

A voice for education and conservation in the natural world  
Rogue Valley Audubon Society  
www.roguevalleyaudubon.org

Deadline for the May issue is April 20



## Letter from the Board

### Birding makes list of approved activities

I often visit the CNN website to keep up on the latest news buzz. I laughed out loud when I read they were recommending what we know already: that bird-watching is good for you, especially now. In a March 15 article titled "Social distancing doesn't have to doom your weekends - Here are some ideas," author Scottie Andrew recommends getting out in nature.

Americans should find an area where we won't encounter crowds, breathe fresh air and **start bird-watching**, Andrew advised. "Coronavirus hasn't bothered the birds," he added.

Will this crisis increase the number of birding enthusiasts?



Pacific Wren  
Credit: Peter Kreisman

Despite social distancing, our local birding community will continue to be connected by our Rogue Valley Birds list, eBird, Birding Oregon, and *The Chat*. Environmental concerns are still being addressed by the Oregon Audubon Chapters Conservation Committee (OAC) and our own RVAS Conservation Committee.

Please check the website calendar often in the next several months to see the latest status of our events.

Keep birding,

Carol Mockridge, President

### Status of upcoming events

April Chapter Meeting (April 28) - Canceled

April Board Meeting - Canceled

Birdathon (May 2) - Still on for now. Check website for updates.

Annual Picnic (May 26) - Still on for now. Check website for updates.

Field trips - Check online calendar

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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.**

## BIRDY SUGGESTIONS FOR HUNKERING DOWN

### Bird ID and natural history websites

Birds of the World: <https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/home>

Macaulay Library at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology: <https://www.macaulaylibrary.org/>

Stewart Janes columns for the Mail Tribune Outdoors: <https://mailtribune.com/oregon-outdoors>

Feather Atlas: <https://www.fws.gov/lab/featheratlas/>

xeno-canto: bird sounds from around the world: <https://www.xeno-canto.org/> (Pepper's Note: Listen to the Musician Wren!)

TowheeBlog (Harry Fuller's blog): [www.atowhee.blog](http://www.atowhee.blog)

### Webcams

Panama Fruit Feeder Webcam <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WtoxxHADnGk> (Pepper's Note: You might see a Rufous Motmot!)

All About Birds Webcams:

<https://www.allaboutbirds.org/cams/>

### Books

*The Feather Thief* by Kirk Johnson (Pepper: great literary non-fiction read)

*The Eye of the Albatross* by Carl Safina

*Edge of Awe: Experiences of the Malheur-Steens Country*

Bernd Heinrich's books on ravens: *Mind of the Raven;*  
*Ravens in Winter*

*Sandy* by Dayton Hyde (Harry Fuller's Note: Now a half century old, this book is about a rancher in Klamath County raising a Sandhill Crane.)

Harry also recommends these other fine books on cranes by Paul Johnsgard: *Those of the Gray Wind;* *Crane Music;* *Sandhill and Whooping Cranes;* *Cranes of the World.* (Harry's Note: I once met Johnsgard. He was tall, thin-legged but graceful in motion—very crane-like.)

*Great Gray Owl of California, Oregon, and Washington* by Harry Fuller & Peter Thiemann

*What the Robin Knows: How Birds Reveal the Secrets of the Natural World* by Jon Young

*The Peregrine* by J.A. Baker (Editor's Note: An odd and wonderful book!)

*H is for Hawk* by Helen Macdonald

**Soothing Soundscapes:** <https://www.audubon.org/news/immerse-yourself-these-peaceful-nature-rich-sound-recordings>

Thanks to Pepper Trail, Sonney Viani, Harry Fuller, Frank Lospalluto, Kristi Mergenthaler, Kate Halstead, and Laura Fleming for their suggestions. I added a couple, too.

## Jacksonville Elementary School's Project FeederWatch

By Erin Ulrich, RVAS Education Committee Chair

How to start a FeederWatch station at your local elementary school.

1. **Ask the principal.** I always remembered how to spell “principal” because the *principal* is your *pal*. Well, that is true at Jacksonville Elementary School. Fred Kondziela is a super pal. If you have an idea, you tell him about it. If it gets kids learning, he’s all for it.
2. **Find a great teacher to work with.** Kathy Koehler is an amazing 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade teacher. She is positive and excited about cool stuff. Project FeederWatch *is* “cool stuff.” On top of the one thousand other things she has to do during the school year, she graciously agreed to take on one more.
3. **Get feeders and bird food.** RVAS had the feeders, and Laura Fleming from Wild Birds Unlimited donated 100 pounds of sunflower seeds! (We have a small budget for the rest.)
4. **Set it up.** Fortunately, I had access to the perfect area outside of Mrs. Koehler’s 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade classroom because I also work at the school.
5. **Get kids excited about birds.** Easy! Go into the classroom and tell them how awesome birds are. Show them a fun PowerPoint presentation and ask them lots of questions. Have them tell you what they already know about birds, and then tell them even more amazing things. 3<sup>rd</sup> Graders get excited very easily. They also agreed that being “citizen scientists” is a very important job.
6. **Check in with them often.** Ask them about “their birds.” They will tell you things like, “Miss Erin, we saw Steller’s Jays today!” or “Miss Erin, there was a Northern Flicker!” or “We get so many goldfinches!”
7. **Bask in birding glory.** When you become a birding hero at your school you will know it. Kids will come up to you and tell you all about what they saw at the feeders. When they go to Science Works and tell you that they bought a Steller’s Jay stuffed animal because it’s their favorite bird now, you will be beyond thrilled. When they tell you about birds, they are seeing at their homes you are completely satisfied because you have made them notice birds beyond their school. And when you have done that, hopefully they will pass their new love of birds on to everyone around them.

Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, we have been unable to finish out the last part of the FeederWatch season. I don’t know when I’ll get to see the students again and give them a report on the data we’ve collected. I do know that they loved working on this project, and I hope we get to do it again. Mrs. Koehler gave me some great feedback:

“My favorite part of the project is watching the excitement in the kids’ eyes and hearing their gasps when they saw really interesting birds,” she said. “I liked how I got to learn about the birds that live in our area. I loved how on days I was at work late, I could just take the time to watch all the bird activity outside the window. It was both soothing and captivating!”



Credit: Erin Ulrich

## 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 in 2020. 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. Note: Due to Covid-19, field trips and other events may be cancelled. Check the RVAS website for the latest updates.

April Walk: Wednesday, April 1 **\*\*CANCELED\*\***

May Walk: Wednesday, May 6 **TBD**

June Walk: Wednesday, June 3 **TBD**

## Another Project FeederWatch Wraps Up

### By Mary Pat Power

Project FeederWatch in Ashland completed its 18th 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 Bullock, Barbara Massey, Vince Zauskey, Bill Hering, Sooney Viani, Keiko Thurston, Dick Ashford, Carol Mockridge, Kate Cleland-Sipfle, and Nala Cardillo. Mary Pat Power** coordinated scheduling and reported data to the Cornell Lab's Project FeederWatch.

This season, 34 species and 892 individual birds were observed. This figure is consistent with the past several seasons.



**Editor's Note:** Visit the Cornell Lab's [FeederWatch website](#) to view data from this and previous year's count. The site also has tips for identifying tricky birds, links to web cams, and a participant photo gallery.

No one who feeds birds in Oregon will be surprised to learn that the number one visitor to our state's feeders during the 2019-2020 count was once again the Dark-Eyed Junco, which visited over 98 percent of the sites. In fact, this species is the most common feeder bird nationwide.

The photo of this leucistic junco was taken Victoria Vosburg of British Columbia. There are several other unusual junco photos in the gallery, including one with a white cap and one with white cheeks.

## Field Notes for Jackson County March 2020

By Frank Lospalluto

“Equal day and equal night, first the dark then the light.” So goes the old animist chant. Though these recent weeks have seemed so very dark, our feathered friends are returning with a joyful noise.

Two **Snow Geese** were on Whetstone Pond Mar 11. Small numbers of **Greater White-fronted Geese** have been reported around the valley. Larger migrating flocks should be heard if not seen moving north over the next month. Many of spring ducks are on local waters and none more thrilling to see than the **Cinnamon Teal** or the subtle but handsome **Gadwall**.

**Band-tailed Pigeons** are spreading out into the forests and can be heard singing more regularly now.

**Mourning Doves** are nesting, the first of three or more broods for many females.

**Rufous Hummingbird** reports are on the upswing, and not just from home feeders. Birds were seen in the Jacksonville Woodlands, on both Lower and Upper Table Rock trails and along the Sterling Mine Ditch Trail (MH, KM, MC, BM, KS). They're no doubt digging the manzanita and buckbrush!

A **Common Poorwill** calling was heard in the Shady Cove area Mar. 22 (HS). This is a couple of weeks early to be hearing them up here. It may be that this cryptic and under-documented species is not wintering that far south of us. Known as the “little sleeper,” Common Poorwills have the ability to induce torpor and “hibernate” for long periods during the winter.

**Sandhill Crane** pairs are beginning to bond up in the meadows around Howard Prairie and Hyatt Lakes. Two early **Black-bellied Plovers** touched down briefly at Kirtland Ponds Mar. 14 (S). See [Jeff Tuft's eloquent note](#) on RV birds.

A **Lesser Yellowlegs** was seen on a Wild Birds Unlimited bird walk on Denman WMA-Hall Tract Unit Feb. 19 (MG).

Two **Herring Gulls** touched down at Kirtland Ponds Mar. 7 (BH). An **American Bittern** was at Denman Ave. G and H ponds Mar. 14 (HS). This area is reliable for that species. Listen for the throat clunking “pump-er-lunk” call the males make, most often given in the early morning or during the evening twilight.

**Osprey** are being seen widely across our region. A **White-tailed Kite** was spotted west of Ave. G ponds Mar. 14 (KM), a species that has been increasingly hard to find the last couple of years in the valley. Possibly the same bird was reported from the Little Butte Unit of



Black-bellied Plover  
Credit: Sammie Peat

Denman Mar. 23 (KS). An adult **Northern Goshawk** was seen near Deadwood Junction off Dead Indian Memorial Rd. Mar. 9 (FE). A **Rough-legged Hawk** was viewed hunting the Imperatrice Property Mar. 19 (AL). A **Ferruginous Hawk** was over Denman near Whetstone Pond Mar. 7 (AL, LdB).

Our small owls, including **Northern Saw-whet Owl**, **Western Screech Owl**, and **Northern Pygmy-Owl**, are active and vocal as they begin to nest. A secretive **Long-eared Owl** was spotted above the Little Applegate River Mar. 22. There is a breeding population of these birds in the Applegate and elsewhere in Jackson County. Their habit of roosting and nesting in dense vegetation and hunting after dark, along with the low single note “*hoo*” makes them difficult to detect. They rely on their hearing to hunt, much like the **Great Gray Owl**, who, it should be pointed out, very likely nests and hunts in close proximity in the Applegate. The Great Gray Owl occurs in greater numbers in our area and is much more easily seen. The night vision of a Long-eared Owl rivals or exceeds most other North American owls.

A **Williamson's Sapsucker** was heard drumming near Howard Prairie Mar. 13 (MC). Most of our resident woodpeckers can be heard drumming now as they define their breeding territories.

An **EASTERN KINGBIRD** was reported from the North Mountain Park area by Anne M. on Mar. 7. The report was accepted and confirmed by Jeff Tufts, our ebird reviewer. Most of the county records for this species occur between May and August.

*Field Notes continued on page 6*

*Field Notes continued from page 5*

A **Northern Shrike** was seen and photographed along Alta Vista Rd. Mar. 17 (JK).

Two **Black-billed Magpies** were near the Valley View Transfer Station outside Ashland Mar. 8 (KS).

Swallows have been making a show of it the last few weeks. **Tree Swallows** have been placing dibs on nest boxes. **Violet-green Swallows** have been circling electric. A few **Northern Rough-winged Swallows** are beginning to appear with one over Denman Hall Tract Mar. 23 (AG). **Barn Swallows** are being spotted here and there with four over Kirtland Ponds Mar. 16 (JK). **Cliff Swallows** are also being seen, with nine spotted at TouVelle State Park Mar. 14 checking out the bridge where hundreds will be shortly (BH).

**Purple Finches** are moving in and through our area and can be heard singing quite often now. A few **Cassin's Finches** are tuning up as well in the mountains.

**Chipping Sparrows** are beginning to arrive with one reported at a suet feeder near Larson Creek Mar. 15 and in Talent on the same day (JB, MC). Another was near the feeders at North Mountain Park Mar. 23 (BM). **Lark Sparrows** are beginning to sing. One was on a property along Little Applegate Rd. Mar. 22 (MH).

**Orange-crowned Warbler** sightings have increased this month. The Orange-crowned Warbler visiting a hummingbird feeder daily continues to visit even as it molts into breeding plumage (JT). An incredible number of **Townsend's Warbler** sightings have poured into eBird this winter. Here is Jeff Tufts on the phenomena:

*There have been 47 checklists submitted this year (Jan-Mar) from Jackson County with a Townsend's Warbler report. Lot of repeat birds obviously....I went back and checked the last five years (2015-2019), and the total of Townsend's reports from those years in the Jan-Mar period was exactly ONE!! That's 15 months worth of eBirding and only one report versus 47 reports for the three months of this year....*

Certainly this may point to the new normal that is on the horizon. As temperate forest breeders and other birds don't migrate as far south, we will see new birds breeding in our area within the next couple of decades, like the "old new ones" that came north in the past two decades. For the future think: Rufous-crowned Sparrow. Or perhaps the Townsend Warbler influx this winter is just an anomaly—possibly evidence of an excellent recruitment year by the species in Oregon. Seek out our own Dr. Stewart Janes with that question.

Thanks to all who contributed sightings, including Janet Kelly, Bob Hunter, Andrew Partin, Norm Barrett, Howard Sands, Jim Livaudais, Gary Shaffer, Vince Zauskey, Alex Lamoreaux, Anne Goff, Marion Hadden, Sammie Peat, Kay Simmons, Jeff Tufts, Karl Schneck, Matt Cahill, Rene Allen, Kristi Mergenthaler, Lauren diBiccari, Jeff Beaupain, Barry McKenzie, and Forrest English.

All errors and omissions are my own. Peace.



Sage Thrasher  
Credit: Barry McKenzie

An **American Dipper** was along the Little Applegate River near the Sterling Mine ditch Trail Mar. 22 (MC). A **SAGE THRASER** was found by Bob Hunter down at the end of W. Dutton Rd. Mar. 9. Norm Barrett saw the same bird or possibly a second Sage Thrasher the afternoon of Mar. 10 along E. Antelope Rd. The W. Dutton bird was seen in the morning hours of Mar. 10 but not any day after. Janet Kelly spotted the E. Antelope bird again Mar. 19.

An astonishing 10 **Mountain Bluebirds** were at Agate Lake Mar. 15 (RT).

## The Conservation Column

### By Pepper Trail

Well. Crazy world, right? At the end of February, I returned to the U.S. from a two-week voyage through the Seychelles Islands, with highlights including the incredible giant tortoises of Aldabra Atoll and such unique birds as the Seychelles Blue-Pigeon and the Black Parrot. Little did I know that soon almost the entire globe – including Jackson County – would be paralyzed by the coronavirus.

At times like these, birds give us blessed respite. The freedom of birds is inspiring when we're told to spend so much time indoors. And it's easy to maintain six-foot separations while birding! Open space is living space for birds – and breathing space for people.

### Imperatrice Lockdown

On March 6, RVAS member Vince Zauskey set out to enjoy some birding on the open spaces of the beautiful Imperatrice grassland. For the past several years, birders, hikers, wildflower lovers, and photographers have made respectful use of this city-owned property across I-5 from Ashland. But Vince found the public access gate was locked. A call to the Ashland Department of Public Works revealed that the Imperatrice has been leased to a non-profit called the Land Manatee Foundation (LMF). The intended use of the property by LMF is stated to be “for purposes of operating a restorative and regenerative ranch for cattle and horses.”

The Imperatrice is far more than just scenic open space. In 2014, the largest nesting colony of Grasshopper Sparrows known in western Oregon was discovered on the property by Frank Lospalluto. The Grasshopper Sparrow is identified as a “Species of Greatest Conservation Need” by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and is in steep decline throughout its range. RVAS paid for formal Grasshopper Sparrow surveys in 2016 (conducted by Frank), resulting in a report by the Klamath Bird Observatory. This documented the presence of 32 singing males on the Imperatrice.

Informal botanical surveys by Kristi Mergentaler of the Southern Oregon Land Conservancy (SOLC) also discovered the presence of two rare plants on the Imperatrice, *California macrophylla* and *Ranunculus austro-oreganus*. These were further documented by the “Biological Assessment, Imperatrice Property, City of Ashland, Oregon,” prepared by Pacific Crest Consulting in 2017, which also confirmed the continued health of the Grasshopper Sparrow population.

Although we now know that the Imperatrice lease was granted following a Request for Proposals (RFP) on the city website, we are dismayed that RVAS was not alerted to this proposed drastic change in the status of the Imperatrice, given our demonstrated interest in the property.

We have two primary concerns: public access and the extent and intensity of grazing.

**Public Access.** Many local residents have become accustomed to hiking, birding, and observing wildflowers and pollinators in the Imperatrice, which is the only expansive grassland area open to the public in the Rogue Valley. We are disappointed that continued public access to the area above the ditch was not made a condition of the lease and would have strongly advocated for that if we had been made aware of the RFP. We hope that access can be re-opened by discussions between the City of Ashland and the Land Manatee Foundation. At minimum, we request that limited access be allowed for scheduled public field trips organized and led by RVAS and SOLC and similar community groups.

**Extent and Intensity of Grazing.** We are not necessarily opposed to grazing on the Imperatrice. The irrigated area below the TID ditch has a recent history of grazing, and we do not object to a continuation of grazing in this portion – which is the part of the property currently “specifically available” for grazing under the terms of the lease.

*Conservation Column continued on page 8*

*Conservation Column continued from page 7*

We are, however, very concerned about the possibility of grazing being extended above the ditch, as could be allowed by the lease if “appropriate fencing is provided along the canal.” We note that the area potentially subject to grazing above the canal includes the locations of more than half the singing Grasshopper Sparrows documented in the 2016 KBO surveys, and most of the rare plant occurrences.

From the documents available on the City of Ashland’s website, it is not clear how many cows and horses will be grazed on the property, or when they will be placed on the land and when they will be removed.

Given the issues identified above, we strongly urge that grazing on the Imperatrice property during 2020 be limited to the area below the TID ditch. Grasshopper Sparrows will be arriving in the Rogue Valley in the second half of April, and establishing territories by early May. Grazing during the nesting period would obviously be highly disruptive for this ground-nesting species. During this first year of the lease, consultation among the City of Ashland, the Land Manatee Foundation, and qualified botanists and ecologists should be conducted to develop a detailed grazing management plan that would meet the LMF’s stated goal of “providing ecological support and ensuring biodiversity.” We have offered to help with this process, and the initial response from the City has been encouraging.



Grasshopper Sparrow, courtesy BLM

We will keep you informed on developments regarding this important local conservation issue. For a link to the letter jointly submitted to the City of Ashland by RVAS and the Southern Oregon Land Conservancy, click [here](#).

**Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) Update**

The Audubon Society of Portland submitted comments to the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on the proposed changes to the MBTA, one of the country’s oldest environmental laws. The letter represents 11 Oregon Audubon chapters, including RVAS.

For more than a century, the USFWS has had the ability to prosecute industries which harm wild birds through their activities. It is this ability that has allowed the USFWS to force utilities to retrofit power lines to prevent the electrocution of eagles and other raptors, to address toxic chemicals that poison birds, and to go after oil companies for oil spills that kill wild birds. Now, the Trump Administration has proposed new regulations which would eliminate the agency’s ability to protect wild birds from incidental take. Under the new rule, these companies could kill wild birds with indifference and impunity. Decades of effort to reduce industrial threats to birds would be reversed and emerging threats would not be addressed.

The comment deadline was March 19. We will be keeping our members informed on this important issue. In the meantime, read the comment letter [here](#).

**BIRDCENTRIC EVENTS FROM AROUND THE REGION**

Due to Covid-19 and Governor Brown’s orders, and to encourage adherence to recommendations for social distancing, we have suspended our listing of events for the time being.

**City of Ashland Parks and Recreation** programs and information: click [here](#).

**Wild Birds Unlimited:**

The Medford store is closed to foot traffic, and the regular talks and walks are cancelled. However, WBU is still open for curbside pickup and online orders. Everyone can continue to feed their birds! Just call the store with a credit card number and they will have your order ready for you when you arrive to pick up.

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# ROGUE VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

## THE CHAT

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### Sign up to receive easy notification of Chapter activities

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