

The Chat

Number 451
May 2019

A voice for education and conservation in the natural world

Rogue Valley Audubon Society

www.roguevalleyaudubon.org

Deadline for the June issue is May 20.



RVAS Annual Picnic

TUESDAY, May 21 at 6:00 PM at

TOUVELLE STATE PARK

The annual picnic replaces our May chapter meeting. Come celebrate our valley birds. All members and guests are welcome!

Bring a dish to share, plus your own plate, cup and utensils. Tea and lemonade will be provided. Birding Bingo and a bird walk to follow.

The potluck will take place in the main area of the park; enter on the east side of Table Rock Road. Look for the group at Shelter A. There is a daily parking fee of \$5.00 unless you have an Oregon State Parks pass or a Jackson County Parks pass.

Note: RVAS will be on hiatus for three months following the May picnic. Programs will resume in September. Check the RVAS website for updates.



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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.

Letter from the Board

Thinking about Habitat

A pair of Black-capped Chickadees checked out the bird-house in my backyard today. They both took turns going in and out, then flew off. A friend gave me this very stylish box as a house-warming present three years ago—and still no residents. I'll never know why the birds have rejected it. This got me thinking about how many variables there are to birds' survival, including finding the best nesting sites. Hopefully, they found better nesting choices nearby.

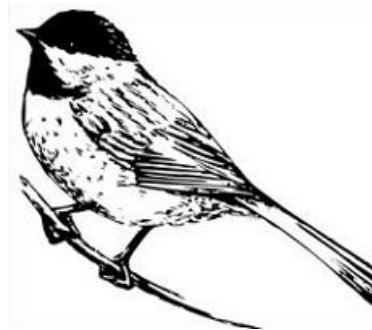
Thinking locally (in my neighborhood), my HOA's landscaping committee is proposing a list of acceptable trees and bushes to plant in our common areas. I realized that there were no native species on the list. We are going to add some. Another goal of mine is to know what chemicals are used on our community landscaping. I can lobby for the safest choices.

Protecting and improving regional habitat remains a focus of RVAS efforts. We often send out a call for action on legislation that is critical to protect the environment. The latest are state bills which would ban the pesticide Chlorpyrifos. It poses a high risk to human health, but also to birds, aquatic species, pollinators, and the biodiversity upon which we all depend. I hope you called your Senate and House representatives.

Saving Hedrick Middle School's chimney roost for the Vaux Swifts is a critical project for RVAS. The school district is working with us to find a solution. We'll know more in June when the finalized plans to replace the boiler are announced. Once the boiler is replaced, the chimney will no longer be used for venting and will no longer pose a threat to the swifts.

Happy Spring.

Carol Mockridge,
President



"The more clearly we can focus our attention on the wonders and realities of the universe about us, the less taste we shall have for destruction." *Rachel Carson*

Ashland Project FeederWatch Report

By MaryPat Power

Project FeederWatch in Ashland completed its 17th season with continued strong attendance and great enthusiasm among the observers. Thanks go to RVAS for providing funds for the bird feed and North Mountain Park staff, especially Brigitte Cooke, for maintaining the feeder area and publicizing the watches. Great appreciation to the lead observers **John and Stephanie Bullcok, Barbara Massey, Bob Quaccia, Vince Zauskey, Bill Hering, Sooney Viani, Keiko Thurston, Dick Ashford, and Nala Cardillo.** Mary Pat Power coordinated scheduling and reported data to PFW.

This season 35 species were observed. This figure is consistent with the past several seasons.



(L - R) Kathy Simonsen, Carol Mockridge and Jon Deason spend an April afternoon weeding as a big "thank you" to the church for hosting our chapter meetings and holiday party.

Photo by Carol Mockridge

Jackson County Field Notes

March 21 — April 20

By Jeff Tufts

Neil Clayton and Alec Bayarsky started it all on April 5.

They were helping a friend with work on a farm on Holton Road in Talent when they heard a bird song that piqued their interest.

Investigation proved that the bird in question was a **California Thrasher**. It also proved that Neil and Alec were attentive students when they took Dr. Stewart Janes's Ornithology class at Southern Oregon University last year.

They passed the word to Stewart who checked out the rare Oregon visitor a few days later and posted notice on the Rogue Valley Birds listserv. Within a day or two, Holton Road was the most popular birding destination in Jackson County, and the thrasher was performing to SRO crowds from all over Oregon. If you thought that state life lists aren't important, think again.



Unofficially, more than 65 eBird checklists were submitted within ten days of the initial listserv report. A few of those may have been from repeat visits, and certainly a significant number of local birders went to see the thrasher. So, no way to know how many people came from well out of the area to see this rarity—remember that not all sightings were reported to eBird—but it's clear that this bird is the biggest ornithological draw this county has seen in many years.

And, guess what. At last report, it's still singing.

Once the novelty has faded, it's impossible not to wonder if this bird may be part of an early stage in the range expansion of a species that is generally confined to California and parts of Mexico.

Complicating any speculation about the status of this particular individual are comments from one of the local residents. She has told more than one visitor that she has been seeing (and hearing) as many as three or four California Thrashers for approximately five years.

Skepticism from some birders is inevitable, but it's worth noting that the woman's comments clearly indi-

cate that she has an awareness of birds even if she would technically fall into the category of "non-birder."

It's also relevant to know that California Thrashers are generally sedentary and that they mate for life. If a pair happens to find a location that proves suitable to them, it's not unreasonable to suggest that they'd stick around and raise young.

The Talent location hardly represents typical California Thrasher habitat—normally dense thickets and chaparral-covered slopes—but if food is plentiful and predators aren't, why not call it home?

One obvious question about the object of so much attention relates to the bird's current status. Is it a male (both sexes sing by the way) proclaiming territory and/or attempting to attract a mate? Is it possible that it's a male that has a mate incubating eggs in a nearby but well-hidden nest?

California Thrashers have been known to lay eggs as early as February in southern California, so an April nest site in southern Oregon doesn't seem impossible. However, it does seem that if there's a mate nearby on a nest, the male would spend less time singing and more time finding food and delivering it to the nest.

The chase to add another name to a life list, a state list or a county list has been the main driver of the attention focused on the Talent bird, but its real importance may not be known until at least later this year.

Will it still be in the area by the end of summer? Will another of the same species put in an appearance in the neighborhood? Stay tuned.

Any rare bird report immediately prompts research about earlier records of the same species, and the history of California Thrasher sightings is a bit fragmented.

The search for previous sightings begins with the Oregon Bird Records Committee whose files currently include five accepted reports: one singing bird near O'Brien in Josephine County in June, 1977; a dead bird found on Table Rock Road in May, 1966; a single bird photographed in the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument in July, 2013; a single bird photographed in the CSNM in the summer of 2014; and two birds seen on a patio deck at the Rogue Valley Manor in May, 2017.

Not included in the OBRC records are four other reports which apparently have never been submitted to the committee.

M. Ralph Browning's pioneering *Birds of Jackson County* publication notes that a single bird stayed near a feeder "8.1 km west of Medford (Chaparral-Oak) from July 24 to October 20, 1967, and a bird was seen at the same feeder on February 4 to 25, 1968."

One bird was seen at a mobile home community in Medford September 17, 1999, but not located thereafter.

And two birds were seen in the Klamath Basin area (north of Stateline Road in Oregon) on April 18, 2013.

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The above report and that from 2017 are especially interesting because they reference TWO birds. No way to know the sex(es), but if either or both were male/female pairs, then the suggestion that the Talent location might now or in the recent past have included a nesting pair gains credence.

There's no question that the California Thrasher has been the surprise star of the local birding scene in the past month, but I'd argue that another less conspicuous (and certainly less vocal) species hasn't been getting as much attention as it deserves. I'm referring to **Loggerhead Shrikes** which have been seen in remarkable numbers during the late fall-winter-spring period. In Jackson County, even one Loggerhead Shrike is a surprising number, and yet there have been perhaps as many as a half-dozen of these "raptorous" songbirds in our area recently.

It's hard to think of a shrike as a songbird when you see it snag a sparrow in mid-air and then impale it on barbed wire and tear it apart with its hooked bill. That scenario would seem to better fit a Merlin or kestrel, but yes, shrikes are songbirds.

The National Geographic field guide describes a shrike song (both Loggerhead and Northern) as "a medley of low warbles and harsh, squeaky notes." If you've never heard a shrike sing, you've got a lot of company. They are not the Freddie Mercury of the bird world.

Normally **Northern Shrike** reports from Jackson County outnumber those of Loggerhead Shrikes by a significant amount. Medford Christmas Count records provide a clear picture of their relative abundance in previous years. From 2000-2017, Medford CBCs have tallied six Loggerhead Shrikes (that's one every three years) and 40 Northern Shrikes (that's more than two per year).

Loggerheads breed east of the Cascades, but there have been no recent records of them breeding in Jackson County. There was a single bird photographed at The Nature Conservancy's Whetstone Preserve on May 20, 2006 (JL), and the Jackson County checklist notes a single sighting in the month of July (no year given).

The first Loggerhead seen during the current shrike season was the bird reported on the Medford CBC Dec. 19 near the intersection of Kirtland Road and High Banks Road. That bird remained at that location through at least Jan. 14.

Another sighting was from the Whetstone Preserve on Mar. 16.

Then came the report of a single Loggerhead at Agate Lake on April 5 followed one day later by a sighting of two of them at the same location (AL, LdB). Shrikes are generally solitary hunters, so two at one site is extremely unusual.

Latest Loggerhead reports came from the Medford

Airport Apr. 16 (AP) and the Kirtland ponds Apr. 18 (AP).

It's not possible to know exactly how many different individuals were seen, but a total of five or six doesn't seem unreasonable. Given that none are seen in Jackson County some years, that's an amazing count.

Spring migration is well underway, and by the time this edition of the Field Notes is published there will be at most only a few of the expected species not yet seen. Perhaps only the normally late Common Nighthawk will have not been reported by the first week in May.

Note should be made of certain species of shorebirds that have been seen recently but are definitely not regular visitors in the spring.

A single Long-billed Curlew was heard and then seen in the Cascades in the vicinity of the Vesper Meadow Apr. 14 (RA, SP).

Agate Lake briefly hosted both a Whimbrel and a Willet Apr. 6 (BH). The Willet stuck around for a day or two. The Whimbrel didn't.

One Short-billed Dowitcher, identified by its characteristic "tu-tu" call, was in the company of a small group of Long-billed Dowitchers at the Kirtland ponds Apr. 4 (JK, RA, SP).

Thanks to all whose sightings have been mentioned in this column (Rene Allen, Lauren diBiccari, Bob Hunter, Janet Kelly, Alex Lamoreaux, Andrew Partin and Sammie Peat) and also to those who have submitted reports to the Rogue Valley Birds listserv and/or eBird.

Note the thicker mask on the Loggerhead Shrike.
Photos courtesy National Audubon Society.

Northern Shrike



Loggerhead Shrike



The Conservation Column

By Juliet Grable

This month we've decided to update RVAS on two ongoing conservation issues: the fate of the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument expansion and the status of the Jordan Cove Energy Project.

Federal Ruling Upholds Monument Expansion

We recently received some great news about the CSNM. But first, a little background. In 2017, near the end of his term, President Obama expanded the CSNM by 48,000 acres using the executive authority granted in the 1907 Antiquities Act. About 40,000 of these acres were designated Oregon and California Railroad Revested Lands, aka "O&C Lands." Timber companies argue that President Obama did not have the authority to include O&C Lands because they were designated for timber production. However, a federal judge has rejected that argument in the case of *Murphy Company v. Trump*.

Here's an excerpt from a press release published jointly by the defendant-intervenors in the case:

In a win for a national monument stretching from Southwest Oregon into Northern California, a federal judge rejected a logging company's challenge to President Obama's expansion of Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument in 2017. The monument was first protected in 2000 under the Antiquities Act as an ecological wonder, known for its incredible diversity of species. Earthjustice and the Western Environmental Law Center represent Soda Mountain Wilderness Council, Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center, Oregon Wild, and The Wilderness Society as defendant-intervenors in the case.

"Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument is one of America's natural wonders, not a collection of standing logs for a timber company," said Kristen Boyles, Earthjustice attorney. "We're grateful that the Court rejected Murphy Timber's arguments and that this incredible monument will remain protected for all of us."

Oregon logging company Murphy Timber brought one of three lawsuits against President Obama's expansion of Cascade-Siskiyou, arguing that a 1937 law known as the Oregon and California Lands (O&C) Act committed some 40,000 acres of the expansion to commercial timber production, making those lands ineligible for inclusion in a monument. Local conservation organizations intervened to defend the monument. The judge ruled that there was no dispute that President Obama acted within his authority when expanding the national monument and that there was no irreconcilable conflict between the Antiquities Act and the O&C Act.

"The Court saw through the confusion timber plaintiffs sought to create," said Susan Jane Brown, attorney with the Western Environmental Law Center. "The O&C Act's principle of sustained yield ensures that the forest is managed in perpetuity – it does not conflict with the Antiquities Act."

"The Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument is a great gift to present and future generations," said Dave Willis, Soda Mountain Wilderness Council chair and long-time Monument-area advocate. "We're very glad this Court saw fit to not let the logging company take any of this gift away."

"The lands included in the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument, all of them, are owned by the public and managed on the behalf of the public," said Sean Stevens, executive director of Oregon Wild. "The logging industry is not entitled to come in and trash them for profit, especially when there are other much greater values at stake."

In 1937, Congress sought to put an end to wasteful and destructive logging practices that clear-cut large forested areas for short-term gain. The Oregon and California Lands Act instituted a conservation ethic on former railroad lands. The court ruling today confirmed that the law does not conflict with the 1906 Antiquities Act under which presidents are granted the authority by Congress to designate national monuments on federal lands and waters.

Two similar lawsuits are pending in federal district court in Washington, D.C. One was filed by Portland-based American Forest Resource Council and the other from the Association of O&C Counties. We'll keep RVAS informed as these lawsuits proceed.

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Jordan Cove DEIS Released

Now for an update on the Jordan Cove Energy Project. On March 29, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) released the long awaited Draft Environmental Impact Statement on the proposed liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal and associated Pacific Connector Pipeline proposed for southwest Oregon. The 1,120-page document can be viewed and downloaded at

<https://www.ferc.gov/industries/gas/enviro/eis/2019/03-29-19-DEIS/03-29-19-DEIS.pdf>

FERC will be accepting public comments on the DEIS until July 5, 2019. In addition, public hearings will be held in the four affected counties in June. It's critical that all concerned individuals and organizations participate in this public process. RVAS will be sending comments to FERC, but we urge you to write your own as well. Rogue Climate is an excellent source for information; the group has also been hosting [comment-writing workshops](#). Check their website (www.rogueclimate.org) or their Facebook page for updates.

Here is an excerpt from the FERC's statement regarding the DEIS:

We conclude that constructing and operating the Project would result in temporary, long-term, and permanent impacts on the environment. Many of these impacts would not be significant or would be reduced to less than significant levels with the implementation of proposed and/or recommended impact avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures. However, some of these impacts would be adverse and significant. Specifically, we conclude that constructing the Project would temporarily but significantly impact housing in Coos Bay and that constructing and operating the Project would permanently and significantly impact the visual character of Coos Bay. Furthermore, constructing and operating the Project is likely to adversely affect 13 federally-listed threatened and endangered species including the marbled murrelet, northern spotted owl, and coho salmon.

Meanwhile, the Oregon Department of State Lands completed its review of an estimated 57,000 comments on Jordan Cove's removal-fill permit application. The permit is required by Section 404 of the Clean Water Act and covers the three main elements of the project: 1) the liquefied natural gas (LNG) slip and access channel; 2) the LNG terminal; and 3) the natural gas pipeline. The DSL has determined that it needs more information to make an informed decision about the permit and so has extended the decision deadline to September 20, 2019. **This would not have happened were it not for the quantity and quality of public comments.**

Here is an excerpt from the DSL website on the process:

Due to robust participation in the review and comment period for the Jordan Cove removal-fill permit application, additional time is needed for these remaining steps:

Current Step: Final Technical Review. This step includes:

- **DSL Review of Comments.** Approximately 49,000 to 57,000 comments were received. DSL has reviewed all comments and requested that the applicant address substantive issues relevant to the removal-fill law. [DSL letter requesting additional information from the applicant](#)
- **Applicant Response.** The final technical review step also includes time for the applicant to address relevant comments and other issues identified by DSL. These may be addressed by the applicant in written response, through project revisions, providing additional information, or other action as appropriate. All comments are also provided to the applicant, and the applicant is asked to respond.

Final Step: Permit Decision. DSL evaluates the entire application record against the criteria for permit issuance and makes a decision to either approve or deny the permit application. The extension also allows DSL the time necessary to thoroughly evaluate the record and make a decision.

We will keep our membership informed of important dates and developments.

RVAS BIRDING FIELD TRIPS

First Wednesday Bird Walks at Denman Wildlife Refuge

Leader: Murray Orr

Murray Orr will continue to lead his monthly bird walks at Denman Wildlife Refuge through 2019. 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 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.

May Walk: Wednesday, May 1

June Walk: Wednesday, June 5

July Walk: Wednesday, July 3

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) ____ Total 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.

BIRD-CENTRIC EVENTS FROM AROUND THE REGION

Klamath Basin Birds: Water and Waterfowl

As part of the Friends of the Hannon Library Lecture Series, birding expert Harry Fuller will give a presentation on the birds of the Klamath Basin. Free campus parking is available for all events with use of parking meter code. To get parking codes or for more information, contact Hannon Library at 541-552-6816 or libraryevents@sou.edu.

DATE: Thursday, May 9
TIME: 4:00 pm
PLACE: SOU Hannon Library, Meese Room
COST: Free
PRESENTER Harry Fuller

ASHLAND PARKS AND RECREATION EVENTS AND CLASSES

Rogue Valley Bird Day

Protect Birds: Be the Solution to Plastic Pollution

Rogue Valley Bird Day is the local celebration of World Migratory Bird Day, which celebrates one of the most important and spectacular events in the life of a migratory bird: its journey between wintering and breeding grounds. RVAS is one of the event's sponsors. Join us on Saturday, May 11, to celebrate! Enjoy Wildlife Images exhibits, guided bird walks and a [bird-calling](#) contest at 11:00 a.m. for all ages. This outdoor event is admission-free and takes place at North Mountain Park. To learn more about this national event visit migratorybirdday.org. For more information call the North Mountain Park Nature Center at 541.488.6606.

DATE: Saturday, May 11
TIME: 8:00 am—noon
PLACE: North Mountain Park, 620 N. Mountain Ave, Ashland
COST: FREE

BLM SPRING HIKES AT THE TABLE ROCKS

Whooo Comes Out at Night?

BLM wildlife biologists **Steve Godwin** and **Kim Coyle** will lead a night hike to look for and listen to the creatures of the night on the Lower Table Rock Loop Trail (1/2 mile accessible trail) They will attempt to lure pygmy, great horned and screech owls - no guarantees! A short presentation about the unique characteristics and adaptations of the common bats, owls and other animals that are active at night in this area will precede the hike. Bring flashlights and wear sturdy hiking shoes. RSVP at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/whooo-comes-out-at-night-registration-57294772206>

DATE: Saturday, May 11
TIME: 7:30 —10:30 pm
PLACE: Lower Table Rock (Wheeler Road, Central Point)
COST: FREE
LEADERS Steve Godwin and Kim Coyle

SOUTHERN OREGON LAND CONSERVANCY COMMUNITY HIKES

Hike Lower Table Rock

Learn about this iconic rock while hiking 3.5 miles roundtrip. Each Spring, the Land Conservancy hosts a special trip to the Table Rocks in cooperation with the BLM. After all, it was the conservation of Lower Table Rock back in 1978 that provided the groundswell of local interest in starting the Southern Oregon Land Conservancy! BLM Interpreter, Molly Allen, will share information at stops along the way to the top including the geological formation of the Table Rocks, conservation, history, and the flora and fauna found alongside the trail. Expect singing birds, beautiful flowers, and outstanding views. Pre-registration required; visit <https://www.landconserve.org/hikes-and-tours/#hike-register-info>

DATE: Wednesday, May 1
TIME: 9:00 am--1:00 pm
PLACE: Lower Table Rock (Wheeler Road, Central Point)
COST: FREE

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Bird-centric events continued from page 9

PRESENTATIONS AND WALKS WITH WILD BIRDS UNLIMITED

Monthly Educational Talk: Birding the Shasta Valley

Just one hour away from the Rogue Valley is the beautiful Shasta Valley. Wildlife educator Shannon Rio will use a PowerPoint presentation to share the beauty and the birds of that area. She will orient you on where to go to explore this spacious landscape and what birds you might see there. As space is limited to 25, please reserve your seat today by calling the store at 541.772.2107 or by coming in to register.

DATE: Wednesday, May 8
TIME: 6:00—7:00 pm
PLACE: Wild Birds Unlimited, 961 Medford Center, Medford
COST: Free
PRESENTER: Shannon Rio

Chickadee Chat: Herons

Erin Linton will talk all about herons this month. No registration is required, just show up to learn, share, and have fun with fellow bird nerds!

DATE: Wednesday, May 8 and 22
TIME: 10:30 am (May 8); 3:30 pm (May 22)
PLACE: Wild Birds Unlimited, 961 Medford Center, Medford
COST: Free

Bird Walk: Mingus Pond

Erin Linton will be leading a bird walk to Lynn Newbry Park along the Bear Creek Greenway this month. Spring migrants like the Bullock's Oriole, Black-headed Grosbeak, and Yellow-breasted Chat may be seen in this area, along with various warblers and waterfowl around the pond. Meet at Wild Birds Unlimited at 10:00 am, 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 to 15, please reserve your spot today by calling the store at 541.772.2107 or by coming in to register.

DATE: Wednesday, May 15
TIME: 10:00 am
PLACE: Wild Birds Unlimited, 961 Medford Center, Medford
COST: Free
LEADER: Erin Linton

ROGUE VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

Birds and Beers

Hosted by RVAS, Birds and Beers is a casual gathering for folks to chat with fellow birders about anything bird related. Topics may include upcoming field trips, current research, interesting sightings, conservation initiatives, favorite birding hotspots, anything you want to discuss. This group offers birders the chance to meet one another and enjoy a relaxing evening with one another over birds and beers!

DATE: Tuesday, May 14
TIME: 7:00 pm
PLACE: El Tapatio, 1633 OR Highway 99, Ashland
COST: Free



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Bird-centric events continued from page 9

ASHLAND BREEDING BIRD COUNT 2019

Reviving the Breeding Bird Count effort made in 2012, **Barbara Massey** is spurring a long-term community survey to learn about bird species in our region and how they are shifting their vital spring habits in response to a changing climate. Counts will be conducted in independent groups of 2-5 people, within a 10 miles radius of Ashland (corresponding to the Christmas Bird Count areas). Nate Trimble and Jeanne Moy are coordinating this event - please let them know if you have further questions. They will send maps and more information to interested participants.

If you are able to join this important event, please **RSVP to AshlandBreedingBirdCount@gmail.com**. Please let Jeanine or Nate know if you have a specific area or group members you prefer, otherwise they will pair you up with some friendly faces! Jeanine and Nate will send updates to the RSVP list and details as the date approaches. Also, for now and future years, you can stay in touch with this effort through the facebook group: [Ashland Breeding Bird Count](#)

DATE: Sunday, June 9
TIME: Sunrise to noon
PLACE: Ashland
COST: FREE
LEADERS Jeanine Moy and Nate Trimble

The World of eBirding: Why Use Hotspots?

By Jeff Tufts

If you use eBird to record your sightings, you've almost certainly encountered the term "hotspot." The word itself implies a site where birds are abundant and interesting, but in the context of eBird, it's more accurate to say that a hotspot is a public location that is frequently visited by a significant number of birders. It may be a great birding spot, or it may simply be convenient and easy to bird.

Well-known hotspots in Jackson County include all of the major bodies of water (Agate Lake, Emigrant Lake, etc.) as well as such sites as North Mountain Park, Denman Wildlife Management Area, the Kirtland Road sewage ponds, the Imperatrice Property, and the Rogue Valley Manor.

The eBird website importantly states that "although hotspots are used to aggregate results in popular birding locations, you should not ALWAYS use a hotspot while eBirding. If you went birding in a location that is accurately represented by a hotspot, then you should use that hotspot."

It sounds easy, but the decision to use or not use a hotspot when designating the location on your eBird checklist isn't always straightforward. But if you're birding an area that is part of a hotspot, use that hotspot as your location. Don't create a new personal location simply because it's easy to let the GPS function in your smartphone tell you where you are.

How do you know if you're at location that is a hotspot? If you're submitting your checklist via a PC or laptop at home, any hotspot that you've used in the past will be in the pull-down menu on the location page which is the first step in submitting a checklist. If you're birding a new location, access the map which displays colored markers and zoom in on the area where you're located. If there is a large red marker on that point on the map, click on it and the name of the hotspot will appear in the box on the right.

If you're submitting your checklist using the eBird mobile app, you'll get a screen that offers several options for naming your location. Start with "Choose a Location From Map." If you don't know if you're at a hotspot, tap on the large red markers closest to your current location. If the name fits, use it. If it doesn't go back to the menu and try creating a new personal location.

When I assumed the role of eBird's regional reviewer for Jackson and Josephine counties several weeks ago, I quickly realized that the use of established hotspots was often inconsistent and sometimes incorrect.

The first area that attracted my attention was the Denman WMA. In a county where the population is rapidly increasing, a site of more than 1700 acres that remains almost entirely undeveloped is extremely valuable bird habitat.

Hotspots continued on page 12

Hotspots continued from page 11

Denman WMA is too big to be represented only by a single hotspot designation, so it's segmented into six separate hotspots with a seventh hotspot representing the entire area and to be used in case of bulk uploads of historic data.

If you're going to bird at Denman, consider which hotspot is appropriate and then use it. Please don't create new personal locations which prevent the aggregation of data obtained from your birding efforts.

And yes, the existing hotspots can create some unusual choices.

Denman WMA--Whetstone Pond is a hotspot, and so is Denman WMA--Hall Tract Unit, which happens to contain Whetstone Pond. Merging the two hotspots wasn't a practical move, so birders coming to this part of Denman must decide which hotspot best describes their location. If you're only going to bird the pond, use that hotspot. If you're going to bird the pond and other parts of the unit, either make two separate checklists (ouch) or use the Denman WMA--Hall Tract Unit hotspot and include in the comments section of the checklist a note that states that your birding included Whetstone Pond.

The hotspot named Denman WMA--Ave. G and Ave. H ponds designates an area especially popular during shorebird season. The so-called Ave. G ponds are generally accessed via an unpaved road that runs north off of Avenue G. The Avenue H ponds are most easily accessed by parking in the northwest corner of the Fire Station. If you bird this hotspot but only visit either the Avenue G or Avenue H ponds, your records will be especially valuable if you include a note in the comments section of the checklist describing which ponds you birded.

Denman WMA--TouVelle Rd. and Interpretive Trail is used mostly by birders who either walk or drive the approximately one-mile long unpaved road that is accessed via the locked gate on Agate Road. The road leads west and ends at a stand of trees that border Little Butte Creek. The Interpretive Trail starts at the west end of the final pond on the left and traverses a variety of habitats before looping back to TouVelle Road.

Denman WMA--Little Butte Creek Unit is the biggest section described as a hotspot and includes a long portion of Little Butte Creek (including the restored meander). Part of this unit is located on the east side of Agate Road and bordered on the north by Nick Young Road. If you're walking or driving the length of TouVelle Road, some of your sightings will be birds that are technically in the Little Butte Creek Unit. Don't worry. Record them on the TouVelle Road list. If you walk one of the trails that explores the Little Butte Creek Unit, use that hotspot.

Denman WMA--Modoc Unit (and viewpoint for private Modoc Pond) is probably the least known section of Denman (it's accessed off Modoc Road), but it has some riparian habitat that can be productive during migration. And it's about the only place from which you can scope Modoc Pond without hiking to the top of Upper Table Rock.

If you're thinking that you'd rather continue using certain favored personal locations when you bird Denman, please remember that aggregating all checklists under the various hotspots will help to create data that informs the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife about how many birders visit Denman and how much time they spend there.

This is the first of a series of monthly columns that will discuss various aspects of the eBirding experience. If you have any specific topics or questions that you'd like discussed in future columns, send them to me at jctufts33@gmail.com

Next month I'll tackle the task of discussing some of the suggestions of Dr. Tyler A. Hallman of Oregon State whose doctoral dissertation concluded that eBird data would be more valuable to researchers if checklists used only personal locations and mostly brief stationary counts. It'll be interesting.

eBirding Tip of the Month

Every column will conclude with an eBirding tip. This month's helpful hint is for those using the eBird mobile app. If you accidentally include a species that you didn't see and don't know how to remove the sighting, just put your finger on the right side of the screen and swipe left. A red box with the words "clear data" appears on the right. Tap it and it will remove the count on the mistakenly reported bird. If you start a checklist but later want to delete it, go back to the home page, tap checklists, then swipe left on the list to be deleted and tap the red delete box.

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Coming Next Issue: Birdathon 2019 report!



Good luck to all of our teams.

Happy birding and stay safe!



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