

The Chat

Number 395
March, 2013

A voice for education and conservation in the natural world

Rogue Valley Audubon Society

www.roguevalleyaudubon.org

Deadline for submissions is the 20th of each month



CHAPTER PROGRAM MEETING
TUESDAY, MARCH 26 - 7:00 PM
Featuring a presentation by Marko
Bey, is co-director of the Lomakatsi
Restoration Project.



The Lomakatsi Restoration Project is an organization whose mission is to restore ecosystems and the sustainability of communities, cultures and economies.

Marko will speak on "Community Based Strategies for Riparian Habitat Restoration" including, among other projects, the RVAS funded Together Green Project along Bear Creek at the end of Spencer Street in Medford.

Interested in attending an Audubon chapter program meeting and would like to carpool from Ashland? Ride-sharing may be available. Reducing greenhouse gases, saving money and meeting new people are just a few of the reasons to consider carpooling. If you are interested in a carpool arrangement please contact Sooney Viani at sooneyviani@gmail.com and ride-sharing can happen.

Chapter meetings are held at 7:00 PM on the fourth Tuesday of the month at the Medford Congregational Church meeting hall, 1801 E. Jackson Street in East Medford. The meeting hall is located north of East Jackson Street between North Berkeley Way and North Barneburg Rd. It is most easily accessed from North Barneburg Rd. Just make a left turn into the church parking lot at the tree in the middle of the road.

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President's Column

I have some changes to report. Last month Bob Arrigoni told us that his long-term absence from the Rogue Valley meant he could no longer serve as an RVAS Director. I am very pleased to tell you that Anne Goff has been elected to the RVAS Board of Directors, to complete the last two years of that term. Welcome to the Board, Anne!

I am also pleased to report that RVAS now has an Archivist. Many of you know Gwyneth Ragsine, one of our favorite field trip leaders, a past President of RVAS, and a previous editor of *The Chat*. Gwyneth knows RVAS very well and is perfectly suited for this role. As an organization relying entirely upon volunteers for everything we do, we will benefit from having an archivist documented what we have done, and when we did it.

We will elect three new members to the Board at our April 25th chapter meeting. Please consider this opportunity to contribute your own ideas to shape the future of RVAS. You need only a commitment to the Audubon mission of education and conservation, and a willingness to serve. The Board sets policy, monitors the budget, and oversees chapter operations, including our education and conservation programs. Board members vary in the amount of time they have to contribute; the only expectation of all members is that they participate in at least six monthly meetings, and advise by e-mail when issues arise between meetings. It's an important responsibility, and every current Director will tell you that it's a very rewarding effort. I urge you to call or e-mail one or more of them (listed on the left column of this page). Each will be glad to answer your questions, describe the scope of their own involvement, and discuss any concerns you may have. Good Birding! -- Bill Hering

Field Notes: The Changing Seasons

Compiled by Stewart Janes

For those of us who can't wait for spring, there are finally some concrete signs it is on its way. The **Canada Goose** flocks have broken up with pairs claiming every pond and puddle. The first real songs can be heard. **Oak Titmice**, **Black-capped Chickadees**, and **White-breasted Nuthatches** are signing their simple songs and checking out potential nesting sites. Just the last week, the **House Finches** and **Dark-eyed Juncos** have begun to sing. Flocks of migrating male **Red-winged Blackbirds** appeared about February 1. Still, I look outside and see snow in the foothills and only the hellebore in bloom. I have to be patient.

Tree Swallows are some of the most optimistic birds I know, pushing north in mid-January. Their numbers continued to grow throughout the month from 4 on 1/27 (RN) at Whetstone Pond, to 15 at Agate Lake on 2/1 (RN) to 100 on 2/19 at Whetstone Pond (SJ).

Turkey Vultures arrived earlier than normal this year although December sightings suggest that at least one never left. The first clear spring arrivals were on 2/5 with small groups of two and three in Ashland and Talent (KM, JT) though individual birds were seen the week before (BH). By 2/15 they had been seen at several locations throughout the county from the Applegate to White City (MR, SJ).

The first **Rufous Hummingbird** was seen in Josephine County on 2/16 (DV). They typically show up in Jackson County about a week later.

The **Sandhill Cranes** are moving, too, though numbers remain small. Migrants were heard and seen on 2/19 and 2/20 over Ashland and the Siskiyou Pass (FL, DA).

The rarest birds this month were birds first discovered earlier this winter. The female **Indigo Bunting** in Medford was last seen on 1/19 (RN, OS). The **Rusty Blackbird** continues to hang out with the Brewer's Blackbirds about Ashland High School 2/21 (NS), and **Common Redpolls** could still be found near Pilot Rock on 2/3 (FE). The **Long-tailed Ducks** are still at Lost Creek Reservoir (NB), and the **Red-naped Sapsucker** remains at Riverside Park (JL). The **Pygmy Nuthatches** on Roxy Ann continue to be seen (JT, FE, RB, GS).

The winter holdovers include an **Orange-crowned Warbler** at the home of Gaylene Hurley in Medford. A bit more unusual were the 60 **Band-tailed Pigeons** near Willow Wind on 2/1 (FL). They usually clear out entirely in the winter, but scattered flocks have been with us throughout the off season.

The boreal bird invasion has slowed, but traces are still with us. **Red-breasted Nuthatch** numbers are thinning out as are those of **Red Crossbills** (NB). The last crossbills were reported on 1/30 on Roxy Ann (RB). However, **Evening Grosbeak** numbers are rising (AM, GR, FE, SJ). This is early for Evening Grosbeaks. The **Mountain Chickadee** in Ashland continues to be seen (ES). And as for **Varied Thrushes**, they appear to be everywhere this year. Enjoy.

Waterfowl are enjoying the slightly warmer weather (no ice). **Redheads** are particularly obvious this winter with individuals and pairs appearing on ponds and lakes of all size (JT, RN, FL, SJ). This is a rare duck in the valley. **Lesser Scaup** and **Canvasbacks** are also more abundant than usual. The largest flock of **Canvasbacks** was 70 strong at Mingus Pond on 2/9 (FL). A **Greater Scaup** was at Emigrant Lake on 1/22 (FL).

Field notes continued on page 6

The Conservation Column

By Pepper Trail

The Future of Ashland Pond

Ashland Pond is a well-loved retreat for Ashland residents who know its hidden-away charms, and is a favorite birding spot for many Rogue Valley Audubon members. An undeveloped city park property officially known as Jones and Bryant Reservoir, Ashland Pond is accessed by an unmarked path leading downhill from the dead end of Glendower Street in Ashland's Quiet Village neighborhood, off Nevada Street. The pond provides good bird habitat year-round, and is especially rewarding in the winter months, when it's the only place in Ashland where you can see waterbirds like Ring-necked Ducks, Buffleheads, Hooded Mergansers, Pied-billed Grebes, and Great Egrets. Visitors this winter have even seen river otters in the pond on several occasions.

For months, rumors have been flying about plans for big changes to Ashland Pond. In fact, some big changes came last year, when many blackberry brambles around the pond were removed as part of the larger effort to encourage more native riparian vegetation along the Ashland segment of the Bear Creek Greenway. While well-intentioned, the blackberry removal was not welcomed by many birders, as it eliminated nesting and sheltering habitat for birds like Spotted Towhees and Song Sparrows. However, as the native trees and shrubs that have been planted increase in coverage, this issue, at least, should improve with time.

A more fundamental change seems to be threatened by a proposal to use Ashland Pond as part of the City of Ashland's system to cool effluent from the nearby water treatment plant. Currently this treated effluent is pumped into Ashland Creek just a few hundred feet above its confluence with Bear Creek.

That short run of Ashland Creek (and the creek's low water volume in the summer and fall) does not provide much cooling of the effluent, which therefore exceeds "thermal limits" set by the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to protect salmon and other cold-water fish. For years, Ashland has cast about for a solution to cooling this water, and appears to have narrowed the options to two basic approaches: cooling towers to artificially chill the water, or a series of wetlands to hold the water long enough to provide natural cooling.

In order to gain a better understanding of what is being considered, and the decision-making timeline, RVAS President Bill Hering and I had a meeting on February 7 with Ashland City Councilperson Carol Voisin, Department of Public Works Director Mike Faught, and City Engineer Scott Fleury. We thank them for taking the time and for their interest in hearing our concerns. Mike Faught indicated that the city is focusing its current planning efforts on the wetlands option, which promises environmental benefits and lower costs. Therefore, I won't discuss the cooling tower further.

It is important to emphasize that the wetlands option is still very much in the feasibility-study phase. In fact, there is no single "wetlands option," but rather a variety of ideas being considered. However, it seems that all of them, to one degree or another, depend on using Ashland Pond as part of the effluent cooling system.

Starting this spring, an engineering firm contracted by the city will be studying these various options. Based on our meeting, and the documents provided, the following appear to be the main possibilities for wetlands cooling of the effluent:

1. Sending virtually all the treated effluent to Ashland Pond, where it would be cooled sufficiently to be then released into Bear Creek just below the confluence with Ashland Creek. The DEQ requirement is for a 1 degree of natural cooling between the treatment plant and the release into Bear Creek (regardless of the cooling option).

2. Pumping the treated effluent over or under Ashland Creek to either release it directly into Bear Creek above the confluence; or to hold at least some of the effluent in a newly-developed pond at the marshy spot along the Ashland Greenway before the bridge over Bear Creek

3. Developing a series of wetlands in the terraces below the Ashland Dog Park for cooling (a disadvantage of this option is that it would require the effluent to be pumped uphill, thus incurring energy and maintenance costs).

More than one of these approaches may be used in the final cooling system. For example, if the engineering studies indicate that option 1 alone would not cool the water enough, then a combination of options 1 and 3 might be employed.

Two basic concerns are how hot the treated effluent would be, and whether it would contain bacteria or contaminants harmful to wildlife. City Engineer Fleury showed us graphs indicating that the hottest average temperature of the treated effluent is about 73 degrees F (in August), and that the hottest it ever gets is 78 degrees. No data have been collected on the current range of annual temperatures in Ashland Pond, but it seems likely that these exceed 70 degrees by late summer, given the relatively small water volume of the pond and the lack of significant cold-water inflow. Much of the flow into Ashland Pond currently is from the water treatment plant, though not as directly as would occur under the planned scenario. While such warm temperatures obviously pose a problem for cold-water fish, the fish in the pond currently are mostly warm-water species like bluegill, gambusia (mosquitofish) and goldfish. Therefore, the expectation is that increasing the flow of treated effluent through Ashland Pond would raise the water temperature, but probably not enough to harm the existing (already altered) ecology. One goal of the engineering study is to model water volumes and temperatures, and thus

as far as the quality of the treated water, it meets all DEQ requirements for release into natural water bodies like Bear Creek - except for temperature. Therefore, contaminants and bacteria do not appear to be an issue.

In our meeting, we learned that some of the discussions about Ashland Pond have envisioned converting it at least partially into a marshy wetland. This is a concern for RVAS. Bill and I emphasized the importance (and scarcity) of open-water habitat for birds in Ashland. The two duck ponds and the lower reservoir in Lithia Park hardly provide natural habitat for wildlife. We would not be in favor of any option that eliminated or severely reduced Ashland Pond's open-water habitat. On the other hand, the creation of an additional pond or wetter wetlands on the terraces below the Dog Park or in the old pond along the Greenway would be a positive development for bird habitat that we would favor.

The engineering studies will continue this summer, and the results will be available in the fall. At that point, public meetings will be held and the decision-making process will begin. RVAS is now on the City of Ashland's list of "concerned parties" for this issue, and we were assured that we would be informed of all meetings and other opportunities for input. I would be glad to hear from any RVAS members who would like to be involved in this, and has the time to commit to reading reports and attending meetings.

Finally, there is one other Ashland Pond issue - its current water supply and water level. At the present time, the pond is fed by a diversion ditch, some of whose water comes from the water treatment plant. The flow into Ashland Pond was augmented by a small diversion dam which was apparently constructed by local residents at some unknown time in the past. This dam recently washed away, and the water level in Ashland Pond dropped as a result.

Field Notes continued from page 3

I'm not sure what to make of the **Smew** reported in Phoenix on 2/8 by ODFW. This sighting of a Smew should be treated with a high level of excitement.

Tundra Swans were noticed by several in the north county with a flock of 18 in Eagle Point being the largest (BH). Scattered **Snow Geese** moved into the valley along with other geese, being seen from Ashland to Medford and Agate Lake. The early movement of geese is another sure sign spring is coming. Cedar Links was host to 5 **Eurasian Wigeon** on 1/23 (GS). The number is unusually high. A **Clark's Grebe** was at Agate Lake on 2/1 (RN).

The wintering **Ferruginous** and **Rough-legged Hawks** in the north of the county are still with us (JT,TP), and **Golden Eagle** sightings on the valley floor were surprisingly common in the second week of February (DA,MR,LN,AN,FE,SJ). **White-tailed Kite** numbers may be down in some areas, but several were seen this month in other areas (BH,LM,MM).

A **Spotted Owl** has been seen on several occasions at Ashland Pond, and a second bird was at North Mountain Park (HF). This is certainly usual habitat for these birds.

Other sightings of note include **Northern Shrikes** near the Airport, Roxy Ann, and Whetstone Pond (FE,LK,LM,MM,SJ). **Say's Phoebes** were at Agate Lake and Airway Drive (LM,MM). A **"Yellow-shafted" Flicker** was at Ashland Pond on 2/12 (AM).

Thanks to this month's contributors including Dick Ashford, Norm Barrett, Ralph Browning, Forrest English, Harry Fuller, Bob Hunter, Gaylene Hurley, Linda Kreisman, Jim Livaudais, Frank Lospalutto, Alex Maksymowicz, Kate McKenzie, Lisa Moore, Marjorie Moore, Russ Namitz, Tom Phillips, Maggie Rackley, Gwyneth Ragosine, Gary Schaffer, Eric Setterberg, Noah Stryker, and Jeff Tufts. Deadline for contributions to the Field Notes in the next edition of The Chat is March 15.

Attention Rogue Valley Birders (and enthusiasts of all living things that fly)

Check out the new website which features the work of local nature photographer and bird walk leader Norm Barrett. Norm is a Shady Cove resident and former Biologist with the National Forest Service. His featured photographs are of dragonflies and damselflies, birds, wildflowers and even a link to photos of grappletails (go ahead and look that one up!). The website, nmbnaturephotography.com is described as a work in progress, the best kind of website. Jeff Tufts

FIELD TRIP LEADERS NEEDED

Local birders are needed to lead field trips. Field Trip Chairman Maggi Rackley coordinates the events, but leaders have the option of choosing their destinations. Please contact Maggi at imabrrrder@yahoo.com to volunteer, or to get further information. Thank you.

WELCOME NEW AND RENEWING MEMBERS

If you see the name of someone you know below, invite them to join you at our meetings or bird walks.

ASHLAND

Philip Boesche
Fred Caruso
Judy Gin
Kindra Hixon
Pam Kelly
Paris
Mary Pat Power
Janet Rueger
Susan Rust
Stefanie Seffinger

APPLEGATE

R. Webster & M. Hart

CENTRAL POINT

Patty Bergh
Emmy Lou Merriman
Shirley Rosecran

MEDFORD

Rose Albachten
Jeff Beaupain
Dolores Fernandez
Jim Harleman
Dennis Hazelman
Denise Jones
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Christi Silver
Hideko Tamura

EAGLE POINT

Lila Williams

GOLD HILL

Anthony Douglas
Rick Fielder
Pat Lindquist

JACKSONVILLE

Jeannie Phelps

PHOENIX

Chris Henry
Carole A. King

TALENT

Sherri Belden
Richard Hales
Charlotte Helms
Mr. Arnold Hirt



Mark Your Calendar for Upcoming Field Trips

Our First Wednesday field trips to the Denman Wildlife Area are scheduled for March 6, April 3, and May 1. Contact Murray Orr at [mworr2@charter.net](mailto:mworrr2@charter.net) or 541-857-9050 for details on where to meet, and what to expect on these half-day walks.

Klamath Bird Observatory will lead a half-day Bird Walk to Roxy Ann Peak on Saturday, March 9. Meet at Wild Birds Unlimited in Medford at 8:00 AM. The trail is 1.5 miles long and gains roughly 600 feet in elevation. Bring snacks, layered clothing for a variety of temperatures, and plenty of water. Vegetation is mostly chaparral and oak with conifers at the peak and on the NW slope. This trip is limited to 15 participants; call 541-770-1104 to register.

On Sunday, April 7, Jeff Tufts will lead an all day trip to the Klamath Wildlife Refuge. The number of participants is limited and carpooling is mandatory. To register, contact Jeff at tal-lahto@aol.com or 541-779-4582. The basin can offer spectacular birding at any time of year and early spring is a good time to see large flocks of 'white' geese as well as eagles and migrating shorebirds. We will meet at the dirt parking lot adjacent to Shop 'n Kart in Ashland. Arrive in time to leave at 8:00 am. Bad weather or unsafe driving conditions may necessitate a postponement.

On April 27th Gwyneth Ragosine will lead a beginner's walk along the Talent portion of the Greenway. Although all are welcome, this trip will focus on locating birds and basic identification skills.

On May 11-12 Ron Ketchum will lead another RVAS field trip to the Oregon coast, either Bandon or Newport area. Our Bandon trip two years ago was a huge success. To reserve a housing block and (optional) restaurant group reservations, it is essential that the approximate group size be known a month in advance. Contact either Bill Hering at bh@ashlandnet.net, 541-488-5886 or Maggi Rackley at imabrrrder@yahoo.com, 541-855-7935 for more information, to indicate you may be interested in participating, and to indicate your preference for Bandon or Newport. Members who register after March 30 may be placed on a wait list.

Looking further ahead, on May 18 Pepper Trail will lead a trip up the Emigrant Creek Road area of the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument. The group will stop at several places and do short hikes along the road and nearby. Thus, some hiking will be involved, but not strenuous.

Conservation Column continued from page 5

The Ashland city officials made it clear that reconstruction of this dam would require an extensive permitting process under current environmental rules (because it constitutes a removal of water from a fish-bearing stream). Therefore, the dam will not be reconstructed. In any event, as of mid-February the level of the pond appears to have returned to normal. Lower water levels should be anticipated this summer, however. It is worth noting that the proposal to cool effluent in Ashland Pond would significantly increase the water flowing into (and through) the pond, which could have positive effects from a wildlife habitat perspective.

The Conservation Committee will continue to watchdog this issue in the coming months, and will keep RVAS members informed. Please don't hesitate to contact us with your input or concerns.

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EDUCATION COMMITTEE VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Submitted by Lynn Kellogg, Education Committee Chairperson

We have a busy Spring planned for our education committee. We will be presenting our power point presentation, Beaks and Feet, Bird Adaptations, to local students. Our focus is 3rd grade students but our program is appropriate for students in grades K thru 5th. Our goal is to visit more than 30 classrooms this year. In addition to classroom visits, we will continue to work with individual teachers to assist them with teacher initiated field trips and projects.

The Education Committee is always looking for new members to help with our programs. If you are interested in birds and like children, we have a spot for you. We can train you to give our power point presentation and when you feel comfortable you can visit classrooms on your own. We also need help leading students in bird watching activities and you do not need to be an expert birder to take part. If you would like to join the committee, contact me at rvas.edu@gmail.com or call 541-855-9638. A committee meeting will be held on Thursday, March 14 at 4 pm at the Coyote Trails, Jefferson Nature Center.

Join our Society

If you like to hang out with the birds, join the *Rogue Valley Audubon Society*



If you would like to

- ☐ Attend our monthly meeting & programs
- ☐ Participate in our field trips and bird walks
- ☐ Read our newsletter The Chat
- ☐ Support our classes for children
- ☐ Help protect bird habitats
- ☐ Support local bird research

... you belong in the Rogue Valley Audubon Society!

Please make your tax-deductible donation payable to:

Rogue Valley Audubon Society - P.O. Box 8597 – Medford, OR 97501

\$20 ___ local member \$ _____ additional donation \$ _____ for the Bob Black Fund*

NAME (Please Print) _____

ADDRESS _____

PHONE _____ E-MAIL _____

Please contact me about volunteering YES _____ NO _____

*This fund is used for local bird research projects and to promote interest in birds and birding.

Birdathon 2013

Birdathon 2013 has been scheduled for May 4. This is a very important fundraiser for Rogue Valley Audubon, and for some teams, a very competitive event. Last year there were four teams: the Binosaurs, led by Jim Livaudais, the Falcons, under the leadership of Pepper Trail, the Old World Warblers led by Edith Lindner, and the Great Grays, under the leadership of Bob Hunter. The Falcons took top honors by observing 162 species, a Jackson County record for a single Birdathon team!

Our goal is to encourage as many members as possible to participate. If you want to go out and have fun by seeing how many species you can spot (and how many pledges you can generate), you can do this by yourself, or RVAS will try to find a team for you to join. Just e-mail or call Bill Hering: bh@ashlandnet.net 541-488-5886 or Maggi Rackley, imabrrrder@yahoo.com, 541-855-7935 to discuss logistics. If you can't or don't want to go out into the field, please consider pledging a certain amount of money per species observed to support your favorite team or making a cash donation to RVAS.

A species checklist and a donation/pledge form will be included in the April issue of *The Chat*. Meanwhile, for your guidance, here are some Birdathon Guidelines.

- Anyone may participate, as an individual or as a member of a team. Both individuals and teams are expected to raise funds either by getting family and friends to pledge a set amount per species seen, or by making a lump sum donation.
- The Birdathon area is limited to Jackson County.
- The time frame is 24 hours, beginning Friday, May 3rd at 6:00 PM. Participants may report their observations for Friday evening session and Saturday, or bird only on Saturday.
- All team members do not need to participate the entire time.
- There is a no limit to team size, but all team members need to travel in the same vehicle. In practice, most teams are four people. Team members don't have to stay together but must stay in visual contact.
- Birds can be identified by sound or by sight.
- For competitive teams, at least two team members must confirm each identification.

There will be a gathering after the event, with a chance to compare results, share a meal with other participants, and possibly claim a prize. There may be RVAS 2013 Birdathon apparel awarded. The highest counts by teams, individuals, individuals doing only backyard birding, individuals and teams with the highest number of pledged supporters, and possibly other categories will be recognized. So begin planning now for Birdathon 2013! Look for more details in next month's issue of *The Chat*!

ROGUE VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

THE CHAT

Newsletter of the ROGUE VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

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MONTHLY BIRD WALK WITH MURRAY ORR

First Wednesday Each Month: Little Butte Creek Walk. Meet at entrance gate of the Denman Wildlife Area at 8:00 and the walk will start at 8:30. (The gate is open between 8 and 8:30 only.) Please contact **Murray Orr**, **541-857-9050** for details and if you are willing to join him in organizing these bird walks. He needs volunteers to help him open and close the gate and record observed species when he is not available. Walks will continue through 2013.



Sign up to receive easy notification of Chapter activities

Your Audubon Chapter wants to be sure you are aware of upcoming field trips, chapter meetings, the most recent edition of *The Chat*, and other items we post on-line. Send an e-mail RogueValleyAudubon@gmail.com and ask to be added to the e-mail notification list. And be assured, we will never share your e-mail address with any other organizations.