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Rogue Valley Audubon Society

www.roguevalleyaudubon.org

Deadline for submissions for the September 2014 issue is August 20.



BIRDATHON—GREAT GRAYS AND BINOSAURS TIE WITH 156 SPECIES!

Six teams competed in the 2014 RVAS Birdathon May 2-3, and when the 6:00 p.m. finish line for the important fund-raising event was reached, the Binosaurs and the Great Grays hit the wire in a dead-heat with each team recording 156 species during the 24-hour count. This is the second-highest winning total in RVAS Birdathon history.

The Falcons of Ashland finished third with 151 species. They won the 2008, 2009 and 2012 Birdathons, and their remarkable 2012 total of 162 established the record for one team.

For the Great Grays, 2014 marked the fourth time in five years that their total earned a trip to the winner's circle.

The total number of individual species seen was 182, and include such notables as Great-tailed Grackle, Sanderling, Baird's Sandpiper and Semipalmated Sandpiper. Statistics for previous years are a bit sketchy, but it appears that the 182 figure is a record for the event.

Also in the competition were the Wandering Tattlers, the Old World Warblers, and The Breakfast Club. The Wandering Tattlers topped this group with 102 species, a number that represented a big jump from their 2013 total of 80. The girls are getting serious.

Birdathon details continued on Page 3

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President's Column

I'm sure I speak for everyone who participated in the May 27th potluck dinner and bird walk when I report that the food was great, the weather agreeable, and the entire event a perfect ending for the RVAS 2013-14 year. This happened because Gaylene and Judd Hurley made it happen. Every year they reserve the space, set up the tables, arrange the food display and then, when everyone has left, they clear the space. RVAS is successful thanks the efforts of many volunteers; Judd and Gaylene epitomize the RVAS volunteer spirit in so many things they do. Thank you both!

The end of June marks the end of my two years as President of RVAS. Thank you all for your support during what has been an exciting and eventful term. Also leaving this month are three Directors who have made significant contributions to the Audubon presence in the Rogue Valley: Conservation Co-chair Robert Mumby, Treasurer Kathy Simonsen, and Vice-President Sooney Viani. Thank you for all that you have done. RVAS is a better organization because of you.

We have a great year to look forward to, led by our new President, Linda Kreisman. Congratulations, Linda! Also, welcome to three new Directors who have joined the RVAS Board. Many of you know Jon Deason as a former Jackson County Supervisor. Some of you know him as a fairly new birder with a rapidly growing life list and an exceptional eye for elusive species. A Jacksonville resident, Jon is out birding every week. Another new Director, Joanne Haddad is also a fairly new birder, with a strong interest in conservation of wildlife. She and her partner Ron live on and preserve a three-acre oak savanna in Talent. Joanne is a semi-retired

Licensed Tax Consultant. Carol Palmer has already done so much for RVAS, including work on the annual holiday potluck and fundraiser, serving on the Conservation Committee, and maintaining our e-mail notification efforts. Carol and her husband Gary, who is our Membership Chair, live in Medford. Welcome to the RVAS Board, Jon, Joanne, and Carol. It's very satisfying to know that RVAS is in such good hands.

BIRDATHON DETAILS—*continued from Page 1*

The members of these three teams competed in the "Relatively-Sane Birders" conference by virtue of their recognition of the importance of a decent night's sleep before the main part of the Big Day.

The Great Grays team was captained by Bob Hunter and also included Ambassador and Legal Consultant Gretchen Hunter, Frank Lospalluto, Forrest English and Dominic DiPaolo.

Binosaur team members were Norm Barrett (captain), Jim Livaudais, Howard Sands, and Russ Namitz. With regular Binosaur birder Gary Shaffer out of town, Russ was drafted to take his place. His presence was the catalyst for an interesting statistical phenomenon: the average age of the team went way down and the total species count went way up. Captain Barrett vigorously denied all rumors that Gary's trip was funded by the other team elders.

Team Falcons of Ashland, perhaps a bit rusty from their one-year absence from the competition, included Captain Pepper Trail, Stewart Janes, John Alexander, Jimmy Billstine and Sarah Rockwell. Although third in the overall competition, they took top honors in the Distinguished Diplomas Division.

The Rogue Valley Audubon Society Board of Directors were very well represented in the other three teams: The Wandering Tattlers were captained by RVAS Vice-President Sooney Viani and also included Birdathon Chair Juliet Grable and board member Anne Goff. Newcomer Carol Mockridge completed the team. Maggi Rackley led the Old World Warblers team which included Edith Lindner, Lynn Kellogg, and RVAS Treasurer Kathy Simonsen. And, RVAS Secretary Linda Kreisman and husband Pete were first-time participants, competing as The Breakfast Club. Their day list included the only Black Phoebe seen by Birdathon participants.

A great time was had by all and money was raised to fund RVAS projects. If you would like to be involved, plan to take part in 2015.

Field Notes: The Changing Seasons: *Compiled by Stewart Janes*

From last month's field notes to this, the spring flood of migrants has come and gone. A few stragglers including **Townsend's Warblers** in the high country and a few **Wilson's Warblers** and **Warbling Vireos** in the oaks can still be found. With the arrival of **Common Nighthawks** at Howard Prairie on 6/1 (KM) spring migration is officially over, in my book at least. They are the last species to appear.

Some late spring highlights from the shorebird migration, all at the Kirtland Ponds, include 31 **Black-bellied Plovers** 4/22 (BH), a **Ruddy Turnstone** on 4/27 (BB), a **Sanderling** on 5/8 (BB), and a **Solitary Sandpiper** also on 5/8 (BB,KP). Six **Black-necked Stilts** continue at the Kirtland Ponds as of 5/21 (RN) joined by 4 **Wilson's Phalaropes** on 5/21. Given the lack of water at White Lake and very little water on the Lower Klamath Lake Refuge this year, who can blame them for seeking out any patch of water they can find.

Other waterbird sightings of note include 2 **White-faced Ibis** at the Kirtland Ponds on 4/24 (HS), 4 **White Pelicans** at the Kirtland Ponds on 5/31 (RN), a **Black Tern** at Howard Prairie on 5/30, and a **Clark's Grebe** at Emigrant Lake on 5/6 (FL). These, too, may be Klamath Basin refugees. A **Caspian Tern** was at Kelly Slough on 5/8 (FL), and **Bonaparte's Gulls** have been at both Emigrant Lake and the Kirtland Ponds throughout the first three weeks of May.

The last big flight of northbound **Greater White-fronted Geese** was observed over the Siskiyou Summit on 4/28 (FL). An uncommon **Blue-winged Teal** was at the Kirtland Ponds for about a week beginning on 4/30 (BH).

Some of the new residents in the county are becoming common. **Purple Martins** were reported on three occasions from the Kirtland Ponds to Lower Table Rock between 4/26 and

5/31 (RN,FL,BQ). Surely they are nesting in the county. There is not much question about **Great-tailed Grackles**. If you visited the White City area or Sam's Valley this spring, it seems you could hardly get away from them.

Some of our less common breeding residents checked in their usual locations including **White-headed Woodpeckers** below the Howard Prairie dam and on Mount Ashland near the lodge and at the head of the road to Bull Gap (BM,SJ,PT,FL). The only **Grasshopper Sparrow** reported this spring comes from Dutton Road on 4/26 (BH,GH).

Flammulated Owls, a regular breeding species if rarely observed, were found along Savage Creek Rd and King Mountain Road (RN).

Some regulars appeared in unusual places. **Common Poorwills** were observed along the road to Pilot Rock on 5/13 (FL) and at milepost 5 on the Mount Ashland Road on 5/31 (SJ). **Gray Jays** were also observed in the Siskiyou, west of their normal haunts in the Cascades. Individuals were seen near milepost 7 on the Mount Ashland Road on 5/17 (BM) and closer to milepost 6 on 5/31 (SJ). A **Northern Goshawk** visited Ashland on 5/25 (DA).

The most unusual sightings this spring include a **Lawrence Goldfinch** at the feeder above Emigrant Lake on 5/4 (GSP) and a singing **Black-throated Sparrow** along Scotch Creek 2 miles south of the state line on 5/23 (SJ). Both belong much further south.

Other sightings of note include a **Gray Flycatcher** at Emigrant Lake on 4/24 (FL), **Calliope Hummingbirds** in Medford on 5/4 (JT) and Eagle Point on 5/1 (HS), a bright **White-throated Sparrow** in Jacksonville on 4/27 (EL) and **Swainson's Thrushes** at Kelly Slough on 5/8 (FL).

Thanks to this month's contributors including Dick Ashford, Brian Barr, Bob Hunter, Gretchen Hunter, Edith Lindner, Frank Lospalluto, Barbara Massey, Kate McKenzie, Russ Namitz, George Peterson, Sally Peterson, Bob Quaccia, Howard Sands, and Jeff Tufts. Deadline for contributions to the field notes in the next edition of The Chat is August 20.

The Conservation Column

by Pepper Trail

Condors in our Past ... and Future?

For this summer's Conservation Column, I thought I'd tell an important Oregon history story - one that may have a happy ending that once seemed impossible. This is the story of *California Condors in the Pacific Northwest* - which just happens to be the title of a fine new book by Jesse D'Elia and Susan Haig, published by Oregon State University.

As the name indicates, California Condors have long been associated with California, and the last stronghold of the species was the rugged mountains north of Los Angeles. By 1984, only 22 California Condors remained in the world, and by 1987, all had been taken out of the wild in a desperate last-ditch attempt to save the species through captive breeding. This breeding effort has been an extraordinary success, and today there are over 200 condors in the wild at sites in Baja California, Arizona, and southern and central California. Although this is more free-flying California Condors than at any time since the 1930s, there is still great concern for the long-term survival of the species, related to small population size, limited number of release sites, and environmental hazards, including power lines, wind turbines, and especially lead poisoning.

In the search for additional possible condor release sites, attention has increasingly focused on northern California and Oregon. This region contains more extensive wilderness areas than central or southern California; appears to offer condor food resources superior to Arizona; and seems likely to have fewer environmental hazards, due to limited human population and infrastructure. But the historic occurrence of condors in the Pacific Northwest was very poorly understood, leading to uncertainty as to whether the region is truly suitable for the species.

D'Elia and Haig set out to address this issue, and their book provides exhaustive documentation of every recorded condor sighting from the San Francisco Bay area north to the coast of British Columbia. Their review leaves no doubt that California Condors were widespread and regular parts of the bird community of the Pacific Northwest, and were especially common in the Columbia Gorge and along the Oregon and California coasts.

Oregon history buffs are well aware that Lewis and Clark recorded California Condors on numerous occasions on their journey up and down the Columbia River and during their winter at Fort Clatsop in 1805-06. Meriwether Lewis's journal even includes a fine sketch of the head of an adult condor. The accounts of Lewis and Clark and of explorers who followed, as well as the statements of Native Americans, indicate that the great birds were common around Celilo Falls (near present-day Dalles, Oregon), where they gathered to feed on the masses of salmon that perished attempting to get past the falls. Certainly the cliffs of the Columbia Gorge appear to offer excellent breeding sites for condors - and any visitor to the gorge knows of the strong winds there, ideal for soaring birds (as well as wind-surfers).

Records of condors from the interior of Oregon away from the Columbia are sparse, and there are none from Jackson or Josephine County. However, this is likely an artifact due to the scarcity of observers in this region before the Oregon gold rush of 1850. Significantly, the reliable David Douglas (of Douglas-fir fame) reported seeing "great numbers" of California Condors along the Umpqua River in October 1826.

The Conservation Column—*Continued from Page 5*

It is hard to imagine that condors were common in Douglas Country but not elsewhere in southwestern Oregon. There are also a number of records of condors along the coast of Oregon and northern California, where they were observed feeding on the carcasses of whales and other marine mammals.

What Happened?

Reports of condors in the Pacific Northwest declined precipitously through the second half of the 1800s - corresponding to the widespread arrival of miners and settlers in the region. The last credible observations of condors in Oregon occurred near Drain in 1904 and 1905. D'Elia and Haig exhaustively examine the possible causes of the extirpation of the species, and conclude that the most likely explanation was the widespread use of poisoned carcasses set out to kill wolves, grizzly bears, and other predators. This was an indiscriminate practice throughout the 1800s and into the 20th century. Scavengers like condors are particularly vulnerable to poison baits. In addition, a distressing number of the records in the late 1800s are of condors shot for no other reason than that they were large targets. The life history of condors, like other species at the top of the food chain, is characterized by low reproductive rates and long adult life spans. When adult mortality vastly increased due to human activity, the birds could not breed fast enough to keep up, and population after population of condors went extinct.

What Next?

In 2001, the Oregon Zoo was approved as a California Condor breeding facility, and the first condor chick hatched there in 2004. In 2007, the Yurok tribe of northernmost California passed a resolution to develop a California Condor reintroduction site. The great birds played an important role in the mythology and culture of the Yuroks and many other tribes in California and Oregon. The website of the Yurok Condor Program states: "Returning the California condor to the Pacific Northwest is part of the Yurok Tribe's obligation to heal the world."

In May, the US Fish and Wildlife Service announced the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Yurok Tribe, the Redwood National Park, and other stakeholders to assess the possibility of condor reintroduction in northern California and southern Oregon. The announcement states "The Service's position is that more widely dispersed populations will enhance recovery because it will reduce the possibility of a catastrophic loss of a large proportion of the population due to a single event. Further, with the many unknowns about the impact of a changing climate, condors will be able to take advantage of many different ecosystems and landscapes, all of which may be affected differently." More information on condor biology and the reintroduction effort can be found at: <http://www.fws.gov/cno/es/CalCondor/Condor.cfm>.

Many questions remain to be answered before condors can return to the skies of northern California, including determination of the most promising release sites, and an assessment of the threat posed by lead from hunting ammunition. Nevertheless, I believe there is every reason to hope that before the end of the decade, these magnificent birds will once again soar above the giant redwoods and wild beaches of our region. That will truly be cause for celebration!

RVAS PROVIDES TEACHER SCHOLARSHIP FUNDS

Rogue Valley Audubon Society will again contribute scholarship funds in 2014 to support Jackson County educators' enrollment in Siskiyou Field Institute classes. This year's donation is \$200 to supplement the \$300 in funds leftover from 2013. Eligible educators include any Jackson County teacher, student teacher, classroom assistant or staff of non-profit organizations involved in outdoor/natural history education.

Siskiyou Field Institute's mission is to educate people about the Klamath-Siskiyou bioregion through field-based natural history classes. The non-profit Institute is based in Selma, Oregon, but conducts classes throughout southwestern Oregon and northwestern California.

Scholarship recipients are welcome to sign up for any SFI adult education class. The RVAS scholarship gives educators an opportunity to connect with peers, re-energize with new knowledge and field experiences and become inspired to share field experiences back in their own classrooms. Scholarships are limited to \$100 per student. The scholarship winners will be required to write a *Chat* article or present a short class report during a chapter meeting.

If you know an educator eligible for the RVAS scholarship, contact SFI Program Coordinator Kathleen Pyle at programcoord@thesfi.org or give her a call at (541) 597-8530.

A list of Siskiyou Field Institute birding classes may be found by following links on the RVAS website under "Links" and "Educational Programs."



www.thesfi.org ■ 1241 Illinois River Rd., Selma

REPORT FROM THE COAST FIELD TRIP—May 10, 2014

Ten RVAS members, my daughter, her husband and two of her friends and an voluntary intern working for the State of Oregon's Snowy Plover projects, joined me at 8:00 AM, the morning of May 10th at the Face Rock Wayside in Bandon, OR.

After a brief introduction, where I gave a short presentation on the birds we were likely to see and hoped to see, plus a primer on the theory of gull identification, we travelled to various overlooks along the Bandon shoreline. We observed rocky areas with breeding populations, the beaches and harbor basin in Bandon.

We then travelled to Cape Arago and Simpson Reef. After viewing those sites, we ate a picnic lunch in Shore Acres State Park. Three other stops were made in the Charleston area, and the day trip ended around 3:00 PM,

The following morning started at the Old Town docks in Bandon and continued onto Bandon Marsh National Wildlife Area, Bullards Beach and the Couquille Lighthouse. The trip ended at noon at the Snowy Plover nesting site, south of Bandon.

Fifty-eight species were seen, including 6 Tufted Puffins, Snowy Plover, 4 species of grebes and a Red-throated Loon still in winter plumage. Photos below, a Wimbrel and Pigeon Guillemots were taken by Maggi Rackley.

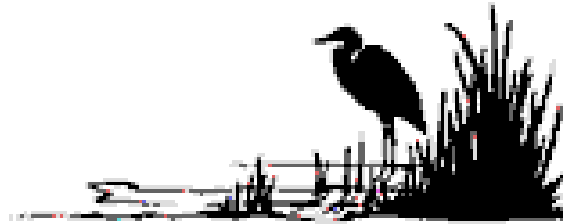
Ron Ketchum - Trip Leader



BIRD AND BIRDING RELATED ACTIVITIES

FIRST WEDNESDAY BIRD WALKS CONTINUE AT AGATE LAKE

Murray Orr will continue to lead his monthly bird walks on the first Wednesday of each month at Agate Lake. Birders wishing to join Murray should meet him on the far side of the lake across from the boat dock to observe birds on and near Agate Lake. The walk begins at 8:30 and will end before noon. Meet Murray at the gate. We hope you can join us. Contact Murray at 547-857-9050.



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