

The Chat

Number 444
September 2018

A voice for education and conservation in the natural world
Rogue Valley Audubon Society
www.roguevalleyaudubon.org
Deadline for the October issue is September 20.



RVAS SEPTEMBER PROGRAM
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 25 at 7:00 PM

"The Birds of Cuba: the World's Smallest and So Much More!"
Presented by PEPPER TRAIL

Join Pepper Trail on a voyage circumnavigating the beautiful island of Cuba. Home to 26 bird species found nowhere else, including the Bee Hummingbird—the smallest bird in the world—and the Giant Kingbird—the largest kingbird in the world. Not to mention trogons, todies, flamingos, lizard-cuckoos, and the cutest little owl you could ever hope to see, all illustrated with Pepper's photographs and described with his customary panache. Don't miss it! The photo depicts a Cuban Tody, his favorite Cuban bird.



****Chapter meetings are held at 1801 E. Jackson Street in Medford****
Lidgate Hall, Medford Congregational Church

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Letter from the Board

New Goals from RVAS Board Annual Retreat

The board agreed on several objectives for the upcoming year while committing to actively supporting our existing programs. As you'll see below, it's ambitious. We'll update you on our progress periodically in *The Chat*.

Extending our Reach

- Reach out to Jackson County National Audubon members and general public
- Plan field trips with other chapters
- Create an RVAS logo design
- Get more members involved in projects
- Make sure RVAS gets credit in media for projects

Conservation

- Lobbying to achieve conservation goals
- Donate money to support water rights for critical habitats
- Support Imperatrice Property remaining wild

Education

- Nurture current programs
- Create new Medford birding class

Donations

- Create board committee to advise management of the Mary Ann Foss bequest
- Explore more ways to ask members and public for donations

Carol Mockridge

Chapter Program meetings are held on the fourth Tuesday of the month, September through April, at 7:00 pm. Meetings take place at 1801 E. Jackson St., Medford, in Lidgate Hall of the Medford Congregational Church.

The Vesper Sparrow: An LBJ Worth Saving

By Emily Lind

If you're hip to birder lingo, you know what a "Little Brown Job" (LBJ) is. You know, those streaky brown sparrows and dull-colored females that we all struggle with? LBJ's are not typically the birds we use to entice our non-birding friends to pick up a pair of binoculars. They are certainly not the sexy species portrayed to draw attention to climate change. So how can we convince people that an LBJ is worth time and money to research and protect?

The Oregon Vesper Sparrow is an LBJ that was recently petitioned for listing under the Federal Endangered Species Act and is currently under an "in-depth, scientifically rigorous review" to determine if listing is warranted (USFWS, 2018). With a population estimated at fewer than 3,000 individuals (Altman, 2011), partners from throughout the bird's range have spent nearly a decade gathering information on where these birds live, what type of habitats they use, and what factors may be limiting their populations.

This past year Klamath Bird Observatory staff studied a population of Vesper Sparrows at Howard Prairie. Nests were located and monitored, individuals were color banded to estimate productivity, survivorship, and dispersal, vegetation surveys were conducted, feathers were collected to investigate genetic relationships among geographically separated populations, and over 90 recordings of their songs were collected by a Southern Oregon University master's student for her research thesis. To wrap up the season, 15 citizen scientists, many of them RV Audubon members, scoured Howard Prairie to relocate color banded individuals to help estimate survival and dispersal.



Vesper Sparrow. Photo Credit: Daniel Thiede

Why all the fuss for this LBJ? Most of you reading this newsletter probably identify as environmentalists and believe in the value of every organism. You probably understand the interconnectedness of life, and that if you remove one piece from the puzzle, the whole

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Vesper Sparrow continued from page 3

system could break down. This is as true for LBJ's as it is for more iconic species. Vesper Sparrows consume thousands of insects from agricultural fields and grasslands, and in return Vesper Sparrows are preyed upon by snakes, mammals, and birds of prey. If we remove Vesper Sparrows from the food chain, or if their habitat disappears, a cascade of secondary extinctions is possible.

All of these hard-to-see data and abstract conservation implications need to be transformed into passion-driven action and collaboration. This task cannot be put solely on the shoulders of scientists whose primary skills are research, not education. That is why Klamath Bird Observatory has teamed up with an Environmental Education master's student from Southern Oregon University to provide outreach and engagement opportunities, and a local multimedia artist to create a short-film documentary on the story of the Vesper Sparrow. The beauty and importance of LBJ's like the Vesper Sparrow need to be shared with people who don't have environmental backgrounds or deep connections with nature. Every organism has a story, and if we can help tell those stories in ways that provoke compassion and concern, the LBJ's of the world that are struggling just might have a fighting chance.

RVAS members Karl Schneck and Amanda Alford relocating color-banded Vesper Sparrows at Howard Prairie.
Photo Credit: Daniel Thiede



RVAS BIRDING FIELD TRIPS AND EVENTS

FIRST WEDNESDAY BIRD WALKS AT AGATE LAKE

Murray Orr will continue to lead his monthly bird walks at Denman Wildlife Refuge this fall. These walks take place on the first Wednesday of each month. In this ongoing citizen science project, the numbers of different species observed by walk participants are entered in the Cornell Ornithological Laboratory's eBird database. Birders wishing to join Murray should meet him in the parking area accessed from Agate Road in White City. Participants will need to purchase an ODFW parking permit. These can be purchased at the ODFW office, Bi-Mart, or at Sportsman's Warehouse in Medford (Delta Waters and Highway 62). Walks begin at 8:30 am and end before noon.

September Walk: Wednesday, September 5
October Walk: Wednesday, October 3
November Walk: Wednesday, November 6

It's Membership Renewal Time

The RVAS Board decided to go back to having membership renewals once a year in the fall. Please renew your membership by **Oct. 31**. Renew online or complete and mail in the form below. Your membership supports all the excellent programs your local chapter provides and the conservation work RVAS supports.

Membership is \$20, but if you wish to receive a paper copy of *The Chat*, please consider including an extra \$20 to cover mailing costs.

What membership includes:

Educational and social membership meetings (free and open to members and the public)

The Chat newsletter

Website (www.roguevalleyaudubon.org)

Birding forum for posting sightings and active locations

Monthly field trips and bird walks

Educational programs for students and adults

Monitoring of regional conservation issues

Work with local wildlife managers to improve access and bird habitats

Bird counts for national species censuses

Support for local research projects

Rogue Valley Audubon Society Membership Form

Mail check to: Rogue Valley Audubon Society, PO Box 8597, Medford OR 97501

or join online with PayPal at www.roguevalleyaudubon.org

Welcome to the flock! We are a dedicated group.

____ Regular Membership (\$20) ____ Printed newsletter (\$20) ____ Additional Donation (amount)

Name(s): _____

Address _____

City, State: _____ Zip _____

Email (required to receive online newsletter and other RVAS announcements):

Phone # _____

Rogue Valley Audubon Society will not share your information with any other organization.

- ☐ Check here if you wish to be sent a printed copy of *The Chat* by U.S. mail. Add \$20 to membership check.
- ☐ Check here if you wish to volunteer for Rogue Valley Audubon.
- ☐ Check here to opt out of all electronic communications from Rogue Valley Audubon.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Submitted by Susan Stone, Treasurer

**Rogue Valley Audubon Society
Financial Summary July 2017- June 2018**

The total income of \$15,778 came from the following sources:

Sales of the <u>Birds of Jackson County</u>	\$ 91
Local Dues	\$1,562
National Audubon dues	\$1,870
Birdathon	\$4,146
Donations	\$5,026
Holiday Event	\$3,053
Great Gray Owl donations	\$ 30

The total expenses of \$12,174 went to the following:

Administrative Expenses	\$1,740
Book Expenses	\$ 387
Chapter Meeting Expenses	\$ 565
Printing and Mailing The Chat	\$2,152
Conference Attendance	\$ 528
Fundraising Expenses	\$ 67
Membership Expenses	\$ 125
Expenses that support the RVAS Mission	\$6,295*
Great Gray Owl Expenses	\$ 315

*RVAS mission support includes funds for Fall in the Field (SOU), Birding in the Schools, purchase of bird seed for North Mountain Park and Coyote Trails Project Feeder Watch, scholarships for educators at the Siskiyou Field Institute, donations to Friends of the Cascade Siskiyou National Monument for the Birding Bioblitz, donation to Southern Oregon Land Conservancy for environmental education about Vaux's Swifts, tabling events for Earth Day and Migratory Bird Day, donation to Ashland Parks and Recreation for a bench and plaque at Ashland Ponds.

The Conservation Column

By Pepper Trail

The Endangered Species Act under Assault

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) is America's strongest wildlife protection law, and has been remarkably successful in preventing the extinction of species. Only one percent of the more than 1,800 species listed in the United States as endangered or threatened have been declared extinct after receiving the protections of the Act, and many species are on the path to recovery.

The ESA currently protects about 100 U.S. bird species, including the Whooping Crane, Piping Plover, and Northern Spotted Owl. The law prohibits harm to listed species, designates "critical habitat," and initiates a recovery plan with population goals and specific management activities. The ESA has also served as an important tool for incentivizing large-scale conservation efforts, such as the case with the Greater Sage-Grouse. The ESA has helped numerous bird species recover and be delisted, such as the Brown Pelican, Bald Eagle, and Peregrine Falcon, and has set many other species on the path to recovery.

Today, however, it is under attack, both from the Trump Administration and from Republicans in Congress. Together, these represent the most serious threats to the ESA since it was enacted in 1973.

In July the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) announced a series of proposed changes which would affect the implementation of three sections of the Endangered Species Act, with significant impacts on the ways threatened and endangered species are managed. This package of proposals represents substantial changes to the ESA's Section 4 (listing, delisting, critical habitat designations), Section 7 (consultation), and Section 9 (prohibitions for listed species).

Listing Process

One proposed change would impact information provided during the listing decision process. Currently, USFWS and NMFS regulations require that listing determinations be made "solely on the basis of the best available scientific and commercial information regarding a species' status, without reference to possible economic or other impacts of such determination." The proposed change would remove the latter phrase of this statement, allowing economic information to be provided during the listing process. USFWS and NMFS say the agencies will not use the economic analyses in listing decisions. They will continue to only consider biological and commercial information in the listing process, since that is still what the law requires. However, injecting cost considerations in the listing process could sap agency resources, make listing decisions more contentious, and delay protections for species that need them.

"Foreseeable Future" Determinations

The agencies also proposed a new interpretation of the term "foreseeable future" in regard to threatened species. Currently the law defines a threatened species as one that "is likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future throughout a significant portion of its range." In recent years, climate change has been used as a factor in listing populations as threatened, including wolverines (*Gulo gulo*) and Arctic bearded seals (*Erignathus barbatus*). Climate change projections showed significant impacts to the species' habitats, but opponents claimed the projections

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were not reliable enough for ESA determinations. Since many species could be affected by environmental changes, the question of whether or not climate change is considered “the foreseeable future” could impact future listing decisions. The proposed regulations would determine “foreseeable future” on a case-by-case basis based on life history and threat projections.

Critical Habitat Designations

Another change would affect how the agencies designate critical habitat for threatened and endangered species. Critical habitats are areas with physical or biological features that are essential to species conservation, and areas defined as critical habitat may require special protections or management.

One change would require that destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat be considered “as a whole.” Critical habitat is already defined as the areas “essential to the conservation of the species.” If that is the case, loss of any portion could impact the species’ recovery. In practice, USFWS approves alterations to designated critical habitat, but this regulation would explicitly authorize the piecemeal destruction of essential habitat leading to “death by one thousand cuts.”

The regulation would also make it more difficult to designate unoccupied critical habitat, areas where the species does not currently reside but which scientists believe are nonetheless essential to the conservation of the species. These could include intact areas of historic habitat, degraded habitats that are capable of restoration, or other areas that provide important benefits to the species. The proposal—which takes aim at the designation of unoccupied habitat for the dusky gopher frog (which the Supreme Court will consider in October)—would do nothing to conserve species and could in fact confine numerous species, like the frog, that lack sufficient occupied habitat to extinction.

Threatened Species Regulations

The administration is also proposing to eliminate a longstanding rule that automatically applies the same protections to threatened species as endangered species, unless the Fish and Wildlife Service develops a species-specific rule under Section 4(d) of the Act. USFWS says this proposed change would make policies and enforcement more consistent between agencies. NMFS does not use a blanket 4(d) rule when managing marine species. The change would not affect species that have already been listed, but in the future all threatened species would have species-specific rules, similar to existing “special rules.”

However, eliminating the “blanket 4(d) rule” changes the default from full protection to no protection. With limited funding and constant political pressure not to regulate, the Service will have a harder time ensuring the conservation of threatened species.

Instead of weakening protections, the administration should provide more resources for species recovery, including for habitat conservation, and deploy these measures as early as possible. By the time many species are listed, their populations have fallen dramatically, making it much more difficult to maintain and increase their numbers. The most effective species conservation strategy is to prevent the conditions that lead to the need for ESA protections by funding and supporting proactive conservation. While there are opportunities to simplify implementation practices that could result in better and faster conservation outcomes, too many of these proposals would only put birds at greater risk.

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The Endangered Species Act is a lifeline for birds, and is far too important to allow its vital protections to be chipped away. We are working to ensure it continues to provide science-based decision-making, incentives for collaboration on proactive conservation, and robust protections for imperiled species and the places they need to survive.

TO COMMENT:

These proposed rules were published in the Federal Register on July 25 as three related entries about interagency cooperation, listing species and designating critical habitat and prohibitions for threatened species. **The public comment periods end on Sept. 24.**

To comment on these changes, go to the three related entries:

<https://www.regulations.gov/document?D=FWS-HQ-ES-2018-0006-0001>

<https://www.regulations.gov/document?D=FWS-HQ-ES-2018-0009-0001>

<https://www.regulations.gov/document?D=FWS-HQ-ES-2018-0007-0001>

I encourage making comments at each site. Comments do not have to be detailed, but should stress your support of a strong ESA and your opposition to these proposals, which will reduce the protections for our most vulnerable wildlife. Remember, unlike legislative proposals, these administrative rule changes could be enacted through the regular departmental regulatory procedure without Congressional action.

Additional ESA Proposals in Congress

Meanwhile, there are a large number of Congressional proposals to weaken the ESA. Sen. John Barrasso, R-Wyoming, has released a draft bill, the Endangered Species Act Amendment of 2018, based in large part on recommendations from the Western Governors Association. On July 12, the Congressional Western Caucus also released a series of nine bills to amend the ESA that focus on “streamlining” the listings and delisting process, providing for more state involvement and codifying existing voluntary private lands conservation programs into law. All these bills would need to pass both houses and the conference process before becoming law, and therefore there will be many opportunities through the political process to defend a strong ESA. Stay tuned!

Changes Coming to Ashland Pond (stop me if you’ve heard this before...).

RVAS members with long memories will recall a flurry of activity in 2014 about possible changes to Ashland Pond. This beloved birding spot is located a few hundred yards downstream from the Ashland wastewater treatment plant, near the confluence of Ashland and Bear Creeks. For years, the city of Ashland has worked on a solution to the problem that the wastewater it releases into Ashland Creek exceeds DEQ temperature standards for fish-bearing streams. Some of the proposals for re-routing the water outfall involved draining Ashland Pond, or turning it into a marshy wetland. Ultimately those plans were shelved, and there seems to have been little activity in the past four years.

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Well, things are gearing up again. Following up on a brief story in the *Daily Tidings*, I met with Ashland Public Works Director Paula Brown to find out what's being proposed. The plan as it stands now includes piping the water from the treatment plant around the south and west sides of Ashland Pond (that is, the town side and the far end of the pond) and releasing it into Bear Creek below the confluence with Ashland Creek. Paula said some small trees may need to be removed, but none of the large conifers. She said that the pond will likely need to be drained during construction (probably in the summer), but will then be re-filled.

There will be a public meeting about the plans in October. The date hasn't yet been set, but I will send out an alert when I find out – or interested RVAS members can periodically check the City of Ashland website (<https://www.ashland.or.us/>), where meetings are posted. It will be important to provide input about the need to preserve this relatively wild bit of habitat, and its importance to birders.

RVAS to Host Annual Conservation Meeting

This year's annual Fall Conservation meeting of the Oregon Audubon Council (OAC) will take place on October 12 to 14, 2018. The goal of the meeting is to bring together Oregon Audubon chapter leaders to discuss conservation issues of concern and select OAC priority issues for the coming year.

Rogue Valley Audubon is hosting the meeting in the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument at the beautiful Green Springs Inn. RVAS members are welcome to participate. For more information, or if you have a conservation issue you feel should be discussed at the meeting, please contact Pepper Trail or Juliet Grable (see below).

OAC WEEKEND MEETING IN BRIEF:

Friday, October 12	Social Gathering and No-host Dinner
Saturday, October 13	Oregon Audubon Council Meeting Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner included
Sunday, October 14	Field Trip in the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument Breakfast and sack Lunch included

MEETING AGENDA: The agenda planning process is being conducted by e-mail and phone with chapter leaders. Please contact us concerning conservation issues your chapter would like to discuss, as well as those you would like to champion for OAC priority status. We look forward to hearing your ideas.

OAC Meeting Contacts:

RVAS Conservation Committee Co-chair Pepper Trail, ptrail@ashlandnet.net
RVAS Conservation Committee Co-chair Juliet Grable, julietgrable@gmail.com or 541-778-8174
OAC Secretary Meg Ruby, megruby@gmail.com or 503-978-9458; 503-784-3912 Cell

Bird-Centric Events from Around the Region

PRESENTATIONS AND WALKS WITH WILD BIRDS UNLIMITED

Chickadee Chat: Vaux's Swifts

We will meet at **Hedrick Middle School** on Jackson Avenue to watch the Vaux's Swifts enter their chimney at dusk. Bring your own chair, water, and any snacks you desire. This is a fun and amazing event. Practice counting birds as they enter the chimney! No registration is required, just show up to learn, share, and have fun with fellow bird nerds!

DATE: Wednesday, September 5 and Wednesday, September 26

TIME: 7:00 pm (September 5); 6:45 pm (September 26)

PLACE: Hedrick Middle School, 1501 E. Jackson Avenue, Medford

COST: Free

Monthly Educational Talk: Bats of Oregon

Join us for an overview of the ecology and biology of bats of the world, then focus on our local bat species and ongoing work in the region. Dave Clayton is the Forest Wildlife Biologist for the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest. His focus on bats has been mitigation for loss of habitat in the forest by using bat boxes, as well as radio telemetry to determine what types of structures our twelve species of forest-dwelling bats use in SW Oregon.

DATE: Wednesday, September 12

TIME: 6:00—7:00 pm

PLACE: 961 Medford Center, Medford

COST: Free

Bird Walk

Erin Linton will be leading a walk to Mingus Pond along the Bear Creek Greenway in Central Point. Meet at Wild Birds Unlimited, wear layers of clothing appropriate for the weather and good walking shoes that can get wet and muddy. Bring binoculars, a field guide, water and any snacks desired, along with paper and pen or smart phone to record/eBird species seen. As space is limited, please reserve your spot today by calling the store or coming in to register.

DATE: Wednesday, September 19

TIME: 10:00 am

PLACE: 961 Medford Center, Medford

COST: Free

LEADER Erin Linton

Birdcentric Events continued on page 12

ASHLAND PARKS AND RECREATION CLASSES AND WORKSHOPS

Late Summer Saturday Morning Bird Walk

Stroll through North Mountain Park with local birding experts from the Rogue Valley. This will be an opportunity to see and hear a variety of birds that are year-round residents in the Rogue Valley and some that are migrating through the area. Binoculars and field guides will be available for checkout. *Please pre-register online or call the Nature Center at 541.488.6606.*

DATE: Saturday, September 15

TIME: 8:00—9:00 am

PLACE: North Mountain Park, 620 N. Mountain Ave, Ashland

COST: FREE/Donations welcome

INSTRUCTOR NMP Volunteer birders

Birds, Beauty, Art and Nature

This visual and auditory presentation teaches about local birds while exploring how they got their common and Latin names. Why is a Killdeer called a Killdeer, and what does its scientific name tell us? Using stories, scientific facts, photography, bird sounds and poetry, this is a fun opportunity to learn about the birds that live all around us. No birding knowledge is necessary; however, curiosity and humor are welcome. *Pre-register online or call the Nature Center at 541.488.6606.*

DATE: Wednesday, September 26

TIME: 6:30 —8:00 pm

PLACE: North Mountain Park, 620 N. Mountain Ave, Ashland

COST: \$15

INSTRUCTOR Shannon Rio

VAUX'S SWIFT SEPTEMBER SURVEYS

The Vaux's Swift Show has returned! If you have never seen them, it's truly worth participating in an evening survey at one of the three prominent Rogue Valley roost sites: Hedrick Middle School; Voorhies Mansion; and the Nunan Estate. Karen Hussey, local coordinator for the Vaux's Happening citizen science program, is looking for volunteers to survey swifts at all three locations through the month of September. Vaux's Happening is an ongoing effort to raise awareness of the spectacular roosting events this species displays at a limited number of large trees and old masonry structures on the Pacific Flyway. The surveys are part of Vaux's Happening (www.vauxhappening.org) and can be done by anyone. Training is helpful but not required.

For more information or if you would like to be a volunteer surveyor please contact Karen Hussey at karen@landconserve.org

PLEASE remember for the birds' sake that we are guests at these locations and want the property owners to be happy with us. Voorhies Mansion is closed after hours. Please don't go there when they are closed unless you've signed up to do a survey and have contacted Karen.

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Save the dates!

Annual Holiday Party and Auction
December 1

Medford Christmas Bird Count
December 15

Ashland Christmas Bird Count
December 29

**Please send me your
bird photos at
chateditor@gmail.com
Thanks!**



20% OFF One Regularly-priced Item

*Valid 4/1/18 thru 12/31/18 at the Medford, OR WBU store. One discount per purchase. Not valid on bird food, previous purchases, optics, gift cards, DSC memberships, or sale items.

961 Medford Center, Medford, OR 97504
541-772-2107

THE CHAT

Newsletter of the
ROGUE VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY
Post Office Box 8597
Medford, OR 97501

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



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. 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.

