Carey & Mary Severdia's Saturday trip with 117 species. And the Big Sit, co-sponsored by RRAS and led by Max Brodie & Nora Papian, resulted in 80 species, one shy of last year's result. A big thank-you to everyone who birded the Big Sit, almost 100 birders stopped by over the 8-hour point count.



Karen Reiss from College of the Redwoods helping Declan Richerson identify the bones found in his owl pellet

My Spark Bird – A Cat Connection

Contributed by Kathryn West

Everyone has a story of their spark bird, the bird that first opened our minds to the joy and love of birding. For many of us, it's more than one spark, and in fact sometimes it's many sparks over time that eventually light the flame that fires us into the world of birding. When I think back to one of my first sparks, a childhood memory of our family cat bringing a live scrub jay to our front porch, fighting and squawking, comes to mind. I remember being impressed that our declawed cat was able to catch such a large bird, I remember surprise that such birds even existed in our San Diego neighborhood, I remember admiring its colors of bright blue and soft gray, and I remember being upset that the cat would hunt such a handsome creature and bring such an unwanted trophy to the front porch.

After separating the two and watching the jay fly away, I looked the bird up in my *Animals of the World* encyclopedia, and made my first bird identification in what would later go on to be a lifetime of bird identifications. Back then, I had no idea of the impact outdoor cats had on local small wildlife populations, and nowadays, I'm sure our cat was one of the many neighborhood cats that contributed to scrub jays no longer occurring in my childhood neighborhood. This memory is one of many reasons why now I am so passionate about promoting the awareness and importance of keeping cats indoors. That spark bird also served as the first step towards a career in environmental conservation, because ever since then as a young girl, I was dismayed by the unnecessary loss of wild creatures, especially due to human-related causes.

Redwood Region Audubon encourages cat owners and cat lovers alike to please keep your beloved cats and your neighborhood birds safe by not allowing cats to roam free. One simple solution is to create a catio. These cat-happy and bird-friendly constructs can range from very budget-friendly to small and suited for apartments to elaborate outdoor rooms big enough to allow their humans inside. For ideas and resources for building a catio, go to rras.org and click on Cats

Indoors. See also “Did You Know? Keep Cats Happy Indoors” (in the box below), where you can read about how others, including the American Bird Conservancy, are changing the way we are treating our cats.

DO YOU HAVE A STORY ABOUT YOUR SPARK BIRD TO SHARE?

The Sandpiper is always looking for guest contributions!!



DID YOU KNOW?

Keep Cats Happy Indoors

Cats are beloved family pets and companions, whose antics fill photo rolls on our phones, and our hearts. The purrs, cuddles, and playfulness that we find so endearing make it easy to forget that cats are carnivores. Dangle a feather toy or toss a catnip-filled mouse to your cat, though, and you'll quickly remember that they can be fearsome hunters. But even the toughest cats are no match for run-ins with predators, collisions with vehicles, diseases, or a disgruntled neighbor's BB gun. As many as 100 million cats roam outdoors in the US. It's a massive problem for birds as well as for public health and the cats themselves.

It has become clear that we need to start treating our cats like we treat dogs: kept indoors and under our control—on a leash or run, in a fenced-in yard or patio, or even in a stroller—when they go outside. Why? Because it would be safer for cats, people, and the birds we love to watch.

You can meet the cats behind a flock of bird conservation experts on the American Bird Conservancy website! Learn how they keep their indoor cats happy, and get tips for helping your cat explore the outdoors with you in a way that's safe for them and for birds. Go to: abcbirds.org/solutions/keep-cats-indoors/ and scroll down to Pawsitively Purrfect Ways to Keep Cats Happy Indoors. For the birds.

RRAS FIELD TRIPS cont.

Arcata Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary, Saturday, June 27, from 8:30 to 11 a.m. Bring your binoculars and meet trip leader Dan Greaney at the end of South I Street (Klopp Lake) in Arcata for incredible views of Humboldt Bay, easy-to-walk trails, and a great diversity of birdlife.

Saturday, June 27, from 9 to 11 a.m. **Wigi Wetlands Volunteer Workday**. Help create bird-friendly native habitats and restore a section of the bay trail by removing invasive plants and trash. The trail section is located behind the Bayshore Mall, and volunteers will meet in the parking lot directly behind Walmart. We will provide tools, gloves, and delicious, homemade cookies. Contact Eric Nelson etn3115 (at) icloud.com with questions or for more information.

Saturday, June 27, Redwood Creek south levee. This half-day, 5-mile round-trip outing will start from the town of Orick to the mouth of Redwood Creek. We can expect a mix of riparian, riverine, estuarine, and oceanic species, and there's always the chance of something unexpected! Meet at the Orick Horse Trailhead (where there is a restroom) at 8 am; carpool from Murray Road just east of 101 in McKinleyville at 7:15 am. Contact Ken (shrikethree AT gmail DOT com) with any questions.

Sunday, June 28, 9:30a.m. Azalea State Reserve. Acquired by the State in 1943, Azalea State Reserve is a small 30-acre holding that is one of the north county's most vegetatively diverse public parks. We'll explore both loop trails, enjoy the spring flora, and hopefully encounter the rich bird life found there. This will be a relaxed morning of birding, which will include the optional drive to visit the Lester's nearby yard for additional plant and bird study. The site requires a short but somewhat steep walk to complete the two separate loop trails. Meet Gary Lester at the Reserve parking lot on the east side of Azalea Avenue in McKinleyville, just north of the intersection of North Bank Road (SR 200) and Azalea Avenue at 9:00 a.m.

Cal Poly Birders Set New Big Day Record, Cont.

when we all staked out targets that proved vital to a high species total. Spirits were high at dawn as we had already picked up all but one of the expected owl species, as well as Common Poorwill, and the ball kept rolling throughout the day. We saw most expected species, and encountered a couple of local rarities and late lingerers that we did not expect (Eurasian Wigeon, Common Goldeneye, Merlin, to name a few). Luck was on our side, without a doubt, but to detect over 200 species in a day, each person in the party must be fully committed, unwavering, and focused for a full 24 hours. I commend my teammates for their effort, and I am grateful to be in such a diverse place with like-minded and motivated people.

Lucas: 210 was a number I never could have imagined.

The night began with uncertainty due to a gale at the Northern Saw-Whet Owl spot. And promptly at midnight, the previously calling saw-whet went silent. But by 4:00 a.m., virtually all of the nocturnal birds on our radar had been found. Thanks to Aidan's tremendous scouting around Garberville and the surrounding areas, most of the owl stops were incredibly brief and efficient. The Common Poorwill highlighted the night and kept the hopeful energy alive. The theme of the day continued to be “automaticness”—everything fell into place. From seamless stop to seamless stop, very few targets were missed, and almost no time was wasted. Our ability

to improvise and adapt in real time proved vital to the success of the route.

From the first bird of the day, Yellow-breasted Chat, to the final bird of the day, Spotted Owl, it was a day marked by memories and an equally amazing stretch of sightings that included continuing rarities such as Solitary Sandpiper, Common Tern, Pacific Golden-Plover, and Palm and Yellow-throated Warblers.

I'm grateful for the shared dedication and vigor of my like-minded friends, and hope to continue to bird with them over the years to come.

Breeding Bird Surveys Are Under Way! Cont.

It's really fun looking for nesting birds, as you slow down and watch individual birds to see if they are showing any "nesty" behavior. I encourage everyone to join me as we learn more about the nesting birds at the Arcata Marsh and help contribute to the [California Bird Atlas](#). June 18 is the next survey; see the full summer schedule and contact information in the box below.



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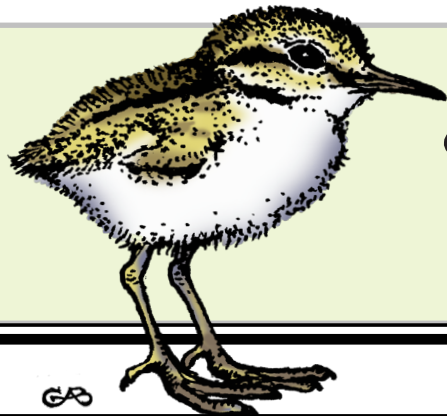
Arcata Marsh Breeding Bird Surveys -- 2026

Anyone can join—from beginner to advanced birders—and start learning how to contribute breeding bird data to the [California Bird Atlas](#) while learning more about Arcata Marsh's breeding birds!

Dates: June 4, 18; July 2, 16, and 30; August 13, 27 (every other Thursday morning)

Meet: Rob Fowler at 8:00 a.m. at G Street parking lot at Arcata Marsh for 2-3 hour survey of breeding birds in various areas of the Marsh.

- Learn how to look for breeding birds and how to code breeding bird activity.
- Learn how to contribute to the statewide [California Bird Atlas](#)
- migratoriusfwlr@gmail.com for more information.



The Sandpiper

June 2026



Redwood Region Audubon Society

www.rras.org



Sylvia Tout; Spotted Owl

Annual Children's Issue



Fiona Varzгах; Great Egret



Madden McCall; Cinnamon Teal